



The Kingdom of Bahrain's Second Voluntary National Review on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Main Messages

May 2023

Institutional Alignment

The Kingdom of Bahrain maintains deep-rooted institutional alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); as evidenced by its Constitution and National Action Charter which promote peace and tolerance, advocate for the protection of the disadvantaged, ensure gender equality, guarantee access to universal healthcare and free education for all, and seek to protect the environment and natural resources.

Bahrain's overarching strategy – the Economic Vision 2030, launched in 2008 – is also strongly aligned with the 2030 Agenda. "Sustainability" and "fairness" constitute two of the Vision's three guiding principles, and its sustainability aspirations extend beyond the economic sphere to human capital, innovation, technology, the environment, and cultural heritage.

Accelerating SDG Implementation

This Voluntary National Review (VNR), at the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda, reflects the Kingdom's commitment to accelerating the achievement of the SDGs. In 2022, the Ministry of Sustainable Development was established to coordinate and promote sustainability efforts for the SDGs and beyond. Moreover, the 2023-2026 Government Plan, titled "From Recovery to Sustainability," further integrates SDGs into government projects.

Response to COVID-19

Bahrain adroitly managed the COVID-19 pandemic through affective preparedness, offering free testing, treatment and vaccinations to all citizens and residents, maintaining uninterrupted essential health services, avoiding full lockdowns, and protecting those hit hardest by the pandemic. Notably, Bahrain granted mothers in the public sector and spouses of frontline female staff the opportunity to work remotely. The Government limited the economic fallout and boosted recovery through a USD 12 billion stimulus package that supported households and corporations, stabilized markets, and restored confidence in the financial system.

This whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach was documented by the World Health Organization in a case study¹ as a guide for preparedness and early response, and for adopting innovative approaches to strengthen health systems' resilience. Health and economic decisions were data-driven, with professional research institutionally integrated into policy, allowing the Government to tailor its interventions to specific stakeholder needs. Also critical to the Kingdom's success were volunteers who made pivotal contributions to the pandemic response, reflecting the vibrancy of Bahrain's civil society.

¹ <https://www.moh.gov.bh/Content/Upload/File/637933076434107917-WHOEMBAH001E-eng.pdf>



Achieving Net Zero by 2060

The 2018 VNR cited environmental challenges facing Bahrain due to its geographical characteristics. Today, the environment is at the forefront of future sustainability plans. In 2021, the Government announced its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2060. To date, the Kingdom registered promising results; enacting the Law on the Environment, exceeding its afforestation targets, and collaborating with the highest emitting sectors and industries to achieve its commitments.

Sustainable Economic Growth

The Economic Recovery Plan, launched at the end of 2021, aims to place Bahrain in the best position to benefit from the global recovery and achieve fiscal and economic sustainability. The Plan comprises five pillars and 27 programs and includes strategies for the six sustainability-aligned sectors (tourism, logistics, financial services, manufacturing, oil, and ICT); all of which promote the deployment of digital technology. In 2022, Bahrain registered the highest non-oil economic growth in a decade, with a 6.2 percent GDP growth year-on-year.

Private Sector Partnerships

In line with the 2030 Agenda and at the core of Bahrain's plans is the principle of partnerships; and in 2022, the Government issued a guide regulating public-private partnerships (PPPs). Bahrain has a long history of successfully promoting PPPs to complete strategic projects, including in electricity generation and sewage treatment. One of Bahrain's biggest successes is in housing, where innovative subsidized mortgage financing solutions enable thousands of eligible Bahrainis, including low-income families, widows, and people with disabilities, to become homeowners through the creation of an attractive market for private construction companies. Bahrain's 2021 national report on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda emphasized the importance of partnerships to drive housing service development.

Key Challenges

A key challenge facing Bahrain is achieving fiscal sustainability. Much progress has been made under the Government's Fiscal Balance Program, nevertheless, further improvements will unleash the transformative investments required and reinforce Bahrain's reputation as a trailblazer and thought leader in the region. Furthermore, to tackle the data challenge, government agencies are working collectively to make available accurate, timely, relevant, and quality data to measure progress and inform future decisions.

In conclusion, Bahrain reaffirms its commitment to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda and is dedicated to working with the global community towards building a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future for all.