HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2022 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report

Prepared by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
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Acknowledgments

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Foreword

The 2022 HLPF provided political guidance for building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition to addressing the impact of the lingering pandemic, it explored the interrelated and compounded effects of the food, energy and financial crises, climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation and outlined steps that countries are taking in pursuit of a sustainable recovery. The HLPF stressed the need for transformational and action-oriented measures to regain lost ground and accelerate progress on the SDGs. It emphasized the centrality of SDG implementation, both to a lasting recovery and to a more crisis-resilient future and underscored the value of multilateralism and the critical importance of global solidarity in overcoming our shared challenges.

Forty-four countries presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of SDG implementation at the 2022 HLPF, 11 for the first time, bringing the total number of countries that have presented a VNR since 2016 to 187. It is heartening to know that, despite the many challenges they are facing, countries continued to prioritize their review of SDG implementation and were successful in delivery.

This Synthesis Report of the Voluntary National Reviews highlights key messages and ideas identified within the VNRs.

Reporting countries were open and candid in acknowledging their challenges, so that others could learn from their experiences. In many cases, reporting countries showed how COVID-19 adversely impacted progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They highlighted measures they have taken to strengthen health systems and extend services and coverage, especially to the most vulnerable. They also elaborated on efforts to strengthen social protection, bolster education and bridge the digital divide, and highlighted efforts to leverage technology for sustainable development.

There was clear acknowledgement of the disproportionate impacts of the crises on those already furthest behind, ranging from women, children and youth, to persons with disabilities, older persons, people in situations of conflict and migrants and refugees. Countries reported on measures to alleviate the situation, such as providing better safety nets, disbursing cash transfers or providing food and healthcare free of charge.

Financing also emerged as an area of acute concern, as reports revealed how the growing confluence of crises has added to pre-existing macroeconomic and financial difficulties, exposing and worsening existing vulnerabilities and creating new ones. Countries reported   steep declines in industrial activity,

high unemployment, elevated levels of poverty, increased inflation, capital flight and record public debt levels.

Countries also pointed again to the challenge of limited evidence, highlighting problems of data availability, data disaggregation and data collection. Despite this challenge, significant improvements have been made as over half of all the VNRs reports included a Statistical Annex.

Overall, the 2022 VNRs showed continued high commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. They presented a rich array of policies and measures, they raised important concerns and they shared critical lessons. We must learn from and draw on those practices and lessons as we seek to deliver the SDGs by 2030 through accelerated action, a reinvigorated multilateralism and international cooperation.

Mr. Li Junhua
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) is a **comprehensive exercise** that UN Member States are encouraged to undertake in their efforts to monitor and evaluate national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 2030 Agenda outlined the principles for the follow-up and review process. It stated that **regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels should be country-led and country-driven**, drawing on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities, and with support from national parliaments as well as other institutions.[1]

General Assembly Resolution 67/290 defined the format and organization of the HLPF, where progress towards the SDGs is reviewed annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly. Since 2016, the annual presentation of VNR reports by countries has become the centerpiece of the ministerial-level segment of the HLPF in July. I**n the seventh year of reporting, 187 of the 197 members of the Forum—95 per cent—have presented at least one VNR**.
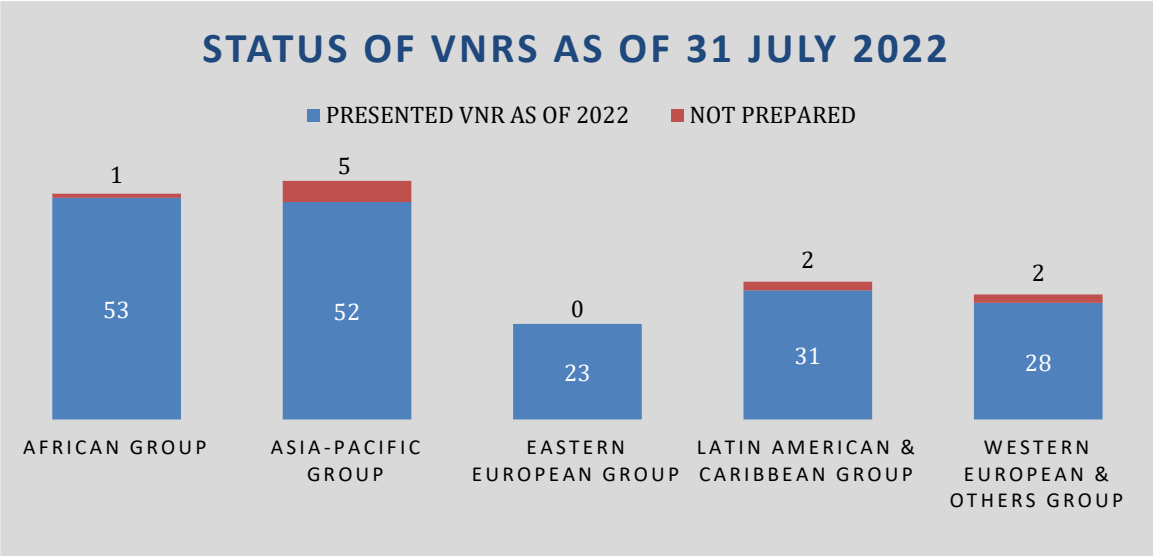
The collection of VNR reports produced each year provide detailed information and data on **how countries are measuring progress towards the 17 SDGs and their targets**. They identify collective challenges and involve the engaging stakeholders, undertaking initiatives to bridge development gaps, and providing recommendations for solutions through partnerships and multilateral cooperation.

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[1] A/RES/70/1: Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraphs 72-77.

In 2022, the VNR reports provide a detailed picture of how **recent global shocks have impacted some of the most developed and least developed countries from every region of the world**, as well as landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, middle-income countries, and countries in conflict or post-conflict situations.

As **the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect multiple spheres of economic and social development**, many VNRs describe setbacks that have eroded years of progress previously achieved in overcoming extreme poverty, food insecurity, and gender inequality. They report widespread environmental devastation due to the **worsening effects of climate change and accelerated biodiversity loss**. In addition, the **outbreak of multiple conflicts** has taken a toll in numerous countries, disrupting supply chains and access to energy, threatening food security, and creating new crises due to forced displacement and migration of millions of people.

Multiple countries have experienced negative impacts to their national welfare, as **COVID-19 exacerbated ongoing issues such as increased levels of poverty, unemployment, unsustainable debt, widening inequalities, and inflation.** Those most at risk in the economic and social fallout are often women and children, due to negative effects on households experiencing income reduction. The deterioration of in-person learning during the pandemic resulted in many countries experiencing issues with accessibility for vulnerable students, as well as lower enrolment and increased dropout rates, with a greater impact comparatively on adolescent girls. Some countries also reported a rise in gender-based violence and early marriage.

Making progress towards the SDGs in a strategic way has become more difficult. However, **countries have also reported on positive outcomes, as a result of increased mobilization of social and economic safety nets and other measures to meet these crises and ensure that no one is left behind**. Many have implemented policies for cash transfer programs, debt moratoriums for businesses, government stimulus packages, and national resilience plans to combat decreasing social and national welfare.

There are many other examples in the VNRs of how Governments have tried to ease the impact of COVID-19 to the greatest extent possible, including provision of medical aid and supplies throughout the pandemic. **Investment in domestic vaccine production was rolled out, vaccines were provided to refugees in country, and donations of vaccines were provided as humanitarian aid by this year's VNR countries.** Scientific support from multilateral organizations has been integrated to better improve response plans. Funding has been allocated to combat the negative effects of the pandemic and increase vaccine access and equity. Countries have also partnered with the private sector to consolidate resources to purchase vaccines, accelerated vaccinations as soon as vaccines were available, and set up social programs to provide free vaccines to all citizens.

The 2022 VNR synthesis report gives the reader a glimpse of how these 44 countries are **strengthening national institutions,** working with stakeholders to implement inclusive solutions to achieve the 2030 Agenda at local levels and developing policies for a recovery from the pandemic that is sustainable and resilient, and accelerates transformative actions to build back better, greener and bluer. **All VNRs report on national efforts to integrate the SDGs within national development plans,** and highlight the potential to strengthen progress, with many detailing comprehensive plans for the way forward.

Building on the data from previous VNRs is important for identifying areas for potential growth and where assistance is needed. The innovative platforms and digitization of collection databases developed during the pandemic have helped to scale-up technological literacy and usage, not only for the VNR but also for services such as alternative educational formats and other social support programmes. **Numerous examples of innovative initiatives are highlighted**, which can provide impetus to further strengthen partnerships, support data systems, and enhance sustainable financing.

All VNRs have made a concerted effort to include stakeholders in new and innovative ways, and to domesticate the SDGs in local communities. The use of national surveys and digital assessments has been effective for numerous countries. While awareness of the SDGs is steadily increasing, the VNRs also underscore that much more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding at all levels.

Actions to engage local municipalities and include more diverse sets of stakeholders have led to VNRs that encompass more in-depth reports of the state of national progress, not only from a top-level perspective but also in terms of scalability and feasibility of policy shifts toward more sustainable development practices. **Promotion of sub-national engagement has brought countries closer to multi-level governance** and aided policy coherence. Local partnering has led to regional seminars and proposals that open discussion on VNRs and identify priority areas for the implementation of SDGs.

It is evident that **the process of preparing a VNR helps create national hubs for peer learning, channeling knowledge and sharing information**, which can facilitate sustainable development and support acceleration of programmes that accelerate national actions and elevate local initiatives to achieve the SDGs into national development policies and plans. **The comparability of the VNR reports is improving,** as most countries in 2022 conducted their second review, and as a result these VNRs show progress and steps taken since the previous review to improve the process, close the gaps, and elaborate in a more detailed way their ongoing commitment to sustainable development.

Introduction

The VNR Synthesis Report provides an assessment of the 44 Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) presented at the 2022 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which was convened from 5 to 15 July under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The Forum was held in person for the first time since 2019, after the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic necessitated a shift to virtual and hybrid formats in 2020 and 2021. All 44 countries presented their VNR reports over the course of meeting, on 11 and 12 July and during the ministerial segment from 13 to 15 July.

Eleven countries presented their first VNR this year,[2] while 28 countries presented for the second time,[3] three for the third time,[4] and two for the fourth time.[5] Africa was well represented, with 21 countries from the region presenting their VNR along with nine countries from Europe, seven countries from Latin America and the Caribbean, and seven countries from Asia and the Pacific.

This year's VNRs collectively illustrate a renewed commitment to multilateralism as countries continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it has taken on the economy, supply chains, energy, food security and the health and well-being of people everywhere. The VNRs report on specific measures and actions to overcome the setbacks to progress in reducing poverty and hunger, ensuring humans rights, empowering women and girls, slowing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, combatting the devastating effects of climate change and achieving all SDGs. They illustrate how governments are working to organize and integrate institutions to realize the SDGs, engage with a wider range of stakeholder groups and development partners, and employ innovative data collection methods to guide national policy and decision making, to build back better and advance implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The VNR synthesis report identifies collective good practices in many specific areas and highlights important initiatives from all VNR reports. But it is necessarily selective rather than exhaustive. The examples included are illustrative, and their selection does not imply that the 2022 VNRs do not also contain many other equally valid and useful instances of best country practices. The reader is invited to explore the individual reports from 2022 in greater detail through the recently updated HLPF website (https://hlpf.un.org/home), which includes a database of countries who have presented their VNRs[6] and

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[2] Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Suriname, Tuvalu.

[3] Andorra, Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mali, Montenegro, Netherlands, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, United Arab Emirates.

[4] Argentina, Philippines, Switzerland.

[5] Togo, Uruguay.

[6] United Nations, "Countries who have presented their Voluntary National Reviews," High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: Countries. Available at https://hlpf.un.org/countries (accessed on 16 September 2022).

a wide range of information, resources, tools, and key documents such as the VNR handbook and the updated voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs at the HLPF.

Bringing SDGs into the national context: assessments and strategies

This section briefly examines how countries are addressing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the context of their broad societal objectives and the steps that are being taken to create ownership. It also outlines different approaches that countries pursue to tap into the interlinkages among the SDGs and build on the co-benefits of some policy actions, while minimizing trade-offs. The section further notes some approaches that countries are taking to incorporate the SDGs into national development plans and strategies.

National context

Member States outlined their approaches to domestication and national ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Countries shared the institutional frameworks and oversight for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their national context. In countries such as Greece, Jordan, Lesotho, or Equatorial Guinea the coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda sits at the highest political level, such as the Office of the President or Prime Minister. In other countries the coordination of the SDGs is under the oversight of a dedicated line ministry, such as ministries of finance, economy and planning. Several countries also indicated that national councils, coordination bodies or steering committees had been established to coordinate and provide oversight for SDG implementation (Argentina, Botswana, United Arab Emirates, El Salvador, Djibouti, Luxembourg, Equatorial Guinea). Countries also discussed the increasing role their parliaments are playing in providing oversight, legislation, resource mobilization, and championing of the SDGs (Philippines, Pakistan, Switzerland). Some also reported engagement with supreme audit institutions to assess the country's implementation and national adaption of the 2030 Agenda (Eritrea, Philippines).

Some countries highlighted how the VNR process provides an opportunity for governments to reinvigorate the national commitment to the 2030 Agenda and raise awareness among stakeholders at national and local levels (Philippines, Somalia, Pakistan); others noted that their VNRs were pertinent in relation to the Decade of Action for the SDGs and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic (El Salvador, Botswana). Countries shared innovative practices and digital solutions to support the coordination and implementation of the SDGs at national level (Philippines, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, Somalia). Switzerland's SDGital platform allowed for the gathering and spotlighting of sustainable development initiatives from various actors. Overall, most VNRs recognized that successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the engagement of a broad range of societal actors, and many also reported on initiatives taken by the private sector as well as by civil society actors (Kazakhstan, Jamaica, Philippines, Latvia).

The VNRs reflect increasing recognition that advocacy, sensitization, and awareness are an integral part of maintaining momentum and commitment to attainment of many SDG targets. Some countries have incorporated SDGs into school curriculums (Eswatini, Botswana, Ghana, Cameroon, Dominica). Latvia identified the role of cultural institutions, museums and libraries to promote the SDGs and provide

impetus for sustainable action. Countries also highlighted the importance of a whole-of-society approach to ensure ownership of the 2030 Agenda (Cameroon, Jamaica, Ghana, Philippines). In Suriname several youth focused initiatives were implemented to generate awareness around the SDGs, such as the SDG Voice Project in collaboration with the Netherlands and an SDG Youth Ambassadors programme, which included campaigns and activities for youth to promote the SDGs amongst their peers. A card game called SDG quartet was also developed in Suriname to get the youth more acquainted with the SDGs in a playful manner. The Philippines sought to foster a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to the SDG integration, through cross-sectoral SDG programs, activities and projects that were implemented at village, local and subnational level.

SDGs in national development plans

Many countries have noted that the 2030 Agenda has been mainstreamed or aligned to their national development plans and frameworks.[7] Some countries noted that they had adopted specific plans or legal instruments related to sustainable development. For example, in Luxembourg, the 2030 Agenda serves the framework for the country's third national sustainable development plan "Luxembourg 2030". Andorra adopted a National Strategic Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2019, and, in 2021, Switzerland adopted its 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy, each of which define government priority areas towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In Sri Lanka, a legal framework for the implementation of the SDGs was enacted by parliament in 2017 through the Sustainable Development Act No.19.

The SDGs have also become a mechanism for countries to align national priorities with complementary regional plans. For example, many African countries noted that their national development plans and monitoring frameworks had been aligned with both the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Eswatini, Cameroon, Djibouti, Ghana, Mali, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Cote D'Ivoire). Montenegro noted that the 2030 Agenda and the process of EU accession were highly complementary, as nearly two thirds of SDG targets are linked to EU policies.

Countries also indicated that tools and guidelines had been developed to assist in the integration of the SDGs within national strategic plans (Botswana, El Salvador, United Arab Emirates). Botswana noted that the country had developed SDG Planning Guidelines to facilitate the transition to a more structured and systematic mainstreaming of specific SDG targets in national and sector level plans. In national adoption of the SDGs, some countries also analyzed the degree of alignment of existing development planning documents with the SDGs, which was often done in collaboration with UNDP (São Tomé and Príncipe, Jamaica, Malawi, Mali, Togo). In Jamaica, the Rapid Impact Assessment (RIA) found that 91.3 per cent of the country's development agenda "Vision 2030 Jamaica" was aligned with the SDGs. Many countries reported that nationally prioritized SDGs had been determined based on a review of the SDGs and their associated targets within the national context (El Salvador, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, Lesotho, Kazakhstan, Uruguay, Switzerland); others took measures to map SDG targets onto existing national development plans and strategies and develop tools to ensure mainstreaming of the SDGs (United Arab Emirates, Botswana). The United Arab Emirates has embedded the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda

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[7] Cameroon, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Jordan, Ghana, Somalia, Philippines, Suriname, Senegal, Liberia, Togo.

implementation within a digital platform that also seeks to align and coordinate the government's efforts at a strategic level and monitor SDG progress. Dominica noted that the country's national planning and strategic documents assist in identifying key enablers and critical "accelerator points" for lagging SDGs, and enable policy coherence. Countries also reported on challenges to the implementation of the SDGs with regard to their national capacity, financing constraints, or other obstacles (Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Sudan and others).

Localization of SDGs and Voluntary Local Reviews

Member States outlined the importance of local ownership of the SDGs (Eswatini, Jamaica, Italy, Argentina). Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) are growing in popularity as countries are recognizing and incorporating the work done on the SDGs at the local government and municipal levels. Countries such as The Gambia, Greece, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands and Pakistan noted that local governments and municipalities in their countries are conducting VLRs and/or VSRs. Greece stated that the 13 regions and 325 municipalities have developed or implemented many actions directly related to the implementation of three dimensions of the sustainable development. The Netherlands highlighted the importance of an integrated approach at local and regional level especially on SDG 11, and a VSR has already been conducted in the country. Jordan also noted that there had been efforts to align the VNR with the VLR of the capital city Amman, to ensure complementarity and coherence as well as contribute to reporting on SDG 11.

The VNRs articulated various ways that governments have sought to engage different groups of stakeholders to localize the SDGs. Cameroon conducted sensitization initiatives for local elected officials and mayors to ensure local ownership of the SDGs and equip them to consider the cross-cutting dimensions of the SDGs in local development policies. It incorporated the SDGs into the methodological guide for municipal development plans. Jamaica conducted a range of "SDG ownership activities" and noted that the process of localization included broad stakeholder engagement to promote awareness and adoption of the SDGs among all sectors of society. However, some countries noted capacity constraints resulting in uneven integration of SDGs at state and local levels. In Sudan for example, the SDGs were integrated in the Khartoum State Plan for 2017-2030, but other states did not have the same level of integration of SDGs. Countries shared examples of mechanisms they used to coordinate local and subnational levels for SDG implementation, including Switzerland's establishment of the Cantonal Sustainable Development Network to facilitate joint coordination efforts between the federal government and cantons in sustainable development matters. Similarly, Argentina established the Federal SDG Network to deepen the exchange and learning of the provincial governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

To foster local ownership, Eswatini stated that the SDGs and sensitization materials have been translated into the local language of Siswati. The Netherlands VNR report features chapters drafted by the four counties in the kingdom, highlighting their unique conditions and challenges. Italy noted that the localization of the SDGs through local and regional engagement would be one the country's core strategies to implement the 2030 Agenda, and they included the VSR as an annex to the VNR report. Cote D'Ivoire noted that conducting regional consultations to produce local reports is part of the government's strategy to ensure ownership of the follow-up mechanism to the SDGs. In Argentina, Local

Sustainable Development Forums were held in three provinces, which allowed participation of a range of stakeholders and representatives.

Financing and budgets

The linkage and alignment of national budgets with the SDGs is key to the effective implementation of sustainable development policies and plans and improves overall policy coherence. Member States are increasingly linking budgets and budgeting procedures to the SDGs by mapping their budgets to the SDGs and measuring the contribution attributed to each one (Andorra, Argentina, Ethiopia, Ghana, Italy, Lesotho, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Uruguay). They are incorporating SDGs into the national budgeting process through the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (Ethiopia, Lesotho, Philippines); developing cross-government coordination mechanisms (Argentina, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan); implementing gender-responsive financing strategies and budgeting (Botswana, Cameroon, Grenada, Jordan, Liberia, Montenegro, Togo); and decentralizing budgeting for SDG implementation at the local level (Ethiopia, Sri Lanka). Practices such as zero-based budgeting, green budgeting, results-based budgeting and Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) are enabling more targeted and efficient allocation of government expenditure to achieve the SDGs (Belarus, Botswana, Djibouti, Gabon, Gambia, Greece, Jamaica, Malawi, Montenegro, Philippines).

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the fallout from the war in Ukraine, and the intensifying climate crisis, Member States are facing tighter financial conditions, which have strained budgetary resources for achieving the SDGs. To alleviate these pressures, Member States are advancing reforms related to innovative SDG-aligned financing instruments that increase access to capital (Gabon, Jamaica); enacting domestic revenue reforms, including SDG-aligned revenue mobilization strategies (Eswatini, Malawi); and adjusting the budget setting process and criteria to include SDG-related indicators (Dominica). INFFs are being used to develop appropriate and fit-for-purpose SDG financing strategies (Botswana).

Ultimately overcoming these challenges will require a holistic approach to resource mobilization and budgeting that considers domestic, external, and alternative sources of financing for the SDGs. Further integration of SDG budgeting principles, including climate finance and gender analysis, will need to be integrated into budgeting processes. INFFs can provide Member States with a clear assessment of possible policy interventions to finance sustainable development. It will be important to bring together monitoring systems at the country level for budget coding and tagging, monitoring the proceeds of thematic bond issuances, tracking private finance through SDG taxonomies, corporate SDG reporting and others in a harmonized way that enables tracking of finance and its impact across the financing landscape. The strengthening of institutional capacities in planning, programming, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation will also be critical in this endeavor.

Institutions for implementing the 2030 Agenda

The success of the 2030 Agenda will require sound institutional mechanisms to lead the coordination and facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. This chapter examines institutional arrangements, including mechanisms for localization of SDG implementation and the involvement of Parliaments. It highlights efforts to mobilize institutions around the SDGs and improve their functioning. While there are some commonalities in countries' institutional arrangements, the 2022 VNRs revealed a variety of national institutional arrangements. The preferred institutional arrangements for sustainable development in each country ultimately depends on the national context and are designed accordingly.

Mechanisms for decision-making and coordination on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Countries have adapted their existing institutional and coordination frameworks or established new ones in order to implement the SDGs. In some countries, SDG implementation is promoted and reviewed at the highest level of government.

Several countries, among them Cameroon and Dominica, reported that SDG implementation is overseen by a ministry. In Dominica, the Government's main institutional mechanism for overseeing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the Ministry of Planning, Economic Development, Climate Resilience, Sustainable Development and Renewable Energy. This Ministry has overall responsibility for national planning, coordination, and monitoring of policies and plans in relation to the SDGs. The Dominican Government has also established an SDG Technical Committee, tasked with implementing an SDGs communications and awareness raising campaign to bring greater awareness about the SDGs to the entire population. In Pakistan, under the chairmanship of Minister of Planning, a sub-committee of the National Economic Council on SDGs was established to strengthen the coordination mechanism and provide solutions to the SDG implementation problems.

In some countries responsibility for SDG coordination has been assigned to existing bodies. The Planning Institute of Jamaica is designated as the coordinating entity and National Focal Point for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs in Jamaica. The institute has also formally established SDGs Core Groups for monitoring of implementation of the SDGs and reporting. In Greece, the core mission of the General Secretariat of Coordination (GSCO) is to ensure the effective coherence and coordination of the whole Government work, including all public policies, which are closely related to the SDGs. A specific Working Group on the SDGs was set up within GSCO. The Inter-ministerial Coordination Network for the SDGs has been operating since 2016 and brings together representatives from all ministries, acting as focal points in charge of working on SDGs-related issues within their respective ministries and mainstreaming them in sectoral and horizontal public policies (see figure 3).

Figure 1: Institutional framework of SDG implementation in Greece
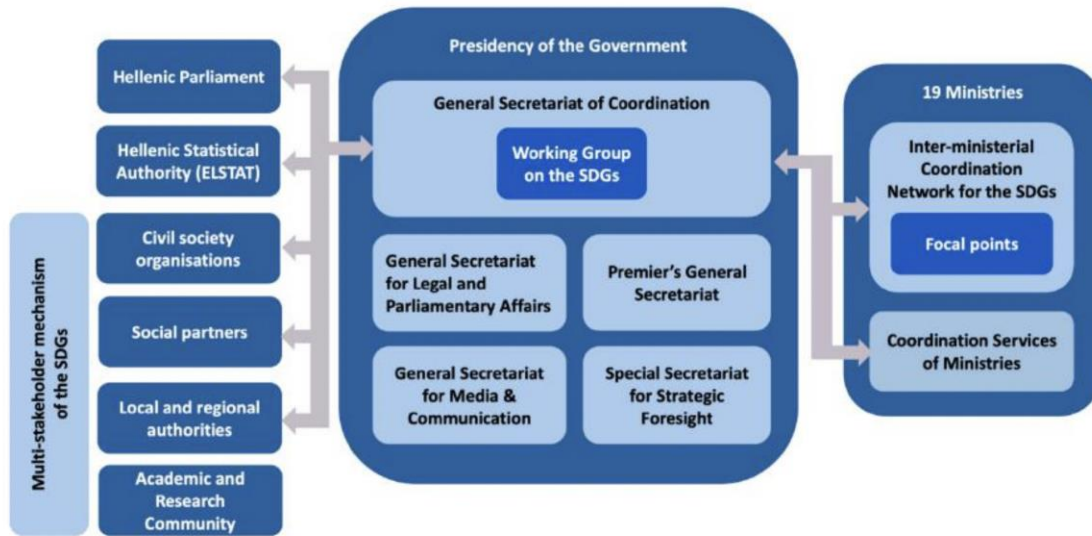
In the Philippines, the sub-committee on the Sustainable Development Goals was formed to aid in the advocacy, coordination, and implementation of the SDGs. It is composed of key government agencies and representatives from other relevant sectors. The sub-committee and its four Technical Working Groups led discussions on SDG progress indicators and provided direction for the Voluntary National Review process. Besides this, the sub-committee advises the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board on SDG-related matters. The Stakeholders' Chamber was also created, which serves as a coordination mechanism between government and non-government actors and is a venue for non-state actors to provide inputs and solutions for collaboration in the implementation of the SDGs (see below figure 1).

Figure 2: Institutional framework for SDGs implementation in the Philippines
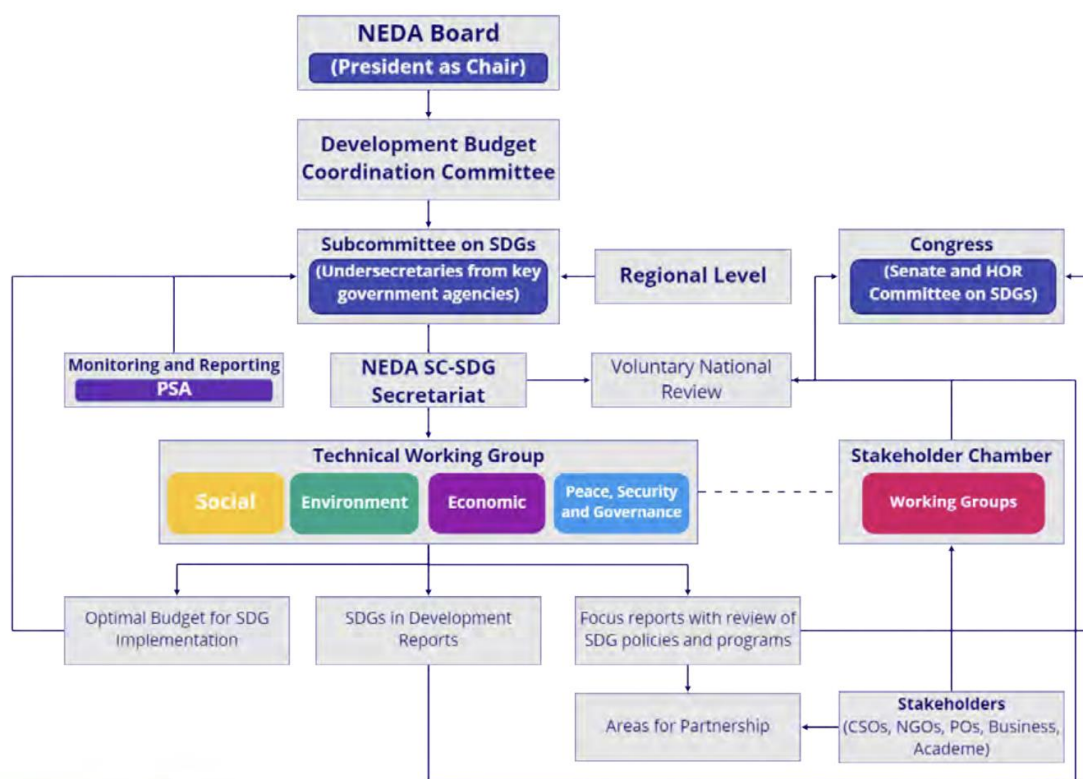
In view of the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda, a number of countries created inter-ministerial structures or inter-ministerial mechanisms as a way to facilitate integration and coherence for SDG implementation. These countries include Argentina, where the National Inter-institutional Commission for Implementation and Follow-up of the SDGs has been established.

Countries reported on SDG-related committees or similar institutions established under a selected ministry (Ghana, Sudan, Suriname, UAE). In Ghana, the High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC) is made up of 15 ministers and is chaired by the Minister for Planning, with the President's Special Advisor on SDGs as secretary. The Committee provides strategic direction for the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 to ensure a "whole-of-government" approach to implementation, by actively engaging all parts of government in a cross-sectoral and coordinated manner. In Sudan, a High National Committee chaired by Minister of Finance and Economic Planning is tasked with ensuring the integration of the SDGs into the government plans and budgets. The Poverty Reduction and SDGs Unit coordinates the SDGs, ensures the streamlining of the SDGs in government strategies and plans, raises awareness for the SDGs and PRSP, and reports on progress made.

In Suriname, under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation, the National SDG committee (with representatives of all line ministries, the

Parliament, the National Planning Office Suriname, and the General Bureau of Statistics) has been established to facilitate further promotion and advancement the SDGs. The Committee is a crucial mechanism for the government to oversee efforts towards SDG coherence and to give direction to harmonize sector strategies, policies and programmes with the SDGs.

In the United Arab Emirates, the National Committee on the SDGs was established with the aim to coordinate the implementation of the SDGs across the country. It is chaired by the Minister of State for International Cooperation. The Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre (FCSC) serves as Secretariat to the Committee and oversees reporting and monitoring progress annually. The committee facilitates the alignment of the SDGs with government plans and undertakes regular follow-ups and progress reviews on implementation. The National Committee has a mandate to engage with relevant local and international stakeholders to promote the SDGs and align them with the United Arab Emirates Vision 2021.

There are also examples of dedicated, cross-sectoral councils and similar institutional arrangements. In Sri Lanka, the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka (SDCSL) has been established as the national focal point for coordination, facilitation, monitoring, and reporting on the SDG implementation. Accordingly, the subject area on "Sustainable Development" has transitioned from being under a dedicated ministry, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife in 2015 to the SDCSL. Critical issues that have been identified as retarding acceleration towards SDGs are the siloed approach to policy making and the institutional fragmentation that impede mainstreaming and ownership of the SDGs across all sectors. However, the Sustainable Development Council, as the nodal government agency for SDG facilitation, coordination and monitoring, is constrained by limitations in legal authority, financial and human resources in providing policy inputs, facilitation and oversight of cross-sectoral action.

Equatorial Guinea created the National Commission for Coordination of the Sustainable Development Goals, whose purpose is to ensure adequate planning, implementation and monitoring of prioritized SDGs. One of the Commission's functions is adopting the national framework of indicators for monitoring of the SDGs. The members of the Commission include the Prime Minister, ministers of various ministries, a Senate representative and a representative of civil society.

In Aruba, the SDG Commission aims to strengthen the gaps in the institutional coordination mechanism towards achieving improved policy coordination, strengthening partnerships for SDG implementation, better policy integration and more effective implementation (see figure 2).

Figure 3: Institutional framework for SDG implementation in Aruba
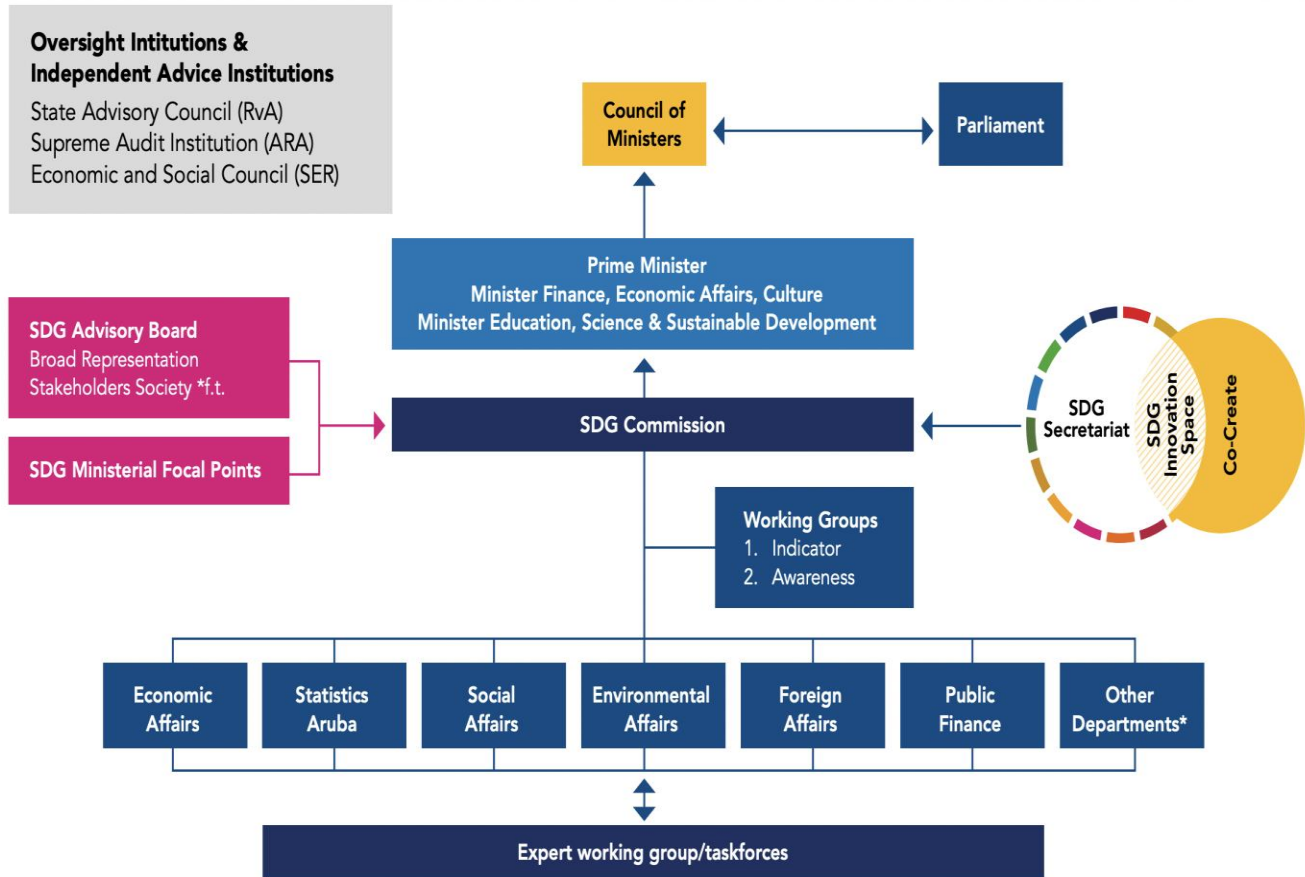
Ministries working in silos with separate budgets and plans can be a challenge in some countries, making it difficult to act coherently and to effectively monitor and evaluate government progress. With this challenge in mind, to support consistent policymaking and to meet the need for coordination and interconnection and to improve knowledge-sharing, the Federal Council of Switzerland created a new organizational structure within the Federal Administration to coherently implement the 2030 Agenda. Strategic coordination and management fell to the newly convened 2030 Agenda Steering Committee. It is composed of the most relevant federal government agencies from all seven departments, plus the Federal Chancellery, all represented at the most senior management level. The 2030 Agenda Steering Committee furthers the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in sectoral policies and also fulfills a strategic, cross-sectoral role.

In some countries such as Botswana, the SDGs institutional mechanism has greatly evolved. In 2022, the Joint National Steering Committee on SDGs was created to enhance partnerships and ensure scaled up and more effective international support for the SDGs (see figure 4).

Figure 4: The evolution of Botswana's SDGs institutional mechanism
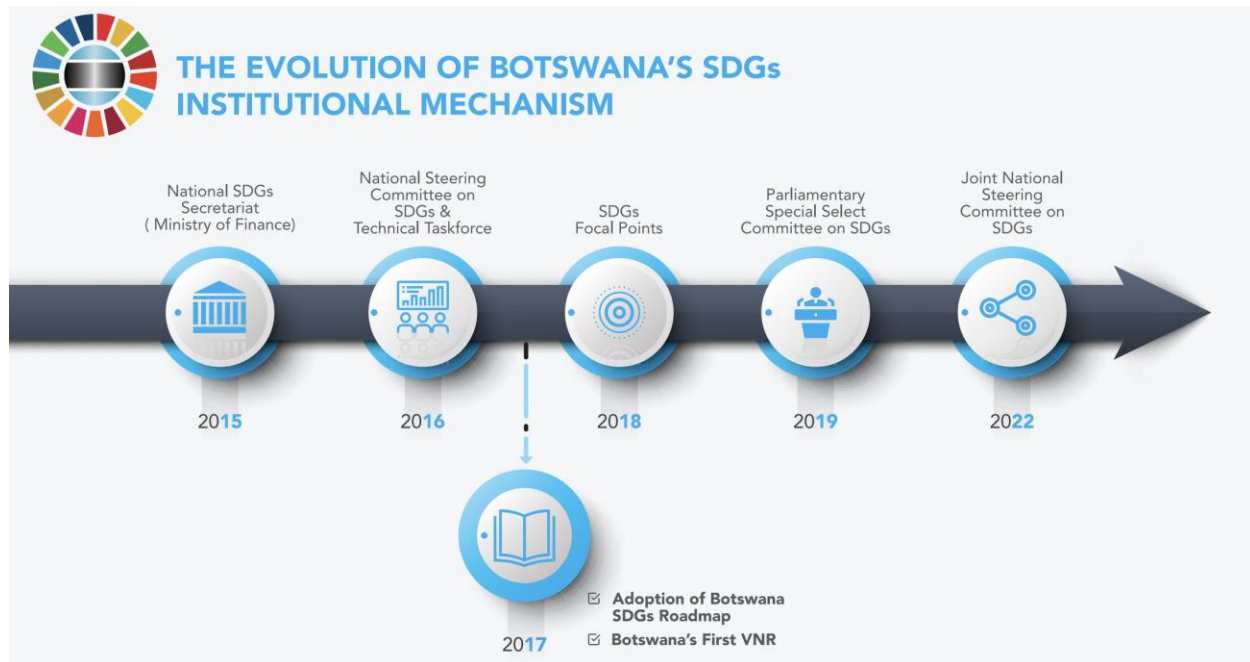
Coordinating mechanisms at multiple levels of government, including local government

While it is important for national governments to set country-level goals and targets and the mandates to support them, subnational and local governments are often responsible for implementation on the ground. For this reason, any coordination council or committee that is established and tasked with developing a national vision and strategy for the SDGs should include all levels of government—national, subnational and local. Such a council or commission must provide the necessary vehicle for vertical coordination, establishing vertical relationships between multi-stakeholder bodies and governments at national, subnational and local levels.

One of such coordinating mechanism is Philippines' regional Sub-committee on the Sustainable Development Goals (RSC-SDGs). To enable the effective implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, the special RSC-SDGs were created to be a responsive, participative, and accountable institutional mechanism at the local level, which aligns with the national government. The localization of the SDGs is seen as a vital prerequisite to achieving the sustainable development agenda, and the Philippines has made strides in localizing the SDGs**.**

In Italy, since 2018, the Ministry for Ecological Transition has established a space for dialogue on vertical coherence and on financial support and promoted sustainability agreements for enabling 2030 Agenda implementation in Regions, Autonomous Provinces and Metropolitan Cities.

However, VNR reports also identify the challenges. For example, Sri Lanka's VNR notes that despite formulating higher-level policies that align with SDG targets, they have not yet adequately cascaded towards sub-national and local levels resulting in an uncoordinated approach to SDG implementation. This highlights the imminent need for clear policy directions that provides mechanisms for ministries, sub-national and local government authorities to take ownership over planning, implementation and monitoring for SDGs.

Involvement of Parliaments

The role of parliaments is critical for SDG implementation through their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions. Parliaments can also make a significant contribution to ensuring that no one is left behind. They can directly enable inclusive outcomes that further the common good. This entails examining how inclusive they are in terms of their representation of all segments of society, particularly of marginalized groups, and whether they take into account the interests, needs and views of these groups when adopting legislation.

In Switzerland, November 2021 saw the establishment in the Federal Assembly of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 parliamentary group. All parliamentary parties are represented in the group. The group seeks integrated, partnership-based and cross-party solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Parliament of Aruba established an SDG Parliamentary Committee starting in 2018, in line with this, the SDG Commission reported to the Parliament on progress of the SDG implementation. In Pakistan, for effective legislations on SDGs implementation 20 sub-groups of parliamentary task forces on SDGs are formed at the National parliament.

In Botswana, a Parliamentary Special Select Committee on SDGs was established in 2019 to provide oversight, ensure resource mobilization, and champion SDGs in parliamentary and other strategic platforms. Additionally, the committee acts as a strategic point for advocating for SDG implementation and integration in policy and legislative developments. The Parliament of Jamaica designated the Internal and External Affairs Committee to consider all matters related to SDG implementation.

Leaving No One Behind

The principle of leaving no one behind (LNOB) guides the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which states that reaching those who are furthest behind is essential to achieving the SDGs. While the definition and identification of groups at risk of being left behind varies by country, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, children, youth, women, persons living in poverty and especially extreme poverty, and LGBTIQ persons are commonly highlighted as being most vulnerable.

Awareness and action has grown with the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected many vulnerable groups. Most VNRs this year document how governments are mainstreaming their commitment to LNOB into national plans and policies.

Addressing geographical inequalities

Many countries provided relief aid to the most vulnerable groups in the form of cash, emergency employment and business grants during and after the pandemic. In Philippines, the targeted policies led to a 5.5 per cent average increase in the income of families from bottom eight deciles during the first trimester of 2021 since 2018. The Ghana CARES programme supported households with free electricity, food, and water in the early period of the pandemic. The PATH programme in Jamaica has been providing cash transfers to many vulnerable individuals as well as business sectors to boost business. Social protection programmes (many covered under SDG 1) have been key in reducing geographical inequalities.

Lesotho and Pakistan have invested in developing telecommunication infrastructure to extend mobile communication to remote areas, which is a significant enabler for many interventions. Eritrea's renewable energy project has been exemplary. The project, worth a total of €11.76 million, provides uninterrupted solar-powered energy to two towns, Areza and Maidma, along with 33 surrounding villages, reaching about 7,000 households and more than 45,000 people. Additionally, 12 schools and seven health institutions, along with hundreds of small enterprises, offices, and organizations, are connected to the 3-megawatt capacity solar photovoltaic mini-grids. Eswatini has also reported an increase in electricity access.

Several countries have reported improvement in their municipality structures, which is enabling them to improve local outreach and incorporate development projects equitably. Guinea-Bissau has created a strategy to encourage more smallholder women farmers to diversify agriculture. Togo, Gambia and Senegal have created a community development strategy to ensure equitable distribution of resources to all social strata and ensure food and health security along with digital access. There has been focus on achieving robustness, keeping in perspectives future pandemics. Liberia and Jordan, along with many others, have improved their water and sanitation structures to provide clean water and toilet access to remote areas.

Many countries are working to improve their legal frameworks and ensure justice for all groups of society, especially for women and for communities situated in remote rural areas that are in need of social assistance. Malawi identified prisoners and street kids as two additional groups whose input should be incorporated into SDG implementation. Kazakhstan reported that many women were excluded from technical and vocational education in rural areas because the training was agriculture-focused and did not align with the demand for vocational training among women. There are still countries where some geographical areas are disproportionately affected by climate disasters and have a history of conflict. These areas need to be addressed in upcoming discussions.

Hearing everyone's voices

Many countries[8] set up sub-committees and leveraged their local municipalities to gain input on the discussions for the VNR report, to increase awareness of SDG indicators, and to disseminate the VNR reports. They have aligned their national development plans, employment plans, and other strategies to be inclusive to several groups in society, with county-wide measures taken to ensure the process engaged youth, women, elderly, poor, and people with disabilities.

The process of creating priority areas in the SDGs has been a bottom-up process, including voices from multiple groups and regions in many countries.[9] These countries went beyond creating an inclusive national plan and conducting multi stakeholder consultations to conduct seminars, prepare questionnaires, and conferences, and fairs to actively hear voices from every area and group and build input from all those messages.

Some countries took distinctive steps for increased accessibility and coverage. Philippines made sure that all SDG-related documentation and was translated into regional languages to improve accessibility. Sri Lanka structured the discussions in virtual and in-person platforms, additionally also ensuring ethnic and religious diversity to ensure no group is left behind. Cameroon, along with other groups, paid special emphasis on indigenous populations such as Baka and Bororo. Djibouti and El Salvador ensured the voices of refugees and migrants was heard. Italy made efforts to ensure that all communication was disseminated across various platforms and mediums to ensure it reaches all regions and gets maximum coverage.

Latvia has leveraged its museums and libraries to promote culture as a space for conversation and exploration. Eritrea has extended many laws to prohibit discrimination, exclusion, and restriction based on disability, ethnicity, color, religion, socio-economic, status, language, opinion, gender, or other similar distinctions, and made it punishable by law.

Among some challenges, Senegal reported weak technical and financial supported available for the participation of civil society and other outreach efforts. Cote d Ivoire reported the mobilization of all stakeholders as a challenge given limited resources.

Role of non-state actors

Most countries[10] have established councils or committees to create systems that include multiple stakeholders, who are consulted on all SDG-related planning, as well as in the preparation of the VNR report. These committees strive to ensure that planning is interrelated and there is minimum duplication. The non-state actors generally include NGOs, youth, indigenous peoples, workers and trade

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[8] Philippines, Lesotho, Liberia, Somalia, Suriname, Switzerland, Andorra, Argentina, El Salvador, Eswatini, Greece, Jamaica.

[9] Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Togo, Luxembourg, Gambia, Andorra, Botswana, Cameroon, Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Cote d Ivoire.

[10] Liberia, Philippines, Malawi, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Suriname, Tuvalu, United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Uruguay, Senegal, Andorra, Cameroon, Argentina, Belarus, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, Grenada, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan.

unions, the scientific community, academia, business and industry, and state and municipal officials. Financing and technical partners also played a key role as non-state actors in almost every country; these partners are significant enablers for the development process in every area.

The Netherlands has engaged a total of 1200 prominent civil society organizations. Somalia has incorporated 200 different types of stakeholders. Sri Lanka engaged 700 stakeholders, including international development partners and volunteers. Lesotho adopted both a qualitative and a quantitative approach to collect information on initiatives from a wide array of documents. Cameroon involved the heads of Decentralized Territorial Communities in its consultative process. Argentina and United Arab Emirates engaged in inter-sectoral action to enhance the coordination and implementation of complex tasks.

Among the challenges, Lesotho identified the need to further formalize the process of consultations. Sri Lanka noted that the ownership and authority of the SDGs at central, provincial, and local government level has also been challenged by a series of legislative and administrative decisions, which have concentrated significant power over policy decisions and implementation with the executive presidency. Eswatini noted that some stakeholders are still not fully conversant with the issues around the SDGs, and Kazakhstan identified public input and processing of input as a challenge due to bureaucracy and administrative obstacles.

Need for disaggregated data

Almost every VNR country reporting this year has a national statistics entity that collects household-level data. Some countries[11] reported on their activities in collecting, monitoring and tracking specific data for the SDGs, and many have created systems for data collection, analysis, and reporting used for SDG purposes only. They engage in usage of disaggregated data to provide an objectively measurable picture of the reported SDGs indicators in closed form and quantitative dimensions with a specific focus on the country's demographic, socioeconomic, and other important characteristics needed to demonstrate progress made towards the achievement of the SDGs at both national and sub-national levels.

Pakistan has used multiple data platforms to gain insights in specific areas; for example, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) geo-tagged every out of school child, and the data allows identification of households to help address the problem. The government of Punjab in Pakistan has also been undertaking initiatives to fill identified data gaps on child labor and home-based and domestic workers.

Somalia reported on its legislation to make data availability transparent and accessible, establishing the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics (SNBS) as an autonomous institution mandated to conduct the collection, compilation, coordination, analysis, evaluation, and dissemination of all national statistical information. In United Arab Emirates, the SDG Adaa System (Performance Monitor System) aims to achieve data transparency and efficiency.

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[11] Philippines, Malawi, Lesotho, Switzerland, Uruguay, Togo, Cameroon, Dominica, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Montenegro, São Tomé and Príncipe.

There are a variety of challenges to be overcome to improve the data system. The Botswana Domesticated Indicator Framework (DIF) revealed that only 34.8 per cent of indicators could be measured, which highlighted the need for a "data revolution". The islands of Netherlands noted that disaggregated data is not available at the micro level, making it unclear how foreign direct investment and local private investment contributes to innovative projects that promote sustainability. In Pakistan, duplication of surveys with different frequencies is very common. In Sudan, inadequate funding for statistical work and limited technical capacity has gravely restricted the production of timely and reliable data. In Suriname, the VNR process exposed the vital role of a robust monitoring mechanism and the need for institutional strengthening to minimize the data gaps. In Senegal, Gambia, and Equatorial Guinea, the main constraint encountered during the process is the non-availability of certain data, despite the completion of some key statistical surveys, and the lack of funding to carry out the monitoring activities for the implementation of the SDGs. In El Salvador, the absence of a population and housing census has left the country without its main statistical tool for the purposes of planning processes and monitoring of development, and for the elaboration of public policies based on interventions with high impact on the population.

Upholding the principle in international development cooperation

Luxembourg has notably made commitments to maintain an official development assistance (ODA) target of 1 per cent of its income gross national (GNI), with a focus on least developed countries, and continues to provide untied ODA in the form of grants, supplemented by international climate financing and the reception of refugees in Luxembourg. Belarus has provided leadership to the establishment of a United Nations global partnership to combat human trafficking.

Latvia has nearly tripled their bilateral development cooperation budget, opening up opportunities for cooperation with new regions such as Africa. The United Arab Emirates has been collaborating with different governments through the United Arab Emirates government exchange program with Jordan, Senegal, Iraq and Uzbekistan to enable knowledge exchange and the acceleration of innovative solutions to overcome challenges in their countries.

Kazakhstan highlighted the launch of the regional SDG Platform for Central Asian countries, whose aim is to work with governments and civil society in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to achieve the SDGs, integrating country-level efforts regionally through its SDGs monitoring and financing process.

Philippines participated in a VNR twinning program with an informal peer learning arrangement with Tuvalu. Sri Lanka and Pakistan also participated in a twinning program introduced by ESCAP as one of the South-South cooperation mechanisms to provide peer support for the preparation of VNRs and the SDGs implementation process.

Measures targeted at specific groups

Children

Many countries emphasized the need to ensure that children are not left behind through education, health, food and nutrition, and sustained support. In Greece, the strategy for social inclusion and the fight against poverty and the first National Action Plan for the protection of Children's Rights (2021) commit to reducing child poverty and guaranteeing every child access to free health services, education, childcare, housing, and adequate food. Mali and Eritrea both provide school meals throughout the country to improve child health. Mali has set up canteens in public schools to support efforts to that ensure that children attend school and can improve their health. Educational systems have been dramatically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a large increase in the number of children out of school, and many countries have taken action ensure enrolment. El Salvador saw a 10.9 per cent increase in access to primary education, and a 7.7 per cent increase in secondary education between 2019 and 2021. Luxembourg's "Staark Kanner" (Strong Children) project aims to promote social inclusion through education and integration into community life.

Youth

Lack of quality education, mismatch between education and industry, and limited access to start-up capital are often cited as reasons for youth employment. Several countries addressed youth unemployment and implemented corresponding strategies. Malawi's Jobs for Youth project aims to empower youth economically to increase their employability for decent work and sustainable entrepreneurship. In Sudan, where youth make up over 65 per cent of the population, the Government addressed youth employment in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) 2021-2023, with plans to increase financial inclusion and promote a strong private sector to create more jobs. To provide young persons who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) with opportunities, the Government of Latvia cooperated with the International Youth Program agency and customized activities to meet the specific needs and interests of individuals. In Switzerland, legislation such as the Act on the Promotion of Extracurricular Youth Welfare (KJFG) does a great deal to help young people who face multiple problems to join the labor market.

Andorra's Law on the Organization of the Andorran Education System ensures the continuity of youth education and expands opportunity for youth with a view to lifelong learning. The Netherlands aims to raise young people's awareness and knowledge of the SDGs by introducing a generational assessment and appointing a Climate Authority to allow youth to advise parliament on existing issues. Gabon undertook initiatives such as the "UN Jeune UN Metier", and National Youth Strategy (2021) to include the most vulnerable populations.

Women and Girls

Many countries noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had further undermined women's empowerment and exacerbated existing specific social and gender inequalities. For example, Cameroon highlighted that mental health in women (51.3 per cent) is more affected by anxiety-related stress associated with fear

of contracting COVID-19 than in men (41.4 per cent). Botswana reflected the growing multidimensional inequalities that women face due to livelihood disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries provided examples of policies, regulations and laws put in place to alleviate these problems. Andorra provides free legal aid to women victims of gender-based violence, pursuant to the Women Protection and Legal Aid Act in March 2021. In the same year, the Liberian government approved a Legal Aid Policy to help marginalized women gain access to justice. A three-day Women's Convention held in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2019 resulted in agreement on a number of actions to achieve gender equality, which have been codified in a single document: the Somali Women's Charter.

Partial lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly increased the risk of violence for women and girls. Several countries, including Ghana and Latvia, noted the increase in gender-based violence. The implementation of legislative amendments on crime prevention in Belarus has expanded the capacity of crime prevention agents to provide assistance to victims of violence. The proportion of organizations dealing with sexual violence in El Salvador increased from 35 per cent in 2015 to 63 per cent in 2020, promoting justice and providing survivors with support. The Philippines has established online reporting platforms to ensure that women survivors have access to services and assistance in their local communities.

Some countries have reported progress in the empowerment of women. In Dominica, 34 per cent of parliamentarians and 61 per cent of senior posts in public services are women, which is well above the global average. The proportion of Ethiopia's female ministerial representatives rose from around 13 per cent to 50 per cent in 2018, but fell back to 36 per cent in 2021, given the reduced economic opportunities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Gambia faces the same challenge. The proportion of women in parliament fell from 10.3 per cent in 2020 to 8.6 per cent in 2022. The wage gap between men and women still exists in Belarus, even though the proportion of women in leadership positions is about 50 per cent. What's more, a significant proportion of Pakistan women are engaged in unpaid work, which are non-market unpaid activities carried out in the home.

Migrants

Most countries report the difficult situation of refugees working in the grey economy and unregulated conditions, combined with the precarious legal status of their countries. Djibouti enacted the law on the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in 2017, integrating the social economy of refugees into the national system. At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, Djibouti made additional commitments to include refugees in its 2020-2024 national development plan. At the end of 2018, Kazakhstan was one of the countries that voted in favor of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Legal Migration to implement its provisions, simplify the visa system, issue the entry and registration of visiting foreign citizens, and modernize visa and migration portals.

Access to education for children of migrants and refugees is supported, and Greece and Jordan continued to provide refugees with access to care and support, including health care. Jordan has been working to encourage Syrian children to return to school, help Syrian students enter the labor market, and has also taken measures to facilitate the acceptance and registration of Syrian students into higher

education. Andorra has introduced several legislative changes to its legal framework to bring criminal legislation into line with the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Persons and to protect victims. In particular, the bill amended the Qualified Immigration Act to provide welfare and assistance to victims to enable them to recover physically, psychologically and socially. Sri Lanka addressed the issue of harassment and exploitation faced by migrants at work by strengthening policies targeting the migration of low-skilled female labor and addressing other employment opportunities and the upgrading of women's skills.

Persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities are mentioned in most VNRs, and many countries have adopted measures targeting persons with disabilities, including programs, laws, national policies, and strategies aimed at removing barriers. Policies and strategies address both the provision of social services to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in society and the legal framework to combat discrimination against them (Belarus, El Salvador, Eritrea, Eswatini, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Sudan).

Many reviews highlighted actions to support inclusive education. In order to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to education and vocational training at all levels, Greece has established an online platform for persons with disabilities, accessible to persons with visual and hearing impairments and physical disabilities. Jordan had reviewed and adopted legislation relating to the employment of persons with disabilities, including a ten-year strategy for inclusive education and a national plan that includes universities where they are exempt from paying tuition. Lesotho and Equatorial Guinea provide access to inclusive education for children and adolescents with disabilities. Sri Lanka has 25 schools for students with severe disabilities who are unable to adapt to mainstream class conditions.

Governments have also made efforts to increase the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Gabon has carried out actions through the establishment of institutions specializing in the care and training of people with disabilities such as NDOSSI (children with Down Syndrome) and AKOMGHA (autistic children). In Latvia, the transition from institutional long-term care to community-based services for people with mental disabilities was initiated. In addition, families with children with disabilities receive fare discounts on public transport.

Older persons

The situation of the elderly is often examined in greater detail when reviewing social protection systems, particularly pensions. In Montenegro, income shortfalls force 73 per cent of the population over 65 to work in the informal economy, while only 52.3 per cent of the elderly receive any form of pension. The partial reviews proposed new measures in response to recent pension policy reforms. The Health Service of Andorra has launched the "Healthy Ageing" service to assess the intrinsic abilities and bodies of older people and to reverse the vulnerability of people over 65 in order to prevent the loss of independence, and delay dependency of older people. In Jamaica, NIS pensioners and clients of the new Social Pensions Programme received additional cash grants in December 2021 in the face of the enormous challenges

posed by COVID-19. The Lesotho government made significant progress in supporting older persons by providing old-age pensions to citizens over 70.

VNRs reported on the promotion of employment for older workers, long-term care, health care, age-based discrimination, nutrition, use of public spaces and digital services. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kazakhstan adopted a comprehensive plan to restore economic growth, especially assistance and support from socially vulnerable groups. The program has now provided assistance to more than 12.588 million people living in hardship, including elderly people who live alone. The United Arab Emirates implements the National Policy for Senior Citizens, which aims to improve the quality of social services and well-being of older persons over 60, including health care, community outreach, civic engagement, infrastructure and transportation, and financial stability, with nearly 3,600 beneficiaries in 2021.

Indigenous peoples

Several VNRs pointed to efforts to improve the status of indigenous peoples. Argentina noted the importance of the education of indigenous children, and provided education and vocational training for vulnerable indigenous children to ensure equal access to education for all. Suriname organized workshops for primary and secondary students, including from indigenous and tribal communities, and cooperated with the UN system to provide funding through the UN-SDG Fund to ensure conditions for the fundamental labor rights of indigenous peoples and propose concrete solutions to support the children of indigenous and tribal peoples.

Many VNRs highlighted the importance of traditional knowledge and access to genetic resources and benefit sharing for indigenous peoples, as established by the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol. Argentina and Uruguay both reported on measures to strengthen the capacity of indigenous peoples to contribute to the implementation of the Nagoya Protocol. Dominica has implemented the Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by improving access to markets and services for indigenous industries and ensuring sustainable incomes, and has supported mainstreaming the Kalinago Development Plan to involve indigenous peoples in national planning.

Some regions of the Philippines have developed technical working groups that specifically target indigenous peoples' concerns, including watersheds, infrastructure, and streamlining of the SDGs at the local level; the "Program Classhome" was developed as a response to poor living conditions of indigenous peoples. Argentina is addressing disparities to ensure indigenous peoples' access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Malawi has integrated indigenous knowledge into early warning systems for efficient dissemination of weather updates.

LGBTIQ

Countries reported new legislation or initiatives aimed at prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and highlighted their contribution to the LGBTIQ community. Andorra, Argentina, Greece, Montenegro, and Netherlands all reported updates to their laws or strategies for LGBTIQ rights. In its 2018 Human Rights Report, São Tomé and Príncipe noted protections

for LGBTIQ people that were not provided for in the law. Guinea-Bissau provided health care for the LGBTIQ group, and Grenada plans to develop a sensitization program for the LGBTIQ community to raise awareness.

Andorra's White Paper on Equality (Le Livre blanc sur l'égalité) promotes genuine inclusion and non-discrimination based on gender identity, sexual and emotional orientation. Argentina reformed national legislation to give LGBTIQ women equal rights to economic resources, ownership and control of land and other types of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources. Greece promulgated the National Strategy for LGBTIQ Equality in 2021, which aimed to reduce inequality, prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and strengthen social inclusion. Montenegro increased LGBTIQ protection in 2020 by passing the Law on Registered Partnerships of Same-Sex Couples.

Countries in special situations

Out of the 44 countries presenting VNRs this year, 27 of these are considered to be countries in special situations, falling into at least one of the following categories: least developed countries (LDC), landlocked developing countries (LLDC), small island developing States (SIDS), African countries, or countries in conflict or post-conflict situations. LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are characterized by specific economic, geographic, or political vulnerabilities and challenges that require targeted actions to support their economic progress, build capacity, and enable development in a sustainable and resilient way.

This group of 27 VNR countries in special situations in 2022 includes 15 LDCs,[12] seven LLDCs,[13] and seven SIDS.[14] Among these, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, and Mali are currently categorized as both LDCs and LLDCs, while Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Tuvalu are considered both LDCs and SIDS. Eleven of these 27 prepared a VNR for the first time,[15] while 15 conducted their second VNR, and one country (Togo) undertook the VNR exercise for the fourth time. Jamaica was the only SIDS that presented its VNR for the second time in 2022. Three additional islands that are members of the Regional Commissions (Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten) also prepared reports, which are found within the VNR of the Netherlands.

Among the group of 21 African VNRs prepared this year, 16 are from countries currently categorized as LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS or a combination thereof: all 15 of the LDCs reporting this year are from Africa, as well as six of the seven LLDCs (with the exception of Kazakhstan), and three of the six SIDS. A number of African countries reporting this year are also considered to be countries in conflict or post-conflict situations (Cameroon, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mali, Somalia, and Sudan).

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[12] Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu.

[13] Botswana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali.

[14] Dominica, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Jamaica, São Tomé and Príncipe, Suriname, Tuvalu.

[15] Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Suriname, and Tuvalu.

There are many examples of progress in this year's VNRs that demonstrate how LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are committed to transforming their unique challenges into opportunities to boost implementation of the 2030 Agenda, alongside efforts to align actions with the Doha Programme of Action for LDCs, the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs, the S.A.M.O.A Pathway, and Africa's Agenda 2063. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the need for enhanced means of implementation to allow these countries to spearhead innovative solutions, accelerate transformative sustainable development at scale and build back better, greener and bluer. The need to further strengthen partnerships, support data systems, and enhance sustainable financing was widely reported in the 2022 VNRs.

However, financing for development in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS remains a challenge, with increasing debt burdens and limited fiscal space to support key development priorities. Some VNRs from developed countries reported on their activities to provide assistance and support to countries in special situations. For example, the United Arab Emirates noted that its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has expanded its geographical aid to more than 170 countries, including 46 least developed countries and low- and middle-income countries.

For countries in special situations there is also a concerted effort to improve national statistical systems, including updated and disaggregated data availability and access, to strengthen strategies for the attainment of the SDGs, including the necessary monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to support evidence-based policy planning and execution. The assessment of progress toward the 2030 Agenda in LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS has been limited by critical gaps in the availability and quality of data to monitor progress. In Guinea-Bissau, for example, only 27.9 per cent of the indicators required to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective were available by 2021. Jamaica is providing leadership in the development of a Multidimensional Poverty Index to better inform intervention measures and tackle group-based inequalities.

LDCs, LLDCs, African countries, and countries in conflict or post-conflict situations

Some countries underscored efforts to ensure peace and security as a prerequisite to sustainable development, also prioritizing progress towards financial and social stability in efforts to ensure recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Somalia's VNR highlighted increased conflict during the past few years due to the impacts of climate change that have precipitated resource scarcity, widespread displacement, and food shortages brought about by persistent drought and floods, as well as by locust swarms and the pandemic.

In Sudan, the transitional government signed the Juba Peace Agreement, and has since undertaken economic reforms, began the debt relief process under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPCs) initiative in June 2021, and is re-engaging with the international community.

Poverty continues to be a major challenge among almost all LDCs and LLDCs in Africa, with many reporting on increases in rural poverty or stagnation of progress toward poverty eradication targets (Eswatini, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Senegal, Somalia, others), and with varying impacts on different

types of communities. The VNRs of LDCs often highlighted the impacts of high poverty rates, GDP contraction, food insecurity, gender-based violence, and vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Botswana, Cameroon, Lesotho and Sudan reported a rise gender-based violence and early marriage, demonstrating the deeper impacts of the pandemic on women and girls, especially those already in vulnerable situations and living in rural communities.

Food insecurity is increasing, due to reduced productivity, inflation, and ecosystem degradation due to climate change, pollution and unsustainable production and consumption (Gambia, Malawi, Somalia), and further exacerbated by an increase in droughts, floods, erratic rainfall trends, biodiversity loss, and locust swarms that depreciate crop yields and affect the livelihoods of those dwelling in rural communities (Gambia, Somalia). Accelerating soil and forest degradation, rising sea levels, and increases in extreme weather incidents such as cyclones and hurricanes (Eswatini, Lesotho). The rural poor and those who derive their livelihoods from the exploitation of natural resources are particularly impacted (Lesotho).

In response to these challenges, some countries are redirecting resources towards policies and activities to accelerate sustainable development. VNRs report on successful solutions to improve gender equality, leveraging digital technologies in education, debt relief, and mobilization of partnerships (Ghana, Lesotho, Somalia). Diversified education products that support the different needs of learners (Botswana), and actions to address deforestation, such as the Green Legacy Initiative in Ethiopia. Guinea-Bissau reported its significant progress in recent years in peacebuilding, democratization and institutional reform through economic prosperity, social justice and environmental protection, as their VNR stresses that the country's wealth lies primarily in its natural resources and biodiversity.

São Tomé and Príncipe mentioned significant progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly in the health and education sectors, and is on track to graduate from the LDC category in December 2024. Djibouti, Senegal and Tuvalu are also making progress toward graduation from LDC status, and are currently under review.

Unique vulnerabilities and challenges of SIDS

SIDS remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their shared unique vulnerabilities. Well documented, SIDS-specific common development challenges include: small landmass; small populations; geographical isolation and spatial dispersion; high cost of transport, communication and energy; low-lying areas and extreme vulnerability to climate change and natural hazards; narrow resource-based and undiversified economies; remoteness from markets and strong dependence on trade, travel and remittances; high sensitivity to international fluctuations and narrow trade partners; and lack of access to concessional financing.

The six VNRs from SIDS show that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely exacerbated their structural vulnerabilities. The social and economic effects of the global economic shutdowns are disproportionately felt in SIDS and their complex, exogenous and underlying conditions have undermined SIDS' sustainable development gains and their progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Jamaica reported that the pandemic exacerbated longstanding threats to development such as low levels of training among the labour force,

a lack of diversification, underemployment and high levels of informal employment. In Tuvalu, COVID-19 has largely impacted the prices of imported merchandise through its effect on the production and supply chain. Suriname reported that the pandemic led to the closure of businesses, increase in unemployment, and exposed gaps in the education system due to inadequate digital transformation in the country for distance learning.

Climate change affects SIDS more than any group of countries. Dominica reported that in 2017, the country was devastated by a category five hurricane (Maria), which resulted in losses amounting to 226 per cent of its GDP. This event happened only two years after Tropical Storm Erika, which cost Dominica 96 per cent of its GDP. The COVID-19 pandemic subsequently created new challenges and impacted the expected gains that would have strengthened Dominica's recovery post-Hurricane Maria. In 2020, Dominica's GDP contracted by 11 per cent, and the country achieved only a modest recovery of 3.7 per cent of GDP in 2021. In the same way, Guinea-Bissau is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, and sea level rise is already affecting the coastal region, threatening 70 per cent of the people living along the coast. Tuvalu further stressed that the adverse impacts of climate change—such as erosion, storm events, tidal flooding, saltwater intrusion, drought conditions and insect infestation of trees and plants—are undoing the progress that has been achieved to date. Suriname stated that the country is currently facing unprecedented flooding in the coastal and interior areas.

The structural challenges faced by SIDS hinder agriculture, tourism and fishing sectors and the movement of people and goods, with overwhelming impacts on the economy directly affecting the lives of the populations, as São Tomé and Príncipe's VNR revealed. Jamaica underlined the challenges regarding the pace of the reduction of fossil fuel use and the flow of financing to propel the move towards renewables. Suriname stressed how the high fiscal and debt burden has weakened the financial space as well as the economic situation and the social security system of the country.

Despite the complex crises that SIDS continue to experience in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in many economic, social and environmental sectors, their VNRs in 2022 also reported the achievement of some notable results in progress towards the SDGs. Grenada highlighted alignment of the SDGs with the national development plan and associated priorities, noting that all 17 SDGs are addressed through the 217 strategic actions designed to implement Vision 2035, and described a data-driven approach to measure progress. Suriname reported on how their national climate mitigation policy led to the approval of the Environmental Framework Act and the adoption of their climate change strategy and action plan, along with the country's classification as one of three carbon-negative countries in the world.

Dominica reported encouraging indicators across several development spheres, including improvements in fiscal discipline and management; reduction of poverty; expansion of housing; improvements in educational outcomes; reduction of infant mortality; improved access to safe water; and gender equality. In the area of governance, significant progress in the rule of law and public-sector modernization have been noted together with the promulgation of three key strategic documents to combat climate change: National Resilience Development Strategy Dominica 2030; Dominica Climate Resilience and Recovery Plan 2020–2030; and a disaster risk financing strategy.

Jamaica recorded downward trends in rates of poverty and extreme poverty, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and reached 11 per cent in 2019 through key social interventions, increased remittance flows and reduced unemployment. Jamaica updated its nationally determined contributions in 2020 to include more ambitious emissions reduction targets and additional sectors, and met the 2020 targets of SDG 14 with regard to the target of increasing the conservation and protection of marine areas.

Middle-income countries

Twenty-four of the 44 countries reporting in 2022 are defined as middle-income countries, which are defined by specific economic challenges.

The pandemic continued to have a profound and long-lasting effect on middle-income countries especially on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable. Governments have undertaken several measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic leading to the creation of national strategies and action plans to stimulate their economies and continue to facilitate the implementation of their sustainable development policies, strengthen public and private partnerships, incorporating resilience programmes that put people first and calling for continuity of different forms of external support.

The VNR reports from middle-income countries emphasized that despite limitations in access to concessionary financing and resource mobilization and accessibility, these countries post-pandemic do have comprehensive plans aimed at accelerating recovery and promoting economic growth including long-term investments in infrastructure, social services and macro-economic reforms.

Some countries still face challenges in meeting the SDGs by 2030. These countries continue to lend their voices in different high-level forums calling for development partners to facilitate access to initiatives to end poverty, reduce inequality, increase resilience and guarantee external support. Some countries like Eswatini and Sri Lanka are facing declining support in terms of development assistance yet are pursuing bilateral and multilateral assistance in the form of investments.

Countries like Ghana have fared well with remittances as a source for revenue for social and economic development. Jamaica noted that international partners have been consistent in supporting advances in key sectors in areas of interest to SIDS, including the investment in global digital cooperation and connectivity to close the digital divide. Cote d'Ivoire and Argentina mentioned the support of the United Nations system in localizing the SDG to build on partnerships between civil society, local authorities and the private sector.

Sustainable Development Goals and targets

Most countries reported on progress toward all 17 SDGs and provided many examples of progress, challenges, and best practices related to nationally relevant SDG targets. First and second time VNRs indicated whether baseline data had been defined, and assessed policies and measures taken to accelerate progress and meet challenges. Second and subsequent VNRs also highlighted progress made since the previous report. A limited number of specific innovative actions undertaken by individual countries under each SDG are included in this chapter, as examples for peer learning and potential replication by other countries.

On poverty alleviation, most countries emphasized that SDG 1 remains one of the most significant goals for the Decade of Action and Delivery for sustainable development. The reports of many countries, including Eswatini, Ethiopia, Jamaica and others, highlighted that national policies, strategies, plans, and programs are being geared towards achieving sustainable development with the eradication of poverty, a focus on the principle of leaving no one behind, and the adoption of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Italy noted that poverty eradication is associated with social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

Many factors have affected progress towards SDG 1 and exacerbated poverty rates. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty estimates is strongly felt, resulting in unemployment, loss of business, and increasing vulnerability of disadvantaged groups. Universally, poverty increased from 581 million to 676 million and countries such as Jordan, Dominica, Eswatini, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Mali, and Sudan faced a reversal or slowdown in decreasing poverty due to the pandemic combined with other factors such as conflict or climate disasters.

Conversely, countries including Belarus, Cameroon, Montenegro, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Togo, Latvia, and Switzerland reported success in decreasing poverty at the national level. Resilience achieved through local and sustainable initiatives to improve overall conditions of poverty is a common factor in their improvement. These VNR reports all highlight the success of social protection programmes, including but not limited to social security, cash transfers, health insurance schemes, employment, and entrepreneurship interventions. There has also been a regular focus on children, disadvantaged groups, and ageing populations. Such social protection programs are implemented in both developed and developing countries, varying in their degree of outreach, effectiveness, and impact.

Eswatini, Ethiopia, and Jamaica reported that they continued social protection and cash transfers as their governments' top priority, including the provision of loans; Belarus and Cameroon reported on increases in wages and social services. Dominica cited extensive social programs that are developmental, supportive, inclusive and preventive that support the most vulnerable by targeting the disabled, indigent, elderly, and drug addicts among others, by providing them with benefits and services that include non-contributory social assistance or social safety nets, active labor market programs, social care

services, and contributory social insurance. Ethiopia initiated decentralization of power and resources targeting the improvement for vulnerable groups. Greece highlighted economic relief measures for the most vulnerable households against the adverse effects of the COVID-19 crisis, support for low-income households, social solidarity income, and assistance to asylum seekers.

Other notable interventions include initiatives for financial inclusion programs in Togo, expanded and efficient health insurance systems in Mali, flexible working hours and childcare to increase female participation at work in Sri Lanka, alignment of youth incarceration with universal child rights in Caribbean Netherlands, and a unique social farming program using hydroponics for vulnerable unemployed groups in the United Arab Emirates.

However, there is also high chance of reversion to the vicious circle of poverty (Cameroon), and poverty reduction requires the creation of sustained employment and income earning opportunities for all (Dominica). There is an emerging of theme of local, community-led initiatives for strong linkages between poverty alleviation and resilience against disaster management that has led to improvement for some countries, which has decreased their vulnerability relative to previous years. Access to basic services such as health, education, and sanitation has improved for most middle-income countries, but some countries (Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe) still report a lack of access to electricity and Internet.

Challenges to poverty remain—data access and availability is poor in many countries, so there is no accurate record of poverty. Agriculture-dependent countries and islands, regardless of economic category, are at risk of falling into poverty due to the risk of natural disasters and crop disruptions, which poses a threat to food security as well as to livelihoods. The macroeconomic damage from the COVID-19 pandemic is still affecting many sectors of employment. Countries such as United Arab Emirates and Togo have launched innovative programs to tackle the employment challenge. Various efforts for the promotion of SDG 1 included collection and production of social indicators related to poverty, reducing the risk of poverty by extending social assistance (Andorra). Social protection programs are present in most countries, but there must be drastic improvements in their operations, transparency, and delivery for them to have impact. Natural disasters and conflict are two emerging drivers for risks of poverty for most countries.

Countries reported that food insecurity is increasing due to reduced farm outputs, inflation, disruptions in ecosystems and the environment due to climate change, as well as unsustainable production and consumption (Gambia, Malawi, Somalia, Switzerland). Some countries have noted an increase in droughts, erratic rainfall trends, reduction in biodiversity, floods, and locusts that devastate crop yield and affect the livelihoods of those dwelling in rural communities (Gambia, Somalia).

Some countries have taken steps to strengthen self-sufficiency, including through the promotion of sustainable and environment-friendly production of quality local agricultural products highlighting the importance of maintaining local traditions and culture (Andorra, Belarus, Dominica). Andorra has created urban gardens in primary schools to nurture an appreciation for nutritious and locally grown produce. The national backyard gardening programme, supported by the Dominica-China Modern Agricultural Center, has the dual objectives of supporting national beautification and food security with the planting of vegetables, horticultural produce and fruit trees.

Belarus has approved the Doctrine of National Food Security until 2030 as a system of official public policy provisions, and established a food security monitoring system. As a result of Hurricane Maria in 2017, Dominica's

Photo: 2022 VNR Dominica Report

decision to create a Global Centre for Agriculture Resilience (GCAR) has placed the country at the center of resilience building for sustainable agriculture, to share experiences and develop technologies that support the important goal of climate-proofing the agricultural sector.

Some countries implemented programmes to improve nutrition for school-aged children, including through school feeding programs and provision of vitamin supplements (Ghana, Greece, Jamaica, Latvia, Liberia). Some countries are making a dedicated effort to combat malnutrition and obesity (Greece, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Switzerland). The Greek National Food Policy Plan aims to integrate healthy dietary habits and exercise into the daily lives of the population. Malnutrition is an issue in Switzerland, with 42 per cent of the resident population considered to be overweight or clinically obese. The government has been working with the business sector to improve the composition of processed foods.

Many countries noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had aggravated the socio-economic vulnerabilities of households (Cote d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Jamaica, Latvia, Liberia, Sudan), including a sharp reduction in income generated by the informal sector (Cote d'Ivoire). Gender disaggregated data form Cote d'Ivoire showed that there was a 30 per cent decline in the quantity and quality of food in households headed by women, compared to nine per cent in households headed by men. Eswatini noted a gender gap in food access, with the proportion of women experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity (65.3 per cent) being larger than the equivalent proportion of men (60 per cent). The prevalence of household food shortages was also higher among female-headed households in Jamaica.

With the support of the private sector, vulnerable groups including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities in Jamaica and Lesotho received food packages, and the Lesotho government also increased the amount and eligibility for monthly pension payments. Governmental and non-governmental organizations in some countries provided direct support to food-insecure families and others vulnerable to food insecurity, including through monthly cash payments (Jordan, Latvia, others).

Greece reported challenges to food security due to the influx of migrants and asylum seekers, who receive groceries, meals, and cash assistance through the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.

Initiatives to support family farming in rural areas in Jordan included subsidized loans and water for livestock. In some countries, the area of land under organic farming is steadily increasing (Latvia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Togo). Some countries introduced systems designed to trace the origin and quality of locally produced food products (Montenegro, Latvia). Early in 2021, the United Arab Emirates launched the Food Tech Valley, serving as a regional hub for future clean tech-based food and agricultural products.

Photo: 2022 VNR Jordan Report

During the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many VNRs in 2022 contain an extensive discussion of its impacts, on the health of citizens as well as on national health care systems. A number of countries reported on shortages of vaccines for their populations and called for strengthened multilateral financial assistance for vaccines such as those delivered through COVAX, along with international support for purchasing medical supplies. Latvia and the United Arab Emirates reported their contributions to these global initiatives.

As medical sectors faced large strains, many countries reported their efforts to provide additional funding to emergency medical systems and compensating medical personnel. Kazakhstan reported it had increased salaries for medical doctors and nursing staff. Greece reported that plans to improve the accessibility of the health sector had been constrained by the pandemic, and others reported on renewed emphasis on addressing the uneven distribution of medical services. Guinea-Bissau reported a lack of specialists, aggravated by a disparity in their distribution between different regions of the country that was detrimental to the ability to respond quickly to new epidemiological challenges. A number of countries reported the rise in mental health problems due to the pandemic (Netherlands, Switzerland). The Netherlands also observed health inequalities between people with high and low socioeconomic status. Pakistan reported limited institutional and human capacity at the local levels for policy analysis, planning, and coordination. Upgrading public health infrastructure at the rural level was recommended by a number of countries.

The theme of resilience came through in a number of VNR reports (Luxemburg, Sudan, others), and some described health sectors that had weathered the increased demands, with confidence that countries could get back on track towards achieving positive health outcomes once the pandemic subsided. There was also support for universal health coverage (UHC) at the national level. For example, Jordan reported efforts towards achieving UHC through those covered by civil health insurance, the introduction of new

categories of beneficiaries of social protection programmes, and the expansion of covered health services provided on the basis of quality and fairness, through partnership with health service providers in the private sector.

Ethiopia, Kazakhstan and Pakistan stated they had made progress in reducing maternal and child mortality rates, especially for children under five years of age. Equatorial Guinea reported limited long-term success in reducing the prevalence of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

Progress on SGD 4 has been limited in many countries due to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as consistent progress towards inclusive and equitable quality education was disrupted. Luxembourg saw a decrease in school participation, after a thirteen-year consistent increase. In Ghana, approximately 35 per cent of youth were not involved in any form of learning. Philippines, Malawi, Lesotho, Liberia, and Montenegro experienced similar trends, with the most vulnerable students, particularly underserved communities, girls, and persons with disabilities suffering the most.

Lack of adequate resources, conflict or climate disasters have also affected school attendance (Eswatini, Ghana, Montenegro, Somalia, Sudan, Tuvalu). Lower enrolment and lack of quality of education remains a problem because of poor teacher training and management systems, and operational failures. Ghana and Grenada cited challenges to girls' education leading to absenteeism or dropout, including the increasing cost of sanitary materials, scarcity of resources to support girls during menstruation, no or limited access to water and sanitary facilities, and inaccessible washrooms for differently abled persons.

However, there has been progress in net enrollment for primary and secondary education in many countries, particularly, Botswana, Eswatini, Ghana, Greece, Jamaica, Malawi, Pakistan, Senegal, Suriname, Switzerland and Togo. Budget allocation and spending on education in countries like Botswana is a contributing factor to such success. The shift in focus to quality education has been promising, with Malawi, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Togo, and United Arab Emirates reporting improvements in quality indicators. Eritrea, Greece, and Jamaica provide meals to students to increase school attendance.

Belarus, Botswana, Liberia, Senegal, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland and United Arab Emirates have all improved gender parity in education. Andorra, Belarus, Botswana, and Greece have emphasized the facilitation of educational infrastructure for those with special needs, and local investment coupled with efforts by international partners has improved school infrastructure. In Lesotho, the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy Policy retains girls in school who would normally drop out due to early pregnancy, while simultaneously increasing awareness about safety and empowerment of girls to minimize their vulnerability.

The investment in digital technologies for learning has also become an opportunity for increased creativity in educational content and accessibility and highlighted the importance of access to the

Internet access as a human right in the 21st century. Many countries are now running supplemental programs to make their curriculums well rounded, and for the development of human capital, including components such digital literacy (Eritrea, Grenada, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe), life skills and health (Andorra, Latvia, Philippines), livelihood and entrepreneurial skills (Kazakhstan, Philippines), psychological support (Latvia, Kazakhstan, Uruguay), and make-up lessons (Pakistan, Togo) to minimize dropouts and compensate for the setbacks to learning during the pandemic.

Photo: 2022 VNR Latvia Report

Many countries have introduced blended learning models and used available resources to make education and instruction accessible online, which has included measures to ensure access to the Internet. Jamaica, Liberia, São Tomé and Príncipe and Malawi provided training to teachers to enable them to use new digital tools, and many countries have continued online courses despite the decrease in COVID-19 cases (Botswana, Dominica, Grenada, Latvia, Sri Lanka, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay). Such efforts are making education accessible for a larger set of people who are restricted in their access to education by factors beyond COVID-19.

Alignment of education with labor market outcomes has been a focus in many countries, with vocational training programs introduced in Eritrea, Grenada, Latvia, Liberia, Pakistan, Senegal, Switzerland and Togo that are adjusted to the local needs of certain industries in those countries, whose models are being replicated by other countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected women and reversed progress on SDG 5. Increases in gender-based violence (GBV) were reported in many VNRs (Andorra, Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Greece, Grenada, Lesotho, Liberia, Somalia and Uruguay), although some countries (Latvia, Malawi, Philippines, Sudan, Switzerland) saw a decline in their reported cases this year. Reforms and initiatives introduced by the governments of Andorra, Botswana, Ghana and Greece to address GBV include toll-free emergency telephone helplines, support via social media, free legal aid and psychological counseling for victims of GBV. Ghana's government also introduced a mobile application for collecting data on GBV.

Coordinating mechanisms, strategic frameworks, legal systems and other measures aimed at eradicating discrimination against women and girls have been adopted in many countries (Andorra, Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Montenegro, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, and Sri Lanka); yet their effectiveness varies across countries and outcomes of progress for discriminatory practices and violence remain low. In many areas the wage gap is a persistent issue, despite progress in economic empowerment. Domestic violence has rapidly increased due to confinement as a result of the pandemic, and the burden of unpaid domestic work for women remains high in some countries (Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Senegal, Uruguay). Courts in Latvia are mandated to require perpetrators of domestic violence to undergo a rehabilitation to reduce recurrence of such incidents.

Photo: 2022 VNR Botswana Report

Early marriage, child marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM) reflect an extension of the problem of discrimination and GBV. Liberia, Malawi, Montenegro, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal and Somalia noted persistent challenges with regard to early marriage. Djibouti and Sudan have made substantial progress against child marriage, and Sudan has enacted legislation to criminalize FGM. Togo has started effective dialogue in communities engaged in FGM to effectively curb the practice.

Some VNRs tracked progress towards SDG 5 as compared to previous reports, in areas such as representation of women in political leadership, decision-making power, employment and wage gaps, gender-responsive budgeting, and access to reproductive healthcare and resources such as contraception. Lesotho, Liberia, and Senegal have made progress relative to their previous reports.

Representation of women in public leadership was highlighted in many countries, including Belarus, Dominica, Ethiopia, Grenada, Italy, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Malawi, Togo, and Uruguay, where the representation of women in politics has increased and the share of women in leadership positions, including entrepreneurs and senior level positions on international platforms, is rising. Dominica's Prime Minister is the first female Prime Minister in the Caribbean, and the country notes that women occupy 61 per cent of government leadership positions. Senegal and United Arab Emirates also reported gender balanced government representation. However, increasing the number of women in political leadership remains a challenge in some countries (Andorra, Botswana, Ghana, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan).

Economic empowerment outcomes have also been promising in many countries. In Greece, women's empowerment is promoted through equal parental leave for men and women, as well as provision of caregivers to working mothers. Latvia has improved female participation in STEM, Pakistan has established programs to teach ICT skills to women, and Kazakhstan has invested heavily in women's entrepreneurship programs.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Some countries reported on policies and legislation to ensure the sustainable use of water resources. Belarus approved the National Strategy of Water Resources Management in the Context of Climate Change until 2030, which aims at improving the efficiency of the use of water and create conditions for the conservation of aquatic ecosystems. Jordan reported on a policy to integrate gender into the water sector, which identified key gender issues in the water sector and opportunities to strengthen the contribution of women in water management

Many countries have undertaken initiatives to improve the quality of and access to safe drinking water. Access to safe, clean water has increased nationwide, to 70 per cent in rural areas and 92 per cent in urban areas (Eritrea). The Ivorian government has implemented a water for all program, supported by significant investments made in drinking water from 2019 to 2021 in both urban and rural areas. This was supported by sectoral reforms, in particular, the creation of a sector dedicated to drinking water. However, due to the emergency response to COVID-19, many of the activities have been put on hold (Cote d'Ivoire, Eswatini). Some countries expressed their concern regarding the increasing cost of water as an obstacle to promoting equitable access (Ghana).

Photo: 2022 VNR Eritrea Report

Some countries focused their efforts on increasing handwashing facilities in response to the pandemic. Ethiopia implemented a One Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) National program, a multisectoral program for improving delivery of WASH services through pooled funding from the government and development partners. Handwash facilities in schools increased in 2020/21 (Ethiopia). In Ghana handwashing significantly improved during the peak of the pandemic due to the adherence to COVID-19 protocols; the government's directive promoting regular handwashing; and the free water initiative. In Greece, emergency funding was provided to disadvantaged and socially excluded Romani communities for the supply of sanitary supplies, dissemination of information on precautionary COVID-19 measures and drinking water.

Some countries are collaborating to develop early warning systems. Under the Integrated Flood and Drought Management and Early Warning for Climate Change Adaptation in the Volta Basin (VFDM) project, an assessment of current capabilities and needs related to the development of risk maps was completed (Ghana). The project supports the six countries of the Volta Basin (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Togo) in implementing coordinated and joint actions to improve existing flood and drought Early Warning Systems and management plans, and to strengthen resilience at regional, national and local levels, including gender-sensitive participatory approaches.

Many countries expressed their concerns over falling water reserves due to climate change and unsustainable consumption patterns. Droughts, floods, rising temperatures and conflicts make it more difficult to manage water resources effectively (Ethiopia, Switzerland). Water levels in many parts of the

country are declining due to over exploitation of groundwater and limited recharging practices (Eritrea). In Jordan, the government encouraged farmers to use reclaimed or treated wastewater for irrigation purposes to reduce pressure on groundwater.

A more sustainable and cost-efficient approach to the management of water in arid Greek islands has been applied through the extensive use of desalination (Greece). Fresh water is made available for drinking, as well as for irrigation. The change in the flow of major rivers as a result of climate change is becoming an increasingly important issue (Kazakhstan). By 2040, Kazakhstan may face a shortage of water resources (50 per cent of the need), therefore, the government is promoting the use of water-saving irrigation technologies. Seawater desalination constitutes 41 per cent and reuse of treated wastewater accounts for 11 per cent of the total water supply (United Arab Emirates).

Some countries collaborated with neighboring countries to manage their water resources. The 2010 Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area between Greece, Albania, North Macedonia and the EU entered into force in May 2019 (Greece). The Agreement provides the institutional framework for multi-stakeholder cooperation and joint activities to ensure an integrated protection of the ecosystem and the sustainable development of the Area, including the development of integrated river basin management approaches. The Blue Peace Central Asia (BPCA) initiative aims to support effective water resource management in a water-food-energy nexus from the local to the regional level, including the management of risks associated with climate change impacts (Kazakhstan).

Some countries have introduced renewable energy sources for their water treatment facilities. Baytown Wastewater Treatment Plant was recently equipped with a 97.2 kW Solar Photovoltaic system to reduce operating energy costs by 60 per cent (Dominica). Solar panels were installed to power their wastewater treatment plants to increase energy efficiency and create environmentally friendly solutions for the energy intensive process of water supply and wastewater treatment (Latvia, Liberia).

SDG 7 was mentioned in many reviews, with most reports underscoring the importance of access to sustainable and modern energy for all and noting progress made towards relevant targets.[16] Several highlighted the need to provide energy access to rural and distant areas, especially those not connected to electricity grids (El Salvador, Eswatini, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan). Argentina's Project for Renewable Energy in Rural Markets (PERMER) aims at supplying electricity to communities, households, schools, and healthcare facilities. El Salvador noted reduction of the number of people without access to electricity from 4.20 per cent to 1.95 per cent. In Eswatini, the improvement in access to electricity for

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[16] Argentina, Belarus, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Malawi, Montenegro, Netherlands, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates.

rural household was largely due to the Rural Electrification Program (REP), which is funded by the government in collaboration with development partners. In rural areas of Ghana, the proportion using electricity has more than quadrupled, from 16.1 per cent in 2000 to 72.6 per cent in 2021. Access by rural populations in Jamaica reached 98.6 per cent in 2019. The Malawi Rural Electrification Programme (MAREP) and Malawi Electricity Access Project (MEAP) are currently working to connect at least 892,000 households to the grid.

The need for improvements in energy efficiency was underscored in some VNRs (Eswatini, Senegal, Somalia). The Netherlands highlighted that the energy intensity of the Dutch economy is decreasing and the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption is increasing. Switzerland noted that improving energy efficiency and electrification or replacing fossil with renewable energies would help to reduce country's dependence on imports and improve energy security.

The need to maximize the use of renewable energy sources was also underlined (Belarus, Ethiopia, Ghana, Jamaica). Kazakhstan reported on introduction of market mechanisms for selecting renewable energy projects, which had created conditions for reducing the average price of electricity from wind and solar power plants to a level comparable to gas generation projects. Latvia noted that the share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption is steadily growing and by 2027, 47.5 per cent of total energy consumption is expected to come from the renewables. Sri Lanka called for immediate investments in renewable energy sources.


Photo: 2022 VNR Kazakhstan Report

Some countries noted that providing access for sustainable and renewable energy is vital for combatting climate change (Andorra, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Switzerland). Dominica's vision for the energy sector is to have 90 per cent clean, carbon-neutral energy by 2029 based on geothermal, hydropower and solar generation. United Arab Emirates noted that nuclear energy would help the country meet its sustainability commitments and reduce 21 million tons of carbon emissions, once power plants in Barakah became fully operational.

Many countries still face difficulties in providing energy access to their respective populations. The current surge in energy prices due to persistent political instability has a negative impact on advancing SDG 7 in general. With the second largest energy access deficit in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia developed an updated National Electrification Program to attract private investors to participate in energy generating facilities. Malawi indicated reduced availability of power supply from renewable resources such as hydropower due to extreme weather events. São Tomé and Príncipe noted a major energy crisis with frequent power outages that have negatively impacted the economy and the well-being of populations.

Attention was also given to the transportation sector (Argentina, Greece, Latvia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates). To promote green energy and innovation in public transport and to ensure climate-friendly and energy efficient transportation, the government of Pakistan has recently adopted its first Electrical Vehicle Policy for the period 2020 to 2025, incentivizing the sector with tax exemptions to facilitate Electric Vehicles (EVs). Jordan also aims to increase projects to incentivize the shift towards electrical transport.
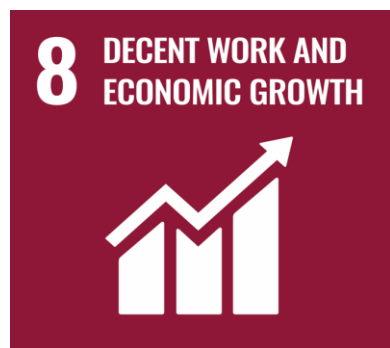
Many national reviews addressed the severe impact of the multiple global crises on the achievement of SDG 8 and their efforts to launch policies that boost economic activity, develop human capital and reduce unemployment. Several countries reported on progress made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment front that had been eradicated by the health crisis. The closure of firms during the lockdowns had immediate effects, both in terms of job loss and in the reduction of wages. For example, in Ghana, 36 per cent of firms closed and over 38 per cent reduced their workers' wages during partial lockdowns. In Pakistan, more than 20 million people lost their jobs or experienced a reduction or loss of income during the first wave of the pandemic.

In many developing countries, the crisis particularly impacted informal workers, such as daily wage earners and female market traders who had to cope with restricted and reduced market hours. Most VNRs also highlighted the vulnerability of women and youth to job loss and the difficulty they face to reengage in the labour market. Jamaica observed that the pandemic had intensified long-standing threats to development, namely low levels of training among the labour force, a lack of diversification, underemployment, and high levels of informal employment. Montenegro also highlighted the persistence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, including in the labour market, which hamper efforts for an equitable recovery.

In this context, the VNRs highlighted strategies and mechanisms to create a new horizon for job creation and decent work. As Cameroon's VNR noted, it is a matter of producing the human capital capable of supporting the ambition of economic development. Such efforts can take place in the context of broader economic recovery plans. For example, Botswana adopted an Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan to boost economic activity and incomes and expand productive capacity, which includes special initiatives on private sector recovery and support for the informal sector. El Salvador implemented a welfare strategy that includes specific recovery measures through supporting microenterprises and small businesses, generating employment, strengthening the capacity to ensure labour rights and implementing a labour market information system. Cote d'Ivoire also pursued a policy aimed at accelerating the structural transformation of the economy and increasing opportunities for wealth, job creation and decent work, in particular for young people, women and persons with disabilities, with a focus on improved labour market governance.
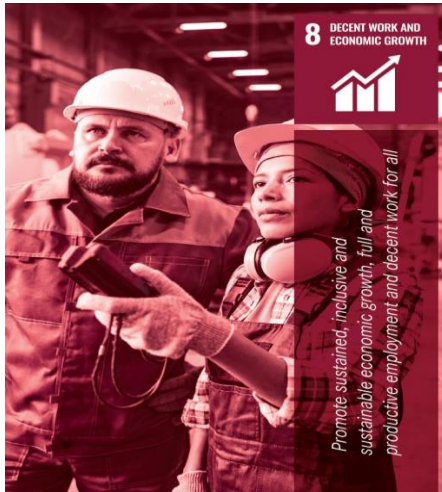
Photo: 2022 VNR Greece Report

In the same vein, some reviews put a special emphasis on the interconnectedness between economic recovery and social protection in the development planning and implementation process. In Greece, the Government's Recovery and Resilience Plan, backed by the European Union corresponding Plan and Facility, introduces forward-looking reforms and investments covering in a coherent manner green transition, digital transition, employment, skills and social cohesion, and private investment and economic and institutional transformation. Similarly, Jordan's development programmes in the pandemic recovery phase are based on cross-governmental action where the Government develops a vision aimed at ensuring inclusive growth, and the accompanying job creation and increased revenues that will in turn be reflected in the standard of living of citizens. In Equatorial Guinea, the national strategy for sustainable development "Equatorial Guinea 2035 Agenda" has set priority axes for development that connect the SDGs, with Goals 8, 9 and 17 considered together as one of these axes.

Some countries established specific programs to support access to employment and to stimulate labour supply. Senegal took urgent steps to promote the inclusion of women in the production of national wealth and youth employment opportunities, through a Start-up Programme for Youth and Women and the 2021 Emergency Youth Employment Programme. In 2020, Ghana instituted an Alleviation and Revitalisation of Enterprises Support programme aimed at supporting productive capacity and employment. In their efforts to reach SDG 8, Surinam and Sri Lanka promoted a positive business and entrepreneurial climate to stimulate the growth of SMEs and ensure sustainable employment.

Decent work for all can be promoted through social protection programmes, such as in the Gambia where the newly created Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare recently launched a social safety net project and established empowerment funds for women and youth. Similarly, in Jordan, the 2019–2025 national social protection strategy includes components on decent work and social security and will add a comprehensive component on crises and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, countries stressed the continued need for increased technical expertise and qualified individuals with the skill sets, knowledge base and experience as a condition for reaching SDG 8 (Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Tuvalu).

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Goal 9 of the SDGs focuses on the achievement of socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic development, through three intertwined pillars, namely infrastructure, industry and innovation. In the 2022 VNRs, several countries emphasized progress and challenges related to these three pillars.

Infrastructure is considered as one of the key enablers for advancing socioeconomic development. In terms of infrastructure development, several countries highlighted substantial progress (Ethiopia, Malawi). In Ethiopia, access to infrastructure improved, with increased access to electricity and a reduced share of the rural population located within 5 km of an all-weather road. However, countries also reported on challenges in terms of infrastructure development. Malawi noted that corruption remains a key challenge, compromising the quality of public service delivery.

Countries also indicated that the importance of economic diversification by broadening the impact of economic growth by supporting prioritized sectors, including manufacturing, and reducing the reliance on a few export industries (such as Sri Lanka, Somalia, El Salvador). To strengthen resilience and combat fragility, Cote D'Ivoire aims to accelerate the structural transformation of the economy by increasing opportunities for wealth and job creation, in particular for young people and women. Through investments in transport infrastructure, Jamaica continues to promote economic diversification initiatives, which can lead to growth in the transport and storage industries.

A number of factors continue to impact industry and infrastructure development. Several countries highlighted how low domestic revenue coupled with low export earnings limits the ability to make the necessary investment in physical and digital infrastructure and promote structural transformation (El Salvador, Ethiopia). Tuvalu indicated how COVID-19 in particular has severely affected the prices of imported merchandise through its effect on the production and supply chains in the building and construction industry. Ethiopia noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, internal conflict, and drought have taken a heavy economic toll by lowering the expected dividend from the country's comprehensive infrastructure reform.

The experience with the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the urgency of promoting innovation to build resilience. Strategies to foster resilience involve financial inclusion, savings mobilization, insurance coverage and effective social protection. The Philippines highlighted the need for innovation, with emphasis on encouraging research, promoting collaboration and building the knowledge economy. Similarly, Sri Lanka highlighted the need for public sector reforms and innovation, especially via digitalization, which is necessary to enable delivery of inclusive transformation, especially to reach the most vulnerable. Several countries highlighted how micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) have the potential to contribute to innovation (Ethiopia, Jamaica). These firms, however, continue to encounter challenges which limit their ability to operate efficiently such as limited credit access, high levels of informality, limited linkages and market access, relatively low human and institutional capacity.

Photo: 2022 VNR Philippines Report

Enhancing equal opportunity and ensuring the inclusion of different demographic groups including, but not limited to, race, age, disability, nationality, religion and gender were highlighted by most countries in the 2022 VNRs. Several countries indicated that despite relatively high economic growth and a general reduction in poverty, the distribution of income has not improved in recent years, resulting in stagnating or worsening levels of inequality (Ethiopia, Ghana, Latvia).

COVID-19 further highlighted inequalities in health, consumption patterns, and income levels, among others. It had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, such as daily wage earners as well as female and young workers. Jordan highlighted how measures have been taken to prevent increased inequalities as a repercussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, through measures to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), provision of financing on soft terms, and assistance to the most vulnerable segments. While the pandemic has increased inequalities, countries also highlighted how persistent inequalities hinder a full recovery from the pandemic. Liberia noted that the recovery process was faced with constraints due to a legacy of entrenched inequality in access to development opportunities and basic social services.

Some countries have adopted policies to address inequalities. The Gambia has launched the Programme for Accelerated Community Development to address disparities in socioeconomic opportunities and access in rural and urban areas. In Latvia, the National Development Plan for the period 2021–2027 was co-created through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process, with a focus on reducing inequality and regional disparities. Ghana highlighted the broadening of social protection coverage for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, as a key measure with a view to enhance social and economic

inclusion. Jamaica is providing leadership in the development of a multidimensional poverty index to improve the targeting of interventions and to address group-based inequalities.

Inclusion of persons with disabilities was also highlighted in the VNRs. Legislative and policy frameworks in several countries have sought to remove the barriers to inclusion for persons living with disabilities. Jamaica highlighted some advancement, but also challenges to address the issues faced by children and youth with disabilities. Dominica highlighted how it is currently making provisions for people living with disabilities through its "build resilience concept," which was implemented following Hurricane Maria, in terms of accessible public buildings and spaces, providing ICT equipment, and access to special education schools.

With regard to gender equality, several countries noted that more attention to be paid to gender mainstreaming and data to measure progress and research on the root causes of inequality. In Jamaica, the Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework 2018-2021 included strategies to mainstream gender indicators in all sectors and develop a gender database as well as gender protocol. Senegal has also taken urgent steps to promote the inclusion of women in the production of national wealth and youth employment opportunities, through the 2018 Start-up Programme for Youth and Women and the 2021 Emergency Youth Employment Programme.

SDG 11 was addressed in several reviews, with a focus on involving municipalities and local communities in the review and implementation process of the 2030 Agenda. Several countries noted progress towards SDG 11, highlighting a decrease of the poverty rate in urban areas at a higher pace than in rural areas (Lesotho, Somalia) as well as progress on the implementation of the overall goal (Latvia). Others noted continued high levels of pollution in urban areas and the need for appropriate public policies (Guinea-Bissau).

Senegal and other countries stressed the importance of the territorialization of the SDGs through their effective integration into local development plans and programmes targeted to local communities to accelerate progress. The Programme for Accelerated Community Development launched in the Gambia to address disparities in socioeconomic opportunities at the local level. In El Salvador, a Municipal Works Directorate was established to improve coordination between the Government and municipalities and ensure transparency in the use of resources, while promoting strategic territorial investment and generating conditions that preserve people's dignity.

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Some reviews highlighted mechanisms put in place to localize the SDGs, promote ownership by local communities and authorities and hold them accountable. For example, the voluntary review carried out by Italy includes voluntary local reviews prepared by local authorities in cooperation with central institutions. As a result, the national review, through this territorial approach, reflects and highlights the effective, multilevel governance initiatives enacted by the regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan areas. Supported by coordination mechanisms established between central and local authorities, this VNR process boosts a coordinated and deeper integration of the Goals into national and local planning processes.

In the same vein, more than a third of the municipalities and a number of provinces of the Netherlands have embraced the SDGs. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities has conducted a voluntary subnational review, and the city of Amsterdam carried out its first voluntary local review.

While holding consultations with local communities has become a common endeavor in preparing VNRs, some countries have set up more institutionalized mechanisms. In Luxembourg, a structure for citizen participation in the VNR process has been established as part of the major urban and architectural consultation known as *Luxembourg in Transition* that aims at producing land-use planning scenarios to support carbon neutrality in 2050. For its 2022 VNR, Switzerland has fully digitized its stock-taking process through the means of a customized digital solution called "SDGital2030". Through this process, representatives from the federal Government, cantons and municipalities, along with diverse civil society actors, were invited to participate in the 2018-2022 baseline assessment, in order to illustrate their contributions to attaining the SDGs.

The Philippines also referred to the articulation between the Sustainable Development Goals Watch ("SDG Watch"), regularly compiled by the national Statistics Authority, and the community-based monitoring system, implemented by local government units, to monitor the SDGs both at the national and subnational levels.

Several countries reported on issues related to SDG 12, noting that progress towards sustainable consumption and production patterns is mixed. Although policies have been adopted to stimulate energy and resource-efficient economies, circular economies, waste prevention and recycling, significant challenges remain.

Urbanization has brought economic opportunities to communities, but the rapid rate of growth of cities in many countries has given rise to challenges related to SDG 12, in particular related to consumption patterns. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected the consumption patterns and routines of people, as well as cities. Greece highlighted efforts to establish more sustainable city and community lifestyles by focusing on raising awareness on the environmental effects of production and consumption choices, and noted some progress due to new policies and regulations aimed at increasing waste recycling and introducing extended producer responsibility schemes.

A particular focus in many countries is given to food waste, where measures have been adopted and incentives provided for encouraging food donation and redistribution in order to reduce food losses along the whole production and supply chain. Switzerland and the Netherlands indicated that food wastes are falling, but Switzerland estimated that the country still annually produces 330kg of avoidable food waste per person, and has adopted an Action Plan Against Food Waste to further efforts to halve food waste by 2030.

Disposable plastic and plastic bags are still in wide use in many countries, although there are acceptable alternatives to these products, and reduction of plastic waste was also highlighted as a priority by several countries (Greece, Montenegro, Philippines). The Philippines reported on measures that ban the use of plastic, noting that the country generates around 2.7 million tons of plastic wastes each year, with approximately one-fifth ending up polluting the oceans and affecting not only the coastal communities but also the entire fishing, shipping, and maritime industries, which are extremely vulnerable to the effects of marine debris. Eswatini has reduced the quantities of single-use plastic bags issued by retailers and replaced them with reusable shopping bags. Sri Lanka has adopted the Extended Producer Responsibility Model, which requires all stakeholders generating plastic waste to take responsibility for recycling and minimizing the use of plastic packaging, an initiative that is expected to help tackle the escalating challenge of Sri Lanka's plastic waste management issues.

Countries also emphasized the need to decouple economic growth from environmental damage and natural resource exploitation. For this, efforts to promote development with the lowest possible greenhouse gas emissions are crucial. Uruguay highlighted a rapid transformation of the energy matrix, whereby a high proportion of electricity production from renewable sources was introduced. This has made it possible to decouple carbon dioxide emissions from economic growth, and ensure more sustainable production patterns.

Combatting climate change remains a top priority for the international community, as reflected in the substantial reporting by most countries during the 2022 VNR cycle, [17] with many reporting on actions for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Ethiopia saw an estimated 91.4 million metric tons of CO_2 emissions reduction during the 2019-2020 period, with agriculture and energy contributing to 58.8 per cent and 25.1 per cent reduction respectively. Kazakhstan managed to reduce emissions to 351 million tons of CO_2 equivalent in 2020 since 2018, with a potential to reduce its ecological footprint further as the volume of electricity in 2021 from the renewables amounted to 4.2 billion kWh or 3.69 per cent of the total electricity, which is 30 per cent more than in 2020. Jordan informed that, with a reference to World Bank, it had become the first developing country to introduce an emission tracking and transaction

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[17] Andorra, Argentina, Belarus, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Grenada, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Montenegro, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Togo, United Arab Emirates.

system. Switzerland's greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 were around 19 per cent lower than in 1990, with a a significant reduction achieved in the buildings sector due to improved energy efficiency replacing oil and gas-fired heating systems with heat pumps and renewable energies.

Efforts to further mitigate climate change by implementing tree planting programmes to increase carbon sinks were cited by countries such as Pakistan and the Philippines; the One Million Trees for One Bataan (1M41B) initiated in the Philippines noted a total of 1,047,217 trees planted so far.

A number of countries dedicated their reports to the Paris Agreement implementation. Belarus reported that after becoming the party to the Agreement in 2016, it has approved a new nationally determined contribution, according to which it is planned to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35 per cent by 2030 compared to the 1990 level, including the land use, land- use change, and forestry sector and without additional funding. The goal will be achieved within the framework of the implementation of the Programme of Socio-economic Development of the Republic of Belarus for 2021-2025, and a number of state and sectoral programmes for this period. In 2020 Greece adopted The National Long-term Strategy for 2050, to meet the Paris Agreement commitments and the Energy Union objectives, has been in place since 2020, for the evaluation of alternatives and sustainable transition paths to a climate-neutral economy by 2050. In 2015, Liberia submitted its first Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) intended to meet its long- term zero carbon emission target by 2050.

Mobilizing investments remains crucial for achieving climate goals. Ghana informed that It requires between US$9.3 and US$15.5 billion of investment to implement the 47 nationally determined contribution measures from 2020 to 2030. US$3.9 billion would be required to implement the 16 unconditional programmes of action till 2030. The remaining US$5.4 billion for the 31 conditional programmes of action would be mobilized the public, international, and private sector sources, as well as carbon markets. Jamaica noted that the country signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the USAID committing US$5 million to assist in funding its Disaster Risk Financing Initiative (2019).

Environmental and climate hazards continue to endanger countries' populations and economies. Greece informed that floods, extreme heat and intense snowfalls are on the rise due to climate change, e.g.: during 2021 more than 1.3 million acres were burnt as a result of devastating forest wildfires across the country, while an equally large area (1.5 million acres) was burnt during the period of the last 8 years (2013-2020). Jamaica reported on the progress towards reducing risks from climate-related hazards and natural disasters in a number of areas, such as strengthening telecommunication infrastructure, expanding the availability of data and decision-making tools and policy development through the National Risk Information Platform and National Vulnerability Ranking Index Tool and Platform, that are in the process of development.

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

Some countries adopted initiatives to combat marine litter. In October 2018, Fish for litter/The Mediterranean Cleanup tackled marine littering and overfishing problems through collecting, sorting, storing and recycling litter, involving port managers and fishers in Greece. Latvia reported that it joined the Group of Friends to Combat Marine Plastic Pollution in Waters, established by a group of countries through their missions to the United Nations in New York to work collectively on global solutions to the plastic pollution crisis.

Many countries expressed their concerns regarding the pollution caused by plastic waste. Ghana noted that for each one million tons of plastic waste generated, only five per cent is recycled, resulting in littering and clogging of drains and watercourses and flowing into the Atlantic Ocean. Jamaica reported on efforts to cut plastic pollution through legislation, public awareness projects, and public-private partnerships. The enactment and enforcement of legislation to reduce plastic waste, and collaboration between the government and stakeholders in addressing problems that stem from the behavior of households, particularly waste disposal practices, was shown to be of critical importance in addressing the issue of marine pollution. Jordan's VNR mentioned ProjectSea, a movement to conserve marine life through collecting plastic and other waste and raising awareness through school campaigns and social media. Switzerland observed that the oceans are primarily polluted with plastics, from tire abrasion as well as from households, industry, construction and littering.

Latvia highlighted "Mission Sea 2030" to restore the biodiversity of the Baltic Sea and promote its sustainable use for economic growth and the well-being of society, creating new industries, markets and jobs, along with the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan that focuses on biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances and litter, and sea-based activities. In the Caribbean, Curaçao (Netherlands) reported participation in the Blue Halo Initiative, a cooperative effort to protect marine life in the region that focuses on extensive research, planning, and legal development to establish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which in 2018 included the nomination of Curaçao as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

Greece is taking steps to address the issue of invasive alien species in the marine environment, including management and monitoring of invasive species. As ocean acidification is seriously hampering the food web, research in Pakistan is ongoing to study the extent of ocean acidification and its impact on fauna and flora. Some countries regulated harvesting and overfishing through the issuance of seasonal fishing permits and self-regulation for community-based fisheries communities (Botswana, Eswatini, United Arab Emirates). Since 2019, Ghana has been practicing seasonal closures for artisanal fishers to conserving and managing fisheries. During the spawning period between July and September, fishing is stopped so that the falling fish stock can be replenished. The government provides the fishers with food items and alternative livelihood activities.

With respect to sustainable management of fisheries, several VNRs cited agreements specifically targeting fishing conditions and marine trade, such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (Gambia, Ghana, Grenada); the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (São Tomé and Príncipe); and the International Commission

for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (Ghana, São Tomé and Príncipe). African regional instruments referred to include the Regional Convention on Fisheries Cooperation between African States bordering the Atlantic Ocean (São Tomé and Príncipe), the Bamako Convention (Gambia), and the African Union's Policy Framework and Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa (Gambia).
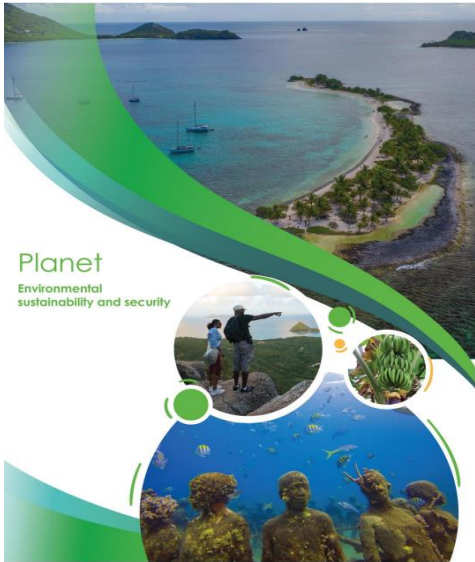

Photo: 2022 VNR Grenada Report

Some countries adopted legislation to protect water bodies. In 2015, Grenada developed an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Policy with three overarching policy goals: governance through holistic decision-making for coastal sustainability; sustainability in preserving ecosystems; and promoting livelihoods and capacity development at all levels in institutional, technical and sectoral areas. Legislation banning single-use plastic bags, plastic straws and expanded polystyrene foam products took effect in January 2019 in Jamaica, along with the Action Plan for the Protection and Restoration of Coral Reefs 2018-2023, which includes targets for conducting research, mapping and monitoring, reducing pollution and habitat destruction and restoring the coral reefs, as well as educating the public on how to change potentially damaging behavior. In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of artificial reefs (and

mangrove replanting) undertaken by agencies and academic institutions, such as the Blue Carbon Restoration in Southern Clarendon Project. The Promoting Community-Based Climate Resilience in the Fisheries Sector Project aims to enhance climate resilience of the fisheries sector through strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks and facilitating the transition of fishers to sustainable livelihoods. In the Philippines, over 120 municipalities issued ordinances to ban single-use plastics and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources formulated the National Plan of Action for the Prevention, Reduction and Management of Marine Litter (NPOA-ML), which aims to achieve zero waste in Philippine waters by 2040.

Almost all countries in the 2022 VNR cycle reported on progress achieved under SDG 15.[18] Combating deforestation is one of the principal targets, and was mentioned by a number of countries. Lesotho pointed out the gradual improvement in the proportion of forest area to the total land area between 2015 and 2012, that had increased by 0.37 per cent; some initiatives take place, such as buying trees and donating them to the Ministry of Planting by the Standard Lesotho Bank, as well as working directly with communities in order to raise awareness of tree growing.

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[18] Andorra, Argentina, Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Greece, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Latvia, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Malawi, Mali, Pakistan, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay.

Eswatini reported that between 2016 and 2020 the forest area in the country increased from 586,136 hectares to 804,350 hectares according to national definitions, an improvement of 37 per cent.

Many countries reported on policies and measures taken against biodiversity loss. In Jamaica, the main threats to biodiversity are habitat loss, climate change, resource over-exploitation, invasive alien species and pollution. The National Strategy and Action Plan for Biological Diversity in Jamaica 2016-2021 (NBSAP) included biodiversity conservation, which is aligned to the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets. Latvia reported that measures to conserve biodiversity would be supported by the EU Structural Funds and the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy, as well as other EU funds. Eswatini developed and integrated the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2022 into the National Development Framework to preserve biodiversity. Ethiopia adopted a National Policy on Biodiversity Conservation and Research Strategy. Greece is developing the National Reforestation Plan, which will be incorporated in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and will constitute a coordinated framework to strengthen the national forest balance with environmental and social benefits and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity protection. The Forest Policy for Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, revised in 2018, provides the overarching framework to ensure forest resilience and sustainability.

Switzerland underscored the role of international cooperation and multilateral processes to fight biodiversity loss via the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Challenges were underlined by many countries, some connected to geography and climate. After Hurricane Maria resulted in the devastating loss of ecosystem services provided by watersheds, wetlands, and forests, Dominica launched an initiative on Strengthening of National Forest Resources and Watersheds Resilience through Post-Hurricane Maria Restoration and Reforestation Programmes. Ghana reported that forest areas were being threatened by illegal logging and mining activities, as well as by farming and fuelwood collection and the uncontrolled conversion of forest areas to other land uses. For some countries, such as Pakistan and Sudan, desertification is a persistent problem.

With regard to wildlife conservation, Botswana reported a slight decline in poaching, with the rate standing at 20 species per 10,000 in 2020 compared to 22.3 per 10,000 in 2016, as well as increases in elephant populations. Malawi introduced its Inter-Agency Committee on Combating Wildlife Crimes in order to end the poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna. In United Arab Emirates, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment transformed all paper certificates for the regulation of international trade in endangered animals and plants (CITES) into digital electronic certificates.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Many reviews addressed SDG 16 and stressed the connection between peace, governance, the rule of law and sustainable development. To ensure an enabling environment for reaching the SDGs, countries highlighted their efforts to build capacity in the justice and security sector, promote an independent judicial system and ensure equal access to justice (El Salvador, Eritrea, Jamaica, Liberia, Sri Lanka). Proactive policies and legal reform in this field are considered essential to address longstanding problems such as corruption, money laundering and terrorism, and also require increased regional and international cooperation, which the strengthening of judicial capacities could facilitate. For example, El Salvador stated that its proactive policy in this field enabled it to become a member of the Financial Action Task Force of Latin America. Making a clear link with sustainable development objectives, São Tomé and Príncipe explained that its efforts to promote the blue economy required action to combat maritime crime, especially maritime piracy and illegal fishing. Sri Lanka also stressed that strengthened law enforcement and rights protection to safeguard civil liberties, inclusive grievance mechanisms and efficient legal systems were key to ensure that all citizens enjoy the benefits of the inclusive transformation envisioned in the 2030 Agenda. Latvia announced that its development cooperation budget had tripled and that 65 per cent of this assistance would be devoted to governance and rule of law initiatives.

Photo: 2022 VNR Liberia Report

Improved governance was highlighted as an enabler for economic performance, as it enhances the business climate. Efficiency in public information management, backed by a modernized public sector, allows for more transparency and efficiency in the creation of economic opportunities and the delivery of public goods (Equatorial Guinea, Dominica, Tuvalu). Digitization of the economy also offers new opportunities for improved overall governance and service delivery, through for example mobile phone applications in the health and other sectors, and the creation of citizen portals and one-window service centres, as has been successfully implemented in Pakistan.

Countries highlighted the importance of full participatory processes to promote social cohesion and ensure a true ownership of the SDGs. The conduct of national surveys, with feedback obtained from citizens, civil society and local authorities, was presented as a positive experience by Andorra, as was the launching of broad partnership schemes and cooperative initiatives by the Government targeting economic, environmental and other fields in Greece. Luxembourg referred to the Citizens' Council established to make recommendations to parliamentarians and the Government on the national energy and climate policy, which represented a successful and replicable experience in deliberative democracy.

Including a human rights approach to such participatory processes was presented as an important step to further enhance inclusion. For example, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights takes part in the preparation of the annual SDG progress report presented to the Dutch Parliament, a collaborative effort

by the Government and a broad range of civil society actors. Similarly, in Montenegro, the Office of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms and its network of "Golden Advisors" for children's rights made a valuable contribution to the VNR prepared by the country. Advancing human rights through legal reform was also advocated, as exemplified by the adoption of the Transgender Protection Act 2018 by the Parliament of Pakistan to protect the rights to inheritance, education, employment and health, along with right to vote and to hold public office of transgender persons.

Countries recognized that all these efforts could not be successful without sustainable peace, and stressed the importance of SDG 16 as a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda. Jordan highlighted the challenge of hosting more than 1.3 million refugees due to crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, which compounded the burdens on the public budget and absorbed a large proportion of the country's development gains. Italy and Latvia expressed deep concerns over the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in particular for the most vulnerable, as well as its effects on multilateralism and the rules-based international order that the war has violated.

Countries experiencing conflicts presented their efforts to engage in nation-building processes grounded in social justice and inclusive participation, a condition for sustainable development (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Sudan). Ethiopia referred to the establishment of an independent national dialogue commission to facilitate reconciliation. Sudan stressed that the signature of the Juba peace agreement allowed for a reengagement with the international community and stated the commitment of the Government to resolve the issue of the freeze of the debt relief process following political events in 2021. In an effort to mainstream gender in public policy, several countries highlighted their National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (Liberia, Malawi).

Many partnerships were featured in the 2022 VNR reports, as the COVID-19 pandemic entered its second year. Innovative and collaborative partnerships, both domestic and international, appear to be more instrumental than ever in sustaining the momentum for achieving the SDGs, with many examples of new and existing multi-stakeholder partnerships that had been established or strengthened to support the 2030 Agenda domestically.

In general terms, Gambia stated there was a need to reinvigorate the Global Partnership for Development. Suriname stated that building national and international alliances is essential in its transition towards a green economy. Andorra placed a heavy emphasis on the well-being of future generations in its Horizon 2023 programme.

Ethiopia established an Ethiopian Diaspora Agency and Diaspora Trust Fund to mobilize the global diaspora community in national development activities. Gambia established a women's enterprise fund, a climate change fund, as well as a fund for the empowerment of women and youth. An infectious disease centre was established with the support of Ghana's COVID-19 private sector fund. In Kazakhstan, a special fund for the sustainable development of rural areas was established with the support of businesses and civil society. Malawi and Mali created similar SDG funds, as financing coordination

mechanisms where priorities are set and resources mobilized jointly by the Government, the United Nations and development partners. Montenegro reported a special "eco-fund" to support activities with various stakeholders.

On domestic resource mobilization, Botswana reported the development of a gender responsive and climate-smart financing strategy for the SDGs to benefit local communities, integrating land use, sustainable tourism and community development with biodiversity management, which is central to the national development agenda.

Many countries reported strong support for voluntary local reviews. In the Netherlands, a third of all municipalities had embraced the SDGs and undertook some form of reporting on progress. Pakistan stated that localization is a key strategy for SDG acceleration. Cote d'Ivoire launched a process of localization with support from the UN system. In Luxembourg, a structure for citizen participation has been set up as part of the major urban and architectural consultation, known as Luxembourg in Transition, that is aimed at producing land-use planning scenarios to support carbon neutrality in 2050, including the establishment of a citizens council for climate issues.

In the area of foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade, Djibouti reported a doubling of its FDI since 2015, and has developed its "Vision 2035" along with a number of plans for national employment and inclusive development. Equatorial Guinea and Gabon reported on the volatility of oil prices, which provide a primary source of foreign revenue to finance the SDGs nationally. Conversely, Ghana and Jordan both faced difficulties in supporting national SDG programmes when oil prices increased. Gambia reported trade disruptions as a result of the pandemic, while Liberia reported improvements in the trade balance. Belarus reported that trade sanctions would undo the results achieved towards the SDGs; Eritrea reported that despite international sanctions and a difficult geopolitical context the country had made great strides in achieving some of their key development outcomes.

In finance, like other Caribbean island states, Dominica reported a "DRR Finance Strategy" ensuring that the country would become more resilient towards natural disasters such as tropical hurricanes that were increasing in frequency and impact as a result of climate change. São Tomé and Príncipe developed a resilience strategy with similar objectives. Uruguay emphasized that at the global level the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) should be applied to address global warming. Sudan has established an aid coordination unit to support the channeling of external financing.

On official development assistance (ODA), Cameroon and Ethiopia reported increased ODA, partly to help combat the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while Grenada reported on reallocation of domestic funding to mitigating the pandemic's effects. Greece promoted numerous international and regional initiatives through the establishment of partnership schemes, and Italy reportedly upheld development cooperation policy through considerable growth in the share of the budget.

On debt, Argentina, El Salvador, Eswatini and Liberia, among others, stated they had embarked to counter the impact of the pandemic against a backdrop of vulnerability and unsustainable foreign debt developed in earlier years. Somalia and Sudan reported their full engagement towards debt consolidation under the ongoing Heavily Impacted Poor Countries (HPIC) Initiative.

On data collection and monitoring of progress, Switzerland has fully digitized its stocktaking process through the "SDGital2030", noting that federal and local authorities, as well as numerous stakeholders, participated in the 2018-2022 baseline assessment. Digitizing this process lowered the barriers to participation, bundled stocktaking from the collection of information to consultation and translation to publication into one single process, and created a database that can be maintained and continuously updated until 2030. In the Philippines, a community-based statistical monitoring system was also developed to track progress.

Monitoring and Data

The successful implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs depends on robust data and information infrastructure in countries, preferably with the national statistical office in a central and leading role. To develop evidence-based policies and VNRs, the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of timely, high-quality and disaggregated SDG data are essential. The 2022 VNRs demonstrate a wide range of statistical capacity for the review and monitoring of the SDGs. However, countries have committed to SDG implementation and improving their data capabilities.

Role of data in the 2030 Agenda

Since 2016, the inclusion of data and progress assessments in VNRs has improved as countries have strengthened their monitoring frameworks for SDGs. This is also evident in the 2022 VNRs, where three-quarters of the countries presented a VNR for a second, third or fourth time. In the 2022 VNRs, countries highlighted not only the increasingly important role of data and statistics for evidence-based policy making, but also documented their progress in progressively monitoring more of the indicators in the SDG agenda.

> *"A data ecosystem is fundamental to the successful realization of the SDGs. To foster transparency, economic growth and to improve efficiency and effectiveness, an unprecedented amount of data is necessary to monitor and incentivize the advancement of these goals".*
>
> *(United Arab Emirates 2022 VNR)*

Over the years, VNRs have highlighted the roles of national statistical offices' (NSOs) in taking on greater responsibility in the VNR preparation process. NSOs often serve on VNR steering committees and provide data guidance in the VNR preparation in countries, as they coordinate with different ministries and departments to map out available SDG data. In a few countries, NSOs are even leading the preparation of the VNRs.

Importance of localizing the SDGs for monitoring

Nearly three-quarters of countries (32 out of 44) presenting their 2022 VNR detail efforts to localize the global SDG indicator framework[19] to the national context and national priorities, creating ownership and facilitating monitoring of the SDGs. For example, Montenegro adopted a National Strategy for Sustainable Development by 2030 (NSSD 2030) that is highly aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Its accompanying action plan defines the national monitoring framework, thereby facilitating the tracking of the SDGs. Such an approach, also illustrated in other VNRs, can help streamline the reporting process of the SDGs to provide timely and quality data that reflects national priorities.

Countries have also established institutional frameworks to mobilise resources and expertise across agencies to enhance SDG monitoring. The Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms developed a national list of SDG indicators, based on the global SDG framework. The Bureau has established close interdepartmental cooperation with government bodies responsible for SDG implementation, as well as the non-governmental sector and international institutions. Mali noted that the work of monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs is mandated in the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development (CREDD). The CREDD, along with the establishment of an institutional framework for monitoring the SDGs, ensure that financial and human capital are mobilized efficiently and better ownership and alignment of public policies with the SDGs.

Evidence-based analysis in the VNRs

The analysis of SDG progress across the 2022 VNRs was primarily based on the national and global SDG indicator frameworks, but also qualitative analysis. SDG progress assessments in VNRs have developed over time and more frequently include not only SDG data availability, but also information on disaggregated data, online and open SDG portals and platforms, progress charts for trend analyses, results from stakeholder surveys and consultations as well as detailed data in statistical annexes.

Data availability analysis: Twenty-eight countries (or more than 60 per cent) shared information on the data available for indicators monitoring SDG progress. For instance, Somalia provided a data coverage analysis as part of its Goal Tracker online platform, with a dashboard presenting all available data by Goal (see below). This helped to identify the need for secondary sources for a range of indicators, which would also require the NSO to validate the information.

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[19] Developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) to monitor the SDGs at the global level. The Global SDG Indicators Database is a transparent platform to access data used in global reporting.

Figure 1. Somalia Data Availability Analysis
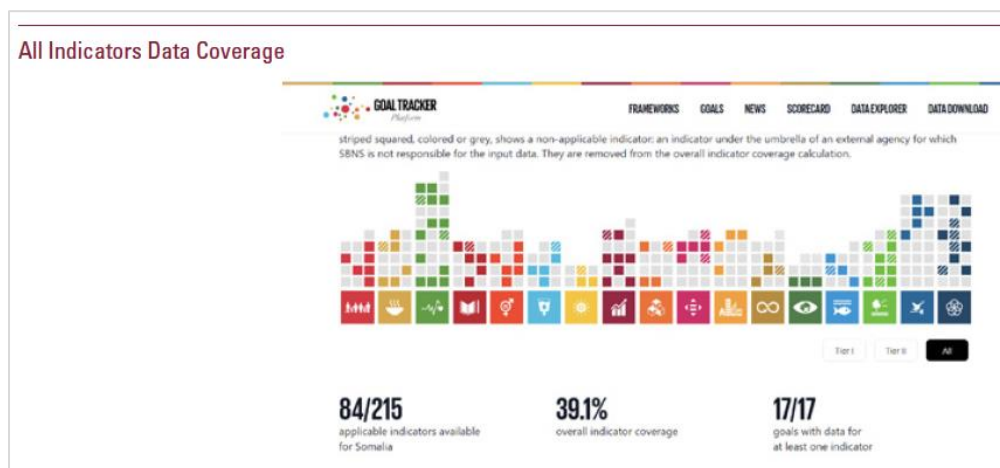
Through the data gap exercises, countries identify areas for enhanced data collection strategies and policies. In Sri Lanka, recognition of data gaps in relation to gender equality led to a Cabinet-level approval to make it compulsory to collect information on sex and age in all censuses, surveys and studies conducted by ministries and departments throughout the government. This initiative is expected to directly contribute to evidence-based policy and planning processes.

Disaggregated data/LNOB: Twenty-eight countries (or more than 60 per cent) provided disaggregated data in their VNR, which help to provide insights on some vulnerable population groups that could be left behind in national SDG implementation. However, the dimensions of disaggregation included in the 2022 VNRs vary across reports (see table below).

Figure 2. Table on Disaggregated Data in 2022 VNRs

| Disaggregation Dimension	Number of Countries*
Gender	25
Age	12
Geographical Location	19
Income Level	2
Race/ethnicity	0
Aggregations are not mutually exclusive. Some countries provide indicators in more than one dimension and not all indicators are disaggregated.	

Further information on disaggregated data is being included in online SDG platforms, such as Latvia, which launched its new Official Statistics Portal in 2020, providing detailed gender, age, ethnic, and

territorial distribution statistics. In addition, the portal includes sections on thematic publications focusing on specific age groups, such as children and seniors.

Online SDG platforms/portals: Almost a third (13 out of 44) of the presenting included information in their VNR regarding online SDG data reporting platforms. These data platforms fulfil several objectives, ranging from ensuring transparency, enhancing stakeholder participation, empowering data users, enhancing coordination of the national statistical system (NSS), collecting and disseminating SDG data, as well as aiding to streamline SDG and VNR review processes. Publicly accessible, these statistical platforms enable the public to explore and analyse the government's findings in the VNR.

Switzerland developed SDGital 2030, a digital tool that aims to simplify the data management process, promote a multi-stakeholder approach and enhance coordination among the NSS. The system acts as a one-stop-shop, facilitating the input, storage and output of data, while also helping coordinators of the VNR process with an overview of SDG targets.

Figure 3. Screenshot of Switzerland Online Data Portal
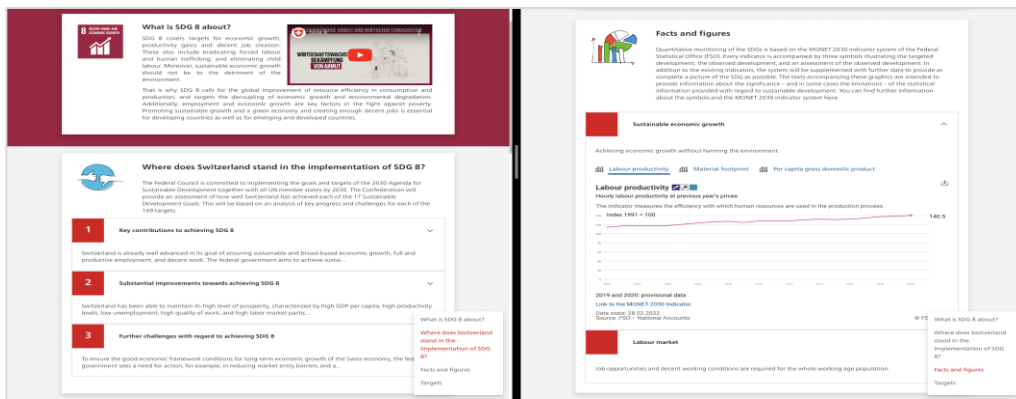
Progress charts: Eleven countries produced progress charts to provide a snapshot of their SDG progress. While some countries conducted the trend analysis by indicator, others provided a summary by Goal or target, with some based on quantitative assessments and others on qualitative assessments. While progress charts in the VNRs often summarize SDG progress based on the current year and a baseline value, Dominica presented its assessment in greater precision (see below), using four directions of trend: substantial progress, fair progress but acceleration needed, limited or no progress, and deterioration. It is helpful to include or link the progress charts with evaluation calculations or criteria, especially if using qualitative information or explanatory information on the evaluation. The progress analyses included in the VNRs are helpful for users to understand which SDG areas require more attention, how far countries must go to achieve a particular SDG and overall progress.

Figure 4. Dominica Goal 5 Progress Chart

Stakeholder surveys and consultation results: Stakeholder engagement in the VNR process ranges across the reports from surveys directed to the public to data gathering and validation consultations. For example, Eritrea conducted multi-stakeholder consultations to address the general availability and quality of data, as well as identify possible sources and mechanisms for collection and estimation. Through these channels, the private sector, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth and academia provided qualitative data for the elaboration of SDG progress and validated the findings in the VNRs. These efforts also help to promote inclusion throughout the VNR process but also facilitate public awareness of the SDGs.

Statistical Annexes: Over half of countries presenting a 2022 VNR (23 out of 44) included statistical annexes, mostly in the form of data tables (or sometimes as a separate document). The information included in the annexes shows a range of baseline years for the analysis (from 2000 to 2015), the source information for indicators, and sometimes embedded progress assessments. The inclusion of statistical

annexes in the VNRs is comparable to the 2021 VNRs, but in general, represents a steady increase since 2016.

Key data challenges and opportunities for SDG monitoring

Data challenges faced by the VNR countries to monitor the progress of the 2030 Agenda in their reports included persistent areas of difficulty for many countries: data gaps and data collection, often tied to a lack of human and financial resources, as well as coordination challenges.

Data gaps and data collection: While there has been significant progress in the VNR period toward more data-driven and evidence-based VNRs, there remains a big gap among countries' capabilities for monitoring SDG progress. Several countries, across the economic spectrum, have cited challenges in collecting timely data at the desired disaggregation levels. Often these data gaps and data collection difficulties are tied to capacity and funding challenges. For instance, in Ghana, data gaps are a challenge to effective tracking of SDG progress, impacting the quality, relevance, accuracy and timely release of statistical information. This results from capacity and funding challenges to generate administrative data and a long time span between surveys. In Eritrea, a lack of available data for SDG monitoring meant its first VNR could only focus on two Goals.

While some disaggregated data is available throughout many of the VNRs, the breadth and inclusiveness of the data across the SDGs are still a concern. Countries highlight the difficulty in collecting data to a sufficiently disaggregated level or dimension and a few countries noted that it had not been appropriately considered in past survey or census designs.

In addition, the impact of COVID-19 on data collection across countries has meant that some information remains delayed or not collected. For instance, Jamaica's national census, which is a primary source of data along with other national-level surveys, has been delayed due to COVID-19 and other factors. Moreover, data gaps, particularly on environmental Goals (Goals 13, 14 and 15) are evident across the 2022 VNRs, however, with little attention detailed on narrowing the environmental data gap.

Coordination: Several presenting countries remarked on the fragmented nature of the NSS that adds burden to the NSO and leads to a duplication of efforts. In Sudan, although the NSO has over 65 focal points producing data for the SDGs indicators from administrative data, there exist multiple sources for the same indicator with differences in the definition and methodology. The lack of coordination between the line ministries meant the administrative data collected are not interoperable, thereby providing little input to the VNR review.

Opportunities for SDG monitoring: Investing in national statistical systems remains an important opportunity to enhance SDG monitoring, which many countries have noted they are committed to. For instance, Pakistan reported an increase from 21 indicators in 2016 to 133 indicators in 2021 at the national level, highlighting the substantial increase in data availability and data quality due to coordinating and supporting key national statistical agencies with technical support, capacity development and training of staff. In addition, the country's sub-committee on SDGs in the National Economic Council is working to establish common standards and harmonise survey instruments to

improve the integration of work across different ministries. Other countries have increased engagement between ministries and the NSO. In Greece, the Presidency of the Government worked in close collaboration with the NSO on the national SDG indicators through a dedicated Working Group on SDGs.

Non-traditional data sources/new technologies: Several countries have identified alternative data sources beyond traditional survey and census data and the incorporation of administrative data to inform their VNRs and enhance SDG monitoring. Others have a keen interest to mobilize citizen-generated data, mobile data, geospatial data and big data to inform subsequent VNRs. In Latvia, the Central Bureau of Statistics carried out its first fully registers-based Population and Housing Census using administrative data in 2021, reducing the data publication time lag. In Kazakhstan, a pilot project on space monitoring was implemented to explore the efficiency of agricultural land use for the monitoring of SDG 2. The Philippines, taking lessons gained during COVID-19, continues to use Computer-Aided Web Interviews (CAWI) to collect SDG data without sacrificing accuracy.

Coherence with global and regional frameworks

Renewed emphasis on multi-sector, multi-stakeholder, transformative partnerships at scale remains at the center of the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Global and regional frameworks play an important role in this regard, as they provide governments with guidance on coherence and complementarities through plans and measures for SDG implementation.

The most commonly recognized frameworks in conjunction with the 2030 Agenda cited in this year's VNRs included the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,[20] the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030,[21] the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development,[22] the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity,[23] and the CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.[24] Other multilateral environmental agreements were also mentioned, including the Stockholm Convention (Eswatini, Gambia, Jamaica, São Tomé and Príncipe), the Basel Convention (Gambia, Jamaica, São Tomé and Príncipe, Switzerland), the Minimata Convention on mercury (Eswatini, São Tomé and Príncipe, Suriname), and the Rotterdam Convention (Gambia, Sao Tome, Principe).

Many countries are aligning their national plans and strategies with regional frameworks that complement and support the 2030 Agenda. VNRs from African countries described how the African

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[20] Belarus, Botswana, Eritrea, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Latvia, Liberia, Malawi, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, Suriname.

[21] Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Jamaica, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Netherlands (Aruba), Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates.

[22] Botswana, Dominica, Ethiopia, Greece, Grenada, Jamaica, Jordan, Latvia, Lesotho, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Suriname, United Arab Emirates.

[23] Belarus, Botswana, Dominica, Eritrea, Grenada, Jamaica, Jordan, Latvia, Lesotho, Montenegro, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Switzerland.

[24] Belarus, Botswana, Grenada, Jamaica, São Tomé and Príncipe, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates

Union's Agenda 2063 shapes the domestication and implementation of the SDGs at the national level,[25] and some also highlighted their commitment to the implementation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Vision 2050. Members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) aligned with regional frameworks such as the Caribbean Charter for Health Promotion (Grenada), or the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (Dominica, Netherlands (Sint Maarten)). Comparably, countries in the European region are seeking to ensure policy coherence through the decisions taken to implement European Union policies and laws such as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the European Council (Greece, Montenegro, Netherlands (Curaçao)) or the EU Climate Package (Montenegro). The Philippines aligned its VNR with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

Some VNRs reported on the integration of global and regional frameworks specifically related to national efforts to implement SDG 4 (Quality Education). Many referenced the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as an important step in advancing an equitable educational environment.[26] Sudan's VNR highlighted the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Latvia mentioned the Global Education Network Europe.

Special interest was also devoted to SDG 5 (Gender Equality). A number of countries referred to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),[27] the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,[28] and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (Ethiopia, Jordan, Latvia). Greece mentioned implementing the United Nations Agenda on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as one of its priorities. Sudan highlighted regional efforts, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on Women in Africa and the IGAD Regional Women's Land Rights Agenda, and members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), such as Botswana and Eswatini, referred to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Jamaica cited the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women; Dominica reported on implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender and Development; and São Tomé and Príncipe highlighted their commitment to the ILO No. 183 Convention on Maternity. The Netherlands and Switzerland both noted the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention).

Countries also highlighted integrated approaches to human rights through various global and regional instruments such as the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Kazakhstan, Somalia), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Eritrea, Liberia, Sudan), the League of Arab States Charter on Human Rights (Jordan) and the European Council Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Greece, Montenegro, Netherlands (Curaçao)), and the Convention on the

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[25] Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe.

[26] Belarus, Botswana, Dominica, Eswatini, Greece, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Netherlands, Somalia, Sudan.

[27] Botswana, Dominica, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Jordan, Lesotho, Liberia, Pakistan, Sudan.

[28] Dominica, Eritrea, Jamaica, Jordan, Liberia, Netherlands, Pakistan.

Rights of the Child (Dominica, Eritrea, Grenada, Netherlands (Curaçao), Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia).

Regarding means of implementation, SIDS and LDCs highlighted their reliance on partners to finance national sustainable development initiatives through the provision of development aid, capacity building, technical assistance and technology transfer. Some of the key partners in development and climate financing included the World Bank (Dominica, Netherlands (Sint Maarten), Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname) and regional banks such as the Asian Development Bank (Philippines, Sri Lanka), the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (Philippines), the African Development Bank (Sudan, Ethiopia), and the Inter-American Development Bank (Jamaica). Official Development Assistance through the OECD plays an important role for donor and recipient countries (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Greece, Netherlands (Aruba)), as well as bilateral development agreements and projects through North-South Cooperation (Sri Lanka, Switzerland). A number of countries noted support from the European Union; [29] others mentioned the United States Agency for International Development (Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Sudan). South-South Cooperation remains essential in many countries for SDG implementation.[30]

Stakeholder Engagement

All VNRs reported on how stakeholders engage in SDG decision-making processes, and most highlighted concrete contributions from different sectors to SDG implementation at national and sub-national levels. Reports also detailed stakeholder contributions to the 2030 Agenda follow up, including through the VNR preparatory process.

Stakeholder participation in SDG-related coordination and decision-making mechanisms

The majority of VNR reports referred to the participation of stakeholders in SDG-related decision-making bodies.[31] In Guinea-Bissau and Jordan, stakeholders participate in decision-making bodies chaired by the Prime Minister, while in Grenada the Prime Minister meets once a month with stakeholders from different sectors to discuss policy gaps and collect feedback.

A number of countries (Argentina, Italy, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malawi, Montenegro, Netherlands, Philippines, Switzerland, Suriname) engage with stakeholders through multi-stakeholder platforms and coordination mechanisms. For instance, in Lesotho, stakeholders from several sectors are represented at the National SDG Forum. In Switzerland, the 2030 Agenda Advisory Group is the link between the federal government and non-governmental actors.

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[29] Greece, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Suriname.

[30] Botswana, Dominica, Eswatini, Netherlands (Aruba), Pakistan, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sri Lanka, Suriname.

[31] Argentina, Belarus, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mali, Montenegro, Netherlands, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Suriname, Switzerland.

Technical working groups are frequently established to facilitate substantive engagement of stakeholders in SDG-related processes. For example, in Jamaica, multi-stakeholder thematic working groups support participatory monitoring of the implementation of "Vision 2030 Jamaica". In Kazakhstan, representatives of NGOs and international organizations integrate the five interagency working groups tracking SDG implementation. Malawi and Italy convene stakeholders from different sectors annually to review SDG and sustainability policies implementation.

Stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was featured in many VNRs.[32] Ethiopia, Italy, and Luxembourg reported on the engagement of stakeholders during the preparation of their National Development Plans.

The establishment of online platforms to compile stakeholders' commitments and contributions was reported by Switzerland (www.SDGital2030.ch), Montenegro (www.sdgmontenegro.me) and Luxembourg (www.aktioun-nohaltegkeet.lu). In Dominica, an online data collection platform was established to identify initiatives implemented in support to the SDGs. Somalia established an online data visualizing dashboard and a SDGs goal tracker.

Stakeholder engagement in monitoring and reporting, including VNRs

Most countries registered processes for establishing and consolidating stakeholder consultation mechanisms for the SDGs, including the VNR process. For instance, in Botswana, Dominica, Eritrea, Jordan, Philippines and Senegal stakeholders were represented in the main mechanisms responsible for the VNR drafting process. In the Philippines, SDG Watch involves multiple government agencies and stakeholders as the main tool to assess SDG progress.

Numerous countries reported on the engagement of stakeholders in the organization of the VNR process, including through consultations,[33] workshops,[34] online questionnaires (Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Latvia, Luxembourg, São Tomé and Príncipe), inclusion of stakeholder inputs (Argentina, Italy, Greece), interviews (Jamaica, Sudan, Suriname) and awareness sessions (United Arab Emirates). In Jamaica, over 600 participants were engaged through meetings and conferences, a community engagement series, as well as through two round tables on civil society and private sector participation in SDG implementation.

Argentina's report featured contributions from PAMPA 2030, the Argentinian Platform to Monitor the 2030 Agenda, which includes representatives from several sectors. VNRs from Eswatini and Latvia included chapters with stakeholder perspectives on SDG-related policies and implementation. Greece

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[32] Andorra, Argentina, Belarus, Botswana, Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Mali, Netherlands, Senegal, Switzerland

[33] Cote D'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Greece, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Italy, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, Tuvalu.

[34] Cote D'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica Ghana, Gabon, Eritrea, Italy, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sri Lanka, Sudan.

and Sudan included Annexes with summaries of stakeholder consultations. In Ghana, a case study template was developed and broadly circulated to compile information on SDG innovative interventions.

Cote D'Ivoire organized regional consultations in 14 autonomous districts, including representatives from local authorities, decentralized State structures, community leaders and other stakeholders. In Sudan, the VNR process included consultations with the 18 states at sub national level, including local governments and civil society. In Senegal, regular regional meetings were organized to present the report to grassroots community organizations. The report from the Netherlands details stakeholder engagement efforts in the four parts of the Kingdom (Aruba, Curaçao, the Netherlands and Sint Maarten). In Djibouti, Kazakhstan and Somalia the consultation process was broadly disseminated through national media, social media and campaigns. In Malawi, the consultation process included mobilization through radio.

In some countries, including Cote D'Ivoire, Eritrea, Greece, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Suriname, working drafts of the VNR report were shared with stakeholders for inputs. In Kazakhstan, each VNR chapter went through an open public discussion in 30 micro-groups, including stakeholders.

Sectorial engagement and participation

The specific contributions from different sectors to SDG implementation were highlighted in a number of VNRs. Argentina, Belarus, Cote D'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Grenada, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Mali, São Tomé and Príncipe and Uruguay mentioned actions undertaken in partnership with and by CSOs. Ethiopia highlighted legislative reforms aimed at making administration of civil society organizations independent, strengthening their capacity to further support SDG implementation. In Latvia, in 2021, 72 per cent of grants for development cooperation managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs included Latvian civil society organizations as partners while the Netherlands showcased its support to grassroot organizations in developing countries, working in collaboration with Dutch NGOs, through four grant instruments designed to achieve the SDGs.

The role of civil society platforms to support SDG implementation and follow up was also emphasized in several reports, including, for instance, the Civil Society Initiative for the SDGs (Cote D'Ivoire), the Lesotho Council of NGOs (Lesotho) and the SDG Nederland (Netherlands). Andorra, Argentina, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Uruguay flagged the work of private sector companies in integrating the SDGs into corporate policies and included examples of good practices. In Luxembourg, the Business Partnership Facility, established in 2016, has supported 34 sustainable projects, mostly in Africa. The Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka conducted a mapping exercise of 150 companies across 10 sectors with the aim of understanding the extent of private sector involvement in SDG activities.

Reports featured micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) as driving forces for progress towards SDGs and the inclusive recovery from COVID-19 (Argentina, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Uruguay). MSMEs were considered economic backbones for employment creation and poverty reduction, especially for groups in vulnerable situations (Cameroon, Ghana, Montenegro, Sri Lanka). MSMEs were also hit the hardest by the pandemic (Cote D'Ivoire, Malawi,

Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Suriname). To support MSMEs and protect jobs, countries have launched stimulus programmes to alleviate cashflow pressure and credit constraints (Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Jordan, Jamacia, Lesotho, Netherlands, Philippines). Capacity building programmes are widely delivered to elevate MSME digitization (Equatorial Guinea), resilience (Djibouti, Dominica, Switzerland) and expand MSME contributions to sustainable industrialization (Mali) and innovations (Belarus, United Arab Emirates). The high informality of MSMEs has undermined MSME resilience (Ethiopia, Liberia, San Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo) and there are urgent needs to promote responsible entrepreneurship for sustainable consumption and production among them (Andorra, Greece, Jordan, Kazakhstan).

Countries including Argentina, Equatorial Guinea, Italy, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Togo and Uruguay referred to activities undertaken in collaboration with academic institutions in support to SDG implementation. For instance, in Italy, an open call was launched in 2019 for universities, foundations and research centers to promote projects aimed at supporting the implementation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy in cooperation with regions and autonomous provinces.

Andorra, Belarus, Dominica, Italy, Latvia, Lesotho, Montenegro, Netherlands, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uruguay, and others shared initiatives implemented to mobilize and engage youth in SDG implementation and follow up. For instance, Belarus instituted Youth SDG Ambassadors identified among university students. In Dominica the government crafted a framework for the integration of the SDGs into the school curriculum at primary and secondary education levels. Lesotho, Malawi, and Montenegro adopted the UNICEF U-report methodologies to foster youth engagement and participation in the VNR process.

Andorra, Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Mali, Netherlands, Suriname, and others flagged examples of collaboration with local governments in SDG implementation. Argentina's SDG localization efforts included a cooperation agreement to provide awareness-raising activities for civil servants and technical assistance at local level.

In Italy, two inter-institutional roundtables are permanent multi-level interaction mechanisms towards sustainable development and policy coherence. In Mali, a guide for the integration of the SDGs in the development programs of the local authorities has been elaborated and capacity building sessions were held. In the Netherlands, by May 2022, 119 local authorities have claimed the title of Global Goals Municipality.

Argentina, Eswatini, Grenada, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates listed examples of contributions of women's organizations to SDG related processes. Argentina's report included a segment with recommendations from feminist groups. Eswatini highlighted the participation of "Lutsango", a cultural formation of women in the country, in several initiatives.

Many countries (Andorra, Argentina, Belarus, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Montenegro, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Uruguay) mentioned collaboration with UN entities and other development partners in SDG implementation and follow up.

In Grenada, the government organized stakeholder consultations in partnership with the UN system. UN agencies in Djibouti supported the drafting process, including the organization of consultations with stakeholders, validation workshops and communication.

Côte d'Ivoire, Italy, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates recognized the contributions from volunteers in SDG implementation at national and sub-national level. Switzerland highlighted the creation of the SDG 2030 parliamentary group, established in 2021 as a non-partisan body that seeks cross-party solutions for the SDGs. Lesotho organized interviews and discussion panels with special and marginalized groups as part of the VNR process.

Other sectors mentioned in VNR reports included trade unions (Italy, Jamaica), senior citizens (Jamaica, Philippines, Senegal), persons with disabilities (Liberia, Philippines, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan), children (Liberia), media (Netherlands, Pakistan, Sudan), parliamentarians (Netherlands, Pakistan, Senegal, Switzerland).

Lessons Learned, Challenges and Next Steps

Many countries reflected on lessons learned, challenges and next steps to strengthen stakeholder engagement. Eswatini highlighted the importance of starting the VNR process early to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were able to participate.

Challenges included: lower response from stakeholders, including the private sector (Andorra, Eswatini, Jordan, Togo); limited technical and organizational capacities of stakeholders (Cameroon, Eswatini, Liberia, Sri Lanka); CSOs limited resources (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia); limited access to technologies for virtual participation (Eswatini, Philippines); need of better coordination between stakeholders (Gabon, Lesotho), need of more systematic spaces for dialogue with stakeholders (Greece, Kazakhstan, Netherlands, Sri Lanka).

Some countries indicated plans to further strengthen stakeholder engagement including by: establishing frameworks for multi-stakeholder consultation and coordination (Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Suriname); creating an enabling environment to increase private sector engagement (Dominica); continued communication, awareness-raising, training and consultation processes (El Salvador, Ethiopia); increasing the number of stakeholders engaged in the next VNR reports (Equatorial Guinea); strengthening stakeholders capacities to engage (Eswatini, Italy, Jordan) and reviewing lessons learned from the VNR process (Liberia). Jordan, the Netherlands, Philippines and São Tomé and Príncipe indicated that multi-stakeholder structures established to support the VNR process would be maintained as long-term engagement spaces.

Awareness-raising

Efforts to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs with the public and specific sectors of society continue to be strengthened through the VNR exercise. This section features some examples and initiatives from this year's reports.

Andorra, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Malawi, Netherlands, Somalia, Togo and others carried out awareness-raising activities as part of the VNR process. The official launching of the VNR in Ghana was planned as an opportunity for SDG awareness.

Through SDG localization efforts, countries including Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Italy and Suriname organized activities to share information, gather views and discuss the contribution of local authorities and communities to the 2030 Agenda implementation. Jamaica organized 'Parish Talks' across the island to build capacity of local authorities and to raise awareness of local citizens to the SDGs.

Belarus, Botswana, Djibouti and Latvia registered awareness-raising activities undertaken as part of SDG-related policies. Eswatini, Malawi and the Netherlands translated the SDGs and related documents into subnational languages while Luxembourg prepared a shorter, educational version of the National Plan for Sustainable Development aimed at the general public.

Reports also featured the contribution of stakeholders in awareness-raising for the SDGs. For instance, in Gabon, NGOs conducted awareness-raising activities in several cities and among young people in high schools and colleges to build ownership towards sustainable development. In Jordan, universities are contributing to SDG awareness with students and local communities. Kazakhstan flagged the contribution of CSOs in disseminating SDG-related knowledge through the media and social networks, especially with vulnerable groups. In the United Arab Emirates, the SDG School Awareness Campaign was created to educate children about sustainable development.

Ethiopia and Mali organized capacity building and awareness-raising workshops for stakeholders, while Liberia conducted an assessment on SDG awareness across the country. Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia and Sudan shared plans to implement SDG awareness-raising campaigns.

Means of Implementation

All countries reported on the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda, providing information and examples of progress and challenges in mobilizing both domestic and international financial resources, and assessing how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international development cooperation and trade. The importance of South-South cooperation, partnerships, and capacity building for a more resilient and sustainable recovery were at the center of many efforts to accelerate the SDGs. Science, technology and innovation continue to play a central role in efforts to reduce inequalities and ensure that all countries are able to advance in critical areas of importance, so that no one is left behind.

Resources and financing

Financing from a range of sources, public and private, contributes to fostering sustainable development and achieving the 2030 Agenda (Djibouti, Dominica, El Salvador, Jamaica, others.) To achieve the priority objectives of its national development plan and the prioritized targets of the SDGs, Djibouti is structuring investment according to three priority pillars—inclusion, connectivity, and institutions—and cross-cutting themes, including human capital development and investment in digitalization. Countries reported on SDG costing (Jamaica, Jordan), gender-responsive budgeting (Jordan, Liberia, Montenegro, Pakistan, Sao Tome & Principe, Senegal), and participatory budgeting (Kazakhstan, Latvia).

Countries reported on various strategic investments in the SDGs and frameworks to channel resources for their achievement, including by developing or strengthening funds and instruments for green investments (Ethiopia, Italy, Montenegro); Greece has established a guarantee fund for sustainable development focusing on investments by SMEs in green finance activities. Ethiopia allocated a dedicated budget to the SDGs to accelerate implementation, which has been distributed to the regional states through a federal grant allocation. In Latvia the proceeds of a sustainability bond are being used for budget expenditures on environmentally friendly transport; the preservation of Latvia's forests, waters and biodiversity; and reducing inequalities. Luxembourg reported that it has become the global center for environmental, social and governance (ESG) funds, with the largest green bond market in the world.

In the context of SDG financing, countries reported on plans to carry out integrated national financing frameworks or updates on their preparation (Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Philippines). Kazakhstan reported that its Development Finance Assessment had revealed, among other things, that the SDGs and their targets and indicators are not yet adequately taken into account in the budget process, which made it more difficult to monitor how public policies and spending contribute to sustainable development. In Malawi the integrated national financing framework (INFF) is being used to mobilize and catalyse resources and investments, public and private, to fund its development plans and deliver the SDGs. Ghana has aligned its allocation and expenditure to allow for annual tracking of SDGs financing through the SDG budgeting reports. Jamaica reported that the Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond Initiative had brought about a number of results, included the extension of the Debt Service Suspension initiative (DSSI) and the issuance of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs).

To attract FDI and boost private investment, countries have implemented diverse strategies, including adoption of new laws (Ethiopia, Greece, Sudan) and institutional changes (Suriname). In Sudan the government established the Investment and Private Sector Development Agency (IPSDA) as a one-stop government institution to promote the private sector. Countries also recognized the need to strengthen financial planning and management systems (Dominica, Malawi, Suriname).

To address the challenges posed by narrow fiscal space, declining FDI and ODA, public-private partnerships are another means of implementation, especially in the area of infrastructure (Ethiopia, Gabon, Swaziland, Senegal, Sudan, United Arab Emirates). In making the national private sector the engine of growth, Senegal relies on the development of public-private partnerships and the involvement of private sector representatives in institutional mechanisms.

Remittances and support from the diaspora continue to be an important source of capital inflows (Dominica, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Jamaica, Liberia, Somalia, Suriname). Senegal noted that, since most of the remittances from emigrants are destined for household consumption, the challenge is to direct them mainly towards productive investment. Sri Lanka drew attention to the social aspects of remittances from a migrant labour force, including child labour and other human rights violations. Lesotho has established a Diaspora Directorate to facilitate coordination of diaspora communities and their investment in Lesotho.

Domestic resources mobilization

As the world grapples with the socio-economic effects from the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising cost of living, countries are continually rethinking means of mobilizing more financing for their development needs. Although there is a declining trend on the flows of official development assistance towards developing countries, it is important to note that ODA directed towards fighting the COVID 19 pandemic has increased in many countries. The United Arab Emirates, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland are committed to honor their ODA pledges.

To finance their development needs, many countries are stepping up efforts for domestic resources mobilization.[35] Developing countries are also embracing INFFs as valuable tools for effectively and efficiently managing development resources. The INFFs provide a framework for a holistic process from development priorities identification, project preparation, resource mapping, funding mobilization and implementation. Some governments are also looking into decentralizing service delivery functions to local levels in order to fast-track development initiatives and reduce intra-country inequalities and disparities (Eswatini).

Countries are also strengthening resource mobilization by adopting innovative tax practices including by modernizing tax administration, broadening the tax base and improving the business environment.[36] In Cameroon for instance, the national budgetary revenues have experienced an upward trend over the period 2015-2021, largely attributable to the good performance of tax revenues, thanks to ambitious tax reforms. Jamaica also saw an increase in government revenue resulting from reforms in the tax system to embed efficiency and transparency. Suriname has also taken steps to modernize their Tax and Customs Administration and introduce tax incentives to stimulate the production sector. Switzerland is committed to mobilize tax revenues in developing countries through its international cooperation framework, by use of vehicles such as the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets.

Some of the constraints to domestic resources mobilization include effects of political instability, weak public administration, and lack of adequate oversight mechanisms. Developing countries require continued assistance to strengthen their domestic resources mobilization capacity. This will ensure faster policy and institutional reforms to facilitate increased mobilization of development financing.

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[35] El Salvador, Eswatini, Ghana, Malawi, Jamaica, Guinea-Bissau, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Pakistan, Philippines, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sudan, Togo
[36] Cameroon, Eswatini, Cote d'Ivoire, Jamaica, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname

International development cooperation

Official development assistance (ODA) continued to be a vital source of development financing for developing countries for achievement of the 2030 Agenda.[37] For smaller economies, ODA makes up a significant proportion of total development financing. ODA accounts for 30 per cent of development financing in Tuvalu and over 90 per cent of public investment spending in São Tomé and Príncipe. Although trends indicate that the total ODA has declined in 2021, ODA directed to social sectors such as agriculture, education, water, health and sanitation in developing countries has increased (Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Jamaica, Tuvalu), which in turn provides economic benefits for transport, power, and sewerage infrastructure, as well as strengthening the environmental sector through ecosystem preservation, disaster risk reduction, building resilience to climate change and associated natural hazards. Developing countries are taking measures to cushion themselves from declining ODA trends by strengthening other means of development financing. Ghana, for instance, is transitioning from aid reliance towards development finance self-sufficiency. As countries like Jamaica and Grenada graduate to middle-income status, a decline in ODA flows has resulted in more limited access to concessional financing.

As developed countries have been called upon to fulfill their pledges to commit 0.7 per cent of their gross national income towards ODA to developing countries. Donor countries including Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland and United Arab Emirates are committed to enhancing development cooperation by contributing to the ODA as determined by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. The United Arab Emirates is ranked among the largest ODA contributors relative to GNI, consistently exceeding 0.7 per cent in targeted assistance to developing countries in multilateral and bilateral arrangements. In 2020, the Netherlands ranked fifth in the European Union on ODA commitments, channeling 0.59 per cent of GNI to development assistance. In 2021, Italy recorded an increase in its ODA commitments due to wide support for COVID-19 mitigation and recovery efforts in developing countries, reaching 0.28 per cent of GNI. Countries that have transitioned from ODA recipients to donors, such as Kazakhstan, are also strengthening the development cooperation ecosystem in pursuit of the SDGs.

Trade

Countries stressed the critical importance of global and regional trade agreements and the international trading system (Guinea-Bissau, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka); of keeping international trade open and non-discriminatory (Switzerland); and of the need to avoid implementing trade-restrictive measures (Jamaica, Latvia). Several countries expressed support for the transition to duty-free and quota-free market access for all least developed countries (Jamaica, Latvia). Sri Lanka noted that free trade agreements could facilitate FDI inflows, bringing with them capital infusions and transfer of technology to increase goods and services exports. The Netherlands noted that one way of promoting sustainable, responsible trade and investment is by encouraging Dutch firms to direct their activities towards achieving the SDGs. The foreign economic policy strategy of Switzerland contains binding sustainability

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[37] Gambia, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Equatorial Guinea, Grenada, Malawi, Gabon, Togo, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Philippines, Uruguay.

provisions for bilateral trade agreements, designed to encourage selected developing and newly industrialised countries on their path to fulfilling sustainability goals and obligations.

Diverse policy actions have been taken to facilitate trade, including closer integration into regional trade agreements (Equatorial Guinea), investment in port infrastructure (Djibouti), and initiatives for market access and trade facilitation (Jamaica, Montenegro, Pakistan). The potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was also recognized (Ethiopia, Ghana).

South-South cooperation

Countries in the global South are keen to strengthen South-South cooperation with aim to share best practices of development models within their regions (Guinea-Bissau, Eswatini, Philippines, Tuvalu). Such cooperation among countries of a similar socio-economic standing enables sharing of knowledge, skills, and other development tools in high-impact areas such as health, agriculture and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Some countries have also proposed establishment of national plans for capacity building to coordinate south-south cooperation and to strengthen cooperation in targeted areas, key among them being technological transfers.

Eswatini revamped its information and communication technology sector through establishment of a science technology part under their South-South cooperation for the development of the participatory poverty assessment study in 2019. As well, Switzerland is keen to facilitate access to technology in developing countries to achieve digital transformation for all. Kazakhstan, through establishment of the Kazakhstan Agency for International Development is stepping up efforts to further integrate into the regional and international cooperation frameworks, notably aiding Afghanistan and other Central Asia developing countries. The Netherlands is supporting south-south cooperation efforts through support to the six Caribbean islands of the Kingdom in thematic sectors such as sustainable tourism, marine biodiversity, blue economy and climate change.

Partnerships

Countries recognized that achievement of SDGs will only be informed by effective partnerships among all national, regional, and global actors such as governments and other stakeholders such as private sector and civil society (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Greece). Regional economic cooperation blocks such as EAC, COMESA, SADC, CARICOM, ECOWAS, CEEAC are being utilized by countries to advance their SDG agenda. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan is leading efforts to strengthen partnerships for SDGs through establishment of the Regional UN Center in Almaty intended to facilitate coordination of the development agenda in the region.

International development partners are more consistent in supporting countries in special situations such as SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs. Middle income countries have also benefitted from increased access to concessional financing especially for COVID-19 response (Jamaica, Grenada). The most vulnerable countries such as SIDS will require special consideration due to their multidimensional vulnerabilities such as exposure to climate related occurrences as well as other socio-economic shocks (Tuvalu, São Tomé and Príncipe, Grenada).

In efforts to create efficient partnerships with its diaspora community, many developing countries have established mechanisms to coordinate and mobilize participation from citizens living in diaspora and create an enabling environment for diaspora to participate in the national sustainable economic development (Ethiopia, Togo, Lesotho, Sao Tome, and Principe).

Greece has also spearheaded a partnership mechanism with Cyprus and other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East regions to establish and build synergies around SDG accelerator sectors such as digital technologies, tourism, and marine conservation. Italy's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2022 prioritizes partnerships as means to integrate the principles of universality and integration to all dimensions of sustainability.

Science, technology and innovation

Digital transformation is crucial to progressing towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ethiopia informed of the development of a digital strategy for inclusive prosperity (Digital Ethiopia 2025) to address the digital divide challenges and promote digital financial services in the country. The government also decided to open the telecom sector to accelerate the digital transformation in the country. Pakistan reported that in order to facilitate the use of innovation in reducing inequalities, the federal government kick-started the "Smart Village" project. Under this project, villages in the country will be equipped with ICT facilities, where people will be trained on the use of digital services in order to transform and digitally empower remote areas and help rural communities attain improved access to basic services of education, healthcare and commerce.

Several countries reported on efforts to modernize data collection (Ethiopia, Grenada, Sudan). In Ghana, the Statistical Service works towards making data more open for reuse, ensures better communication and visibility of data, ensures that data connects to decision-making process and meets users' needs, as well as ensures that data is interoperable and harmonized. Switzerland noted that while technological innovation opens up new possibilities for advancement, it can also give rise to significant risks, such as cyberattacks, and it is important to set legal frameworks to keep up with developments.

Greece reported on scientific cooperation with the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's science and knowledge service; the outcome of the workshop "Science for Policymaking in Greece", held in collaboration with EU policy makers and scientists, concluded that science for policy making is gaining momentum, given the successful use of scientific evidence and public management during COVID-19 and other government initiatives, and that there seems to be a strong political will to take further steps.

Jamaica reported on developing the National Broadband Initiative (NBI), led by the Ministry of Science, Energy and Technology, seeking to improve inter-island connectivity through a multiphase approach with the help of international partners through FDI or ODA in order to ensure island-wide fibre-optic broadband; part of this is addressed in the National Infrastructure Communication Backbone, a network that includes schools and public entities.

Some small island developing states (Dominica) mentioned that their limited technical capacity, among other problems, presents a challenge to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Sri Lanka underlined that in view of limited fiscal space, mobilizing North-South and South-South partnerships for technology transfer would be critical to address the challenges connected to digital infrastructure, human capital and ICT education. The Suriname Agriculture Market Access Project (SAMAP) with support from the European Union (EU) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is working to improve innovation in the agriculture sector.

Capacity-building

The 2022 VNRs underlined the importance of capacity-building in implementing and advancing the 2030 Agenda in a pandemic-affected world,[38] and countries highlighted specific capacity development needs in various areas. Sudan observed that its decades of isolation from the international community created demand for capacity building across many sectors for achieving the SDGs, including for civil servants at federal and subnational levels and for civil society. Somalia expressed the view that decades of conflict and weak institutional capacity have significantly hindered the country's development and listed as one of its priorities the strengthening of national technical level capacity to collect, consolidate, measure and evaluate SDG progress through the provision of appropriate technical assistance.

The Cameroonian government intends to pursue action and plans to enhance its ability in the anticipation of risk management in relation to exogenous shocks. Jamaica noted the need for increased human resources and capacity-building among public institutions to support rapid response and adaptation to provide services to a larger number of poor and vulnerable groups seeking assistance. São Tomé and Principe noted that capacity-building actions would be carried out for the coordination and implementation of planning instruments at all levels. In particular, the capacities of development actors in prioritizing, mainstreaming, monitoring and evaluating SDG implementation would be strengthened. Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten (Netherlands) stressed the importance of international, regional and national cooperation, with a focus on capacity-building as well as policy coherence and institutional strengthening. Grenada plans to promote capacity-building and succession planning in the public sector, while Gambia highlighted the need for continuous capacity development for effective SDG implementation.

Countries including São Tomé and Principe, Sudan and Suriname highlighted their capacity development programmes with the United Nations system in country, and noted that intensified cooperation and partnerships with national research institutes, as well as with regional and international partners, was crucial. Some countries (Montenegro, São Tomé and Principe, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates) highlighted cooperation between the public and private sector, while Luxembourg and Malawi also called for an increase in international cooperation activity.

The 2022 VNRs re-addressed the need for capacity-building of the institutional framework for the SDGs. Countries such as Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Jamaica, Lesotho,

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[38] The Gambia, Netherlands (Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten), Philippines, São Tomé and Principe, United Arab Emirates.

Luxembourg, Curaçao, Aruba and Sint Maarten of the Netherlands, São Tomé and Principe and Sudan expressed the need for strengthening institutional resilience. Gabon, Latvia, Malawi, São Tomé and Principe and Senegal noted their challenges in combating corruption, which negatively affect the delivery of development programmes and social services. These countries expressed need for capacity-building to establish transparent government agencies in support of institutional integrity.

Countries continued to highlight the need for further digitalization and advancement of e-government, noting that the strengthening the digital capacity of the public sector ensured high productivity and innovative approaches. Countries including Belarus, El Salvador, Greece, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lesotho, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Suriname and Switzerland noted the problem of inadequate digital competencies and observed that many people are being left behind in training and capacity building programmes to build digital skills. Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Sudan further noted in particular the significant gender disparity in digital training and education. Countries including Argentina, Botswana, Cameroon, Dominica, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Greece, Jamaica, Lesotho, Malawi, Montenegro, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, Suriname, Togo and Uruguay raised the issue of capacity for the development of technical training projects and technological-digital infrastructure.

Countries continued to seek capacity-building initiatives to ensure subsidiarity and bottom-up development. Argentina, Dominica, Eswatini, Grenada, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Mali, Sri Lanka and the United Arab Emirates pointed out the need to generate capacity and dialogue between municipalities. Eswatini pointed out the importance of sub-national capacity-building and noted that implementation of the goals must be visible at grassroots level. Reduction of inequalities between urban and rural areas and between different social, religious and ethnic groups was also noted as an area requiring attention. The Philippines observed that the SDGs are seen to be too technical at the local level, and that national governments should translate the SDGs from its technical form to a version that is more accessible for local governments and their local realities.

Capacity-building for the national statistical system (NSS) remains urgent for the majority of countries who prepared VNRs. As in previous years, a significant number of countries mentioned the need to strengthen capacities to increase the availability of high-quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data. Equatorial Guinea pointed out that strengthened statistical capacity and public administration information can help the government better identify vulnerable populations, develop evidence-based policies, improve transparency and social inclusion, and create more development opportunities. Countries such as Grenada, Guinea-Bissau and Montenegro noted that both human and financial resources continue to limit capacity building for the NSS.

Evolution of Voluntary National Reviews

In 2022, the number of countries reporting for the second and third time continued to increase, with three times more countries presenting a second VNR than in 2019. All second-, third- and fourth-time presenters except one mentioned their previous review(s), but the degree to which they were taken into

account for the subsequent VNRs varied among the reports. Some have only a cursory mention, while others underline advancements since their previous VNR(s).

The majority of countries conducting their second, third or fourth VNR highlighted a paradigm shift in their second and subsequent VNRs or cited major achievements since the year of their previous review. Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Latvia reported that their first VNR was done to show commitment to the 2030 Agenda, while the second one showed more concrete and tangible progress, including identification of challenges and areas where more needs to be done.

All countries that had conducted a previous VNR reported on the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress towards achievement of the SDGs. Argentina, Liberia and Switzerland referred to what has changed in their institutional structure or how it has been further reinforced. Botswana, Greece and Jamaica highlighted the implementation of gender-responsive and climate-smart SDG financing strategies, including increased private sector engagement and innovative sources of financing that were not previously in place. Italy, Netherlands and Philippines highlighted increased engagement of stakeholders, both from government and outside government in their subsequent VNRs, including localization of SDGs. Kazakhstan, Senegal and United Arab Emirates reported on advancements in data collection, development of national and local indicators, and better monitoring and review of the SDGs. Andorra, Jordan and Uruguay described follow-up on concrete measures undertaken, which had been announced in the first VNR.

Overall, it can be said that the quality of VNRs has improved with subsequent reporting. All countries with more than one VNR show commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and stress that SDGs are the central framework for recovering sustainably. Most of these countries also emphasize effort in areas of gender equality and women's empowerment, social protection, and fostering resilience.

Sustainable recovery from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound global impact with an estimated 676 million people expected to be living in extreme poverty in 2022, further aggravated by rising inflation and the effects of the war in Ukraine.[39] An estimated two out of five learners continue to experience disruptions to education[40] and there has been a 25 per cent increase in the global prevalence of anxiety and depression because of stress caused by social isolation, with young people and women most affected.[41] As infections recede, all countries are leveraging opportunities to build back better from the pandemic, while learning how to

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[39] World Bank (April 2022). Pandemic, prices, and poverty. https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/pandemic-prices-and-poverty

[40] UNICEF (2022). Where are we on Education Recovery? https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381091

[41] World Health Organisation (March 2022). COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25 per cent increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide. https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide

deal with ongoing outbreaks. Many countries reported on how they are taking measures for a sustainable recovery from COVID-19 while continuing to address inequality and achieve the SDGs.

Economic measures toward sustainable recovery from the pandemic

National strategic plans to build back better

The impact of the pandemic has led to governments taking a fresh look at the development of financing strategies for the SDGs that are risk-informed, climate-focused, gender-sensitive, and responsive to their country's development priorities (Botswana, El Salvador, Philippines and Lesotho). Many countries have revised their national development plans to incorporate lessons learned from the pandemic (Botswana, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Grenada, Italy, Jamaica, Switzerland) and added new development pillars to enhance public sector efficiency and support policies and mechanisms that strengthen economic, social, and environmental protections against future crises (Jordan, Montenegro).

Many countries have implemented government stimulus packages, solidarity funds and debt moratoriums for businesses, investments in various socio-economic sectors, (Botswana, Dominica, Luxembourg, Malawi, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Togo, United Arab Emirates) and some have also developed resilience and economic recovery plans (Cameroon, Liberia, Somalia), working in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to manage foreign debt (Suriname) and combat the deteriorating social situation. Senegal reported their development of an integrated financing framework to streamline available financing while strengthening public-private partnerships (PPP).

Innovative solutions and policy measures

The pandemic accelerated the use of scientific data in decision-making processes with countries like Greece, Italy, and the United Arab Emirates leveraging the development of numerous digital services to enable the collection and aggregation of data to drive evidence-based policymaking.

Digital transformation measures

COVID-19 has given great impetus to digital technologies, fast-tracking the digitization of public services in Djibouti, Gabon, Philippines, Sri Lanka and others, and contributing to changing citizens' behaviour and accelerating the adoption of digital and financial technologies. Various countries have established policy frameworks to accelerate their digitization agenda (Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Grenada), and Greece is reportedly using the pandemic as an opportunity to overcome the bureaucratic inertia of past programs to provide digital services to its citizens.

Measures to control inflation

The pandemic has disrupted global and domestic supply chains along with foreign direct investment, forcing some countries to draw down on foreign reserves and prompting them to obtain budget support from the World Bank and international debt issuance markets to establish longer-term economic recovery (Andorra, Botswana, Cameroon, Dominica).

Some countries, such as Argentina, implemented macroeconomic strategies that accumulate international reserves to strengthen their Central Bank's foreign currency position to maintain sustainability in their markets and avoid devaluation jumps that harm economic activity. Eritrea leveraged national fundraising campaigns that involved financial and material contributions from individuals, businesses, and groups (local and living abroad) to support the elderly, women or single-person headed households, people with disabilities, the poor, and the unemployed. To deal with inflation, countries like Andorra increased socio-economic benefits, reduced indirect taxes on necessities, and ran campaigns to promote sustainability and energy savings.

Supporting people through COVID-19 recovery

Health care and vaccination campaigns

Globally, vaccination campaigns were key for COVID-19 recovery, in addition to campaigns to promote prevention, emergency plans, and early detection. For some countries, the pandemic was an opportunity to showcase their medical know-how on research, pharmacopoeia (Cameroon) or medical innovation (United Arab Emirates), or to improve the public health care system of delivery (Djibouti, Greece).

Mental health support

Andorra, Sri Lanka, Argentina and United Arab Emirates reported the creation of special mental health programmes to better support the populations affected by the pandemic and provide easier access to trained professionals.

Adapting education systems

Governments implemented online learning to ensure educational continuity despite school closures. Programmes of computer loans were facilitated in many countries (including Andorra, Dominica, Greece, Grenada). To reach children without Internet access, several Governments facilitated learning through TV and radio broadcasts (Greece, Sudan). Health protocols were also created to prepare for a safe reopening of schools (Mali, Somalia). In Suriname, the pandemic led to reducing the number of school children per class. In Sri Lanka, child protection services became an essential service to continue to protect children from violence, abuse, and child labour through the pandemic.

Supporting women and girls

Many countries, including Belarus, Botswana, Cameroon, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Uruguay, reported adopting special measures to support women and girls who were disproportionally affected by the pandemic, such as reinforcing the fight against the rise in gender-based violence and human trafficking. Somalia reported increased efforts to eradicate Female Genital Mutilation. Some reported on initiatives to provide specific financial aid to women to help compensate for the loss of paid work, training for women entrepreneurs and support for women return to the workforce, including a "Business and Career Days for Women" held in Belarus with the support of UNDP, and the training of thousands of women

and girls in Cameroon to produce masks, soap and hand sanitizer. Campaigns to highlight increased unpaid work of women in households and promote women's representation in leadership positions were also undertaken.

Combating climate change through COVID-19 recovery

Several countries made important strides in combating climate change, despite the challenges stemming from the pandemic. Guinea-Bissau adopted a multi-sectoral approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, based on its ambitious vision of climate resilience. Relying on development partners, the country is strongly positioned to consolidate the achievements and lay the foundations for economic recovery and better reconstruction, post-COVID-19. Luxembourg has exceeded the target it had set for 2020 of 11 per cent renewable energy in its total consumption of energy. Its "Climate Pact" provides financial and technical support for the implementation of concrete climate protection measures at the local level. Along with the Philippines and Sweden, they also took concrete measures to help streamline green and climate finance in the financial sector. The Philippines and Cameroon have both achieved some progress on sustainable management of their coastal and marine sectors, and the Philippines also implemented the production of eco-friendly personal protective equipment. Projects such as the creation of ecological villages, new methods of waste management, and recycling projects were implemented by governments in Togo and other countries.

The way forward

The global crises resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts to recover sustainably have shined a spotlight on the relevance of the 2030 Agenda and the urgent need for partnerships at all levels. The VNRs in 2022 reveal that the initiatives undertaken to put countries on the path of a truly sustainable recovery are often the result of successful partnerships, particularly those related to food distribution, support for vulnerable groups, better access to the Internet, financial aid, or combating climate change. This year's VNRs make it very clear that all parts of society—and all parts of the world—must work together for a post-pandemic recovery that leaves no one behind.

Conclusion

The 2022 VNRs catalogue how the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as multiple conflicts and other crises, have caused major setbacks to progress in many areas across the SDGs. They reflect the HLPF theme of "Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" by describing national and local efforts to align an inclusive recovery grounded in building resilience against future global shocks with implementation of the SDGs.

The increase in efforts by national governments to coordinate among ministries, strengthen institutions for good governance, and domesticate the SDGs resonates throughout the VNRs this year, especially in second, third- or fourth-time reports. Multi-level stakeholder committees and platforms increasingly aid

governments in implementing the SDGs through national measures such as legislation and institution building, as well as through local measures to empower communities and implement innovative solutions.

The VNR reports contain valuable examples of economic and social solutions implemented in critical sectors such as education, health care, energy, food security, technology and digitalization, trade and transport, and protection of basic human rights. The use of innovative platforms and the digitization of some public services during the pandemic have helped scale-up the use of technologies and promote further technological advances, not only for health care, education and other social services, but also in the use of data for VNRs and national policy making. The data from this year's VNRs build on the existing repository of tools and resources that can aid in identifying areas for potential growth and where urgent assistance is needed.

VNR reporting increasingly engages local authorities and includes more diverse sets of stakeholders both in implementation and in data collection, to more accurately assess community-level needs and challenges. VNRs that incorporate local reviews of progress and actions present a more nuanced and in-depth view of national progress and can identify local actions to be scaled-up and inform national policymaking for sustainable development.

A total of 187 countries have now conducted at least one VNR, with a collective total of 292 VNRs presented during the HLPF since 2016. After seven years of reporting, it is evident that the VNR exercise creates channels for knowledge-sharing and serves to support the collaborative work of governments, development partners, stakeholder groups, and local communities to understand how to build back better, including by scaling-up local initiatives and adjusting national development policies and plans.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the trajectory of progress in many ways, and its effects will continue to impact countries for years to come, the VNRs register a narrative of hope, and a prospect for recovery in which leaders in government, industry, and civil society work together to seize opportunities for sustainable growth, close gaps to reduce inequalities, and forge ahead with renewed political will, so that the momentum for advancing the SDGs will not be lost.

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