

IRAQ - Key Messages 2019

When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were adopted in September 2015 by all Member States of the United Nations, Iraq was busy fighting terrorist groups and handling the repercussions of the falling global crude oil prices. Nevertheless, Iraqis never stopped aspiring to a better future.

This first Voluntary National Review (VNR) report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) testifies to this commitment. It showcases the experience of a strong nation which chose life and development and relied on its people despite the hardships they went through; which never stopped aspiring to sustainable development even during war and its noise; which shows determination and ambition while acknowledging that exceptional efforts are required to achieve the needed balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, sustain peace and protect the rights of all people and future generations, ensuring that *no-one is left behind*.

While acting the main implementer and coordinator of the implementation of the SDGs, in line with Iraq Vision 2030, the Government of Iraq firmly believes that their implementation represents an opportunity to empower a wider group of national actors, enhance national dialogue and strengthen partnerships on a wider scale and is committed to support initiatives implemented by civil society organizations, universities, trade unions, and other stakeholders.

This review is the outcome of a series of consultations, which helped gather valuable insights on priorities and challenges from *inter-alia*, the academia, civil society, the private sector, women, young people and the parliament.

The Ministry of Planning serves as the focal point for coordinating, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It has established a National Committee for Sustainable Development to coordinate economic, social and environmental action among national and local government actors as well as with the private sector, civil society and local and international organizations to ensure that all groups and regions of Iraq can participate in and benefit from development progress. The Ministry strives to promote awareness and ownership of the SDGs and their integration in national and subnational plans, while eliciting support from development partners for their implementation.

This review focuses on advances and challenges with the implementation of Iraq Vision 2030 priorities and related SDGs namely, human development (SDGs 1, SDG3, SDG4 and SDG5), good governance and safe society (SDG16), economic diversification (SDG8 and SDG9), sustainable environment (SDG6, SDG11 and SDG13). These are being implemented through various plans and strategies, including Iraq National Development Plan (NDP, 2018 – 2022) and Iraq Governmental Program. The report shows for instance that the NDP aligns with more than 70% of the SDG targets.

Data limitations, including the lack of disaggregated data, place huge constraints on SDG monitoring (with close to 70% of SDG indicators currently missing). However, available data shows improvements in enrollment ratios, fertility rates, and child and maternal mortality. Poverty experienced a relative decline, despite a significant rise in poverty rates during the crisis. Efforts are being made to expand the coverage of social protection programs for the poor and vulnerable. Efforts to promote women's empowerment

and reduce violence against women have led to some improvement in gender related indicators, although much remains to be done in terms of improving women's participation.

Important steps have also been taken towards improving governance and the rule of law, including through administrative decentralization, the establishment of a high anti-corruption council, and reforms of the financial management and service delivery systems. Iraq also seeks to create an enabling environment for the private sector, which, coupled with the implementation of mega-projects, is expected to transform Iraq's development path, including reducing Iraq's reliance on oil.

Confronted to a dire water crisis, Iraq strives to promote a more efficient management of water resources, and to restore environmental sustainability in its vast marshlands.

Clearly, Iraq still faces many challenges on the road to sustainable development. The Government facilitated the return of than two-thirds of the population displaced by the crisis but close to 2 million people have not yet returned to their home. The reconstruction burden is estimated at USD 88.2 billion. Iraq has yet to secure political stability, strengthen national dialogue and establish inclusive and accountable governance frameworks at federal and local levels. Iraq needs to deal with significant demographic pressures, the water crisis and the effects of climate change. However, all these challenges shall motivate us to accelerate efforts with greater determination and expand partnerships to consolidate gains, while learning from past failures.