



## Progressing National SDGs Implementation - January 2019

### Key findings

Four years ago in 2015, world leaders adopted the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and its [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). 2019 marks the end of the first four-year cycle of review set out by the [UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#). Two meetings will be held to examine progress on the 2030 Agenda's implementation: a Ministerial level one in July under the Economic and Social Council; and a Heads of State and Government level meeting in September under the UN General Assembly. Fifty-one (51) countries will provide a progress update by presenting a [voluntary national review](#) (VNR) at the July HLPF, ten of whom are doing so for a second time. These VNRs are meant 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](#), provides essential insights that will be key to 2019 HLPF discussions and to the official review of the HLPF that is scheduled to take place during the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly (2019-2020). It can help guide improved SDG implementation and reporting. The authors have analysed all VNR reports submitted in 2018 to the HLPF and a sample of 2018 civil society reports. They have developed recommendations for improving implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the VNR process and reports, and accountability.

A number of key findings emerge:

#### **1) Majority of countries demonstrated some progress in implementation and reporting**

The majority of countries made progress incorporating the SDGs into national policies, developing institutional mechanisms for implementation, building partnerships and/or monitoring and evaluating progress. At least 70% included all elements of the Secretary-General's updated voluntary reporting guidelines in their reports (excluding leave no one behind, structural issues and annexes).

#### **2) More progress needed to establish key SDG building blocks**

Almost two thirds (or 65%) of countries reporting in 2018 have incorporated the SDGs into existing national development plans directly, 15% of which also provided a roadmap for getting there. However, country progress on establishing the building blocks for 2030 Agenda implementation - governance structures, institutional arrangements, policies and means of implementation - 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 practice.

#### **3) Stakeholder engagement needs further improvement, going beyond *ad hoc* measures**

In a positive step, 93% of countries reported that non-state actors were engaged in the VNR itself, up from 74% in 2017. The 2018 VNR reports reveal a significant increase in participation by non-state actors in formal governance mechanisms that drive and oversee 2030 Agenda implementation. However, for just over 30% of reporting countries in 2018, no information was provided on non-state actor engagement in governance mechanisms. Local and national governments should adopt an approach to stakeholder engagement around SDG implementation that is timely, open, transparent, informed and iterative.

#### 4) Little engagement in the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda

Only 35% of countries referred to the universality of the goals, 13% to human rights-based approaches and 7% to planetary boundaries. Among the 2018 VNR reports reviewed, 43% did not include an examination of the impact of domestic or foreign policies. Progress in these areas will be key to ensuring a sustainable approach to the 2030 Agenda and going beyond business as usual. Very few countries reported actively engaging in the more transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda, such as integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into implementation, nationalising implementation in line with local needs, and establishing effective mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and partnership.

#### 5) Focused efforts to leave no one behind still receive insufficient attention

Most countries (89%) provided some information on efforts to leave no one behind, up from 71% in 2017, suggesting an improvement in reporting in 2018. This is likely owing to the revised Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines. That said, only 35% gave a detailed account of focused efforts to leave no one behind. Countries need to examine the extent to which policies and programmes are addressing the needs of those left furthest behind first to deliver on this principle and ensure the 2030 Agenda is truly transformative.

#### 6) Member states still not making the most of VNRs

Reporting on best practices increased in 2018. There are still gaps in reporting on lessons learned or areas in which countries would benefit from hearing about other experiences and challenges in implementation. The provision of such information generates understanding of country needs, provides a basis for holding stakeholders accountable and assists in identifying best entry points for support. This gap undermines the VNR process and represents a missed opportunity for maximising the impact of HLPF discussions.

#### Key opportunities in 2019 and 2020

Governments and stakeholders should redouble their efforts over the next two years to address these gaps. After the July HLPF, the second HLPF meeting in September will be the first [summit](#) in a series of 2030 Agenda Heads of State and Government meetings due to occur every four years until 2030. It is meant to reconfirm political commitment to the 2030 Agenda, provide guidance on how to accelerate implementation and reinforce other high level events scheduled for September 2019, such as the [2019 Climate Summit](#) and the [High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development](#).

The two HLPF meetings in 2019 are political moments for reviewing both process and progress to date on SDG implementation. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a review of how the HLPF is meeting its mandate with respect to follow-up and review of SDG implementation is also being planned, most likely for early 2020. This review should be open and inclusive to all stakeholders, and should provide space for meaningful participation of civil society. Future HLPF meetings should provide additional opportunities for the exchange of views and inclusion of civil society reports and expert analysis.

In doing so, it is our hope that the coming years can support even greater achievement of our collective ambition for the future of our planet and our communities. This report, and its predecessors, provides a number of important recommendations to feed into the process.

