

Synthesis of Main Messages 2018

Contents

A. Introduction	2
B. Institutional arrangements	2
C. Integration into national plans	3
D. Multi-stakeholder participation.....	3
E. Leaving no one behind.....	4
F. Goals and targets	5
G. Means of implementation	5
H. Gaps or challenges in implementation	6

Synthesis of Main Messages 2018

A. Introduction

This document synthesizes the main messages submitted by the countries conducting voluntary national reviews at the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The main messages emphasize that the 2030 Agenda is not just for and about government initiatives and activities, rather it also involves the business sector, civil society, academia, communities, and individuals. Youth play a crucial role given their potential to deliver on the SDGs into the future and their stake in the realisation of the Goals in their voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Countries indicated that their reviews took stock of national actions, achievements and challenges, and identified next steps in implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Agenda enjoys widespread support at the highest levels of government. It was noted that this support extends across the political spectrum. Countries highlighted steps taken to integrate the Agenda into national policy frameworks, as well as further follow-up actions. This year several countries have returned to present their second – Colombia, Egypt, Mexico – voluntary national review and, for Togo, its third. Some countries stated their commitment to conduct future VNRs.

B. Institutional arrangements

The main messages contain information on a variety of institutional arrangements for the implementing the 2030 Agenda. Active and operational inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms can foster a “whole-of-government” approach. Going further, a “whole-of-society” approach will involve strong stakeholder engagement in the gap analysis and stock-taking process, enhancing transparency, partnership and accountability in implementing the goals. Many countries stated that arrangements such as inter-ministerial committees on the SDGs provided coordination and leadership, sometimes drawing on stakeholders from outside the government. For instance, Mexico established the National Council for the 2030 Agenda as a coordinating mechanism, with participation of key sectors of civil society through thematic committees. In some countries, the committee is chaired by the prime minister, for instance in Lao PDR. In other countries, it is lead jointly by two ministries, for example in Singapore, or by one ministry, as in the case of Hungary and the UAE. High level institutions and committees are, in several countries, supported by technical bodies. Several countries noted that their national statistical offices are members of the coordinating institutions, or provide them with technical support. With respect to taking ownership and promoting ownership within government, countries have taken steps such as appointing SDG focal points in line ministries and establishing SDG units to ensure effective coordination across departments and agencies.

Countries also report on the involvement of other branches of government, with actions taken including the establishment of a working group for the legislative follow-up of the SDGs and the adoption of the Agenda as a mandatory reference for the work of the national assembly and its committees. Countries also reported on the adoption the Agenda at the sub-national level, in the form of institutions at the state and municipal levels, as well as guides on incorporating the 2030 Agenda.

C. Integration into national plans

Countries have taken up the Agenda at the national level through a variety of policies and planning frameworks, including longer-term vision documents, national development plans, government plans of action, and SDG roadmaps. The Agenda is being localized into national development planning processes. Alignment of the national development plans with the Agenda was widely reported. The Agenda is also being implemented through government action plans. Actions taken include declaring the Agenda as the public policy of government, with the aim of having its objectives and goals fulfilled within the framework of national planning and development.

Harmonization of national strategies and plans with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is a continuous process that needs to be implemented in all sectors. This entails mapping existing policies and programmes against each of the SDG-targets, as well as continuing the process of aligning state programmes and strategies with the SDGs. The SDGs have been adapted for national needs and circumstances in accordance with the national priorities contained in development strategies and vision documents. Countries noted that the broad framework of their existing strategies was flexible enough to encompass the SDGs. A next step is the integration of the SDGs into sectoral policies and investment plans, in order to ensure a whole-of-government approach and adequate financing. To turn this ambition into reality, a robust institutional framework involving key stakeholders is necessary. Overall, the key role of stakeholders in preparing and validating national strategies and plans was widely noted.

While countries have built on existing development strategies, it was noted that the SDGs require a step change in the integration of national social, economic and environmental policy, prompting some countries to put in place frameworks for achieving the SDGs domestically, as well as supporting their global implementation. Some countries are reviewing their strategies in order to properly localize the Agenda and the SDGs.

Key priority areas for integration include strengthening the role of SDGs at the sub-national level and enhancing the monitoring and evaluation infrastructure for tracking progress towards the achievement of SDGs at the national and sub-national levels. Some countries also noted that national plans were also aligned with regional frameworks, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063.

D. Multi-stakeholder participation and awareness-raising

The role of the private sector and the civil society is key in the realization of the Agenda. Broad stakeholder engagement is an established part of policymaking processes, and it may include consultation with youth groups, the private sector, knowledge institutions and civil society. The main messages indicate that countries are seeking to take action in this regard by capitalizing on the positive synergies between the governmental efforts, private sector efforts and civil society efforts to achieve this ambitious agenda. Synergies between various stakeholders are important, as is the creation and maintenance of an enabling environment for partnerships. There is a recognition that innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships are essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda, including to mobilize additional sources of capital in support of the SDGs. The main messages indicate that governments, organizations

and individuals are already answering the 2030 Agenda's call to action and convening new partnerships to respond in new ways to collective challenges.

The main messages also outline the range of consultations and inputs that contributed to the preparation of the voluntary national reviews, with the relevant bodies tasked with preparing the reviews conducting discussions with, among others, civil society, representatives of business, members of parliament, city and regional associations, women's groups, youth organizations, and researchers. Increasing the multi-stakeholder engagement for the 2030 agenda was seen as a key objective of the VNR process. Public consultations have been launched on the internet accompanied by awareness and information campaigns, as well as workshops. Reference was made to the elaboration of the review using a participatory approach, with organizations representing various stakeholder groups already being involved at the drafting stage of drafting the report.

Other sectors, including universities, on the businesses and civil society, are making substantial efforts to raise awareness, form partnerships and address the risks and opportunities inherent in the Agenda. A joint initiative with the private sector is being developed so that companies provide information that makes it possible to make visible their efforts and contributions to the SDGs, complementing the official information. Outreach to business associations and councils of higher education institutions is also taking place. Countries have put in place communications and advocacy campaigns to inform communications and stakeholder engagement regarding the SDGs. Communications strategies can be used to reach out to societal stakeholders that are not part of more established mechanisms. Special efforts have been made to reach out to youth, for instance through the appointment of a minister of state for youth affairs and the establishment of youth councils, with involvement in official deliberations concerning the implementation of the SDGs. The need to strengthen the role of local media in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs was recognized. A stronger involvement of the national parliament was recognized.

E. Leaving no one behind

Countries – facing very different national circumstances – have clearly stated their commitment to leaving no one behind. The main messages outline a how countries are identifying those at risk of being left behind and what policy measures are being put in place. Indigenous peoples, women, youth and the elderly, the LGBTQ community, migrants, and persons with disabilities are more likely to face poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. Gender is a common element of the analysis of leaving no one behind, with special emphasis on the groups and communities that require more attention.

Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable groups and communities can be a key element of the implementation framework of the SDGs through countries' national development plans. Among other things, relevant programmes must consider the special issues of the elderly, youth at risk and the particular, but different challenges for both men and women, as well as the geographical disparities within the country. Women's empowerment and social inclusion were identified as especially important to building resilient societies. The main messages contain references to legal provisions, such as constitutional guarantees of gender equality, as well as policies instituted to ensure equal opportunities.

Reference was also made to programmes for migrant workers that safeguard their rights, provide health insurance and shelter, protect against arbitrary dismissal, and combat human trafficking.

Measures taken to ensure that no one is left behind include scaling up social protection programmes and improving their targeting mechanisms. State reform can reduce inequalities and regional asymmetries by allocating more resources to the more deprived areas to provide better quality of public services and infrastructure. In this context, decentralization contributes toward ensuring that no one is left behind and the achievement of the SDGs on a local level.

F. Goals and targets

Some main messages contain information on the coverage of the SDGs in the reviews, either covering all SDGs, the SDGs under in-depth review at the 2018 HLPF, or a different combination of goals. Main messages also commonly outlined broad priorities and areas for action, sometimes presented in terms of three dimensions of sustainable development. The main messages also provided information on how the reviews covered the SDGs, including an overview of goals and targets, especially information how they have been integrated into policy frameworks and also reporting on initial progress and lessons learned. Additional elements that were mentioned include a short diagnosis in relation to reaching the SDGs reviewed, identification of the priorities in a given area, as well examples of initiatives implemented by NGOs, entrepreneurs or local communities. The review was seen as setting the baseline for all 17 SDGs, serving as a useful reference and measurement tool for all stakeholders as they further integrate the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development.

Main messages also singled out goals of particular importance for the countries in question. For instance, the importance of quality education was highlighted, noting its transversal character in the context of sustainable development. Similarly, it was recognized that none of the SDGs can advance without “peace, justice, and strong institutions”, through cross sectoral efforts along with public sector modernization and good governance initiatives. There is also coverage of the progress made with respect to gender equality - for instance, in the spheres of education, political representation, and land rights, including policy and legislation – but a range of challenges remain, in particular high poverty rates among women coupled with high unemployment rates poses a challenge to the attainment of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. The potential of innovative solutions and smart energy were highlighted as the basis of a modern and sustainable economy. Key national priorities include the shift towards a low carbon circular economy and improvement in waste reduction, reuse and recycle for creating new jobs and increasing resource efficiency. Policies to increase the share of renewable energy were commonly referenced in the main messages.

G. Means of implementation

The main messages refer to assistance in the context of commitment to the international development agenda and the global partnership for sustainable development. Donor countries referred to the priorities of their development assistance, including infrastructure, fisheries and water, effective governance, education and health, and building resilience and gender equality. Steps are being taken that will further strengthen the alignment of development assistance with the SDGs. Countries are

undertaking efforts to strengthen their partnership with the international community, including through reform of local aid coordination structures to improve the alignment of donor aid with national priorities. Reference was made to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), and its significance for countries in conflict and fragility. Promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls was considered as the most effective way to achieve this goal and drive progress on all SDGs.

Effective implementation of the Agenda 2030 is contingent on the availability of adequate and timely resources, and countries are exploring both domestic and external financing mechanisms. A financing needs assessment was recognized as a means to develop a resource mobilization strategy for the effective implementation of the SDGs, with countries planning or having undertaken such assessments. Countries are broadening their tax base and improving the enabling environment for investment. An analysis of the contribution of federal budget programs to implementation of the SDGs confirmed the relevance of public investment in development and identified opportunities.

There continued to be a limited institutional and financial capacity to effectively monitor and implement the SDGs. The international community was urged to collaborate with small island developing states and middle-income countries in accessing financing, using new mechanisms and partnerships that encourage greater public and private financial participation in these economies and the use of methodologies and indicators that go beyond economic growth. Continued support by development partners was important and valued, especially considering the potential graduation of countries from least developed country status. The need to mobilize financial resources for reinforcing statistical capacity for the implementation of the SDGs was highlighted.

H. Gaps or challenges in implementation

The achievement of the Agenda will require substantial and sustained commitment and cooperation of all the relevant stakeholders. Among the gaps and challenges noted in the main messages are:

- Acceleration of action in priority areas, the prioritization the SDGs in the local context and the strengthening of the institutional capacities of all the key stakeholders engaged in the process, including the monitoring and reporting institutions.
- Strengthening the role of evidence-based statistics and policy making to increase transparency and improve the public service and SDG delivery. Statistical capacity – critical for the production of high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data is critical to support effective policy and decision-making – remains a challenge. To this end, plans are being put in place to meet the need for better statistics.
- Strengthening public institutions including, the introduction of a new programme to strengthen its financial and budgetary management systems, programme delivery capacity.
- Mitigating climate change impact on water, agricultural, biodiversity, and coastal resources, and health.
- Ensuring equitable, universal and sustainable access to energy, water and sanitation and other basic services.

- Growing populations in some countries, with an associated demand for services, as well as an aging demographic in others.
- Enhancing productive capacity to develop economic resilience is vital to sustainable graduation and achieving the SDGs.
- The need to diversify the economy, improve the efficiency of government services, strengthen the participation of youth and women in the labour market.
- High rates of informality in the labour market, while unemployment especially affects youth, women and poor households.
- Developing human capital and ensuring that knowledge and skills are relevant for the labour market.
- Increasing private and public investment in research and innovation.
- The impact of natural disasters, negative effects of climate change, and high levels of indebtedness.
- Strengthening the capacity of subnational governments, as well as to achieve better institutional coordination, both vertical and horizontal.

Accelerating SDGs implementation will require focus on strengthening national statistics systems, improving M&E frameworks, identifying mechanisms and strategies for financing the SDGs, improving policy coherence and building capacity in policy integration and the use of goal-oriented, evidence-based, and participatory frameworks to formulate, implement and review policies and strategies for sustainable development.

While continuing to grapple with difficult long-standing policy challenges, countries recognize the need to address ongoing or evolving ones, such as assisting workers through transitions related to technological and industrial change.