

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred immediately after the international community had reaffirmed its commitment to accelerate its efforts to achieve the SDGs based on the declaration of “the Decade of Action”. The Pandemic has since been threatening the lives, livelihoods and dignity of people around the world, especially those in vulnerable situations. It has also greatly affected efforts to achieve the SDGs. It is indeed causing a human security crisis. Under these circumstances, the SDGs will be an important roadmap for social transformation that looks ahead to a new era and anticipates the future. Therefore, in this VNR, we look back at how Japan has been working to promote the SDGs and check the progress toward achieving the SDGs in order to overcome and “build back better” from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to achieve the SDGs, it is critical for all stakeholders to work together to promote their efforts. In this VNR, through reviewing Japan's domestic institutions to promote the SDGs, it was confirmed that through such frameworks as the “Japan SDGs Award” organized under the SDGs Promotion Headquarters headed by the Prime Minister, which recognizes leading companies and organizations working on the SDGs, collaboration among various stakeholders has been broadened, leading to increased awareness throughout Japan and progress on the SDGs.

In particular, with regard to local governments, those that proposed outstanding initiatives to achieve the SDGs have been selected as “SDG Future Cities” since 2018, and leading model cases have been disseminated throughout the country. In addition to “SDG Future Cities”, other initiatives such as the “Public-Private Partnership Platform for Local SDGs” and “Local SDG Finance” have created momentum to promote the SDGs and encouraged every citizen to treat the SDGs as their own concern. As a result, a movement to promote the resolution of regional issues, such as declining birthrates, aging communities, and declining populations, through the principles of the SDGs has been gaining momentum throughout the country. In 2017, when Japan submitted its last VNR, the percentage of local governments working on the SDGs was only 1%, but by 2020, it had risen to 39.7%, and the Government of Japan is working to increase it to 60% by the end of FY2024. In this connection, in this VNR, we have included several positive examples of local governments that have taken the lead to promote the SDGs as model cities in Japan, including four cities that have conducted their own Voluntary Local Reviews.

In its “SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles”, the Government of Japan has identified eight priority issues that Japan should focus on in particular. This VNR describes major efforts that have been made for each priority issue in terms of both domestic implementation and international cooperation, as well as the progress that has been made on the 17 goals through such efforts, taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the achievement of the SDGs requires the efforts of a wide range of stakeholders, this VNR was prepared not only through discussions within the government, but through discussions at the “SDGs Promotion Roundtable”, which consists of representatives from various fields, discussions with civil society and the youth generation who will lead the society in the future, and through public comments in order to incorporate the

opinions of a wide range of people. In addition, in order to evaluate our progress, we have included evaluations from the private sector members of the “SDGs Promotion Roundtable”, considering that it would be desirable to include evaluations of progress from other perspectives other than the government’s.

The drafting process of the VNR provided us an opportunity to review the institutions for promoting the SDGs and major initiatives, and to consider how Japan should promote the SDGs in the future. Therefore, based on the opinions of experts and citizens, the VNR concludes with a description of how Japan will promote initiatives to achieve the SDGs henceforth.

Japan will continue to work with the international community based on the principle of human security, in order to address global health, including the achievement of universal health coverage, and realize a society where the SDGs have been achieved and "no one is left behind".