



## **Questions and Answers as part of the Voluntary National Review of Brunei Darussalam at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council**

New York, July 2020

Brunei Darussalam thanks the United Nations member states and Major Groups and Other Stakeholders for their interventions and questions. The Government reiterates its commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs), in recognition of their continued contribution to the improvement of the lives of the world's population and global socio-economic developments.

- 1. Kingdom of Bhutan: We refer to Brunei Darussalam's national vision, *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, and one of its goals to ensure high quality of life for its people. In this regard, can you share more on what efforts the government has taken to ensure the continued wellbeing of its people?**

Brunei Darussalam continues to place great importance in caring for the well-being and welfare of its people. This includes through provision of quality healthcare and affordable housing; ensuring access to quality and inclusive education, electricity, clean water, and sanitation; and provision of supporting infrastructure for enhanced connectivity.

In the field of public health, the recently released results of the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) Health conducted by the World Health Organization in October 2019 showed that Brunei Darussalam has made good progress in the implementation of the International Health Regulation (IHR), with 90 per cent of the indicators under the JEE scoring three and above, out of a maximum score of five. These results show that the country has made significant improvement in ensuring that it is fully prepared to respond to a public health emergency and the progress achieved in the implementation of the IHR has helped the country tremendously in facing the current COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of its social security system, the Government provides both financial and non-financial assistance to those in need, including empowerment programmes to improve employability and encourage entrepreneurship. One of its recent efforts is the digitalised National Welfare System to be launched on 15 July 2020, which aims to lift welfare recipients out of poverty and ensure that those who truly need assistance receive it. The development of this system represents a whole of nation approach towards poverty eradication, in which it involved the government and non-government sectors, and enhances information sharing through the establishment of a centralised database. The system will additionally be able to produce a support recipient map that will allow for appropriate analysis and intervention by the Government. These initiatives are complemented by on-going efforts by the Government's strategic partners, such as non-governmental organisations, to provide support and assistance in various forms to vulnerable groups.



In readying the country to adapt to the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution which affects the way people live, communicate and work, the Government will continue to invest in its people and supporting infrastructures.

**2. Republic of Indonesia: Can you share some of the major challenges Brunei Darussalam has faced in the implementation of the SDGs? How have and how will you overcome these challenges?**

One of the common challenges faced in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs is the complexity of the targets and indicators as well as gaps in the availability of data for these targets and indicators. In order to have a complete understanding of the country's progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda, Brunei Darussalam will seek to further identify gaps in and availability of its SDGs data and strengthen mechanisms for national data collection in general. Complementing these initiatives, Brunei Darussalam is also working with ASEAN member states through the Working Group on ASEAN Sustainable Development Goals Indicators, as well as with other regional and international organisations such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Another challenge is ensuring adequate financial resources, including from the private sector, for the implementation of the SDGs. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, has further constrained the Government's ability to fully implement the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, Brunei Darussalam encourages the United Nations' assistance in sharing best practices to increase private sector and other stakeholders' involvement in projects to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The Government further welcomes continued collaboration, including technical assistance and capacity building programmes, that will allow the strengthening of its human resources and supporting infrastructures towards better implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

**3. Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal: Your VNR mentions of development strategies and policies, which have incorporated sustainable development perspectives into them. Can you share on Brunei Darussalam's sustainable development strategies, including protection of its natural resources?**

Brunei Darussalam is known for its rich biodiversity and green environment. Based on the World Bank's data, Brunei Darussalam is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> globally for forest coverage as a percentage of total land area. 72 percent of Brunei Darussalam is covered by forests, with 41 percent gazetted as forest reserves and 20 percent of its total marine area are Marine Protected Areas. These reflect the Government's unwavering commitment to preserving its natural resources.

Brunei Darussalam's sustainable development strategies are guided by its national vision, *Wawasan Brunei 2035*, whereby one of its three goals is to ensure a high quality of life for its people while ensuring the preservation of its natural environment. This is in line with the environmental aspects of the 2030 Agenda. The Government is conscious of the need to use



the country's primary resources, such as its seas and forests, in a sustainable manner. Protection of the environment continues to be one of the key factors in the deliberation of Government's development projects.

As one of its priority sectors, Brunei Darussalam advocates for sustainable or eco-tourism, by strengthening and ensuring the sustainability of current products while introducing more niche activities, such as bird watching, diving, sports, adventure tourism as well as culture and community-based tourism.

Brunei Darussalam is also active in regional and international forums that look at cooperation in the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity and national resources, environmentally sustainable cities and sustainable consumption and production.

**4. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: We note that Brunei Darussalam is undertaking efforts to diversify its economy. Can Brunei Darussalam share its economic diversification progress and future plans?**

Brunei Darussalam remains committed to intensify its diversification efforts towards achieving the goal of a dynamic and sustainable economy as envisioned in its national vision, *Wawasan Brunei 2035*. To do so, the Government has identified five main priority clusters to develop namely (i) Downstream oil and gas; (ii) Food; (iii) Tourism; (iv) Services; and (v) Infocommunication Technology. These sectors' developments are expected to increase employment, boost exports and create spin off industries that overall will enhance the country's economic growth.

Due to the Government's persistent efforts, the country has seen growth and increase in the Non-Oil and Gas Sector's contribution to the overall GDP. In 2019, the value of the Non-Oil and Gas Sector was BND 8,268.2 million, an increase from BND 6,915.8 million in 2010, and within such timeframe, the same sector contributed 44.3 percent to GDP in 2019 as compared to 36.3 percent in 2010.

The private sector continues to be the driving force in the country's economic diversification agenda, vis-à-vis Foreign Direct Investment and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Between 2010 and 2017, the number of MSMEs increased from 5,427 to 5,876, and as of 2018, the current FDI value operating in the country is BND 4.7 billion, which has generated employment for more than 1000 locals and contributed towards increased exports.

Moving forward, the Government is strengthening its private sector through the 11<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan (2018 – 2023) that aims, among others, to provide supporting infrastructure and utilities as well as ensure that the future industries' workforce needs are met.

Recognising the potential contribution of technology to advancing the country's socio-economic development agenda, mechanisms have been put in place such as the Digital



Economy Council and the 5G National Task Force to look at digital transformation across various economic clusters. Through the implementation of the Digital Economy Masterplan 2025, the Government is aiming for Brunei Darussalam to become a Smart Nation, with Digital Economy as a key enabler and driven by Digital Government, Digital Economy and Social Society.

**5. Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka congratulates Brunei Darussalam on the presentation of the Voluntary National Review and on the impressive progress made towards achieving the SDGs. As a co-sponsor of the annual "World Youth Skills Day" (July 15), Sri Lanka is a strong advocate of youth participation in economic and development initiatives and has noted with interest that Brunei has launched a programme in this regard (PIBB). Could you please elaborate on how Brunei Darussalam engaging youth in driving economic development and the implementation of the SDGs?**

Accounting for 45.6 percent of the country's population as of 2019, Brunei Darussalam recognises youth as crucial partners to development and their important role in shaping the future of the country. Such recognition was reflected in His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam's statement during the SDG Summit in 2015, that "it is especially crucial for our youth to be included because they stand to inherit this new agenda".

The revised National Youth Policy and Strategy (2020-2035) of Brunei Darussalam has also emphasised youth involvement in driving and implementing the SDGs. Outlining the goals and strategies of long-term youth development, the vision of the revised National Youth Policy and Strategy is to develop value-driven world-class Bruneian youth, who are future-ready agents of change for national development and rooted in inclusivity. This Policy ultimately aims to address pertinent challenges including youth unemployment, encouraging the active participation of youth in society as well as inculcating entrepreneurship towards achieving the *Wawasan Brunei 2035*.

Towards this, the Government seeks to facilitate youth's contributions to the economy by providing strong infrastructure and supporting regulations. An instance of these efforts is the establishment of the Youth Entrepreneurship Steering Committee that would monitor and implement initiatives to facilitate the growth of youth-led businesses from the starting up stage to being competitive internationally.

Initiatives to increase youth employment and entrepreneurship skills are ongoing. One such example is the i-Ready Apprenticeship programme, which helps to equip unemployed graduates with skills for the industry as well as to elevate their employability and marketability. Darussalam Enterprise, a national SME body that was established to support local businesses in the country, further provides entrepreneurship initiatives such 'Industry Business Academy', 'Accelerate Bootcamp Programme', 'Micro Bootcamp Programme' and 'Brunei Mentors for Entrepreneurs Network'. These programmes target all groups of entrepreneurs including start-ups and those who are expanding their businesses beyond



Brunei Darussalam. The Manpower Planning and Employment Council and local universities further work closely with industries to ensure that youth meet the requirements of industry and are trained to meeting these needs.

Active volunteerism by the country's youth complements Government's efforts towards the implementation of the SDGs. Examples of youth-led initiatives are in the fields of social welfare, education, conservation and advocacy in the promotion of environmental sustainability; and innovations particularly those that utilise technology. However, a more recent example of the youth's active role was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic this year, when they assisted the front-liners, among others, in producing Personal Protective Equipment, distribution of food for those in quarantine and supporting administrative activities. In this regard, to encourage continued active volunteerism by the youth, Brunei Darussalam will nurture, from an early age, their sense of responsibility, empathy and caring for those in need.

**6. Kingdom of Thailand – We welcome Brunei's commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and commend its crucial work particularly on universal health coverage, quality education, and infrastructure. Can Brunei Darussalam share on the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect its citizens, particularly the vulnerable groups?**

As of 10 July 2020, Brunei Darussalam has had no COVID-19 cases for 65 days. In preventing and monitoring further spread of COVID-19, Brunei Darussalam has heavily invested in mass testing, with 33,327 tests taken since January 2020 from a population of 459,500<sup>1</sup>.

To ensure the spread can be contained effectively, the Government introduced BruHealth, which is a one-stop mobile application for anything COVID-19 related in Brunei Darussalam. Among others, it features updates on the epidemic, provide a personal assessment code that reflects the infectious risk of the user and determine the type of activity the user can participate in, and allows for contact tracing. The BruHealth apps has allowed the resumption of "normal" daily lives in Brunei Darussalam as businesses have successfully reopened and social as well as religious activities are permissible.

The Government amended the Infectious Diseases Act (Chapter 204) to allow for legal action, with a fine of up to BND10,000 or imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or both, to be taken against those who have been found to breach or refuse any order issued by the Ministry of Health.

Brunei Darussalam has implemented stimulus measures worth about BND 450 million to soften the impacts of the pandemic. These measures put emphasis on supporting our micro, small and medium enterprises, job security for the locals and the population's well-being. The Government has ramped up spending on medical equipment and supplies; building new

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<sup>1</sup> As of mid-year estimates in 2019.



medical facilities and laboratories; and working to further strengthen the country's health system. Brunei Darussalam's private sector has also been playing their part by providing the necessary infrastructures to support Government directives such as providing e-business platforms and affordable broadband rates.

The Government has begun easing the restrictions starting 16 May 2020, through a 4 phase de-escalation plan. In the implementation of these phases, it continues to emphasise for the public to observe regulations, directives, and guidelines including controlled capacity occupancy, social distancing, personal hygiene, and premise cleanliness.



## **Major Groups and other Stakeholders Questions and Answers as part of the Voluntary National Review of Brunei Darussalam at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council**

### **1. What strategies do you have in your country to promote awareness, education and opportunities to contribute to the SDGs?**

Brunei Darussalam appreciates that a comprehensive and whole of nation approach is required in order to achieve the SDGs.

As a small country, with a population of less than 450,000 people and a still developing private sector, many initiatives to achieve the people's wellbeing and welfare are steered by the Government, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

A more recent visible example where the Government has called upon the public participation is during COVID-19 pandemic where a COVID Fund was created. As of 23 July 2020, the Fund has collected B\$14,597,940. Volunteers were also active in assisting the front-liners during the peak of the pandemic.

However, the country is seeing increasing participation by NGOs, some of which are advocated by women and youth, in various fields including health, environment, education, and economic empowerment. This is a result of the volunteerism spirit inculcated by the since early age.

Specific move to socialise SDGs is MyActionforSDGs, which is an awareness campaign, led by local female youth, Ms Nurul Hadina binti Haji Alias, that aims to inspire individuals, organisations and the local community to start taking action for the SDGs. It is supported by the UN SDGs Action Campaign, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and UN Volunteers Asia-Pacific.

It is hoped that Brunei Darussalam's VNR report will contribute to more awareness of the Agenda 2030 and the country's active steps to achieve the SDGs.

### **2. What accountability mechanisms have you put in place to progressively guarantee, respect, protect and fulfil all human rights for all persons alongside gender equality?**

The laws of Brunei Darussalam have adequate legislations that protect the rights of the vulnerable groups in relation to offences under the Penal Code (Cap 22); the Syariah Penal Code Order 2013; Children and Young Persons Act (Cap. 219); Women and Girls Protection Act (Cap. 120); Old Age and Disability Pensions Act (Cap. 18); Islamic Family Law Act (Cap. 217); and Married Women Act (Cap. 190). Brunei Darussalam is currently preparing legislation relating to the protection of persons with disabilities (PWDs) which will accord specific protection provisions with respect to abuse and neglect and this is targeted to come into force sometime this year. Brunei Darussalam's legal system ensures that any person, who has been aggrieved and whose legal rights have been violated, has the right to apply and seek redress from the court.



Various governmental mechanisms including the provision of essential services, high standard infrastructure and decent employment, have been put in place to ensure that citizens of Brunei Darussalam continue to enjoy high quality of life in a safe, secure and prosperous environment. This entails the implementation of policies and collective efforts by the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), supported by laws to maintain a harmonious society which instills care and respect for all citizens and further strengthen the protection of human rights in the country.

One such mechanism is the National Council on Social Issues (MKIS) established in 2008, mandated to address a number of social issues. Special Committees under the MKIS have put in place plans of action and policy directives which set out comprehensive strategies with result-oriented deliverables and actions that are measurable through outcome indicators to provide redress and secure the wellbeing, welfare and development of women as well as vulnerable groups such as children, PWDs and the elderly.

In order to ensure the effective implementation of these plans of action, strategy champions are appointed among relevant stakeholders to ensure that all deliverables are met according to targeted indicators and timelines. Through the involvement of strategic partners such as the Council for the Welfare of Persons with Different Abilities; Council of Women of Brunei Darussalam; and Brunei Council on Social Welfare and other NGOs, the MKIS has been able to further promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups. Among the plans of action is the establishment of the National Framework on Child Protection and the National Welfare System.

The strategic objectives of these plans of action are to develop the optimum potential of the vulnerable groups through inclusive and equitable capacity building, empowerment and self-development programmes that are implemented through a whole of nation approach including involvement at the grassroots level and the NGOs to ensure unified action in the affairs of women, children, PWDs and the elderly.

### **3. What are the specific initiatives taken to focus on the social groups that are often discriminated against such as women, young persons, indigenous persons, older persons, persons with disabilities and LGBTI people, migrants and refugees?**

Brunei Darussalam's SDGs journey is guided by its national vision, Wawasan Brunei 2035, in which the country aspires to be widely recognised for its educated, highly skilled and accomplished people, with a high quality of life. Everyone in Brunei Darussalam is viewed and treated as equal and laws are enacted to protect the society against all forms of harm and injustice.

The National Council on Social Issues (MKIS) established in 2008 is mandated to address social issues relating to women, children, PWDs and the elderly. Special Committees under the MKIS have put in place plans of action and policy directives which set out comprehensive actions and measures to secure the wellbeing, welfare and development of women, children, PWDs and the elderly. The plans of action have the strategic objective to develop the optimum potential of the



vulnerable groups through inclusive and equitable capacity building, empowerment and self-development programmes.

These plans of actions are implemented through a whole of nation approach including involvement at the grassroots level and the NGOs to ensure unified action in the affairs of women, children, PWDs and the elderly.

Brunei Darussalam has legislations in place that protect the rights of the vulnerable groups such as those relating to offences under the Penal Codes, Children and Young Persons Act (Cap. 219); Women and Girls Protection Act (Cap. 120); Old Age and Disability Pensions Act (Cap. 18); Islamic Family Law Act (Cap. 217); and Married Women Act (Cap. 190). Brunei Darussalam is currently preparing legislation relating to the protection of PWDs which will accord specific protection provisions with respect to abuse and neglect of PWDs and this targeted to come into force sometime this year.

Brunei Darussalam also has a number of legislations, including the Employment Order 2009 and its subsidiary legislations; Anti-Trafficking in Persons Order 2019; Employment Agencies Order; as well as enforcement practices which sufficiently ensure that all migrant workers in the country are protected, provided adequate housing, and ensure safety against harmful working conditions. The Employment Order, 2009 and its regulations set the basic terms and conditions of employment for all workers, including migrant workers. The Order provides penalties on non-payment of salary, stipulated working hours and rest days, medical coverage as well as repatriation.

Inclusive youth development continues to be a priority of the Government. To ensure active participation of youth in national development, Brunei Darussalam is currently revising the National Youth Policy and Strategy (2020-2035), an undertaking based on the findings of an inclusive youth survey involving the participation of 4,000 youth from various backgrounds and socio-economic status. The revised National Youth Policy will set the vision, goals and strategies for youth development for 2020 – 2035, and will be implemented through a whole of nation approach. In addition to the study, the Brunei Youth Council in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, organised the National Youth Congress in 2019. This is another platform for youth to voice their concerns and discuss issues relevant to them such as development of future ready youth, employment and participation. During the Congress, the youth engaged directly in dialogue with cabinet ministers and policymakers. A joint youth statement and a resolution were issued and these will be integrated into the action plan for the updated National Youth Policy and Strategies 2020-2035.

The Revised National Youth Policy and Strategies 2020-2035 also emphasises youth involvement in driving and implementing SDGs through active volunteerism. Examples of youth-led initiatives are in the fields of poverty alleviation, education, conservation and advocacy in the promotion of environmental sustainability; and innovations particularly those that utilise technology. A more recent example of the youth's active role was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic this year, when they assisted the front-liners, among others, in producing Personal Protective Equipment,



distribution of food for those in quarantine and supporting administrative activities. To encourage continued active volunteerism by the youth, Brunei Darussalam will nurture, from an early age, their sense of responsibility, empathy and caring for those in need.

Further opportunities are open for youth to participate in economic growth through entrepreneurship. To encourage youth entrepreneurship, the Government, through the Youth Entrepreneurship Steering Committee, monitors and coordinates the implementation of initiatives to facilitate the growth of youth-led businesses from the start-up stage to being competitive internationally, by creating a conducive youth entrepreneurship ecosystem including an investment ready infrastructure and supporting regulations.

In terms of International obligation, Brunei Darussalam is party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its optional protocols CRC-AC and CRC-SC; Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ACTIP); UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (UN TIP Protocol) and has taken various measures to implement its commitment under these conventions.

#### **4. What citizen-led engagement strategies have occurred to contribute to the national review process?**

Since it was the Brunei Darussalam's first VNR, the inter-ministerial Special Committee had led the preparation for the review. Notwithstanding this Government-led process, and in due recognition of the other non-state actors' active contribution to the SDG process, a workshop was held to socialise the SDGs as well as the VNR. Throughout the review process, the Committee consulted the stakeholders who in turn had conducted their own internal assessment with their respective constituents in getting their feedback to Brunei Darussalam's SDG achievements. As a result, more than 15 organisations shared their perspectives, especially in sharing their own efforts to the SDGs achievements.

#### **5. What plans does your government have to follow- up the presentation of the VNR at national and subnational levels after the HLPF?**

As reflected in the Report, Brunei Darussalam will seek to further identify ways to strengthen mechanisms for monitoring and reporting progress for the SDGs, in addition to the gaps in and availability of its SDGs data, in order to have a complete understanding of the country's progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Such review will take into account the most feasible means to continue carrying out engagements and forging partnerships with the relevant stakeholders, including the private sectors, NGOs and CSOs, towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.



**6. What modalities did your government adopt to ensure meaningful participation of rightsholder groups, particularly those most affected by development challenges, when implementing the SDGS?**

There is parallelism in the objectives and goals between the SDGs and the country's national development plan, *Brunei Wawasan 2035*. As such, it is viewed that any initiatives implemented by the Government towards sustaining high quality of lives of its citizens and the country's economic development, ultimately lead to the overall achievements of the SDGs.

The Government continues to actively engage the relevant stakeholders in policy discussions, whereby national policies and development plans, along with budget proposals, are discussed during the annual Legislative Council meetings. The Legislative Council represents the Brunei Darussalam's formal consultative structure which allows its people to communicate and consult with the Government on various areas on the country's development. This Council is one of the platforms in which the interests of the people and country are safeguarded and preserved.

The authorities also hold inclusive consultations with the relevant stakeholders on specific sectoral policy documents. A recent example of this was the establishment of the Brunei Darussalam National Climate Policy Drafting Committee which consisted of members from government bodies, private sector agencies, research, academic institutions, and NGOs. To provide insights from youth's perspective, a group of 51 youth representatives from different sectors of Brunei Darussalam were invited to participate in the review of the BNCP draft. The BNCP was published on 25 July 2020. The importance of youth participation is already emphasised in Brunei Darussalam's response to Question 3 above.

Community involvement is important in the implementation of initiatives that affect the population at large. Further to the prior consultations mentioned above, the Government also frequently hold roadshows to socialise new measures which provide additional opportunity for public feedback. In action-oriented initiatives, community leaders are also roped in to ensure their effective practical implementation. Such example is the Disaster Preparedness Coordinator programme, implemented by the National Disaster Management Centre, which looks to train community and grassroots leaders with the abilities and competencies to assist authorities during disaster preparedness activities or disaster response operations.