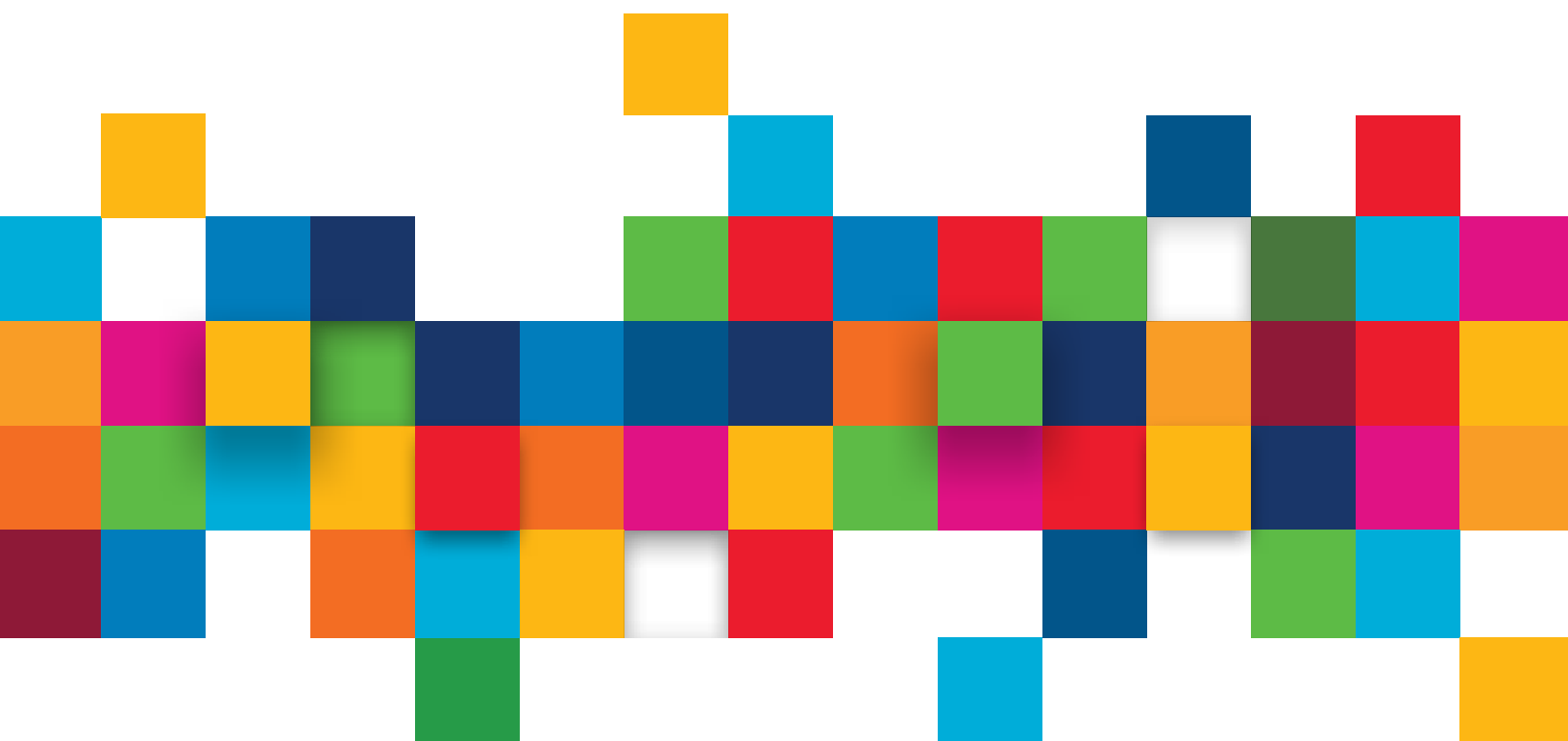# Progressing national SDGs implementation:

An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018

The Third Edition in an annual series commissioned by civil society organisations

Executive Summary

Four years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 by world leaders, 2019 marks the end of the first four-year cycle of review. As such there will be two meetings of the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development to examine progress on their implementation in 2019: the Seventh Meeting of the HLPF at the Ministerial level in July under the Economic and Social Council; and a Heads of State and Government level meeting in September under the General Assembly.

The HLPF is mandated to carry out regular, inclusive, state-led and thematic reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with inputs from other intergovernmental bodies, regional processes, major groups and other stakeholders. Countries present their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) on an annual basis at the HLPF. In 2019, 51 countries will present their VNRs, ten of whom will present their second VNR. The purpose of the follow-up and review process is to promote accountability to citizens, support effective international cooperation and foster exchange of best practice and mutual learning.

This report, the third edition of *Progressing National SDGs Implementation*, aims to provide useful insights and suggestions to inform these discussions and help guide improved implementation and reporting. It documents and analyses all 46 VNR reports submitted in 2018 to the HLPF, as well as a sample of civil society reports also produced in 2018 for the HLPF; and it includes recommendations for improving implementation of the 2030 Agenda the VNR process and reports, and strengthening accountability. The review identifies good and best practices and provides recommendations on how governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders can improve their efforts. It also provides recommendations on how countries can improve their reporting to the HLPF by meeting and building on the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs. Importantly, the review also provides a comparative assessment of how VNR reporting is evolving over time through a comparison of analysis of the VNRs in 2016 and 2017 with findings for 2018.

The analysis in the review is based largely on the VNR reports, and where available, civil society reports. No additional research was conducted to verify the accuracy and confirm the validity of the information governments included in reports. Where relevant, findings from other assessments of the VNR reports for 2018 have been noted. Nevertheless, this is a clear limitation of the findings.

FORTY-SIX (46) COUNTRIES REPORTING TO THE HLPF IN 2018

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Viet Nam.

What's new in the 2018 edition

A number of new findings emerge from the 2018 review of VNR reports, though many of the recommendations and best practice from the 2017 edition of this report remain relevant and have been included here. Findings and contributions from the 2018 review of VNR reports that stand out in comparison to the 2017 review include:

GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

- A significant increase in participation by non-state actors in formal governance mechanisms.

- Principles to ensure timely, open, transparent, informed and iterative stakeholder engagement.

POLICIES

- Inclusion of culture as a national priority for 2030 Agenda implementation, in addition to other dimensions of sustainable development.

- Marked improvement in terms of reporting on all SDGs in 2018; however, there is still limited reference to linkages between the dimensions of sustainable development, a finding that represents a backsliding in comparison to 2017.

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Improved reporting on the means of implementation – notably international public finance, trade, technology and systemic issues.

- Reporting on best practices increased in 2018, however gaps still remain in terms of reporting on lessons learned or areas in which countries would like to learn from others.

- Limited reporting on leaving no one behind despite the inclusion of this component in the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines. There is a need for countries to examine the extent to which policies and programmes are addressing the needs of those left behind first.

- The status of local implementation efforts, as highlighted by the 2018 VNR reports, suggests that much more work is needed to promote localisation.

- Marked improvement in reporting on contributions from civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector and academia. However, only a handful of VNR reports still included contributions from non-state actors and local governments throughout.

- A limited number of countries committed to regular reporting on implementation. Through their VNR report, some countries, including two who have reported previously, signalled progress against targets.

USE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S VOLUNTARY COMMON REPORTING GUIDELINES

- VNR reports continue not to be structured according to the outline in the guidelines though they capture most elements, as was the case in 2017. Nevertheless, all elements of the guidelines were included by at least 70% of reporting countries, with the exceptions of leaving no one behind, structural issues and the annexes.

In short, the 2018 VNR reports show that the majority of countries have made progress in terms of incorporating the SDGs into national policies, developing institutional mechanisms for implementation, efforts to build partnerships and/or attention to monitoring and

evaluation of progress. This is consistent with the assessment of VNR reports in 2017. However, despite the advances being made, country progress on establishing the building blocks for 2030 Agenda implementation - governance structures, institutional arrangements, policies and means of implementation - by our assessment, still varies substantially across countries. Some countries have made significant progress on some building blocks, but not all, and they still have much to learn from emerging good and best practice. Furthermore, very few countries are actively engaging in the more transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda, such as incorporating the 2030 Agenda principles into policies and approaches, integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, localising implementation in line with local needs and establishing effective mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and partnership. Progress in these areas, *inter alia*, will truly drive an integrated and sustainable approach to 2030 Agenda implementation and go beyond business as usual. It is our hope that these findings will encourage governments and stakeholders to redouble their efforts, as we believe that the next two years provide a number of key opportunities to address these shortfalls.

Key opportunities to improve VNRs and the HLPF over the next two years

A number of meetings in 2019 will offer an opportunity for stakeholders to commit to accelerating 2030 Agenda implementation. The second meeting of the HLPF in September 2019 will serve as the first summit in a series of Heads of State and Government HLPFs, which are set to occur every four years over the course of the 2030 Agenda. The Summit is meant to reconfirm political commitment to the 2030 Agenda and will reinforce other high level events scheduled for September 2019, namely the 2019 Climate Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development. It will result in a "political declaration" that aims to give guidance on how to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The two meetings of the HLPF in 2019 are political moments that present an opportunity to review both process and progress to date on SDG implementation. This report provides comprehensive guidance on how to make progress on implementing the SDGs at the national level - guidance that will help shape and inform the process as countries return to New York in July and September to improve and refine their plans for the coming years of delivery. Critically, this report shows that there is a need for member states to improve the quality of VNR reporting, and as such, the HLPF process. This is particularly important given the planned review of the format and organisation of the HLPF for early 2020. The review of the HLPF is intended to learn lessons from the first four years

of implementation and follow-up and review. It is our expectation that this review of the HLPF will be open and inclusive to all stakeholders. Civil society organisations will provide a number of recommendations based on the detailed findings of this report and its predecessors.

VNR reporting should be improved following the recommendations outlined in this report, recognising that the VNRs serve as an important mechanism for national accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation and the basis for follow-up and review at the HLPF. More time and space should also be given to the presentation and discussion of the VNRs at HLPF meetings – this is essential if the original vision of the positive and constructive follow up and review mechanisms outlined in the 2030 Agenda are to become a reality. Future HLPF meetings should include constructive forums for the meaningful participation of civil society, recognising their valuable contributions to SDG implementation and follow-up and review. Furthermore, future meetings of the HLPF should provide additional opportunities for exchange of views and inclusion of independent assessments, including reports from civil society and expert analysis, which would enable member states to benefit from a wider pool of knowledge. In doing so, it is our hope that the coming years can provide even greater ambition for our collective future.

Findings and recommendations:

Assessment of Governance and Institutional Mechanisms for 2030 Agenda Implementation

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

As was the case for VNR reporting in 2017, 2018 VNR reports suggest that institutional mechanisms for implementation and coordination are largely established. Most VNR reports (31) refer to the use of new or existing councils or committees to govern implementation. The most commonly cited leaders for 2030 Agenda implementation include heads of government or state and individual cabinet ministers, although a handful of countries are putting leadership in the hands of multiple cabinet ministers. As in 2017, these governance structures typically oversee and drive national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including policy alignment, coordination, implementation and monitoring.

In comparison to 2017, formal inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements has shown a marked improvement, shifting from a commitment to engage non-state actors, to now actually including them. This marks a small shift towards a more whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. While the types of non-state actors included in these structures remains wide-ranging, there is a slight drop in the engagement of parliaments in these institutions and a slight increase of local governments relative to the 2017 reports.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Clearly establish leadership and governance structures to support 2030 Agenda implementation and lay out lines of accountability between various national stakeholders.

- Assign responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation across government institutions to create ownership, identify shared responsibilities and ensure transparency and accountability for progress on implementation.

- Formalise non-state actor engagement in governance structures to realise the 2030 Agenda.

ENGAGING PEERS

The 2018 VNR reports signal some movement on participation in regional activities or special country groupings to support regional or sub-regional implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To date these initiatives are focussed on the development of regional frameworks, monitoring initiatives and best practice sharing. The VNR reports continue to make limited references to initiatives that are promoting peer learning and regional follow-up and review.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Identify opportunities to realise the 2030 Agenda domestically and globally through engagement more formally in regional level initiatives and with like-minded countries. Such engagement offers opportunities to share best practice with and learn lessons from peers.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

While half of the countries examined (26) consulted with stakeholders around setting national priorities, and almost all (43) engaged groups around the development of their VNR, there are still relatively few examples of formal processes and mechanisms that have been established to allow for more widespread and regular engagement with stakeholders. Such engagement contributes to ongoing awareness raising efforts, national ownership and whole-of-society approaches to implementation. There is a need for countries to report on engagement processes. This review proposes a range of ways that stakeholder engagement could meaningfully be enhanced

in the long-term, including through the adoption of principles for effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

• Establish and report on formal mechanisms to ensure regular, inclusive stakeholder engagement on 2030 Agenda implementation. Such mechanisms should support multi-stakeholder dialogue across the SDGs and with different sectors with a wide range of stakeholders, in line with the principles for effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement. This will help to promote greater understanding of shared goals and objectives and potential synergies, build momentum and strengthen partnerships in implementation. Ensuring inclusivity in this context is important to contribute to the leave no one behind agenda.

• Ensure stakeholder engagement on the 2030 Agenda is timely, open, transparent, informed and iterative. This means making use of varied and inclusive approaches to consultation such as online and offline methods; publicising consultation opportunities widely and with appropriate lead time, including at sub-national events in different parts of the country; taking steps to include vulnerable groups and their representatives; and, ensuring that information is available in local languages.

• Include non-state actors in institutional mechanisms or drafting teams responsible for the VNR report.

• Solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders in the preparation of VNR reports and provide stakeholders with an opportunity to review and comment on the first draft. Ensure a formal response to civil society reports.

Policies for 2030 Agenda Implementation

BASELINE OR GAP ANALYSIS

The VNR reports reveal that a majority of countries reporting in 2018 have carried out an assessment of their policies, data or both to inform 2030 Agenda implementation – albeit less countries carried out an assessment relative to 2017.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

• Conduct an assessment that identifies gaps in existing policies and programmes, examines data availability, and sets out baselines from which to measure progress and assess where additional efforts are needed.

• Clearly articulate how the assessment was conducted and provide a summary of the gaps identified for each goal.

INCORPORATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA INTO NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES

Similar to the findings in 2017, most countries have also incorporated the 2030 Agenda into their national policies or prepared a strategy for implementation. As was the case in 2017, VNR reporting for 2018 shows that countries tend to focus on the SDGs rather than the broader 2030 Agenda and its transformative principles. While most countries refer to leaving no one behind (41), substantially fewer refer to inter-generational responsibility (17) and universality (16), and even less to human rights-based approaches (six) and planetary boundaries (three).

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

• Fully integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national plans and strategies based on an evaluation of existing policies, approaches and progress to identify gaps, adapt policies and target areas where further progress is needed. The fact that existing policies already align to the SDGs is not sufficient.

• Operationalise the principles of the 2030 Agenda in approaches to implementation recognising the universal, rights-based and interlinked nature of the agenda. VNR reports should demonstrate how approaches to sustainable development are transforming, based on the principles of the 2030 Agenda and not just the SDGs.

• Inform policies and programmes by efforts to leave no one behind, including by prioritising those most in need to consistently reach marginalised communities.

• Ground plans and strategies in human rights, including by linking activities to international and national human rights commitments and establishing appropriate institutions and mechanisms to support a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

• Address domestic and global dimensions of sustainable development, and the relationships between them, in efforts to realise the 2030 Agenda, respecting the principle of universality.

• Undertake actions with reference to and respect for planetary boundaries and responsibilities towards future generations.

NATIONALISING THE 2030 AGENDA

While most countries have selected national priorities (and two countries sub-national priorities) that reflect all or most dimensions of sustainable development, the environment was listed less frequently as a priority for countries reporting in 2018 versus 2017.

Conversely, a focus on culture and national identity emerged as a priority for a handful of countries in 2018. The selection of national targets and indicators for implementation remains limited with only seven countries having selected both national targets and indicators.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

• Identify national sustainable development priorities. This means addressing all dimensions of sustainable development, recognising the interlinkages between society, the economy, and the environment.

• Develop national and sub-national targets and indicators through an inclusive and participatory process to complement global targets and indicators.

⚙ INTEGRATION AND POLICY COHERENCE

VNR reports show a marked improvement in terms of reporting on all SDGs in 2018 over 2017, with most countries adopting this approach. The majority of countries provided a detailed analysis of their progress on sustainable development and examined all dimensions of sustainable development. However, there is still limited reference to linkages between the dimensions, with countries taking more of a siloed approach in their goal-by-goal analysis. These findings represent a backsliding in comparison to 2017. As in 2017, countries are still not sufficiently ensuring integration in their approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation. In addition, the analysis presented in the assessment of goals in the 2018 VNR reports is similar to what was noted in 2017. Information is provided largely in terms of pre-existing policies and programmes that happen to be aligned with and supportive of progress on the SDGs.

Policy coherence for sustainable development does not feature strongly in reports. Reporting on the impacts of domestic and foreign policies on sustainable development at home and abroad in the goal-by-goal analysis can help prompt greater policy coherence for sustainable development across countries. Most countries do not consistently refer to existing international agreements that support implementation of the 2030 Agenda, such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, or internationally agreed aid and development effectiveness principles.

✅ Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

• Assess all 17 goals in their VNR reports, respecting the indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

• Demonstrate how existing policies, programmes and practices are changing to address gaps and support progress on the 2030 Agenda, in addition to existing approaches that are supportive of the SDGs.

• Ensure all dimensions of sustainable development are addressed in SDG implementation and VNR reporting. Linkages and synergies between the different dimensions of sustainable development should be clearly stated in policies, supported through implementation and included in reporting - all to help ensure clear integration.

• Include a summary of best practice, lessons learned, gaps and priorities, and areas where support is needed in the goal by goal analysis to facilitate learning and global partnership.

• Link implementation of the 2030 Agenda to relevant international agreements that support 2030 Agenda implementation, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and global agreements on aid and international development effectiveness, including in VNR reporting.

Provide an assessment of domestic and global dimensions of sustainable development in the goal-by-goal analysis, demonstrating contributions to realising the SDGs at home and abroad, and supporting policy coherence for sustainable development.

2030 Agenda Implementation

⟲ IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

Most countries have not costed 2030 Agenda implementation, but they have identified public and private domestic and international sources of finance to support implementation, showing a slight improvement in numbers over 2017. More than half of the VNR reports (25) provide no information on inclusion of the SDGs in national budgets or budgeting processes. Five (5) countries provide information on how they have incorporated the SDGs into national budgets and ten countries indicated plans to incorporate the SDGs into budgeting processes.

Reporting has improved on international public finance, trade, technology and systemic issues relative to 2017.

• Information reported on international public finance included the amount of international public finance (such as official development assistance (ODA) or South-South Cooperation) provided, ODA commitments, and challenges facing countries

that have graduated from ODA-eligibility due to income status. Six (6) countries noted challenges resulting from declining ODA flows. Only three countries noted efforts related to improving aid effectiveness. Only two countries noted they would further explore opportunities through South-South Cooperation.

- Countries reporting in 2018 largely focussed on the expansion of trade as a key priority.

- Similar to 2017, countries pointed most to capacity constraints related to 2030 Agenda implementation. This included challenges in monitoring and evaluating the impacts of programmes and changing course as necessary, and challenges in improving coordination.

- More countries reported on technology in 2018 than 2017, focussing on their national investments in this area.

- Finally, there was a marked increase in reporting on systemic issues in 2018 relative to 2017, likely as a result of the inclusion of this focus in the revised Secretary General's common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF. Global financial and economic (in) stability was the most commonly cited systemic issue, followed by efforts to combat illicit capital flows.

With respect to experiences in 2030 Agenda implementation, countries report on their challenges and, to a lesser degree, best practices. Data availability and monitoring progress are the most commonly cited challenges to implementation across VNR reports, followed by mobilising financial resources. This is consistent with findings from the 2017 review of VNR reports.

While there was a notable improvement in reporting on best practices in 2018, with some valuable examples provided, there are still very few countries (14 of 46) who explicitly note their lessons learned or areas in which they would like to learn from others. Equally, more countries could also identify priorities for development partner support. The provision of such information generates understanding of country needs, provides a basis on which to hold stakeholders accountable for their efforts to support 2030 Agenda implementation and assists in the identification of the best entry points for support. This is a gap that undermines the VNR process and creates a missed opportunity for making the most of HLPF discussions. The United Nations needs to explore with member states why there is underreporting on these dimensions, particularly given the focus of the HLPF follow-up and review process on knowledge and lesson sharing.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Clearly include best practices, lessons learned in accelerating implementation, challenges going forward and where opportunities exist to learn from peers in VNR reports.

- As an essential part of the process, examine national and subnational budgets and start integrating the SDGs into them to ensure that resources are allocated for implementation, building on the good practice in costing out SDG implementation and identifying sources of finance to implement the 2030 Agenda at country level.

- Report on all means of implementation, including clearly specifying capacity constraints. Such information is critical for assessing gaps, including in terms of identifying where greater domestic and international efforts are needed. Member states failed to meaningfully operationalise Millennium Development Goal 8 on global partnership. Member states should ensure that SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals of the SDGs is fully implemented.

- Bolster efforts to support development partners' capacity development priorities, including strengthening statistical systems and the capacities of local stakeholders to implement the 2030 Agenda.

- Scale up efforts to address systemic issues that impact SDG implementation, in particular international peace and security, illicit capital flight, tax avoidance and tax evasion, among other things.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Even with the inclusion of a component on leaving no one behind in the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF, only 16 countries provided a detailed account of efforts to leave no one behind. As was the case in 2017, VNR reports provided little information on the status of data to leave no one behind. Women, children and youth, persons with disabilities and elderly people continue to be the most commonly cited groups at risk of being left behind. However, the emphasis placed on different groups changed in 2018, with more countries pointing to persons with disabilities and children and youth, compared to women, which was the top group cited in 2017. Beyond the most common choices of those being left behind, there was tremendous diversity in the different types of people that countries feel are being left behind, a striking increase in 2018 over 2017.

Countries also tended to highlight their existing policies and approaches to leave no one behind, rather than signal the development of new approaches. However, half of reporting countries (23) noted a mix of specialised and universal programmes.

Given that combining universal policies with targeted approaches and strong leadership can be an effective approach to reaching marginalised communities, this is a positive step in the right direction. That said, this is still only the case for half of the countries reporting. Countries also highlighted a range of policies and programmes related to social protection, health, education and other initiatives. Twenty (20) countries noted the development or use of strategies to target specific groups. The findings suggest that countries have yet to adapt new programmes to target those left behind and rely, for the most part, on existing programmes. Overall, there is a need for countries to examine and adapt existing policies and programmes in light of the focus on leaving no one behind, particularly to first examine the extent to which such policies and programmes are addressing the needs of those furthest left behind.

Information on the results of efforts to leave no one behind was in the form of specific figures on the results of programmes and initiatives, and overall trends (including data) or information (without data) on the status of progress. Reporting on efforts to reduce inequality improved substantially in 2018. Countries highlighted the use of policies and strategies to address inequality, followed by social protection.

Finally, efforts to realise gender equality as outlined in the VNR reports centre around legal instruments (31), specific policies and strategies (25), and projects and other benefits that support women (24). The status of gender-disaggregated data is still very mixed across VNR reports.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Include a specific chapter on leaving no one behind in VNR reporting and demonstrate how the leave no one behind approach is being translated into action in an overarching way.

- Provide information on the status of data collection or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind. This includes information on gender-disaggregated data. Approaches to gathering qualitative assessments, especially for populations for whom data is not available should also be presented. Such efforts could include engagement with key experts and representatives of marginalised groups. Ensuring no one is left behind means knowing who is being left behind, by how much, and in what areas.

- Highlight existing and planned efforts to leave no one behind, including how policies and programmes are being adapted, and in particular new approaches developed, to first reach the people who are furthest behind.

- Develop a mix of targeted and universal approaches to leaving no one behind, drawing on the latest evidence of what works and best practice.

- Report on the outcomes of efforts to leave no one behind, including by drawing on civil society expertise and citizen-generated data. Clearly present links between specific policies and actions with results.

- Target domestic inequality in 2030 Agenda implementation, including in support of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and outline the current status of domestic inequality and how it is being addressed in VNR reports.

- Adopt a range of internationally recognised best practices to promote gender equality, such as gender budgeting, gender-based analysis and mainstreaming into policies and plans, and appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.

AWARENESS RAISING AND LOCALISATION

Fewer countries reported on efforts to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda in 2018 over 2017. That said, VNR reporting countries in 2018 continued to recognise that awareness-raising is an area for ongoing effort throughout the course of 2030 Agenda implementation and part of public engagement strategies (seven countries specifically noted that more efforts to raise awareness are needed). Countries are making use of a wide range of innovative in-person and online mechanisms, with a number of VNR reports noting the use of the VNR to contribute to awareness-raising efforts.

As was the case in 2017, the VNR reports continue to show a wide variance in terms of where countries and their local governments are in terms of localising the SDGs. That said, reports in 2017 compared to 2018 tended to be more detailed in terms of articulating next steps for localisation and outlining existing activities, including the status of policy development and local institutional structures for implementation. The status of local implementation efforts, as highlighted by the 2018 VNR reports, suggests that much more work is needed to promote localisation.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Continue to promote, or immediately begin adopting, innovative ways to raise awareness of the SDGs among the general public with a view to long term engagement, including in partnership with civil society and other non-state actors.

- Provide support to sub-national levels of government to raise awareness of the SDGs, strengthen local institutional structures

and resources for implementation, and further develop capacities for local level implementation, including translation of the SDGs into local plans, programmes, and monitoring efforts.

PARTNERSHIP TO REALISE THE SDGS

For the most part, VNR reports stress the important contributions that non-state actors and others play in 2030 Agenda implementation, similar to 2017. Reporting on the contributions from civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector and academia improved in 2018. However, only a handful of VNR reports still included contributions from non-state actors and local governments throughout. VNR reports continue to remain silent on the enabling environment for civil society, and a limited number speak to other challenges that civil society organisations face in contributing to the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the range of activities (in particular, specific projects, awareness raising and promoting accountability, particularly in the areas of independent monitoring of progress) and the variety of roles attributed to civil society organisations in terms of supporting 2030 Agenda implementation expanded in 2018. That said, the predominant focus on projects and awareness raising demonstrates a narrow perception of the roles that civil society organisations play in broader society.

Marginally more VNRs in 2018 (relative to 2017) reported on ways in which parliaments, the private sector and academia are being engaged. The main ways parliamentarians are contributing to the 2030 Agenda include through committee work, the adoption of resolutions in support of implementation, and oversight – similar to what was reported in 2017. For the private sector, VNR reports cited specific projects, company specific commitments and participation in multi-stakeholder partnerships. The most common examples of academic or expert contributions noted in VNR reports related to specific projects, followed by expert analysis. While reporting has improved on the contributions from academics and experts, only half of the VNR reports for 2018 included their contributions. Finally, the provision of finance (official development assistance, finance from international financial institutions and South-South Cooperation) was the most commonly cited role identified by countries for development partners, followed by technical assistance. Interestingly, twice the number of countries (14) than in 2017 explicitly noted that they received support to carry out their VNR, in partnership with the United Nations. With a few notable exceptions, VNR reports continue to not be specific enough to really inform future areas for development partner support and the establishment of partnerships, as was noted in 2017.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Support civil society to engage in 2030 Agenda implementation by creating a more enabling environment, including through institutionalised dialogue and consultation, inclusion in formal governance arrangements, finance, and capacity development.

- Integrate the 2030 Agenda into parliamentary committee work, recognising the critical role parliamentarians play as citizens' representatives and in ensuring national level accountability for progress.

- Support and develop partnerships with a variety of non-state actors, including academia and the private sector.

- Where relevant, clearly stipulate and provide details on priority areas for support from the international community, laying out the roles development partners can best play to support the acceleration of 2030 Agenda implementation.

MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

The majority of countries provided information on monitoring and evaluation at the national level, though less countries reported this information in 2018 than in 2017. Information on data availability, including disaggregated data, is often unclear or not articulated, similar to the findings from the review of VNR reports in 2017. Both availability and disaggregation need to be strengthened. Eleven (11) countries noted the use of a dashboard or web portal to report on data, an increase over the five countries noting this approach in 2017.

Fourteen (14) countries noted that they engage in regular reporting. Five (5) countries have given indications of when they will report next to the HLPF, including some who provided a reporting timetable. As in 2017, national reports on progress in 2018 still tend to be government reports, rather than whole-of-society reports. A limited number of countries pointed to the role of parliament in reviewing progress on 2030 Agenda implementation. Some countries, including two who have reported previously, are starting to use their VNR reports to signal progress against targets.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, and country efforts to improve data availability - given the importance of data for SDG monitoring and accountability, as well as leaving no one behind.

- Link reviews of progress for 2030 Agenda implementation to parliamentary oversight mechanisms in order to ensure accountability at the national level.

- Spell out plans to review progress at the national level and be accountable to citizens for progress on the 2030 Agenda beyond reporting to the HLPF. This should include consultation with non-state actors and articulating plans for future HLPF reporting. These elements are important for ensuring accountability for progress on the 2030 Agenda, identifying gaps in implementation, allowing for course correction and ensuring transparency in reporting processes.

- Include an assessment of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports to the HLPF, particularly with reference to the status of implementation in previously submitted VNR reports.

Assessment of VNR Reports against the United Nations Secretary General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines

Similar to 2017, many of the VNR reports are not structured according to the outline in the guidelines though they capture most elements. This can hinder comparison of shared challenges and good practices.

The majority of countries include most elements of the voluntary common reporting guidelines in their VNR reports. All elements of the guidelines were included by at least 70% of reporting countries, with the exceptions of leaving no one behind, structural issues and the annexes. Reporting on these elements was lower.

Despite these missing elements, VNR reports still tend to be very long and in some cases unnecessarily detailed. Repetition was identified as a key issue in the 2017 review of VNR reports, however this was less of an issue for the 2018 VNR reports.

In terms of reporting against the specific sections in the voluntary common reporting guidelines, the review showed the following:

- The VNR reports showed continued growth in terms of inclusion of an opening statement with 38 countries including an opening statement in 2018.

- The majority of reports (33) included a highlights section or captured the main elements of the highlights section in the report, a decrease in comparison to 2017.

- All countries, with the exception of Kiribati and Sudan who both only submitted main messages, included an introduction or the main elements of the introduction in 2018.

- Reporting on the methodology for the review improved in 2018.

- More countries did not include information on creating ownership in 2018 (nine) than in 2017 (three).

- Australia and Singapore were the only countries that did not include information on how the SDGs have been incorporated into national frameworks in 2018.

- A larger proportion of countries reported on how they integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in the 2018 reports (33 or 72%) compared to previous years.

- Reporting on leaving no one behind could be improved with just under 61% (28 of 46 countries) addressing this component fully or somewhat in their VNR reports.

- Sudan and Singapore were the only countries that did not report on institutional mechanisms in 2018.

- Structural issues, a new component in the guidelines for the 2018 HLPF, were captured by 31 (67%) of the VNR reports for 2018.

- The analysis of goals and targets was met or partially met by all countries in 2018 with the exception of Bahrain, Kiribati, Slovakia, and Sudan. The majority of countries reported on all goals rather than a sub-set of the goals as was the case in 2017.

- More countries provided information on the means of implementation in 2018 than in 2017, however around half of the reporting countries did not follow the instructions as per the guidelines.

- Most countries (34) provided information on next steps in 2018.

- Most VNR reports (37) included a conclusion.

- Over half of the countries reporting in 2018, or 28, included an annex in their VNR report; however only 20 countries met this component as instructed by the guidelines. A number of countries also included annexes with best practice or views from other stakeholders, as suggested by the 2018 voluntary common reporting guidelines.

Based on these findings, member states may still need to:

- Follow, as much as possible, the guidelines as proposed by the Secretary General to ensure that all elements of SDG implementation are captured, and facilitate comparison of shared challenges, good practices and lessons learned.

- Include a statement from a head of state to demonstrate commitment and give profile to the agenda.

- Include highlights as a tool to provide a snapshot of context, the review, integration of the three dimensions, efforts to leave no one behind, best practice, challenges and lessons learned.

- Include an introduction to set the scene and outline components of the VNR report that avoids repetition of the opening statement and executive summary.

- Continue to include the methodology for the VNR, with sufficient details that clearly articulate how the drafting process occurred, timing, how stakeholders were engaged, and lessons learned. This will provide greater clarity on what was done, and how other member states can draw from the experience of different countries.

- Continue to provide information on efforts to raise awareness and foster ownership, in particular key initiatives, successes and lessons learned in this process.

- Continue to provide information on efforts to incorporate the SDGs into national frameworks, in particular key initiatives and successes and lessons learned in this process.

- Make use of the guidance provided by the *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews* to better assess and report on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in VNR reports.

- Report on efforts to leave no one behind as instructed by the voluntary common reporting guidelines, including information on who is being left behind, data, efforts, and results.

- Continue to provide information on institutional mechanisms for 2030 Agenda implementation, including governance arrangements.

- Report on structural issues that hinder progress on 2030 Agenda implementation and approaches to addressing such issues.

- Continue to report on all SDGs with specific attention to trends, gaps, best practice, and lessons learned.

- Repor on progress between first and subsequent VNRs, providing an indication of trends over time.

- Report on the means of implementation as instructed in the guidelines, including domestic finance, resource allocation, budgeting, international public finance, trade, capacity development, technology and partnerships.

- Provide a detailed assessment of the forward-looking agenda, outlining where the country needs to go and the steps to get there, based on gaps and lessons learned to date. This should include next steps in terms of follow-up and review with concrete commitments to be fulfilled by states, strengthening the VNR process and clarifying what stakeholders can expect in the years following VNR reporting at the HLPF.

- Include lessons learned from the VNR process in the conclusion to showcase the value of the VNR process to national and international stakeholders and how it can be improved next time as a result of the lessons learned.

- Include a statistical annex in the VNR report as suggested by the voluntary common reporting guidelines.

- Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, with reference to global and national level indicators, in the statistical annex. This will provide a better picture of countries' overall capacity to monitor SDG implementation.

Contents

Progressing national SDGs implementation   **1**

1.1 Overview

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by member states of the United Nations in 2015, serve as a comprehensive, universal, agenda to realise sustainable development in all countries and for the world. The 2030 Agenda is grounded in a promise to ensure no one is left behind in the implementation of the goals and in a set of principles that represent a transformative approach to sustainable development.

PRINCIPLES OF THE 2030 AGENDA

Human-rights based approach

Leaving no one behind and combating inequality

Respecting planetary boundaries and inter-generational responsibility

Integrated nature of sustainable development and the equal importance of the economic, social and environmental pillars

Inclusivity, solidarity and participation

Transparency and accountability

The Seventh Meeting of the United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development will convene in July 2019 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The HLPF is the main global venue for governments, civil society and other stakeholders to share their efforts to implement and monitor the goals – both at a procedural and substantive level. The Forum is mandated to carry out regular, inclusive, state-led and thematic reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with inputs from other intergovernmental bodies, regional processes, and Major Groups and Other Stakeholders. Countries present voluntary national reviews (VNRs) on an annual basis at the HLPF. The follow-up and review process is meant to promote accountability to citizens,

support effective international cooperation and foster exchange of best practice and mutual learning. [1] To date, ten[2] countries have presented VNRs.[2] In 2019, 51 countries will present their VNR, ten of whom will be presenting their VNRs for a second time.[3]

As part of efforts to ensure accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation, civil society organisations and coalitions from different countries regularly produce their own independent reviews and analysis on their respective governments' implementation of the 2030 Agenda. These civil society reports complement official processes, particularly given that some governments have pursued limited dialogue with non-state actors in their respective VNR process.

This publication documents and analyses all the VNR reports and a sample of civil society reports produced in 2018 for the HLPF.[4] It does so with a view to improving the VNR process and the VNR reports, and strengthening accountability around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It identifies best practices in implementation and provides recommendations on how governments, civil society organisations and other stakeholders can improve efforts to implement the SDGs. The report also provides recommendations on how member states can improve their reporting to the HLPF by meeting and building on the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for the 2018 VNRs at the HLPF. Importantly, the review looks at how VNR reporting is evolving over time through a comparison of analysis of the VNRs in 2016 and 2017 with findings for 2018.

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1   See United Nations. 2016. *Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level.* Report of the Secretary-General. A/70/684. New York: United Nations. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/684&Lang=E.

2   A number of countries have presented more than one report. Colombia, Egypt, Mexico and Switzerland presented in 2016 and 2018. Benin, Qatar and Uruguay presented in 2017 and 2018. Togo volunteered for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

3   Azerbaijan, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Indonesia, Philippines, Sierra Leone and Turkey.

4   Details on the methodology, including the analytical framework, used for the assessment of all the VNRs can be found in Annex 2.

1.2 About the 2018 edition

This year's review includes an assessment of all 46 VNR reports submitted in 2018.[5] Although Kiribati and Sudan did not submit a VNR report, they did submit main messages at the HLPF, and have been included here. The box below provides a list of the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2018. Annex 1 also provides an overview of the countries according to region and income level.

Countries reporting to the HLPF in 2018

ALBANIA	ECUADOR	LITHUANIA	SINGAPORE
ANDORRA	EGYPT	MALI	SLOVAKIA
ARMENIA	GREECE	MALTA	SPAIN
AUSTRALIA	GUINEA	MEXICO	SRI LANKA
BAHAMAS	HUNGARY	NAMIBIA	STATE OF PALESTINE
BAHRAIN	IRELAND	NIGER	SUDAN
BENIN	JAMAICA	PARAGUAY	SWITZERLAND
BHUTAN	KIRIBATI	POLAND	TOGO
CABO VERDE	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	QATAR	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
CANADA	LATVIA	ROMANIA	URUGUAY
COLOMBIA	LEBANON	SAUDI ARABIA	VIET NAM
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC		SENEGAL	

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5   Though they did not submit full VNR reports, Sudan and Kiribati are included in the data presented below – both in terms of the ten pillars of implementation and the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines – as these countries reported on a number of elements in the assessment framework and on components of the reporting guidelines through their main messages.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

The review follows the assessment framework prepared for the 2017 edition of *Progressing National SDGs Implementation*,[6] and examines countries in terms of ten pillars of implementation. The framework complements the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' synthesis of VNR reports. It provides greater detail on actions undertaken at the goal level and with respect to specific groups in the context of leaving no one behind, but does not assess VNR reports in terms of best practices and where they could be improved.

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

BASELINE OR GAP ANALYSIS

INCORPORATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA INTO NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES

NATIONALISING THE 2030 AGENDA AWARENESS RAISING AND LOCALISATION

INTEGRATION AND POLICY COHERENCE

IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

PARTNERSHIP TO REALISE THE 2030 AGENDA

MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

To improve the logic and flow of the report, this year we have organised the ten pillars into three sections focussed on 1) governance and institutional mechanisms, 2) policies, and 3) means of implementation. Components of pillar six on *Raising awareness and creating ownership of the 2030 Agenda* have been split into two according to their relevance to the respective pillars on policy and means of implementation, as shown below.

GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS
- Leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms
- Stakeholder engagement

POLICIES
- Baseline or gap analysis
- Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies
- Nationalising the 2030 Agenda[7]
- Integration and policy coherence

MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION
- Implementing the 2030 Agenda
- Leave no one behind
- Awareness raising and localisation[8]
- Partnership to realise the 2030 Agenda
- Measurement and reporting

The assessment framework also gives special attention to the spirit of the 2030 Agenda through, for example, the examination of the principles of the 2030 Agenda (as identified above). A number of small changes were made to this year's framework for the review to better capture elements of these principles and other aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation. The changes include additions related to: environmental principles related to the 2030 Agenda; international agreements and frameworks related to the environment and effective development cooperation, more detailed analysis of efforts to leave no one behind, including addressing gender equality; and how governments are budgeting for the SDGs. Overall however, the framework for the 2018 edition is largely identical to the 2017 edition. Annex 2 provides an overview of the assessment framework, highlighting the differences between the 2017 and 2018 assessment frameworks. Finally, data presented in the first three sections of the 2018 edition includes a comparison with the key trends identified in the 2017 report, where appropriate.[9]

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6 The 2017 edition built on the framework set out in Bond et al's 2016 assessment of the VNR reports. See Cutter, Amy. 2016. *Progressing national SDGs implementation: Experiences and recommendations from 2016*. London: Bond. The second edition built on the eight pillars of analysis from the first edition by adding two more that focus on partnerships to realise Agenda 2030 and the means of implementation. It also provided an annex of two-page profiles for the country VNR reports reviewed, a contribution that has continued with this edition (see Annex 3).

7   Part of the raising awareness and creating ownership of the 2030 Agenda pillar of analysis.

8   Part of the raising awareness and creating ownership of the 2030 Agenda pillar of analysis.

9 The 2017 report is referred to throughout, however only cited once here for ease of reading. See Kindornay, Shannon. 2017. *Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2017*. Ottawa: CCIC. The full report can be found at https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2018/05/Full-report-Eng.pdf. Similarly, 2016 edition of this report (Cutter (2016), cited above) is available at https://www.bond.org.uk/sites/default/files/sdgs-9.pdf.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Assign responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation across government institutions. This creates ownership, identifies shared responsibilities and ensures transparency and accountability for progress on implementation.**

The fourth section in the review pertains to VNR reporting against the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF. It looks at the extent to which countries are following the guidelines and provides a comparison of 2016, 2017 and 2018 VNR reports where possible. In December 2017, the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines were updated for the 2018 HLPF. [10] The analysis has been updated to reflect these changes.

Finally, this report includes an annex that presents short country profiles for the 46 reporting countries based on the ten pillars of analysis.

Throughout the main sections of this report, good and best practices are highlighted based on government reporting through the VNR reports. All best practice spotlights showcased below are based on reporting or activities carried out by one or more countries reporting in 2018. The good practice case studies provide a more detailed account of efforts by individual countries.

Recommendations are also presented throughout the report. Most of the recommendations made in the 2017 edition of this report remain relevant based on the review of 2018 VNR reports and have been included where relevant. Recommendations from the 2017 review that are not included in this edition remain important however. For example, VNR reports in 2018 did not emphasize the need for development partners to meet the United Nations 0.7% target for official development assistance to gross national income to the same extent as in 2017, nor did they make significant reference to South-South Cooperation and the need to implement trade agreements to benefit developing countries. Accordingly, in the 2017 edition, recommendations were included calling on development partners to meet the United Nations target, provide South-South Cooperation in support of national priorities and implement trade agreements and agendas to benefit developing and developed countries. While these recommendations are still relevant and reflect priorities for civil society and many countries, since they did not feature much in the 2018 reports, they have not been included in the 2018 edition.

The analysis in the review is based largely on the VNR reports, and where available, civil society reports. [11] No additional research was conducted to verify the accuracy and confirm the validity of the information governments included in their reports. Where relevant, findings from other assessments of the VNR reports for 2018 have been noted throughout the report. Nevertheless, this is a clear limitation of the findings.

> **How to use this report**
> This review of VNR reports is comprehensive and covers most, if not all, aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation and VNR reporting. The report has a lot to offer governments, civil society, researchers and others interested in understanding the current state of 2030 Agenda implementation and reporting, including good practices.
>
> While stakeholders are encouraged to review the report in its entirety to get a full picture of 2030 Agenda implementation, sub-sections of analysis can be read on a standalone basis, allowing readers to review topics that are of most interest. For governments that are planning to carry out a VNR, this report serves as useful guide to best practices in implementing the VNR and reporting. It also offers a range of examples from which governments can draw in establishing governance and institutional mechanisms, policies, programmes and partnerships to support 2030 Agenda implementation.
>
> For civil society organisations, the content and structure of this report provides a basis for parallel reporting, and highlights the key issues that civil society organisations may want to consider, including to improve their own reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation. The report is also a powerful advocacy tool that can be used to promote the adoption of best practice at the country level.
>
> Finally, the country profiles included in this report provide a simple, short overview of the current status of 2030 Agenda implementation according to the pillars of analysis for reporting countries, serving as a useful reference document.

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10   The original guidelines can be found here: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/9768Guidelines from SG report.pdf.

11   Civil society reports are available for 16 of the countries reviewed in 2018, and can be found under "Reports" here: https://action4sd.org/major-groups/hlpf/.

1.3 What's new in the 2018 edition

A number of the main findings from the 2018 review of VNR reports stand out in comparison to the 2017 review. In the area of leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms, the 2018 review revealed a significant increase in participation by non-state actors in formal governance mechanisms that have been established to oversee overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda by, for example, driving policy formation, coordinating across government institutions and assessing progress on implementation. This a significant change from 2017 when most countries only noted a promise to engage non-state actors. While this is a welcome improvement, relatively few reports presented formal mechanisms for stakeholder engagement beyond governance mechanisms. This report proposes a set of principles to improve stakeholder engagement going forward.

Photo: © Greg Armfield / WWF-UK

Policies for 2030 Agenda implementation continue to focus more on the SDGs than the transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda with less than half of the VNR reports referring to inter-generational responsibility (17), universality (16), human rights-based approaches (six) and planetary boundaries (three). The environment was listed less frequently as a priority for countries reporting in 2018 versus 2017 though a handful of countries pointed to a focus on culture

and national identify in addition to other dimensions of sustainable development. VNRs show a marked improvement in terms of reporting on all SDGs in 2018 over 2017, however, there is still limited reference to linkages between the dimensions of sustainable development, a finding that represents a backsliding in comparison to 2017.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Reporting on the means of implementation – notably international public finance, trade, technology and systemic issues – improved in 2018 relative to 2017. Consistent with 2017, data availability and monitoring progress are the most commonly cited challenges to implementation across VNR reports, followed by mobilising financial resources. While reporting on best practices increased in 2018, gaps still remain in terms of reporting on lessons learned or areas in which countries would like to learn from others.

A component on leaving no one behind is included in the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines. Yet, only 16 countries provided a detailed account of efforts to leave no one behind. Countries tended to highlight their existing policies and approaches to leave no one behind, rather than signal the development of new approaches. Overall, there is a need for countries to first examine the extent to which policies and programmes are addressing the needs of those left behind.

Fewer countries reported on efforts to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda in 2018 over 2017, however countries continue to recognise that awareness-raising and public education should be ongoing over the course of the 2030 Agenda. The status of local implementation efforts, as highlighted by the 2018 VNR reports, suggests that much more work is needed to promote localisation.

Reporting on the contributions from civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector and academia improved in 2018. However, only a handful of VNR reports still included contributions from non-state actors and local governments throughout.

The majority of countries provided information on monitoring and evaluation at the national level, though less countries reported this information in 2018 than in 2017. Fourteen (14) countries committed to regular reporting. Through their VNR report, some countries, including two who have reported previously, signalled progress against targets.

Finally, with respect to adherence to the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, many of the VNR reports are not structured according to the outline in the guidelines though they capture most elements, as was the case in 2017. This can hinder comparison of shared challenges and good practices. Nevertheless, all elements of the guidelines were included by at least 70% of reporting countries, with the exceptions of leaving no one behind, structural issues and the annexes.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE VNRS AND THE HLPF OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS

An additional meeting of the HLPF will also occur with Heads of State and Government at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019. This Summit will be the first Heads of State and Government HLPF, which are set to occur every four years over the course of the 2030 Agenda. The Summit is meant to provide a key moment to consider progress of the SDGs globally and reconfirm political commitment to the 2030 Agenda. It is reinforced by other related high level events in September 2019, namely the 2019 Climate Summit and the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development. The Summit will result in a 'political declaration' that aims to give guidance on how to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, that is being negotiated under the co-chairs of Barbados and Sweden. It is also expected that a review of the process of the HLPF itself will take place following this Summit in 2020. Given the significance of this, this report concludes with some initial suggestions for the proposed review of the HLPF. It provides recommendations from civil society on ways to improve the HLPF process and implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

2.0 Assessment of Governance and Institutional Mechanisms for 2030 Agenda Implementation

Photo: © Pham Bao Son / WWF-Vietnam

Chapter Summary

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

As was the case for VNR reporting in 2017, 2018 VNR reports suggest that institutional mechanisms for implementation and coordination are largely established. Most VNR reports (31) refer to the use of new or existing councils or committees to govern implementation. The most commonly cited leaders for 2030 Agenda implementation include heads of government or state and individual cabinet ministers, although a handful of countries are putting leadership in the hands of multiple cabinet ministers. As in 2017, these governance structures are typically overseeing and driving nationalisation of the 2030 Agenda, including policy alignment, coordination, implementation and monitoring.

In comparison to 2017, formal inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements has shown a marked improvement, shifting from a commitment to engage non-state actors, to now actually including them. This marks a small shift towards a more whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. While the types of non-state actors included in these structures remains wide-ranging, there is a slight drop in the engagement of parliaments in these institutions and a slight increase of local governments relative to the 2017 reports.

ENGAGING PEERS

The 2018 VNR reports signal some movement on participation in regional activities or special country groupings to support regional or sub-regional implementation of the 2030 Agenda. To date these initiatives are focussed on the development of regional frameworks, monitoring initiatives and best practice sharing. The VNR reports continue to make limited references to initiatives that are promoting peer learning and regional follow-up and review.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

While half of the countries examined (26) consulted with stakeholders around setting national priorities, and almost all (43) engaged groups around the development of their VNR, there are still relatively few examples of formal processes and mechanisms that have been established to allow for more widespread and regular engagement with stakeholders outside of governance mechanisms. Such engagement contributes to ongoing awareness-raising efforts, national ownership and whole-of-society approaches to implementation. There is a need for countries to report on engagement processes. This review proposes a range of ways that stakeholder engagement could meaningfully be enhanced in the long-term, including through the adoption of principles for effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

2.1 Leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms

Analysis of leadership, governance and institutional mechanisms provides insights on political commitment to the 2030 Agenda, roles and responsibilities in implementation and lines of accountability. The establishment of governance and institutional mechanisms is a basic building block for effective 2030 Agenda implementation and signals to national and international communities the extent to which governments have institutionalised their efforts towards realising progress on sustainable development. Information on governance arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation is available in all VNR reports.[12] This is consistent with reporting in 2017 where all countries, with the exception of Curacao, reported on governance arrangements.

2.1.1 Leadership

Leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation provides an indication of the importance ascribed to the 2030 Agenda by governments. Most VNR reports include information on leadership, identifiable through an examination of governance arrangements. Consistent with 2017, countries appear to be taking a wide range of approaches (Figure 1).

Whereas in 2017 the most common leaders for 2030 Agenda implementation were cabinet ministers (14 countries) and implementation bodies outside parliament (11), in 2018 VNR reports pointed to the head of government or state (13) or an individual cabinet minister to provide leadership (ten). Implementation bodies outside parliament were the next most prominent site of leadership for seven countries. Five (5) countries noted that multiple cabinet

FIGURE 1. LEADERSHIP FOR 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

FORM OF LEADERSHIP

Form of leadership	Number of countries
Head of government or state	12
Individual cabinet minister	10
Multipe cabinet ministers	5
Parliamentary committee	1
Implementation body outside parliament	7
Lead department	4
Other	3
Not articulated in the VNR	4

Number of countries
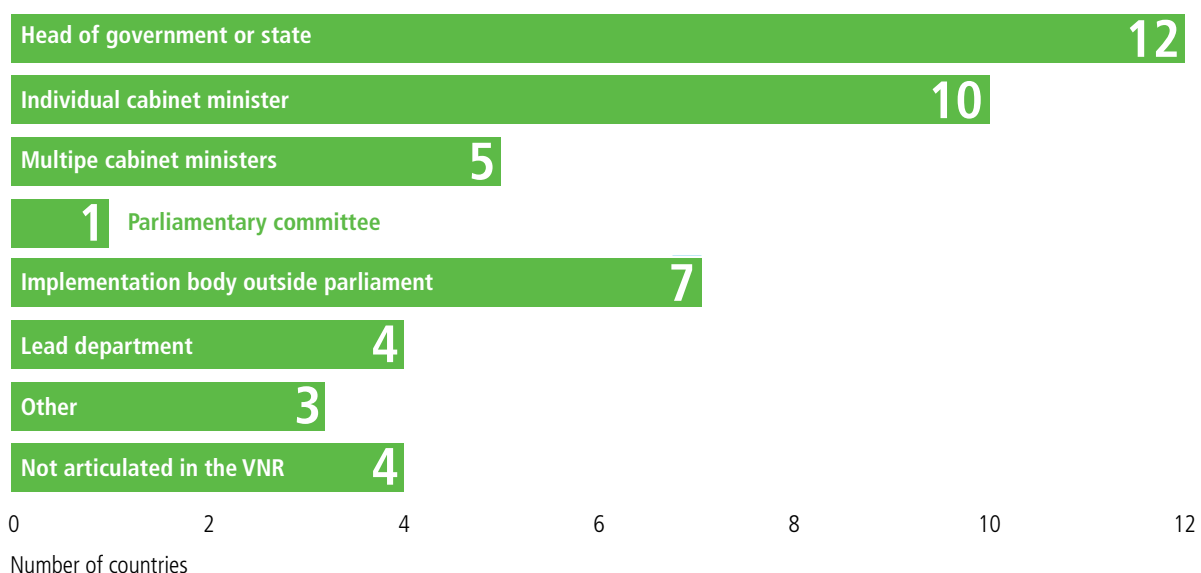
12 The main messages for Sudan include reference to the governance structure but the information is incomplete.

ministers provide leadership for 2030 Agenda implementation.[13] This is a shift from previous years.

2.1.2 Governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms

Given the scale, scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda, effective governance arrangements and institutional mechanisms are important for orienting and providing impetus for implementation, ensuring policy coherence and coordinating action across government institutions, including at national and sub-national levels. The majority of countries – 32 of 46 – are making use of new or existing councils or committees to govern 2030 Agenda implementation. Thirty-six (36) countries reporting in 2017 noted a similar approach.[14]

Of the 32 countries, 22 created a new council or committee, of which nine countries noted that implementation occurs through government institutions and two noted the use of a lead department for this purpose. Ten (10) countries are making use of existing councils or committees, four of which noted implementation occurs through a lead department (two) or government institutions (two). Three (3) countries referred to implementation through government institutions generally speaking, while another three pointed to a lead department. Five (5) countries made use of other types of governance mechanisms, while information provided in two VNR reports was unclear in terms of articulating the governance mechanism.

As was the case for countries reporting in 2017, the main responsibilities for governing bodies tend to include overseeing and driving nationalisation of the 2030 Agenda, policy alignment, coordination, implementation and monitoring. A number of countries – 13 – also noted the creation of technical and/or substantive working groups or other specialised bodies to support implementation.

VNR reports for Albania, Ireland and the United Arab Emirates provided information on the main government institutions responsible for progress on SDG targets. Albania's VNR report included an institutional map that linked government institutions to specific SDGs, including the number of targets for which an institution is responsible. Ireland provided an annex of the country's SDG Policy Map that assigns each SDG target to a particular department and showcases the relevant national policies linked to that target as well as national policy objectives. Finally the United

Arab Emirates included reference to responsible government institutions in the goal-by-goal analysis of its VNR report.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Assign responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation across government institutions. This creates ownership, identifies shared responsibilities and ensures transparency and accountability for progress on implementation.

A case study in good practice: Including parliament in 2030 Agenda implementation in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka established the Select Committee of Parliament on the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to review and provide advice on 2030 Agenda implementation, and coordinate activities with Parliament and respective Ministries. The committee includes 15 members of Parliament. It will make recommendations on the formulation of national policies and laws, on the allocation of domestic and international resources, on coordination among government institutions, on networking at national, provincial and local levels, on engagement with non-state actors, and on follow-up and review. The committee also has a mandate to share expertise and experiences at regional and international levels. While civil society organisations in Sri Lanka have noted that knowledge levels among parliamentarians are still low, overall this is a positive start.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Sri Lanka's VNR report.

2.1.3 Non-state actor engagement in governance arrangements

The inclusion of non-state actors in governance arrangements is one indicator of the extent to which countries are adopting whole-of-society approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation. Fourteen (14 of 46) VNR reports did not provide information on non-state actor engagement in governance mechanisms.[15] Information in the VNR report for Uruguay suggests that non-state actors are not included in governance mechanisms. Figures 2 and 3 provide data for 2018 and 2017 on how stakeholders outside government institutions are engaged in governance and institutional mechanisms for implementation according to methods of engagement. Participation in councils, committees or technical working groups that oversee implementation refers to instances in which

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13   Spain and Jamaica are responsible for 'other' forms of leadership in terms of 2030 Agenda implementation. Spain has established a High Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda who reports to the President of the Government and the High Commissioner for Child Poverty. Jamaica adopted a tripartite mechanism comprising three key national focal points: the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, and the Statistical Institute of Jamaica.

14   Twenty-one (21) countries established a new committee or council and 15 reporting making use of an existing committee or council in 2017.

15   Colombia's 2018 VNR report did not cover this issue, however in its 2016 VNR report, it was noted that civil society can participate in meetings of the lead governance body on 2030 Agenda implementation by invitation only. Data for Colombia is not included in Figure 2.

the stakeholder is a formal member. Data presented as 'commitment to engage' refers to instances in which no formalised participation has been set out, but there is a well-established expectation of engagement, generally through the mandate of governance mechanisms and institutions carrying out implementation. The category 'other' includes interest groups such as women's organisation.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Formally include non-state actors in governance arrangements. This contributes to inclusivity, and a whole of society approach in 2030 Agenda implementation and the promotion of partnership.**

Figures 2 and 3 suggest an improvement in 2018 over 2017 in terms of the engagement of non-state actors in governance mechanisms.[16] Whereas the most prominent form of engagement was a commitment to engage groups through governance or institutional mechanisms in 2017, countries reporting in 2018 showed a marked increase in terms of actual inclusion of non-state actors in lead councils or committees responsible for 2030 Agenda implementation.[17] With the exception of local government institutions and special interest groups (other), the most prominent form of engagement is formal inclusion in governance mechanisms for all non-state actors. In terms of the actors involved, this includes civil society (17), the private sector (17), academia (eight), trade unions (seven), development partners (six), and youth (four). Countries reporting the inclusion of parliament in governance mechanisms declined from three in 2017 to only one in 2018. Local government (five) and government institutions (15) are also more frequently listed as participating in lead governance mechanisms for 2030 Agenda implementation in comparison to 2017.

The 2018 VNR reports suggest a marked improvement in terms of formal inclusion of representatives from major stakeholder groups. This approach supports whole-of-society ownership over the 2030 Agenda, cross-sector relationship and trust building, and inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches to implementation.

> 🇸🇰 **A case study in good practice: Including non-state actors in governance arrangements in Slovakia**
> In Slovakia, the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has responsibility for 2030 Agenda implementation. The council coordinates policy development related to sustainable development at national and regional levels, and assesses progress. Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Investment and Informatization, the Government Council includes representatives from relevant government institutions, regional administration, cities and municipalities, employers, trade unions, academia, non-governmental organisations and relevant government advisory bodies. The council is supported by a Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the preparation of the National Investment Plan of the Slovak Republic for the years 2018 - 2030. The Working Group has two elements – a Government Chamber that involves the analytical units of line ministries and a Chamber of Stakeholders that includes non-governmental representatives.
>
> Source: Excerpt adapted from Slovakia's VNR report.

2.1.4 Engaging peers on the 2030 Agenda

An important element of the 2030 Agenda is implementation at the regional level, including through engagement with regional organisations, peer learning and regional follow-up and review. Over half of the VNR reports examined – 27 of 46 – did not refer to regional institutions or activities that specifically address the 2030 Agenda.[18] The 19 VNR reports that note participation on the 2030 Agenda at the regional level include a range of initiatives largely aimed at promoting the 2030 Agenda, participation in regional institutions, and the development of regional frameworks for 2030 Agenda implementation, including monitoring frameworks (Table 1). The United Arab Emirates did not include reference to regional activities on the 2030 Agenda in its report, however, the country did note that its flagship event on global issues, the annual World Government Summit (WGS), includes a strong focus on the SDGs. The Summit's "SDGs in Action @ WGS" series has focussed on important issues such as monitoring and reporting, financing and the role of science, technology and innovation.

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16   In 2017, there were limited references to trade unions – captured by the category 'other' along with other interest groups. The general finding that 2018 VNR reports show greater inclusion of non-state actors in lead councils or committees for 2030 Agenda implementation is not impacted by the separation of trade unions from the category 'other.'

17   VNRs are assessed as having a 'commitment to engage' only in instances where non-state actors are not formally included in governance mechanisms. This does not mean that countries have less of a commitment to engage per se, but shows the difference between the number of countries that have formally including non-state actors versus those that have not, but commit to engage with them.

18   Most reports refer to regional activities more generally. In 2017, 25 countries that were examined referred to regional activities.

FIGURE 2. PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO 2018 VNR REPORTS

LEAD COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE   TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS   COMMITMENT TO ENGAGE

Academia
8 | 3 | 4

Civil society
17 | 5 | 3

Development partners
6 | 3 | 1

General reference to non-state actors
1 | 1 | 2

Government institutions
15 | 5 | 3

Local government
5 | 5

Other
4 | 1 | 2

Parliament
1

Private sector
17 | 5 | 3

Trade unions
7 | 1 | 1

Youth
4 | 1 | 1

0   5   10   15   20   25
Number of countries
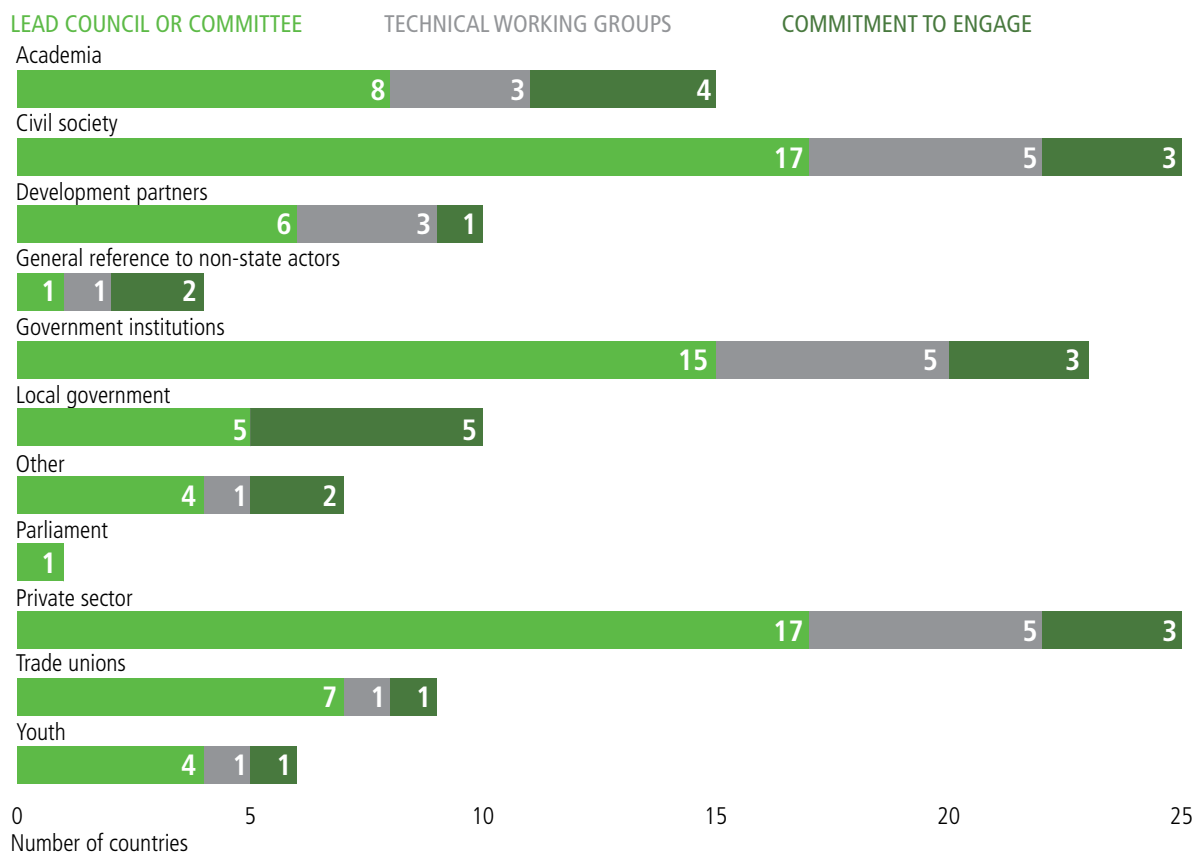
FIGURE 3. PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION ACCORDING TO 2017 VNR REPORTS

LEAD COUNCIL OR COMMITTEE   TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS   COMMITMENT TO ENGAGE

Academia
4 | 5 | 5

Civil society
6 | 9 | 12

Development partners
2 | 4 | 3

General reference to non-state actors
1 | 2 | 3

Government institutions
2 | 7 | 3

Local government
2 | 1 | 2

Other
3 | 4 | 4

Parliament
3 | 3

Private sector
6 | 8 | 9

Youth
1 | 2 | 1

0   5   10   15   20   25   30
Number of countries
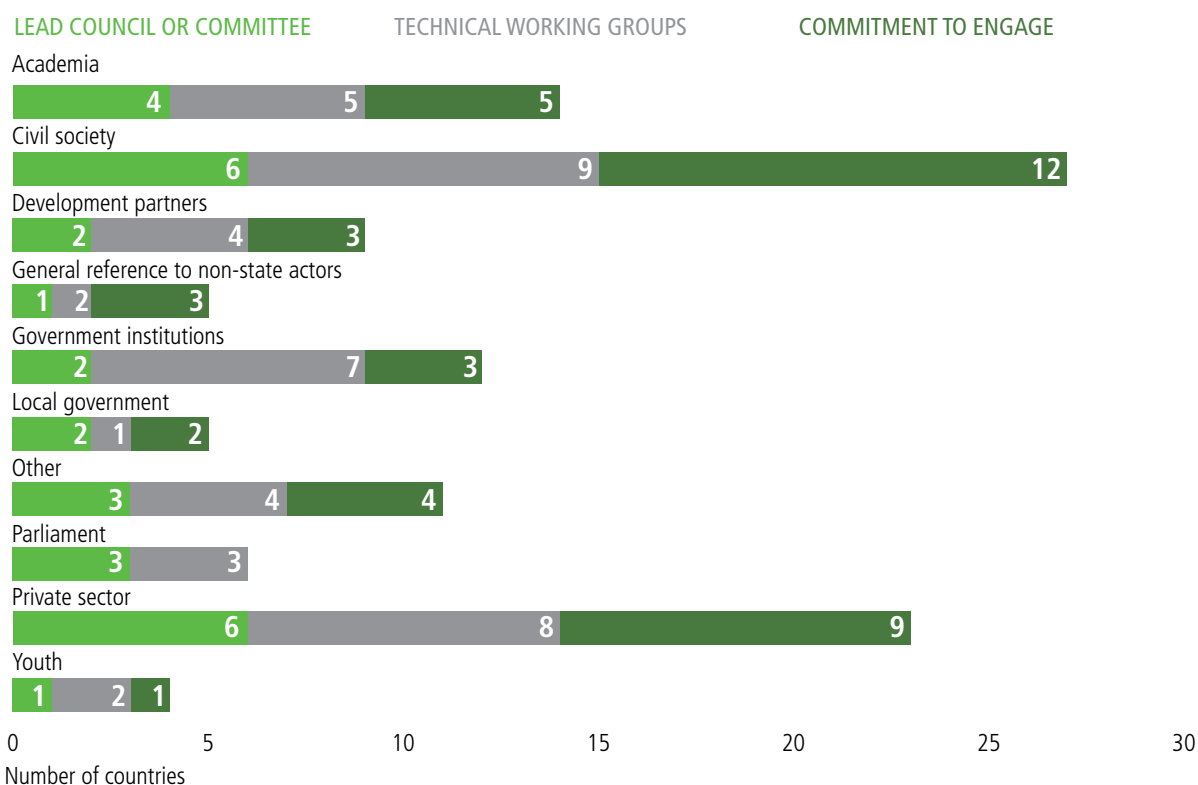
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TABLE 1. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

Activities	Countries	
Contribution to regional position / advocacy on regional priorities for the 2030 Agenda (10 countries)	BAHRAIN CABO VERDE IRELAND JAMAICA MEXICO	ROMANIA SINGAPORE SLOVAKIA SPAIN VIET NAM
Participation in regional 2030 Agenda working groups / technical bodies (6 countries)	AUSTRALIA BAHRAIN JAMAICA[19]	LATVIA STATE OF PALESTINE URUGUAY
Adaptation of the 2030 Agenda for regional implementation (4 countries)	AUSTRALIA MEXICO	SAUDI ARABIA VIET NAM
Regional agreement/projects regarding specific SDGs or sustainable development more generally (4 countries)	GREECE MALTA	MEXICO VIET NAM
Knowledge sharing, including best practice, at regional level (3 countries)	BENIN HUNGARY	ROMANIA[20]
Regional 2030 Agenda indicators (2 countries)	AUSTRALIA	MEXICO

19   Represents the Caribbean on the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs Indicators.

20   Civil society organisations in Romania.

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Only eight countries referred to coordinating on the 2030 Agenda through special country groupings (this figure was ten in 2017) focussed on the needs of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and promoting the SDGs writ-large. Bahrain is advocating for SIDS in relation to their 2030 Agenda priorities. Cabo Verde and the Bahamas each highlighted hosting events on SIDS and the 2030 Agenda. Jamaica is contributing to specific projects that aim to benefit the realisation of the SDGs for SIDS in the Caribbean region, particularly in the area of climate action. Malta has established a Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence with the Commonwealth Secretariat. It aims to support smaller states with attaining specific SDGs (SDG 3 on health and well-being, SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 14 on life below water, and SDG 17 on partnerships). Saudi Arabia noted that it will prioritise the SDGs when it hosts the G20 summit in 2020. Slovakia will make the 2030 Agenda a part of its presidency of the Visegrád Four (which is a cultural and political alliance between Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Spain is advocating for the 2030 Agenda in the context of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G20.

The range of regional activities presented in VNR reports suggests that there has been some movement on regional follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda, at least in terms of the creation of regional frameworks and indicators. Reference to knowledge sharing activities by some countries also suggests opportunities for peer learning. Nevertheless, the number of reports that refer to peer learning activities and follow-up and review mechanisms are limited. In 2017 no examined country made reference to peer learning and review activities at a regional level in relation to implementation.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Engage with peers, including at the regional level, as a means to promote learning, establish collaborative initiatives to realise the 2030 Agenda and review progress on implementation.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clearly establish leadership and governance structures to support 2030 Agenda implementation and lay out lines of accountability between various national stakeholders.

- Assign responsibilities for 2030 Agenda implementation across government institutions to create ownership, identify shared responsibilities and ensure transparency and accountability for progress on implementation.

- Formalise non-state actor engagement in governance structures to realise the 2030 Agenda.

- Identify opportunities to realise the 2030 Agenda domestically and globally through engagement more formally in regional level initiatives and with like-minded countries. Such engagement offers opportunities to share best practice with and learn lessons from peers.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement in 2030 Agenda implementation

The multi-stakeholder and inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda is well established through its emphasis on whole-of-society approaches to implementation and leaving no one behind.

Photo: © Thippakone Thammavongsa / WWF-Laos

2.2.1. Process for stakeholder engagement

Formal arrangements for stakeholder engagement are an element of governance and institutional mechanisms that support participation and input by all stakeholders in 2030 Agenda implementation. Only 18 VNR reports provide information on processes for stakeholder engagement beyond governance mechanisms, or *ad hoc consultations that occurred as a result of the VNR process or the selection of national SDG priorities. Most countries referred to the creation of a specific platform,*[21] annual event,[22] or framework or policy[23] for engagement. Some countries outlined regular, existing channels through which non-state actors can engage the government such as through members of parliament or regular dialogue processes and mechanisms.[24] Albania's VNR report did not note a process for stakeholder engagement, but rather a commitment to engage throughout implementation. Canada's VNR report included information on how the government engages with different stakeholders in the goal-by-goal analysis, but did not articulate how engagement occurs specifically on the 2030 Agenda more broadly. With the information provided in VNR reports, it is not possible to assess the overall quality of stakeholder engagement. The level of detail on stakeholder engagement mechanisms varies and no VNR report highlighted principles for stakeholder engagement – as was the case for Indonesia in its 2017 VNR report.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Establish and report on formal mechanisms to ensure regular, inclusive stakeholder engagement on 2030 Agenda implementation.**

As noted above, the 2018 VNR reports suggest improvement in terms of non-state actor participation in formal governance arrangements. While these efforts are welcome, the establishment of formal processes and mechanisms that allow for more widespread and regular engagement with stakeholders outside governance mechanisms are important. They contribute to ongoing awareness-raising efforts, national ownership and whole-of-society approaches to implementation. Such mechanisms can also make a positive contribution to leaving no one behind by ensuring that populations that are being left behind, and individuals or the organisations that represent them, are included and supported to engage.

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21   Benin, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Spain, Sri Lanka, and Switzerland.

22   Ireland, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Viet Nam.

23   Benin, Canada (in relation to international cooperation), Greece, Mexico (strategy planned), Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay.

24   Lao People's Democratic Republic and Latvia.

A case study in good practice: Formal processes for stakeholder engagement in Greece and Latvia

Greece and Latvia have both established formal processes for stakeholder engagement on 2030 Agenda implementation. The government of Greece sees engagement mechanisms as critical for promoting shared responsibility for 2030 Agenda implementation and collaboration across sectors, and for ensuring that the central government is working with the best advice and recommendations for implementation. The government is making use of its constitutionally established Economic and Social Committee of Greece to promote consultation and dialogue on the SDGs. The Committee is responsible for social dialogue in the country on issues related to the economy and society and operates under a tripartite structure representing the interests of employers and entrepreneurs, public and private sector employees, and other interest groups. The committee makes use of thematic working groups, an Executive Committee and a General Assembly to prepare policy proposals on a range of issues related to the SDGs. The committee prepared a proposal for the government on national priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation and a set of proposals for effective implementation across sectors and at different levels (e.g. national, regional, and local). The Economic and Social Committee of Greece also carries out other activities to raise public awareness of the 2030 Agenda, such as conferences and other events.

Latvia has a range of mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and consultation. The public can participate in policymaking by providing inputs into problem identification, preparation of planning documents and supporting policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Public consultations offer an opportunity for the public – individuals and organisations – to join informal and formal working groups, advisory councils and other forums. They can also send written opinions to the government. Draft documents are published for comment on ministry websites under a section entitled "Public Participation." Latvia considers its procedure for achieving consensus on development planning as best practice. In addition, any stakeholder can submit proposals to the government and receive responses. A citizens' engagement website exists for this purpose - ManaBalss.lv. Parliament also has an obligation to consider a particular issue if a certain number of signatures are collected. For the VNR, Latvia established an informal advisory working group that included representatives from government, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations and trade unions.

Source: Except adapted from the VNR reports for Greece and Latvia.

A number of civil society reports prepared for the HLPF (discussed further below) commented on the issue of stakeholder engagement. Civil society reports for Canada, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Sri Lanka and Switzerland suggested there is a need for respective governments to improve their engagement with non-state actors. A number of reports provided details in terms of what more effective engagement might entail.

- Civil society organisations in **Colombia** have called for increased dialogue, coordination and joint implementation of SDG initiatives between government, civil society and the private sector, particularly at sub-national levels.

- In the **Dominican Republic**, there is a need to establish mechanisms to improve the effective participation of civil society in different stages of 2030 Agenda implementation. A strengthened communication strategy is also needed, supported by actions to socialise stakeholders on the 2030 Agenda.

- For **Hungary**, civil society organisations called for the following: establishment of an institutional system of public participation including access to information; wide public communication; active involvement of all partners in implementation, including through better sharing of documents for review by non-state actors; and, continuous direct participation by stakeholders through working groups that include non-state actors and address planning, monitoring and reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation.

- Civil society organisations in **Ireland** called on the government to ensure that the country's newly established National Stakeholder Forum is guided by a clear mandate and facilitates robust participation. They also criticised the government for providing insufficient lead time to fully engage in the VNR ahead of the HLPF or provide input into the country's national implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda.

- In the **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, participation in the VNR was limited, with only selected civil society organisations invited to participate and informal channels used to solicit comments from civil society. The civil society report called for the establishment of a formal, institutionalised engagement mechanism, with invitations channeled through the Lao CSO Coordinating Office to facilitate a selection process for participation by civil society organisations. The report noted that meaningful and inclusive participation requires civil society engagement in all stages of 2030 Agenda implementation, including policy and legislative development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and reporting.

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- The government of **Sri Lanka** set up a National Sustainable Development Platform in 2016 that engaged stakeholders in the development of the country's National SDG Action Plan (2017-20). However, despite its success, the government abandoned the platform in 2017. According to the civil society report, the absence of such a platform led to a bureaucratic decision-making process for the VNR, rather than an inclusive process.

- Civil society organisations in **Switzerland** have called on the government to ensure full, effective and equal participation of all people in efforts to realise sustainable development, including through the establishment of new forms and mechanisms of participation and by guaranteeing access to information.

Other civil society reports flagged different concerns and developments. The Bhutan civil society report noted that regular policy dialogue has not been possible given that civil society and the government are guided by their own different visions. Mexico and Togo, on the other hand, has seen improvements in collaboration between civil society and the government according to civil society reports. The second VNR saw greater opportunities for consultation in Mexico – both face-to-face and virtual – in comparison to the first VNR. In Togo, civil society was involved in all phases of the preparation of the 2018 VNR, including the launch phase of the process, information gathering and validation of the report. Civil society organisations were also involved in the drafting phase of the 2018 VNR report through their participation in a drafting retreat.

Going forward, to enhance the quality and long-term engagement of civil society in these processes, governments will need to make use of principles for effective stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement and consultation should centre around five core elements that support meaningful engagement of civil society, as outlined in Figure 4 below.[25] Engagement should occur within a broader context of fostering an enabling environment for civil society through supportive policy and legislation, institutionalised engagement and predictable and diverse funding. Recognising that the capacity for stakeholder engagement varies by country, there is also a role for development partners to support developing countries in this context.

Photo: © WWF / Simon Rawles

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25   Adapted from *A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue*, Voluntary Sector Initiative (Canada, 2002). Available at http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/policy/pdf/codes_policy.pdf.

FIGURE 4. DRAFT PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

TIMELY Provide sufficient notice provided and hold consultations within relevant time frames

- Clearly articulate consultation timelines at the outset of stakeholder engagmeent on national priorities, policies and all phases of the VNR.

- Prepare draft documents well in advance of deadlines for finalisation to ensure sufficient lead time for comments and inputs from stakeholders.

OPEN Enhance equal opportunity for access and use of effective models

- Undertake efforts to facilitate accessible and robust participation, particularly for diverse populations and left behind groups, in addition to established civil society organisations.

- Provide opportunities for engagement across regions and territories to ensure inclusivity.

- Provide online consultations as well as face-to-face meetings.

- Respect the right of stakeholders to self-organise and incorporate representative organisations for non-state actors (e.g. civil society platforms/umbrella groups; private sector associations; national trade union bodies, etc.).

- Make information available in local languages.

TRANSPARENT Communicate a clear process and purpose, and provide feedback to participants

- Esnure information about the process is publicly shared through communication channels including websites and social media.

- Ensure access to information and share documentation.

- Clearly establish opportunities for engagement for all stages in policy and legislative development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting.

INFORMED Provide comprehensive preparatory and follow-up documentation to detail current approach and how inputs have been considered

- Ensure 2030 Agenda implementation is informed by a strategy for effective stakeholder engagement that sets out a clear mandate, policy, mechanisms, and expectations and desired outcomes.

- Provide documentation in advance of meetings to allow proper preparation by stakeholders.

- Provide documentation on the outcomes of stakeholder engagement in a timely manner, including with reference to how inputs have been considered and used.

ITERATIVE Ensure an ongoing process

- Establish institutionalised mechanisms for meaningful public engagement.

- Ensure that there are opportunities for dialogue, feedback and meaningful input, as opposed to one-way reporting.

2.2.2 Consultation on defining national priorities

Part of a whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation is developing a shared, national vision for implementation that reflects priorities from stakeholders across society. This approach supports broad-based, democratic ownership over the nationalisation process. Though less than half of the VNR reports referred to formal stakeholder engagement mechanisms, more than half provided information on consultation processes for defining national priorities and in the VNR.

For the 26 (of 46) VNR reports that noted consultations with non-state actors took place on the selection of national priorities, consultations occurred largely in online and offline forms.[26] VNR reports provided varying degrees of detail in terms of consultation processes. Some provided a full account of consultation events and those involved; others provided more of a general overview, asserting that consultations had occurred with a broad cross-section of non-state actors. Eleven (11) VNR reports did not provide information on whether non-state actors were consulted in the selection of national priorities.[27] Canada was the only country that did not consult stakeholders on the national priorities outlined in its VNR report, however the country plans to establish additional priorities with consultation on a national strategy that will inform the selection of national SDG indicators. Eight (8) VNR report did not set out national priorities.[28]

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Ensure inclusivity and participation in the nationalisation of the SDGs, including the creation of national targets and indicators, in line with the principles of the 2030 Agenda.**

2.2.3 Consultation in the preparation of VNRs

The 2030 Agenda includes a commitment to participatory follow-up and review. The 2019 edition of the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews provides guidance to countries on multi-stakeholder engagement, emphasizing the importance of open, inclusive and participatory VNRs.

The majority of countries (43 of 46) reported that non-state actors were engaged in the VNR. This is an improvement over 2017 where only 34 of the 45 countries examined included this information in their VNR report. Canada is the only country that did not articulate if non-state actors were engaged in the VNR process (although a civil society report notes that the government solicited vignettes in their VNR for inclusion from non-state actors). The status of non-state actor engagement in the VNR is unclear for Guinea and Niger. Guinea's report notes that a consultation workshop took place and was attended by various stakeholders, but is unclear on who the stakeholders where. Niger's report notes that the VNR was conducted in a participatory manner, but provides no information on engagement with non-state actors.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders in the preparation of VNR reports and provide stakeholders with an opportunity to review and comment on the first draft through public consultation.**

> **A case study in good practice: Including non-state actors in the VNR process in the State of Palestine**
> The State of Palestine took efforts to ensure multi-stakeholder consultation and participation in the VNR. According to the VNR report, more than 500 mid-level and high-level representatives from government, the United Nations, local and international non-governmental organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector participated in the VNR. The Prime Minister's Office led the VNR process and was supported by a steering committee of senior officials and a National SDGs Team. The National SDGs Team includes 24 representatives from government, civil society and the private sector.
>
> Source: Except adapted from the State of Palestine's VNR report.

As with the case of consultations on national priorities, most countries made use of offline and online consultation formats. Andorra provided stakeholders with a chance to review and comment on the VNR report. Greece collected direct written contributions for the VNR report from non-state actors. Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the State of Palestine established

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26 In 2017, six VNR reports did not provide information on whether non-state actors were consulted in the selection of national priorities, three countries did not consult non-state actors and 31 countries consulted non-state actors.

27 The Bahamas, Colombia, Ecuador, Guinea, Niger, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and Viet Nam.

28 Albania, Armenia (the country is updating its current national development strategy through a participatory process), Australia, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico (a national consultation is underway on a new National Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda), Singapore, and Sudan.

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VNR working groups or committees or made use of existing governance structures for 2030 Agenda implementation that included representation by non-state actors to draft the VNR report. Information presented in the 2018 VNR reports suggests the use of similar approaches to what was reported in 2017.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Include non-state actors in institutional mechanisms responsible for the VNR and drafting the VNR report.**

A case study in good practice: Ensuring broad stakeholder engagement on the VNR through public consultation in Poland's VNR
In addition to the creation of a task team with non-state actor representation to facilitate the VNR, Poland's VNR process included a number of opportunities for broad public consultation. Over a three-week period in April 2018, the VNR report underwent inter-ministerial and public consultations. The public consultations included online and offline elements. A dedicated form was available for stakeholders to submit comments through the government website that hosted a draft version of the VNR report. The government also purposefully submitted the draft report to social partners to solicit their feedback. A draft version of the VNR report was also submitted to local government institutions as well as a Social Dialogue Council for review. Selected Parliamentary Committees also reviewed the draft VNR report.

Source: Except adapted from the Poland's VNR

2.2.4 Civil society reports

In addition to engagement through the VNR, civil society organisations in a number of countries produced parallel reports for the HLPF. These reports provide independent analyses of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation and offer validity checks on the information presented in national VNR reports. The authors of this review identified 16 civil society reports for the 2018 HLPF.[29] The reports are in the form of submissions to respective governments as part of the VNR process, shadow reports and spotlight reports. One of the reports – for Bhutan – was a response to the survey prepared by Action for Sustainable Development. In addition, Hungary and Malta included contributions from civil society in their VNR reports.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Produce a civil society report on VNRs, which does the following: provides an assessment of 2030 Agenda implementation at the country level and government efforts; information on civil society initiatives, including the challenges that non-state actors face to contributing to the 2030 Agenda; and, an independent assessment of progress on the SDGs.**

Generally speaking, the civil society reports broadly support the evidence presented in the VNR reports, with some exceptions as identified in the country profiles in Annex 3. Civil society reports tend to argue that respective governments should be taking greater steps to leave no one behind and call for greater engagement and partnership with civil society. It would be helpful to ensure an official process for responses to civil society reports and suggestions.

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29   Bhutan, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Mexico, Senegal, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, and Viet Nam. All reports available at: https://action4sd.org/major-groups/hlpf/ under the "Report" tab.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

🇱🇰 A case study in good practice: Civil society reporting on the VNR in Sri Lanka

The Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform, an umbrella platform established in March 2018 representing a collective of civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, professional associations, and trade unions, prepared a Voluntary Peoples Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform was launched in response to insufficient stakeholder engagement during the VNR process. The resulting report, based on contributions from over 500 experts, activist and researchers and representatives from more than 100 organisations, provides a frank assessment of Sri Lanka's implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The report includes a report card that assesses implementation of the SDGs through a traffic light system. The report examines: awareness-raising and capacity to implement the SDGs (including for different stakeholders); institutional mechanisms and coordination; policy coherence and the national SDG framework; integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; the science-policy interface; localising the SDGs; stakeholder engagement; means of implementation; and monitoring, review, reporting and follow-up mechanisms. The report includes a more detailed assessment of the policy and enabling environment for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which broadly captures the key elements in the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines. A traffic light assessment of efforts by the government to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development is also available, grounded in the framework developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. A report card on the state of resilience is also included to assess resilience related SDG targets as part of the report's analysis of the 2018 HLPF theme, *Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies.* The report evaluates Sri Lanka's performance on individual SDG targets for all 17 SDGs, again through a traffic light system, coupled with a narrative around progress and key challenges. Finally, the report includes a chapter on leaving no one behind that showcases the concerns of individuals raised through the consultation process for the Voluntary Peoples Review.

Source: Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform (2018).[30]

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish and report on formal mechanisms to ensure regular, inclusive stakeholder engagement on 2030 Agenda implementation. Such mechanisms should support multi-stakeholder dialogue across the SDGs and with different sectors with a wide range of stakeholders, in line with the principles for effective and inclusive stakeholder engagement. This will help to promote greater understanding of shared goals and objectives and potential synergies, build momentum and strengthen partnerships in implementation. Ensuring inclusivity in this context is important to contribute to the leave no one behind agenda.

- Ensure stakeholder engagement on the 2030 Agenda is timely, open, transparent, informed and iterative. This means making use of varied and inclusive approaches to consultation such as online and offline methods; publicising consultation opportunities widely and with appropriate lead time, including at sub-national events in different parts of the country; taking steps to include marginalised groups and their representatives; and, ensuring that information is available in local languages.

- Include non-state actors in institutional mechanisms or drafting teams responsible for the VNR report.

- Solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders in the preparation of VNR reports and provide stakeholders with an opportunity to review and comment on the first draft. Ensure a formal response to civil society reports.

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30   Sri Lanka Stakeholder SDG Platform. 2018. *Sri Lanka Voluntary Peoples Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* Colombo, Sri Lank Stakeholder SDG Platform. https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SRI-LANKA-Voluntary-Peoples-Review-on-the-SDGs-to-HLPF-2018.pdf

3.0 Policies for 2030 Agenda Implementation

Photo: © naturepl.com / Bryan and Cherry Alexander / WWF

Chapter Summary

BASELINE OR GAP ANALYSIS

The VNR reports reveal that a majority of countries reporting in 2018 have carried out an assessment of their policies, data or both to inform 2030 Agenda implementation – albeit less countries carried out an assessment relative to 2017.

INCORPORATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA INTO NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES

Similar to the findings in 2017, most countries have also incorporated the 2030 Agenda into their national policies or prepared a strategy for implementation. As was the case in 2017, VNR reporting for 2018 shows that countries tend to focus on the SDGs rather than the broader 2030 Agenda and its transformative principles. While most countries refer to leaving no one behind (41), substantially less refer to inter-generational responsibility (17) and universality (16), and even less to human rights-based approaches (six) and planetary boundaries (three).

NATIONALISING THE 2030 AGENDA

While most countries have selected national priorities (and two countries sub-national priorities) that reflect all or most dimensions of sustainable development, the environment was listed less frequently as a priority for countries reporting in 2018 versus 2017. Conversely, a focus on culture and national identify emerged as a priority for a handful of countries in 2018. The selection of national targets and indicators for implementation remains limited with only seven countries having selected both national targets and indicators.

INTEGRATION AND POLICY COHERENCE

VNR reports show a marked improvement in terms of reporting on all SDGs in 2018 over 2017, with most countries adopting this approach. The majority of countries provided a detailed analysis of their progress on sustainable development and examined all dimensions of sustainable development. However, there is still limited reference to linkages between the dimensions, with countries taking more of a siloed approach in their goal-by-goal analysis. These findings represent a backsliding in comparison to 2017. As in 2017, countries are still not sufficiently ensuring integration in their approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation. In addition, the analysis presented in the assessment of goals in the 2018 VNR reports is similar to what was noted in 2017. Information is provided largely in terms of pre-existing policies and programmes that happen to be aligned with and supportive of progress on the SDGs.

Policy coherence for sustainable development does not feature strongly in reports. Reporting on the impacts of domestic and foreign policies on sustainable development at home and abroad in the goal-by-goal analysis can help prompt greater policy coherence for sustainable development across countries. Most countries do not consistently refer to existing international agreements that support implementation of the 2030 Agenda, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, or internationally agreed aid and development effectiveness principles.

3.1 Baseline or gap analysis

The preparation of baseline or gap analyses are critical to informing policy priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation.

3.1.1 Status of assessments

Baseline or gap analyses help ground approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation in real, evidence-based gaps in progress, data and policies and programmes. As shown in Figure 5, most countries (32 of 46, or 69.5%) noted that they carried out some kind of assessment of the SDGs (or some SDGs), or plan to carry out an assessment.[31] This is down from 2017, in which the review of 45 VNR reporting countries showed that 38 countries had either prepared an assessment (33 countries) or planned to carry one out (5 countries). In 2016, this figure was ten of 16 (or 62.5%) countries examined. For 2018, 12 countries did not provide information on a baseline or gap assessment.[32]

FIGURE 5. GAP OR BASELINE ANALYSIS
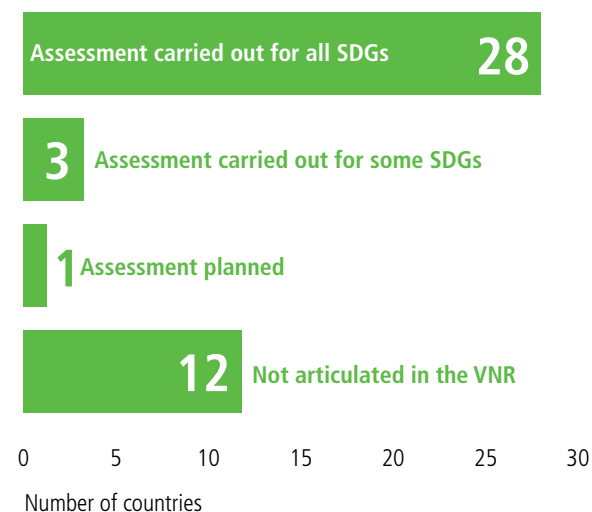
Assessment carried out for all SDGs — **28**

3 Assessment carried out for some SDGs

1 Assessment planned

12 Not articulated in the VNR

Number of countries

The government found that 14 of the 17 SDGs have been aligned and integrated with the achievement of the country's 16 National Key Results Areas in the 11th Five Year Plan. A Rapid Integrated Assessment was also conducted by the United Nations Development Programme which similarly revealed high levels of integration between the 11th Five Year Plan and the 169 SDG targets.

In terms of measuring progress, the government assessed alignment between SDG indicators and existing indicators used by the country, including on data availability with respect to these indicators. Bhutan's report classifies SDG indicators in terms of whether they have been fully adopted, partially adopted, are relevant but not adopted or not relevant to Bhutan's context. The government then classified data availability against the SDG indicators in terms of whether data is available (regularly collected according to high standards), partially available (data available on an *ad hoc* basis) or not available. Finally, Bhutan's VNR report included an assessment of progress towards each goal in terms of whether SDG targets have been achieved, are on track or at risk. The goal-by-goal analysis in the report provided the status of each SDG, with a candid summary of progress and challenges.

Source: Except adapted from Bhutan's VNR report.

3.1.2 Content of baseline or gap assessments

The content of assessments shows whether countries are assessing policies and/or data to inform 2030 Agenda implementation. As shown in Figure 6, 32 countries (of 46) provided information on the content of their assessments. The degree to which assessments were detailed varied, though generally speaking, what was assessed was clear. Similar to findings in 2017, the 2018 VNR reports revealed three main types of assessments – mapping of country policies

🌏 **A case study in good practice: Assessing policies, data availability and progress in Bhutan**
Bhutan reviewed policies and data to examine alignment and integration between the country's 11th Five Year Plan (2013-18) and the 17 SDGs, as well as progress on implementation.

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31 The European Union has resisted developing a gap analysis for quite some time but has recently expressed its intention to develop a "distance analysis" to identify how far the current policy reality is from the SDG target.

32 The Bahamas (the report notes a capacity assessment of government institutions will be carried out to examine resource gaps for SDG implementation), Canada (though the report notes that government departments have been asked to examine how they can better incorporate the SDGs and the statistical annex includes baselines and information on data availability), Colombia (the 2016 VNR report noted the country takes a "closing gaps" approach and also noted the availability of data for follow-up, however no information was presented in the 2018 VNR report), Lebanon, Malta, Mexico (although baselines are provided in the statistical annex), Paraguay, Qatar, Romania, Singapore, Sudan, and Uruguay (the report notes that baselines have been established but provides no further information).

FIGURE 6. TYPES OF SDG BASELINE AND GAP ASSESSMENTS LISTED IN VNR REPORTS

ASSESSMENT OF DATA AVAILABILITY AND/OR BASELINE ESTABLISHMENT
7 COUNTRIES
AUSTRALIA, CABO VERDE, EGYPT, LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (PLANNED), NAMIBIA, STATE OF PALESTINE, AND VIET NAM

POLICY AND DATA ASSESSMENT
15 COUNTRIES
ALBANIA, ANDORRA, ARMENIA, BAHRAIN, BHUTAN, HUNGARY, KIRIBATI, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, POLAND, SENEGAL, SLOVAKIA, SPAIN, SRI LANKA, AND SWITZERLAND

MAPPING POLICIES AGAINST THE SDGS
10 COUNTRIES
BENIN, GREECE, GUINEA, IRELAND, JAMAICA, MALI, NIGER, SAUDI ARABIA, TOGO, AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

against the SDGs (and their targets), assessment of data availability and/or establishment of baselines, or a combination of both. The most common type of assessment noted in VNR reports was an assessment of data and policies (15). In 2017, the majority of assessments (16 of 32 countries) focussed on data availability and/or the establishment of baselines.[33] Ten (10) countries assessed policies only, while six assessed data availability and baselines. One country – Lao People's Democratic Republic – plans to assess baselines.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Assess policies, data availability and baselines to inform prioritisation and nationalisation of the 2030 Agenda, and ensure an evidence-based approach to implementation.**

A case study in good practice: Making use of the United Nations Development Programme's Rapid Integrated Assessment tool to support 2030 Agenda implementation
VNR reports for Albania, Bhutan, Guinea, Jamaica, Mali, Niger, Saudi Arabia, and Sri Lanka noted the use of the United Nations Development Programme's Rapid Integrated Assessment Tool to assess alignment of existing national policies to the SDGs. The tool supports countries to mainstream the SDGs into national and sub-national planning through an assessment of readiness for SDG implementation. It includes a set of steps and templates that enable countries to assess the relevance of the SDGs and interlinkages across targets.

3.1.3 Results of assessments

The results of country gap and baseline assessments provide insights on countries' starting points with respect to implementation. For countries that assessed policies, the VNR reports tend to provide information regarding the extent to which the SDGs and their targets are aligned or integrated into national policies, with some countries providing details on the percentage of targets aligned. The results of data assessments tend to be presented in terms of overall data availability. This includes with respect to indicator availability according to the level of methodological development and available data. Information on gaps in terms of progress for 2030 Agenda implementation is also presented in the goal-by-goal analysis for some countries (however this information is not explicitly linked to the assessment carried out or showcased as results of the assessment). In the case of Bahrain, the report identifies the key priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation that are a result of the country's assessment.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conduct an assessment that identifies gaps in existing policies and programmes, examines data availability, and sets out baselines from which to measure progress and assess where additional efforts are needed.

- Clearly articulate how the assessment was conducted and provide a summary of the gaps identified for each goal.

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33 Kindornay, 2017. For countries examined in 2017, eight mapped or planned to map their policies while another eight had examined or planned to examine both data and policies.

3.2 Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies

Incorporating the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs and its transformative principles, into policies, plans and programmes is a building block for implementation. National frameworks and policies set the overall direction for implementation and provide guidance to government institutions and other stakeholders.

3.2.1 Incorporating the 2030 Agenda into policy frameworks

Updating existing policies and frameworks and/or establishing new ones that set out national priorities, targets and indicators for 2030 Agenda implementation shows that governments are serious about recognising and addressing national level sustainable development challenges.

> **A case study in good practice: The 2030 Agenda as the basis for decision-making in Andorra**
> In 2016, the Andorra Council of Ministers decided that all actions submitted to the Council for approval should be associated with one or more SDGs to ensure that the Agenda 2030 becomes the basis for decisions by the Andorran executive.
>
> Source: Summary provided by IISD based on Andorra's VNR report.

In terms of the degree to which states have incorporated the 2030 Agenda into policy frameworks, the results in 2018 are similar to 2017. Half of the countries (23 of 46) reporting in 2018 have incorporated the SDGs into national development plans and related policies and frameworks directly. In 2017, 23 of 45 countries had noted a similar approach. While eight countries had developed a specific SDG implementation strategy according to 2017 VNR reports, only three countries took this approach in 2018. Seven (7) countries reported that they incorporated the SDGs directly into national development plans and developed an SDG implementation strategy, versus nine countries in 2017. Eleven (11) countries reporting in 2018 have not incorporated the SDGs into national plans or through a specific strategy (this figure was three in 2017). VNR reports for seven of the 11 countries including Canada, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Romania, Senegal, and Sudan indicate that the SDGs will be further integrated into national policies going forward. The VNR reports for Australia and Singapore did not provide information on whether and how the 2030 Agenda has been incorporated into national policies and programmes.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Integrate Agenda 2030 priorities into national policies and frameworks and develop a roadmap to accelerate implementation.

> **A case study in good practice: Keeping 2030 Agenda implementation ambitious in Ireland**
> Ireland prepared a 2030 Vision as part of its SDG National Implementation Plan 2018-20. Recognising that meaningful implementation of the SDGs requires countries to translate global ambitions to the national context, Ireland's 2030 Vision includes a set of ambitious high-level commitments that take into account all dimensions of sustainable development and address the 17 goals. The government plans to review the 2030 Vision on a rolling basis to ensure it remains ambitious as it develops new SDG implementation plans.
>
> Source: Excerpt adapted from Ireland's VNR report.

3.2.2 Integrating the 2030 Agenda Principles

The 2030 Agenda is informed by a number of key principles, including universality, human rights, integration, partnership, inclusivity, pursuing development within planetary boundaries, inter-generational responsibility and leaving no one behind. These principles represent the spirit of the 2030 Agenda and serve as transformative elements of implementation. Building on the 2017 assessment framework, the 2018 framework now also tracks references in VNR reports to inter-generational responsibility and planetary boundaries, as well as examining references to human rights based approaches, leaving no one behind, and universality. This assessment aims to provide an indication of the extent to which the 2030 Agenda principles are informing implementation. [34]

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34   Other principles are captured in the sections that follow through the examination of integration, stakeholder engagement and partnership.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Explicitly link the implementation of each SDG to relevant national and international human rights frameworks.

Establish policies and institutions to ensure a human rights-based approach to sustainable development in 2030 Agenda implementation.

As shown in Figure 7, the majority of countries (41) refer to the principle of leaving no one behind in their reports (39 countries referred to the principle in 2017). Inter-generational responsibility was the next most cited principle (17), though it should be noted that reports refer to this principle in different ways, such as the rights of future generations or responsibility towards future generations. Universality is the next most commonly referenced principle, referred to in 16 VNR reports. In 2017, 17 countries — 16 of which are high-income and upper-middle-income countries — referred to the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda. In 2018, countries that referenced this principle included a range of high-, middle- and low-income countries.

Only six countries referred to human rights-based approaches as an important principle of the 2030 Agenda,[35] versus ten countries in 2017. Countries that refer to a human rights-based approach do not define it. An additional nine reports refer to human rights as central to the 2030 Agenda and provide evidence throughout the VNR report on the prioritisation of human rights and/or their links to specific SDGs. Another nine reports also make reference to human rights occasionally, generally in relation to specific SDGs, although they do not include an overarching reference to human rights in relation to the 2030 Agenda. A number of countries included reference to international and national human rights legislation throughout their report, highlighting the establishment of institutions and policy processes that aim to guarantee human rights. Australia (see case study below) and Hungary[36] are notable examples, both of which have established institutions that ensure the promotion and respect for human rights, including in relation to implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

FIGURE 7. REFERENCE TO 2030 AGENDA PRINCIPLES

Legend: ▮ Does not refer to principle ▮ Refers to principle

Human rights based approach: 40 / 6
Inter-generational responsibility: 29 / 17
Leave no one behind: 5 / 41
Planetary boundaries: 43 / 3
Universality: 30 / 16

Number of countries
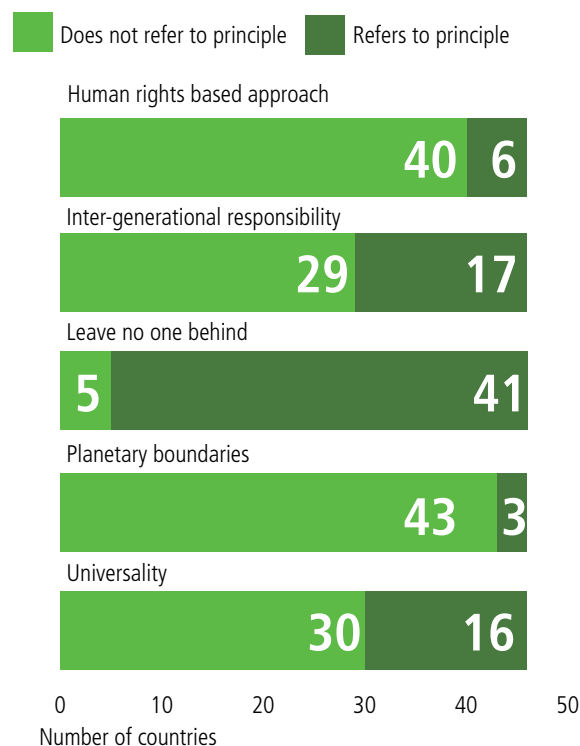
Finally, only three countries — Bahrain, Hungary and Switzerland — refer to planetary boundaries. Of the nine planetary boundaries identified by the Stockholm Resilience Center,[37] countries that do not refer directly to planetary boundaries tend to refer to climate change, biodiversity, land system change, and chemical pollution. Some reports also referred to the ozone and ocean acidification, but with less frequency. Specific references to nitrogen and phosphorus flows to the biosphere and oceans and atmospheric aerosol loading were limited. Even in the instances where reports refer to some of the planetary boundaries, they are not understood as such, but rather presented as part of country progress and commitments related to environmental goals.

As was the case in 2017, VNR reporting for 2018 shows that countries tend to focus on the SDGs rather than the broader 2030 Agenda and its transformative principles overall.

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35 Two countries made reference to the human rights-based approach but in terms of the role of civil society and in relation to international development cooperation (rather than as central to the 2030 Agenda). These countries were not included in the six noted above.

36 Hungary's Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights has a number of responsibilities in 2030 Agenda implementation. These include efforts to: "monitor the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, linking it with already existing human rights monitoring systems; participate in the development of national indicators, including providing advice and expertise on a human-rights based approach to data; support transparent and inclusive public participation and consultation processes; and collaborate in capacity building and sharing of experience in order to contribute to a human-rights-based approach to the implementation of the sustainable development framework" (p. 66).

37 These include stratospheric ozone depletion, loss of biosphere integrity (biodiversity loss and extinctions), chemical pollution and release of novel entities, climate change, ocean acidification, freshwater consumption and the global hydrological cycle, land system change, nitrogen and phosphorus flows to the biosphere and oceans, and atmospheric aerosol loading.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

🇦🇺 A case study in good practice: Australia's human rights-based approach to sustainable development

Australia's VNR report showcases a human rights-based approach to sustainable development and implementation of the 2030 Agenda that emphasizes respect, protection and promotion of human rights in accordance with international human rights law. For Australia, "if global development is not based on human rights, it will not be sustainable" (p. 10). Australia is a party to the core United Nations human rights treaties, and has established legislations, policies, institutions and programs to promote and protect rights at federal, state and territory levels. Policy and legislative development processes integrate an assessment of human rights. According to the VNR report, all bills and disallowable legislative instruments introduced to the federal parliament must be assessed in terms of compatibility with the rights and freedoms outlined in the seven core United Nations human rights treaties. Human rights frameworks are also integrated into policies accordingly. For example, Australia's National Disability Strategy 2010-20 works to ensure the principles underpinning the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are incorporated into policies and programmes. The Strategy aims to ensure that people with disabilities can participate in all aspects of Australian life through a more inclusive approach to the design of policies, programs and infrastructure.

Australia has a Human Rights Commission that was established in 1986 to promote awareness of human rights, inquire into and attempt to conciliate complaints of discrimination, and conduct educational activities on human rights in Australia. The Commission has examined its work in light of the 2030 Agenda. The Commission has seven commissioners, responsible for social justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Age Discrimination, Children, Disability Discrimination, Human Rights, Race and Sex Discrimination.

Australia is also taking a strong stance on human rights at global and regional levels. Australia sees its membership (2018-20) to the Human Rights Council as "built around the pillars of gender equality, good governance, and freedom of expression, the rights of indigenous peoples and strong national human rights institutions and capacity building" (p. 10). The government's priorities include: the abolition of the death penalty; promotion of equal human rights for LGBTI persons; protection of the freedom of religion or belief; and enabling civil society to protect and promote human rights through participation in the United Nations human rights

system. At the regional level, the Australian Human Rights Council provides human rights technical assistance to build capacity in the Asia-Pacific region.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Australia's VNR report.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Fully integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national plans and strategies based on an evaluation of existing policies, approaches and progress to identify gaps, adapt policies and target areas where further progress is needed. The fact that existing policies already align to the SDGs is not sufficient.

- Operationalise the principles of the 2030 Agenda in approaches to implementation recognising the universal, rights-based and interlinked nature of the agenda. VNR reports should demonstrate how approaches to sustainable development are transforming, based on the principles of the 2030 Agenda and not just the SDGs.

- Ensure policies and programmes are informed by and integrate efforts to leave no one behind, including by prioritising those most in need to consistently reach marginalised communities.

- Ground plans and strategies in human rights, including by linking activities to international and national human rights commitments and establishing appropriate institutions and mechanisms to support a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

- Address domestic and global dimensions of sustainable development, and the relationships between them, in an effort to realise the 2030 Agenda, respecting the principle of universality.

- Undertake actions with reference to and respect for planetary boundaries and responsibilities towards future generations.

3.3 Nationalising the 2030 Agenda

While successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires that governments work towards realising all SDGs, governments are expected to implement the 2030 Agenda in line with their national context and priorities. This means identifying national (and local) priorities, targets and indicators through inclusive and participatory processes.

3.3.1 Nationalisation: Identifying priorities

The identification of national priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation is an important way for countries to situate implementation in light of baselines and existing progress, generate ownership and adapt the goals to country-specific contexts. In the context of prioritisation, the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda means that countries can be a leader on some goals, but a laggard on none.

Three years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the majority of 2018 VNRs – 35 of 46 – show that national priorities have been selected (34 of 45 countries reviewed in 2017 had selected national priorities). The United Arab Emirates VNR report provides information on both national and sub-national SDG priorities. The VNR report for Spain showcases sub-national priorities as well. For the 11 countries that have not selected national priorities, five are in the process of selecting national priorities or plan to do so going forward.

🇷🇴 A case study in good practice: Prioritising culture for development in Romania

Romania's VNR report outlines the important role of culture in the 2030 Agenda. Culture is a cross-cutting dimension in the areas of education, food security, the environment, economic growth, sustainable consumption and production patterns, and peaceful and inclusive societies. It is also mentioned directly in the context of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities through target 11.4 – Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

Romania is carrying out a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization project, "Culture for Development Indicators," which contributes to implementation of the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The project includes design and analysis of 22 indicators that reflect the contributions of culture to development. The indicators assess the contribution of culture to sustainable development in a number of policy areas including the economy, education, governance, social participation, gender equality, communication and heritage. The 22 indicators correlate with nine SDGs and 36 targets.

Through its nationalisation of the 2030 Agenda, Romania has made culture an important component of implementation plans.

Source: Except adapted from Romania's VNR.

As was the case in 2017, the approach to articulating national priorities varies greatly across 2018 VNR reports. Some countries listed national priorities with reference to specific SDGs. Others noted priority areas, such as economic growth or social inclusion that apply to more than one goal. Others still point to particular targets within goals that are behind and therefore a priority.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Include all dimensions of sustainable development in the selection of national priorities.

For the 34 countries[38] that provided information on their priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation, the most commonly cited priorities include those related to social outcomes (32) and the economy (30) (Figure 8). Priorities related to the environment were noted for 26 countries. The VNR reports for 2018 show less of an emphasis on the environment compared to 2017. The priorities of the 36 countries that provided this information in 2017 reflected all three dimensions of sustainable development more evenly.[39]

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38   VNR reports for Lebanon and Sudan do not list national priorities, however civil society reports provided this imformation. These countries are not included in Figure 8 as the information was not presented through VNR reports. Planned priorities for Malta are included in Figure 8.

39   In 2017, social outcomes and the environment were noted by 32 countries while economic dimensions were listed as a priority for 30 countries.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Governance continues to be a priority area. In 2017, 21 of 36 countries noted governance as a priority while 21 of 34 countries noted issues related to governance as a priority in 2018. Thirteen (13) countries prioritised inequality in 2018 versus nine in 2017. Fourteen (14) countries reporting in 2018 noted issues related to the means of implementation (or SDG 17) in their priorities. Ten (10) countries had similar priorities in 2017. While the 2017 VNR reports did not show culture as a priority area overall, in 2018, six countries – Ecuador, Hungary, Latvia, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, and the United Arab Emirates[40] – noted culture or issues related to national identify as among their priorities for 2030 Agenda implementation.

FIGURE 8. NATIONAL 2030 AGENDA PRIORITIES

in light of realities at the country level. National indicators help to assess progress on sustainable development overall, harnessing existing available data that suits country level monitoring and evaluation needs. National level targets and indicators should ideally complement those at the global level.

Seven (7) countries reporting in 2018 (versus 13 reporting in 2017) have completed the process of developing national targets and indicators to inform domestic level implementation of the SDGs. Benin, Niger, and Guinea have prioritised the existing global targets and their related indicators. The Bahamas, Colombia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates have set their own targets and indicators.

> 🇪🇸 **A case study in good practice: Selecting sub-national indicators for 2030 Agenda implementation in Spain**
>
> A number of sub-national level governments in Spain have or plan to established sustainable development plans and indicator frameworks to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda. The government of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia has developed two strategic plans to guide 2030 Agenda implementation. Progress will be monitored through an initial set of 43 indicators. The Basque Government has established its First Basque Country 2030 Agenda (2016-20), that includes a selection of 100 SDG targets to government commitments and 50 indicators. The Catalan Government has committed to draft a National Plan for the SDGs, supported by a system of targets and indicators for the region. A sustainability strategy was developed for Galicia and includes a series of indicators adapted to Galicia. The Navarre Government is establishing a system of indicators based on those proposed by the European Union, as well as its own, to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda.
>
> Source: Except adapted from Spain's VNR.

3.3.2 Nationalisation: Developing national targets and indicators

In line with the establishment of national priorities, governments have been encouraged to establish national targets and indicators as needed. This is an important way for countries to link existing national targets and indicators to 2030 Agenda implementation and develop new ones where gaps exist. National targets can be used to set an ambitious agenda for national level implementation

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Establish sub-national targets and indicators as part of localisation efforts.**

Bahrain, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mali, Namibia, Paraguay, the State of Palestine, Togo, and Viet Nam have developed national targets only. Nine countries – Egypt, Hungary, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Qatar and Spain – developed national indicators only, largely making use of existing data that reflects country context and priorities.

40   Notwithstanding the best practice spotlight above that shows Romania has prioritised culture in 2030 Agenda implementation, the country does not actually list its national priorities in its VNR report, and as such, is not included here.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Fifteen (15) countries have not prepared national targets or indicators. Of these, six – Armenia, Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Sri Lanka and Sudan – are planning to develop national indicators. Saudi Arabia's report also refers to targets. VNR reports for Albania, Bhutan, Latvia and Senegal seem to indicate that the countries are making use of existing targets and indicators that align with the SDGs. Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Lebanon and Singapore appear to be making use of the global target and indicator frameworks. Greece has not developed its own targets and indicators, but rather is using the European Union's SDG indicator framework. For three countries – Cabo Verde, Jamaica and Uruguay – the status of national target and indicator development is unclear. Ireland's VNR does not provide information on the creation of national targets and indicators.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify national sustainable development priorities. This means addressing all dimensions of sustainable development, recognising the interlinkages between society, the economy, and the environment.

- Develop national and sub-national targets and indicators through an inclusive and participatory process to complement global targets and indicators.

⚙ 3.4 Integration and policy coherence

The 2030 Agenda is significant in its scope and scale. It covers economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, alongside issues related to governance, culture, inequality and partnership. It has implications for domestic and foreign policies as well as efforts at the local level. Governments and other stakeholders face the challenge of ensuring an integrated and coherent approach to 2030 Agenda implementation. This approach must promotes synergies to realise progress on all dimensions of sustainable development at local, national and global levels while addressing trade-offs.

Photo: © Antonio Busiello/WWF-US

3.4.1 SDG COVERAGE

The review includes an examination of SDG coverage in the VNR reports and the nature of reporting on them. This facilitates an assessment of how countries are adopting integrated approaches to implementation. In this vein, reporting on all 17 SDGs improved significantly in 2018 over 2017 (Table 2). In 2017, 11 of the 45 countries examined reported on all SDGs whereas this figure was 28 countries for 2018. Three (3) countries, versus eight in 2017, reported only on the HLPF theme goals. Eight (8) countries reported on a limited set of country selected SDGs. In 2017, 19 of 45 countries took this approach. Seven (7) countries, the same as in 2017, did not prepare a goal-by-goal analysis, but rather presented progress through a thematic discussion with references to individual goals.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Provide a detailed assessment of all 17 goals, with appropriate linkages to all dimensions of sustainable development and reference to domestic and global efforts to realise the 2030 Agenda.

Progressing national SDGs implementation   31

TABLE 2. GOAL BY GOAL REPORTING IN THE 2018 VNR REPORTS

SDG COVERAGE	COUNTRIES		
All SDGs examined (28 countries)	AUSTRALIA	HUNGARY	POLAND
	BAHAMAS	IRELAND	SAUDI ARABIA
	BHUTAN	JAMAICA	SENEGAL
	CABO VERDE	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	SINGAPORE
	CANADA		SPAIN
	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	LATVIA	SRI LANKA
	ECUADOR	LEBANON	STATE OF PALESTINE
	EGYPT	LITHUANIA	SWITZERLAND
	GUINEA	MALTA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
		MEXICO	VIET NAM
SDGs covered by the HLPF theme (3 countries)	QATAR	ROMANIA	TOGO
Limited set of country-selected SDGs (8 countries)	ANDORRA	BENIN	NIGER
	ARMENIA	MALI	URUGUAY
	COLOMBIA	NAMIBIA	
SDGs not examined though a goal-by-goal analysis (7 countries)[41]	ALBANIA	KIRIBATI	SLOVAKIA
	BAHRAIN	PARAGUAY	SUDAN
	GREECE		

41

41 Kiribati and Sudan only submitted main messages.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

FIGURE 9. COVERAGE OF SPECIFIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

ALL SDGS   LIMITED SET OF SDGS   HLPF THEME SDGS

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

Number of countries: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40

Figure 9 provides an overview of the goals most commonly featured in VNR reports according to the approach taken to the goal-by-goal analysis.

Most countries – 30 of 46 – provided a detailed account of their progress on sustainable development, including those that did not analyse specific SDGs, but rather presented a thematic analysis. This finding is similar to reporting in 2017; 29 countries provided a detailed analysis in their VNR reports. Twelve (12) countries (versus 15 in 2017) provided a summary of progress in their examination of goals. Four (4) countries, two of which did not submit actual VNR reports but only main messages, provided no details. These include Bahrain, Kiribati, Paraguay and Sudan.

One issue that emerged from the extensive examination of the 2017 VNR reports was that countries tend to provide a significant amount of detail on efforts relating to goals, but do not provide information on best practice, lessons learned, gaps and priorities going forward. Though reports were detailed, the information provided is not necessarily conducive to promoting peer learning and garnering support to address challenges in implementation. This challenge remains in 2018 VNR reporting (although reporting on best practice has improved, as noted below). In addition, it is not clear from the reports that countries have created new programmes and initiatives in light of the 2030 Agenda. Many countries detailed pre-existing policies and programmes that happen to be aligned with and supportive of progress on the SDGs similar to in 2017.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Summarise best practice, lessons learned, gaps and priorities, and areas where support is needed in the goal by goal analysis to facilitate learning and global partnership.**

Progressing national SDGs implementation   33

3.4.2 Integration

The review looks at coverage of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the extent to which countries refer to linkages between the goals and relevant dimensions of sustainable development. This assessment is meant to provide some indication of how countries are dealing with the challenge of integration in the 2030 Agenda. Figure 10 provides an overview of the extent to which countries examined all three dimensions of sustainable development.

Most countries (29) gave equal attention to all three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental - in their VNR report overall. In 2017, 33 countries took this same approach. Twelve (12) countries focussed on all dimensions but gave greater emphasis to economic (eight), social (one) or environmental (three) dimensions. Four (4) countries gave limited attention to environmental dimensions while one country, Sudan, addressed only social and economic dimensions in the main messages it submitted.

FIGURE 10. ATTENTION TO SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN VNR REPORTS

ALL DIMENSIONS BUT GREATER FOCUS ON ECONOMIC
8 COUNTRIES

ONLY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
1 COUNTRY

ALL DIMENSIONS BUT LIMITED FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL
4 COUNTRIES

ALL DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
29 COUNTRIES

ALL DIMENSIONS BUT A GREATER FOCUS ON SOCIAL
1 COUNTRY

ALL DIMENSIONS BUT GREATER FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL
3 COUNTRIES
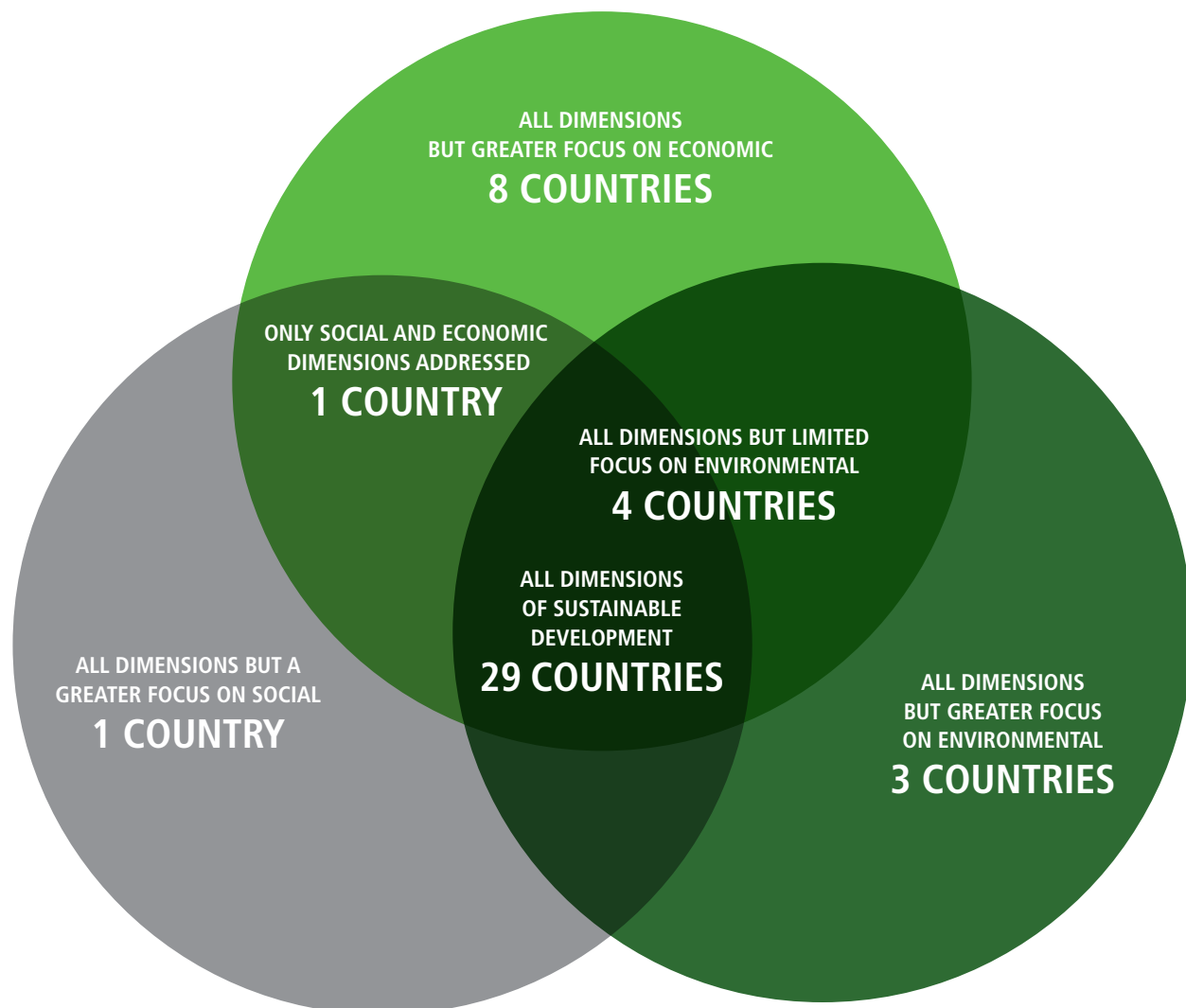
🇪🇬 **A case study in good practice: Ensuring integration in 2030 Agenda implementation in Egypt**

Egypt is in the process of updating its Sustainable Development Strategy. Two years following the adoption of the strategy, the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform launched a review to ensure the strategy accounts for a number of major changes in the country, including the introduction of the structural adjustment program in 2016, and new information resulting from the 2017 national census, which showed increased rates of population growth. There is also a need for the strategy to reflect priorities in achieving food, water, and energy security. The review process is being carried out based on a number of principles including "reinforcing the multidimensional aspect of sustainable development and its interconnected nature; highlighting the benefits of sustainable development, i.e. adoption of a "green economy" as a tool to achieve sustainable development; [and] stakeholder engagement to create ownership," (p. 9) including with parliamentarians, trade unions, women, youth, civil society, and the private sector.

According to the report, public investments prioritise projects that achieve all dimensions of sustainable development. The government is making use of an integrated electronic system for planning and monitoring to ensure projects' compliance with criteria of sustainability. All projects submitted by public entities are linked to the goals and key performance indicators of the Sustainable Development Strategy, enhancing monitoring and evaluation processes.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Egypt's VNR report.

In the goal-by-goal analysis, 17 (of 46) countries made references to applicable social, economic and environmental linkages between goal areas. However, more than half of the countries reporting in 2018, or 25 countries, made limited reference to linkages between dimensions, tending to take a silo approach in their goal-by-goal analysis. These findings represent a backsliding in comparison to 2017. In 2017, 22 of 45 countries made appropriate references to linkages while only 19 provide limited references. Two (2) countries – Egypt and Sudan, made no linkages between dimensions of sustainable development in their analysis (in 2017, Brazil and Qatar were the only countries that followed a similar approach). As noted in 2017, these results may indicate that countries are not

sufficiently ensuring integration in their approaches to 2030 Agenda implementation.

3.4.3 Policy coherence for sustainable development

The review of VNR reports looked at the extent to which countries made linkages to international agreements related to the 2030 Agenda and policy coherence for sustainable development.

LINKAGES TO INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS THAT SUPPORT THE 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda is supported by a range of international agreements and frameworks that can be used to further strengthen and progress implementation. Improving on the analysis in 2017 that examined references to climate change and the Paris Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2018 review also examined references to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the global aid and development effectiveness agenda.

All countries except Sudan referenced climate change, however 38 explicitly refer to the Paris Agreement.[42] Kiribati and Sudan are the only countries that provided no information on how they tackle climate change. In 2017, this was the case for ten countries, suggesting an improvement in reporting on climate change. Table 3 provides an overview of the main approaches to tackling climate change as outlined in the VNR reports. VNR reports most commonly referred to the development or implementation of national climate policies (35), reducing greenhouse gas emissions (30), sector specific initiatives (30), and improving energy efficiency and/or the use of renewable energy (28). [43]

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[42] All 45 countries examined in 2017 referred to climate change while 27 explicitly referred to the Paris Agreement.

[43] In 2017, 22 countries referred to national policies and plans related to climate change mitigation and adaptation in their VNR reports, while 15 highlight efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, typically providing information on national targets. Another 14 specifically pointed to improving energy efficiency and renewable energy usage.

Progressing national SDGs implementation   **35**

TABLE 3. EFFORTS TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Development and/or implementation of national climate policies (35 countries)		
ANDORRA	HUNGARY	PARAGUAY
ARMENIA	IRELAND	POLAND
AUSTRALIA	JAMAICA	QATAR
BAHAMAS	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	ROMANIA
BAHRAIN	LATVIA	SINGAPORE
BENIN	LEBANON	SRI LANKA
BHUTAN	LITHUANIA	STATE OF PALESTINE
CABO VERDE	MALI	SWITZERLAND
CANADA	MALTA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
COLOMBIA	MEXICO	URUGUAY
EGYPT	NIGER	VIET NAM
GREECE		
GUINEA		

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions (30 countries)		
ALBANIA	HUNGARY	ROMANIA
ANDORRA	IRELAND	SAUDI ARABIA
ARMENIA	JAMAICA	SENEGAL
AUSTRALIA	LATVIA	SINGAPORE
BAHRAIN	LITHUANIA	SPAIN
BHUTAN[44]	MALI	SRI LANKA
CANADA	MALTA	SWITZERLAND
COLOMBIA	MEXICO	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
EGYPT	NAMIBIA	URUGUAY
GREECE	POLAND	VIET NAM

44   Commitment to remain carbon neutral.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Sector specific initiatives (30 countries)

- ALBANIA
- ANDORRA
- AUSTRALIA
- BHUTAN
- CABO VERDE
- CANADA
- COLOMBIA
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
- EGYPT
- GREECE
- HUNGARY
- IRELAND
- JAMAICA
- LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
- LATVIA
- LEBANON
- LITHUANIA
- MALI
- MALTA
- NIGER
- POLAND
- ROMANIA
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SINGAPORE
- SLOVAKIA
- SPAIN
- SRI LANKA
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- URUGUAY
- VIET NAM

Improving energy efficiency and/or renewable energy usage (28 countries)

- ANDORRA
- AUSTRALIA
- BAHAMAS
- CANADA
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
- ECUADOR
- EGYPT
- GREECE
- HUNGARY
- IRELAND
- JAMAICA
- LATVIA
- LEBANON
- LITHUANIA
- MALTA
- MEXICO
- PARAGUAY
- POLAND
- QATAR
- ROMANIA
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SINGAPORE
- SLOVAKIA
- SPAIN
- STATE OF PALESTINE
- SWITZERLAND
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- VIET NAM

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Reducing climate and disaster vulnerabilities (25 countries)
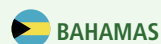
- ARMENIA
- AUSTRALIA
- BAHAMAS
- BENIN
- BHUTAN
- CANADA
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
- ECUADOR
- GREECE
- GUINEA
- JAMAICA
- MEXICO
- NAMIBIA
- NIGER
- PARAGUAY
- QATAR
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SENEGAL
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- SLOVAKIA
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- STATE OF PALESTINE
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- VIET NAM
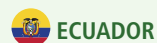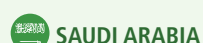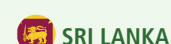
Reforestation and/or conservation efforts (15 countries)

- ALBANIA
- CABO VERDE
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
- ECUADOR
- GREECE
- GUINEA
- JAMAICA
- LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
- MALTA
- POLAND
- ROMANIA
- SINGAPORE
- SRI LANKA
- URUGUAY
- VIET NAM

Adaptation (15 countries)
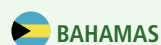
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- BAHAMAS
- BENIN
- BHUTAN
- ECUADOR
- GREECE
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- MALI
- NIGER
- SENEGAL
- SRI LANKA
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- URUGUAY
- VIET NAM
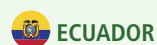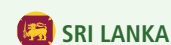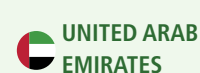
Establishment / use of institutional mechanisms (15 countries)

- ALBANIA
- ANDORRA
- AUSTRALIA
- EGYPT
- GUINEA
- HUNGARY
- JAMAICA
- MALTA
- QATAR
- SENEGAL
- SINGAPORE
- SRI LANKA
- STATE OF PALESTINE
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- VIET NAM

Progressing national SDGs implementation

Contribution to international climate finance / international partnerships to address climate change (11 countries)	ANDORRA AUSTRALIA CANADA HUNGARY	LATVIA LITHUANIA MALTA SINGAPORE	SPAIN SWITZERLAND UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Support for climate related research (10 countries)	AUSTRALIA CABO VERDE CANADA	IRELAND JAMAICA SINGAPORE SLOVAKIA	SPAIN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES VIET NAM
Education initiatives (8 countries)	ANDORRA AUSTRALIA CABO VERDE	QATAR SINGAPORE SLOVAKIA	SPAIN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Efforts by sub-national governments or at municipal level (7 countries)	AUSTRALIA ECUADOR HUNGARY	LITHUANIA MALI	NIGER SENEGAL
Strengthened capacities (7 countries)	CABO VERDE LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	MALI NIGER QATAR	SENEGAL UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

More countries (21) linked the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda than in 2017 (15 countries). Over half (26) of the countries reporting in 2018 referred to the Convention on Biological Diversity while 19 referred to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Only nine countries referred to the international aid and development effectiveness agendas as outlined in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. This included three high-income countries, (Ireland, Latvia and Romania), two lower-middle-income countries (the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Namibia) and four low-income countries (Guinea, Mali, Niger and Senegal).

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Link the realisation of each SDG to relevant existing national and international commitments and frameworks to ensure coherency in 2030 Agenda implementation and create synergies with existing commitments, policies and actions.

Two reports stood out for 2018 in terms of linking the realisation of specific SDGs to existing commitments. Though they did not refer to the global aid and development effectiveness agendas, the VNR reports for Australia and Greece consistently referred to other relevant international agreements and frameworks throughout.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

🏴 A case study in good practice: Efforts to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation in the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Issues related to aid and development effectiveness are underreported across VNR reports. The VNR report for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, however, highlights important efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of development cooperation. The Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (2016-25) serves as the country's overarching framework for development cooperation. The Declaration aligns with the global agenda for effective development cooperation, including the 2012 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, the 2014 Mexico High Level Meeting Communiqué, the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the SDGs. Working with development partners, the government is in the process of developing a monitoring framework in line with the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. The framework will guide monitoring and reporting efforts on the effectiveness of development cooperation at the country level. In addition to these efforts, the government has also renewed its commitment to enhance the national development cooperation forum, its Round Table Process and Sector Working Groups to enhance multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Source: Except adapted from the Lao People's Democratic Republic VNR report.

POLICY COHERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Domestic policies have an impact on the realisation of sustainable development at home and abroad. In this context, policy coherence for sustainable development is an important part of ensuring that domestic policies maximise their positive contributions and minimise negative contributions to sustainable development globally. The number of countries referring to policy coherence for sustainable development has remained fairly consistent over 2017 and 2018, with 15 countries for each year. Four (4) other countries reporting in 2018 referred to policy coherence more generally.

Figure 11 provides an overview of the extent to which countries assessed the impacts of their domestic and foreign policies on the realisation of the 2030 Agenda globally. Countries were included if they made at least one reference to their domestic and/or foreign policies contributing to the SDGs globally. Twenty (20) countries included no examination of the impact of domestic or foreign policies. Fifteen (15) countries examined foreign policies only. Ten (10) high-income and upper-middle-income countries examined domestic and foreign policy contributions. Bhutan was the only country that noted the contribution of a domestic policy only to the

SDGs globally, in the area of the country's environmental efforts. By way of comparison, in 2017, 11 countries assessed domestic and foreign policies, 17 assessed foreign policies, 17 provided no assessment and no countries examined only domestic policies.

FIGURE 11. ASSESSING IMPACTS ON THE SDGS GLOBALLY

Number of countries
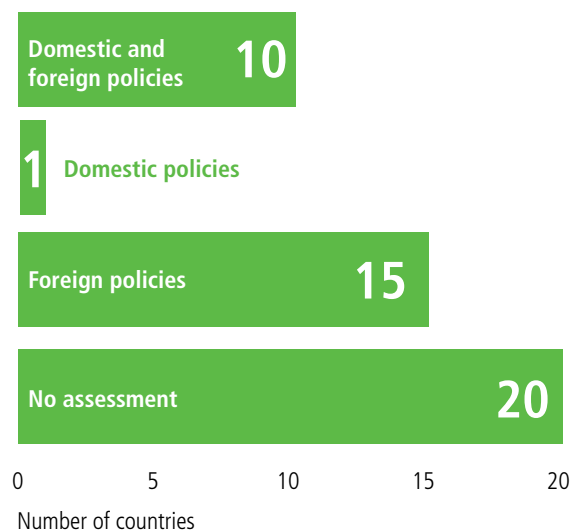
For countries that noted contributions in terms of domestic and foreign policies, domestic policy areas covered included efforts by host countries with respect to Syrian refugees, agricultural policies, water management policies, energy policies and efforts in health and education. No VNR report provided a systematic assessment of the impact of domestic policies. Countries that examined their foreign policies tended to refer to contributions in terms of international public finance, trade, and addressing global systemic problems such as illicit flows.

🏴 A case study in good practice: Using technology to ensure policy coherence on sustainable development in Benin

In Benin, to ensure better control over the coordination of the 2030 Agenda as well as effective governance of the goals, an application was developed to measure the relative "sensitivity of Ministries' annual interventions" to the SDGs. The application, called MeSODD, makes it possible to assess the level of alignment of each Ministry with the achievement of the SDGs. It also measures the sensitivity or adequacy of each Ministry's activities regarding SDG priority targets. The application helps to focus attention on actions that could lead to inter-sectoral synergies for achieving the SDGs, and outline comprehensive, collaborative and specific measures that should be followed by Ministries to make progress on the SDGs.

Source: Except adapted from Benin's VNR.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

For the 21 countries that provided information on policy coherence for sustainable development (or in some cases, coherence more generally), nine refer to institutional coherence or coordination. Six (6) refer to policy coherence across sectors while five refer to ensuring coherence between different levels of government. Some countries (six) noted the use of an overarching policy or strategic framework to ensure policy coherence. Four (4) countries referred to examining the impacts of their foreign policies as part of ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development while two countries referred also to domestic policies.

> 🇪🇸 **A case study in good practice: Spain's approach to policy coherence for sustainable development**
>
> Spain's VNR report recognizes that policy coherence for sustainable development is about the impacts of foreign and domestic policies. It also notes that policy coherence for sustainable development requires a review of political and institutional mechanisms, recognising the need for coherent national policies that take into account the roles of different levels of government and other stakeholders that contribute to the 2030 Agenda. For Spain, "alignment of public policies with the SDGs—that is, [policy coherence for sustainable development]—takes place in three areas: in domestic actions, to advance the SDGs in Spain; through the international cooperation that Spain undertakes to support third countries in their own efforts; and by ensuring that domestic efforts do not have negative external impacts on other countries or on achievement of global public goods" (p. 87).
>
> The VNR report includes a number of initiatives to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development. The country will prepare an SDG impact analysis for legislative initiatives that includes external and global impacts, improve assessment of the impacts of foreign policy on the SDGs in partnership frameworks with other countries, and incorporate analysis of policy coherence as part of the parliamentary accountability mechanism and through an annual progress report on the 2030 Agenda.
>
> Source: Except adapted from Spain's VNR.

Similar to 2017, only a limited number of countries provided information on their foreign policy contributions in the goal-by-goal analysis. Andorra, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Slovakia, and Switzerland refer to their domestic efforts to realise the SDGs as well as relevant foreign policies in their goal-by-goal analysis. This approach shows how each country supports implementation of

the SDGs both at home and abroad. Reporting on goal-by-goal contributions also has potential to prompt greater policy coherence for sustainable development across countries by bringing into focus the impacts of domestic and foreign policies on sustainable development at home and abroad. Such an approach could be replicated by all stakeholders.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assess all 17 goals in their VNR reports, respecting the indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

- Demonstrate how existing policies, programmes and practices are changing to address gaps and support progress on the 2030 Agenda, in addition to existing approaches that are supportive of the SDGs.

- Ensure all dimensions of sustainable development are addressed in SDG implementation and VNR reporting. Linkages and synergies between the different dimensions of sustainable development should be clearly stated in policies, supported through implementation and included in reporting - all to help ensure clear integration.

- Include a summary of best practice, lessons learned, gaps and priorities, and areas where support is needed in the goal by goal analysis to facilitate learning and global partnership.

- Link implementation of the 2030 Agenda to relevant international agreements that support 2030 Agenda implementation, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and global agreements on aid and international development effectiveness, including in VNR reporting.

- Provide an assessment of domestic and global dimensions of sustainable development in the goal-by-goal analysis, demonstrating contributions to realising the SDGs at home and abroad, and supporting policy coherence for sustainable development.

4.0 2030 Agenda Implementation

Photo: © Ranjan Ramchandani / WWF
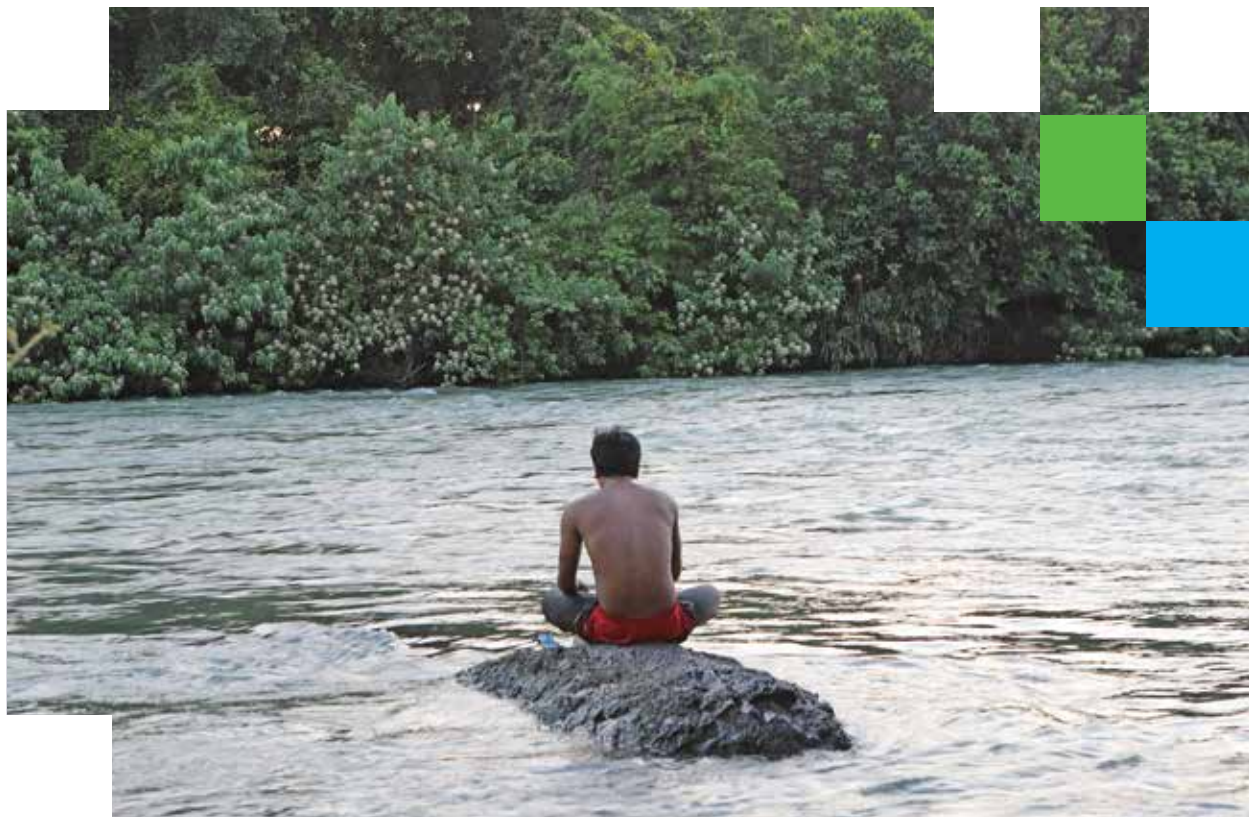
Chapter Summary

OVERALL STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The majority of VNR reports (44) show evidence of change to realise the 2030 Agenda in terms of incorporating the SDGs into national policies, developing institutional mechanisms for implementation, efforts to build partnerships and/or attention to monitoring and evaluation of progress. This finding is consistent with the assessment of VNR reports in 2017.

IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA

Most countries have not costed 2030 Agenda implementation, but they have identified public and private domestic and international sources of finance to support implementation, showing a slight improvement in numbers over 2017. More than half of the VNR reports (25) provide no information on inclusion of the SDGs in national budgets or budgeting processes. Five (5) countries provide information on how they have incorporated the SDGs into national budgets and ten countries indicated plans to incorporate the SDGs into budgeting processes.

Reporting has improved on international public finance, trade, technology and systemic issues relative to 2017. Information reported on international public finance included the amount of international public finance (official development assistance (ODA) or South-South Cooperation) provided, ODA commitments, and challenges facing countries that have graduated from ODA-eligibility due to income status. Six (6) countries noted challenges resulting from declining ODA flows. Only three countries noted efforts related to improving aid effectiveness. Unlike in 2017 when a number of countries emphasized the role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation, only two countries noted they would further explore opportunities through South-South Cooperation. Whereas countries reporting in 2017 focussed on commitments to sustainable and/or fair trade, finalisation of trade packages for developing countries, and improvements in trade capacity, countries reporting in 2018 largely focussed on the expansion of trade as a key priority, in particular on preferential access and reducing barriers to trade. Similar to 2017, countries pointed most to capacity constraints related to 2030 Agenda implementation. This included challenges in monitoring and evaluating the impacts of programmes and changing

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course as necessary, and challenges in improving coordination. More countries reported on technology in 2018 than 2017, focussing on their national investments in this area. Finally, there was a marked increase in reporting on systemic issues in 2018 relative to 2017, likely as a result of the inclusion of this focus in the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines. Global financial and economic (in)stability was the most commonly cited systemic issue, followed by efforts to combat illicit capital flows.

With respect to experiences in 2030 Agenda implementation, countries report on their challenges and, to a lesser degree, best practices. Data availability and monitoring progress are the most commonly cited challenges to implementation across VNR reports, followed by mobilising financial resources. This is consistent with findings from the 2017 review of VNR reports. While there was a notable improvement in reporting on best practices in 2018, with some valuable examples provided, there are still very few countries (14 of 46) who explicitly note their lessons learned or areas in which they would like to learn from others. The provision of such information generates understanding of country needs, provides a basis on which to hold stakeholders accountable for their efforts to support 2030 Agenda implementation and assists in the identification of the best entry points for support. This is a gap that undermines the VNR process and creates a missed opportunity for making the most of HLPF discussions. The United Nations needs to explore with member states why there is underreporting on these dimensions, particularly given the focus of the HLPF follow-up and review process on knowledge and lesson sharing.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND
Even with the inclusion of a component on leaving no one behind in the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF, only 16 countries provided a detailed account of efforts to leave no one behind. As was the case in 2017, VNR reports provided little information on the status of data to leave no one behind. Women, children and youth, persons with disabilities and elderly people continue to be the most commonly cited groups at risk of being left behind. However, the emphasis placed on different groups changed in 2018, with more countries pointing to persons with disabilities and children and youth, compared to women, which was the top group cited in 2017. Beyond the most common choices of those being left behind, there was tremendous diversity in the different types of people that countries feel are being left behind, a striking increase in 2018 over 2017.

Countries also tended to highlight their existing policies and approaches to leave no one behind, rather than signal the development of new approaches. However, half of reporting countries (23) noted a mix of specialised and universal programmes. Given that combining universal policies with targeted approaches and strong leadership can be an effective approach to reaching marginalised communities, this is a positive step in the right direction. That said, this is still only the case for half of the countries reporting. Countries also highlighted a range of policies and programmes related to social protection, health, education and other initiatives. Overall, these findings suggest that countries have yet to adapt new programmes to target those left behind and are relying for the most part, on existing programmes. In 2018, we enhanced the focus of our analytical framework to determine whether governments were developing strategies to address the specific needs of different types of groups that were being left behind. We found that 20 countries noted the development or use of strategies to target specific groups. Overall, there is a need for countries to examine and adapt existing policies and programmes in light of the focus on leaving no one behind, particularly to first examine the extent to which such policies and programmes are addressing the needs of those left behind.

Information on the results of efforts to leave no one behind was in the form of specific figures on the results of programmes and initiatives, and overall trends (including data) or information (without data) on the status of progress. Reporting on efforts to reduce inequality improved substantially in 2018. Countries highlighted the use of policies and strategies to address inequality, followed by social protection.

Finally, efforts to realise gender equality as outlined in the VNR reports centre around legal instruments (31), specific policies and strategies (25), and projects and other benefits that support women (24). The status of gender-disaggregated data is still very mixed based on VNR reports.

AWARENESS RAISING AND LOCALISATION
Fewer countries reported on efforts to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda in 2018 over 2017. That said, VNR reporting countries in 2018 continued to recognise that awareness-raising is an area for ongoing effort throughout the course of 2030 Agenda implementation and part of public engagement strategies (seven countries specifically noted that more efforts to raise awareness are needed). Countries are making use of a wide range of innovative in-person and online mechanisms, with a number of VNR reports noting the use of the VNR process to contribute to awareness-raising efforts.

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As was the case in 2017, the VNR reports continue to show a wide variance in terms of where countries and their local governments are in terms of localising the SDGs. That said, reports in 2017 compared to 2018 tended to be more detailed in terms of articulating next steps for localisation and outlining existing activities, including the status of policy development and local institutional structures for implementation. The status of local implementation efforts, as highlighted by the 2018 VNR reports, suggests that much more work is needed to promote localisation.

PARTNERSHIP TO REALISE THE SDGS

For the most part, VNR reports stress the important contributions that non-state actors and others play in 2030 Agenda implementation, similar to 2017. Reporting on the contributions from civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector and academia improved in 2018. However, only a handful of VNR reports still included contributions from non-state actors and local governments throughout. VNR reports continue to remain silent on the enabling environment for civil society, and a limited number speak to others challenges that civil society organisations face in contributing to the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the range of activities (in particular, specific projects, awareness-raising and promoting accountability, particularly in the areas of independent monitoring of progress) and the variety of roles attributed to civil society organisations in terms of supporting 2030 Agenda implementation expanded in 2018. That said, the predominant focus on projects and awareness-raising demonstrates a narrow perception of the roles that civil society organisations play in broader society.

Marginally more VNRs in 2018 (relative to 2017) reported on ways in which parliaments, the private sector and academia are being engaged. The main ways parliamentarians are contributing to the 2030 Agenda include through committee work, the adoption of resolutions in support of implementation, and oversight – similar to what was reported in 2017. For the private sector, VNR reports cited specific projects, company specific commitments and participation

in multi-stakeholder partnerships. The most common examples of academic or expert contributions noted in VNR reports related to specific projects, followed by expert analysis. While reporting has improved on the contributions from academics and experts, only half of the VNR reports for 2018 included their contributions. Finally, the provision of finance (official development assistance, finance from international financial institutions and South-South Cooperation) was the most commonly cited role identified by countries for development partners, followed by technical assistance. Interestingly, twice the number of countries (14) than in 2017, explicitly noted that they received support to carry out their VNR, in partnership with the United Nations. With a few notable exceptions, VNR reports continue to not be specific enough to really inform future areas for development partner support and the establishment of partnerships, as was noted in 2017.

MEASUREMENT AND REPORTING

The majority of countries provided information on monitoring and evaluation at the national level, though less countries reported this information in 2018 than in 2017. Information on data availability, including disaggregated data, is often unclear or not articulated, similar to the findings from the review of VNR reports in 2017. Both availability and disaggregation need to be strengthened. Eleven (11) countries noted the use of a dashboard or web portal to report on data, an increase over the five countries noting this approach in 2017.

Fourteen (14) countries noted that they engage in regular reporting. Five (5) countries have given indications of when they will report next to the HLPF, including some who provided a reporting timetable. As in 2017, national reports on progress still tend to be government reports, rather than whole-of-society reports. A limited number of countries pointed to the role of parliament in reviewing progress on 2030 Agenda implementation. Some countries, including two who have reported previously, are starting to use their VNR reports to signal progress against targets.

⟳ 4.1 Implementing the 2030 Agenda

Financing implementation of the 2030 Agenda includes national and international dimensions. At the national level, there is costing, budget allocations and identifying sources of finance. Domestic public resources, private investment, trade and international public finance contribute to varying degrees. In addition to financing domestic implementation, development partners also have a role to play internationally by supporting developing countries, notably through official development assistance (ODA), South-South Cooperation and by promoting fair trade, including preferential trade access where relevant.

4.1.1 Financing the 2030 Agenda

Costing 2030 Agenda implementation and identifying sources of finance assists countries in preparing realistic implementation strategies, identify financing shortfalls and setting clear expectations regarding needs when working with development partners. Figure 12 provides an overview of whether VNR reports refer to costing for domestic implementation of the 2030 Agenda and identified sources of finance for 2018 and 2017. It shows that there has been improvement in terms of the number of countries providing information on either costing and/or sources of finance (29 of 46 countries in 2018 versus 23 of 45 countries in 2017). For 2018, 12 of the countries that do not provide this information were high-income countries (the remaining five are upper- and lower-middle-income countries). This finding is consistent with VNR reporting (or lack thereof) in 2017.

Nearly half of countries (21) refer to sources of finance but have not costed out SDG implementation. This was the case for 16 countries in 2017. Poland and Viet Nam are the only countries that costed country level implementation of the SDGs and identified sources of finance. According to its VNR report, Albania plans to assess costs for SDG implementation, however the VNR report does not identify sources of finance. Bhutan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Slovakia and Spain are planning to cost SDG implementation and have identified sources of finance. For the countries that identified sources of finance, these tend to include domestic resources, private investment, and where applicable, official development assistance. Thirteen (13) countries specifically referred to the promotion of foreign direct investment or private investments, three referred to the use of public-private partnerships to realise the 2030 Agenda and four countries noted the importance of remittances.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Cost out SDG implementation and identify sources of finance.

FIGURE 12. RESOURCING AGENDA

2018   2017

Costed, finance sources identified
2   1

Costed, finance sources not identified
1, 0

Costing not mentioned, finance sources identified
21   16

Costing planned, finance sources identified
4   5

Costing planned, finance sources not identified
1, 0

Not articulated in the VNR
17   22

0   5   10   15   20   25   30   35   40
Number of countries
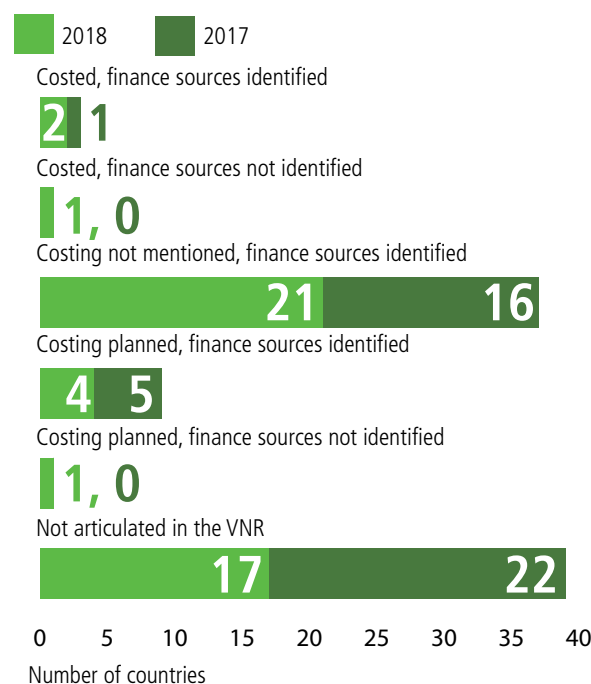
4.1.2 Finance-related means of implementation

BUDGETING FOR 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

The inclusion of the 2030 Agenda into national (and sub-national budgets) ensures that resources are effectively allocated for implementation. Budgetary allocations also give life to government commitments and priorities, making clear the actions that are being undertaken to realise the SGDs. As such, the 2018 assessment framework for the review was updated to examine whether countries have explicitly incorporated the SDGs into their budgets. More than half of the VNR reports (25) provide no information on inclusion of the SDGs in national budgets or budgeting processes.[45] Reports for an additional 16 countries show that the SDGs have not been incorporated into budgetary processes. However, ten of these countries, including Albania, Benin, Guinea, Jamaica, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Niger, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka and the State of Palestine, indicated *plans* to incorporate the SDGs into budgeting processes in their respective VNR reports. Bhutan's VNR report notes that as the SDGs are aligned with its national plans, with a significant portion of SDG financing captured by the existing budget. The Bahamas plans to analyse its budget in terms of SDG expenditures, but made no commitment to incorporating the SDGs into budgetary processes. Similarly, Mexico examined expenditures in light of the SDGs. According to Mexico's VNR report, just over 80% of the government's expenditures in 2018 contributed to the SDGs.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Assess budget allocations for SDG implementation at national and sub-national levels and incorporate and clearly denote activities aimed at realising the SDGs in budgets.**

🔴 A case study in good practice: Understanding budgetary allocations for the SDGs in Albania

Albania's VNR report includes details on budget analysis to understanding SDG expenditures. The VNR report provides an estimate of total amounts spent, according to specific policy areas, over 2015-17. The baseline mapping of expenditures indicates that a total of roughly USD $6,668 million in public spending geared towards the achievement of the SDGs occurred over 2015-17. It also showed that the main SDG related expenditures for Albania are for the social pillar, with approximately half of the total budget supporting health, education, culture and social protection. Expenditures on sustainable growth (transport, water, infrastructure and the environment) accounted for 18% of the total budget outlays, whereas good governance, democracy and rule of law expenditures accounted for 17%. Spending on competitiveness and fiscal stability accounted for just over one percent of the budget. The VNR report also includes tables and charts for spending on individual SDGs. Going forward, the government plans to further map the SDGs to its strategies and plans, including their respective budget programmes.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Albania's VNR report.

Five countries noted that the SDGs have been incorporated into budgets. These include Colombia, Ecuador, Latvia, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

- In its 2018 VNR report, **Colombia** focusses on budgeting for 2030 Agenda implementation. The country has developed a tool to track, collect and systematise budget information to quantify contributions to the SDGs.

- In **Ecuador**, the National Assembly determined the funds allocated for 2030 Agenda implementation for the 2018 budget, with expenditure related to the SDGs reaching USD 16,920 million, or 48.5% of the country's budget.

- **Latvia** has identified its investment needs according to its National Development Plan, including funding sources. Information is publicly available on the linkages between budget expenditures and government priorities.

- According to **Uruguay's** VNR report, a Budget Transparency Portal has been created that shows links between the national budget and the SDGs.

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45   Ireland refers to tagging the SDGs in its international cooperation budget but does not refer to its national budget.

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- **Viet Nam's** VNR report notes that most funding for the country's Medium-Term Public Investment Plan (2016-20) supports the SDGs, however it does not provide an indication of whether specific SDGs are tagged to budget lines.

INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC FINANCE

For many countries, international public finance, including ODA, other official flows and South-South Cooperation, remains an important contributor to national sustainable development efforts. Moreover, the examination of international public finance provides an indication of how development partners see their responsibilities with respect to supporting the realisation of the SDGs globally and in developing countries. Reporting on international public finance improved in 2018 over 2017 with 44 of 46 countries providing information versus 38 of 45 in 2017.[46] For the 21 high-income countries that reported in 2018, 13 provided information on the amount of international public finance (ODA or South-South Cooperation) provided. Five (5) countries noted efforts to align development cooperation with the SDGs.

Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Romania re-confirmed their respective commitments to reach a 0.33% of gross national income target for ODA by 2030. Ireland re-confirmed its commitment to the United Nations target of 0.7% of gross national income. VNR reports for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates highlighted surpassing the 0.7% target.

The Bahamas and Bahrain highlighted a continued need for international support despite their high-income status, while Uruguay's VNR report showcased contributions from international public finance to its implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Low- and middle-income countries covered a wide range of issues related to international public finance and their ongoing needs for such support. Decline in ODA flows and international support was highlighted as a challenge by Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Kiribati (who presented this issue as valuing continued support as the country graduates from least developed country status), Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. These countries noted graduation from least developed country status and/or to higher income classifications as the cause for declining support. Benin, Bhutan and Viet Nam referred to support in the areas of green finance and climate change. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mali and Niger referred to efforts related to improving aid effectiveness. Egypt and Senegal re-stated the international commitments made by high income countries, notably in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and with respect to the

0.7% target.[47] The Lao People's Democratic Republic and Senegal noted they would explore further opportunities through South-South Cooperation, while Namibia highlighted efforts to increase the international public finance the country receives. Cabo Verde called for reconsideration of ODA financing criteria, particularly given the vulnerability of many countries to climate change. Similar critiques of ODA criteria were made by the Bahamas, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Finally, Sudan noted that its exclusion from the Heavily Indebted Poor Country initiative is unjustifiable.

TRADE

Participation in international trade is a key strategy for realising sustainable development across countries. Moreover, the international community has committed to establishing a universal, rules-based, fair trading system that enables developing countries to reap the benefits of trade. Reporting on trade as a means of implementation also improved in 2018 compared to 2017. In 2017, 22 of 45 countries reported on trade. In 2018, 35 out of 46 countries reported. Whereas countries reporting in 2017 focussed on commitments to sustainable and/or fair trade (13), finalisation of trade packages for developing countries (five) and improvements in trade capacity (six), countries reporting in 2018 largely focussed on the expansion of trade as a key priority (21 countries). Four (4) high-income countries highlighted the importance of preferential trade access for developing countries, and in particular least developed countries. Sri Lanka and Togo noted that they had benefited from such preferential access. Six (6) countries emphasized the universal, rule-based nature of the global trading system, while five countries noted that reducing trade barriers is a priority at the country level. Three (3) countries referred to the trade facilitation efforts that benefit developing countries. Niger, Qatar, Senegal and Sri Lanka are the only countries that reported information on their trade balance or trade revenues. No country reporting in 2018 provided data on trade flows from developing countries (three countries provided this information in 2017).

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46   Albania and Colombia did not refer to international public finance in their 2018 VNR reports.

47   In 2017, five countries called on providers of ODA to meet their commitments.

4.1.3 Capacity-related means of implementation

A range of capacities are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda across governments and non-state actors. These actors face the challenge of thinking and working differently to realise the vision of sustainable development embodied by the 2030 Agenda. This includes developing new and updating existing skills and capacities, and investing in technological innovations that can support implementation and learning from others.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The 2030 Agenda includes capacity development as an important means of implementation through SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals, as well as in the implementation targets related to specific SDGs. Thirty-two (32) of 46 countries reported on issues related to capacity development in 2018, the same as in 2017 for the 45 countries examined. The most common capacity challenges, noted by 13 countries, relate to local capacities for implementation, such as difficulties to monitor and evaluate the impacts of programmes and change course as necessary, and to improve coordination.[48] Goal specific capacity challenges were noted for Benin, Ecuador, Jamaica, Latvia, Sri Lanka, Uruguay and Viet Nam.[49] Andorra, Armenia, Benin, Bhutan, Kiribati, Sir Lanka and Viet Nam pointed to challenges related to 2030 Agenda monitoring or data collection. High income countries tended to note overall or specific contributions to capacity development in partner countries.[50] Bahrain and the Lao People's Democratic Republic referred to capacity development as an area requiring support in general terms. Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic and Senegal referred to improving civil society capacities.[51] While more reports referred to the role of South-South Cooperation in 2017 than in 2018, overall capacity constraints remain largely similarly for reporting over the two years.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Clearly articulate specific capacity constraints to 2030 Agenda implementation and with respect to realising specific SDGs in VNR reports. Indicate the type of support needed to address capacity constraints.**

TECHNOLOGY

SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals includes three targets on technology transfer to developing countries, in particular least developed countries. For the 46 countries reporting in 2018, 37 reported on technology (versus 30 of 45 countries examined in 2017). Most countries (32) reported on their national investments in technology and research and development. Namibia, Sri Lanka, and Uruguay (versus eight countries in 2017) highlighted technology transfers received or needed, while seven countries (versus eight in 2017) noted their efforts to support technology transfer.

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

Systemic issues such as global macroeconomic stability, peace and conflict, migration and illicit flows impact the capacity of countries to pursue sustainable development. In 2018, 32 of 46 countries reported on systemic issues versus 17 of 45 countries examined in 2017, suggesting a marked improvement in reporting on the key systemic issues that hinder the capacities of countries to implement the 2030 Agenda. The inclusion of a chapter on structural issues in the Secretary General's common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF likely contributed to the increased attention to this area.

Global economic and financial crises or instability was the most commonly cited systemic challenge (9 of 32). This was followed by efforts to combat illicit flows (7 of 32). Four (4) countries pointed to their contributions in terms of supporting global macro-economic stability. Regional instability was cited as an issue for Egypt, Lebanon, Mexico and Niger. Armenia, Qatar and the State of Palestine noted the challenges they face owing to unfriendly relationships with their neighbours. The issues raised in the 2018 VNR reports are similar to those presented in 2017.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

The Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines suggest that countries can include information on where they would like to learn from others in the VNR reports. The inclusion of this information supports the mandate of the HLPF forum to promote learning and knowledge exchange. Learning, and a focus on what countries are keen to learn more about, still receives very little focus in any of the VNRs. In the 2017 review of VNR reports, six countries noted areas they would like to learn from others. In 2018, seven countries included reference to peer learning.

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48 Armenia, Benin, Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Guinea, Kiribati, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Togo, the United Arab Emirates.

49 Guinea also referred to capacity development related to risk and resilience, but more in the context of an overall strategy for the government in light of the country's climate related vulnerabilities.

50 Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Switzerland.

51 Other capacity development priorities include capacity to: engage stakeholders (Kiribati), engage civil society (Benin), coordinate with development partners (Cabo Verde), and make use of new forms of finance (Cabo Verde). Qatar pointed to efforts to improve the capacities of citizens to engage on the 2030 Agenda, including through scholarships and education-related initiatives.

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- Armenia highlighted learning from others to improve data collection and monitoring of SDG implementation. Efforts with respect to harmonising data were noted in particular to facilitate the aggregation of data across countries. Armenia is interested also in the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data.

- Bahrain is interested in knowledge, innovation and culture.

- The VNR reports for Egypt and Slovakia included general comments on learning from how other countries work towards sustainable development.

- Guinea relies on the HLPF to share and discuss challenges and difficulties in 2030 Agenda implementation with the international community. The country welcomes the systematic analysis of regional aspects of sustainable development, especially emerging trends and challenges and coordinated responses and actions to address the most pressing issues. The country called on the HLPF to give more attention to sustainable development issues for low-income and fragile countries.

- The State of Palestine noted that the country would benefit from the expertise and experiences of other countries in the area of improving capacities to follow-up and review sustainable development plans based on human rights and partnerships with all stakeholders.

- Viet Nam would like to learn from the experiences of others that are more advanced in the areas of science and technology.

Rather than noting where the country could learn from others, Singapore noted a commitment to share the country's expertise and learning with international partners on issues related to the weather and climate, particularly with the relocation of the World Meteorological Organization's Regional Office for Asia and the South-West Pacific to Singapore.

4.1.4 Experiences in implementation

The Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines ask member states to outline their best practices, lessons learned in accelerating implementation, challenges to 2030 Agenda implementation and what they would like to learn from peers. Reporting on these elements is critical for the promotion of peer learning and the identification of areas for greater support by domestic and international stakeholders.

Figure 13 shows that there has been improvement in reporting on best practice between countries in 2018 over 2017; but fewer countries reported on lessons learned in accelerating implementation

in 2018 than in 2017. Reporting on challenges in implementation and areas for peer learning each improved by one additional country.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Report on best practice, lessons learned to accelerate 2030 Agenda implementation, challenges and areas countries would like to learn from peers.

While there have been some improvements, overall, there is room for countries to report further on where they would like to learn from others, lessons learned, and best practices. Reporting on these elements is critical to meeting the learning objectives of the HLPF. As was noted in the 2017 review of VNR reports, there continues to be a need for the United Nations to explore with member states why there is underreporting on these dimensions particularly given the focus of the HLPF follow-up and review process on knowledge and lesson sharing.

FIGURE 13. COUNTRIES HIGHLIGHTING AREAS REQUESTED IN THE COMMON REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR 2017 AND 2018
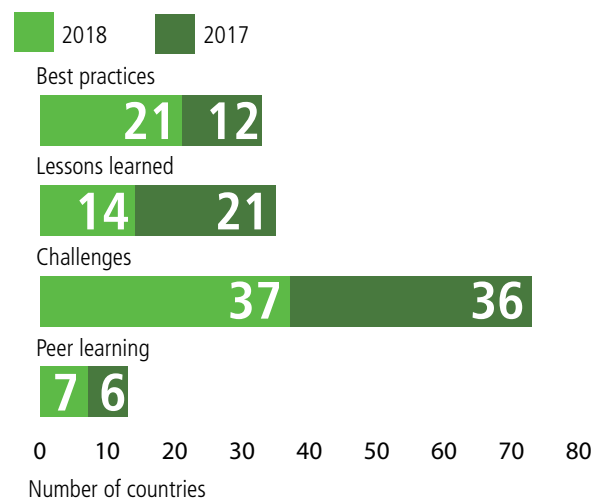
BEST PRACTICE
The identification of best practices is an opportunity for countries to showcase what works in 2030 Agenda implementation. Best practices can also provide a basis for follow-up between countries that are keen to engage in peer learning and exchanges. The information shared for best practices tends to be fairly detailed across reports, providing a good basis for understanding and learning. Some countries used detailed case studies and text boxes for this purpose. For the 21 countries, largely high-income and upper-middle-income, that presented best practice in their VNR reports, 15 highlighted specific programmes or practices related to

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the realisation of specific SDGs. The countries that identified best practices in implementation more generally are outlined in the case study below.

A case study in good practice: Reporting on best practice in 2030 Agenda implementation

Albania's VNR report points to the Mainstreaming, Acceleration, Policy Support missions as an example of best practice in United Nations Delivering-as-One to support Agenda 2030 implementation at the national level. The government notes that MAPS reports have helped to identify concrete policy and programming next steps.

Partnering with the United Nations, **Armenia** established a National SDG Innovation Lab (SDG Lab). The lab serves as an innovation platform, the first of its kind in the world, to support 2030 Agenda implementation at the country level. The lab supports experimentation, collaboration, analytics and human resource development. It also partners with innovation and technological centers worldwide to bring in the best available expertise and experience to Armenia. The VNR report also highlights Armenia's experiences incorporating SDG targets and indicators into policies and strategies as good examples of how the SDGs can be used in policymaking and linked to budgetary spending. Armenia has also developed good practice in strengthening data collection on migration through the creation of a set of proxy SDG indicators.

Bahrain established a National Information Commission to facilitate exchanges on 2030 Agenda data and indicators between institutions involved in data collection and use. This has improved the quality and credibility of official data and supported evidence-based decision-making.

Greece sees its "whole-of-government" approach to 2030 Agenda implementation as best practice. The government has established long-term institutional mechanisms for leadership and coordination on the 2030 Agenda.

Hungary's Ombudsman for Future Generations is an "exceptional" institution worldwide according to the VNR report. Founded in 2008, the Ombudsman fosters sustainable development and advocates for the interests of future generations at the national level.

Latvia considers its open and participatory processes for achieving consensus on development planning as best practice (see also case study on best practice, page 15, above).

Mali's VNR report notes that efforts to establish mechanisms for national 2030 Agenda implementation are examples of good practice. The country points to the establishment of a committee and action plan to monitor the SDGs in the National Assembly, consultations and training on the SDGs at the community level, the creation of a national platform for SDG monitoring, and efforts to strengthen the political accountability of the Office of the Chief Executive for mobilising relevant actors, setting priorities and coordinating thematic groups at the national and regional level. The VNR report also notes that five thematic groups were formed under the leadership of five Departments to lead the operational coordination of joint programmes.

Poland highlights the country's approach to partnership as best practice. The VNR report emphasizes inclusive policy making and the creation of spaces for systemic exchange of knowledge, information and good practices. The country also takes a project approach to implementing 2030 Agenda initiatives. The approach sets milestones and makes use of participatory models of cooperation.

Romania sees the use of multidisciplinary approaches and close collaboration between specialists in different fields as an example of best practice in 2030 Agenda implementation.

Sources: Excerpts adapted from the VNRs reports submitted by Albania, Armenia, Bahrain, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Mali, Poland and Romania.

CHALLENGES

Identifying challenges in 2030 Agenda implementation is an important contribution of VNR reports. Frequently cited challenges across VNR reports signal areas where more support is needed from the United Nations and development partners. Moreover, the discussion of challenges can inform expectations regarding the speed and scale of 2030 Agenda implementation and provide a basis for addressing bottlenecks in individual countries.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Articulate clear and detailed challenges in 2030 Agenda implementation to inform how the country can best be supported by domestic and international communities.

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Figure 14 provides an overview of the main challenges identified in reports.[52] In most cases, countries present implementation challenges as a list of key issues without significant details provided. Greater details tend to be available for challenges identified for specific SDGs.

FIGURE 14. CHALLENGES IN SDG IMPLEMENTATION

Challenge	Number of countries
Areas of limited progress ior existing	13
Capacity and human resource	12
Climate change and environment	4
Country level coordination	4
Data availability and monitoring	22
Finance and resource	18
Global specific challenges	10
Governance	5
Localisation	4
Multi-stakeholder participation	5
Policy harmonisation	8
Public awareness	2
Stakeholder coordination	2
Stakeholder engagement	5

Number of countries

Data constraints and monitoring progress on the SDGs remains the top challenge facing countries in 2030 Agenda implementation over 2017 and 2018. Financing is the next most commonly cited challenge, as was the case in 2017. A number of countries identified existing challenges such as poverty rates or inequality, and structural factors such as population growth, as challenges. Capacity constraints were the next most commonly cited challenge, followed by goal-specific challenges. Countries are still facing challenges with setting out the building blocks for 2030 Agenda implementation, such as harmonising policies, adapting institutional structures as

needed, engaging stakeholders and coordination at country level, including with non-state actors.

LESSONS LEARNED

Pointing to lessons learned in VNR reports is another aspect of reporting that supports peer learning. The lessons learned varied across the 14 countries that reported on this issue. Albania, Bhutan,[53] Romania, the State of Palestine and Viet Nam emphasized engaging all stakeholders for successful 2030 Agenda implementation. Mali highlighted consultation to ensure broad-based ownership, while Romania noted the importance of experts in providing evidence and analysis to inform implementation. Ecuador and Saudi Arabia pointed to the need for a long-term vision to guide efforts and the preparation of policies and initiatives that align with the SDGs. Viet Nam highlighted 2030 Agenda incorporation into overall policies and plans, while Cabo Verde noted the importance of translating the SDGs into sectoral strategies. Andorra and Ecuador emphasized the importance of coordination at the country level. The creation of appropriate mechanisms to track progress was noted by Cabo Verde, Egypt (in particular at the sub-national level) and Romania. Saudi Arabia and Viet Nam pointed to ensuring implementation occurs in line with country realities and priorities, while three countries – Albania, the Bahamas and Spain – identified accelerator policies to speed up implementation. Latvia and Spain noted approaches to address the needs of vulnerable populations. Spain highlighted bottom up, regional approaches while Latvia outlined coordinated approaches that address multiple needs for given populations. Finally, Viet Nam highlighted strong political commitment. The lessons learned in the 2018 VNR reports are largely aligned with what was reported in the VNR reports examined in 2017. In addition to the issues noted above, some countries highlighted ensuring integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development through policies and in implementation as a lesson learned.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Clearly include best practices, lessons learned in accelerating implementation, challenges going forward and where opportunities exist to learn from peers in VNR reports.

- As an essential part of the process, examine national and subnational budgets and start integrating the SDGs into them to ensure that resources are allocated for implementation. In doing so, build on the good practice in costing out SDG implementation

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52 Issues mentioned by only one country and not captured in Figure 14 include identification of accelerator actions, declining official development assistance, better management of development partner relationships, behavioral changes, fund allocation, target setting and technology transfer.

53 More specifically, multi-stakeholder partnerships.

and identify sources of finance to implement the 2030 Agenda at country level.

- Report on all means of implementation, including clearly specifying capacity constraints. Such information is critical for assessing gaps, including in terms of identifying where greater domestic and international efforts are needed. Member states failed to meaningfully operationalise Millennium Development Goal 8 on global partnership. Member states should ensure that SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals of the SDGs is fully implemented.

- Bolster efforts to support development partners' capacity development priorities, including strengthening statistical systems and the capacities of local stakeholders to implement the 2030 Agenda.

- Scale up efforts to address systemic issues that impact SDG implementation, in particular international peace and security, illicit capital flight, tax avoidance and tax evasion, among other things.

✊ 4.2 Leave no one behind

The revision of the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines for the 2018 VNR reports included the addition of a chapter on leaving no one behind. Given the critical importance of the leave no one behind pledge to realising the SDGs, this revision is a welcome addition. Seventeen (17) countries did not provide a chapter on leaving no one behind or significantly address the issue in other sections of their reports. These include: Armenia, Ecuador, Ireland, Kiribati, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malta, Namibia, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Uruguay. Another 12 countries did not include a chapter, but did make reference to leaving no one behind in their reports with some detail, however they did so without addressing the main components of leaving no one behind as outlined in the Secretary General's reporting guidelines. One country included a chapter on leaving no one behind but provided insufficient information therein. Finally, 16 countries – Albania, Australia, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Egypt, Guinea, Jamaica Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mali, Mexico, Romania, Spain, Sri Lanka – provided a detailed account of efforts to leave no one behind, generally through a dedicated chapter.

🍁 **Best case study in good practice: Defining what leaving no one behind means for Canada**
Canada's VNR moves beyond reference to the principle of leaving no one behind to defining what the principle means for the country. "For Canada, leaving no one behind means that everyone can participate in, contribute to and benefit from the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals" (p. 4). The report includes a dedicated chapter on leaving no one behind as well as sub-sections on who is being left behind or at risk of being left behind in the goal-by-goal analysis.[54]

Source: Except adapted from Canada's VNR.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Follow the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines and include a chapter in the VNR report on leaving no one behind. This includes details on who is being left behind, available data, and efforts to leave no one behind and reduce domestic inequalities.

4.2.1 Data to leave no one behind
Efforts to leave no one behind should be informed by disaggregated data and efforts to improve data availability. This is important for knowing who is being left behind and monitoring progress. VNR reports for 2018 indicate that nearly one third of reporting countries (16) require additional data to leave no one behind. In 2017, 11 countries noted the need for additional disaggregated data. Thirteen (13) VNR reports seem to indicate that efforts to leave no one behind are informed by existing data. These VNR reports tend to

54   Australia also includes a sub-section on leaving no one behind in its goal-by-goal analysis.

include detailed information in terms of who is being left behind, including data, and do not indicate data challenges with respect to disaggregation. The status of data to leave no one behind is either not articulated or unclear for the remaining 17 VNR reports.

The leave no one behind index, prepared by the Overseas Development Institute, provides an impartial assessment of the status of data to leave no one behind. [55] The index looks at data, policies and finance to leave no one behind. The 2018 assessment of 86 VNR reporting countries over 2017 and 2018 showed that 65 countries have basic elements in place to leave no one behind in their context in terms of necessary data.[56] Fifteen (15) are partially ready, and five are not ready. These results, based on whether countries are undertaking necessary surveys to identify those at risk of being left behind, represent an improvement over the 2017 index. The authors attribute this to an increase in the number of countries with household surveys in the past three years.

4.2.2 Understanding who is at risk of being left behind

Identifying who is left behind (and why) enables countries to target efforts that work to ensure that all members of society benefit from progress on the 2030 Agenda. Despite the lack of information on data availability to leave no one behind, most countries (42) note the main groups in society that are vulnerable or at risk of being left behind. In 2017, 33 countries provided this information, suggesting that reporting on the main populations at risk of being left behind has improved over 2017 to 2018. At the same time, as was the case in 2017, 2018 VNR reports do not provide information on progress for identified groups across SDG targets as a general rule, with the exception of those pertaining to SDG 5 on gender equality or for targets that have historically been disaggregated by gender, such as education. Kiribati and Sudan, both of which only submitted main messages to the HLPF, did not report on leaving no one behind. Togo and Uruguay did not list those left behind in their VNR reports. Though the VNR report for Bahrain includes information on specific groups, it also notes that there are no marginalised people in Bahrain owing to the high levels of social services provided by the government.

Table 4 provides an overview of the main groups identified as vulnerable or being left behind. It shows that persons with disabilities (34), children and youth (30), women (25), and elderly people (21) are the groups most often cited as being left behind or at risk of being left behind. The top categories of groups of people listed were the same in 2018 as 2017, however in 2017 women (28) were cited more often than persons with disabilities, followed by children and youth (27), persons with disabilities (21) and elderly people (16). In comparison to 2017, countries were also more likely to refer to a wider range of groups, as shown in the table below, such as ethnic minorities, single parent households, unemployed or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, two spirit and/or intersex persons. Five (5) countries from Europe specifically pointed to Roma communities as left behind.

Beyond the most common choices of those being left behind, the tremendous diversity of different types and subcategories of people that countries feel are being left behind saw a striking increase in 2018 over 2017 – symbolised by the number of footnotes in the next few pages.

Photo: © Greg Armfield / WWF-UK

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55   Manuel, Marcus, Francesca Grandi, Stephanie Manea, Amy Kirbyshire and Emma Lovell. 2018. 'Leave no one behind' index 2018. Briefing note. London: ODI.

56   Monaco could not be assessed owing to insufficient data.

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TABLE 4. GROUPS IDENTIFIED AS BEING LEFT BEHIND IN THE 2018 VNR REPORTS

GROUP	COUNTRIES			
Persons with disabilities (34 countries)	ALBANIA	ECUADOR	MALI	SINGAPORE
	ANDORRA [57]	EGYPT	MEXICO	SLOVAKIA
	ARMENIA [58]	GUINEA	NAMIBIA	SPAIN [61]
	AUSTRALIA	IRELAND [59]	PARAGUAY	SRI LANKA
	BAHAMAS	JAMAICA	POLAND [60]	STATE OF PALESTINE
	BAHRAIN	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	QATAR	SWITZERLAND
	BHUTAN	LEBANON	ROMANIA	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
	CABO VERDE	LITHUANIA	SAUDI ARABIA	VIET NAM
	CANADA		SENEGAL	
Children and youth (30 countries)	ALBANIA [62]	COLOMBIA	MALI	SAUDI ARABIA
	ANDORRA [63]	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	MALTA	SENEGAL
	ARMENIA [64]	ECUADOR	MEXICO	SPAIN [73]
	AUSTRALIA [65]	EGYPT	NAMIBIA [71]	SRI LANKA
	BAHAMAS [66]	GUINEA	PARAGUAY	STATE OF PALESTINE
	BAHRAIN	JAMAICA [69]	POLAND [72]	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES [74]
	BHUTAN [67]	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC [70]	QATAR	VIET NAM [75]
	CABO VERDE [68]		ROMANIA	

57   Students with disabilities.

58   Children with disabilities and under 18.

59   Women

60   Children and youth with disabilities.

61   Children

62   Including households with children, children of Roma and Egyptian heritage.

63   Also vulnerable girls and children in vulnerable situations.

64   Children with disabilities.

65   Youth and girls specifically mentioned.

66   Children with obesity and at-risk youth

67   Orphans, out of school children, unemployed youth, children in conflict with the law, children of single parents.

68   Young unemployed people.

69   Children living in poverty, unemployed youth, adolescents and youth.

70   Adolescent girls and children more generally.

71   Orphans and vulnerable children, school children.

72   Particularly those with disabilities.

73   Children with disabilities.

74   Orphans

75   Including orphans, abandoned children and children without nurturing care.

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GROUP	COUNTRIES			
Women (25 countries)	ALBANIA	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	JAMAICA[78]	SAUDI ARABIA
	ANDORRA	ECUADOR	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	SENEGAL
	ARMENIA	EGYPT[76]	LEBANON	SRI LANKA[80]
	AUSTRALIA	GREECE	NAMIBIA[79]	STATE OF PALESTINE[81]
	BAHAMAS	GUINEA	PARAGUAY	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES[82]
	BAHRAIN	IRELAND[77]	QATAR	VIET NAM
	CABO VERDE			
Elderly people (22 countries)	AUSTRALIA	JAMAICA	MALI	ROMANIA
	BAHAMAS	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	MALTA	SENEGAL
	BAHRAIN	LATVIA	MEXICO	SLOVAKIA
	BHUTAN	LEBANON	NAMIBIA	SRI LANKA
	CABO VERDE	LITHUANIA	QATAR	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC			VIET NAM

76   Including rural women.

77   With disabilities and migrant women.

78   Pregnant and lactating women.

79   Rural women.

80   Including women in informal employment and those that head households.

81   Including women with disabilities.

82   Including widows.

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GROUP	COUNTRIES			
Other (22 countries)	AUSTRALIA[83]	GUINEA[89]	LEBANON[95]	SINGAPORE[101]
	BAHAMAS[84]	HUNGARY[90]	LITHUANIA[96]	SPAIN[102]
	BENIN[85]	JAMAICA[91]	MEXICO[97]	STATE OF PALESTINE[103]
	BHUTAN[86]	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC[92]	NAMIBIA[98]	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES[104]
	CABO VERDE[87]	LATVIA	NIGER[99]	
	COLOMBIA[88]		POLAND[100]	
	ECUADOR			
Migrants, refugees, internally displaced people (15 countries)	ANDORRA	CABO VERDE	GREECE	LEBANON
	ARMENIA	CANADA	IRELAND[106]	MEXICO
	BAHAMAS	DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC	SPAIN
	BAHRAIN	ECUADOR[105]		SRI LANKA
Poor people (12 countries)	ALBANIA	CANADA[107]	HUNGARY	MALI
	BAHAMAS	EGYPT[108]	LATVIA[109]	MALTA[110]
	CABO VERDE	GUINEA	LEBANON	VIET NAM

83 Veterans, carers, families with children.

84 Family island residents, men with criminal records

85 The most disadvantaged, the vulnerable and those most exposed to climate, economic or financial hazards.

86 People who beg, victims of domestic violence, those working in vulnerable places, people affected by HIV/AIDS, individuals engaging in risky sexual behavior, people using drugs and alcoholic, vulnerable urban dwellers.

87 People with dependents without an income.

88 Peasants and populations with scarce resources.

89 Vulnerable populations and future generations.

90 Vulnerable populations.

91 Untrained employees, employees under the age of 25 or over the age of 55, permanent job seekers, parents with young children.

92 Informal settlers, fisher folk.

93 Farmers with limited access to land, unskilled workers, unpaid workers.

94 Families with three or more children.

95 Non-public sector retirees, blue-collar self-employed.

96 Single persons.

97 Farmers.

98 War veterans, marginalised communities and populations affected by hunger.

99 Vulnerable groups, vulnerable people, the most vulnerable populations, and vulnerable people affected by disasters or food crises.

100 Families with many children and families where at least one carer is unemployed.

101 Low income families or individuals.

102 Those with a higher risk of falling into poverty.

103 Ex-prisoners.

104 Families of the imprisoned and those in ill health.

105 People in situations of mobility.

106 Migrant women.

107 Those likely to be in poverty not already listed above include single people aged 45-64, and single parents.

108 Low income families

109 Employed persons in poverty

110 Working poor.

GROUP	COUNTRIES			
Ethnic minorities, including indigenous peoples* (11 countries)	ALBANIA AUSTRALIA * CANADA *	COLOMBIA* ECUADOR* IRELAND[111]	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC MEXICO*	PARAGUAY * SPAIN VIET NAM
Particular regions or communities, including rural locations (10 countries)	AUSTRALIA CABO VERDE EGYPT	GREECE JAMAICA[112]	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC NAMIBIA	ROMANIA SPAIN STATE OF PALESTINE
Single parent households (9 countries)	BAHAMAS BHUTAN COLOMBIA[113]	IRELAND LATVIA	LITHUANIA POLAND	SRI LANKA[114] VIET NAM
Unemployed (8 countries)	AUSTRALIA BAHAMAS CABO VERDE	LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC LEBANON	MALTA SPAIN	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, two spirit and/or intersex persons (6 countries)	ALBANIA AUSTRALIA	CABO VERDE CANADA	IRELAND	MEXICO
Roma (5 countries)	ALBANIA	GREECE	HUNGARY	ROMANIA SLOVAKIA
People with HIV/AIDS (4 countries)	BHUTAN	MALI	SENEGAL	VIET NAM[115]

111 Traveller women.

112 Rural farmers.

113 Woman headed households.

114 Woman headed households.

115 From poor households.

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> 🏴 **A case study in good practice: Assessing those at risk of being left behind in Bhutan**
>
> In 2017, Bhutan launched its first Vulnerability Baseline Assessment 2016. The assessment aims to identify those at risk of being left behind. Bhutan is using the Vulnerability Baseline Assessment, the 2016 Climate Vulnerability Assessment and the country's 2018 Population and Housing Census to better target vulnerable populations over the next five years. Bhutan identified 14 vulnerable groups through the Vulnerability Baseline Assessment. The assessment also looked at the causes of vulnerability, reviewed policies and programmes in terms of how they help or hinder those left behind, and identified opportunities for improvement. The VNR report includes a number of recommendations for the government based on the Vulnerability Baseline Assessment, including in terms of strengthening capacities to address issues of vulnerability, improving data availability on vulnerable people, and improving legal and policy frameworks through a greater focus on vulnerabilities and inequalities.
>
> Source: Except adapted from Bhutan's VNR.

4.2.3 Approaches and efforts to leave no one behind

The analysis of approaches and efforts to leave no one behind is important for understanding the extent to which countries are adopting new methods to reach vulnerable groups in light of the 2030 Agenda. It also provides an indication of the extent to which countries are adopting approaches based on evidence of what works best to reach the furthest behind first. Most countries (41) provided information on efforts to leave no one behind versus 33 of 45 countries in 2017, suggesting an improvement in reporting in 2018, likely owing to the revised Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines. Reports were assessed in terms of the extent to which efforts appear to make use of new or existing specialised programmes for particular groups, and/or universal programmes such as overarching policies or social assistance. Half of the VNR reporting countries (23) are working to leave no one behind by making use of specialised and universal approaches. Given that combining universal policies with targeted approaches and strong leadership can be an effective approach to reaching marginalised

communities, this is a positive step in the right direction;[116] that said, 23 countries did not take a similar approach, suggesting more action may be needed to develop an appropriate suite of approaches to leaving no one behind.

Nineteen (19) countries pointed to existing specialised programmes, coupled with universal programmes. Four (4) countries pointed to existing specialised programmes only, while two pointed to existing and new specialised programmes. Only two countries pointed to a mix of old and new specialised programmes as well as universal programmes. Three (3) countries pointed only to universal programmes while two countries noted universal programmes coupled with new specialised programmes. Overall, these findings suggest that countries have yet to adapt new programmes to target those left behind and are relying for the most part, on existing programmes. At a minimum, there is a need for countries to examine and adapt existing programmes in light of the focus on leaving no one behind, particularly to first examine the extent to which such programmes are addressing the needs of those left behind.

The range of efforts presented in the VNR reports is significant. Overall, no country noted how the leave no one behind approach is being translated into policies and specific actions in an overarching way, a concerning finding that has been echoed and raised as an important issue by others.[117] Ireland's VNR report noted a commitment to being guided by the right to a life of dignity for all in which people can fulfil their potential and the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. To put these principles into practice, the VNR report highlighted a pledge by the government to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first.

Figure 15 provides an overview of the main activities identified in VNR reports to leave no one behind.[118] It shows that access to social services and social protection, special programmes such as employment support, and targeted plans or strategies for specific groups are the most popular approaches to leaving no one behind, followed by the use of legal instruments and improved, equal access to health and education. Cash transfers were specifically highlighted by 13 countries while ten countries noted the creation of a specific institution to lead on leaving no one behind more generally, or supporting a particularly vulnerable group. Ten (10) countries referred to provisions in their overarching national sustainable development strategy or similar.[119]

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116 Samman, Emma. 2016. 10 Things to Know about 'Leave no one Behind.' London: ODI. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11811.pdf

117 Binat Sarwar, Moizza and Susan Nicolai. 2018. *What do analyses of Voluntary National Reviews for Sustainable Development Goals tell us about 'leave no one behind'?*. London: ODI. https://www.odi.org/publications/11147-what-do-analyses-voluntary-national-reviews-sustainable-development-goals-tell-us-about-leave-no-one

118 Increased minimum wage was referred to by two countries and one country each referred to strengthening civil society organisations and localisation of the goals to leave no one behind.

119 Based on an assessment of policies related to resilience, equal access to employment, health and land, and financing for education, health and social protection, the leave no one behind index suggests that 19 countries are not ready to leave no one behind in terms of policies, while 16 countries are not ready in terms of finance.

FIGURE 15. EFFORTS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

Category	Number of countries
Access to social services and/or social protection	20
Cash transfers	13
Establishment of a dedicated institution	10
Expanding coverage of social welfare systems	5
Focus on disadvataged regions	9
Free services such as public transportation	5
Improved, equal access to healthcare or education	17
International efforts	4
Legal instruments	17
National sustainable development policy	10
Other programmes such as employment support	20
Part of general approach, no details	4
Progressive taxation	6
Quota system for employment of persons with disabilities	4
Targeted plan or strategy for specific groups	20

0   5   10   15   20

Number of countries

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🏴 A case study in good practice: Accountability to children and adolescents to leave no one behind

Paraguay has developed strong systems of accountability to children and adolescents over the past ten years. Recognising the human rights of girls, boys and adolescents, Paraguay seeks to foster a culture of accountability from childhood. A National Secretariat exists for children and adolescents. Administrative, political and pedagogical processes facilitate the provision of information on the use of public resources for projects that benefit young people to children and adolescents in accessible ways. Methodologies are used that promote protagonist participation (participation that enables individuals to have power over outcomes), the right to public information and the right to petition authorities. The protagonist participation of children and adolescents in public affairs guarantees the development of more democratic citizenship and a civil society that is more aware and committed to its community. Protagonist participation also makes it possible to visualise the demands of children and adolescents from their experiences and concrete realities, contributing to improved public policies from an equality and equity perspective. Paraguay's approach to accountability for children and adolescents works to leave no one behind by operationalising commitments set out in the National Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Code of Childhood and Adolescence accountability mandates.

Source: Summary provided by CEPEI based on Paraguay's VNR report.

VNR reports do not provide enough information on data to leave no one behind to evaluate the outcomes of activities. The 2018 assessment framework was updated to include a category on the results of efforts to leave no one behind to assess which policies and programmes are successfully reaching the people who are furthest behind first. Thirty-two (32) countries provided information on results for those left behind. This information is presented in the regular goal-by-goal analysis and in the chapter (where available) on leaving no one behind. Generally speaking, this information was in the form of specific figures on the results of programmes and initiatives or overall trends or information (without data) on the status of progress. With the exception of data on specific programmes, the links between specific policies and actions and the results presented are not always clear.

Nineteen (19) countries provided data on overall progress, including changes in the Gini Coefficient or incomes for particular populations, number of recipients from specific projects and other trend data, such as employment data. Given the breadth of programmes showcased, it is difficult to assess which programmes work best and could be replicated by others, particularly with the level of detail provided in reports. Nevertheless, the best practice box below

highlights some of the more impressive results in terms of leaving no one behind as highlighted in VNR reports.

A case study in good practice: Reporting the results of efforts to leave no one behind

In **Canada**, the after-tax Gini coefficient showed a reduction from 0.314 in 2015 to an estimated 0.306 in 2016. The bottom wage quintile had the highest rate of real hourly wage growth at +1.8% in 2017, while the fourth and fifth quintiles had practically no growth at 0.0% and +0.1%. The market income share of the bottom 90% of income earners has not changed significantly since 2000, though since the 1980s the top 10% of income earners have seen substantial gains. The Guaranteed Income Supplement has helped to lift 57,000 seniors out of poverty.

In **Latvia**, people at risk of social exclusion was 28.2% in 2016, a fall of 10% since 2010. Families with two adults and three or more children have seen a reduction in their risk of poverty, though single parent households remain at high risk. People over 65 continue to be at risk of poverty, with rates increasing (39.9% in 2016), and women are more likely to be at risk of poverty (45.1%) than men (29.1%). Despite improvements in income inequality, Latvia will not meet the targets it has set for itself in this area by 2020.

In **Mali**, 1,056,441 people have benefited from Mandatory Health Insurance, representing 33.88% of the country's target for 2016. The Medical Assistance Plan has 192,580 beneficiaries or 21% of its target in 2016. In 2016, 251,643 of the poorest households received cash transfers.

The number of vulnerable households that received economic grants progressed under **Senegal's** National Family Security Grant Programme in 2017, but the target was not reached (71%). The coverage rate for universal health coverage was 49.3% in 2017, up from 46.8% in 2016. The prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity decreased from 28% in 2015 to 16% in 2016.

Singapore has seen impressive income growth for those in the lowest 10%. Their real per capita household income increased by 30.2% between 2007 and 2017. The 20th percentile of full-time employed residents saw income growth of 4.2% per annum in real terms over 2012-17.

The **State of Palestine** reported that between 2000 and 2015, the average salary in the West Bank increased by 34%. While daily wages increased by only 17% in the Gaza Strip.

Source: Except adapted from VNR reports for Canada, Latvia, Mali, Senegal, Singapore and the State of Palestine.

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4.2.4 Targeting domestic inequality

Addressing inequality is a fundamental part of the 2030 Agenda as a means to leave no on behind and as part of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities. While only 23 of 45 examined countries referred to efforts to reduce inequality in 2017, 37 countries reported on this dimension in 2018. This likely reflects, in part, the greater coverage of all SDGs in 2018 VNR reports versus 2017. The use of policies and strategies to address inequality was cited by 21 countries, followed by social protection (19), special programmes such as housing support (13), access to universal education or activities that promote education (12), and legal instruments (12). Ten (10) VNR reports noted that addressing inequality is part of their respective governments' overall priorities. Other efforts to reduce inequality include progressive taxation (seven), access to healthcare (seven countries), establishing or raising the minimum wage (six), employment services (five) and the creation of a dedicated institution or institutional structures that focus on inequality and related issues (five). In 2017, the 23 countries that address inequality highlighted government strategies to address inequality (eight), special programmes that target groups facing inequality (eight), social protection schemes (six) and legislation (two).

4.2.5 Realising gender equality to leave no one behind

To improve analysis on gender equality (in terms of leaving no one behind), the 2018 assessment framework for the review was updated to include two sub-components in this area. The first was an assessment of the status of gender-disaggregated data based on the information presented in the VNR reports. The second included listing the efforts noted in VNR reports to improve gender equality. The inclusion of gender equality as a specific sub-component of leaving no one behind in the analysis is grounded in a recognition of the critical importance of gender equality and women's rights as an outcome and means to realise sustainable development. The Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines also refer to giving particular attention to women and girls.

Based on a review of data available in the VNR reports, the review found that gender-disaggregated data is available consistently for seven countries, most of the time for eight countries and not available or rarely available for seven countries. The status of gender-disaggregated data is unclear for 19 VNR reports, largely because the reports present sometimes conflicting information, such as detailed data for SDG 5 on gender inequality, but no disaggregated data for other goals; or in the text they note further efforts are

Photo: © Greg Armfield / WWF-UK

needed to produce gender-disaggregated data, but still present a fair amount of data in the VNR report. Gender-disaggregated data or commentary on gender-disaggregated data is unavailable for five VNR reports.

The majority of countries (40) include information on efforts to realise gender equality. Legal instruments that guarantee gender equality were cited by 31 countries. Twenty-five (25) countries noted the existence of a specific strategy or policy related to gender equality, such as for the promotion of women's economic empowerment or reduction in domestic violence. Just over half of the countries (24) highlighted specific projects or benefits that support women, such as micro loans, training, child care benefits, or parental leave. Twenty (20) countries highlighted the creation of new institutions that address gender equality issues or the establishment of gender units across government departments. Other initiatives include gender budgeting (12), mainstreaming gender equality into policies and planning (ten), awareness-raising (nine), improving gender-disaggregated data and monitoring (eight), international development cooperation efforts (seven), quota systems (seven, largely for electoral politics but also in some countries on boards) and inclusion of gender equality as a priority in overarching government plans and strategies (five).

MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY
STRATEGIES OR POLICIES
INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS
AWARENESS-RAISING
DATA AND MONITORING
PROJECTS
NEW INSTITUTIONS
GENDER BUDGETING
QUOTA SYSTEMS **OVERARCHING PRIORITY**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include a specific chapter on leaving no one behind in VNR reporting and demonstrate how the leave no one behind approach is being translated into action in an overarching way.

- Provide information on the status of data collection or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind. This includes information on gender-disaggregated data. Approaches to gathering qualitative assessments, especially for populations for whom data is not available should also be presented. Such efforts could include engagement with key experts and representatives of marginalised groups. Ensuring no one is left behind means knowing who is being left behind, by how much, and in what areas.

- Highlight existing and planned efforts to leave no one behind, including how policies and programmes are being adapted, and in particular new approaches developed, to first reach the people who are furthest behind.

- Develop a mix of targeted and universal approaches to leaving no one behind, drawing on the latest evidence of what works and best practice.

- Report on the outcomes of efforts to leave no one behind, including by drawing on civil society expertise and citizen-generated data. Clearly present links between specific policies and actions with results.

- Target domestic inequality in 2030 Agenda implementation, including in support of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and outline the current status of domestic inequality and how it is being addressed in VNR reports.

- Adopt a range of internationally recognised best practices to promote gender equality, such as gender budgeting, gender-based analysis and mainstreaming into policies and plans, and appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.

📡 4.3 Awareness raising and localisation

Raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and educating citizens on sustainable development is critical for establishing a national vision for sustainable development, generating support, and promoting whole-of-society approaches to implementation. It also contributes to localisation and can inform the activities local governments and citizens can take to promote sustainable development in local communities. Localisation also requires coordination between different levels of government, and as was shown in the 2017 review, financial support and capacity development for local governments to effectively participate.

4.3.1 Awareness raising

Awareness-raising requires ongoing attention over the course of 2030 Agenda implementation, as was noted in a number of 2017 VNR reports. While reporting on awareness-raising improved in 2017 VNR reports over 2016,[120] less countries reported on this dimension in 2018. Forty-one (41) countries out of 45 reported in 2017 whereas 38 of 46 countries reported awareness-raising activities in 2018. Canada, Ecuador, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the State of Palestine, Switzerland, and Togo do not refer to awareness-raising efforts on the 2030 Agenda. Niger and Spain have not raised awareness of the 2030 Agenda. Niger plans to launch a series of activities to strengthen stakeholder understandings of the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The country also plans to prepare a communications plan for the general public. Spain's VNR report noted that there was no need to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda given existing high levels of awareness. Nevertheless, the country plans to develop communication plans and will monitor knowledge of sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda among citizens periodically.

The most commonly cited form of awareness-raising was technical or localisation workshops with stakeholders in government and beyond on 2030 Agenda implementation (10 countries). Nine (9) countries referred to the VNR process as part of awareness-raising efforts. Another nine countries noted education activities – either existing or planned. A number of countries (eight) highlighted events that had been carried out. Hungary noted that the translation of the 2030 Agenda into Hungarian was an important part of raising public awareness. Mali, Namibia and Senegal noted that they plan to translate the 2030 Agenda into local languages. Six (6) countries have prepared or plan to prepare an education and communications strategy. Consultations, in particular on SDG priorities, were noted as a method to raise awareness by four countries. Two (2) countries noted plans to establish an online platform while one country highlighted that it had already done so. VNR reporting countries in 2018 continued to recognise that awareness-raising is an area for ongoing effort throughout the course of 2030 Agenda implementation and part of public engagement strategies (seven countries specifically noted that more efforts to raise awareness are needed).

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Go beyond consultation meetings to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda, such as through the use of media and social media, competitions and roadshows.**

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Develop a communication and engagement strategy to continue to raise awareness of and ownership over the 2030 Agenda with a wide range of stakeholders over the course of SDG implementation.**

120 Cutter 2016 found that only 11 out of 16 VNR reports referred to awareness-raising.

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A case study in good practice: Innovative and interesting ways to raise awareness on the 2030 Agenda and engage the general public
The 2017 VNR reports highlighted the use social media, and media – television and radio – to raise public awareness. Some countries reporting in 2017 created online portals on the SDGs. Other initiatives included an SDG roadshow, an SDGs photo contest and an SDG Awards programme that encouraged non-state actors to submit project ideas for SDG implementation.

The 2018 VNR reports similarly showcased initiatives to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and educate the public on sustainable development.

Egypt created a mobile application "Sharek" (participate) to allow citizens, particularly youth, to raise awareness of sustainable development and participate in the review of its Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Ireland plans to identify SDG Champions – individuals who can leverage their public profile to raise awareness of the goals.

Lithuania has organised documentary film festivals, photo exhibitions, interactive events, "brain fights" and discussions to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The government makes use of television and radio shows, as well as social media to disseminate information. For example, advertisements on the 2030 Agenda have been shown on television, in cinemas and through public transport. The country also makes use of a major annual conference on development cooperation that brings together civil society, academia, the private sector and government. The conference themes for 2016 and 2017 focussed on the 2030 Agenda.

Jamaica's VNR report outlined the creation of a Communication and Advocacy Roadmap (2018-21) to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda. The public was also engaged on the new agenda in 2017 through a Dialogue for Development Series that focussed on the theme "The Jamaica We Want." The VNR report also noted the creation of an SDGs promotional video that was circulated on social media and included a call to action.

In **Latvia**, an education campaign supported by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "The World's Largest Lesson," has been underway for three years. The campaign brings together around 50 educational institutions and 3,000 children, young people and teachers. The

initiative includes lessons on the SDGs and interactive classes, hikes, concerns, fairs and other events.

Andorra has also undertaken education for sustainable development initiatives. Sustainable development has been integrated into formal education. Approximately 6,200 students participate in activities organised by Andorra Sostenible Center (Andorra Sustainability Center) and the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture and Sustainable Development.

In **Paraguay**, youth participated in a learning day on the SDGs and meetings were held with students from agricultural schools in the interior of the country to discuss specific SDGs.

Source: Compiled by author from referenced countries' VNR reports.

4.3.2 Localisation of the 2030 Agenda

Rooting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in local priorities and activities at the community level makes the agenda meaningful, practical and impactful in the day-to-day lives of citizens. The majority of countries (30) provided information on efforts to localise the 2030 Agenda (33 of 45 countries provided this information in 2017). As was the case in 2017, the VNR reports continue to show wide variance in terms of where countries and their local governments are in terms of localising the SDGs. The status of local implementation efforts, as highlighted by the VNR reports, suggests that more work is needed to promote localisation. Countries whose VNR reports suggested relatively strong advancement on localisation include Benin, Greece and Spain. Their VNR reports include dedicated sections on efforts by local governments, moving beyond the presentation of vignettes. They show that many local governments in Greece and Spain are advanced in terms of incorporating the SDGs into policies and programmes.

A case study in good practice: Localising the 2030 Agenda in Benin
In Benin, a benchmarking process in 15 municipalities, and a process of capitalising on experiences in 22 municipalities, was initiated to assess the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. This exercise was applied to five thematic SDGs reviewed in depth during the 2018 HLPF and to SDG 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). The government organised technical workshops to support and train municipalities in ten regions of the country on integrating the SDGs into local development planning documents.

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Benin has also established the Joint Community-Government Coordination Framework on the SDGs (Cadre de coordination Commune-Gouvernement sur les ODD). The Framework consists of a technical SDG commission set up within the National Association of Municipalities of Benin where mayors and officials involved in the national coordination of the SDGs examine implementation in municipalities. The Framework meets once every quarter and serves as an advocacy platform for SDG action at the sub-national level.

Source: Summary provided by IISD based on Benin's VNR report.

Figure 16 provides an overview of the main elements of localisation reported in VNR reports.

FIGURE 16. STATUS OF 2030 AGENDA LOCALISATION

INCORPORATION INTO LOCAL PLANS AND POLICIES (16 COUNTRIES)

USE OF SDG INDICATORS (5 COUNTRIES)

INCLUSION IN NATIONAL PRIORITY SETTING AND THE VNR (4 COUNTRIES)

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AT LOCAL LEVEL (4 COUNTRIES)

LOCAL SDG INITIATIVES (3 COUNTRIES)

ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH PLATFORMS OR A COORDINATION FORUM (3 COUNTRIES)

LOCALISING THE 2030 AGENDA

For the 16 countries that referred to incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local plans and policies, six have done so while ten noted intentions to do so. A limited number of countries (four) are making use of SDG indicators at the local level while one country noted plans to this effect. Some countries (three) reported examples of local initiatives that contribute to the 2030 Agenda or sustainable development more generally but did not refer to the overall status of localisation. A limited number of countries (three) noted the use of platforms or coordination forums to engage local governments or build local capacity. Some countries (four) only stated that local governments have been engaged in the VNR and/or SDG prioritisation processes but did not articulate further activities at the local level. Whereas eight countries noted that further engagement with local government is a next step in their implementation process in 2017, this was only the case for one country in 2018. Overall, reports in 2017 tended to be more detailed in terms of articulating next steps for localisation and outlining existing activities, including the status of policy development and local institutional structures for implementation.

> **A case study in good practice: Supporting localisation in Senegal**
>
> According to the civil society report produced for Senegal's VNR, in December 2017, the Association of Mayors of Senegal (AMS) mandated experts to carry out studies on various themes related to the SDGs to help local elected officials make better decisions, ensure coherence in local development policies, and increase SDG ownership with a view to promoting local development.
>
> Source: Excerpt adapted from Plateforme des organisations de la société civil pour le suivi des Objectifs de Développement Durable (2018). Original story available at: http://localizingthesdgs.org/story/view/165. [121]

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Continue to promote, or immediately begin adopting, innovative ways to raise awareness of the SDGs among the general public with a view to long term engagement, including in partnership with civil society and other non-state actors.

• Provide support to sub-national levels of government to raise awareness of the SDGs, strengthen local institutional structures and resources for implementation, and further develop capacities for local level implementation, including translation of the SDGs into local plans, programmes, and monitoring efforts.

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[121] Plateforme des organisations de la société civil pour le suivi des Objectifs de Développement Durable. 2018. *Contribution de la société civile au rapport national de suivi de la mise en oeuvre des ODD*. Dakar, POSCO – Agenda 2030. https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Senegal-POSCO-Agenda-2030-Rapport-citoyen-2018.pdf

4.4 Partnership to realise the SDGs

As previously noted, partnership is a critical element of implementing the 2030 Agenda and its principles. Most countries agree that contributions are needed by all stakeholders in society if countries are to realise the SDGs by 2030. As such, VNR reports should include and showcase contributions from a wide range of stakeholders towards the 2030 Agenda.

The 2017 review of VNR reports found that most were government reports that focus on the activities of the highest level of government with some reference to the activities of local government and non-state actors. Overall, this trend continued for reporting in 2018. Nevertheless, the VNR reports for Canada, Jamaica, and Egypt included contributions from non-state actors and often local governments throughout, emphasising their roles and contributions in the goal-by-goal analysis. Greece's VNR report included a dedicated chapter on the contributions from non-state actors with a wide range of examples. The inclusion of activities by a wide range of stakeholders provides a national picture of implementation efforts, including and moving beyond government. This approach to VNR reporting respects the principles of inclusivity and participation embedded in the 2030 Agenda.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Submit a *national* report for the VNR that systematically outlines the contributions made by a wide range of stakeholders, not just the national government.

4.4.1 Non-state actor participation in SDG implementation

All countries, with the exceptions of Bahrain, Benin, Guinea, Kiribati, Namibia, Senegal, and Sudan provide information on local non-state actor participation in implementation beyond consultation on priorities and participation in governance arrangements.[122] As was the case in 2017, for the most part, all VNR reports stressed the important contributions of non-state actors and others (even those that did not provide specific examples of partnership), and the need for multi-stakeholder partnership for 2030 Agenda implementation.

A case study in good practice: Multi-stakeholder partnerships to leave no one behind in the Bahamas
The Over the Hill project in Nassau, Bahamas, works to address key challenges in an economically depressed area characterised by high unemployment levels, high crime rates, low income and infrastructure dilapidation. Working with civil society, academia and the private sector, the government developed a comprehensive poverty alleviation pilot project focussing on social and economic empowerment, rejuvenation, smart and green technology, and programmes which focus on youth and the elderly. The project aims to improve preschool education, solid waste management, water availability, and management and maintenance of public parks. A white paper on tax incentives will also be prepared for the community and community support programmes will be strengthened. The government has committed $5 million per annum from the national budget to fund the initiative. The private sector will be able to contribute through a planned fund. The local community is deeply involved, resulting in high levels of local participation and ownership.

Source: Summary provided by CEPEI based on the VNR report for the Bahamas.

122 This section deals with the forms of engagement and participation that have not yet been addressed in the earlier sections of the report – as such looking beyond engagement through consultation and governance arrangements.

🇸🇰 **A case study in good practice: An enabling environment for partnership in Slovakia**

The VNR report for Slovakia emphasizes building partnerships with the private sector, civil society and the scientific community. It notes that "partnerships and synergies between various stakeholders can supplement missing capacities and bring additional resources necessary for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. [The country] is therefore dedicated to sustaining an enabling environment for the creation of partnerships" (p. 9). The country plans to increase involvement by parliament and partnerships with civil society. The government has also adopted a micro-granting scheme to encourage voluntary activities aimed at sustainability by citizens. Projects supported by the scheme will focus on sustainable development and be implemented by local communities, schools and civil society organisations. The country also has a Volunteer of the Year Award, which included a special category on the 2030 Agenda in 2018 for the first time. An award programme also exists for the private sector to raise awareness among the business sector and to encourage socially and environmentally responsible business conduct.

Source: Except based on Slovakia's VNR report.

4.4.2 Civil society

Civil society organisations play a number of roles in supporting 2030 Agenda implementation, including representing and advocating for citizens and those left behind, contributing to policy development, implementing projects and programmes and promoting accountability through independent analysis and reporting, among other things. The review examined the enabling environment for civil society to realise these roles in 2030 Agenda implementation, as well as the contributions made by civil society as highlighted in different VNR reports and civil society reports prepared in parallel for the HLPF.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

While civil society is listed as contributing to 2030 Agenda implementation for a majority of the 2018 VNR reports (discussed further below), in general, VNR reports do not refer to the importance of fostering an enabling environment for civil society

to realise its full potential to contribute to the SDGs. A notable exception is Ireland's VNR report. It notes that "Ireland recognises that civil society space has come under increasing pressure in many parts of the world in recent years and in some countries, dialogue with civil society remains limited and the space for civil society engagement is either narrow or shrinking" (p. 99). Furthermore, Ireland has made the protection of civil society space a foreign policy priority and advocates for an enabling environment for civil society at the international level.

The enabling environment for civil society is a major issue in 23 of the countries that reported to the HLPF in 2018. Of the 41[123] countries reporting to the HLPF in 2018 that were assessed by the CIVICUS Monitor, only eight are considered "open" – that is, the state enables and safeguards civic space.[124, 125,] In ten countries, the space for civil society is "narrowed" meaning that the rights to freedom of association, and peaceful assembly and expression have been subject to violations.[126] More than half of the countries for which reviews are available are evaluated to be "obstructed," "repressed" or "closed." Among these, 13 countries are deemed to be obstructed – in which "civic space is heavily contested by power holders, who impose a combination of legal and practical constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights."[127] Four (4) countries are rated as "repressed", or those in which civic space is heavily constrained and civic engagement can lead to harassment, intimidations, imprisonment, injury and death.[128] Finally, six countries were ranked as "closed" which refers to a situation when there is a complete closure of civic space in law and practice with an atmosphere of fear and violence prevailing.[129]

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN VNR REPORTS

VNR reports provide an indication of how governments see the role of civil society in contributing to 2030 Agenda implementation. Most VNR reports (30) provided information on specific partnerships and initiatives carried out by civil society to realise the SDGs. Twenty-five (25) countries provided this information in 2017. Figure 17 provides a comparison of the most commonly cited activities carried out by civil society in 2017 and 2018. It shows an improvement in terms of the variety of roles attributed to civil society organisations in terms of supporting 2030 Agenda implementation in 2018. While specific projects and awareness-raising were the most often

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123 Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Lithuania and Senegal are currently under review.

124 Andorra, Australia, Cabo Verde, Ireland, Kiribati, Malta, Switzerland and Uruguay (Uruguay's rating improved from narrowed in 2017).

125 See https://monitor.civicus.org/Ratings/ for a full description of ratings.

126 Albania, Bahamas, Greece, Jamaica, Latvia, Namibia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

127 Armenia, Benin, Bhutan, Dominican Republic, Guinea, Hungary, Lebanon, Mali, Niger, Paraguay, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Togo.

128 Colombia, Mexico, Qatar and the State of Palestine.

129 Bahrain, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.

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emphasized contributions, some 2018 VNR reports also recognised the role of civil society organisations in providing guidance and tools for 2030 Agenda implementation, including through toolkits, websites and events. The role of civil society organisations in promoting accountability, particularly in the areas of independent monitoring of progress was noted by seven countries. A limited number of countries also highlighted areas absent in 2017, namely participation in multi-stakeholder partnerships or initiatives, incorporation of the SDGs into institutional operations and priorities, and promotion of structured dialogue. While a wider range of the roles of civil society organisations was recognised across 2018 VNR reports, the continued focus on contributions in terms of specific projects and awareness-raising activities is a narrow perception of the roles that civil society organisations play in broader society.

FIGURE 17. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS HIGHLIGHTED BY COUNTRIES IN VNR REPORTS, 2017 AND 2018

CONTRIBUTIONS HIGHLIGHTED IN CIVIL SOCIETY REPORTS

Parallel civil society reports also showcase a range of contributions from civil society to the 2030 Agenda and provide examples of effective delivery by civil society organisations. For example, the civil society report for Canada provides a number of examples of concrete initiatives taken by civil society organisations, including specific projects, advocacy activities and awareness-raising to support 2030 Agenda implementation. Civil society organisations in Colombia are contributing through multi-stakeholder partnerships and by mobilising citizens towards more sustainable lifestyles. In Bhutan, civil society organisations are aligning their plans with the SDGs and implementing them in accordance with available funds. The civil society report for the Dominican Republic highlighted the roles of civil society organisations in ensuring accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation, working to leave no one behind and carrying out projects. In Malta, civil society organisations worked in partnership with the government and the European Commission to strengthen the capacity of the government and civil society to contribute to the 2030 Agenda at national and sub-national levels and raise awareness of the global agenda. Civil society organisations in Mexico noted their contributions in terms of supporting consultations on the 2030 Agenda and disseminating information, promoting dialogue between civil society and the government, monitoring progress, research, analysis and the formulation of proposals and positions, input into government reports to the United Nations and other relevant multilateral forums, and advocacy. They have also indicated their intention to participate in implementation, follow-up and the design of national indicators with the government, and prepared a proposal for a Civil Society Participation Mechanism for dialogue. In 2016, the National Institute of Social Development launched a programme to strengthen the capacities of civil society to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. An action plan on the SDGs was prepared by civil society organisations in Senegal. The plan includes flagship actions such as translation of the SDGs into local languages, a series of meetings and capacity building sessions for civil society organisations, grassroots community organisations, youth and women's associations, people living with disabilities, local elected officials and traditional communicators. The platform also invests in community radio stations, social media (Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp) and produces communications materials. Futuro en Común, a civil society platform in Spain, has been working to promote the 2030 Agenda since 2030. Civil society organisations in the country hope to contribute to implementation through their diverse roles and be included as a fundamental part of the follow-up and review process. Finally, in Togo, civil society organisations worked on raising awareness on the SDGs through training workshops organised by various youth and women's groups.

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Awareness-raising activities were also organized for the general public by the Working Group of Civil Society Organizations for the SDGs (GTOSC-ODD) and its members. The Togo report also highlights specific SDG-related projects supported by Togolese civil society organisations.

Civil society reports also highlighted case studies on effective delivery by civil society organisations in 2030 Agenda implementation.

- In **Bhutan**, the Tarayana Foundation has worked to help many villages alleviate poverty. The Disabled Persons' Association of Bhutan has contributed to ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy a decent life and independence, contributing to leaving no one behind.

- **Canada's** civil society report provides a wide range of examples of civil society efforts towards the 2030 Agenda, particularly with respect to the environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. One example includes efforts by environmental non-governmental organisations and Indigenous Peoples to conserve the Great Bear Rainforest on Canada's west coast. Advocacy efforts, protests against industrial logging and mining activities in the region, and collaboration between civil society organisations, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples and the provincial government led to the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements. The region is now characterised by a strong network of protected areas, sustainable forestry management, support for Indigenous Peoples' economic diversification in the region and greater decision-making power on land use in the hands of Indigenous Peoples in the region.

- The civil society report for **Colombia** showcases a number of examples of civil society delivery on the 2030 Agenda. One example is the Low Carbon City, a global citizen movement that builds collective solutions to address climate change in cities. The initiative focusses on informing citizens using creative, participatory and artistic tools to encourage climate-friendly lifestyles.

- The Roundtable of Hungarian Civil Society Organisations for the Sustainable Development Goals has launched the first dedicated website to the 2030 Agenda in **Hungary**. The website reports on 80 indicators on national 2030 Agenda implementation and provides information on the commitments of more than 75 civil society organisations in the country.

- **Togo's** civil society report highlights various examples of effective civil society delivery on the SDGs. Civil society organisations have launched a Community Access to Sustainable Energy Programme (Programme d'accès des communautés à l'énergie durable - PACED) that aims to give access to sustainable and clean energy to vulnerable people. The non-governmental organisation STADD has developed a project to establish a plastic waste collection, sorting and recycling unit in the city of Lomé. Since the project's launch in 2013, seven collection units have been created in several districts of Lomé and a recycling unit has been opened. The project has also led to the collection and recycling of 500 tonnes of plastic waste, and raised awareness among 3,000 households about recycling.

- The civil society report prepared for **Viet Nam** argued that the VNR report could have better incorporated initiatives by non-state actors. The civil society report provides a number of examples of initiatives by civil society that support the 2030 Agenda. World Vision International is working to reduce malnutrition in the rural mountainous region of Viet Nam. The organisation is working with the government to educate communities on child nutrition, leverage local resources and link caregivers to livelihood opportunities. The initiative makes use of Nutrition Clubs, 1139 of which have been established across 25 project districts and have supported first 1000 days of life interventions. The initiative has seen positive results, having rehabilitated 418 children at the end of 2017. Accessibility to nutritious food has improved in 16 districts and 209 villages have implemented integrated water, sanitation and hygiene interventions.

CHALLENGES FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY DELIVERY ON THE 2030 AGENDA

Parallel civil society reports also provide useful insights on the challenges civil society organisations face in contributing to the 2030 Agenda. In 2017, civil society reports noted a range of challenges that prevent CSO delivery of the 2030 Agenda, including low levels of awareness of the agenda by the public, civil society and government, limited finance, insufficient participation and lack of government alignment with the agenda. Figure 18 provides an overview of the main challenges identified in 2018.[130]

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130 The challenges facing civil society in Lebanon were noted in the VNR report. The civil society report for Togo does not specifically note challenges, however commentary on SDG 16 on peace justice and strong institutions suggests that improvements in governance would positively impact the work of civil society organisations.

FIGURE 18. CHALLENGES TO CSO DELIVERY OF THE 2030 AGENDA

AWARENESS, ENGAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

- **Colombia**: Low awareness of the SDGs among civil society organisations; greater dialogue and cohesion are required within civil society to clarify its role

- **Dominican Republic**: Low awareness of the implementation processes among civil society organisations

- **Ireland**: Ensuring effective participation in the development of implementation plans; sufficient resourcing of the 2030 Agenda engagement mechanism; and establishing clear modalities for multi-stakeholder engagement

- **Lebanon**: Limited linkages between government, civil society, the private sector and academia

- **Sudan**: Poor coordination within civil society and with the private sector

- **Senegal**: Assessing and coordinating activities of all stakeholders in 2030 Agenda implementation; efforts needed to mobilise stakeholders and establish multi-stakeholder partnerships; institutionalising the role of civil society in planning, implementation and monitoring

- **Viet Nam**: Exclusion from governance arrangements, and needing to preparae a formal framework for engaging civil society

INSTITUTIONAL PREPAREDNESS

- **Colombia**: Local development planning follows a sectoral logic that favours fragmention of policies and does not support the integrated nature of the SDGs

- **Canada**: Lack of clear institutional mechanisms, implementation plan and stakeholder engagement plan

- **Dominican Republic**: Decentralisation of the 2030 Agenda and support for municipalities is needed

- **Mexico**: Lack of completion of the 2030 Agenda implementation strategy

- **Senegal**: Capacities for data monitoring and evaluation need to be strengthened; improved data availability and quality; localisation required, including engaging with local stakeholders; translating leaving no one behind into a guiding principle in the development and implementation of public policies

- **Sudan**: Government and civil society organisations repurposing old projects under the banner of the SDGs; the need for further capacity development

- **Viet Nam**: Efforts needed by government to broaden engagement and consultation with stakeholders through online tools and social media

LACK OF ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **Lebanon**: Corruption; lack of transparency and good governance; outdated legislation; centralisation; limited access to data

- **Mexico**: Addiitonal efforts needed to promot civil society organisations within the framework fo enabling environment strengthening

- **State of Palestine**: Shrinking space for civil society and increasing government control of the judiciary; affiliation with the private sector

- **Sudan**: Civil society margainalised by government instititutions

- **Togo**: improvements to governance and access to information needed

FINANCE

- **Bhutan**: Limited funding

- **Dominican Republic**: Funding needed to promote civil society contributions

- **Ireland**: Inadequate resources for enagement; training needed in the national statistics office and with civil society to ensure quality disaggregated data on SDG indicators

- **Malta**: Continued financial support for public education

- **Senegal**: Funding required for all actors

- **Sudan**: Limited external funding

- **Viet Nam**: Provision of grants to local governments and civil society for implementatio

LACK OF TRUST

- **Sudan**: Discrepencies in statistics used; failure to use civil society knowledge; capacity building programmes implemented by government and international partners not successful

STRUCTURAL FACTORS

- **Bhutan**: Deeply rooted behaviours

- **Lebanon**: Syrian crisis; lack of a comprenhensive social protection strategy

- **Mexico**: Changes in government may lead to new governments that are less supportive of civil society engagement

4.4.3 Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians play an important role in 2030 Agenda implementation. They can advocate for the priorities and concerns of the citizens they represent, and hold governments to account for progress. More countries (18) in 2018 reported on efforts by parliamentarians to support SDG implementation, beyond consultations and engagement in governance arrangements, than in 2017 (15).

Parliaments in Albania, Bhutan, Ecuador, Mali, Paraguay, Romania and Spain have adopted resolutions on the 2030 Agenda. Mali, Lebanon, Mali, Mexico, Romania, Spain and Sri Lanka have developed a parliamentary committee or working group on the 2030 Agenda, while Bhutan, Ecuador, Greece and Jamaica will address the 2030 Agenda through existing parliamentary committees. Latvia has established a parliamentary commission that includes a range of stakeholders involved in 2030 Agenda implementation. A number of VNR reports highlighted the role of parliament in monitoring progress, including Albania, Bhutan, Greece, Lebanon, Mali, Senegal and Sri Lanka. Bhutan and Malta have set out specific days or opportunities for discussion on the 2030 Agenda as a part of parliamentary work. Parliaments in Ecuador, Hungary, and Latvia have engaged in public outreach. Spain's VNR report noted studies prepared by parliament. Viet Nam noted international engagement by its parliament. Finally, Uruguay noted that the parliament engages on the 2030 Agenda through budgeting processes and the development of legislation. The main activities showcased by parliaments in the 2018 VNR reports are similar to what was reported in 2017.

🇧🇹 A case study in good practice: Bhutan's parliament engages on the 2030 Agenda

The Bhutan National Assembly is taking steps to ensure effective oversight of the SDGs. In 2017, a resolution was adopted that incorporates SDG oversight into parliamentary work. A standing committee to engage on the SDGs was established and one day is allotted for SDG discussions per parliamentary session. The parliament aims to mobilise resources to facilitate its oversight role. The resolution also requires parliamentarians that travel for SDG-related trips to report on their visits in plenary.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Bhutan's VNR report.

4.4.4 The private sector

The role of the private sector in contributing finance and innovative solutions to development challenges has received a lot of attention in the context of 2030 Agenda discussions – both globally and in many country contexts. Yet, the extent to which VNR reports highlight private sector contributions to sustainable development remains somewhat limited. Twenty-eight (28 of 46) countries (versus 23 of 45 in 2017) provided information on specific initiatives with the private sector – beyond consultations and engagement in governance arrangements. In 2017, the main activities noted were the creation or use of forums to raise awareness and coordinate the private sector (8 countries), specific projects (7 countries), events (6 countries), company specific commitments (5 countries) and research on the role of the private sector in 2030 Agenda implementation. These activities were also highlighted in the 2018 VNR reports, alongside a wider range of contributions. Specific projects were most commonly cited (12 countries), followed by company specific commitments and participation in multi-stakeholder partnerships (10 countries each). Four (4) reports highlighted efforts beyond company specific commitments, which tend to relate more to corporate social responsibility efforts, to demonstrate how some businesses are incorporating the SDGs into their core business. Forums for awareness-raising and coordination were noted in six VNR reports. Research on the role of the private sector in 2030 Agenda implementation was highlighted in four VNR reports while another two reports noted efforts to map private sector impacts on the SDGs. The creation of prizes and competitions, notably through local United Nations Global Compact Network chapters, were noted in four VNR reports.

🇪🇨 A case study in good practice: Responsible business in Ecuador

The Telefónica Movistar Responsible Business Plan incorporates the SDGs into a series of their programmes, using it as a fundamental element that guides their response to social, economic and environmental challenges. A number of projects are supported by the business plan. The project EduTIC-Digital Education promotes digital literacy of children, youth, teachers and adults, and encourages the responsible use of information and communication technology. It aims to reduce the digital divide and improve the quality of education through a sustained partnership with 72 organisations from the public, private and social sectors. Between 2014 and 2016, 246,645 children and adolescents, 3,111 youths, 6,170 teachers and 47,492 adults received digital education, totaling 3,450,672 hours of training. Other initiatives are being carried out to support SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy and SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure.

Source: Summary provided by CEPEI based on Ecuador's VNR report.

4.4.5 Academia and experts

Academics and experts contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation through research, project implementation and education initiatives. Reporting on the contributions from academics or experts to SDG implementation improved in 2018 over 2017. In 2017, 14 of 45 countries provided this information versus 23 of 46 countries in 2018. To the extent that VNR reporting on the role of academics and experts reflects engagement at the country level, this suggests that there is room for greater involvement by academic and expert communities in 2030 Agenda implementation.

The most common examples of academic or expert contributions noted in VNR reports related to specific projects.[131] The Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Lebanon, Mexico, Spain, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay noted the contribution of expert analysis specifically on the 2030 Agenda. Universities in Australia, Ecuador, Greece and Latvia have begun incorporating the 2030 Agenda into curricula. VNR reports for Andorra and Greece noted events on the 2030 Agenda hosted by universities. In Andorra, a "summer school" was also held on 2030 Agenda implementation. Universities in Albania, Australia, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, and Spain have formally indicated their commitment to support 2030 Agenda implementation. Activities by national Sustainable Development Solutions Network chapters were noted for Australia and Canada. Spain's Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities is working to adapt the 2030 Agenda within its sphere of power, namely in terms of university education and training, research, outreach and management. Canada's International Development Research Center is supporting research on the 2030 Agenda in partner countries. Finally, improving partnerships between the private sector, public sector and academia was noted to improve the quality of education in Bahrain.

4.4.6 Other stakeholders

Beyond the stakeholders noted above, a wide range of groups contribute to 2030 Agenda implementation, including youth, volunteers, trade unions and the media, *inter alia*. Half of the VNR reports (23) referred to other stakeholders in their VNR reports (versus 20 countries in 2017). Participation by youth and youth organisations is most commonly cited (ten), with governments taking steps to consult with youth on their priorities, and youth organisations in some countries carrying out advocacy related to youth priorities, as was the case in 2017. Whereas six countries noted the role of media in disseminating information on the SDGs in 2017, no countries pointed to the media in 2018. The next most commonly cited stakeholder supporting SDG implementation was

volunteers, with countries emphasising the contributions of their volunteers, and some having established policies and plans to further harness their potential contributions to the 2030 Agenda. A number of countries highlighted partnerships with international development partners. Three (3) high income countries noted their partnerships with United Nations agencies in supporting partner countries, while five countries noted specific partnerships with international and bilateral development partners. Two (2) countries referred to the role of diaspora populations, one country pointed to foundation partnerships and one country noted the role of trade unions.

4.4.7 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

The role of development partners in 2030 Agenda implementation is relevant for at least 30 of the 46 reporting countries in 2018 (includes low- and middle-income countries as well as high income countries that have indicated they require further support). The United Nations Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines ask countries to outline their main priorities for development partner support. VNR reports for 18 countries identified priority areas for support while 20 identified the type of support and roles needed from development partners. With a few notable exceptions, VNR reports continue to not be specific enough to really inform future areas for development partner support and the establishment of partnerships, as was noted in 2017.

In terms of priority areas for support, strengthening systems to collect data and monitor SDG implementation is highlighted by five countries (ten countries highlighted this in 2017). Goal specific priorities were outlined by four countries (versus seven in 2017). Support for general plans or SDG implementation more broadly was noted by five countries. Support to raise awareness of the SDGs and produce education materials, help integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, and assistance in making use of innovative finance were each identified by one country. In supporting country priorities, the provision of finance (official development assistance, finance from international financial institutions and South-South Cooperation) is the most common role identified by countries (12) followed by technical assistance (nine). A limited number of countries also noted the role of development partners in capacity development (four), knowledge sharing (two), technology transfer (one) and debt relief (one). Overall, these types of support are consistent with VNR reports from 2017. Fourteen (14) countries, double the number in 2017, explicitly noted that they received support to carry out their VNR, in partnership with the United Nations.[132]

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131 Included by the Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Latvia, Lebanon, Mexico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and United Arab Emirates.

132 Albania, Bahrain, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guinea, Jamaica, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Mali, Mexico, Niger, Paraguay, Sri Lanka, and Uruguay.

✅ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support civil society to engage in 2030 Agenda implementation by creating a more enabling environment, including through institutionalised dialogue and consultation, inclusion in formal governance arrangements, finance, and capacity development.

- Integrate the 2030 Agenda into parliamentary committee work, recognising the critical role parliamentarians play as citizens' representatives and in ensuring national level accountability for progress.

- Support and develop partnerships with a variety of non-state actors, including academia and the private sector.

- Where relevant, clearly stipulate and provide details on priority areas for support from the international community, laying out the roles development partners can best play to support the acceleration of 2030 Agenda implementation.

4.5 Measurement and reporting

The Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines note that it would be useful for countries to include information on how they intend to review progress at the national level, including with respect to future HLPFs. The same number of countries (31) provided this information in 2018 and 2017. In 2017, ten of the countries that did not provide this information were from Central and South America. Countries from this region accounted for seven of the 15 countries that did not report this information in 2018.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Provide an account of national level reporting and accountability processes for 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports.

4.5.1 Data availability

The inclusion of information on data availability in VNR reports is important for understanding the current status of monitoring efforts and where additional data collection efforts are needed. In 2018, 28 countries did not provide clear information on data availability for SDG monitoring. In 2017, this figure was 31. Where countries do provide information on available indicators, they tend to make use of different methods to calculate data availability, making it difficult to provide an overall assessment of data availability for 2030 Agenda monitoring based on VNR reports. Moreover, countries do not consistently provide information on *which* indicators lack data, with some countries providing an overall percentage on data availability and others noting data gaps for specific SDGs. One exception is perhaps the VNR report for the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which included a summary of data challenges and specific information in the goal-by-goal analysis. Unlike in 2017, a number of countries also provided a full statistical annex. Canada, for example, provided the full global set of SDG indicators with actual data (previous and latest data), sources, clearly identified proxy indicators and a link to the data in English. Other reports only provided summary level information on data availability (without a statistical annex) and often with limited information on the challenges regarding data in particular sectors or for specific SDGs.

BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT
Provide an analysis of data availability in the goal-by-goal analysis.

TABLE 5. DATA AVAILABILITY FOR GLOBAL SDG INDICATORS

	COUNTRIES	
PERCENT	**2017**	**2018**
11-20%	GUATEMALA	PARAGUAY
21-30%	AZERBAIJAN, THE MALDIVES	JAMAICA
31-40%	JAPAN, PANAMA, THE NETHERLANDS	BAHAMAS, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
41-50%	BELGIUM, ITALY, NIGERIA, PERU	BENIN, EGYPT, STATE OF PALESTINE
51-60%	DENMARK	ECUADOR, NIGER, SPAIN, URUGUAY, VIET NAM
61-70%	INDONESIA	BHUTAN, CABO VERDE, LITHUANIA, SENEGAL
71-80%	BANGLADESH	HUNGARY, MEXICO
81-90%	MALAYSIA	

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Table 5 provides an overview of data availability according to country calculations for 2017 and 2018. Data availability is based on available data and proxy or partial data. The data presented does not attempt to reconcile the differences in how countries calculate data availability. Rather the table provides an indication of where countries situate themselves in terms of data availability, and further demonstrates the need for countries – regardless of their income level – to strengthen data availability for SDG monitoring. Comparing findings from 2017 with 2018, it appears that, overall, countries noted greater data availability.

4.5.2 Disaggregated data

As noted in the section on leaving no one behind, information on disaggregated data is not well reported in the VNR reports for 2017 or 2018. Yet, this information is important for establishing baselines and informing evidence-based approaches to policy-making and programming. For the 15 countries that provided information on disaggregated data, 12 noted that there is a need to improve disaggregated data in general terms. Countries were limited in terms of providing information on specific gaps in disaggregated data with references made only to gender (three), region (one), age (oney), disability (two) and migration status (one).

4.5.3 Efforts to improve data availability

Given that most countries are facing challenges with respect to monitoring the full global SDG indicator set, the review examines efforts to improve data availability. A majority of countries (31) reported on efforts to improve data availability. In 2017, countries focussed on capacity development and technical assistance (18), building new data sets (12), improved coordination (eight), resource mobilisation (six), improved data dissemination (four) and use of technology (three). These same themes were highlighted by countries reporting in 2018 as shown in Figure 19. In addition, 11 countries noted existing or planned strategies for improving statistical capacity. Some countries will improve their legal and policy environment (three) and raise awareness of data challenges and priorities (three). Four (4) countries noted improved engagement with experts, the private sector or civil society and international development partners to improve data availability and analysis. Three (3) countries made a general commitment to improve statistical capacity but did not provide details on how.[133]

FIGURE 19. EFFORTS TO IMPROVE DATA AVAILABILITY

A case study in good practice: Adoption of a human rights-based approach to data in Armenia

The VNR report for Armenia highlights the use of a human rights-based approach to data. For Armenia, this means collecting data for SDG indicators on a sustainable basis and with appropriate levels of disaggregation, maintained through a participatory and consultative approach. The VNR report sets out a number of actions needed to ensure effective "data engagement" at the municipal level, including establishing necessary legal institutional arrangements, preparing simple indicators rooted in the SDG indicators that are user friendly and not too difficult to collect at the community level. The government recognises that it is important to introduce the concept of a human rights-based approach to data at the community level drawing on internationally agreed principles for statistics, upholding human rights and ensuring efforts are based on the principles of participation, transparency, privacy and accountability.

Source: Excerpt adapted from Armenia's VNR report.

133 Bahamas noted that it would establish a national statistical system working with partners. Canada highlighted the creation of center to improve the availability of disaggregated data. Paraguay noted regional cooperation efforts.

4.5.4 National reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation

In addition to reporting at the HLPF, the 2030 Agenda recognises the importance of country-driven follow-up and review at the national and sub-national levels. Countries are also invited to report on provisions for national level reporting in the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines.

In 2017, 31 countries provided information on national reporting provisions. In 2018, 30 countries did the same. In 2017 and 2018, no country referred to regional accountability mechanisms or peer learning. While only one country, Japan, noted when it would submit a follow-up report to the HLPF, Ireland, Spain and Romania presented timetables for presentation of VNR reports to the HLPF. Switzerland plans to report every four years to the HLPF.

> **BEST PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT**
> **Link accountability for progress on 2030 Agenda implementation to regular, planned parliamentary reviews.**

A case study in good practice: Ireland's transparent commitment to report

Ireland's VNR report includes a time table for SDG reporting. It includes planned national reports on a biennial basis from 2018-30. The government also plans to submit VNRs to the HLPF in 2018, 2022, 2026 and 2030. Over 2018-30, the country plans to produce a total of 7 national reports and 4 VNR reports.

Source: Except adapted from Ireland's VNR report.

Similar to 2017, the 2018 VNR reports did not refer to reporting by non-state actors on their contributions to 2030 Agenda implementation. However, three countries noted that national level reporting would occur in consultation with non-state actors. Fourteen (14) countries noted regular reporting, seven of which will report annually (one – Benin – annually plus more frequently) and two of which will report biennially. Whereas five countries noted the use of dashboards or web portals in 2017, 11 countries noted this approach in 2018, often in conjunction with other forms of reporting. Eight (8) countries plan to make use of existing monitoring and evaluation systems to assess progress on the 2030 Agenda. Two (2) countries highlighted statistical reports (one annually, one biennially). Five (5) countries note responsibility for reporting by their 2030 Agenda committee or council (or its associated working groups), two countries highlight a responsible department, and one

country pointed to the Prime Minister's Office. Three (3) countries – Jamaica, Paraguay and Sri Lanka – noted the role of their supreme audit institutions. Two (2) countries noted parliamentary discussions on progress while three countries highlighted reporting to cabinet or the parliament.

A case study in good practice: Recognising the role of supreme audit institutions in supporting 2030 Agenda implementation and accountability

VNR reports for **Jamaica**, **Paraguay** and **Sri Lanka** highlighted contributions by supreme audit institutions to 2030 Agenda implementation. Jamaica's Auditor General's Department is taking part in the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions' (INTOSAI) initiative to support contributions by supreme audit institutions to 2030 Agenda implementation. The initiative includes carrying out audits and reviews in four capacities, including 1) assessing national government preparedness for implementation, 2) carrying out performance audits; 3) contributing to SDG 16 in terms of supporting effective, accountable and transparent institutions; and 4) identifying ways in which supreme audit institutions can serve as models for transparency and accountability. Jamaica's VNR report noted that an audit on SDG preparedness was underway.

Other countries reporting in 2018 whose supreme audit institutions have produced a report as part of INTOSAI's initiatives on the 2030 Agenda include Canada, Ecuador, Poland, the State of Palestine and Sudan. However, VNR reports for these countries do not mention the work of their supreme audit institutions.

Supreme audit institutions are allies in safeguarding financing for sustainable development according to Paraguay's VNR report. The country's supreme audit institution is mandated to examine progress made by the government on the achievement of the SDGs. Audits are currently being conducted in order to assess preparedness for 2030 Agenda implementation, and specifically, for SDG 2 on zero hunger, SDG 4 on quality education, and SDG 5 on gender equality. Further audits are planned.

Sri Lanka's VNR report noted that the country's Auditor General's Department plans to incorporate the SDGs into the government's auditing process. The Auditor General's Department sent a questionnaire to public agencies to inquire about their SDG involvement.

Source: Excerpts adapted from VNR reports for Jamaica, Paraguay and Sri Lanka.

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A number of countries reporting to the HLPF in 2018 are reporting for the second time. These include Benin, Colombia, Egypt, Mexico, Qatar, Switzerland, Togo and Uruguay. The Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines note that it is desirable for countries to present progress made since their last VNR. As shown in the best practice case study below, a number of countries included a system to indicate the status of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation, two of which include second time reporting countries, namely Egypt and Switzerland. The majority of countries, however, do not include an assessment of their progress since their last VNR. This includes Benin, Colombia, Mexico, Qatar, Togo and Uruguay. This might be explained, in part, by the fact that all countries but Mexico focussed largely on the HLPF-specific theme goals, rather than all the goals, having reported on different SDGs specific to the HLPF in previous years.

A case study in good practice: Reporting on progress through the VNR report

A number of the VNR reports included a system for showcasing progress on available SDG indicators. **Egypt** and the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** included a traffic light system to indicate progress on available indicators. **Latvia's** statistical annex includes a system to assess trends. A score of "1" was allotted to indicators for which the trend fully complies with the SDG or is in line with progress towards the national development plan and the country's national SDG targets. A score of "0" indicates that there has been insignificant change, positive or negative. A score of "-1" indicates a negative trend.

In the goal-by-goal analysis of **Switzerland's** VNR report, the presentation of targets included a symbol to indicate the direction in which the country would like a particular indicator to move, a symbol indicating observed trends and a third symbol indicating whether the observed trend is positive, negative, unchanged or has no verdict.

Source: Excerpt adapted from the VNR reports for Egypt, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, and Switzerland.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, and country efforts to improve data availability - given the importance of data for SDG monitoring and accountability, as well as leaving no one behind.

- Link reviews of progress for 2030 Agenda implementation to parliamentary oversight mechanisms in order to ensure accountability at the national level.

- Spell out plans to review progress at the national level and be accountable to citizens for progress on the 2030 Agenda beyond reporting to the HLPF. This should include consulting with non-state actors and articulating plans for future HLPF reporting. These elements are important for ensuring accountability for progress on the 2030 Agenda, identifying gaps in implementation, allowing for course correction and ensuring transparency in reporting processes.

- Include an assessment of progress on 2030 Agenda implementation in VNR reports to the HLPF, particularly with reference to the status of implementation in previously submitted VNR reports.

5.0 Assessment of VNR Reports against the United Nations Secretary General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines

Photo: © World Vision, Jim Wungramyao Kasom- India

Chapter Summary

Similar to 2017, many of the VNR reports are not structured according to the outline in the guidelines though they capture most elements. This can hinder comparison of shared challenges and good practices.

The majority of countries include most elements of the voluntary common reporting guidelines in their VNR reports. All elements of the guidelines were included by at least 70% of reporting countries, with the exceptions of leaving no one behind, structural issues and the annexes.

Despite these missing elements, VNR reports still tend to be very long and in some cases unnecessarily detailed. Repetition was identified as a key issue in the 2017 review of VNR reports, however this was less of an issue for the 2018 VNR reports.

The United Nations Secretary-General proposed a set of voluntary common reporting guidelines to help countries frame their VNR reports to the HLPF. The guidelines, which were updated in December 2017, are voluntary; countries ultimately decide how to present their findings. The guidelines for the 2018 HPF emphasize the use of the structure outlined by the Secretary General to promote consistency and comparability. They include the following elements listed below. Changes from the previous guidelines are also noted. The order for the chapters also changed. This is denoted below by an asterisk ("*"). All the VNR reports presented in 2018, were reviewed against the guidelines to identify which of the suggested components are being addressed by countries in their VNR reports.

TABLE 6. COMPARISON OF UPDATED AND PREVIOUS SECRETARY GENERAL VOLUNTARY COMMON REPORTING GUIDELINES

PREVIOUS	2017 UPDATE FOR THE 2018 HLPF
Opening statement	
An opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official.	An opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official.
Summary becomes highlights	
A summary highlighting good practice, lessons learned, key challenges and support needed as outlined in the previous guidelines.	In addition to the previous elements, the highlights serves as a one-to-two page synthesis that should provide an overview of the review process, status of SDG progress and how the government is responding to the integrated and indivisible nature of the 2030 Agenda and working to leave no one behind.
Introduction	
The introduction set the context and objectives for the review with a discussion of national priorities and critical challenges.	An introduction that sets the context and objectives for the review, outlines the review cycle and how existing national reports were used. The policy architecture for implementation and policy tools to support integration of the three dimensions, as well as linkages to relevant international agreements could also be mentioned.
Methodology and process for preparation of the review	
Presentation of the methodology for the review, outlining the process for preparation of the national review.	No change: Presentation of the methodology for the review, outlining the process for preparation of the national review.
Policy and enabling environment – Creating ownership	
Creating ownership of the SDGs, outlining efforts towards all stakeholders to inform them on and involve them in the SDGs. Could include how the SDGs will be reviewed at the national level.	Creating ownership of the SDGs, outlining efforts towards all stakeholders to inform them on and involve them in the SDGs. Could address how specific groups have been engaged.
Policy and enabling environment – Incorporation of the SDGs in national framework	
Incorporation of the SDGs in national framework, in terms of the critical initiatives countries undertook to adapt the SDGs and targets to its national circumstances, and to advance their implementation. Should include challenges in implementation and refer to efforts taken by other stakeholders.	No change: Incorporation of the SDGs in national framework, in terms of the critical initiatives countries undertook to adapt the SDGs and targets to its national circumstances, and to advance their implementation. Should include challenges in implementation, and their cause, and refer to efforts taken by other stakeholders.

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PREVIOUS	2017 UPDATE FOR THE 2018 HLPF
Policy and enabling environment – Integration of the three dimensions	
Integration of the three dimensions though a discussion of how the three dimensions of sustainable development are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration. Could include analysis of how the principles of the 2030 Agenda are being mainstreamed.	Integration of the three dimensions though a discussion of how the three dimensions of sustainable development are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration. Could include analysis related to the HLPF theme.
Policy and enabling environment – Thematic analysis becomes leaving no one behind*	
Thematic analysis of progress and initiatives related to the HLPF's thematic focus for the year.	Assessment of how the principle of leaving no one behind is mainstreamed in implementation. Includes how vulnerable groups have been identified, efforts to address their needs, and particular attention to women and girls.
Policy and enabling environment – Institutional mechanisms	
Institutional mechanisms, described in terms of how the country has adapted its institutional framework in order to implement the 2030 Agenda. Would be useful to include how the country plans to review progress.	Institutional mechanisms, described in terms of how the country has adapted its institutional framework in order to implement the 2030 Agenda. Would be useful to include how the country plans to review progress and can note where support is provided by United Nations Country Teams in the preparation of national SDG reports.
Policy and enabling environment – Structural issues*	
Not included in previous guidelines.	Relevant structural issues or barriers, including external constraints that hinder progress. Transformative approaches to addressing these challenges can be highlighted.
Goals and targets* (became separate from the policy and enabling environment heading)	
A brief analysis of progress on all goals and targets, including whether a baseline has been defined. Discussion can also include trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, lessons learned and actions to address gaps and challenges.	A brief analysis of progress on all goals and targets, including whether a baseline has been defined. Discussion can also include trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, lessons learned and actions to address gaps and challenges. Countries completing a subsequent VNR are encouraged to describe progress since the previous review.

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PREVIOUS	2017 UPDATE FOR THE 2018 HLPF
Means of implementation (MOI)	
Presentation of the means of implementation including how MOI are mobilised, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed.	Presentation of the means of implementation, including how MOI are mobilised, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed. Can include reference to how financial systems and resource allocation support implementation. Can also include reference to the private sector, the role of technology, concrete capacity development and data needs and the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships.
Next steps	
An outline of next steps the country is taking or planning to take to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.	An outline of next steps the country is taking or planning to take to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Can also outline how implementation will be reviewed at national and sub-national levels.
Conclusion	
A conclusion that provides a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications. Lessons learned from the VNR could be highlighted.	No change: A conclusion that provides a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications. Lessons learned from the VNR could be highlighted.
Statistical annex becomes annexes	
A statistical annex with data, using the global SDG indicators as a starting point and adding priority national/regional indicators and identifying gaps.	Annexes can include an annex with data, using the global SDG indicators as a starting point and adding priority national/regional indicators and identifying gaps. Additional annexes can showcase best practice or comments from stakeholders.

Progressing national SDGs implementation

5.1 Overall assessment of use of the guidelines

As shown in Figure 20, most countries include most elements of the guidelines in their VNR report, with notable exceptions being leaving no one behind, structural issues and the annexes. While some countries organised their VNR reports according to the guidelines, many did not. In addition, the VNR reports show an absence of details on best practices, lessons learned, and areas in which countries would like to learn from others, a finding consistent with the review of 2017 VNR reports. More countries could also identify priorities for development partner support. The provision of such information generates understanding of country needs, provides a basis on which to hold stakeholders accountable for their efforts to support 2030 Agenda implementation and assists in the identification of the best entry points for support. This is a gap in existing VNR reports that undermines the HLPF process.

Despite these missing elements, VNR reports still tend to be very long and in some cases unnecessarily detailed. Repetition was identified as a key issue in the 2017 review of VNR reports, however this was less of an issue for the 2018 VNR reports.

Photo: © World Vision, Crislyn Felisilda - Philippines

FIGURE 20. THE EXTENT TO WHICH COUNTRIES INCORPORATE ELEMENTS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S VOLUNTARY COMMON REPORTING GUIDELINES, 2018, 2017 AND 2016

● The report addresses this component as instructed in the guidelines

● The report addresses this component to some extent in this or another section of the report but does not fulfil the brief as laid out in the guidelines

● The report does not address this component

Legend: G = green (addresses as instructed), Y = yellow (addresses to some extent), R = red (does not address)

2018	OPENING STATEMENT	HIGHLIGHTS	INTRODUCTION	METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW	CREATING OWNERSHIP	INCORPORATION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	INTEGRATION OF THREE DIMENSIONS	LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND	INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	STRUCTURAL ISSUES	GOALS AND TARGETS	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	NEXT STEPS	CONCLUSION	ANNEXES
Albania	G	G	Y	G	G	G	Y	G	G	Y	Y	G	G	G	Y
Andorra	Y	R	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	G
Armenia	Y	G	G	G	Y	G	G	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Australia	G	Y	G	G	G	R	G	G	G	R	G	Y	R	G	R
Bahamas	G	G	G	Y	G	G	Y	G	G	G	G	Y	G	G	R
Bahrain	R	Y	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	R	G	G	G
Benin	G	G	G	G	G	G	Y	G	G	G	Y	G	G	G	G
Bhutan	G	G	G	Y	G	G	G	G	G	Y	G	G	G	G	G
Cabo Verde	G	G	G	G	G	G	Y	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Canada	G	Y	G	R	R	G	R	G	G	R	G	G	G	G	G
Colombia	G	G	G	G	Y	G	R	G	G	R	G	G	R	G	G
Dominican Republic	G	Y	G	G	Y	G	R	Y	G	R	G	Y	G	R	R
Ecuador	Y	G	G	G	R	Y	R	R	Y	R	G	G	Y	Y	Y
Egypt	Y	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	G
Greece	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	Y	G	Y	G	G	G	R	G
Guinea	Y	G	G	G	G	G	Y	G	G	Y	G	Y	Y	G	G
Hungary	R	R	R	G	G	G	G	Y	G	R	G	R	R	R	G
Ireland	G	R	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Jamaica	G	G	Y	G	Y	Y	G	G	G	Y	G	R	Y	G	R
Kiribati	R	R	G	G	G	R	G	R	G	R	Y	R	R	R	R
Lao People's Democratic Republic	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Latvia	G	Y	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
Lebanon	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	R	G	G	G	G	G	G	R

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2018

Country	OPENING STATEMENT	HIGHLIGHTS	INTRODUCTION	METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW	CREATING OWNERSHIP	INCORPORATION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	INTEGRATION OF THREE DIMENSIONS	LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND	INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	STRUCTURAL ISSUES	GOALS AND TARGETS	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	NEXT STEPS	CONCLUSION	ANNEXES
Lithuania	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢
Mali	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟡
Malta	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢
Mexico	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Namibia	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴
Niger	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢
Paraguay	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟡	🟢	🔴	🟢
Poland	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Qatar	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Romania	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Saudi Arabia	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢
Senegal	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢
Singapore	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢
Slovakia	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢
Spain	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Sri Lanka	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
State of Palestine	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Sudan	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴
Switzerland	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟢
Togo	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢
United Arab Emirates	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🔴
Uruguay	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡	🔴	🔴	🟡	🔴	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢
Viet Nam	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
Percentage of countries meeting or partially meeting the guideline	82.6	71.7	**95.7**	**93.5**	80.4	**95.7**	71.7	63	**95.7**	67.4	**91.3**	76.1	73.9	80.4	60.9
Direction of change over previous year	▲	▼	▼	▲	▲	▼	▲	▲ [134]	▲	—[135]	▼ [136]	▲	▼	▲	▲

134 Over 2016.

135 Not included in previous VNR voluntary common reporting guidelines.

136 However, reporting improved overall as most countries looked at all 17 SDGs rather than a sub-set of them as was the case in 2017.

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2017	STATEMENT BY HOSG	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	INTRODUCTION	METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW	CREATING OWNERSHIP	INCORPORATION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	INTEGRATION OF THREE DIMENSIONS	THEME CHAPTER: ERADICATING POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY	INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	STRUCTURAL ISSUES	GOALS AND TARGETS	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	NEXT STEPS	CONCLUSION	STATISTICAL ANNEX
Afghanistan	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡
Argentina	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟡	N/A	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟡	🔴
Aruba	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴
Azerbaijan	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Bangladesh	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Belgium	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🔴	🔴	🟢
Belize	🔴	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴
Benin	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Botswana	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟢
Brazil	🟢	🟡	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟡	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢
Chile	🔴	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Costa Rica	🟢	🔴	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
Curaçao	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢
Cyprus	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢
Czech Republic	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟡	N/A	🟡	🟡	🟢	🔴	🟢
Denmark	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
El Salvador	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Ethiopia	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Guatemala	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🔴	🟡	🟢
Honduras	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
India	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟢
Indonesia	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Italy	🟡	🔴	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴	🟢
Japan	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🟢	🔴	🔴
Jordan	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴
Kenya	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢
Luxembourg	🟢	🔴	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡	🔴
Malaysia	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟡
Maldives	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟡
Monaco	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟡	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟡	N/A	🔴	🟡	🟡	🟢	🔴

Progressing national SDGs implementation

2017

	STATEMENT BY HOSG	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	INTRODUCTION	METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW	CREATING OWNERSHIP	INCORPORATION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	INTEGRATION OF THREE DIMENSIONS	THEME CHAPTER: ERADICATING POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY	INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	STRUCTURAL ISSUES	GOALS AND TARGETS	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	NEXT STEPS	CONCLUSION	STATISTICAL ANNEX
Nepal	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴
Nigeria	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Panama	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
Perú	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟡	🟡	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢
Portugal	🔴	🟢	🟡	🟡	🔴	🟡	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🔴	🔴	🟢
Qatar	🟢	🟡	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢
Slovenia	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢
St. Maarten	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴
Sweden	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢
Tajikistan	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🔴	🟡	🟢	N/A	🔴	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡
Thailand	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢
The Netherlands	🟢	🟢	🟡	🔴	🟢	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟢	🔴	🔴	🔴	🔴
Togo	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🟡	🟢	🔴
Uruguay	🟡	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟡	🟢	🔴	🔴	🟢	N/A	🟡	🔴	🔴	🟢	🟢
Zimbabwe	🔴	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟢	N/A	🟡	🟢	🟢	🟢	🟡
Percentage of countries meeting or partially meeting the guideline	71.1	82.2	**100**	71.1	**93.3**	**97.8**	66.7	_137	86.7	_138	**95.6**	64.4	75.6	75.6	46.7*
Direction of change over previous year	▲	▼	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	–	▲	–	▲	▲	▼	▲	▼

137 Not included in the 2016 voluntary common reporting guidelines.

138 Not included in the 2016 voluntary common reporting guidelines.

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2016	STATEMENT BY HOSG	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	INTRODUCTION	METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW	CREATING OWNERSHIP	INCORPORATION IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	INTEGRATION OF THREE DIMENSIONS	THEME CHAPTER: ENSURING THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND	INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	STRUCTURAL ISSUES	GOALS AND TARGETS	MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	NEXT STEPS	CONCLUSION	STATISTICAL ANNEX
China	red	green	red	green	red	red	red	red	red	N/A	red	red	red	red	red
Egypt	red	green	green	green	red	yellow	yellow	green	green	N/A	green	green	green	green	yellow
Estonia	red	green	green	green	green	green	green	yellow	red	N/A	green	green	green	green	green
Finland	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	N/A	red	red	yellow	green	yellow
France	red	green	green	yellow	green	green	green	green	red	N/A	green	green	green	green	red
Georgia	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	N/A	green	yellow	green	green	green
Germany	red	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	red	N/A	green	green	green	green	green
Montenegro	red	green	green	yellow	yellow	green	green	green	green	N/A	red	green	green	green	green
Norway	red	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	N/A	green	green	yellow	green	green
Philippines	red	green	green	green	green	green	red	red	green	N/A	yellow	green	green	green	yellow
Republic of Korea	red	green	green	green	green	green	yellow	green	green	N/A	yellow	green	green	green	yellow
Samoa	red	red	green	yellow	red	green	red	red	green	N/A	yellow	red	red	red	red
Sierra Leone	red	green	green	green	green	green	red	red	green	N/A	red	red	green	green	green
Switzerland	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	green	N/A	green	green	green	green	green
Turkey	red	green	green	yellow	yellow	green	green	red	yellow	N/A	red	red	red	green	yellow
Uganda	green	green	green	green	green	green	yellow	yellow	green	N/A	red	green	green	green	green
Percentage of countries meeting or partially meeting the guideline	25	**93.8**	**93.8**	**93.8**	68.8	87.5	56.3	43.8	75	-[139]	62.5	43.8	81.3	75	62.5

✓ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

• Follow, as much as possible, the guidelines as proposed by the Secretary General to ensure that all elements of SDG implementation are captured, and facilitate comparison of shared challenges, good practices and lessons learned.

139 Not included in the 2016 voluntary common reporting guidelines.

5.2 Detailed assessment of the use of the guidelines

5.2.1 Statement by head of government

Thirty-eight (38) countries included an opening statement in 2018, 32 of which were signed by the head of government or another government official. This shows continued growth in terms of VNR reports including such a statement since 2016 [140] with just over 82% of countries including this element in 2018 versus 32 of 45 (or 71%) countries in 2017, and four of the 16 (or 25%) examined countries in 2016. The high number of reports including opening statements bodes well as an indication of political support for the 2030 Agenda.

✅ Include a statement from a head of state to demonstrate commitment and give profile to the agenda.

5.2.2 Highlights

The majority of reports (33 of 46 or 71%) included a highlights section or captured the main elements of the highlights section in the report. This represents a decrease in the proportion of reports that included this section or something similar relative to 2017, when 37 countries included an executive summary (82%). In 2016, 15 of 16 examined VNR reports included an executive summary (93.75%). Highlights should be included in VNR reports to ensure accessibility and dissemination of key findings.

✅ Include highlights as a tool to provide a snapshot of context, the review, integration of the three dimensions, efforts to leave no one behind, best practice, challenges and lessons learned.

5.2.3 Introduction

In 2018 all countries, with the exception of Kiribati and Sudan who only submitted main messages, included an introduction or the main elements of the introduction. All 45 countries examined in 2017 followed a similar approach. In 2016, only one country – China – did not meet this requirement.

✅ Include an introduction to set the scene and outline components of the VNR report that avoids repetition of the opening statement and executive summary.

5.2.4 Methodology for review

Reporting on the methodology for the review improved in 2018, with 38 countries including this component and another four countries following the guidelines to some extent. Canada, Slovakia and Switzerland (three countries) did not provide information on the

methodology for the review in 2018, versus 13 countries in 2017. One country did not include this information in 2016. For those that included information on the methodology, information was generally detailed on the VNR process and stakeholder engagement. VNR reports included information on leadership, the drafting process, data sources, methodology, and engagement mechanisms.

✅ Continue to include the methodology for the VNR, with sufficient details that clearly articulate how the drafting process occurred, timing, how stakeholders were engaged, and lessons learned. This will provide greater clarity on what was done, and how other member states can draw from the experience of different countries.

5.2.5 Creating ownership

More countries did not include information on creating ownership in 2018 (nine) than in 2017 (three). The proportion of countries reporting on their efforts to raise awareness and create ownership over the 2030 Agenda was approximately 80%, with 11 of the 36 countries that included this component only meeting the guideline to some extent. In 2017, 42 (93%) countries reported on creating ownership versus 11 of 16 (69%) in 2016. VNR reports included information on lessons, key initiatives and successes in creating ownership as was the case in 2017.

✅ Continue to provide information on efforts to raise awareness and foster ownership, in particular key initiatives, successes and lessons learned in this process.

5.2.6 Incorporation of SDGs in national frameworks

Australia and Singapore were the only countries that did not include information on how the SDGs have been incorporated into national frameworks in 2018. In 2017, Monaco was the only country that did not report this information (versus two countries in 2016 – China and France). Information was included with varying degrees of detail; however, most countries are adhering to this element of the guidelines.

✅ Continue to provide information on efforts to incorporate the SDGs into national frameworks, in particular key initiatives and successes and lessons learned in this process.

140 Throughout the analysis, reference to the 2016 report refers to Cutter, 2016.

5.2.7 Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development

A larger proportion of countries reported on how they integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development in the 2018 reports (33 or 72%) compared to 2017 (30 or 66.7%) and 2016 (9 or 56%). That said, only 24 of the 33 countries met this component as instructed in the guidelines, suggesting that countries require further guidance on this section. In this vein, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' 2019 edition of the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews provides some useful guidance. It notes that VNRs should clearly state the inter-linkages between SDGs in terms of synergies and trade-offs or conflict. VNR reports should also refer to institutional arrangements to promote integration in this context. The Handbook, which includes a range of questions to guide member states for all components of VNR reporting, showcases questions on integration that member states can use to analyse and report on this aspect of implementation. The Handbook welcomes the use of simple examples to illustrate integration.

✅ Make use of the guidance provided by the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews to better assess and report on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in VNR reports.

5.2.8 Leaving no one behind

As noted above, reporting on leaving no one behind could be improved, with just under 61% (28 of 46 countries) addressing this component fully or somewhat in their VNR reports. In previous years, leaving no one behind was part of the thematic analysis for 2016, but not in 2017 when the HLPF theme looked at eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world. In 2016, seven out of 16 countries reported on leaving no one behind as part of the thematic analysis.

✅ Report on efforts to leave no one behind as instructed by the voluntary common reporting guidelines, including information on who is being left behind, data, efforts, and results.

5.2.9 Institutional mechanisms

Sudan and Singapore were the only countries that did not report on institutional mechanisms in 2018, though 11 countries only fulfilled this component to some extent. In 2017, all countries reported on institutional mechanism with the majority (39 of 45) fully meeting instructions as per the guidelines. Four (4) countries did not include this component in 2016. Generally speaking, countries included information on governance mechanisms, key institutions supporting 2030 Agenda implementation and coordination mechanisms.

✅ Continue to provide information on institutional mechanisms for 2030 Agenda implementation, including governance arrangements.

5.2.10 Structural issues

Structural issues, a new component in the 2018 guidelines, were captured by 31 (67%) of the VNR reports for 2018. In this context, only 22 reports fully met the component as instructed by the guidelines. Generally speaking, information on structural issues tended to be incorporated throughout VNR reports rather than explicitly stated, with information on how challenges and barriers are being addressed.

✅ Report on structural issues that hinder progress on 2030 Agenda implementation and approaches to addressing such issues.

5.2.11 Goals and targets

The analysis of goals and targets was met or partially met by all countries in 2018 with the exception of Bahrain, Kiribati, Slovakia, and Sudan. All countries but two met or partially met this component in 2017. There was improvement in 2018 overall however, as the majority of countries reported on all goals rather than a sub-set of the goals, as was the case in 2017. Only two of eight countries – Egypt and Switzerland – that submitted a subsequent report to the HLPF included information on trends.

As noted above, reporting on best practice, lessons learned and where countries would like to learn from others could be improved. While some countries have included this information in the goal-by-goal analysis, more countries could do so alongside the detailed account of policies, programmes and trends. The removal of the thematic analysis chapter in the 2018 voluntary common reporting guidelines appears to have helped with reducing repetition, an issue noted in the 2017 review of VNR reports.

✅ Continue to report on all SDGs with specific attention to trends, gaps, best practice, and lessons learned.

✅ Report on progress between first and subsequent VNRs, providing an indication of trends over time.

5.2.12 Means of implementation

More countries provided information on the means of implementation in 2018 (76% or 35 countries) than in 2017 (29 of 45 countries, or 64%). However, as was the case in 2017, around half of the reporting countries did not follow the instructions as per the guidelines (16 of 29 in 2017). In 2016, seven of 16 (or 44%) countries reported on the means of implementation, with six reporting according to the guidelines. While reporting on the means of implementation improved overall for international public finance, trade, technology and systemic issues, countries did less well in terms of reporting on domestic resources, allocations and financial systems to support 2030 Agenda implementation, as requested in the revised voluntary common reporting guidelines.

✅ Report on the means of implementation as instructed in the guidelines, including domestic finance, resource allocation, budgeting, international public finance, trade, capacity development, technology and partnerships.

5.2.13 Next steps

The same number of countries provided information on next steps in 2018 as in 2017 – 34. Thirteen (13) of 16 countries provided this information in 2016. Similar to 2017, next steps are often presented in the conclusion. While some next steps tended to be vague – e.g. further localisation of the agenda – some countries provided enough detail to allow for an assessment of progress on next steps in subsequent VNR reports. Detailed explanations of next steps are important for articulating future activities and for supporting accountability in SDG implementation. This information enables stakeholders to follow-up on whether countries have carried out the actions identified in their VNR reports.

✅ Provide a detailed assessment of the forward-looking agenda, outlining where the country needs to go and the steps to get there, based on gaps and lessons learned to date. This should include next steps in terms of follow-up and review with concrete commitments to be fulfilled by states, strengthening the VNR process and clarifying what stakeholders can expect in the years following VNR reporting at the HLPF.

3.2.14 Conclusion

The majority of countries (37) prepared a conclusion as part of their VNR report. In 2017, 34 countries prepared a conclusion whereas 12 of 16 countries did the same in 2016. A number of conclusions, in addition to highlighting the main elements of the report, included reference to lessons learned through the VNR or the value of the VNR process.

✅ Include lessons learned from the VNR process in the conclusion to showcase the value of the VNR process to national and international stakeholders and how it can be improved next time as a result of the lessons learned.

5.2.15 Annexes

Over half of the countries reporting in 2018, or 28, included an annex in their VNR report; however only 20 countries met this component as instructed by the guidelines. In 2017, only 21 of 45 countries included a statistical annex. In 2016, ten of 16 countries did the same. There has been an improvement in the provision of statistical annexes from 2017 to 2018. Only a handful of countries provided the full global SDG indicator dataset; however a number of countries presented based on regional or national SDG indicators. As was noted in 2017, statistical annexes would benefit from an overview of data availability, including disaggregated data, when this information is not listed in the main report. A number of countries also included annexes with best practice or views from other stakeholders, as suggested by the voluntary common reporting guidelines for the 2018 HLPF.

✅ Include a statistical annex in the VNR report as suggested by the voluntary common reporting guidelines.

✅ Report on data availability, including disaggregated data, with reference to global and national level indicators, in the statistical annex. This will provide a better picture of countries' overall capacity to monitor SDG implementation.

6.0 Conclusion

The VNRs offer an opportunity to strengthen national level accountability and demonstrate accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation on the global stage. This review of 2018 VNR reports identified a number of best practices that countries, civil society organisations and citizens can take forward in SDG implementation and reporting to the HLPF.

While this analysis has used the VNR reports that countries provided as its basis of analysis, it is important to remember that VNRs are much more than just reports. In reading the VNR reports, it is clear that countries continue to value the VNR process and use it as more than just a means to an end. For Armenia, the VNR was an important participatory process that provided the government with an opportunity to assess its work in the scope of the SDGs and identify opportunities for achieving priorities going forward. According to the Armenia VNR report, an important lesson from the VNR process was that "the dialogue effort was critical for generating ideas for effective solutions, building confidence and establishing partnerships to coordinate and implement programs" (p. 16). The VNR also helped to localise the SDGs and raise awareness among stakeholders regarding their own and each other's roles in 2030 Agenda implementation. For Bhutan, the VNR process helped to engage stakeholders and create ownership in implementation. Ireland's VNR report noted that the process raised awareness of the SDGs across government. The VNR process in Lithuania contributed to strengthened cooperation between the government and non-governmental organisations. It also prompted the formulation of national priority areas for the country in 2030 Agenda implementation. According to Malta's VNR report, the VNR process was a learning opportunity and helped to create awareness and ownership over the SDGs, in particular for the public sector. In Spain, the VNR jumpstarted 2030 Agenda implementation and drove commitments from all stakeholders.

Fifty-one countries will present VNR reports to the 2019 HLPF, ten for the second time. This report has identified best practice in 2030 Agenda implementation and VNR reporting that can support countries to realise sustainable development for everyone and ensure effective reporting to the HLPF, contributing to its value as a forum for peer learning and exchange. As stated previously, 2019 is a crucial year for the 2030 Agenda, marking the end of the first four-year cycle of delivery and monitoring since 2015. At the HLPF in September 2019, Heads of State will assess overall progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In early 2020, the format and organisation of the HLPF will be reviewed. Whilst the structure of the review is not yet known, it will aim to "benefit from lessons learned in the first cycle of the forum as well as from other processes" (UNGA Resolution 70/299, para 21). This report has outlined a significant number of lessons from the 2018 VNR process and, in addition to the reports covering 2016 and 2017, civil society has developed detailed feedback and recommendations based on extensive engagement. As the structure of the review is agreed, it should include forums for meaningful participation by civil society and other stakeholders.

The review of the HLPF should examine, among other things, how VNR reporting can be improved following the recommendations outlined in this report, recognising that the VNRs serve as an important mechanism for national accountability for 2030 Agenda implementation and the basis for follow-up and review at the HLPF. More time and space should also be given to the presentation and discussion of the VNRs at HLPF meetings – this is essential if the original vision of the positive and constructive follow up and review mechanisms outlined in the 2030 Agenda are to become reality. Future HLPF meetings should include constructive forums for the meaningful participation of civil society, recognising their valuable contributions to SDG implementation and follow-up and review. Furthermore, future HLPF meetings should provide additional opportunities for exchange of views and inclusion of independent assessments, including reports from civil society and expert analysis, which would enable member states to benefit from a wider pool of knowledge.

We hope that this review provides useful insight and suggestions that will help shape and guide the process as countries return to New York in July and September to improve and refine their plans for the coming years of delivery. Many of the key recommendations from this report and its predecessors will provide a strong evidence base for improving the process of follow-up and review. It is our hope that the coming years can provide the critical step change towards even greater ambition for the future.