



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## Synthesis of Main Messages of Voluntary National Reviews at the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Informal Background Note

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# 1

## Introduction

The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to tracking progress and accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The VNRs continue to evolve, as some countries are now reporting for the third or four time. The emergence of new and interesting best practices, lessons learned, gaps and challenges encountered in working towards the achievement of the SDGs are being analyzed in deeper context, as well as for the effectiveness in accelerating progress toward the SDGs.

This synthesis report highlights key aspects of the main messages submitted by the countries conducting VNRs at the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).<sup>1</sup> The main messages showcase the collaborative efforts of national and local governments, legislative bodies, civil society and the private sector towards the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

Thirty-six countries will present their Voluntary National Reviews at the 2024 HLPF. Two will be presenting for the first time,<sup>2</sup> 14 for the second time,<sup>3</sup> 14 for the third time,<sup>4</sup> and 4 for the fourth time.<sup>5</sup> Most of the countries presenting this year come from Africa (14), followed by Asia Pacific (8), Latin America and the Caribbean (8), Oceania (3) and Europe (2).

<sup>1</sup>Main messages collected in document E/HLPF/2024/5, available at <https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N2412749&t=pdf>

<sup>2</sup> South Sudan and Yemen

<sup>3</sup> Austria, Belize, Brazil, Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Palau, Solomon Island, Syrian Arab Republic, and Vanuatu.

<sup>4</sup> Armenia, Chad, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Georgia, Honduras, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic People, Namibia, Nepal, Peru, Samoa, Spain, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

<sup>5</sup> Azerbaijan, Colombia, Mexico, Sierra Leone.

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Following the 2024 HLPF, a total of 366 VNR presentations will have taken place, by 190 countries and the European Union. The VNRs were initiated in 2016, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 67/290 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

With 190 countries having presented at least one VNR, there is a strong focus on follow-up, building on progress, and applying good practices and lessons learned to accelerate national implementation.

The synthesis of the main messages reflects advancements focused on economic development and resilience, social inclusion and human rights, governance and institutional reforms, and innovating financing and partnership to achieve the SDGs. Despite the continuing impact of COVID-19 on the advancement towards the SDGs, some countries reported strong economic and employment growth, reduced emissions and increased renewable electricity production. Prioritized themes include Decent Jobs and Social Protection, Food System Transformation, Transformation of Health and Education, Sustainable and Resilient Urbanization, Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Climate Action, Digital Transformation, and Data Management. However, major challenges remain, especially in relation to issues such as food insecurity<sup>6</sup> and energy.

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<sup>6</sup> Colombia, Mauritius, Nepal, Oman, Palau, Samoa, South Sudan, Zimbabwe

# 2

## Three dimensions of sustainable development

The main messages of the VNRs addressed the interlinkages that exist between SDGs, both in the form of synergies and in trade-offs and conflicts, considering the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environment. Many countries reported economic growth, highlighting their efforts to bolster economic stability through macroeconomic policies and fiscal reforms. Poverty reduction efforts showed significant progress during the first four years, but the Covid-19 pandemic, conflicts, natural disasters and economic hardships<sup>7</sup> caused many people in least developed countries to fall into extreme poverty<sup>8</sup>, representing a considerable obstacle for sustainable development at a global level<sup>9</sup>. Despite these setbacks, poverty reduction strategies remained central.

As initiatives aimed to lift people out of poverty, programmes such as the “Bolsa Familia Program”<sup>10</sup> and the “Solidarity Network Program”<sup>11</sup> highlighted as especially effective. In addition, countries emphasized the importance of employment and skills development, focusing on digital skills and vocational training programmes to address unemployment and skills shortages.<sup>12</sup>

Environmental sustainability and climate action were prominently featured in the VNRs. The main messages raised the concern by the impacts of climate change currently affecting people's livelihoods, food security, health, water security,<sup>13</sup> and enhanced socioeconomic vulnerabilities.<sup>14</sup> Despite, these challenges there are efforts to actively address climate change, reduce emissions, and promote renewable energy sources, with a strong focus on stimulating investment in renewable energy projects.

<sup>7</sup> South Sudan.

<sup>8</sup> Nepal and Chad.

<sup>9</sup> Peru.

<sup>10</sup> Mexico.

<sup>11</sup> Honduras.

<sup>12</sup> Austria and Congo.

<sup>13</sup> Yemen.

<sup>14</sup> Samoa.

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Many countries demonstrated their commitment to green energy transition,<sup>15</sup> increasing solar energy production and setting ambitious renewable energy targets. Climate resilience and biodiversity conservation were also priorities, with practices such as the implementation of an eco-social tax reform<sup>16</sup> and biodiversity protection.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, sustainable urban development was emphasized, including improving public transportation<sup>18</sup> and investing in resilient infrastructure to enhance urban planning.<sup>19</sup>

Conservation and adaptation strategies are shown as a priority.<sup>20</sup> Notable achievements have been reported in nature-based solutions,<sup>21</sup> community-based forest management, afforestation and the conservation of iconic species, as well as dedication to environmental sustainability, driven by low carbon and green growth initiatives.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Mauritius, Namibia.

<sup>16</sup> Austria.

<sup>17</sup> Costa Rica.

<sup>18</sup> Congo.

<sup>19</sup> Ecuador.

<sup>20</sup> Namibia.

<sup>21</sup> Mauritius.

<sup>22</sup> Namibia.

# 3

## Leaving no one behind

The principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the SDGs. Addressing inequality and promoting social justice were highlighted as critical for sustainable development. Countries showcased their efforts in gender equality<sup>23</sup> and ethnic-racial equality.<sup>24</sup> Refugee support in humanitarian crises was also significant, including addressing food insecurity among vulnerable populations. Health and education improvements were noted as vital components of social inclusion. Moreover, achievements in universal healthcare coverage<sup>25</sup> and significant advancements in educational infrastructure have been reported.<sup>26</sup>

Efforts are focused on expanding social protection for vulnerable populations, enhancing food security, harnessing technology to expand basic services for all<sup>27</sup> and promoting sustainable agriculture. A pathway to digital transformation to keep pace with global developments in research, innovation, and advanced technologies such as AI is also highlighted.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the reduction of gender inequalities has progressed through legislative frameworks that promote gender equality, including ensuring gender representation,<sup>29</sup> equal participation of men and women and investment in a future free of violence. Policies were showcased to support women and youth

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<sup>23</sup> Eritrea.

<sup>24</sup> Brazil.

<sup>25</sup> Costa Rica.

<sup>26</sup> Eritrea.

<sup>27</sup> Palau.

<sup>28</sup> Oman.

<sup>29</sup> Sierra Leone.

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empowerment, gender equality, children's rights and social and emotional well-being.<sup>30</sup>

# 4

## Institutional Mechanisms

To implement the 2030 Agenda effectively, countries need robust and inclusive institutional mechanisms. Such frameworks often involve establishing or strengthening institutions to coordinate the diverse and interconnected SDGs. This includes creating inter-ministerial bodies that ensure coherent policy implementation across various sectors.

Countries are actively developing administrative arrangements,<sup>31</sup> upgrading government work and establishing institutions to improve decision-making processes and measure institutional performance. Reforms aimed at enhancing governance and combatting corruption have been highlighted.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, some countries have re-established programmes to better coordinate sustainable development efforts. Stakeholder engagement in the VNR process was emphasized and showcased. Decentralization and local<sup>33</sup> initiatives were also noted as crucial to advancing the SDGs, particularly through Voluntary Local Reviews.<sup>34</sup> Such reviews help local governments engage citizens, share best practices, and contribute to the national SDG agenda tailored to a region's

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<sup>30</sup> Solomon Islands.

<sup>31</sup> Oman.

<sup>32</sup> Mauritania.

<sup>33</sup> Georgia

<sup>34</sup> Honduras

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challenges. Thus, localization of the SDGs and VLRs is an emerging trend that other countries can follow for more bottom-up actions.

Institutional mechanisms also play a critical role in monitoring and evaluating progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Strengthening statistical capacities is essential to accurately track SDG indicators. They involve various sectors, including academia and local governments, in preparing and reviewing national reports, ensuring transparency and accountability. Such mechanisms enable continuous improvement and adaptation of policies to effectively address emerging challenges.

By fostering sound institutional mechanisms, countries can better manage the complexities of sustainable development, ensuring that efforts are well-coordinated, inclusive and aligned with global goals.



# 5

## Innovative Financing and Partnerships

The role of the private sector in agricultural investment leading to rapid development of the agricultural sector.<sup>35</sup>

The implementation of strategies aimed at fostering global, regional and national collaboration and cooperation with various stakeholders to enhance financing and partnerships, are determinants to reach the SDGs.

Countries have shown their support for strengthening the multilateral system which fosters international cooperation and effective financing for development to fulfill the 2030 Agenda. They are also keen to seek partnerships with the global community to access technologies, develop innovations, and secure financing for a resilient, sustainable, and equitable future for both current and future generations.<sup>36</sup>

Innovative financing mechanisms and partnerships are critical for achieving the SDGs. Countries like Azerbaijan and Chad discussed the use of investment maps and integrated national financing frameworks (INFF) to mobilize resources. International cooperation was also emphasized, through increased funding for development cooperation and climate mitigation.<sup>37</sup> Public-private partnerships were seen as essential, highlighting the role of private investments and partnerships in driving sustainable development.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Zimbabwe.

<sup>36</sup> Palau.

<sup>37</sup> Austria and Ecuador.

<sup>38</sup> Guinea.

# 6

## New and emerging challenges

The achievement of the SDGs by 2030 will require substantial and sustained commitment and cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. Among the challenges highlighted in the main messages are:

- On SDG 1 and SDG 2, the challenges to decrease the poverty rate remain the priority in the countries, linked to addressing undernourishment and food insecurity.
- On SDG 13, small island States (SIDS) face adverse impacts of climate change, hurricanes, deforestation and land degradation.
- On SDG 16, peace and stability in many regions caused by humanitarian crises, land blockade, internal displacement and refugee crisis. There is also science denialism and democratic challenges, political instability and social transition, and challenges in coordination across sectors.
- On SDG 17, limited development financing, quality data access, standardized monitoring, coordination across sectors.

Addressing these challenges will require integrated and collaborative efforts to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development.

# 7

## Recommendations and policy options

The VNRs can help assess achievements and progress toward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). VNRs facilitate the sharing of experiences, policy options, and recommendations including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Among recommendations and policy options emerging from the 2024 VNR main messages are:

1. To incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national frameworks, consistent adoption of programs and policies is necessary to combat poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.<sup>39</sup> This involves building institutional capacities at both central and local levels while establishing partnerships, enhancing stakeholder coordination and engagement, improving the monitoring and evaluation framework, and strengthening statistical processes and data collection capabilities<sup>40</sup>—all aimed at achieving the SDG.
2. To achieve the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, it is essential to direct economic opportunities toward a green economy by introducing climate change adaptation and conservation measures<sup>41</sup> with a community-based approach. Additionally, investing in appropriate human capital<sup>42</sup> is crucial to enhance the quality of basic social services, including water, health, and education. Furthermore, in this new technological era, digital infrastructure investments should prioritize a human-centered approach, facilitating technological transformation and digitalization through improved internet connectivity and universal access to information.<sup>43</sup> There is need to build broad partnerships with the private sector and civil society and enhance the role of the private sector in financing development and reconstruction.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Yemen.

<sup>40</sup> Mauritius.

<sup>41</sup> Vanuatu.

<sup>42</sup> Sierra Leone.

<sup>43</sup> Zimbabwe.

<sup>44</sup> Yemen.

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3. To ensure that no one is left behind, it is crucial to bridge the gap between disadvantaged groups, through equal access to resources, opportunities, and services.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, efforts to eradicate poverty should be replicated while focusing on the development of small and micro enterprises, creating job opportunities for women and youth, expanding social protection, enhancing access to basic services<sup>46</sup> and leveraging technology.<sup>47</sup> Policies aimed at reducing inequalities and overcoming discriminatory barriers should be prioritized. Furthermore, inclusive and effective participation in implementation, with a gender responsive approach is essential.
  4. Enhancing institutional mechanisms is crucial for mobilizing institutions and funding from national and international stakeholders. This facilitates reconstruction efforts and contributes to achieving the SDGs, as well as managing the rapidly changing development context, including population growth, security, cost of living, socio-cultural and environmental change.<sup>48</sup> Building resilience and steadfastness is essential to prevent risks and crises. Additionally, adapting to dynamic challenges such as climate change, economic shocks, and pandemics should be a priority.
  5. Efforts to strengthen statistical capacities<sup>49</sup> are essential for monitoring progress toward achieving the SDGs. Consistently updating SDG indicators ensures robust tools for informed decision-making and knowledge sharing. Challenges that need to be addressed include insufficient budgetary support for producing Voluntary National Reviews (VLRs),<sup>50</sup> data gaps, the necessity to digitize systems, and limited awareness of the SDGs and Agenda 2030.

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<sup>45</sup> Nepal.

<sup>46</sup> Yemen.

<sup>47</sup> Zimbabwe.

<sup>48</sup> Solomon Islands.

<sup>49</sup> Mauritius.

<sup>50</sup> Zimbabwe.