HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2018

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

SYNTHESIS REPORT

Coordinated by
Division for Sustainable Development Goals
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations

Synthesis of Voluntary National Reviews 2018

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations

Foreword

I am pleased to share with you the third annual Synthesis Report of the voluntary national reviews (VNRs). It represents a rich tapestry of national experiences in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Three years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, 111 VNRs have been conducted by 102 countries at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC. At the 2018 HLPF, 46 countries presented reviews; for 2019, 51 countries have volunteered, 10 of which will be carrying out their second or even third review. Such rapid uptake of the reviews, by a broad cross-section of countries, is a testament to countries' commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

This report captures some of the texture and detail in the early implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The report provides a narrative of select actions countries have undertaken with respect to the 17 SDGs, including an overview of which countries addressed particular goals, as well as pertinent examples. In many cases, reporting on the Goals has become more in-depth and structured. This report also highlights how countries have addressed the imperative of "leaving no one behind", a core principle of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, this report examines how countries have put in place a robust institutional framework for guiding and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also reflects the challenges, including in the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of reliable, timely, accessible, and sufficiently disaggregated data.

The 46 VNRs presented at the 2018 HLPF are rich in lessons learned, progress achieved, and obstacles encountered. Countries have been open and candid in acknowledging their challenges, for instance, in examining who is at risk of being left behind and why. They have clearly and cogently presented their policies and strategies so that others can learn from their experiences. It is evident from this year's reports that the benchmark for the VNRs is being raised every year. The VNRs bear the hallmarks of careful collection of material, outreach and stakeholder engagement, and the consolidation of coordination processes within governments. At the same time, it is worth noting that the review is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a tool for strengthening implementation.

LIU Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The 2018 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development took place from 9 to 18 July. A total of 46 countries presented voluntary national reviews, up from 43 countries that conducted reviews in 2017. Since the inaugural reviews in 2016, 111 reviews have been presented, by 102 countries, with a number of countries conducting second reviews. Looking ahead to the 2019 HLPF, it is anticipated that 51 countries will present their national reviews, of which 41 will be doing so for the first time.

The voluntary national reviews document how countries are tackling the transformative challenge of the 2030 Agenda. The reviews are country-specific and complement the broader thematic review of progress that also takes place at the HLPF.

This report synthesizes some of the findings of the VNRs, drawing from the written reports. As in the prior two synthesis reports, this edition uses a theme-based analysis, based largely on the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines. The report examines the efforts of reporting countries to implement the 2030 Agenda, including challenges, gaps, achievements, and lessons learned.

In their reviews, countries describe steps taken to incorporate the 2030 Agenda into national policies and plans. This takes place with varying degrees of formality—for some countries, the planning documents explicitly mention the SDGs and enshrine the Agenda as a blueprint for development, while others have matched the national priorities with the SDGs. The substance of national implementation also reflects these interlinkages, and in this regard, countries emphasized the multidimensional nature of poverty, for instance, or the cross-cutting aspects of health and human wellbeing. The reviews highlight that bringing the SDGs into the national context relies on a range of actors, including local governments, private business, civil society, academia, as well as individuals willing to change their behaviour.

Voluntary National Reviews

Number of Countries

Regional Distribution

- Western European & Others Group
- Latin America and Caribbean Group
- Eastern European Group
- Asia-Pacific Group
- African Group

Countries in Special Situations

- Least Developed Countries
- Land-locked Developing Countries
- Small Island Developing Countries

Institutions for implementing the 2030 Agenda

Many countries described institutional arrangements that reflected the integrated nature of the SDGs, whether by placing their implementation under the aegis of the executive branch or developing
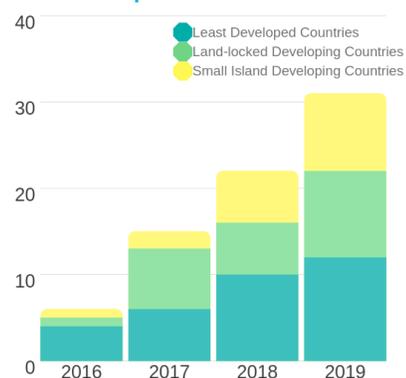
SDG budgets through inter-ministerial cooperation. A variety of different mechanisms and bodies make up countries' institutional frameworks, including coordinating mechanisms at the highest level of government, and coordination of implementation by specific ministries. Countries have also put in place multi-stakeholder mechanisms, in line with whole-of-society approaches. To strengthen their capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda, countries have established structures to link national with sub-national, regional and local governments. The reviews recognize that parliaments have a critical role in SDG implementation through their oversight and legislative functions, including adoption of budgets. Many countries emphasised the importance of meaningfully engaging parliaments. Achieving progress on the SDGs will require governments to work across policy areas; however, several countries emphasised that policy coherence still presents a key challenge for many countries.

Leaving no one behind

"Leaving no one behind" is one of the fundamental principles of the 2030 Agenda. It is recognized as such by almost all countries in their VNRs. This central theme guided coun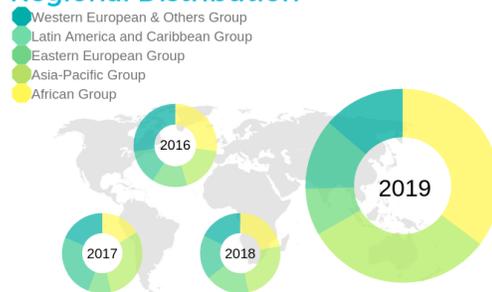tries to identify vulnerable groups, communities and individuals, or those at risk of being left behind within their national contexts. Some reviews highlighted that reaching the furthest behind first (putting the focus first on those most in need of action) is key to achieving the principle. In implementing the Agenda, countries have mainstreamed their commitment to "leaving no one behind" into national plans and programmes. Countries reported utilizing both universal and targeted policies and measures to give effect to the principle. While groups at risk of being left behind vary by country, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, children, youth, women, persons living in poverty, especially extreme poverty, and LBGTIQ persons were commonly identified as being the most vulnerable.

SDGs

All reviews addressed SDG 1, with some focusing on the eradication of extreme poverty, while others consider relative poverty and the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, in line with the commitment to leave no one behind. The multidimensional nature of poverty was stressed throughout the reviews. Children and youth were identified as being particularly at risk of living in poverty in both developing and developed countries, along with single-parent households, particularly single mothers.

Most countries reported on SDG 2, particularly its interlinkages with goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 12, and 13. Several countries identified the adverse impacts of climate change as the main challenge for achieving SDG 2. Many countries reported higher levels of food insecurity in rural areas than in urban settings. Countries also stressed the double burden of malnutrition and obesity, especially among children, as public health problems that require comprehensive interventions.

In the context of SDG 3, countries recognized that public health is a national asset and the basis for achieving sustainable development. Several countries referred to the right to health while others provided information on the provision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Health has been indeed identified as a priority area in the national development plans of several countries. Countries reported on policy measures to fight the high maternal, neonatal and under-five mortality rates, and communicable as well as non-communicable diseases. Concerns about health equity are also reflected in the reports.

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, SDG 4, continues to be a central development priority across all VNR countries. The reviews reveal a focus on increasing access to early childhood education and vocational education. Some countries noted higher educational achievement levels for young women as compared to young men, but also noted that a significantly lower number of women are pursuing education in STEM fields. There was an emphasis on the need to improve access to quality

education for low-income and rural students, and to close the "digital gap" by ensuring that all students have reliable internet access.

On SDG 5, countries stated that inequality between men and women persists as women have not achieved full parity in any dimension. They still lag in political life and leadership roles, are not paid equally for equal work, hold fewer managerial and executive positions, and experience higher rates of harassment and gender-based violence. Countries also reported on initiatives taken to increase women's representation on the boards of state-owned entities and companies and publicly-listed companies

On SDG 6, countries reported on progress towards access to safe drinking water, noting remaining challenges such as rural access and pollution. Countries provided information on access to sanitation and hygiene, with some reviews citing remaining challenge in rural areas. Competing demands for water resources, for households, manufacturing, energy, agriculture and food production, together with impacts of climate change, conflict, natural disasters and excessive groundwater consumption, cause challenges for water availability. Countries are taking steps to diversify their sources of water, including recycled and reclaimed water and desalinated water.

To ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (SDG7), countries elaborated on measures taken, such as diversifying energy sources, developing renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, awareness-raising activities for the public on sustainable energy consumption, and connecting more households to the energy grid in rural areas. Countries reported on legislative frameworks and national actions plans for the promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Many reviews addressed SDG 8, illustrating their governments' commitment to fostering a strong, growing economy that accommodates a wide range of people in meaningful, decent work. The reviews emphasize the value in capitalizing on traditional strengths of a country while also seeking new opportunities—such as those offered by technology—and investing in support to small and medium-size enterprises. Reviews also stress the importance of creating an enabling environment for businesses, through legal stability, protection of intellectual property, a fair and transparent tax code, simplified licensing and permits, and clear regulations.

On SDG 9, nearly all countries described efforts to advance their infrastructure, whether in the form of road, rail, air, or marine transport, or information communication technology (ICT) connectivity. Many reported on efforts to advance manufacturing and to help companies gain access to global and regional markets. All countries expressed a commitment to advancing science, technology and innovation, including through partnerships with academia and the private sector.

Most countries addressing SDG 10 emphasized links to poverty reduction, leaving no one behind, political, economic and social inclusion, especially for women and girls and peoples with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Establishing legal identity was also prioritized by many countries.

On SDG 11, countries reported on various strategies, plans, and programmes put in place in response to pressure from rapid population growth and urbanization on public services, infrastructure and the environment. In this regard, key challenges included housing shortages, shrinking public space, rising property prices, the proliferation of informal settlements and increased vulnerability to disasters, waste management, water drainage issues, and congestion and air pollution. Several countries highlighted their lack of capacity in integrated urban planning and the need to strengthen data and monitoring.

Several countries reported on achievements towards more sustainable consumption and production. While progress is being made, the reviews indicate that achieving SDG 12 is difficult, with

VNR COUNTRIES' SDG REPORTING CHOICES 2018

ALL 17 GOALS

72%
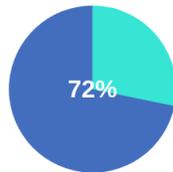
Many countries included dedicated sections on each of the 17 SDGs. A few countries addressed all SDGs in a cross-cutting way through their own national frameworks.
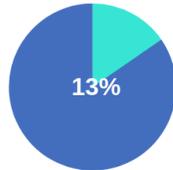
GOALS UNDER IN-DEPTH REVIEW AT 2018 HLPF

13%

These countries only included specific sections focusing on the set of goals that are under in-depth review at the 2018 HLPF. Some also included a statistical annex covering more goals.

GOALS OF OWN CHOICE

11%

Some countries chose to focus on their priority goals within the 2030 Agenda, including some of the goals under in-depth review at the 2018 HLPF.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

38%
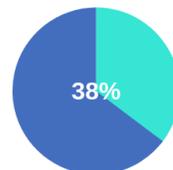
Some countries included a section dedicated to the implementation of the concept of leaving no one behind.

STATISTICAL ANNEX

48%
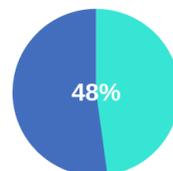
Some countries included a statistical annex.

Indicative and prepared for illustrative purposes only. Not an official representation of country reporting.

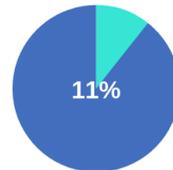population growth and increased consumption, spurred by economic growth, eroding gains achieved. Countries reported on numerous action and policies, including implementation of the circular economy. The crucial importance of behavioural change of individuals in achieving more sustainable consumption and production was stressed.

On SDG 13, countries highlighted the cross-cutting nature of climate change and reported on numerous challenges they are facing such as increased floods, mud- and landslides, worsening land degradation, intensive heat events, sea level rise, ocean acidification, and changing rain patterns. Some of the mitigation policies that countries have implemented include taxes and levies on fossil fuel imports, emissions trading, increased funding for technological solutions and green infrastructure. On adaptation, countries reported numerous actions and initiatives they have taken, such as new or improved disaster management plans, natural infrastructure projects, and awareness-raising efforts.

As noted by the countries reporting on SDG 14, oceans and seas are inextricably linked to some of the most pressing challenges facing society. Many reported on their actions towards enhancing their Blue Economies, deriving benefits, such as economic growth, food and nutrition, and transport, employment and tourism opportunities, from oceans and seas. Countries also reported on progress in relation to effective management of key commercial fish stocks**,** establishment of new marine protected areas, and development of comprehensive policy, legal and institutional frameworks. Countries also mentioned challenges regarding sustainable fisheries and illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, marine pollution, particularly plastics and nutrient pollution, and protection of coral reefs.

The most common threats to healthy ecosystems raised by countries in their reports on SDG 15 are increasing urbanization and population growth, causing competing pressures and demands on land use. Other threats are climate change, habitat fragmentation, and invasive alien species. Countries highlighted actions to taken to combat deforestation and land degradation and tackle poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna.

Additionally, steps are being taken to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning.

SDG 16 was underlined as a vital enabling goal for the entire sustainable development agenda. Countries elaborated on measures to promote good governance, implementation of human rights, and the eradication of violence. Several countries highlighted the importance of upholding the rule of law, ensuring universal access to justice, and enabling access to information. Achieving SDG 16 through conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts was also mentioned in the reviews of several presenting countries.

On SDG 17, all countries reported on initiatives to revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. Cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs was reflected in different forms – international, regional, bilateral, south-south and triangular cooperation, in many instances including stakeholders. Countries also reported on systemic issues, including policy coherence, tax evasion and crime.

On monitoring and data, the reviews indicate that substantial efforts have been made at the national level to assess data availability, sources, methodologies, coverage and dissemination, as well as identification of data gaps. To overcome challenges, countries are actively looking for solutions that best fit their national context and aspirations for monitoring and evaluation. Key challenges include: data disaggregation, data collection and management, and mobilizing financial and technical support for data and monitoring.

Stakeholder Engagement and awareness-raising

Countries are aiming at enhancing the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in SDG implementation and decision-making, and many reported on establishment of institutionalized engagement methods. In many countries, inter-ministerial committees or working groups coordinating SDG implementation also include stakeholder representatives. In some countries, existing engagement mechanisms have been adopted for SDG implementation. Stakeholders are also taking an active role in implementing the SDGs and countries reported on numerous activities, outlining actions taken up by civil society organizations, private sector representatives, members of the academia, and local authorities, to name a few.

Although three years have passed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, several countries reported that awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs remains relatively modest, especially at grassroots and community level. Hence, several countries stressed the need to enhance awareness-raising activities in the next phase of implementation.

Means of implementation

As regards means of implementation, the reviews underline the importance of mobilizing national resources from a variety of sources; public, private, national and international. Countries noted that applying science and technology to sustainable development challenges can play a transformative role in alleviating poverty, advancing human rights, and accelerating inclusive economic growth. The need for capacity building–on statistics, data, monitoring and evaluation–was underlined by reporting countries. Other areas for capacity-building underlined by countries were resource mobilization, including from the private sector, policy coherence, and enhancing science, technology and innovation.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The reviews contain a wealth of information and analysis of progress at country level, covering specific SDGs, as well as cross-cutting issues such as means of implementation. Among the lessons learned are: (a) using "leaving no one behind" to better understand challenges and obstacles to implementation; (b) continued commitment to more meaningful engagement with stakeholders; and (c) overall alignment of the Agenda and the SDGs with national plans and strategies.

Going forward, areas that can be considered to require additional effort include: (a) ensuring that strategies and plans contain priorities; (b) putting in place processes to meaningfully align national plans and budgets; (c) investing in statistical offices and their capacity to produce high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data; (d) strengthening evaluation and monitoring systems; (e) more clearly identifying capacity-development needs in the reviews; (f) encouraging work and analysis on interlinkages between Goals; and (g) identifying successful models for engagement with the private sector and continuing to institutionalize engagement with civil society and other stakeholders.

As more countries conduct their second or even third reviews, they will need to consider how such reviews ought to be structured to contribute meaningfully to the implementation of the Agenda. The Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines provide sufficient flexibility for countries to continue innovating in this regard.

I.   Introduction

This report synthesizes some of the main issues addressed in the third round of the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) that took place during the ministerial segment of the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), from 9 to 18 July. Forty-six countries presented their voluntary national reviews during the ministerial segment of the HLPF.[1] The report includes general characteristics of the early implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and identifies challenges and examples of implementation from countries conducting reviews.

This report examines a range of topics, including ownership and involving stakeholders, institutional mechanisms, incorporation of the SDGs into national frameworks, means of implementation and an overview of how countries addressed goals and targets in the VNRs. It attempts to highlight practices from all countries that participated in the 2018 VNR process. However, of necessity, the report is selective and not exhaustive with respect to practices and examples. All examples chosen are illustrative and their selection does not imply that the 2018 VNRs do not contain other equally valid and useful examples of country practices.

Background information and details concerning the mandate for the voluntary national reviews is contained in the Synthesis of Voluntary National Reviews 2016, and it is not repeated in the present report.[2]

II.   Bringing SDGs into the national context: assessments, strategies and budgets

This section of the report briefly examines how countries are addressing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the context of their broad societal objectives. It also outlines what countries are doing to take advantage of interlinkages and co-benefits. It is also notes some approaches countries are taking to incorporate the SDGs into national development plans and strategies.

National context

Some countries reported that their national elections featured the 2030 Agenda, with political parties embracing its tenets as part of their platform, and others showcased ways that national parliaments and executive branches engaged with the SDGs, adopting legislation to advance sustainable development and overseeing the monitoring and review of SDG implementation (Mexico, Romania, Greece, Ecuador). Some countries reported working with UN system partners to advance the "nationalization" of the SDGs, for instance the review of Armenia states that the government and the United Nations established the National SDG Innovation Lab as an innovation platform to support national SDG implementation.

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[1] Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Vietnam.
[2] See UN DESA, Synthesis of the Voluntary National Reviews 2016 (2016)
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/126002016_VNR_Synthesis_Report.pdf

Andorra

All VNR countries agreed that national ownership of the 2030 Agenda is critical for SDG implementation. In many countries, this means that a wide range of stakeholders are involved. Countries like Andorra, Laos, Jamaica and Lithuania among others pointed in particular to the strong role that academic institutions are playing in rooting SDG implementation and analysis in substantive issues of national priority. Civil society and private business are also important partners, and countries like Uruguay, Vietnam, Slovakia and others highlighted the ways they are working with these partners to advance the Agenda. Municipal and other sub-national government officials are also important partners, and several countries (Benin, Cabo Verde, Spain, among others) showcased ambitious programmes carried out at the city level to promote sustainable development.

A recurring theme throughout many of the VNRs was the importance of individual action and each citizen's commitment to and ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Governments, including those of the Bahamas and Namibia, have undertaken awareness raising campaigns—sometimes in partnership with UN entities or local universities—to inform their citizens about the SDGs and what individuals can do to advance them. Canada and Australia, among others, described programmes supporting the involvement of indigenous communities in SDG implementation, and Slovakia discussed efforts to integrate the Roma community in sustainable development programmes. Some countries including Armenia, Albania are engaging their diasporas to advance the 2030 Agenda.

Assessing the SDGs for national implementation, inter-linkages and trade-offs

A number of countries discussed the integrated nature of the SDGs and pointed to institutional arrangements that allowed governments to take advantage of the interlinkages and co-benefits among the Goals. Some countries (United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Lao PDR, among others) have established committees and offices specifically to oversee work on sustainable development initiatives across sectors. Placing responsibility for 2030 Agenda implementation in the executive branch—in the office of the Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister (Albania, Slovakia, among others) helps to accomplish this cross-sectoral approach as well.

United Arab Emirates

In general, countries are addressing the SDGs in ways that advance their national priorities and plans. Often, this means capitalizing on the interlinkages inherent in the 2030 Agenda, through interventions that influence more than one sector (Bahrain, Canada, Colombia, Senegal, among others). Sri Lanka and Albania, for instance, are working to become upper middle-income countries and are shaping their policy framework to advance toward this goal by taking complementary action in social, economic and environmental spheres. Bhutan reported that it is developing SDG interventions within the context of their "Gross National Happiness" (GNH) efforts, so the GNH Commission is serving simultaneously as a High-Level SDG Committee. For several countries (Ecuador, Mexico, Guinea, among others) the multi-dimensional nature of poverty provides a framework to approach the interlinkages among many of the SDGs, and their institutions reflect this orientation. Others, like Paraguay, emphasized the human rights approach as a way to address cross-cutting issues of human wellbeing, equity, empowerment and decent work. Australia highlighted the "Health in All Policies," which takes into account the economic, social and environmental determinants and impacts of health challenges. When policy makers work across ministries and sectors, according to several countries, they are better equipped to recognize and mitigate trade-offs—situations where a policy intervention to advance one SDG may have negative impacts in another area.

Colombia

SDGs in national development plans, strategies, budgets

Almost every VNR in the 2018 cohort includes a description of steps taken to incorporate the 2030 Agenda into national plans and strategies. This happens with varying degrees of formality—for some countries,

Integrative approach between the Government's work program and sustainable development goals
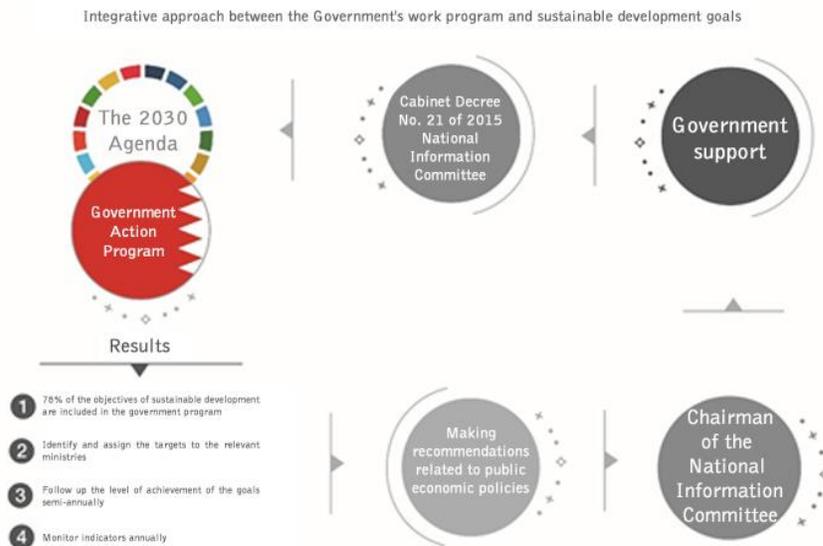
Source: 2018 VNR of Bahrain

the planning documents explicitly mention the SDGs and enshrine the Agenda as a blueprint for development, while for others the alignment is implicit and perhaps not fully articulated. The difference often lies in the timing of the planning cycles—those countries that produced or updated their national planning documents after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda report being more explicit in making the link to the SDGs. Some countries, especially those whose national plans predate the SDGs, have carried out mapping exercises after the fact to see how existing policies and plans can advance the 2030 Agenda (Spain, Bahamas), or have mandated that line ministries spell out how their work is advancing specific SDGs (among them Andorra, Benin, Guinea). For instance, Jamaica Vision 2030, dating from 2009, represents an integration of the three dimensions of sustainability, underpinned by the core principles of sustainable development and inclusive growth, equity, and good governance. The SDGs have been aligned with the Vision 2030. The Medium-Term Framework, prepared every three years, is the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the country's Vision 2030, as well as the SDGs.

Source: 2018 VNR of Albania

Countries carried out a range of mapping exercises to map the SDGs and targets to their national strategies and plans, which are often tiered, consisting of a longer-term framework–sometimes a sustainable development strategy or a vision document–and shorter-term documents, such national development plans. For instance, the review of Latvia states that 136 of the 169 SDG targets were categorized as relevant for the country's policy, both domestic and external, and that the targets in question were covered by the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, the National Development Plan 2020, and various sectoral policies. The review of Egypt states that several ministries and entities, following the localization model of the national Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt Vision 2030, have developed their own medium- and long-term strategies, among them the National Strategy for Science and Technology for Sustainable Development 2030, prepared by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

Budget issues featured prominently in several reviews, with countries including Benin, Canada, Paraguay and others describing how they are shaping their national budgets for the 2030 Agenda, allocating adequate funds to various SDG initiatives and working across ministries to maximize the impact of public resources. The review of Latvia notes that although the elaboration of goals in long-term and medium-term policies is important, results will also depend on budget allocations and other resources. Countries including Cabo Verde, Egypt, Ireland, and Togo, also mentioned the leveraging private money, noting promising public-private partnerships in infrastructure, sustainable cities, energy, and climate change.

Benin

III.   Institutions for implementing the 2030 Agenda

This section examines institutions and mechanisms for decision making on the 2030 Agenda, mechanisms for inter-ministerial and multi-sectoral coordination and coherence at multiple levels of government, as well as the involvement of parliaments. As in the previous two synthesis reports[3] all countries reported progress in establishing and/or strengthening existing institutional frameworks, inter-ministerial coordinating offices, committees, or commissions. Important features of these institutional frameworks are the emphasis on coherence, integration, coordination and multi-sectoral involvement. Many countries are also using these structures for monitoring and tracking progress of the implementation of the SDGs.

Lebanon

Countries that conducted reviews in previous years described institutional frameworks consisting of a variety of mechanisms and bodies, including coordinating mechanisms at the highest level of government, as well as coordination of implementation by specific ministries. The involvement of parliaments, sub-national, and local governments can also be observed. Many countries have also put in place multi-stakeholder mechanisms, in line with whole-of-society approaches. Additionally, the same pattern evident in previous years was found to be present, consisting of a three-tier approach. The first tier is typically concerned with broad vision and strategic policy direction, national priorities, and the integration of global commitments and frameworks; the second tier typically carries out coordination among line ministries and government agencies, as well as strengthening their capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda; while the third tier coordinates technical work, usually including in its membership both government and non-state actors. For example, in Lebanon

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[3] Synthesis report 2016 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/127761701030E_2016_VNR_Synthesis_Report_ver3.pdf and Synthesis report 2017 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis_Report_VNRs_2017.pdf

the Council of Ministers established a national committee to oversee and guide the roll-out of the SDGs. The committee is chaired by the prime minister and includes more than 50 state officials at director-general level, to facilitate the continuation of work regardless of political developments. The committee also includes civil society and private sector representatives to promote an open, inclusive and participatory approach. It has four thematic groupings organized around the '5Ps' (People; Planet; Prosperity; Peace, justice and strong institutions). The fifth 'P' for Partnership was considered a cross-cutting issue in implementing and achieving the SDGs. The Office of the Prime Minister serves as the committee's secretariat.

Albania

Some of the reviews analyse the impact measures adopted by institutions concerned with the 2030 Agenda have had. Albania details the effects of the government's fight against organized crime, which resulted in the identification of a variety of criminal groups, detailed information on organized criminal groups, and the carrying out of successful operations, including arrests and the seizure of property obtained through illegal means. Egypt reports on economic reforms that include consolidating government finances and improving the investment environment, while also expanding the size and scope of social protection programmes targeting the most vulnerable.

Institutions in Greece have established priorities focussing on the fight against unemployment, particularly for youth and women, the reduction of social inequalities, progress in gender equality and the promotion of social inclusion for immigrants and other vulnerable population groups. The review states that these priorities are implemented through a robust social solidarity system, establishment of a minimum guaranteed income for all, universal access to quality health care services, combating energy poverty for vulnerable citizens, and free access to quality education for everyone at all education levels.

Mechanisms for decision making on the 2030 Agenda implementation

Latvia

This year's reviews confirm the pattern evident in previous years, with countries putting in place a high-level entity that makes political decisions on how 2030 Agenda is to be implemented through a country's vision, priorities and overall development frameworks. In most of the 2018 reviews, these entities already existed prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the Bahamas' SDG review was guided by a collaboration between the Economic Development and Planning Unit (EDPU) in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Latvia the Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre (CSCC)–responsible for the Latvian development planning system, under the direct authority of the Prime Minister–has since 2015 been designated as a focal point for the SDGs. In conjunction with line ministries, the CSCC has assessed the significance of certain SDGs for Latvia, progress towards achieving the goals, and highlighted best practice and success stories.

Namibia

Namibia has a three-tier mechanism capped by the Development Partners Forum, tasked with providing coordination and oversight; a multi-stakeholder National Steering Committee composed of senior officials from both government and development partners at implementation level; and lastly the coordination of all developments pertaining to the 2030 Agenda, through the National Development Plan. Similarly, in Niger the Prime Minister's Office oversees the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its mainstreaming into the National Social and Economic Development Plan (PDES). The governance of the PDES is carried out by the Council of Ministers, chaired by the President of the Republic The review states that Council is responsible for ensuring that priorities contained in the PDES are respected when the budget is considered.

Egypt is among the countries that established new entities, in this case the National Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which was created by prime ministerial decree. The Committee falls under the remit of the prime minister's office and is composed of representatives of 17 ministries and state entities. Canada's review states that it has budgeted for a SDG Unit that will work across federal departments and agencies and with Canadian stakeholders to ensure effective 2030 Agenda coordination, as well as to track Canada's progress on the SDGs. The Australian Government has established an interdepartmental group of senior officials, co-chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, tasked with coordination to give effect to the 2030 Agenda, domestically and internationally. The review of the Bahamas states that the country has started a management reform process, which will include the creation of a delivery unit in the Prime Minister's office to ensure priority policies are implemented, as well as the establishment of a

FIGURE 1.
Structure of the committees that make up the National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
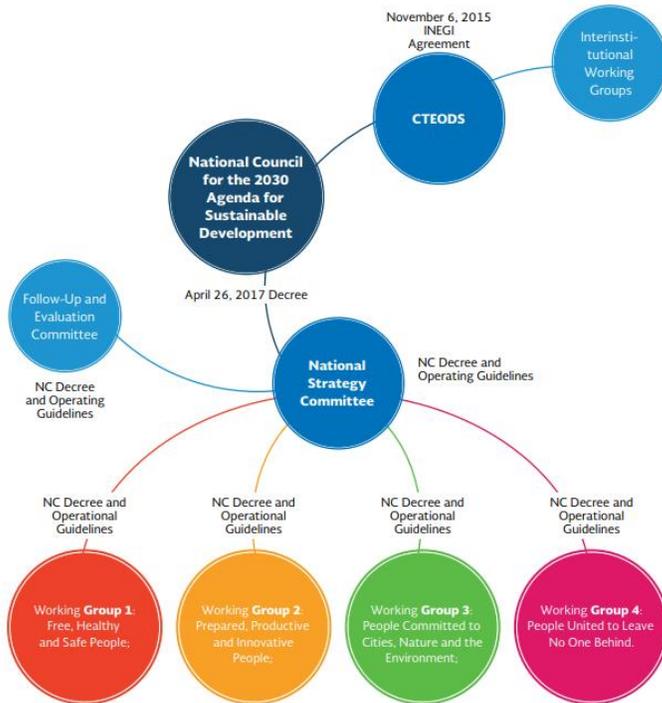
Source: 2018 VNR of Mexico

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National Statistical System to ensure that there is adequate data to assess and monitor the implementation of the SDGs.
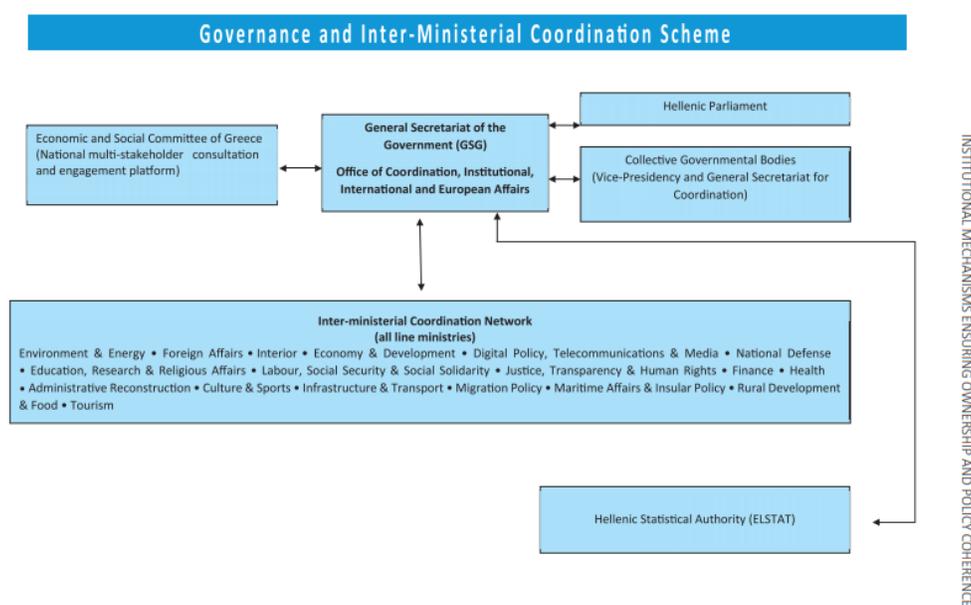
Source: 2018 VNR of Greece

The review of Hungary refers to the Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations, who advocates the interests of future generations at the national level and acts as a deputy to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Fundamental Rights. The latter is responsible for the protection of the constitutional right to a healthy environment, the right to the preservation of physical and mental health in connection with sustainable development, and the protection of the environmental and cultural heritage of the nation.

Coordinating mechanisms at multiple levels of government, including local government

The VNR reports reflect the recognition that effective vertical integration promotes nation-wide achievement of the SDGs and facilitates implementation at sub-national levels of government.

Furthermore, several countries noted the importance of decentralization, which enables levels of government closest to communities to take charge of their development priorities and assume ownership of initiatives. Countries have established structures to link national with sub-national, regional and local governments to strengthen their capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the review of Lithuania states that the Lithuania Association of Local Authorities forms part of a broad cooperation network established by the Government, coordinated by the Ministry of Environment, which brings brought together a large group of experts, including specialists from numerous ministries and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

Spain

Such structures assume added importance in countries with a federal system. For instance, the government of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia has committed to advance the 2030 Agenda by preparing two specific strategic plans: the Andalusian Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (EADS 2030) and the Andalusian Strategy for Fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The review of Ecuador reports that local governments have aligned their development plans with the 2030 Agenda. The review of Senegal outlines, in relation to the goals covered, the institutional arrangements at the local level, the measures being undertaken, and progress made. For instance, the review explains that the Senegal Code of Local Authorities gives local authorities the competence to develop economic, spatial and urban planning documents, to ensure the management of local resources.

Sub-national governments and local authorities are also participating both in local implementation and national decision-making. The review of Spain states that the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces of Spain has played a strategic role in the development of the concept and the tools for "localization", as well representing the interests of local authorities. The Federation has established the localization of the Agenda as a priority line of action, which had also been adopted by many specific local entities. The Federation provided material for a specific section of commitments by local governments for the national VNR. In Switzerland, many cantons and communes have defined their own strategies for sustainable development.

Poland

Countries have established coordination mechanisms to improve linkages within government, as well as with other relevant stakeholders. Poland has established a Task Force for the Coherence of the Strategy for Responsible Development by 2020 (with a perspective to 2030) as the key body for cooperation between the administration and social and economic partners concerning the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Sri Lanka's review states that the Sustainable Development Commission serves as a main coordinating body for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Viet Nam has established the Inter-Sectoral Working Group on SDGs to enhance coordination among ministries, sectors, agencies and organizations, to advance the implementation of the National Action Plan and SDGs. The Working Group is part of the larger institutional arrangement that connects different parts of government, local governments, stakeholders, and United Nations entities.

Involvement of Parliaments

Parliaments have a critical role in SDG implementation through their oversight and legislative functions, including adoption budgets. Many reviews emphasised the importance of meaningfull engagement of parliaments. Many parliaments have established committees on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, and in many

countries the executive branch of government has organised regular dialogues and briefings for parliamentarians. It is also worth noting that some countries included members of parliament in their delegations to the 2018 HLPF.

Mexico

Compared to previous years' VNRs, a larger number of countries reported on the involvement of their parliaments in SDG implementation, monitoring and review. The review of Mexico states that in September 2016, the Senate created a Working Group for Monitoring the Legislative Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which has links to over 30 congressional committees. This group has organized awareness and training forums for legislators on the Agenda, and it has developed a diagnostic on legislative capacity to address the Agenda in Mexico. In Latvia, Parliament's Sustainable Development Commission provides a public platform for reviewing proposals on promoting sustainable development. It promotes new policy initiatives by working with all stakeholders, highlighting their latest research and sharing international best practice. The review of Bhutan states that the National Assembly adopted in 2017 a resolution to embed SDG oversight into Parliamentary practice. The resolution, among other things, affirms Parliamentary oversight in ensuring the integration of SDG in the next five-year plan and institutionalized a requirement for all parliamentarians and parliamentary delegations visiting abroad on SDG-related trips to report to the plenary of the National Assembly on their experience.

As the Supreme Audit Institution, Jamaica's Auditor General's Department has undertaken a performance audit of the country's preparedness for implementation of the SDGs, which will be made available by the final quarter of 2018. The audit seeks to ascertain:

(i) Functional coordinating and institutional arrangements which allow for proper oversight of the 2030 Agenda;

(ii) Level of prioritization and allocation of requisite resources towards the major interventions to accelerate the delivery of the SDGs;

(iii) Level of engagement of the relevant stakeholders and established mechanisms to raise awareness;

(iv) Established mechanisms to monitor and report on the progress of the goals; and

(v) Previously established arrangements in respect of Vision 2030 that will aid or impede the preparedness for the implementation of the SDGs.

Source: 2018 VNR of Jamaica

In Lebanon, a legislative institutional mechanism was established to follow-up and advance progress towards the SDGs in Lebanon. The SDG parliamentary committee has started mapping existing legislation related to Agenda 2030. Cabo Verde is including parliamentarians as members of its implementation mechanism for the Sustainable Development Strategic Plan (PEDS). The review of Poland states that relevant parliamentary committees have been engaged in the VNR process, and the VNR was also submitted to parliament for comment. In the context of its international cooperation, Ireland supports the strengthening of parliamentary oversight, accountability and domestic resource mobilization in developing countries. Ireland has a partnership with the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), to support independent audit institutions in developing countries, thereby facilitating improved tracking and reporting of expenditures to parliament.

Challenges

Achieving progress on the SDGs will require governments to work across policy areas; however, several countries emphasised that policy coherence and multi-sectoral coordination still presents a major challenge for many countries. Three years into the 2030 Agenda, many reviews describe in detail institutional frameworks for implementation, but contain less information on the impact that these frameworks have had on the advancement of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV.   Leaving no one behind

This section provides an overview of how countries have addressed "leaving no one behind", one of the 2030 Agenda's key principles. Many countries included dedicated sections on the topic in their reviews, while others provided references to ways in which the principle is upheld when discussing progress on the implementation of specific SDGs. Overall, there are two main ways in which countries are aiming at ensuring that no one is left behind: the focus on universal policies and programmes that ensure basic services for all and the provision of targeted policies and measures to support specific vulnerable groups.

Greece

Following a rights-based approach to leaving no one behind (LNOB), several countries reported on rights enshrined in their constitutions or in other laws. Bahrain stresses that its Constitution and public policies guarantee universal access to basic services without exception and noted that the coverage rate of the population of public services of water, sanitation and electricity is one hundred per cent. Other countries focused on their universal policies, for instance in the field of health care, water and sanitation and education. Greece, for instance, mentioned the establishment of a minimum guaranteed income for all, universal access to quality health care services, combating energy poverty of vulnerable citizen groups through a reduced social residential electricity tariff, support for "energy communities", and free access to quality education to everyone at all education levels.

Several countries included a definition of what the principle entails in their view. For instance, Jamaica stated that "'Leaving no one behind' means that the benefits of development are equitably distributed and that the most vulnerable and marginalized are able to realize their potential. It means that no one is discriminated against because of their race, ethnicity, colour, identity, age, residence, sex, political affiliation, income, abilities, or other statuses. Many countries stated that LNOB is at the core of their development framework and other policy strategies. Several others dedicated a whole section to LNOB (such as Benin, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Spain, and Mali). Jamaica, for example, provides a detailed mapping of those at risk of being left behind and highlights specific challenges of each of these groups (such as urban poor communities). The country also reports on their Social Protection Strategy that addresses the needs of those groups in the Jamaican society that have been identified as being at risk of being left behind. Benin also has a section dedicated to LNOB, where it highlights several programmes specifically targeted at implementing the principle. For instance, the government put in place an insurance ("Assurance pour le Renforcement du Capital Humain") that covers those otherwise left behind in the pension and health

Cabo Verde

insurance. Cabo Verde has a very detailed section on LNOB, outlining and critically reviewing different policies and activities put in place pursuant to the principle.

Some reviews provide details on *how* they identified those parts of their populations left behind (or at risk thereof). In 2017, Bhutan launched its first Vulnerability Baseline Assessment to better understand those greatest at risk of being left behind. Several countries used their VNRs to clearly spell out which groups are most at risk and openly reflected on challenges in meeting the principle of LNOB. Albania reported on its heritage of marginalised and vulnerable persons in dire need of support, but who continue to receive often inadequate services. They found that inclusion is especially unsatisfactory for the poor, Roma, and persons with disabilities. Namibia highlights those who suffer losses from human wildlife conflict and recognizes that some of their initiatives aimed at redressing the imbalances have not been adequate in reaching out. Jamaica identified cultural change as a major challenge but considers it as fundamental for buy-in and commitment to support the realization of the SDGs for all Jamaicans, especially for the most vulnerable.

Most countries used their reviews to report on targeted support measures for vulnerable groups in order to leave no one behind. The following section highlights some of them, focusing on themes under which most of these measures can be grouped.

Addressing geographical inequalities

Kiribati

Geographical imbalances were highlighted, among others, by Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Namibia, State of Palestine and Senegal as an important aspect to address in order to leave no one behind. Most references pointed at challenges in rural areas. Namibia recognized that, according to their Gini coefficient, the country remains a very unequal society, with a challenge being the urban-rural divide. Palestine mentioned the need to address rural poverty, which is much higher than in urban areas. Guinea's review notes the importance of considering regional differences to achieve social cohesion, while Senegal highlights that significant investments are needed to address inequalities between its urban and rural areas.

Several countries mention specific measures they undertook to address geographical inequalities: Jamaica reported on several policies and programmes the government has implemented to support rural farmers, such as the National Food and Nutrition Security Policy and Action Plan, the National Youth in Agriculture Policy and Implementation Plan, and the Import Substitution Programme.

Some reviews mentioned the need to address the urban poor, such as Lao PDR, which notes rising inequality in urban areas. Next to geographical differences attributed to urban and rural areas, other forms of geographical imbalances were also mentioned. As a state composed of islands, Cabo Verde outlined its regionalization strategy to maximise the potential of each island and to correct regional inequalities and asymmetries, so as to favour convergence. In a similar vein, the review of the Bahamas addressed geographical disparities within the country and on a special zone for a traditionally marginalized region known as the "Over the Hill Community", as a pilot for a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy.

Hearing everyone's voices

Bhutan

Only a handful of countries (among them Bhutan, Benin, Jamaica) made a specific mention of the importance of "reaching the furthest behind". Jamaica recognized that a specific focus on reaching those who are furthest behind will facilitate key initiatives and accelerate overall progress towards the goals. Benin highlighted the social protection for the most vulnerable as one of four key elements of its policy.

More countries (among them Andorra, Bhutan, Colombia, Ireland, and Uruguay) highlighted their efforts to "hear everyone's voice" specifically in the context of the preparatory processes for their VNR. Andorra stressed the importance of including all sectors of society in the implementation of the SDGs and outlined their public consultation process for the review, which was conducted online to reach a wide audience. The review of Mali stresses efforts made to consult with all stakeholders as part of the preparatory process and highlighted the successful implementation of the My World 2030 survey, leading to participation of many societal groups. The review of Bhutan states that it engaged in a robust consultative process for the VNR with the ambition not to leave anyone behind.

Other countries (among them Albania, Bhutan, and Cabo Verde) mentioned, under the heading of leaving no one behind, targeted groups or policies to ensure inclusive participation more generally. Albania reported on specific measures to increase the participation of children with disabilities and stated that they had made significant progress in increasing women's participation. Cabo Verde stressed that their regionalization efforts also aim at giving their citizens more space for participation, while also highlighting that specific groups, such as youth, older persons, and persons with disabilities, are currently among those without effective political participation.

Stakeholder engagement in general is covered in more detail in Chapter 8.

Need for disaggregated data

Jamaica

Countries (among them Bahrain, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Kiribati, Senegal, Viet Nam) mentioned data as a crucial concern in leaving no one behind. Jamaica identified timely disaggregated data on the populations that are at risk of being left behind as a priority, with a need for specific attention to data related to vulnerabilities, such as the impact of disasters on vulnerable groups. Bahrain stressed that having statistical data available disaggregated by, among other things, sex, age, place of residence, standard of living, type and degree of disability, has been instrumental for monitoring inequality and identifying groups of citizens with special difficulties. Similarly, Viet Nam stated that disaggregated data on ethnic minorities allowed it to identify vulnerable sub-groups requiring policy action. Senegal highlighted the necessity of mapping by SDG the persons left behind, as well as the importance of systematizing data collection in this regard. The review of Bhutan stresses that a significant level of data disaggregation will be required to meet the ambitious principle of leaving no one behind, noting the successful conclusion of its Population and Housing Census in 2017, which serves as a source of comprehensive and reliable data.

References to more general data requirements for the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Role of non-governmental actors

Senegal

Some countries mentioned the positive contributions that NGOs can make in ensuring that no one is left behind. The review of Senegal, for instance, underlines the important role of civil society in contributing to the VNR, including with respect to producing a complementary report based on the principle of LNOB. The review of Lebanon stresses that the government is eager to work with civil society organizations, and the review highlights its cooperation with NGOs, for instance in improving the working conditions of women migrant domestic workers. More often, countries mentioned the positive role of NGOs in general, without specifically relating it to actions focused on vulnerable groups. Greece, for instance, outlined the ways in which NGOs can contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Latvia highlighted the important role of civil society actors in implementing the Agenda 2030, emphasizing that there are NGOs in Latvia working on every SDG, including at the grassroots level.

Upholding the principle in international cooperation

State of Palestine

The reviews of some countries (among them Australia, Ireland, Jamaica, Palestine, Qatar, Switzerland and Uruguay) also highlighted the role of the principle of leaving no one behind in their international cooperation and partnership efforts. Ireland, through its new policy for international development, states that it commits to strive to fulfil the ambition of leaving no one behind. The review of Australia stresses that the imperative to leave no one behind extends beyond its national borders and recognises the responsibility of Australia to contribute to global efforts to reduce poverty, alleviate suffering, and promote sustainable development. In this regard, ten of Australia's top 15 recipients of aid are considered fragile or conflict-affected. The review notes that over 90 per cent of Australia's ODA goes to improving the lives of the most vulnerable in the Indo-Pacific region. The review of Switzerland states that increases in ODA have been channelled into assistance for LDCs and countries in fragile contexts. Jamaica highlighted the need of international partnerships to acquire new sources of funding. The review of Uruguay states that, as a middle-income country, it is advocating for a system of international cooperation without exclusions, which does not leave anyone behind and which puts the emphasis on those countries with the biggest challenges and weakest capacities to mobilize their own resources.

Measures targeted at specific groups

Many countries outlined policies and interventions that are aimed at ensuring that specific groups are not being left behind. Some of these are considered below.

Children

Paraguay

Several countries reported on specific challenges faced by children and outlined actions to address them. Bhutan states that child poverty is a challenge and reports on special policy measures to address the issue. The review notes that the country is also the first one in the world to develop a Child Multidimensional Poverty Index. The review of Paraguay highlights that it is among the pioneers of the global partnership to end violence against children, based on its actions under the National Plan of Action for the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence. In a similar vein, the review of Niger refers to its efforts to ensure access to quality education for all, especially vulnerable persons. Hungary has established preventive measures to prevent children becoming victims of human trafficking, for instance through sensitization programmes in children's homes. Egypt outlined its monthly conditional cash transfer for households with children, which aims promote capital accumulation by providing family income support, while incentivizing poor households to invest in their children's health, education and nutrition.

Youth

Australia

The reviews demonstrate that countries are increasingly aware of the importance of tackling the needs of their youth populations, including addressing the obstacles faced by groups of youth especially at risk of marginalization. Jamaica mentioned challenges with youth unemployment and crime, which the country seeks to tackle through promoting education and access to productive employment. The country also launched a 'Youth in Business initiative' in 2017, to empower socially excluded and underserved youth to develop and build businesses. Seeking to better outcomes for children and youth who come into contact with the criminal justice system, Ireland developed 'Tackling Youth Crime', its Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018, which forms part of the country's National Policy Framework for Young People. The review states that Ireland also developed a LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy, the first of its kind worldwide. Australia funds 'Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships' to support students from regional and remote areas to undertake certain courses in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), agriculture, and health. The review of Hungary reports on a 'Special Development Centre for the Promotion of Employment in the Labour Market', which is the first constituent of the institutional network for the labour market placement of students with disabilities and young people in the country.

Persons with disabilities

Canada

The reviews show that many countries considered disability within the context of leaving no one behind. Benin, Jamaica, Senegal, and Spain were among the countries that revised and implemented specific laws, policies, or action plans to combat discrimination, and promote rights and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Albania, Jamaica, Poland and Senegal specified concrete measures to address the rights and needs of persons with disabilities, through removing infrastructural and policy barriers in educational, health care, workplace facilities, as well as transportation, public spaces and other public services to ensure equal access and facilitate effective inclusion. Australia, Canada, Egypt and Malta took measures such as promoting accessible physical environments, increasing investment in human capital (job-oriented skill training and upgrading), and strengthening institutions for robust enforcement of policies for disability inclusion in socio-economic life. Poland established a programme that aims to improve the quality of life and independence of people with permanent or temporary mobility and sensory limitations through improvements in the accessibility of public areas, products and services. The United Arab Emirates launched the "My Community: A City for Everyone" initiative, which aims to transform Dubai into a disability-friendly city by 2020. To redress the marginalization and vulnerable situations of persons with disabilities, targeted actions, including special measures, were also taken. In this regard Azerbaijan, Benin, Ecuador, Namibia, Poland, and Singapore shared their experiences applying taxation and financial

mechanisms to support persons with disabilities and their families who were in financial hardship or poverty.

Older Persons

While many reviews mentioned that older persons fall within the category of vulnerable groups, specific actions to meet the needs of older persons were mentioned by only a few. For example, Bhutan outlined investments in infrastructure to improve access for senior citizens. The review of Cabo Verde highlights several programmes that specifically benefit older persons, such as pension and medicine coverage plans, as well as an income transfer programme. It notes that older persons are also among those with less effective political participation.

Indigenous peoples

Among the reviews that referred to indigenous peoples as left behind include Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Mexico, and Paraguay. Canada recognizes that for indigenous peoples, the Canadian reality is not, and never has been, equitable or fair. The review states that the Government of Canada is developing-in full partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis–a Recognition and Implementation of Rights Framework, and it notes that it is undertaking actions to improve primary and secondary education on reserves. Additionally, the review states that Canada is taking further steps to better align its laws and policies with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The review of Paraguay notes that

Ecuador

the government is in the process of developing a National Plan for Indigenous Peoples (Plan National de Pueblos Indígenas), based on several rounds of consultations with indigenous communities. The review of Ecuador highlights the need to provide incentives to indigenous peoples who voluntarily commit themselves to food production, conservation and the protection of native forests, thereby protecting ecosystems important for biodiversity and food security. The review of Mexico, where over 70 per cent of indigenous peoples are considered either poor or extremely poor, provides details on several measures taken to improve their situation, for instance through the Indigenous Infrastructure Program. Australia stated that its government is committed to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their constitution and highlights that all 17 SDGs are significant for these communities. As an example, on how to support these groups, the review notes that indigenous procurement policies were put in place to help support and grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses around the country and promote economic inclusion and resilience in disadvantaged communities.

Migrants

Several reviews highlight specific challenges faced by migrants, relating to the access to health care, education and the labour market. Spain states that immigrants from outside the European Union, compared to those from within the Union, have a 50 per cent higher risk of social exclusion, resulting from difficulties with integration and a lack of formal and informal social support networks. The review of Greece mentions that its priorities include the promotion of social inclusion for immigrants, and it

specifies several projects aimed ensuring decent living conditions and access to health care and education for refugees and their children. The review of Australia notes that it has a national Refugee Employment Support Program to provide employment support for refugees, as well as other initiatives to provide employment and education pathway support for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. For its part, Lebanon referred to targeted measures in the labour market, for instance to improve the working conditions of women migrant domestic workers. The review of Bahrain also focused on measures in the labour market, outlining services provided to all expatriate workers, including those working in low-income jobs. Sri Lanka states that it has implemented its National Migration Health Policy, which addresses health issues of internal, inbound, and outbound migrants.

Women and girls

While many reviews outlined the challenges women and girls face in general terms, only few focussed on measures to reach the most disadvantaged or marginalized among them. Egypt outlines interventions specifically targeted at rural women, which are identified as a low-income, poor and vulnerable group. The review of Hungary states that the Roma population is the most exposed to social exclusion, therefore it is particularly important to strengthen the employment of Roma women. To this end, the government has created a training and employment program and put in place a programme intended to prevent Roma girls from leaving school early. For its part, the review of Togo mentions

Egypt

specific efforts to support women entrepreneurs. Egypt and Lebanon mentioned their efforts to raise awareness of gender-based violence, and they outlined their legislation and programmes to protect women survivors of violence and their children. Bahrain's review notes that housing services are provided to vulnerable women, including for those who are divorced, abandoned, or widows. The section below on SDG 5 contains further material on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

LGBTIQ

Several reviews identified LGBTIQ people as being left behind, including Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, and Mexico. Cabo Verde, for instance, noted that the LGBTIQ community is still the victim of ignorance, incomprehension or intolerance and does not have effective political participation. The reviews of Australia and Canada were among the few that addressed targeted measures for the LGBTIQ community. Canada is actively promoting human rights related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression at home and on the international stage, where Canada is co-chair of the Equal Rights Coalition, the first intergovernmental network formed to promote and protect the human rights of LGBTIQ people around the world. In its review, Australia states that the government recognizes the particular impact of mental health issues and suicide in the LGBTIQ community. It funds a number of programmes specific to the community's needs, such as a peer-supported telephone and web-based counselling and referral service for LGBTIQ people.

V.   Goals and targets

The majority of 2018 VNR countries included SDG-specific analyses and reviews in their reports. No uniform way of reporting on SDG specific implementation in the VNRs exists, and countries chose numerous different methods depending on their national circumstances. The section aims at giving an overview of the ways in which countries reported on the SDGs. It also outlines the main findings from the reports regarding each of the 17 SDGs.

Priorities and national focus areas

In their reviews, many countries also elaborated on the integration – "nationalization" - of the SDGs and targets. Some countries outlined how the goals have been incorporated into national strategic frameworks.

Structure and sources

Countries used different structures for showcasing their results of their reviews, either using free-flowing analysis of their policies or actions or a set structure for each goal analysed. Some structured their analysis of goals around sections such as trends and progress, challenges, and lessons learned. The Australia included under each SDG a section on "At home" and "Abroad", highlighting actions and priorities taken in national implementation and in the country's development cooperation activities.

Some reviews relied on national indicators. For instance, Switzerland uses a system of 85 indicators to monitor the SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda, and the review makes use of succinct graphics to communicate trends and progress. To support their reviews of progress countries most often noted using their national inputs from statistical offices, line ministries, national submissions to various international treaties and agreements and other internal sources.

Goal 1

Recognizing SDG 1 as a cross-cutting priority, all 46 reviews either address SDG 1 as a standalone goal or in its interlinkages with other goals and their respective contribution to poverty eradication. While the reviews of Benin, Cabo Verde and Namibia focus on the eradication of extreme poverty, Albania, Armenia, Australia, those of the Bahamas, Canada, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania address SDG 1 in terms of relative poverty and the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, in line with the commitment to leave no one behind. The multidimensional nature of poverty was stressed throughout the reviews. For instance, Sri Lanka uses a multidimensional poverty index, while the review of Jamaica states that the country is in the process of developing one. The reviews of Ireland, Mexico and Ecuador underscored the need to adopt a life-cycle approach to social protection and social inclusion. In their reviews, the Bahamas and Sudan highlighted the need for accurate and timely data to study the prevalence, incidence and multiple dimensions of poverty.

The reviews of Bhutan, the Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Jamaica and Mali stress the need to ensure that vulnerable sections of the population do not fall back into poverty due to natural disasters. The review of Jamaica mentioned measures such as disaster-responsive social assistance, crop insurance schemes, relocation strategies, and improved access to micro finance and social insurance. Countries (among them Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Singapore, Slovakia, Viet Nam, and the Dominican Republic) address housing insecurity as an important dimension of poverty.

Countries provided examples of a wide range of measures and policies to curb poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon and to foster social inclusion. For instance, the review of Malta states that its National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion comprehensively addresses

Dominican Republic

poverty through six dimensions: income and benefits, employment, education, health and environment, social services, and culture. Similarly, the Social Initiative Program in Sudan aims at the provision of a diverse range of health services, educational opportunities, and income generating activities for poor households. The reviews of Australia and Canada pointed to poverty as both a determinant and a consequence of poor mental health.

Countries (among them Bhutan, the Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Mexico, and Senegal) addressed reviewing legislation regarding land property and registration, including the challenge of generational land and strengthening the access of women to land ownership. The Bahamas noted that land tenure insecurity critically affects poverty, especially for those at or below the poverty line.

Many reviews highlighted a holistic approach to social protection systems and schemes (Canada, Ecuador), including social safety nets (Benin, Guinea, Namibia, Senegal, Singapore, Saudi Arabia). The reviews of Albania, the Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Greece, Guinea, Mali and Sri Lanka stress the need to strengthen social protection systems and citizen's access to them. Albania states that it has created a cash assistance scheme, however it recognizes the limitations of this intervention in adequately addressing the multiple, interlinked dimensions of poverty. The reviews of Cabo Verde, Guinea and Mali note that access to social protection is linked to formal employment and thus only benefits a small portion of their societies. In Australia, social security payments form an integrated package of support, along with mutual obligations, taxation concessions, productivity initiatives, employment services and labour market strategies. The review of Latvia states that it is gradually implementing a minimum income level as reference point for improving the system of social benefits, insurance, and assistance. In Canada, the Province of Ontario is conducting a pilot project to study the impact of basic income, while the Province of Quebec announced a guaranteed income policy for long-term social assistance recipients.

The reviews of Australia, the Bahamas, Benin, Canada and Poland note that effective poverty reduction requires the involvement of all levels of government, particularly the community level, as well as multi-stakeholder partnerships. Benin has launched a pilot project on social safety nets, implemented by communities. The review of the Lao PDR provides that efforts to curb rural poverty include community radio volunteer broadcasters in provinces of the country who, by reaching out to vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, have increased awareness on agriculture, family relations, education, health, and nutrition.

Hungary

While many reviews note that poverty has been reduced, several countries reported a rise in poverty levels due to economic factors, public health crises, and conflict. Children and youth were identified as being particularly at risk of living in poverty in both developing and developed countries, along with single-parent households, particularly single mothers. Spain states that it has created a special fund to combat child poverty, while Hungary has introduced tax reductions for families with children. Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Slovakia pointed to an increasing at-risk-of-poverty rate of the elderly. A number of reviews (among them Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Guinea and Jamaica) stated that people with disabilities or chronic health conditions, and indigenous peoples are more likely to live in poverty.

The reviews of Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Niger, Sri Lanka and Sudan are among those that mention regional disparities. In many places, rural poverty remains higher than urban poverty. Lao PDR has set up a poverty monitoring system to focus poverty reduction measures on remote and poor communities; however, the review notes that progress has been slow, due to capacity and budget constraints.

The reviews underlined a range of challenges. Several reviews (among them Armenia, Bahamas, Canada, Latvia and Malta) point to the challenge of the working poor. A challenge cited in the review of Dominican Republic is the lack of legal identity of people from poor households, which restricts their access social security and education. Jamaica, Lao PDR, Latvia, and Lithuania highlighted the challenges of financing comprehensive social protection systems.

Several reviews (among them Canada, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates) outlined their support to curbing poverty through their international development cooperation. Switzerland states that its international cooperation addresses poverty as a multi-dimensional concept, encompassing basic human needs as well as economic, social, environmental, political, and socio-cultural aspects. Australia supports the improvement of targeting of social protection programs in Indonesia and the reform of electricity subsidies releasing funds for the construction of electricity infrastructure.

Goal 2

Most countries reported on SDG 2, particularly its interlinkages with SDG 1 (Bahrain, Benin, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Paraguay, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan), SDG 3 (Australia, Bahrain, Greece, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland), SDG 4 (Spain, Sudan), SDG 5 (Armenia, Canada, Jamaica, Namibia), SDG 12 (Bahrain, Colombia, Egypt, Spain) and SDG 13 (Bahrain, Egypt, Ireland, Jamaica). Bahrain, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also stressed the importance of water management to achieve SDG 2, while Namibia highlighted disaster risk reduction.

Benin noted sub-regional, regional and international frameworks in support of the eradication of hunger and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. Cabo Verde and Spain pointed to the right to adequate food. Many countries reported higher levels of food insecurity in rural areas than in urban settlements (among

them Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Guinea, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam). The Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Lebanon, Namibia, and Singapore noted that their reliance on food imports challenges food security and renders them more vulnerable to international food price shocks.

Countries also stressed that the double burden of malnutrition and obesity, especially among children, is a public health problem that requires comprehensive interventions. Armenia noted that children from the poorest households and in rural areas are at higher risk of obesity, emphasizing the long-term consequences of the latter. In Ireland, a whole-of-government strategy for children under five and their families will support SDG 2.

Several countries reported on legal and policy frameworks in place, as well as initiatives aiming to end hunger and food insecurity, including National Zero Hunger Challenges (Mali, Lao PDR). Examples

Armenia

ranged from national plans and policies on food and nutritional security (the Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Jamaica), action plans and strategies to reduce food waste (Romania) and strengthen food safety (the Bahamas), to more specific initiatives focusing on food assistance (the Bahamas), consumer knowledge and education about dietary practices (the Bahamas, Spain, Sri Lanka) and backyard farming initiatives in communities and at schools (the Bahamas), as well as land management reforms (Albania). Singapore adopted a holistic approach to SDG 2, pursuing import source diversification, local production, internationalisation, and stockpiling schemes through a whole-of-government and multi-stakeholder effort. Jamaica's Import Substitution Programme aims at reducing the country's dependency on imports and achieving self-sufficiency in selected agro-industries. Institutional mechanisms contributing to strengthening coordination among actors for the achievement of SDG 2 include the creation of a National Council for Food and Nutritional Security in Cabo Verde, the creation of Commodity Councils in Sudan, as well as sector-specific initiatives such as the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Crops.

Several countries reported on initiatives to promote sustainable and organic farming practices (Bhutan, Latvia, Malta, United Arab Emirates). The review of Lithuania notes that the country's Rural Development Programme 2014–2020 encompasses measures to promote the competitiveness of agriculture, protect the environment and conserve biodiversity, and improve the quality of life in rural areas. Several reviews underline the importance of investments in agricultural research, development and training (among them Australia, Canada, Poland, Togo, United Arab Emirates), as well as access to environmental and meteorological information and statistics (Cabo Verde, Saudi Arabia). The review of Singapore focuses on technology-enabled solutions for a progressive farming sector, including vertical farming and fish farming systems. Countries also noted measures taken to maintain the genetic diversity of seeds (the Bahamas, Hungary), including national seed policies (Jamaica) and plans to set up a seed bank facility (Malta).

Several reviews highlight the role of civil society organizations in surplus food rescue and food distribution to communities. Addressing both the issues of food shortage and overpricing, and the accumulation and burning of waste in rural areas, the review of Colombia states that it launched *Bancalimentos* in 2015 through which food and medicine can be purchased in exchange for recyclable materials, following a circular economy approach.

Egypt, Hungary, Jamaica, Latvia, and Poland reported on their school meal programmes and efforts to make public catering healthier. Bhutan has issued a Dietary Guideline for School Children and a consolidated School Agriculture Programme, highlighting the need to evaluate and monitor school feeding programmes. In Spain, the "Know what you eat" campaign promotes the consumption of fruits, vegetables and milk in schools, to curb childhood obesity.

Several countries identified the adverse impacts of climate change as the main challenge for achieving SDG 2. Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Lao PDR, Namibia, Singapore, Spain, and United Arab Emirates are focusing on the adaptation of agricultural production systems and climate-smart and resilient agriculture. Mexico is promoting the environmental resilience of the agricultural sector through universal insurance coverage for small producers. Other challenges identified in the reviews include the weak market power of smallholder farmers (Armenia); seasonal feminization of agriculture, shortage of agriculture land, limited access to market, and crop damage by wild animals (Bhutan); labour shortages (Bhutan, Sri Lanka); enhancing farm productivity and innovation (Latvia, Lithuania); and creating a quality regime for agricultural products (Malta). The reviews of Australia, Lao PDR, Singapore, Spain, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay single out food waste as a major challenge. In its review, Australia notes that major domestic supermarket chains and commercial and hospitality businesses are partnering with food recovery organisations to use excess food to assist those experiencing food insecurity, while also reducing waste.

Several reviews (among them Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Saudi Arabia and Switzerland) stress their support to SDG 2 through international cooperation, including a focus on shifting from short-term food aid to long-term food security and an improvement in the resilience of smallholder farmers and food systems.

Goal 3

Although the Goal was not under in-depth review by the HLPF this year, almost all VNR countries reported on it. Countries recognized that public health is a national asset and the basis for achieving sustainable development. They shared specific strategies or policies put in place to strengthen health care systems and ensure health and well-being for all.

Several countries referred to the right to health (among them Albania, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Lebanon, and Namibia), while others (among them Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Canada, Ecuador, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Bahrain, Singapore, Spain, and Sri Lanka) provided information on the provision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Health has been identified as a priority area in the national development plans of several countries (among them the Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Lebanon, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, and United Arab Emirates).

The Bahamas

Reviews covered areas ranging from: enhancing essential health services and coverage of health facilities (Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Jamaica, Lao PDR); sector governance reform and institutional development (Cabo Verde, Lao); closing service gaps between different social groups and regions (Mexico, Romania, Viet Nam); reforming health insurance (Egypt); improving coverage and promoting greater efficiency, equity, performance and accountability within the healthcare system (the Bahamas, Lebanon, Sudan); ensuring quality and availability of essential medicines and vaccines (Armenia, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Hungary, Jamaica, Lao, Namibia, Senegal); extending healthcare services to vulnerable groups (Albania, Australia, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Viet Nam); and striving to improve healthcare infrastructure (Bhutan, Ecuador, Hungary, Jamaica, Lebanon, Malta, Romania, Sri Lanka, Senegal, State of Palestine).

Maternal, neonatal and under-five mortality rates in some countries conducting VNRs remain high. Reported challenges facing reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health include, among others, absent neonatal screening (Albania); gender inequality and the use of traditional practices (Armenia); culture, and lack of education and awareness (Armenia); disparities in the prevalence of both institutional delivery and skilled birth attendants (Bhutan); complications from chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity (Jamaica); disparities in maternal and child health service coverage (Lao PDR); and poor results from immunization programmes, as well as insufficient financial resources (Senegal). The reviews contain information on strategies to improve accessibility and quality of healthcare facilities; train midwives, labour and delivery care personnel; strengthen prenatal, neonatal and post-natal care; provide coverage for all basic vaccinations; and improve access to modern contraceptives.

On communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and hepatitis, policy measures reported included: timely and effective access to diagnosis; the provision of targeted treatment; developing action plans to fight vector-borne diseases, including Zika virus infection; and targeted, evidence-based interventions focused on priority populations. The review of Egypt states it has drastically reduced the prevalence of hepatitis C, as a result of lower prices for the applicable medicine, once it was produced domestically.

Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory disease and cancer, remain a source of concern across the development spectrum. Many countries highlighted increasing public or private spending on health and use of statistical data for the implementation of evidence-based policies. Countries also promote prevention through public awareness initiatives on healthy and physically active lifestyles, early diagnosis and treatment, and substance/alcohol/tobacco abuse prevention programs. Canada's Healthy Eating Strategy aims to improve the food environment in Canada to make it easier for Canadians to make healthier choices. The Bahamas, Bhutan, Jamaica, Lao and Romania reported on efforts to reduce the number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. According to its review, the Bahamas are working on revising the Road Traffic Act, with a view to modernizing the country's transportation system. The reviews of Australia, Cabo Verde, and Viet Nam express concern over the impact of climate change on health.

Concerns about health equity are also reflected in the reports, including regional or urban/rural differences, healthcare of the elderly, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, Roma, and the LGBTIQ population. The reviews of Armenia, Australia, and Greece also discussed refugees' access to health care programmes. The review of Lithuania expresses concern about the increased consumption of antibiotics and the scant level of public knowledge about antimicrobial resistance.

The reviews of Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia state that they promote the achievement of universal health coverage, access to quality essential healthcare services and training of personnel as part of their international development strategies.

Goal 4

Sustainable Development Goal 4 was addressed by nearly all VNR countries, and cited as a central development priority, including as the top development priority in some reviews (Slovakia, Vietnam).

Bahrain, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Lebanon, Mali, Senegal, and the United Arab Emirates have integrated SDG 4 into national development plans or strategic development frameworks for education. Countries also cited the UNESCO Education 2030 Framework for Action to guide education policies in line with the implementation of SDG 4 (Latvia, Andorra, Australia, Bahrain, Greece, and Romania).

While school matriculation rates continue to be a challenge in some countries (Armenia, Cabo Verde, Lao PDR, Namibia, Romania); others reported significant improvements in this area (Ecuador, Guinea, Niger, Saudi Arabia). Early childhood education and preschool were reported as top priorities in a large number of reviews (among them Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Jamaica, Poland, and Lao PDR) and some reviews noted significant progress in improving access to early childhood education (Bhutan, Hungary, Lithuania, and Vietnam).

Sri Lanka

A significant and increasing focus on vocational education was also cited (Australia, the Bahamas, Bhutan, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Jamaica, Malta, Poland, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, among others). In this regard, countries underlined the challenge of more closely linking higher education with the job market. The review of Senegal provides that the percentage of girls in vocational and technical training sectors increased from 15 per cent in 2015, to 52 per cent in 2017, which can be attributed to improvements in facilities and access to proper sanitation, as well as scholarships and prizes. There has also been an increased focus on digital education, and "closing the digital gap", by increasing internet access for all citizens (the Bahamas, Hungary, and Sri Lanka, among others).

Several countries reported initiatives working to integrate the principles of sustainable development into education curricula, including Bahrain, Ireland, Greece, Australia, Romania, among others. In Andorra, for example, education for sustainable development is comprehensively integrated into formal education curricula, designed to generate a critical awareness of fair and equitable human development.

Common challenges reported in the implementation of SDG 4 included insufficient funding and infrastructure (Bahamas, Vietnam, Lebanon, Armenia). Mexico–through the country's One Hundred Percent Program–noted significant progress in increasing the provision of adequate infrastructure for schools. The reviews point to inequalities in access to quality education, with lower levels of access reported among low-income students (Albania, Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka), and those living in rural areas (Armenia, Australia, Bhutan Dominican Republic, Guinea, Lao PDR, Lithuania, Romania, Senegal, Vietnam, among others). Insufficient access to education was also reported for persons with disabilities and was cited as a key challenge in several reviews (Albania, Armenia, the Bahamas, Cabo Verde, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and State of Palestine, among others).

To address these challenges and encourage inclusion, the reviews contain actions and policies. For instance, the review of Romania states that it recently included criteria for working with disadvantaged students, including students at risk of dropping out in the merit-based allowance system for teachers, which has traditionally had a narrow focus on preparation for tests and academic competitions. In Australia, the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) builds bridges between university and high school for indigenous peoples living in rural areas, to ensure higher educational attainment rates for indigenous students through academic tutoring and special programmes.

In their reviews, Armenia, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Lithuania, and Senegal note the lower education and achievement levels for young mean as compared to young women; at the same time, Armenia, Australia, and Canada reported that more males than females were pursuing education in STEM fields. Throughout the VNR reports, there was little focus on education for older persons, and in the cases where it was mentioned, it was often viewed as a challenge (Latvia, Romania).

Goal 5

In covering SDG 5, countries referred to legislative and constitutional guarantees of equality before the law (among them Singapore, Switzerland, Viet Nam).

Many countries reported on the legal framework in place to promote gender equality and end all forms of discrimination. Countries also highlighted the revision of existing laws or the enactment of new ones, for example regarding domestic violence or gender-based violence (Lebanon), gender equality acts (Switzerland), and laws improving working conditions such as a new law or provisions related to flexible work (Lebanon) or amendments to the maternity protection law (Singapore, United Arab Emirates). Some countries noted the challenge of implementing or enforcing existing laws (Namibia). The review of Lebanon describes legal amendments favouring gender equality, including the abolition by Parliament in 2017 of article 522 of the penal code that had allowed the prosecution to drop charges against a rapist if he married his victim. The review of Greece notes that the law on legal gender recognition establishes a simple as possible procedure to amend the registered sex of transgender persons.

Ireland

Countries reported on other measures, including national gender equality strategies or gender action plans (among them Egypt, Greece, Ireland, Lebanon, Namibia, Singapore, Viet Nam). The review of Greece states that the country's gender action plan places emphasis on designing targeted policies for women who suffer multiple discrimination, such as immigrants, refugees, women with disabilities, Roma, and single mothers. In recognition of the different health requirements of women compared to men, Singapore's Women's Health Committee focuses on key health issues among women, such as increasing cancer screening uptake and promoting bone health. The review of Namibia states that Gender Responsive Budget Guidelines were adopted in 2014, alongside a previously developed National Gender Mainstreaming Programme.

Violence against women and girls was one of the main challenges mentioned and a number of countries reported on measures in place to address the issue (among them Greece, Ireland, Namibia, Switzerland, Viet Nam). The review of Ireland states that a new domestic violence legislation was enacted in 2018, bringing Ireland a step closer to ratifying the Istanbul Convention. Noting that the level of female genital mutilation (FGM) continues to increase, the review also states that separate legislation makes it a criminal offence to remove a girl from the state to mutilate her genitals. Countries (among them Ireland, Greece, Singapore) also reported on legislation and other measures in place to safeguard women against the threat of trafficking.

Countries mentioned measures to encourage men and women to share caregiving and household responsibilities equally, such as paid paternity leave (Singapore) and increases in the duration of paid maternity leave (United Arab Emirates).

Another challenge emphasised by countries was the low participation of women in decision making or leadership positions, both in public and private, (Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Singapore). Countries also reported on initiatives taken to increase women's representation on the boards of state-owned entities and companies (United Arab Emirates) and publicly-listed companies (Singapore, United Arab Emirates) and in public life, including government (among them Egypt, Mexico, Lebanon, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates). In Namibia the ruling party has adopted a 50/50 representation policy, which has seen the percentage of women in leadership positions rise, with 43 per cent of parliamentarians being women.

Countries also reported other SDG 5 challenges, including the gender pay gap (among them Ireland, Mexico, Switzerland), low labour participation rate (Saudi Arabia), and gender-based differences regarding access and control of resources, such as access to land or financial assets (Egypt, Namibia). The review of Namibia states that 45 per cent of the land in communal areas is registered to women, while 41 per cent of firms are registered in the name of women. The review of Viet Nam states that there is an increasing trend in women-owned enterprises, with the present share at 31.6 per-cent. To promote equal pay, Switzerland's Gender Equality Act is to be revised, among other things to introduce a regular analysis of wage equality for employers with at least 50 employees.

Countries stated that they were committed to the principles of equality and non-discrimination as espoused by Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (Lebanon, Namibia, Singapore, Switzerland). In addition to CEDAW, reference was also made to other instruments, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Namibia), Council of Europe Convention of 2011 (Istanbul Convention) on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Greece, Switzerland).

Goal 6

SDG 6 reflects a joint vision of the global community that holistic management of the water cycle is required to ensure access to safe drinking water, proper sanitation and hygiene and sustainable management of water. Numerous countries reported on their progress towards access to safe drinking water, with Switzerland noting support for the human right to clean drinking water.

Togo

While most of the countries have made significant progress towards access to safe drinking water, challenges such as rural access (Uruguay) and pollution (Lebanon, Sri Lanka) exist in several VNR countries. A few countries noted experience with water committees and water user associations for the management of water points in rural and peri-urban areas, but also referred to the difficulties arising from lack ownership by and involvement of beneficiaries (Togo).

Many countries reported also on access to sanitation and hygiene (among them Greece, Lebanon, Mexico, Namibia, Romania, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Viet Nam). Some reviews cited the remaining challenge in rural areas, with lower levels of access to improved sanitation (among them Egypt, Namibia).

Countries highlighted advances in wastewater management and treatment (among them Singapore, United Arab Emirates). Several countries reported also on their efforts to enhance water use-efficiency (among them Egypt, Greece, Qatar), with Singapore noting that changing behaviour patterns and practices in the industrial sector is especially important, because non-domestic use is expected to be the main cause behind the increase in that country's future water demand. The review of the United Arab Emirates notes that the Water Security Strategy 2036 focuses on reducing the total demand for water, increasing the reuse of treated wastewater and increasing national water storage capacity. The review of Egypt noted efforts underway to transform the irrigation system in Egypt into a drip system, including by Sekem, an Egyptian company that that has pioneered organic farming and the complete reuse of wastewater after treatment.

At the same time, challenges in ensuring wastewater treatment and water quality in general were reported by a number of countries (among them Ireland, Lebanon, Mexico, Romania, Viet Nam). Several countries noted actions taken to reduce pollution due to wastewater (Egypt, Viet Nam), extractive industries (Mexico), nutrients (Greece, Switzerland), and pesticides (Switzerland). The review of Sri Lanka states that hard metals and agrochemical contaminants have caused water in agricultural areas of two provinces to become unsuitable for drinking.

Several countries with currently sufficient water resources noted the potential for water shortages in the future. Competing demands for water resources, for households, manufacturing, energy, agriculture and food production, together with impacts of climate change, conflict, natural disasters and excessive groundwater consumption, cause challenges for water availability. Countries are taking steps to diversify their sources of water, including recycled and reclaimed water (Singapore, United Arab Emirates) and desalinated water (Egypt, Qatar, United Arab Emirates), which has become a viable option for producing drinking water due improvements in technology (Singapore, Qatar). The interconnectedness of water with healthy terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity was also highlighted (Mexico).

Several countries reported on their aims, existing laws, mechanisms and plans for ensuring integrated water resource management (among them Greece, Lebanon, Qatar, Romania, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam). The review of Lebanon notes that the country's parliament in 2018 adopted the Water Code, which applies international agreements on water, promotes integrated water resource management, and provides for delegated management to the private sector. Highlighted challenges for integrated management include weak data collection and insufficient institutional, human, financial and technological capacity (Togo), and administrative, legal and political challenges (Greece). The review of Greece notes that emphasis has been placed on ensuring active and meaningful public participation in the planning and implementation of water policy, with public debate and multi-stakeholder consultations held in all water districts on river basin management and flood risk management plans. Institutional coordination among the various government agencies concerned with water and water management remains a challenge (Qatar, Sri Lanka).

Reviews highlighted support for transboundary cooperation in waters (Switzerland), the UNECE Helsinki Convention on transboundary watercourses and lakes (Greece), or specific initiatives with other countries. The review of Uruguay outlines river basins and aquifers that cross its borders, while also describing related institutional and management arrangements. It notes as a challenge progress in elaborating and implementing integrated watershed management plans for national and transboundary basins.

The review of Armenia underlines that SDG 6 is inter-linked with many other SDGs, and therefore an integrated approach is necessary to achieve effective synergies and avoid conflict with the needs of stakeholders from agriculture, industry, cities, and aquaculture. In this context, a multi-stakeholder participatory approach is imperative.

Goal 7

Many countries reported on SDG 7 and noted its importance for sustainable development. To ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all, countries elaborated on measures taken such as diversifying energy sources, developing renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency, awareness-raising activities for the public on sustainable energy consumption, and connecting more households to the energy grid in rural areas.

Energy supply security and reliability is a concern for countries, with some drawing attention to reliance on hydropower generation, which may be vulnerable to seasonal precipitation and climate change (Albania, Bhutan), the challenges of maintaining security of supply in an archipelagic island context (the Bahamas), the effect on reliability of supply of institutional deficits and poor revenue collection (Albania, Lebanon), and high dependence on imported sources of energy (Ireland). The review of Romania notes that with a large percentage of the population burning wood for heating, an area of strategic intervention

is the development of high efficiency cogeneration, in parallel with the modernization of district heating supply systems.

Viet Nam

In the context of access to energy, the review of Greece states that a reduced Social Residential Tariff for electricity has been established for vulnerable social groups, among them people with low family income, long-term unemployed, and people with disabilities. The review of Egypt states that the government reformed the country's energy subsidies, which had been poorly targeted and constrained spending on social issues. The review of Viet Nam states that the country is on track to achieve universal access to electricity through electricity infrastructure investments in rural and mountainous areas and islands, as well as cost subsidies for poor households.

The review of Uruguay states that it is the first country in Latin America with full coverage of electric power in its schools, having achieved universalization of access for all 1,090 rural schools in the country, through a combination of grid access and solar PV.

Countries reported on legislative frameworks and national actions plans for the promotion of renewable energy (among them Armenia, Bahamas, Egypt, Greece, Ireland, Lebanon, Mexico, Romania, Uruguay) Many countries reported on measures to increase solar power, among them Albania, Armenia, Australia, Egypt, Greece, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Uruguay. The Bahamas noted that a programme to promote the installation of solar panels for household use has been bolstered by the elimination of tariffs on solar equipment. Given land-scarcity, Singapore launched a floating solar test-bed, and the feasibility of deploying more floating solar PV systems is being explored. The review of Sri Lanka describes a small-scale, community-based programme to promote small rooftop solar power plants in households, religious places, hotels, commercial establishments and industries. Under this programme, the consumers will have options to use electricity themselves, sell electricity generated in excess of their requirement to the national grid, or bank it for later use.

With a view to ensuring that their energy grids can support the greater deployment of renewables, countries are investing in system-level solutions such as solar forecasting and smart energy storage technologies (Canada, Singapore). In Australia, several sub-national (state and territory) governments are undertaking procurements for grid-scale battery storage facilities as part of their programmes to meet their renewable energy and energy security goals.

Countries also reported on national action plans and measures taken to increase energy efficiency (among them Egypt, Greece, Lebanon, Ireland, Mexico, Qatar, Singapore, Uruguay). Activities included initiatives to enhance energy efficiency of buildings (Canada, Romania), including through the creation of a revolving fund for energy efficiency retrofits of public housing (Armenia). To reduce the emission of GHGs and air pollutants, the Canadian federal government extended tax provisions that allow companies to accelerate the depreciation on assets that are more energy efficient. Egypt is implementing a project that targets the replacement of 3.9 million streetlights with more efficient lighting technology. In Latvia, the Energy Efficiency Law and relevant regulations on energy efficiency came into force in 2016, stipulating that large energy consumers, big cities, counties, and state institutions must implement energy efficiency plans. Albania has established an Energy Efficiency Agency and a fund on energy efficiency has been made

operational. Some countries cited reductions in energy intensity (Armenia, Latvia, Mexico), attributing this to supportive policies, investments in energy efficiency by businesses and households, as well as the growth of sectors with low energy intensity such as ICTs and services (Armenia).

To achieve SDG 7, some reviews noted the importance of clean energy research and fostering technological innovations. For instance, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) provides research, development, demonstration and deployment grants to researchers and businesses. The review of Qatar states that Texas A&M University at Qatar has launched a smart network centre that merges electric power with the infrastructure of ICT technologies. To encourage investments in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology, countries had had established funds, loans or grants, to both businesses and individuals (among them Australia and United Arab Emirates).

A major challenge regarding the use of renewable energy is the transport sector. The review of Sri Lanka noted the growing vehicle fleet, pointing to threefold increase since 2000, with private vehicles a major factor in this growth. Other challenges to achieve SDG 7 included improving energy efficiency in consumption and production; meeting rising energy consumption; continuing over-reliance on biomass for heating and cooking (Armenia); maintaining consistent policy momentum and sustainable financing models to implement renewable energy programmes through the country (Bahamas); training of technical experts in renewable energy (Bahamas); strengthening institutions and capacity at national and local levels (Benin) and improving their performance through adequate management, including reduction of losses, with a view to creating a favourable environment for investment (Albania); extending and modernizing the electricity grid (Benin); meeting increasing energy demand while reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Canada); the divide between electricity access rates between urban and rural areas (Benin, Namibia, Togo); and growing dependency on power generation using fossil-fuel energy resources (Sri Lanka). Greece, as a shipping nation is implementing a set of technical and operational measures adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to increase the energy efficiency of ships, as a contribution to the achievement of SDG 7.

Several reports referred to the interlinkages between energy and other SDGs. Energy is linked with social protection (SDG 1), as some countries stated that cash transfer schemes include support for energy bills (Albania). Even in prosperous societies remote communities may lack access to reliable energy supply, with some sub-national levels of government creating subsidies to ensure access (Australia). Canada has appointed four ambassadors to the Clean Energy, Education and Empowerment (C3E) initiative, which works to promote gender equality (SDG 5) in the clean energy sector. Armenia referred to the rapid increase in small hydropower installations, resulting in growth in the share of electricity from a renewable source, but also creating risks for ecosystems (SDG 15) and potential conflict among stakeholders.

In the context of international cooperation, several countries (Canada, United Arab Emirates) referred to their membership of the Clean Energy Ministerial, a group of the world's 23 largest and most innovative economies focused on voluntary carbon mitigation through clean energy deployment. The review of Mexico notes that the country was in 2018 admitted to the International Energy Agency as the first and, to date, only member from Latin America and the Caribbean.
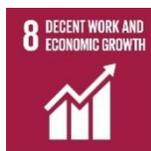
SDG 8

Reviews covering SDG 8 described successes and challenges in progress toward decent work and economic growth, rooted in a strong, growing economy that accommodates a wide range of people in meaningful and decent work. Many framed the current state of their economies in terms of recovery from the 2008 economic crisis, and though almost all reported some level of positive and improving growth, many indicated that they still experienced the reverberations of the crisis. Levels of employment are generally rising but not equally, and groups including young people, women, and people with disabilities continue to face obstacles.

Some reviews described the hurdles stemming from countries' particular circumstances, whether they were affected by ongoing or recent conflict or upheaval (Egypt, Sudan, Albania, Colombia, Niger), working to absorb large numbers of migrants and refugees (Greece, Lebanon, State of Palestine), or overcoming general vulnerability to natural disasters or external economic shocks (Cabo Verde, Jamaica). Reviews addressed the impact of demographic realities on economic growth—whether taking advantage of a "youth dividend," as in the case of Namibia, Bhutan or Sudan, or grappling with the challenges of an aging or shrinking population (Latvia, Singapore). Some countries described the potential benefits from diaspora and remittances (Albania, Armenia).

Lao PDR

Several of the reviews show how countries are working to capitalize on the assets, natural resources, specific human capacities and traditional strengths as they plan how to build up their economies and improve the employment landscape. The reviews describe framing economic plans and strategies around, for instance, fortunate geographic location vis-a-vis trading routes and high capacity ports (among them Singapore, Egypt, Togo). In Lao PDR, the "One district one product" initiative is promoting local products with the potential to reach global or regional markets. Hungary is promoting its "Irinyi Plan," which envisions a re-industrialized Hungary rooted in seven core sectors where it has natural strengths. Many reviews (among them Jamaica, Dominican Republic and Malta), point to sustainable tourism as an area of traditional strength with more room for enhancement and growth, while other reviews (among them Singapore, Hungary, Ecuador and Lithuania), saw tourism as an area for new development.

Malta

Building the capacity of their populations was a top priority, with the reviews of Saudi Arabia, Romania and others describing training and education programmes to help equip people for 21st-century jobs, especially in technology-related fields. A number of countries, among them Vietnam and Malta, described programmes to offer skills training to people with disabilities and to people who had been out of the workforce for extended periods of time. Members of the European Union, such as Poland, Lithuania, and Ireland, cited a comprehensive youth training, job search, and employment programme, known as "Youth Guarantee," which offers support to all young people

within 4 months of graduating from school. The Bahamas, Vietnam, Mali and others also emphasized building youth capacity. Programmes that recognize and promote the social value of work—for stronger communities and social cohesion, particularly for migrants and foreign workers and other people new to a country—were stressed in several reviews, including Greece, Malta, Canada, and Bahrain.

Countries from all regions showed a strong commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and offering a support system to small and mediums enterprises (SMEs). Several highlighted in particular their programmes helping women business owners (among them Australia, Bahrain, Malta). The Bahamas supports micro, small and medium size enterprises to foster economic opportunities for the poor and vulnerable. Several reviews (Lebanon, Mexico, Cabo Verde, among others) address the risks inherent in an economy when much of the work is in the informal sector, as well as policy options to address these risks. Several countries (Ireland, Spain, Poland, Vietnam) likewise described efforts to reverse the trend toward short term work arrangements that undermine stability for urban and rural workers alike. On the other hand, the need for flexibility was acknowledged, especially for mothers working outside the home. The reviews of Sri Lanka, Canada, Poland and others emphasized the importance of offering flexible work arrangements to workers. Several reviews also addressed the need for improved worker safety (among them Ireland and Greece).

Several countries (among them Hungary, Switzerland, Greece, Australia) discussed the importance of creating an enabling environment for business, through legal stability, protection of intellectual property, a fair and transparent tax code, simplified licensing and permits, and clear regulations. The review of Slovakia states that the government has since 2017, adopted two anti-red-tape packages, containing specific measures to lower the administrative burden for businesses, with a special attention to medium-sized enterprises.

SDG 9

The three "I's" of SDG 9—infrastructure, industrialization and innovation—were addressed as major priorities for the countries conducting VNRs in 2018.

Nearly all countries described efforts to advance their infrastructure, whether for road, rail, air, or marine transport (Vietnam, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Cabo Verde, Senegal, Dominican Republic others); or information communication technology (ICT) connectivity (Lithuania, Switzerland, Mexico, Palestine, Mali, among others). Some reviews highlighted "smart city" technology in terms of its potential to improve efficiency and sustainability of cities and their surroundings (Hungary).

Countries described their approach to developing infrastructure, and some emphasized the importance of involving local communities, including civil society, indigenous peoples, and others, when designing infrastructure projects (Canada, Australia). A number of countries stated that they were factoring the risks posed by climate change into infrastructure decision-making processes and plans (Bahamas, Australia).

Qatar

The level of industrialization varies from country to country, but many reported on efforts to advance manufacturing and to help companies gain access to global and regional markets. For some, this would mean moving beyond a traditional reliance on extractive industries, fossil fuels or primary agriculture (Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Togo) and focusing on higher value-added sectors including agri-business, green technology, and manufacturing (Greece, Cabo Verde). Countries also reported investing in industries underpinned by emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and 3-D printing (Singapore, Mexico). Several also indicated their commitment to promoting creative and cultural industries (Malta, Ecuador). In addition, many countries emphasized their commitment to promoting low carbon and green industry (Australia, Bahrain, Cabo Verde, Canada, among others).

Innovation featured strongly in the reviews, and almost without exception countries expressed a commitment to advancing science, technology and innovation. In this regard, some described partnerships between governments and academia (Lithuania, Lao PDR, Jamaica, among others). Several reviews discussed advancing SDG 9 through international cooperation and technical assistance to advance industrialization and transfer of technology (Switzerland, Canada, Australia, United Arab Emirates, among others).

Goal 10

Recognizing it as a cross-cutting goal, all reviews, except two, address SDG 10 as a standalone goal. Most reviews link discuss between the goals and, among others, poverty reduction; leaving no one behind; political, economic and social inclusion, especially for women and girls and peoples with disabilities and other vulnerable groups; national, racial, religious and other minorities; human rights; and legislation that targets national, racial, gender or religious discrimination, promotes social inclusion; and social protection floors. For instance, the reviews of Australia and Canada state that they have put in place special measures for their indigenous populations, while Albania, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia have adopted special measures for their Roma populations.

Switzerland

Migration is mentioned in most of the reviews as posing a significant challenge. The reviews of countries of migration intake, such as Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Greece, Spain and Switzerland provide information on their non-discrimination laws and special measures for settlement of migrants. Migration is also highlighted as an issue in the reviews of countries with a proportionally lower intake of migrants, among them Albania, Armenia, Bahamas, Cabo Verde, and Mali.

The reviews note that inequality between men and women persists. They still lag in political life and leadership roles, are not paid equally for equal work, hold fewer managerial and executive positions, and experience higher rates of harassment and gender-based violence. The reviews of some countries covered laws and strategies for LGBTIQ persons, for instance Ireland, where marriage equality was recognized based on a referendum. Among other actions, the review of Canada states that the government has appointed a special advisor on LGBTQ issues, whose principal responsibility is to work with the LGBTQ community, protect the rights of its members, and address discrimination – both historical and current – against them.

Many countries have passed laws or adopted measures protecting persons with disabilities. The review of Bahrain notes that the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with civil society organizations, private institutions and the private sector work together to rehabilitate and train persons with disabilities to integrate them into the labour market and society. Canada has established the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities and Workforce Development Agreements, which assist persons with disabilities to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment.

Many reviews (among them Armenia, Australia, Bahrain, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Egypt, Lao PDR, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Senegal, Slovakia, and Togo) emphasize economic and financial inclusion, fair wages, and decent work. Australia states that it has established multilateral forums to advance policies that promote open trade and investment, tax compliance and greater economic competitiveness to reduce inequalities. Ecuador notes that it is promoting the solidarity economy through sustainable ventures. Malta's review states that the government, the opposition, and social partners, who are all represented on the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development, have reached a new agreement on minimum wage standards. Mexico notes that is has instituted measures to protect workers in the informal economy through the tax incorporation regime (RIF), giving them access to insurance, housing, pension and credit benefits. Namibia has established New Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework (NEEEF) to promote access to productive assets, capital, land, and skills.

Goal 11

Almost all VNR countries addressed SDG 11, showcasing strategies, programmes and policies put in place to make cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In addition to reporting on measures reflecting the interlinkages with other SDGs, many also referred to the New Urban Agenda (Cabo Verde, Canada, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Armenia, Australia, Cabo Verde, Greece, Jamaica, Lebanon, Qatar, Switzerland), and the Paris Agreement (Singapore, Switzerland).

Uruguay

Rapid population growth and urbanization are putting unprecedented pressure on infrastructure, public services and the environment in cities around the world, bringing challenges such as housing shortages and rising property prices (Namibia, Jamaica, State of Palestine), the proliferation of informal settlements and increased vulnerability to disasters (Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Jamaica), waste management (Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Greece, Sri Lanka, Qatar), water drainage issues (Cabo Verde, Viet Nam), congestion (Egypt, Canada, Poland, Sri Lanka), the need for more green public spaces (Qatar), and air pollution (Armenia, Bhutan, Poland, Hungary, Jamaica, Beirut, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Spain, Viet Nam, Greece).

Many countries have implemented or expanded their social housing programmes targeting the low-income population (Egypt, Ireland, Romania, Viet Nam, Togo). The review of Namibia states that the government has introduced regulatory measures to reduce property speculation to stabilize land and property prices. Jamaica introduced a Mortgage Bank Act to facilitate the reduction in housing down payments. Participatory planning is mentioned as an effective approach in effectively upgrading informal settlements (Jamaica, Cabo Verde, Togo). The review of Cabo Verde further stresses the need for preventive policies in favour of the poorest population, along with measures that offer solutions for housing and formal urban development. Many reviews contain information on countries' activities in integrating disaster risk reduction and resilience into urban planning (Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Switzerland, Viet Nam, Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Hungary, Greece, Jamaica, Laos, Lebanon, Mexico, Qatar, Romania, Spain). The reviews of Australia, Canada and Switzerland also shared their initiatives to help vulnerable countries improve their disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation policies.

Box: City resilience strategy of Montevideo

Montevideo is implementing its Resilience Strategy, within the framework of the global 100 Resilient Cities programme. This is a platform dedicated to helping cities around the world improve their capacity to adapt and grow in the face of impacts and stresses. In 2017 the Municipality of Montevideo created an Executive Resilience Unit, located within the Department of Planning. Montevideo has prepared a preliminary assessment of resilience, which identifies four lines of intervention to build resilience in the city, directly involving SDG 11 targets.

Source: 2018 VNR of Uruguay

Emphasis is frequently placed on integrated urban planning and spatial planning that aims to consider the overall safety, liveability, sustainability, productivity and inclusivity of communities. For example, Canada's $40 billion, 10-year National Housing Strategy promotes diverse communities and building housing that is fully integrated into the community–close to transit, work and public services. Singapore's public housing is developed based on the "neighbourhood principle", where several neighbourhoods are grouped around a town centre that provides essential services within close reach of the residents. Greece has gathered a wide interdisciplinary pool of experts to develop and

officially adopt a National Standard for Sustainable Cities in Greece, containing requirements from energy efficiency and spatial planning, to financial viability and quality of health services. Some countries, however, reported their lack of capacity in integrated planning (Namibia, Viet Nam). Cabo Verde reported the lack of public spaces such as squares, parks, urban furniture, and in many cases, spaces and equipment for sports. The review of Qatar states that it has set a target establishing a green belt around Doha and its suburbs but highlighted that efforts to expand green spaces and parks are hindered by high costs and water scarcity.

Lithuania

The review of Sri Lanka highlights that deficits in the quality of public transport could be a major push that drives middle-income households towards private modes of transport. Many countries shared specific measures taken in sustainable transport, especially in promoting public transportation. Sri Lanka is introducing bus priority lanes during peak hours in selected roads to improve reliability. Lithuania is developing public electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Malta, Romania and Jamaica are among the countries that launched mobile application to make public transport more user-friendly. The reviews of other countries contain information on their plans to upgrade/expand public transport infrastructure (Egypt, Ireland, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia), promoting cycling culture (Egypt, Singapore, Hungary, Greece, Lebanon, Malta, Lithuania), improving road safety (Greece, Jamaica, Malta, Qatar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Greece, Saudi Arabia). To improve road safety, Jamaica launched a Road Safety Hub facilitating access to real time road crash and network data using geospatial technologies. Many reported on their efforts in making public transport accessible to vulnerable groups such as women and children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (Bhutan, Singapore, Jamaica, Malta, Switzerland, Canada, Ireland).

Many reviews contain information on measures taken in response to growing environmental concerns, such as air pollution (Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica) and waste management (Egypt, Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Laos, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, United Arab Emirates). Hungary has introduced programmes to improve energy efficient modernization of family houses, apartment houses, and the exchange of outdated household appliances for energy efficient models. In Greece, the city of Athens has implemented emission reduction measures, as well as emission monitoring and early warning, especially targeting vulnerable social groups in case that air spot pollution, including ozone and PM10, exceed the applicable thresholds. The review of Sri Lanka highlights its lack of capacity in air pollution monitoring at the PM2.5 level, the need for an appropriate legal framework, and technical standards for waste management.

Countries also reported on their efforts in safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, including through tourism (Albania, Australia, Bhutan, Canada, Egypt, Hungary, Greece, Ireland, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malta, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Switzerland). For example, Lebanon is launching a project on cultural religious tourism to promote local development, by fostering a constructive partnership between industry, residents, and government. The reviews also indicate that cultural and

historical sites would benefit from more stringent use and enforcement of cultural heritage impact assessments as part of development planning, strengthened conservation planning, heritage education for residents and tourists, promotion of cultural industries, and reinvestment of taxes and fees into heritage conservation.

Goal 12

While the reviews of several countries contain information on achievements towards more sustainable consumption and production, no country is on a firm path towards achieving SDG 12 in its entirety. In many cases, population growth and increased consumption spurred by economic growth erode small gains achieved. The review of Australia notes that the country has in recent years reduced per-person use of greenfield land and reduced per-person waste to landfill. Apart from waste to landfill, these changes are, however, not yet sufficient to bring about absolute declines in consumption of materials. The review of Armenia states that SCP approaches and practices are not yet widespread in the country and that there is a lack of economic incentives to encourage sustainable consumption and production. Nonetheless, positive developments reported included an increase in green buildings (Bahrain), major increases in municipal waste recycling (Lithuania), reduced food waste (Spain), and an increased recycling rate (Ireland), to name a few.

Countries stated that they are in various stages of including sustainable consumption in their national plans and strategies, with some countries lacking a dedicated plan (Armenia, Cabo Verde), some being in the process of mainstreaming SCP into their policies (Bhutan), and others updating their existing policies (Australia). Greece stated that circular economy has been included as a part of the national Growth Strategy, in addition to a separate national Action Plan on Circular Economy. The reviews of several countries (Armenia, Australia, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Latvia, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland) reported on their aims and plans for achieving circular economy. Reviews contain information on actions in varying fields such as fashion and textile production (Australia), clean technology in mining, energy and forestry sectors (Canada), agriculture (Hungary, Togo), organic farming (Poland), health care (Ireland) and green buildings (Bahrain).

On a general level, some of the challenges that countries reported on when striving towards SCP include inadequate research and development funding and capacity (Armenia, Bhutan), lack of policy and legal frameworks (Bhutan, Lao PDR), contradictory policies and legislation (Armenia), lack of financing and adequate skilled staffing of the institutions concerned with environmental governance (Jamaica), inadequate coordination efforts between different levels of government (Armenia), and among different stakeholders (Saudi Arabia). The review of Sri Lanka highlighted that the lack of data on waste hampers actions on managing hazardous waste.

Countries also noted their aims at ensuring that micro-, small and medium enterprises stay competitive and can connect to global markets. The review of Jamaica highlights the EcoMicro Caribbean Project, launched to support the development of green financial products in partnership with microfinance green. The review of the Lao PDR notes that SMEs will need to develop their human resources and skills, while Government entities and SMEs will need access to the best available technologies and environmental practices, innovations and marketing tools.

Environmentally sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste is a challenge for many countries, and reviews from countries such as Armenia, Australia, Canada, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Ecuador, Greece, Jamaica, Ireland, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri

Lanka, and State of Palestine refer to the actions they are taking to tackle the problem. Colombia highlighted its extended producer responsibility policy for products such as lead acid batteries, medicines and electronic waste, in place since May 2018. The review of the State of Palestine notes that the polluter pays principle has been introduced into its environmental legislation, requiring polluting companies pay for and rectify any damage done.

Guinea

On waste management, many reviews (among them Australia, Bahrain, Benin, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, Guinea, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Switzerland) reported on their efforts to increase resource efficiency and recycling and reusing waste. Several countries also noted the fragmentation and lack of integration of their waste management systems. For instance, the review of Vietnam notes that the management and treatment of solid waste, especially industrial waste, has not been conducted in an integrated manner and consequently enterprises have not paid sufficient attention to minimizing, recycling, reusing and collecting energy from waste. The review of Latvia states that a natural resource tax is levied on waste disposal and the sale or use of certain goods. Tax rates are differentiated, depending on the specific environmental impact of the types of goods and disposal management costs. The review of Ireland states that since 2017, household waste collectors have begun phasing out flat rate fees, to be replaced progressively with payment plans that incentivize waste reduction and segregation.

Several countries, such as Australia, Colombia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, Mexico, and Singapore also reported on their policies for reducing and recycling electronic waste, including a mandatory e-waste management framework based on the principle of extended producer responsibility (EPR).

The reviews of several countries highlight their actions to reduce and recycle plastics. For instance, Cabo Verde has already prohibited the import and use of non-biodegradable plastic bags by law; Egypt is promoting the use of biodegradable bags; Malta has introduced a tax on plastic bags; and Greece has implemented consumer fees for plastic bags.

Reviews note that challenges with food loss differ depending on the levels of development, capacities and consumer behaviour (among them Armenia, Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Mexico, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, and United Arab Emirates). The review of Saudi Arabia notes that in cooperation with a food donation society and a specialized recycling company, the Eastern Province Amanah (Trust) launched an initiative to use food waste for conversion into organic fertilizers. Work is underway to build a factory for production of organic fertilizers from table scraps and food leftovers, with an annual production capacity of 6000 tons. Jamaica states that it has tackled food loss due to infestations, including through routine inspections, disinfestation operations and laboratory analyses, and training programmes in food storage.

Countries are also aiming at improving energy efficiency in numerous ways, while also increasing the production of renewable energy. For example, Canada is using building codes to ensure that new

constructions produce net-zero ready buildings which are ready for renewable energy production. Cabo Verde, Vietnam and Egypt also reported on their energy subsidy reforms.

Many reviews (among them Armenia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Poland, Romania Switzerland, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Togo, United Arab Emirates) contain information on sustainable public procurement policies and action plans. Romania reported on increasing the capacity of public authorities to implement green public procurement, through clear commitments on eco-efficiency and environmental protection standards in all tender documents. A national guide for procurement is currently being developed.

The need to include all stakeholders in SCP efforts was highlighted in many reviews, with countries underlining the role of all levels of government, including local authorities, business, industry, civil society organizations, academia, schools, and individuals. The Swiss federal government, for example, sees its role in supporting the commitment of the business sector, the scientific community and NGOs by providing fundamental knowledge and tools, and by facilitating dialogue between all parties concerned. United Arab Emirates reported that the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, while working to develop a national SCP Plan, is conducting a series of stakeholder workshops to identify suitable SCP projects in different fields.

Several reviews (among them Colombia, Greece, Ecuador, Ireland, Romania, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, and Vietnam) highlighted their aims and policies for enhancing corporate social or sustainability reporting, with Spain and Switzerland also stressing the importance of companies fulfilling their human rights obligations. Countries also reported on their actions to support the private sector in the transition to greener business models.

Many reviews (among them Armenia, Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Malta, Lebanon, Lithuania, Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam) highlighted the importance of behavioural change of individuals in achieving more sustainable consumption and production. Many reviews (among them Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates) contain information about the use of eco labels and related environmental standards to guide consumers towards more sustainable choices, with several reviews singling out labelling for energy or water efficient appliances.

Several reviews (among them Armenia, Australia, Bahrain, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Egypt, Hungary, Lao PDR, Romania, and United Arab Emirates) stressed the importance of SCP in education and school curricula. In Hungary, the Green Kindergarten Program, which has been in operation since 2006, aims to develop the environmental awareness of children between the ages of 3 to 6 years.

Several countries (among them Australia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Hungary, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Qatar, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine) are aiming at promoting sustainable tourism. Bhutan, for example, has developed a Green Hotel Guideline and the Tourism Council of Bhutan, while the National Environment Commission, in collaboration and consultation with other stakeholders, will develop and award a Green Leaf to hotels that comply with the Guideline.

Goal 13

In their sections on climate change, countries reported on numerous challenges they are facing, including increased floods, mud- and landslides, debris flows, drought, worsening land degradation and salinity, intensive heat events, melting glaciers, sea-level rise, ocean acidification and salt water intrusion, changing rain patterns, and sand and dust storms.

Reports also highlighted the complex nature of climate change, with the review of Guinea noting the challenges of populations displaced due to climate change. Several countries stressed that climate change is a global issue that requires international cooperation.

Several countries reported being on track to achieving or surpassing their 2020 or 2030 emissions reduction targets (among them Australia, Canada, Hungary, Latvia, Spain, Singapore). At the same time, some reviews, for instance that of Ireland, note that emissions are increasing across all sectors in line with economic and employment growth. The review of Poland states that reducing GHG emissions is a relatively difficult task due to the high emissions-intensity of the economy, resulting from the dominant role of coal in the production of electricity and heat. In some countries, such as Australia, Canada, Greece, and Ireland, their reviews indicate that local authorities have taken an active role in climate mitigation and adaptation. In Australia, for example, state and territory governments and local councils have set aspirational or legislated emissions reduction targets, including some with targets of reaching net zero emissions or adopting up to 100 per cent renewable energy.

Many of the general challenges that countries are facing are related to lack of capacity and financing. The review of Lao PDR, for example, states that the government is focusing on capacity strengthening to establish a credible institution for direct access to climate finance and ensuring that domestic and international finance is successfully acquired, utilized, and accounted for. The review of Lebanon stresses that combating climate change requires stronger political leadership and technical capacities in, and coordination among, the line ministries, as well as integration of climate change action into national development planning.

Countries highlighted the importance of research and innovation in general for tackling both mitigation and adaptation. Several reviews (among them Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Jamaica, Latvia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam) stressed the importance of scenario and modelling work done at the national level, together with development partners. The review of the United Arab Emirates reports on its launch of the Climate Observatory in Space, which will provide governments and the scientific community with satellite data.

On mitigation policies, several countries reported using different financial instruments to reduce emissions. For example, the review of Australia states that the government has allocated $2.55 billion to purchase carbon credits through a reverse auction process. To date, the Emissions Reduction Fund has secured more than 191 million tonnes of emissions reductions through six auctions. The review of Mexico states that regulations have been put in place for the launch of an emissions trading system. The review of Canada states that the government has announced investments, including the Low Carbon Economy Fund and the Investing in Canada plan, which support projects aimed at reducing GHG emissions and generating clean growth. Numerous countries (Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Singapore Sri Lanka, Switzerland) reported on their efforts to increase energy efficiency and use of renewable energy.

Challenges in reducing GHG emissions from the transport sector were highlighted in some reviews (Hungary, Ireland, Switzerland). Several reviews, including those of Latvia, Ireland, Lebanon, and Singapore reported using taxation as a measure to encourage a transition toward electric or more energy efficient vehicles, many with good proven results. Lebanon, for example, has abolished taxes on electric vehicles and reduced by 80 per cent the taxes on hybrid vehicles. Many reviews, (among them Canada, Lebanon, Singapore, and United Arab Emirates) highlight their efforts to increase the use of public transport. Egypt has aimed at improving energy efficiency in the transportation sector by extending the electrified underground metro to new areas in Greater Cairo and intensifying the use of environmentally sound river transport. The reviews of Canada, Malta and Singapore also reported on impacts of aviation.

The need to increase and maintain carbon stored in forests, soil and wetlands was stressed in many reviews. In Bhutan, the constitutional mandate to maintain a minimum of 60 per cent of total land under forest cover is being respected. Lao PDR, on the other hand, reported that its GHG emissions have doubled in ten years with nearly all the increase stemming from land-use change and forestry.

On adaptation, reviews contain information on numerous actions and initiatives, such as new legal and institutional frameworks (Armenia), flood risk management plans and water management support for agricultural farms (Poland), development of agricultural terraces in mountainous areas and flood control projects (Saudi Arabia), strengthening the resilience of vulnerable farmers in large and medium irrigation schemes and small tank cascade systems (Sri Lanka), and raising the minimum crest levels for entrances to underground facilities (Singapore).

Countries (among them Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Benin, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Jamaica, Mexico, Namibia, Malta, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and Spain) reported on their disaster management plans. Actions taken include natural infrastructure projects (Canada), investments in sea dykes, river dykes, flood control and flash flood risk maps and saline intrusion upgrading projects (Vietnam), and local level vulnerability analysis of food security (Ecuador).

Several reviews (among them Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Latvia, Singapore, Spain, and United Arab Emirates) outlined actions to improve education and awareness-raising on climate change. For instance, Singapore has designated 2018 the Year of Climate Action, and to complement classroom lessons on climate change, schools conduct excursions to sites such as power stations, incineration plants, meteorological stations and green buildings.

Several reviews highlighted contributions to climate finance, with a few (Ireland, Latvia) particularly stressing their obligations and actions towards the $100 billion commitment. Commitments and contributions to the Green Climate Fund were also reported on by many (Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Spain).

Goal 14

Reviews covering SDG 14 underline that oceans and seas are inextricably linked to some of the most pressing challenges facing society. Several countries highlighted the role of oceans and seas for poverty reduction (Cabo Verde), employment (Bahrain, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Mexico, Namibia, Senegal, Sri Lanka), food and nutrition (Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal), marine trade and transport (Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Greece, Namibia, Singapore, Sri Lanka), attracting tourism (Australia, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Bahrain, Jamaica, Latvia, Namibia, Sri Lanka), recreation (Greece, Latvia, Singapore, Sri Lanka), energy production (Cabo Verde, Greece, Namibia), biotechnology and genetic resources (Namibia), and regulating global temperatures and absorbing carbon dioxide (Mexico). The cultural value of oceans and seas was also highlighted (Australia, Bahrain, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador).

Some of the challenges noted in the reviews include continuing sea level rise (Cabo Verde, Canada, Hungary), climate change (Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Hungary, Ireland) and associated increased sea-surface temperature increases and storm surges (Jamaica), ocean acidification (Cabo Verde, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Saudi Arabia), thinning sea ice (Canada), negative impacts of off-shore oil rigs (Egypt), overfishing (Egypt, Hungary, United Arab Emirates), rapid, unplanned urbanization and privatization (Lebanon), sand extraction and sea reclamation (Lebanon), hazardous substance contamination and pharmaceutical substances (Latvia), heavy metals (State of Palestine), oil pollution (Poland), concentration of contaminants in the sea and seafood for human consumption (Lithuania), and lax enforcement (Egypt).

The review of Cabo Verde highlights its lack of investments in knowledge and skills in marine resources, research and infrastructure, but also the lack of adoption of organized management models.

The reviews also contain information on progress in relation to effective management of key commercial fish stocks (Australia) and improving fish populations (Ireland), increasing sustainable fishery production (Egypt), establishment of marine protected areas (Canada), reduction in hazardous substance pollution (Latvia), increases in research budgets for marine technology (Mexico), and development of comprehensive policy, legal and institutional frameworks (Sri Lanka). Bhutan, Hungary and Switzerland also highlighted the role that landlocked countries play in conserving our ocean and seas, with Bhutan noting that its conservation of upstream 'white waters' has intricate linkages to downstream 'blue waters'.

On marine pollution, numerous reviews highlighted policies for reducing pollution of all kinds, reporting actions such as establishment of a national marine litter monitoring and assessment project (Egypt), new legislation and a polluter-pays approach for vessel clean-up (Canada), clean up initiatives (Malta, Mexico), developing strategies and conducting emergency exercises for addressing oil spills (Singapore), establishment of a Coastal Oil Spill Clean-up Guide to facilitate efficient decision-making (United Arab Emirates), redesigning fishing gear or practices to reduce discarded or lost fishing gear, more effective management of ports and fleets (Spain), and relocating abandoned ships to places suitable for diving tourism (Cabo Verde).

Several reviews stress address marine debris and litter, particularly plastics and micro-plastics (Bahrain, Cabo Verde, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Saudi Arabia). For instance, new regulations, prohibiting the manufacture, import and sale of toiletries containing plastic microbeads, came into force in January 2018 in Canada. Ireland has announced the expansion of its "Fishing for Litter" Programme which encourages fishermen to take ashore the litter they encounter at sea while fishing. On nutrient pollution, several countries (Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland) reported on their actions to tackle human-induced eutrophication. Initiatives related to researching and reducing underwater noise were also reported by some (Canada, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta), with Canada noting its research on underwater noise, and implementing vessel slowdowns in key areas and habitats to protect endangered species from vessel strikes and noise.

Regarding sustainable fisheries, reviews address the balancing act of increasing economic and social benefits derived from oceans and seas, while retaining their integrity and the health of fish stocks. In Namibia, the growth of deep sea fishing has helped develop a fish processing industry, attracting private investments and increasing exports. At the same time, Namibia has introduced fishing quotas and fishing seasons, and increased policing to control overfishing and unauthorized fishing.

The reviews of many countries (among them Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Jamaica, Malta, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Vietnam, Sri Lanka) reported on their actions towards tackling illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. Jamaica's Fishing Industry Act from 2015 increased the penalties to deter future offences and the fleet of coast guard boats was expanded in 2017. The review of Senegal also reports on increased penalties, participatory surveillance, and more efficient monitoring.

Many countries (among them Australia, Cabo Verde, Greece, Bahrain, Ireland, Lebanon, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Singapore) reported on their challenges and actions towards preserving marine biodiversity. Some countries highlighted particularly the stressors on corals reefs (Australia, Bahrain, Jamaica, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore), with Australia naming climate change, poor water quality, costal development, fishing, bleaching and cyclones as some of the main factors. In Bahrain, degraded habitats such as coral reefs have been rehabilitated by cultivating living coral, establishing artificial coral reefs and planting

mangrove trees. Numerous countries (Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Bahrain, Jamaica, Latvia, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Poland, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, Vietnam) reported on their progress towards achieving the target on conserving at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, with Australia, Bahrain and Greece and Malta reporting already exceeding the target.

The need to engage all relevant stakeholders and to form partnerships was noted in several reviews (Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Jamaica, Singapore, Vietnam).

Almost all countries reporting on the SDG 14 highlighted their national plans, legislation, and frameworks, stressing the usefulness of ecosystem-based approaches, integrated management plans, and marine spatial planning. In Poland, for example, the first maritime spatial plan in the history of Poland will be adopted by 2021. Several reviews highlighted the importance of science, technology and data gathering for ensuring the wellbeing of our ocean and seas and reported on the initiatives taken (Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Ecuador, Greece, Ireland, Jamaica, Lebanon, Malta, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, State of Palestine, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates).

Several reviews (Australia, Canada, Hungary, Lithuania Switzerland) highlight the crucial importance of global cooperation for successful management of our ocean and seas. On a similar note, numerous countries stressed the importance of conventions and agreements such as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Basel Convention, the UN Convention on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, Protocol Concerning Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and numerous others. Several countries also highlighted their compliance with the European Union regulations in this field.

Goal 15

The most common threats to healthy ecosystems mentioned in the reviews are increasing urbanization and population growth, causing competing pressures and demands on land use. Other threats to ecosystems and biodiversity mentioned include climate change, habitat fragmentation, invasive alien species, changing food consumption patterns, increasingly intensive agriculture and poor agricultural practices in crop production as well as animal husbandry, unsustainable aquaculture and forest cutting for industrial and household purposes, inappropriate tourism and associated infrastructure development, increasing pollution, including from lack of waste treatment, and depletion of groundwater, as well as the demands of water desalination. Several reviews noted that the above-mentioned challenges are exacerbated by poverty. The challenging linkages between ecosystem services, environmental degradation and economic growth were noted in several reviews, for instance Qatar.

Several reviews (Bahrain, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Greece, Lithuania, Jamaica, Romania, Spain, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates) place emphasis on specific ecosystems, such as wetlands, mountains and drylands, in the spirit of SDG target 15.1, with many also addressing issues related to peatlands (Canada and Ireland), prairies and tundra (Canada), coastal areas, and mangroves (Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Togo). Romania, for instance reported that the area of wetlands has been reduced to about half of its previous extent with many areas being converted to agricultural use. Greece noted the need for policies to guide sustainable tourism in mountainous areas.

All reviews that cover SDG 15 refer to countries' plans and actions to halt biodiversity loss and protect threatened species and habitats. Countries reported on several actions from legislation to sector specific initiatives. Greece has enhanced its legislation and conducted fine-scale mapping and assessment of

ecosystems and their services at national level. In Swiss agriculture, setting aside of specific areas to enhance biodiversity is encouraged by means of direct subsidies. The review of Vietnam states that new legislation on biodiversity has helped to systematize biodiversity protection issues that had previously been only partially addressed; however, distinctions between the new legislation and other relevant laws had not been sufficiently defined, leading to overlaps and difficulties during enforcement.

Several reviews (among them Bahrain, Bhutan, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lebanon, Mexico and Togo) address the need to ensure access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, with some specifically referring to their obligations under the Nagoya Protocol. In Lebanon, a law is being drafted to regulate access to biological and genetic resources and ensure equitable sharing of benefits in accordance with the Nagoya Protocol. Some reviews (Canada, Greece, Namibia, Qatar) also report on initiatives for protecting genetic diversity.

Many reviews (Australia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Lithuania, Romania, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Togo) contain information on challenges with land degradation and desertification. The reviews cite factors such as, deforestation and changes in land use patterns (Sri Lanka), water erosion of agricultural land (Bhutan), urban expansion and related soil compacting and the operation of heavy equipment and bulldozers (Saudi Arabia), and improper crop land use and drying of marshes and wetlands (Armenia). The review of the State of Palestine notes that assessment of the state of desertification is underway.

Several specific initiatives were also mentioned. Saudi Arabia has set up the Regional Center for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning (RDMEC), which conducts on-going monitoring of drought and related impacts for Saudi Arabia and Arab countries. Togo is aiming at enhancing its soil fertility with farmer field schools and the use of the GIFERC technique, which consists of the use of mushroom-based biological products associated with compost, which has led to a clear improvement in soil structure and water retention capacity.

Numerous reviews (Australia, Cabo Verde Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Lithuania, Qatar, Spain, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates) outline how countries are tackling the issue of invasive alien species, with policies such as removal of invasive plants (Cabo Verde), new databases (Jamaica) and regulations (Hungary). In Vietnam, the prevention and control of invasive alien species has achieved some results, with effective eradication measures and communication to prevent people from producing and releasing harmful aquatic species.

Countries have made significant efforts to increase ecosystems covered by protected areas and several countries (Armenia, Australia, Bahrain, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Egypt, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mexico, Jamaica, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Vietnam, Togo, United Arab Emirates) reported on their recent developments. The review of Egypt outlines capacity-building programmes, management-effectiveness tracking tools, and regulatory overhauls that, taken together, ensure that protected areas are operated correctly after the establishment. Several reviews (Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Spain) highlight actions to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, and poverty reduction strategies. Several reviews (Armenia, Australia, Canada, Egypt, Hungary, Jamaica, Romania) also refer to the use of community-based or participatory management plans, and some highlight the importance of indigenous expertise (Australia).

Deforestation and sustainable forest management was covered by all countries addressing SDG 15. While many reviews identified a loss of forest cover, those of Cabo Verde, Hungary, Jamaica, on the other hand, point to progress towards increasing it. The review of Vietnam states that the country has successfully

implemented the policy of forest environmental services payment, which helps generate income for households that participate in forest protection and improves the value of forestry products and promotes forest protection.

Policies countries have adopted to halt deforestation include creation of economic incentives to reduce illegal logging by people living near forests (Armenia), regional forest agreements and wood certification schemes (Australia), community forest management (Bhutan), tree planting (Cabo Verde, State of Palestine), sustainable forest management with science-based management plans (Canada), elaboration and endorsement of forest maps (Greece), adaptation to climate change through drought-tolerant species and "close to nature" forest management (Hungary), establishment of community forests (Namibia), multifunctional and sustainable forest management (Hungary), defining forests as green infrastructures (Spain), increasing the use of domestic timber, and protecting forests against harmful organisms and high nitrogen levels (Switzerland).

The reviews of numerous countries (among them Bhutan, Hungary, Lao PDR, Mexico, Namibia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Togo, United Arab Emirates) refer to the need to tackle poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna. Several reviews (Australia, Canada, Greece, Ireland, Singapore, Bahrain) make specific references to their efforts to uphold the CITES Convention. Many reviews stress the importance of coordinated efforts and the need for awareness raising to tackle demand for products. The review of Australia states that it is working to build the capacity of Pacific Island CITES parties to implement the agreement, encouraging accession by non-parties and assisting with the introduction of electronic wildlife permitting systems to support legal, well-managed and sustainable trade in wildlife. The review of the United Arab Emirates highlights its efforts to ensure that relevant entities and the general public are aware of the issue of illegal wildlife trade. Recent campaigns have targeted Abu Dhabi and Dubai airports in cooperation with partner organizations to raise awareness. Bhutan and Sri Lanka reported that in addition to poaching, human-wildlife conflict also causes challenges for wildlife protection.
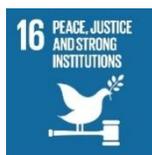
Goal 16

Among the countries that addressed SDG 16, Armenia, Cabo Verde, Australia, Canada, Hungary, Jamaica, Latvia, Lebanon and Spain underlined that it is a vital enabling goal for the entire sustainable development agenda. The Bahamas stressed that just, peaceful and inclusive societies are crucial for the realisation of the SDGs, while the role of inclusive, democratic governance, with responsive institutions, and access to justice for all is paramount to progress.

Several countries (among them Australia, Bahrain, Egypt, Ecuador, Mali, Guinea, and Sri Lanka) elaborated on measures to promote good governance, protection of human rights, and the eradication of violence – especially against women and children. Several countries reported on their efforts to combat organized crime, money laundering and terrorist financing, corruption and bribery. Ecuador, for example, is seeking through education and training to generate a society with ethical and civic values promote rejection of corruption. To curtail illicit financial flows into Switzerland from developing countries, Switzerland helps these countries to better manage their revenue from commodities transactions and institute effective taxation.

The importance of upholding the rule of law, ensuring universal access to justice as well as to government and information, building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, and the delivery of public services was highlighted by several countries (among them Armenia, Canada, Bhutan, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Mali, Malta, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, and Viet Nam). To this end, Australia's Public Data

Policy Statement (2015) commits government entities to release non-sensitive data as open by default, serving to supplement existing legislation.

Achieving SDG 16 through conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts was highlighted by many presenting countries. In this context, Australia, Canada, and Ireland underlined the need to integrate a gender perspective into international peace and security policy outcomes. Slovakia and Hungary reported on their projects supporting countries to strengthen national institutions and public-sector effectiveness.

Some of the challenges in realizing the goal included: violence against vulnerable groups of people (Armenia, Australia, Cabo Verde, Canada, Dominican Republic, and Guinea); weak institutional capacities (Bahamas, Benin, Mexico, Sri Lanka); corruption (Bahamas, Mexico, Slovakia, and Sri Lanka); limited specialization and regulation of the legal profession and slow and underdeveloped justice systems (Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Lao PDR, Namibia); and lack of or limited birth registration and/or legal identity (Dominican Republic, Lao PDR, Senegal, and Viet Nam). As host and transit countries, Canada, Egypt, Greece and Lebanon recognized that migration offers opportunities but also creates challenges and reported on their measures to tackle it. By way of example, Egypt created a ten-year National Strategy for Combatting Illegal Migration in 2016, spearheaded by the National Coordinating Committee on Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration.

As next steps, the reviews highlight increasing the transparency and efficiency of public institutions, reforming the justice system, reviewing legislations, upholding the rule of law, and increasing the use of ICTs in state management and public service delivery.

Goal 17

All countries reported on initiatives for strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. Most countries addressed it under their SDG 17 chapter. However, due to overlapping thematic areas, more issues are, for practical purposes, covered in the chapter on means of implementation.

Cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs is reflected in different forms – international, regional, bilateral, south-south and triangular cooperation – in many instances including stakeholders. International cooperation with the United Nations, International Financial Institutions, and the EU was highlighted by among others Armenia, Bhutan, Greece, Lithuania, Niger, Ireland, Singapore, Spain, and Switzerland. The review of Mexico states that within the framework of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), it has promoted the establishment of a network to strengthen the ability of countries to implement and follow up on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region. This network has the goal of sharing experiences and strengthening institutional and technical capacities of governments, which will help align international cooperation strategies with the SDGs.

The reviews of several countries mention institutions for regional cooperation (among them Australia, Bahrain, Latvia, Lao PDR, Spain, Slovakia, and Singapore). Also mentioned were ASEAN, Gulf Cooperation Council, European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, among others. Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Lao PDR, Paraguay, Uruguay and Singapore emphasized the importance of south-south cooperation, while the review of Romania covers its triangular cooperation activities.

Paraguay highlighted an innovative mechanism to link the follow up of international human rights recommendations to the SDGs – the SIMORE Plus platform. In the category of technical cooperation under the South-South modality currently offered by Paraguay to other countries, the "SIMORE Paraguay" Technical Cooperation Program stands out. It aims at aiding the installation and start-up of an online

tracking system for international human rights recommendations and compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), based on the Paraguayan experience of SIMORE (el Sistema de Monitoreo de Recomendaciones).

Source: 2018 VNR of Paraguay

Cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships were addressed in many reviews as one of the most effective means to implement the 2030 Agenda. Some countries highlighted cooperation to leave no one behind, including Cabo Verde, Canada and Egypt. Cabo Verde reported that the Single Social Registry – implemented through a partnership between the ILO and the World Bank – is a permanent instrument for the mapping of vulnerable families; to date, approximately 75,000 individuals in 19,000 households have been registered.

Countries also reported on systemic issues, including policy coherence, the economic system, tax evasion and crime. Countries including Greece, Guinea, Romania, Senegal, Spain and Switzerland, recognized the importance of policy coherence, given that the SDGs are interlinked. The review of Romania provides that policy coherence can be fostered by ensuring and maintaining the commitment of all political actors, providing the appropriate strategic umbrella through the national strategy, and putting in place adequate coordinating mechanisms and dedicated groups of experts at the national, regional, and local levels. The review of Switzerland promotes policy coherence through a number of different procedures, including a consultation procedure involving all the main stakeholder groups, followed by consultations at different levels within the government. Laws adopted by Parliament can be challenged directly by referendum.

Another systemic issue reported under SDG 17 was tax evasion, connected to resource mobilization for the 2030 Agenda. The review of Jamaica refers to the OECD Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting as a mechanism to guard against tax

evasion. In its review, Canada states that large multinational enterprises are now required to file country-by-country reports containing information on their global allocation of income and taxes, as well as the nature of their global business activities, as recommended by the OECD/G20's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project.

Several countries highlighted measures to follow-up and review the 2030 Agenda. These are elaborated on under the monitoring and data chapter. However, in addition to the follow up and review at government level, by the national statistics offices, countries emphasized the contribution of stakeholders that also report on the SDGs. For instance, Andorra, Colombia and Uruguay highlighted different initiatives of private sector reporting on the 2030 Agenda. Colombia reported that at national level, the private sector has promoted initiatives for the development of indicators to measure the contribution of companies to comply with the SDGs. Because of this initiative it was possible to track a sample of companies' alignment with the SDGs, using their sustainability reports.

VI.   Monitoring and data

It is widely recognized that effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda requires not only a robust institutional framework but also the collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of an unprecedented amount of reliable, timely, accessible, and sufficiently disaggregated data. To this end, countries have taken a range of measures to inform decision-making and enhance accountability, contributing to more robust follow-up and review in the long term.

Data, statistics and indicators

At the global level, the United Nations Open SDG Data Hub promotes the exploration, analysis, and use of authoritative SDG data sources for evidence-based decision-making and advocacy by enabling data providers, managers and users to discover, understand, and communicate patterns and interrelationships across SDG data and statistics. The Sustainable Development Goals indicators database provides transparency on the data used for global reporting. The indicators can be openly accessed, using electronic means (through the so-called OpenAPI specification).

The reviews indicate that substantial efforts have been made at the national level to assess data availability, sources, methodologies, coverage, and dissemination. Data availability for the global indicators varies. Among the reviews that contain information in this regard are Albania, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea, Hungary, Jamaica, Lithuania, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and the State of Palestine. For instance, the review of Bhutan states that data are available for 84 indicators (34 per cent), partially available for 66 indicators (27 per cent), and there are no data for the remaining 94 (39 per cent) indicators.

Countries are exploring solutions that best fit their national contexts and aspirations for national level monitoring and evaluation. To this end, existing national structures are being utilized to ensure harmonized reporting and accountability and to avoid parallel processes. In this regard, Namibia is developing a National Indicator Framework with a baseline report mapping the status of the indicators. Canada will also define its own national indicators to ensure that it can track and report progress on the SDGs. At the regional level, Eurostat is defining a framework of its own 100 indicators for the EU as regards the SDGs, of which 56 are aligned with the UN global indicators, 68 form part of the European Statistical System (ESS), and the other 32 are derived from official sources not in the ESS.

Key challenges:

Top challenges highlighted by VNR countries in their efforts to meet the demands of the 2030 Agenda include the following:

- **Data disaggregation**. Albania, Armenia, Australia, the Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Senegal, Slovakia, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, and Viet Nam were among the countries that highlighted inadequate disaggregation of data as an obstacle in designing targeted programmes. Armenia stressed that the data gaps need early consideration and action, because effective and timely collection of sex, gender and diversity-disaggregated data will be critical for analysis, monitoring, evaluation, and evidence-based policy making.

- **Data collection and management.** Albania, Armenia, the Bahamas, Benin, Bhutan, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guinea, Jamaica, Lao PDR, Mali, Namibia, Paraguay, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Uruguay, and Viet Nam noted the challenge of data collection, processing and dissemination. Guinea and Sri Lanka, among others, also noted that the lack of baseline data for some indicators hinders monitoring efforts.

- **Mobilizing financial and technical support for data and monitoring.** Albania, Armenia, Benin, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Mali, Namibia, Sudan, and Viet Nam underlined the lack of adequate financial resources for achieving the SDGs. The review of Jamaica stresses that its classification as a middle-income country is affecting its eligibility to access grants and concessionary loans. Namibia also highlighted a general society-wide phobia of data (low levels of numeracy) that limits data usage among planners, decision-makers, and legislators.

Measures taken to strengthen national statistical capacity

- **Clarification of institutional ownership on data and monitoring for SDGs**. Several countries stressed the key role of national statistical systems (NSS) in monitoring the progress of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and their positioning in the national implementation framework. In Uruguay, for example, the Office of Planning and Budget, through the National Directorate of Management and Evaluation is responsible for monitoring and articulating public policies on the SDGs, whereas the Uruguayan Agency of International Cooperation (AUCI) oversees matters related to cooperation, and the National Institute of Statistics (INE) is responsible for the elaboration and the survey of indicators.

- **Use of technology to improve data collection, analysis, and accessibility**. Countries are also utilizing technology to overcome challenges in data management. For example, Digital Earth Australia (DEA), led by Geoscience Australia, translates decades of satellite data into information and insights about Australia's land and oceans and can help measure and drive progress towards the SDGs.

- **Involving stakeholders in data collection.** Australia, Niger, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, among others, noted that national statistical offices could benefit from data and analysis produced by other stakeholders. In Saudi Arabia, the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) is implementing "Masdar", program to build a comprehensive national statistical database collecting statistical data from different internal and external sources.

- **Identification of new data sources to guide SDG implementation.** To meet growing data requirements, official statistical offices are tapping into new data sources. Jamaica conducted the Women's Health Survey, the first of its kind in CARICOM, to provide data on the national prevalence

of violence against women and support the country's monitoring of its global normative commitments under the 2030 Agenda. The survey also promotes implementation of the National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence and related plans, policies and laws.

- **Mobilizing support through partnerships**. Countries are seeking partnerships to boost national efforts. To further strengthen the production of high quality data and monitoring capacity, the Bahamas is strengthening its national statistical capacity and developing a national statistical system, with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank.

VII.   Coherence with regional and global frameworks

Countries are implementing international agreements and frameworks related to sustainable development, with the following often being mentioned in conjunction with the 2030 Agenda: the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, and the New Urban Agenda agreed during the Habitat III global UN conference in 2016.

References to other international agreements, including multilateral environmental agreements, also came up in the sections dedicated to specific goals. For instance, in addressing SDG 6, a number of countries specified that certain wetlands were protected under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance of 1971. Several countries noted actions taken to implement European Union policies and laws (among them Albania, Greece, Romania, Spain). In the context of water, some countries also referred to the implementation EU directives. Similarly, in the sections on energy, several countries referred to the impact of Union regulation on energy markets, as well as targets for renewable energy generation.

Countries included reference to international and regional instruments, as well as plans and measures. For instance, in addressing SDG 5, many countries referred to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), while some (Ireland, Switzerland) also drew attention to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Other regional measures were also referenced, for instance the ASEAN Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Lao PDR).

Countries noted that national plans and strategies were being aligned not only with the 2030 Agenda, but also with regional frameworks, for instance the African Union Agenda 2063 (Cabo Verde, Egypt, Guinea, Namibia), as well as sub-regional frameworks, for instance the ECOWAS Vision 2020 (Guinea).

Countries discussed the significance that their region or status may have on their development and approach to nationalizing the SDGs. The Bahamas, Cabo Verde, Jamaica, Singapore and Bahrain described challenges specific to them as small island developing states. Countries including Senegal, Togo, Benin, and others discussed the importance of shaping their SDG implementation within an African context, including alignment between the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

Countries referred to the consideration of the Agenda in other international forums or bodies. The review of Singapore states that under its Chairmanship, the ASEAN Leaders' Vision Statement endorsed by the 32nd ASEAN Summit in April 2018, calls for ASEAN to become a sustainable community which promotes economic and social development alongside environmental protection, while leaving no one behind. The

Leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including through working to promote complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda. The review of Vietnam states that as a host of the 2017 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), it developed and promoted four significant priorities related to SDGs. These were promotion of sustainable, innovative and inclusive growth; deepening of regional economic integration; improvement of competitiveness and creativity of MSMEs; and enhancement of food security and climate-smart, sustainable agriculture. The review of Mexico notes that the country participated in the first round of a voluntary peer learning mechanism on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, taking part in two groups with different countries. The outcomes of these exchanges have been captured in two documents, which will be presented to the development working group at the 2018 G20 summit in Argentina.

Countries also highlighted other avenues for partnerships such as: Addis Tax Initiative (Ireland); the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico), Global Partnership on Effective Development Co-operation (Ireland).

VIII. Stakeholder Engagement

This section outlines how the reviews reflect the broad understanding that meaningful stakeholder engagement is one of the cornerstones of the 2030 Agenda. Stakeholder engagement occurs through institutionalized mechanisms, ad hoc arrangements for stakeholder consultations during decision-making processes, the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships, and engagement during follow-up and review activities, including during the preparation of the VNRs themselves. As in previous synthesis reports, the involvement of parliaments in covered in the section on institutions.

Institutions for stakeholder engagement

Several countries are aiming at enhancing the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders in the SDG implementation and decision-making, and many reported on establishment of institutionalized engagement methods.

In many countries, inter-ministerial committees or working groups coordinating SDG implementation also include stakeholder representatives. Examples from these types of arrangements are Jamaica's National 2030 Agenda Oversight Committee and the National Commission for Sustainable Development in Lithuania. In Albania, the coordination of implementation is provided by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs, chaired by the deputy prime minister. The Committee comprises key government institutions, as well as other stakeholders from the business community, civil society, academia and international organizations. Mexico's new National Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the highest decision-making body for SDG coordination, as it connects the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the federal government with local governments, the private sector, civil society, and academia. Chaired by the president, it has an executive secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister. It includes multi-sectoral working groups specializing in the 17 SDGs as grouped into four thematic axes, with key stakeholders being represented in each group.

The review of State of Palestine describes the National SDGs Team, tasked with coordination for the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs amongst all related stakeholders, including members from NGOs and the private sector. The Team works under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office. In addition, 12 National Working Groups have been set up to support the Team, tasked with specific SDGs. Simultaneously, the UN Resident Coordinator in Palestine designated focal points in respective United Nations entities to support the SDG working groups.

In other countries, joint specific advisory groups or technical committees support the overall coordination bodies and include stakeholder representatives. This is the case in Cabo Verde, where the National Directorate for Planning under the Ministry of Finance serves as the national coordinator for SDG implementation. It is supported by an interagency Working Group composed of representatives from key Ministries, public agencies, regulatory agencies, United Nations entities, the private sector, and civil society.

A slightly different model for engagement is seen in Ireland, where a national SDG Stakeholder Forum has been established. The Forum comprises representatives from, among others, the NGO community and other civil society groups, the private sector, the trade union movement, the agricultural sector, youth, academia, the education sector, government departments, and the local government sector. The Stakeholder Forum will also be asked to develop proposals for raising public awareness of the SDGs and fostering public engagement with initiatives to achieve the Goals.

In some countries, existing engagement mechanisms have adopted the work of SDG coordination and implementation. In Greece, the Economic and Social Committee of Greece (ESC), the constitutionally established institution responsible for conducting the social dialogue on the country's general policy and on economic and social issues, has assumed an important role in promoting systematic and structured consultation and dialogue on the effective implementation of SDGs at different levels and in various sectors.

Stakeholder participation in SDG-related decision-making processes

Countries reported on numerous participatory processes of decision-making at national, sub-national and local level, such as development of strategies, and plans and policies.

Several countries, among them Armenia, the Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica Namibia, State of Palestine, Togo reported on their participatory processes for the establishment or update of national sustainable development plans and strategies. Cabo Verde also noted its plan to develop an SDG Prioritization Report with the participation of all stakeholders. In Jamaica, thematic Working Groups (TWGs) of Vision 2030 Jamaica and other sector committees form a critical arm of the institutional structure. They are multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder bodies that, for example, provide input into new and existing sectoral policies and strategies relating to thematic areas, as well as providing feedback on implementation performance. The review of Egypt states that an action plan is currently being developed to outline the mechanism by which youth can actively participate in the sustainable development planning and monitoring process, with a view to also creating a generation of sustainable development ambassadors across Egypt.

The review of Uruguay notes that some sub-national governments have developed mechanisms for citizen participation in urban planning through participatory budgeting. Through this mechanism, the inhabitants of Montevideo can participate, propose and decide on the use of a part of the departmental resources for the execution of projects of common interest. In turn, inhabitants can collaborate in the monitoring and social oversight of these projects.

Some countries have also used web-based solutions for keeping stakeholders informed of progress and for conducting consultations. In Latvia, stakeholders are encouraged to comment on draft documents published on each ministry's websites under the section "Public Participation". The review of Spain states that the government has developed a public access database showing the contribution of Spain's Central Administration to each SDG, the framework documents for each SDG, and each stakeholder's position paper, drafted and approved by each of them. In Australia the Fair Work Commission reviews Australia's national minimum wage each year with the participation of stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement in SDGs implementation

Stakeholders are taking an active role in implementing the SDGs and countries reported on numerous activities. Greece, for example, dedicated a whole section of its report for showcasing the efforts made by national stakeholders from local authorities to academia, youth, civil society and private sector, while United Arab Emirates dedicated sections to youth, the private sector, and knowledge institutions. Several other examples exist in the report. References to stakeholders are also found in the in the sections on specific SDGs, as well as in the partnerships section in the Chapter on means of implementation.

Several reviews highlight the active role that civil society organizations have assumed in SDG implementation, in relation to all dimensions of sustainable development. The review of Australia stresses the key role of partnerships between WWF affiliates in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand and industry and technology partners in implementing blockchain technology in tuna fisheries in Pacific islands. Use of this technology will enable the tracing of tuna to assure consumers of its origin, sustainability, and whether the tuna was caught legally. The review of Albania notes that at present its publicly-funded, non-financial social services are limited, and that most such services are provided by civil society organizations on a voluntary basis, or by development partners.

Several reviews highlight the contributions of the private sector towards the SDGs, with Hungary, Latvia, United Arab Emirates, and Lebanon, among others, dedicating specific sections for these efforts in their reports. The review of the United Arab Emirates explains that UAE SDG Pioneers are organizations that have taken early action to advance the SDGs and in doing so, have set an example for the business community in pursuing sustainable practices. Organizations can apply to be UAE SDG Pioneers under one of the five themes of the 2030 agenda: people, peace, prosperity, planet and partnerships.

Members of the academia have also taken an active role, both by including SDGs and sustainability in their curricula and by steering research towards the SDGs and their interlinkages. The review of Spain states that universities have created research groups and begun applied research related to the SDGs, while the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) is also considering how to integrate the Agenda into its activities.

The role of volunteers was also highlighted. The Australian Volunteers program matches skilled Australians with organizations in developing countries to assist these organizations in delivering their development objectives. All departing volunteers receive a briefing on the SDGs and their ongoing engagement in development activities is supported by a Returned Australian Volunteers Network. Lao PDR highlighted recent activities and noted its reflections on the best ways to harness the power of volunteers.

Stakeholder engagement in monitoring and reporting, including VNRs

Engaging national stakeholders in the review process early on is an emerging good practice for the VNR countries. The scope of engagement ranges from one-off consultations to requests for inputs, holding a series of workshops, online open review of draft reports, and the inclusion of stakeholder drafted material in separate sections of the VNR report.

Most countries organized consultations seeking inputs and engagement with different stakeholders during the VNR process. In most cases, these consultations often took place through national workshops, roundtables, calls for inputs, and web-based platforms for submissions. As noted by Armenia, consultative roundtable discussions also helped stakeholders understand their own and each other's roles in implementing the SDGs. Many countries, such as Vietnam, used a two-step approach, first organizing a

kick-off workshop to discuss the process, raise awareness and involve stakeholders in the formulation process, and later conducting additional consultations. A similar process was conducted in Togo.

Some countries, such as the Bahamas and Uruguay, gave special attention to consulting with the private sector. In Uruguay, the government joined forces together with "Empresas por el Desarrollo Sostenible", a private sector organization, to seek inputs from 100 companies on their actions towards achieving the 6 SDGs under in-depth review at the 2018 HLPF. Some of the results of the survey were included in the VNR report. The review of Lao PDR states that a concerted effort was made to consult local authorities, youth, and volunteers. The National SDG Secretariat conducted the first stakeholder consultations for VNR preparation with public officials from all 18 provinces to enable them to understand the nature and importance of the SDGs and implement relevant strategies in each province. In Latvia, Parliament's Commission on Sustainable Development periodically invited the Cross Sectoral Coordination Centre working on the VNR to report on progress, and the Commission provided opinions and recommendations on sustainable development issues.

Some countries also included stakeholders in the drafting process. Cabo Verde included stakeholders from the start in the drafting process, in addition to seeking inputs and arranging consultations on the initial structure and the draft report. Vietnam established an Inter-Sectoral Working Group on SDGs, composed of representatives from ministries, agencies, organizations and stakeholders at the start of the VNR process.

Countries are also engaging with a variety of stakeholders in the longer-term monitoring and review of implementation. One of these groups are the national human rights institutions. In Hungary, the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, in addition to having been involved in the VNR process, is tasked, among other duties, to monitor the progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, linking it with already existing human rights monitoring systems and to participate in the development of national indicators, including providing advice and expertise on a human-rights based approaches to data.

The review of Sri Lanka states that the VNR process was collaborative and inclusive, encompassing government, private sector, academia, development partners and CSOs, including volunteer involving organizations (VIOs). A stakeholder engagement plan (SEP) was developed and an online platform has been developed to engage all stakeholders in the SDG implementation – a process that goes beyond the 2018 review.
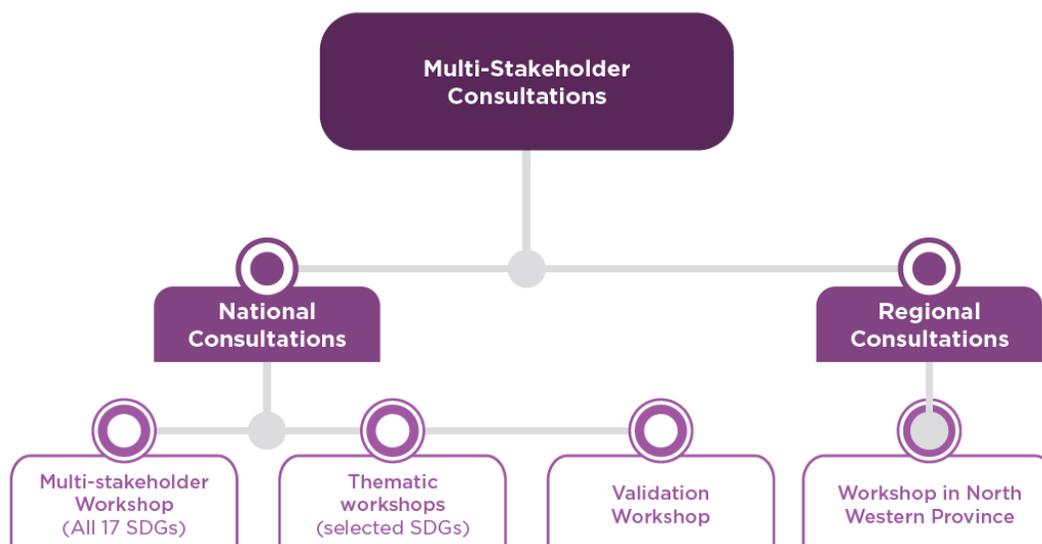
Source: 2018 VNR of Sri Lanka

Challenges

Despite the interest and efforts of Governments for working together with a wide variety of stakeholders, challenges to meaningful engagement remain. One of the most frequently mentioned issues is the lack of capacity of national stakeholders. As noted by Bhutan, the role of civil society in advancing a rights-based approach, improving services, and encouraging participation and accountability is increasingly understood; however, the perception is that their capacities, while promising, are still weak. The challenging task of coordination of stakeholder actions was also stressed by countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

IX.   Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising among all stakeholders is crucial to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and ensuring that no one is left behind. This chapter briefly highlights some ways in which countries are raising awareness and increasing ownership of the SDGs.

Although three years have passed since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, several countries stated that awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs remains relatively modest, especially at grassroots level. Hence, several countries stressed the need to enhance awareness-raising activities in the next phase of implementation. Ireland, for example, noted that increasing SDG awareness is a strategic priority, and therefore, during the lifespan of the first SDG National Implementation Plan, a national SDG communications strategy will be developed. Work is also underway on the development of a national SDG online platform that can function as a 'one-stop shop' for the public in relation to SDG information and learning.

Sudan

Sudan highlighted the importance of the VNR process and noted that future capacity-building efforts would need to benefit media personnel, given the demand for development of information and material on the SDGs. Similarly, State of Palestine highlighted the need to promote the participation of media in the follow-up and implementation of the SDGs. Namibia noted that its awareness raising campaign has been undertaken through national and sub-national level consultations on the development of the National Development Plan, and that going forward there is a need to translate the SDGs into local languages.

Several countries stressed the importance of including children and youth in the implementation efforts and raising their awareness of the importance of sustainable development. Numerous countries have included the SDGs in their curriculum, from kindergarten to university level. For instance, several Australian universities are including the SDGs in their strategic plans and curricula. Youth representatives serve as strong advocates and champions for the SDGs in engaging with governments, local authorities and institutions, as well as with peers and colleagues. As part of the youth involvement in the Agenda at the subnational level, the Mexican Youth Institute (IMJUVE) has created the Youth for SDGs project, in collaboration with several universities and state governments.

Other sectors of the society have also participated in awareness-raising efforts. Following the establishment of its National Stakeholder Forum, Ireland will seek to select several national organizations, from across the multi-stakeholder network, to act as 'SDG Champions'. These 'SDG Champions' will be asked to leverage their public profiles to raise awareness of the SDGs and draw on their own experiences to demonstrate the relevance of the SDGs to daily life in Ireland.

Countries also highlighted their awareness-raising activities under sections addressing specific SDGs, such as thematic guidebooks, online platforms, school courses, and information campaigns.

X.   Means of implementation

This section covers means of implementation, an issue that is addressed in many of the reviews. In addition to finance, trade and STI, the reports also contain material on partnerships of various kinds.

Resources and financing

Countries noted that a critical condition for the implementation of the SDG is the availability and effective and efficient use of financial and other resources. The reviews reflect the importance of mobilizing resources from a variety of sources; public, private, national and international. Many countries reported on how they had strengthened domestic resource mobilization and improved domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection, such as tax reforms. Countries also reported on their official development assistance, often referring to partnerships in this regard. Many countries looked to the private sector when discussing the mobilization of additional resources and emphasized the need to create a favourable business environment. Several countries highlighted the link with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda as a strong foundation to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Domestic resources and financing

Many countries (among them Albania, the Bahamas, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Guinea, Jamaica, Latvia, Mali, Mexico, Kiribati, Sri Lanka, and Togo) reported on measures to strengthen domestic resource mobilization and improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection. This included tax or fiscal reforms (Albania, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Latvia, Senegal), redrafting of existing tax laws (Sri Lanka), a new resource mobilization strategy (Togo), strengthening audit and enhancing efficiency of tax administrations (Guinea, Latvia, Mali), raising awareness about tax compliance (Guinea), and improved financial literacy and the promotion of greater savings as a means to strengthen household and personal financial resilience (Bahamas).

Albania mentioned measures implemented to improve revenue collection, including the review of tax policy and the reform of the tax and customs administrations, with a view to enhancing revenue collection efficiency and combating tax evasion. The review of Colombia outlined structural changes undertaken to turn the tax system into a tool for sustainable development. One of the main advances in this regard was the adoption of a national carbon tax in 2016, which is based on the carbon content of liquid fuels.

Australia, Ireland, Canada and Switzerland, reported on international efforts to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including the Addis Ababa Tax Initiative. Ireland supports and provides funding to the OECD's role in strengthening intergovernmental efforts to develop global norms on taxation. The Tax Inspectors without Borders initiative, which is designed to share tax audit knowledge and skills with tax administrations in developing countries, has seen a total increase of over US$260 million in revenue collected for developing countries. Switzerland noted its commitment to developing tools that will support the mobilization of domestic resources by helping developing countries get to grips with the transfer pricing practices of multinational corporations.

International development assistance

Most countries, both developed and developing, reported on their international commitments to implement the 2030 agenda, including official development assistance, new ways of delivering aid, international, regional and south-south cooperation, and engagement with the private sector to leverage funds.

Slovakia

The reviews of Andorra, Hungary, Lao PDR, Latvia, Greece, Mexico, and Slovakia highlight the alignment of their framework for development cooperation with the SDGs. Benin and Jamaica mapped their international development partners' interventions to support SDG implementation. The review of Mexico states that its agency for international development - AMEXCID - has taken on the responsibility of aligning the cooperation accepted and offered by Mexico with the 2030 Agenda. Benin noted that the mapping exercise of technical and financial partners made it possible to identify, on the one hand, the SDGs and priority targets which had a high concentration of partners and that consequently require a high level of coordination and, on the other hand, the priority targets not extensively covered by development partners, and which accordingly require more attention.

Poland, Bahrain, Lithuania, Romania, Singapore, Spain and United Arab Emirates noted that their ODA contributed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with some with referencing priority goals (Lithuania, Romania). The review of the United Arab Emirates states that the "2016 UAE Foreign Aid Report" is the first report that measures the Emirates' foreign assistance contributions through the lens of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. In 2017, Canada launched the Feminist International Assistance Policy, which refocuses Canada's development, humanitarian, and peace and security assistance on helping the poorest and most vulnerable and supporting fragile states. Canada seeks to ensure that 95 per cent of its bilateral development assistance will advance gender equality by the period 2021 to 2022.

Some countries, among them Australia, Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, and Hungary, elaborated on new or innovative ways of delivering aid that incorporate private sector partnerships to leverage contributions. For example, Australia's Emerging Markets Impact Investment Fund will help small and medium-sized enterprises that are actively improving the lives of the poor in South and South-East Asia. Likewise, Switzerland strengthens the mobilization of private investments for long-term, sustainable growth in developing and emerging economies through SIFEM, the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets. In a similar vein, the Government of Canada recently announced it would invest up to $300 million to leverage contributions from the private sector, investors and philanthropic organizations to support the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in developing countries.

Regarding challenges, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Vietnam and Jamaica mentioned the decline in ODA and other resources due to attainment of middle income status, or expected graduation from LDC status, in the case of Bhutan. As a next step, Bhutan will carry out a financing needs assessment to estimate the cost of SDG implementation, which will be used to develop a strategic framework for resource mobilization that identifies potential sources of financing.

Other sources of financing

Countries reported on efforts to mobilize additional financial resources from multiple sources, such as blended financing, the growing trend of green and social bonds, green financing mechanisms, financing from the private sector, improving favourable conditions for business and supporting entrepreneurship, as well as foreign direct investment and remittances.

Singapore

Colombia, Egypt, Mexico, Singapore and Sri Lanka reported on green and social bonds as sources of sustainable finance. Colombia noted that its entrepreneurial development and import-export bank (Bancóldex) defined the issuance of green and social bonds as an instrument for financing the SDGs in the country. The first issuances of green and social bonds were both over-subscribed, demonstrating the interest of the private sector, despite the novelty of these instruments in the Colombian market. Similarly, the Development Bank of Singapore has released green bonds as a form of sustainable financing, under the green bond grant scheme of the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

The reviews of many countries (among them Canada, Guinea, Namibia, Romania and Vietnam) refer to private sector engagement to mobilize additional funding and support for the SDGs. Canada is drafting new policy guidance to engage the private sector and facilitate private investment in Canada, through a

social innovation and social finance strategy. The review of Armenia notes that a major challenge for resource mobilization is attracting private sector investments into initiatives with impact. It is vital to ensure active involvement of the private sector not only as a taxpayer, but also as an initiator and implementer of projects that advance the 2030 Agenda.

The reviews of many countries (among them Poland, Slovakia, Bhutan, Egypt and Sri Lanka) note the importance of improving the enabling conditions for business and the investment climate, including for small and medium enterprises. Poland is supporting start-ups through the 'Start in Poland' programme, as well as a new system for nurturing innovative ideas at the junction of the science and business sectors.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) was identified as another source for financing the 2030 Agenda. Albania, Greece, Lao PDR and Sri Lanka reported on their regulatory and legal framework for enhancing foreign investment. To attract FDI, Namibia has set up the Namibian Investment Centre, which aims to attract investment and promote exports, while Sri Lanka intends to establish a 'Single Window' for new business registration, bringing together multiple government agencies and streamlining procedures.

Remittances and contributions of diaspora to development financing were mentioned by Armenia, Albania, Cabo Verde, Ecuador, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Togo, and Vietnam. Togo reported that the mobilization of the Togolese diaspora has intensified in recent years through innovative initiatives such as "Réussite diaspora", which is a programme designed to mobilize capacities of the Togolese diaspora, on the one hand and to intensify the visibility of Togo abroad as a preferred destination for foreign investors, on the other hand.

Partnerships

All countries reported on the importance of partnerships to implement the 2030 Agenda. Countries recognized the significance of strategic and inclusive partnership with multiple stakeholders, including the international community, private sector, civil society, and the local governments in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Different forms of partnerships–public, public-private, multi-stakeholder, with civil society, and partnerships to leave no one behind–were outlined. Countries also noted the importance of creating an enabling environment for partnerships. It was recognized that partnerships and synergies between various stakeholders can supplement missing capacities and bring additional resources necessary for the implementation of the Agenda.

Public-private

Numerous countries reported on public-private partnerships (PPPs) and engagement with the private sector both to finance the Agenda, as well as a partner in SDG implementation. Measures to promote PPPs were mentioned, such as PPP laws and frameworks. Canada, Colombia, Ireland, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Paraguay, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Spain, Paraguay, and United Arab Emirates reported on specific public private partnerships in diverse sectors such as renewable energy, housing, infrastructure, agriculture, and technology. Partnerships to further engage the private sector and promote corporate social responsibility were also presented.

Bahrain

The review of Bahrain describes how the Ministry of Housing strengthened partnerships with the private sector in providing housing services to ensure the sustainability of the housing sector in the Kingdom. To date, this has been a very successful endeavour, with the Ministry distributing new housing units to citizens on housing waiting lists. In Malta, the government is developing a partnership with private enterprises to develop solar farms on property owned by government or its entities.

The reviews of Lebanon, Greece, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Senegal, report on legal frameworks to promote public private partnerships and create a supportive regulatory environment. The review of Mali states that it has drawn up a national strategy that served as a framework for the development of a law on public-private partnership, with the aim, among other things, of mitigating the infrastructure deficit and harmonizing the approach of Mali with that of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA).

The reviews of Andorra, Colombia, Egypt, Paraguay, Spain and Singapore mention partnerships with the UN Global Compact and its local networks to further engage the private sector in 2030 Agenda implementation and promote corporate social responsibility. In addition to public-private partnerships, Andorra, Colombia, Ecuador, Hungary, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Uruguay reported on initiatives by the private sector and its growing interest in supporting the SDGs. For example, Singapore is witnessing a growing trend of ground-up initiatives and events from the private sector in support of the SDGs. More information in this regard may be found in the stakeholder engagement chapter.

Multi-stakeholder

It was recognized that multi-stakeholder partnerships were an effective vehicle for the implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Numerous countries, including Australia, Armenia, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Ireland, Jamaica, Greece, Malta, Mexico, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, State of Palestine, Togo, Vietnam, United Arab Emirates, and Uruguay reported on multi-stakeholder partnerships. Countries also noted the importance of creating an enabling environment for multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Saudi Arabia

Ireland, Mexico, Spain, and Romania mentioned global partnerships that mobilize and intensify international and national action on specific topics, such as the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, Every Woman Every Child, Partnering for Green Growth, and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. Australia mentioned the Global Action on Disability Network that brings together civil society, donor governments, multilateral agencies and the private sector to advance disability inclusion in sustainable development and humanitarian action, while Saudi Arabia mentioned the Lives and Livelihood fund, a multilateral partnership between Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Islamic Development Bank, and Bill & Melinda

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Gates Foundation. With a capital of USD 2.48 billion, LLF focuses on combating poverty and on providing livelihoods over the next five years in 32 countries, including 26 least developed and six low and middle-income countries.

Countries, such as Jamaica, Mexico and Poland, highlighted partnership platforms to share information, best practices, and in some cases collect commitments. The review of Poland describes the Partnership for the Implementation of the SDGs in Poland, which aims to integrate representatives of various circles in cooperation for effective achievement of sustainable development objectives. So far, more than 70 organizations representing a wide range of stakeholders have entered into partnerships, with a total of more than 130 commitments.

At regional, national and local level, countries reported on multi-stakeholder partnerships in different sectors, such as academia (Qatar, Malta, Romania and Saudi Arabia), agriculture (Ireland), partnerships related to cities (Australia, Poland, Colombia, Singapore and Spain) and partnership and role of volunteers (Andorra, Niger, Togo). The review of Spain mentions the creation of the Partnership of Cities for Sustainable Development, currently comprising 33 municipalities in Valencia, to inform about and raise awareness of the SDGs in municipalities, together with the Valencian Federation of Municipalities and Provinces. Vietnam emphasized the results of the Ha Long-Cat Ba Alliance Initiative [See box].

Andorra, Togo and Niger referred to partnerships with volunteers and the promotion of volunteering as a powerful human means of implementing the SDGs. The review of Togo describes Civic Commitment Volunteerism (VEC), which is open to youths out-of-school and half-schooled, seeking to mobilize them for development projects.

Box: Ha Long-Cat Ba Alliance Initiative: Promoting the participation of local organizations and communities

Ha Long World Natural Heritage and Cat Ba Biosphere Reserve are two of the most economically and ecologically important sites in Viet Nam, famous for their landscape and biodiversity importance. The Ha Long-Cat Ba Alliance Initiative was launched in 2014 to build the partnership between State agencies, businesses and communities to promote conservation activities and protect Ha Long Bay and Cat Ba archipelago.

The initiative is coordinated and implemented by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to engage stakeholders in biodiversity conservation through the high-level, business-led Alliance Leadership Committee. Members of this committee include representatives of businesses, local and international NGOs, local authorities of Quang Ninh province and Hai Phong city, and the Government of Viet Nam and US Government. Relevant stakeholders in the alliance set the vision and provide guidance on alliance work plans, including increasing public awareness of environmental conditions, advancing a green certification standard for overnight cruise companies, improving water quality in Ha Long and Cat Ba, and providing technical advice for World Heritage Site reports submitted to UNESCO.

To date, the alliance has cooperated with nearly 20 cruise companies, local and international businesses as well as NGOs. It has mobilized more than USD 210,000 from private businesses for awareness raising and community development in Hai Phong city and Quang Ninh province. It set up three large-scale clean-up programmes of coastline with more than 300 volunteers, collecting nearly four tonnes of waste along 4km of coastline of islands in Ha Long Bay. The alliance has also trained more than 70 tour guides on environmental and biodiversity values of the site and advocated tourism infrastructure projects not to threaten the outstanding universal values of the expanded site.

Source: 2018 VNR of Viet Nam

Civil Society

Romania

Canada, Ecuador, Mexico, Romania, Singapore, Sudan and Qatar, mentioned partnerships with civil society and the importance of supporting meaningful and active engagement with civil society. In this regard, reviews addressed civil society organization (CSO) policies (Canada, Qatar), CSO partnership agreements and coalitions (Ecuador, Mexico, Romania, Singapore), and small-scale partnerships with community-based organizations (Sudan). Qatar highlighted the Doha Declaration on the Role of Civil Society in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasizes the role of civil society in implementing the 2030 Agenda and in assisting governments in their implementation efforts and reporting on progress achieved. The review of Romania notes the results of the partnership between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the Federation of Romanian Nongovernmental Organizations for Development (FOND), including joint projects aiming at engaging more civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders in the context of development cooperation and the Agenda.

Trade

Several countries recognized trade to advance implementation of the Agenda and reported on their commitments to promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable trading system under the World Trade Organisation. Countries including Australia, Lebanon, Hungary, Jamaica, Malta, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, and Viet Nam referred to Free Trade Agreements they were part of, or in the process of negotiating. The review of Hungary states that, in line with efforts towards the more effective implementation of sustainable development provisions in bilateral agreements, the government supports the inclusion of trade-related environmental and labour standards in free trade agreements.

The reviews of Canada, Australia, Ireland, and Switzerland describe measures taken to support trade with developing countries. Ireland has facilitated Irish and UK wholesalers' sourcing of retail goods from Sub-Saharan Africa countries. Irish Aid also supports a three-year project on Access to Markets for Value Added goods made in East Africa, which has led to strengthened capacity of 26 East African producers to market their products internationally. Countries also reported on measures to strengthen exports, such as developing trade-related policies, strategies and regulations (Mali, Lao PDR), technical assistance projects for potential exporters and entrepreneurs (Ecuador), upgrading two domestic airports (Bhutan), supporting SMEs (Saudi Arabia), and capacity building activities (Senegal).

Science, technology and innovation (STI)

Science, technology and innovation are major pillars of the means of implementation. Countries noted that applying science and technology to sustainable development challenges can play a transformative role in alleviating poverty, advancing human rights, and accelerating inclusive economic growth. More information on science technology and innovation can be found under Goal 9.

Niger

The reviews of Canada, Colombia, Niger, Lao PDR, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates describe national strategies or policies as measures to promote science, technology and innovation, such as national research strategies, STI policies, innovation or artificial intelligence strategies, and policies to stimulate private sector investment in STI. Sri Lanka, Lao PDR, and Poland mentioned legislation intended to promote innovation, while Australia and Colombia highlighted the work and partnerships of universities to support and promote the SDGs.

Australia, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Ireland, Malta, Namibia, Niger, Qatar, Romania, Sri Lanka reported on measures to enhance knowledge sharing and capacity building on science, technology and innovation. The review of Namibia states that the government has established institutions and infrastructure through which the country can access and adapt to new technology. These include the National Council on Technology, the University of Namibia's Centre for Innovation, the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST), and several other local institutions of higher learning.

Countries also emphasized the need to empower youth and support them to acquire creative digital capabilities. The review of Sri Lanka states that to impart ICT skills to the younger generation the government will integrate ICT literacy into school curricula and improve facilities available for digital-based teaching and learning, especially in rural areas.

Countries also reported on challenges regarding science, technology and innovation. These included limited capacity to harness benefits of science and technology (Bhutan), inadequate linkages between research and development (Ecuador), weak performance in innovation indicators, inadequate funding for

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Box: Grand Challenges Canada
Grand Challenges Canada is an innovation platform to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. Its model enables innovators and convenes new partnerships to address collective challenges in new ways. Grand Challenges Canada has supported over 1000 programs and innovations in low- and middle-income countries and Canada, including, for example, the development of a mobile app to enhance women's reproductive health services provided by mobile delivery units in conflict-affected areas of Iraq and projects integrating sexual and reproductive health, rights and mental health needs of refugee women in Ethiopia. Grand Challenges Canada is launching new programs such as the Humanitarian Grand Challenge, which finds innovations to help the most-vulnerable and hardest-to-reach people affected by humanitarian crises, and the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, which identifies and supports Indigenous innovators addressing the most pressing challenges facing their people and their communities.

Source: 2018 VNR of Canada

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research and development, lack of equipment and facilities, and limited collaboration between learning institutions and industries (Namibia).

Capacity-building

Capacity building is another means of implementation to realize the Agenda. Capacity building, on statistics, data, monitoring and evaluation, was underlined by reporting countries. The section on the goals contains additional examples of goal-specific challenges.

The need for capacity building on statistics, data and monitoring was mentioned by Lao PDR, Namibia, Paraguay, Guinea, Sri Lanka and Vietnam; efforts to support developing countries in this regard were mentioned by Canada and Ireland. The reviews of Jamaica, Niger, and Paraguay are among those referring to technical assistance received for the production and dissemination of statistics.

Lao PDR notes that support is needed to strengthen statistical capacity to track SDGs and fully implement the Statistics Law. Among the gaps that have been identified are the lack of systematic disaggregation of data by gender and especially by disability status. Likewise, the review of Namibia states that inadequate infrastructure and resources for statistical production affects timely production of statistics. There is further limited usage of administrative data as they do not meet the requirement for data soundness and 'fit-for-purpose.' The review of Guinea states that major efforts are needed to strengthen the methodological statistical capacity, improve the dissemination of statistical results in terms of punctuality and timeliness, and develop data sources to produce official statistics.

Countries also reported on capacity building initiatives on data and statistics. Ireland supports the UN Women flagship programme on statistics, Making Every Woman and Girl Count. The programmes objective is the production, availability, accessibility and use of quality data and statistics on key aspects of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mali

Another area for capacity-building underlined by countries, such as Cabo Verde, Armenia, Guinea, Ecuador, Jamaica and Mali, was resource mobilization, including from the private sector. The review of Mali notes that efforts to increase the capacity to mobilize and efficiently use national and international financial resources must be further pursued.

Other challenges reported on by countries in relation to means of implementation concerned policy coherence and enhancing science, technology and innovation (Bhutan, Ecuador, Jamaica, Namibia, Switzerland). Ecuador for example mentioned the challenge of the limited linkages between national planning instruments and local development plans.

XI. Conclusion

Conducting a voluntary national review can place heavy demands on the officials tasked with preparing, drafting, reviewing, agreeing, and then presenting the final product. While the reports of 2018 evince a variety of approaches, they collectively confirm the upward trend in terms of relevance, coverage of the SDGs, level of analysis, and balance between outlining both obstacles and success stories. The deeper analysis of the principle of "leaving no one behind" that is evident in many of the reports lends added value to the reviews. Similarly, the stronger institutionalization of stakeholder engagement is very encouraging. While providing a snapshot of progress on the SDGs is challenging, the reviews contain many very effective and informative examples, incorporating accessible and meaningful use of statistics and

graphics. A move towards description and analysis can be observed, with less reliance on summarizing the policies, strategies and laws in place.

Voluntary national reviews are, among other things, meant to serve to share experiences and lessons learned. Judged by this yardstick, the reviews of 2018 have a great deal to offer all other countries and stakeholders. It is hoped that for those interested the present report will serve as an entry point for deeper exploration of the 2018 reviews themselves.