

Key Messages of Iran's Voluntary National Review (VNR) on SDGs

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The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the 2030 Agenda an opportunity to strengthen and to boost sustainable development at, global, regional and national levels. Iran has had an active participation in drafting the post 2015 development agenda and will continue its constructive cooperation to fulfill its commitments to global sustainable development goals and principles based on the national priorities and in conformity with its national legislations. Iran has contributed profoundly to the realization of the MDGs within Iran. It intends to actively build on these achievements and is committed to the effective implementation of the 2030 agenda in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Iran is confident that, with true partnership, cooperation and solidarity, commitments can be brought into actions yielding tangible results.

Whilst enabling the country to address sustainable development gaps, the SDGs through their targets and indicators, also provide an overarching framework for collaboration to solve national, regional and international emerging, existing predicaments and challenges. For Iran, these challenges include those that significantly impact water, environment and economic development – as well as international and regional peace, stability and security.

This VNR report discusses the initial experiences and lessons learned as well as the successes and challenges Iran faces in undertaking this task. The most important challenges that Iran currently faces are (a) the inconsistency of the many indicators with the existing national monitoring and evaluation frameworks and (b) the lack of scientifically credible and/or reliable data and information for a large number of the identified targets and indicators.

The adoption of the SDGs, nonetheless coincides with a broad national effort to integrate and mainstream the environment and sustainable development elements contained in the 6th National 5-Year Development Plan, President Rouhani's "Environment Government", and the General Environmental Policies of the Supreme Leader.

In response to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and in line with its recommendations and actions to implement the SDGs at the national level, the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran undertook a process of reviewing and reforming relevant existing institutions later in 2015. The first and crucial step was the rearrangement of the inter-ministerial coordination mechanism. For this purpose, the National Committee for Sustainable Development (NCSD, established in 1994) was

transformed into the main body for coordinating and reporting all measures, policies and programs related to the implementation of the SDGs at the national level.

In order to align SDGs with a greater degree of coordination among different stakeholders, the relevant Ministries and government agencies were assigned as custodians of subcommittees and in charge as the prime responsible authority of each respective SDG. A specific mandate was given to the Statistical Center of Iran to furnish the report with credible statistics and ensure consistency with the SDG indicators. Each Ministry was given the custodian of one or more goals as appropriate.

To address all 17 SD goals, the NCSD reached out to various stakeholders who provided inputs towards the Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDGs attainment in Islamic Republic of Iran. The stakeholders include the Sustainable Development Steering Council, the Parliament, local governments and communities, academia, municipalities, civil society and private sector.

Going forward, Iran plans to create a coordination mechanism which will contribute to the implementation and localization of the SDGs in an interdisciplinary manner. This will include all stakeholders with an emphasis on a special network for civil society.

In order to incorporate the SDGs into relevant national frameworks, during 2015-2016, the NCSD encouraged Iran's Ministries to integrate the SDGs into the sectoral needs of Iran's 6th National 5-Year Development Plan (NDP). This plan was recently endorsed and approved by the parliament and will continue to be implemented during the period 2017-2022.

Strong links have been established between the 6th NDP and the SDGs through supporting documents which have been incorporated into the development plan. Examples are: The Climate Change Plan, the Health Transformation Plan, the National Welfare Plans, and the Resilient Economy Policies. By striving to address the identified gaps, Iran will focus on issues like improving women and youth participation in decision-making as well as creating equal employment opportunities for all Iranians. These two issues relate to a number of SDGs, including goals 1, 5, 8 and 10.

In the recent decade, countries in the Middle East, including Iran, have not only encountered challenges such as land degradation, desertification, water scarcity, hotter climate conditions, but they are also grappling with the threat of terrorism and extremist violence. The result is that often, instead of focusing on ways to reverse poverty, environmental destruction and development generally, governments are obliged to commit their limited national resources to fighting insecurity. Iran recognizes the necessity for dialogue, cooperation and partnership among peoples and countries of the region. It is committed to working with all responsible actors to restore sustainable peace and security in the region, in line with goals 16 and 17 of the Agenda.

One of the most challenging impacts faced by the region is the resulting from the frequent and severe sand and dust storms. The issue of sand and dust storms is a powerful example of the importance of the interlinkages among the SDGs. It negatively impacts food security and agriculture, human health, local economy and work days, as well as biodiversity. These challenges are themselves linked to water management, droughts, climate change as well as war and instability. Therefore, this single phenomenon of sand and dust storms is directly related to SDGs 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 15 and 16. Iran is determined to contribute to political resolve and technical solutions to address this through regional and international cooperation and partnerships – SDG 17. In this regard, Iran co-hosted the International Conference on Combating Sand and Dust Storms, 3-5 July 2017.

Prior to the UNFCCC, COP21, Iran announced its intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) of a 4% unconditional reduction of GHGs emissions by 2030 below its business as usual scenario. It has also offered an additional 8% reductions subject to removal of all sanctions coupled with provision of adequate financial resources, development and technology transfer, know-how and capacity building. In order to ensure that Iran achieves these contributions, a special annex has been incorporated into the 6th five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan to address all policies and programs related to climate change. On the climate adaptation, Iran is implementing various green economy activities in full coherence with its National Adaptation Plan, NAP, under the general policies of resilient economy.

Iran has already made important steps in recent year to advance principles that are also enshrined in the 2030 Agenda. For example, the government of Iran issued the 'Charter of Citizenship's Rights' in December 2016. The Charter contains 120 substantiated articles covering a wide array of rights ranging from freedom of opinion, expression and press, access to information, judicial justice, minority and ethnic rights, fair trial and women's rights. The significant surge in number and activity of the civil society – including a doubling in the growth in pro-environment NGOs amounting to more than 900 at the national level – is indicative at the social capital Iran harbors in this field.

Iran stands by its commitment in this endeavor. National General Guiding Policies, especially policies regarding resilient economy which are issued by the Supreme Leader, have created supportive framework in implementation of the SDGs in Iran. Achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals requires political will and collective action at all levels.

Iran, in the near future, looks forward to preparing its first 'National Sustainable Development Strategy' according to its development priorities, namely water and environment, as well as promoting decent jobs, employment and poverty eradication. The emphasis will remain on ensuring the quality of life also addressing the well-being

and prosperity of peoples in different societies undertaking ethical and cultural values is also an important feature of the Iranian vision.