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LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES IN MONITORING PROGRESS TOWARDS SDGs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) constitute one of the greatest contributions to monitoring countries' performance within the Sustainable Development Goals.

- In 2021, a group of 31 countries from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia voluntarily presented their reviews to the High Level Political Forum.

- These documents are an excellent opportunity to understand in depth some of the policies that Governments have taken to advance towards the SDGs and to learn some possible measures that could potentially be implemented in other countries.

Introduction. What is this project about?

The research presented is the result of the work of 20 selected students from IE University who worked in multidisciplinary groups of 4 students from Mid-May to the end of July 2022. This Summer Research Program was conducted thanks to the partnership between the United Nations System Staff College and IE University on the joint Bachelor of International Relations initiative. It is important to note   that the VNRs are reports produced by nations to assess their performance and progress in implementing the United Nations Agenda 2030.

The research was conducted by a total of five groups. Each group of four students was put in charge of researching a specific region: Europe, the Americas and Africa were analysed by three different groups, while Asia was divided into two sub-regions and investigated by two remaining teams.

Each group produced a 30-page report for their regional analysis, critically examining the process for data collection and the preparation of the VNRs, The groups also looked intoprogress in the implementation of the SDGs and the challenges faced by the countries. A particular emphasis was put on the best practices found in the different regions that other countries could implement.

By conducting these comparative analyses at the regional level, differences in policy implementation and effectiveness stood out. Common challenges were underlined. This demonstrated that collaboration among countries is key to facing challenges together and achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Research question and methodology

VNRs reflect the progress and challenges associated with the SDGs. They are up-to-date, and are considered reliable resources . In light of this, all the groups used the 2021 reviews as the main source for this comparative study. We noted that many countries had published older VNRs . They were valuable indicators for some nations, and they provided evidence of intentional planning and continuous committments. , Some reports were more interconnected than others, as such they were used as a reference if possible and where required. To supplement the missing componentsand offer a more comprehensive review, external data sources and academic papers were used for comparability and in-depth analysis.

The research questions that were used to frame the studies were based on specific reqions. . For Europe, the researchers intended to predict the effects of best practices on the remaining challenges. Economic well- being for example, also means higher carbon emissions and insufficient ecological committments. The research question of the Americas was very similar but more practical: to what extent have the measures been successful in SDG achievement?

The first group working on Asia had one methodological question about data collection and one substantial question, the synergy of partnerships. This came from the heterogenous nature of these countries resulting from both intrinsic conditions and current state capacity. We observed partnerships with civil society organisations and NGOs for many. Meanwhile, the economic giant, China, was able to initiate partnerships at the international level itself. The second group working on Asia scrutinised the evolution of SDGs indicators since 2015 and their impact. The importance was self-evident since bad indicators caused spurious relations.

The group who focused on Africa proposed a similar question about limitations to data and the effects of partnership. Yet, the researchershad different conclusions due to underlying differences.

SDG achievements

Main challenges

When it comes to the main challenges under the context of SDGs achievement, climate change action is an area where many countries present significant defiances. Core challenges remain in all European countries analysed, the Asian states of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, China, Iraq, and Qatar, the African nations subject to the study, and all the countries in the Americas except Uruguay. Further, theCOVID-19pandemic has been a global challenge affectingall regions. Health services were delayed and scarce, unemployment and economic instability rose. In some Asian countries, this increased domestic violence and decreased technology and data collection access.

Another defiance observed is gender inequality, which is especially noticeable in Africa,where practices such as female genital mutilation are still present. An analysis of women's access to education for in some of the regions (e.g Americas or Africa) showed that at times education is not successful intervention in efforts to overcomethe gender inequality gap.

Successes and best practices

Looking at best practices, in Africa, the African Union Agenda 2063 is one of the greatestplans intended to improve women's participation inboth the societal and political life as well as the health system. In the Americas, different network lines have been established to allow for the direct transfer of resources from thegovernment to students and vulnerable populations. The aim is to tackle challenges such as zero hunger (out of the 31 nations analysed, Germany and Sierra Leone seem to be doing better in this field).

In Asia, education is used as a tool to increase women's participation in society and in Nicaragua a training programme for professors has been developed as an additional measure. In terms of successes observed, the reduction of poverty is a constant in Europe and in the Asian region, particularly for Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, China, Iraq, and Qatar. Similarly the fight against gender inequality is a common success in most regions. This is also the case in Asia where an increase in women's participation within the political and social spheres is seen. Africa has

also seen greater   inclusion of women into politics. Finally, SDG 17 is another area where there has been much work done in Europe and in the Americas as a result of the multi- stakeholder approach.

Data collection

Main challenges and Successes

The road that leads to the preparation and finalization of VNRs is not always smooth. Data collection processes are usually time- consuming and involve several parties. Although this may vary from country to country,there are challenges within the practice that appear to be common to all different regions.

For instance, within the six areas, data shortages were observed and not all indicators presented within the 2030 Agenda were   assessed. This can occur due to several reasons, which vary across geographical spheres. In Europe, for example, the lack of information is due to difficulties in transforming global parameters into national ones. On the other hand, in Africa, the lack of technology is the main factor which contributes to the insufficiency of data. Whereas in Asia, a shortage of figures within some indicators is caused by the lack of fieldwork that had to be put on hold as a result of the COVID-19 mobility restrictions. In addition, the creation of national indicators by states as a result of the difficulties in applying global standards at the country level has mitigated the effectiveness, in terms of time and length, of the comparative process of nations across regions.

There are some challenges that are specific to a geographical area. For example, many African states depend on aid to produce the VNRs reports. This means that the quality and quantity of data correlate positively with the amount of financial assistance they receive, which can compromise their information- gathering autonomy.

In Colombia, Mexico, and Spain, data is collected by different regional entities and then transferred to the central government for its final management, which requires additional funding and makes the process lengthier. However, this can also be a positive aspect as it has potential to offer greater objectivity and accuracy to the study.

When it comes to other general good practices under the information collection process, the most recurring one is the revitalisation of partnerships. The cross-sectoral involvement of central, regional, and local governments, statistical offices, civil society, and the private sector, among others, within the crafting stage has been crucial to further raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, it has also strengthened the exercise of tracking data as it has made it more diverse and impartial, which has also impacted positively the final outcome.

Conclusion

To conclude, the majority of countries assessed, excluding some Asian countries, have embedded the 2030 Agenda into their national development plans. This is a good sign of progress towards sustainable development in all regions because it signals that countries are using the SDGs targets as a rubric for development. This is one that they can follow and use as a base for measurable projects, interventions, and partnership goals.

However, there still exist several challenges that affect the goal to achieve of the SDGs in each region. One challenge that is common to all regions is climate change. An increased number of natural disasters have been recorded and the continued environmental deterioration of countries has also been observed. Although it is a common challenge, climate change goals are also the set of goals that are most neglected by majority of countries.

It is worth pointing out that different states have different resources available to combat climate change and, unfortunately, it seems that those nations most exposed to hazardous natural disasters - coastal Asian and desertous African countries - are the ones that have the least available resources for environmental restoration.

Moreover, the disregard for environmental indicators could also be attributed to the idea that countries with a higher probability of economic growth tend to focus on those indicators instead of green ones, as seen in the Americas.

COVID-19 has had a large impact on the nations evaluated. The majority of the regions' labour markets and implementation of SDG projects have regressed. This has had an impact on poverty and economic inequality, with rural areas being worse affected. Oil- rich countries have found it more difficult to diversify economically. On the other hand, gender equality has improved

in almost all regions. There are many ways that countries have done this; increased access to healthcare, education, female political and economic participation, among others.

Regarding methodology and data, there are two underlying questions countries have faced. Is using country-specific indicators rather than UN-established targets a better method for tracking SDG progress? Is decentralisation of data viable in the country? The former creates measurable policies that reduce problems from adapting UN targets to the countries' reality but creates dissonance and a skewed perception of progress when comparing different states and regions.

The latter yields more accurate data that lead to better insights for SDG policy implementation but requires large amounts of capital and digital infrastructure. It is important to note that all regions have reported a lack of data overall.

All in all, there is much work to be done to achieve global sustainable development but the efforts and determinations displayed by the VNRs show that each region is moving in the right direction.

The dimensions of the SDGs
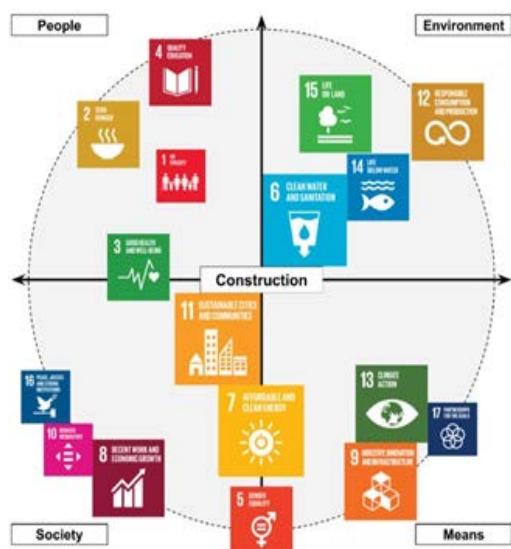
Source: European Commission - Department of Environment

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFSTS: Agriculture Food Systems Transformation Strategy

AIDS: Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome

ANEP - National Board of Public Education

A-SDGs: Afghanistan's Sustainable Development Goals

ASEAN: Association of SouthEast Asian Nations

AU: African Union

BDI: Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (The Federation of German Industry)

BEAC: Barents Euro-Arctic Council

BOP: Base Of the Pyramid

CBSS: Council of the Baltic Sea States

CCONG - Colombian Confederation of NGOs

CCOO: Comisiones Obreras (Trade Unions)

CLTS: Community-Led Total Sanitation

CO2: Carbon Dioxide

CONPES - National Council for Economic and Social Policy

CPI: Consumer Price Index

CPS: Carbon Pricing Strategy

CRUE: Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities

CSA: Climate Smart Agriculture program

CSO: Civil Society Organization

DANE - National Administrative Department of Statistics

DBG: Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (The German Trade Union Confederation)

DFPA: The Danish Family Planning Association

DGE: Deutsche Gesellschaft Ernährung (German Nutrition Society)

DNP - Colombian National Planning Department

EAPN: European Anti-Poverty Network Denmark

ECOSIT: Study on the Living Conditions and Poverty of Chad (Enquête sur les conditions de vie des ménages et la pauvreté au Tchad)

ECOSOC: United Nations' Economic and Social Council

EMAS: Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

ESC: Environmentally Sustainable Cities

EU: European Union

FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

FIT: Feed-In Tariff

ForUM: The Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment

FQSEP: Free Quality School Education Program

FY: Financial Year

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GEF: Global Environmental Facility

GRI - Global Reporting Initiative

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HLPF - High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

IBEX: Iberia Index

ICC: International Chamber of Commerce

ICDP: International Conference on Population Development

ICT: Information and Communication Technology

IDB - Inter-American Development Bank

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

INDP: Iraqi National Development Plan

INE: Instituto Nacional de Estadïstica (National Office of Statistics)

INFF - Integrated National Financing Framework

INSEED: National Institute of Statistics, Economic Studies and Demographics

IoT: Internet of Things

IPPF: Sex og Politikk Norway

IPRS: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy

IT: Information Technology

IWRM: Integrated Water Resources Management

KS: The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

LAGs: Local Actions Groups

LECS: Laos Expenditure and Consumption Survey

LGBTQAI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexuall, Transexual, Queer, Asexual and Intersex

LNOB: Leave No One Behind

LNU: The Norwegian Children and Youth Council

LSU: The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations

MASFAMU: Ministry of Social Action, Family and Women's Protection

MDGs: Millennial Development Goals

MOE: Ministry of Environment

MOFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MSME: Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise

NCCSD: Azerbaijan's National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development

NCD: Non-Communicable Disease

NDS: National Development Strategy

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NMBU: Norwegian University of Life Sciences

NSIA: Afghanistan's National Statics and Information Authority

NSO: National Union of Students in Norway

NSS: National Statistical System

NTD: Neglected Tropical Illnesses

NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology

OAG: Office of the Audit General

ODA: Official Development Assistance

ODS: Ozone-Depleting Substances

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OGPC: Office for Government Policy Coordination

PARCE: Environment Sector Capacity Building Support Project

PEDS: Strategic Sustainable Development Plan from Cabo Verde

PINE - Comprehensive School Nutrition Program

PPPs: Public-Private Partnerships

PROPER: Program for Pollution control, Evaluation, and Rating

R&D: Research & Development

ROK: Republic of Korea

SAWER: Solar Air Water Earth Resource

SCOPE: System for cash operations

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SDSN - Sustainable Development Solutions Network

SEI - Stockholm Environment Institute

SESRIC: Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries

SIDS: Small Island Developing State

SME: Small Medium Enterprises

SNU - Interagency group of the United Nations System

SO2: Sulphur Dioxide

SONU: Urgent Neonatal Obstetric Care (Soins Obstétricaux Néonataux d'Urgence)

U4SSC: United for Smart Sustainable Cities

UDAPE - Unit of Analysis of Social and Economic Policies

UGT: Unión General de Trabajadores (Trade Unions)

UN - United Nations

UN DESA - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UN: United Nations

UNAMA: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

UNAPF: United Nations-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework

UNCCPJ: United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund

UNICEF - United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNSCF: United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

USAID: United States Aid

VENRO: Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNR: Voluntary National Review

WFP: World Food Programme

WHO AFRO: World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa

WTO: World Trade Organisation

ZACC: Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission

ZIMRA: Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

ZUNDAF: Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework

UNSSC Summer Research Program:

Lessons Learned and Good Practices in Monitoring Progress Towards SDGs in Europe

FACULTY ADVISOR:

Borja Santos Porras

AUTHORS:

Aldara Vázquez Rodríguez

Hugo Herrera

Nicole Astašenkova

Pablo Santin

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda has given life to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These have become core aspects of agenda setting and policy making at the international and national level for all the 193 member-states forming the United Nations (UN). Nevertheless, not all nations share the same level of involvement within the Agenda. This is due to the fact that the pre-existing degree of country development conditions their level of engagement. This may occur due to several reasons, however, the most recurring is budgetary. Nations that are found at the top of economic, political and social world-rankings, are usually the ones making the greatest progress towards achieving the 17SDGs. In the latest review published by the UN, it can be seen that the top 20 countries that have the highest scores when it comes to SDGs improvement are all European but Japan, found in the 19th position[1].

Despite the fact that the 17 SDGs are greatly present within the European continent, the agenda further materialises into regional and national policies when it comes to the European Union (EU). The EU has greatly emphasised the importance of the goals and even aligned them with their own existing programs. For instance, the Council of Europe is very much engaged with the SDGs, especially with number 16: "Peace, justice and strong institutions". The Council has become a key partner in the promotion and development of the agenda under the context of the EU, spending over €200 Million in programs relating to the achievement of these 17 Goals[2].

The following report intends to analyse the VNRs of Denmark, Czech Republic, Spain, Norway, Germany and Sweden, as presented to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2021. The main question this paper intends to answer is: "To what extent do the European region's best practices tackle the remaining challenges they are facing?". This query captures the main purpose of the VNRs and allows further deconstruction of the European model of progress that then can be extrapolated to other areas of the world facing similar challenges.

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[1] Sachs, Jeffrey D., et al. "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT2022." Amazon S3, 24 June 2022
[2] Council of Europe, Office of the Directorate General of Programmes. "UN Agenda 2030." The Council of Europe, Council of Europe, n.d.

2. CONTENT

Table 1. Explanations of symbols for SDG indicators and trend progress

Table 1 is the main visual tool that has been used to portray the different levels of progress that each of the six countries have within the 17SDGs. This also allows us to further observe trends within the region. Moreover, Table 1 is a supporting element that facilitates the understanding of the second one.

SDG Indicators - Progress made since last VNR	Status of the indicators	Trends	Trend Indicators - Progress made since last VNR
SDG achieved	🟢	↖	On track or maintaining SDG achievement
Challenges remain	🟡	↗	Moderately improving
Significant challenges remain	🟠	↘	Stagnating
Major challenges remain	🔴	↘	Decreasing
Information unavailable	⚪	✖	Trend information unavailable

Table 2. European countries' SDG and trend progress since their last VNR[3]

The following table depicts the main challenges the six European nations have encountered when striving for SDG achievement. Moreover, it also shows which are the areas where the nations have had the biggest progress.

Countries/ SDG	Czech Republic	Denmark	Germany	Norway	Spain	Sweden
SDG1	🟢↖	🟢↘	🟢↖	🟢↖	🟠↗	🟢↑
SDG2	🔴↗	🔴↗	🟠↗	🔴↘	🔴↗	🔴↗
SDG3	🟠↗	🟡↗	🟠↗	🟡↗	🟡↗	🟠↗
SDG4	🟡↗	🟡↗	🟠↗	🟡↗	🟡↗	🟡↗
SDG5	🟠↗	🟡↑	🟡↗	🟢↖	🟡↖	🟢↖
SDG6	🟡↑	🟡↑	🟡↖	🟠↗	🟡↖	🟡↖
SDG7	🟠↗	🟢↖	🟡↖	🟢↖	🟡↗	🟢↖
SDG8	🟡↖	🟡↗	🟡↖	🟠↗	🔴↖	🟡↖
SDG9	🟠↗	🟡↖	🟡↖	🟡↗	🟠↗	🟡↗
SDG10	🟡↗	🟢↖	🟡↗	🟢↖	🟠↗	🟡↗
SDG11	🟡↑	🟡↗	🟡↗	🟡↑	🟡↗	🟡↗
SDG12	🔴↘	🔴↘	🔴↗	🔴↘	🟠↘	🔴↗
SDG13	🔴↘	🔴↗	🔴↗	🔴↗	🔴↗	🔴↘
SDG14	⚪✖	🟠↘	🟠↘	🟠↗	🟠↗	🔴↘
SDG15	🟡↖	🟡↖	🟠↗	🔴↗	🔴↘	🔴↗
SDG16	🟡↗	🟡↗	🟡↖	🟡↖	🟠↗	🟡↖
SDG17	🔴↗	🟡↖	🟡↖	🟢↖	🟠↗	🟡↖

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Table 3. European countries' main challenges and best practices

These main challenges have been identified by the research group according to which SDGs and indicators the countries scored the lowest. Additionally, the best practices have been identified on a mentioning basis, where the European countries mentioned these practices the most in their VNRs.

Countries	Challenges	Best practices
Czech Republic	Climate action (decarbonisation) Gender inequality	Innovative technology to combat climate change
Denmark	Consumption rate & amount of resources used Gender inequality	Partnership creation Empowerment of society:"Leave no-one behind" "Build forward better"
Germany	Climate action Consumption & Production Pattern	Innovation for energy transition Eco-management for business audit
Norway	Climate action Biodiversity & ecosystems conservation	Innovation in research and education for sustainable solutions Regional and local coordination for execution, implementation and measuring target progress.
Spain	Lack of protection of Biosphere	Political coherence Strong institutions
Sweden	Climate action Inequalities	SDG synergies tool Gender mainstreaming

2.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS IN THE REGION

The main challenges faced by the European region comes down to two main issues: climate action, ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. These three main points face a lot more resistance compared with the other SDGs, given that they represent issues that cannot be addressed unilaterally, and need global cooperation to deal with their negative externalities. SDG 1 is improving in the whole region as well as SDGs 6 and 7 and 17, although at a smaller rate. At the same time SDGs 12 and 13 are not improving and remain to be the key challenges. SDG 2 is improving but major challenges remain. Other SDGs show uneven progress throughout the region.

2.1.1. Improvements in the European region

2.1.1.1. End poverty in all its forms

5 out of 6 countries examined have achieved SDG1, with the exception of Spain. Certain targets, such as eradicating extreme poverty (1.1.), are not relevant in the context of the countries examined. However, the European region is still working on improving conditions and working on the remaining issues, such as economic inequalities. Hence, the dynamic is positive and the countries continue to improve.

2.1.1.2. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

While challenges remain when it comes to ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, the dynamic is positive and the European region is improving. All six countries examined are either on track or maintaining SDG achievement or are moderately improving. The population in the countries examined has access to drinking water and sanitation services.

2.1.1.3. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Producing and providing affordable energy and clean energy is one of the main achievements in

the European region. In all the six countries studied, 100% of their respective population has access to electricity[4]. In addition, the same percentage of the European population primarily uses clean cooking fuels and technologies for cooking. This falls under the WHO regulatory framework which classifies kerosene from the safe to use cooking fuels list[5]. In addition, all the European countries analysed performed well with regards to their carbon intensity resulting from energy production. This is calculated by dividing CO_2 emissions from the combustion of fuel by electricity output. And while not all of the six countries were fully on target, their CO_2 emissions from fuel combustion per total electricity output averaged at 0.79 mega tonne of CO_2 per terawatt-hour, with an overall trend of improvement towards the objective of reaching 0 in the long run[6]. Subsequently, producing and providing affordable energy and clean energy is one of the main successes for the European region in working towards achieving sustainable development.

2.1.1.4. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the goal partnership for sustainable development

Now, strengthening the means of implementation for global partnerships is an aspect where Europe has proven to succeed. Looking at the sum of public expenditure on health from domestic income as well as government expenditure on education, all the countries analysed have pledged government spending on health[7] and education[8] of around 15% of their GDP, making these two points priorities in their national public expenditures. Furthermore, the European countries equally implemented jurisdictions and measures to poach the tax base of others as anointed in their laws and regulations to avoid corporate tax havens. As such, EU law protects the region and foreign nations against any sort of corporate tax havens in its territory, with bills such as the Anti Tax Avoidance Directive (EU) 2016/1164[9]. As well, an estimation based on macroeconomic data of how much profit is shifted into tax havens show that a limited amount of money coming from the European countries is lost to tax havens, where the countries analysed show an average of 14% of corporate tax revenue lost[10]. Consequently, political legal and fiscal measures within the European countries analysed have made the regional sentiment and commitment to implementing and revitalising global partnerships for sustainable development one of the main achievements in Europe.

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[4] Access to electricity (% of population), World Bank Global Electrification Database.
[5] Access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking (% of population), World Bank Database, Metadata Glossary.
[6] Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Energy: Overview – Analysis, IEA, Statistics Report, August 2021.
[7] Domestic general government health expenditure (% of GDP), World Bank Data, January 2022.
[8] Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP), World Bank Data, June 2022.
[9] The Anti Tax Avoidance Directive, Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission, July 2016.
[10] Economists Without Borders, Missing Profits Worldwide, University of Copenhagen, UC Berkeley, Arnold Ventures

2.1.2. Remaining challenges in the European region

2.1.2.1. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

It might seem surprising that SDG2 is where major challenges remain. However, SDG2 not only includes ending hunger but also improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture, which is measured by looking at human trophic level, prevalence of obesity and sustainable nitrogen management index. That is where the challenges lie. For instance when it comes to the human trophic level, which is a measure of the energy intensity of diet composition and the proportion of plants eaten in relation to animal products eaten, major challenges remain within the European region. It is doing much worse than the African and Asian regions. Prevalence of obesity is also quite high within the region and the trend is alarming because it is getting worse. Sustainable Nitrogen Management Index measures environmental performance of agricultural production by looking at Nitrogen use efficiency and land use efficiency. The European region is still struggling with it. Although, it seems to be a common trend for all of the regions. However, it is important to note that countries can receive the same score for different reasons since the index combines nitrogen use efficiency and land use efficiency.

2.1.2.2. Ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns

Looking at the overall consumption and production patterns in the European region, it not only appears that these are unsustainable, they also present remaining challenges for the region. Indeed, a prevalent aspect of the consumption and production patterns in Europe is the many types of waste that they generate. In Europe, people consume more electronic devices in a shorter period of time than what the products' lifespan is. Looking at the domestic production as well as imports and exports of electronic products including their product lifespan, it becomes clear that the region's production and consumption are unsustainable. Indeed, in 2021, Europe generated 12Mt of electronic waste[11]. Another indicator amongst SDG12 that the region is struggling with is their sulphur dioxide emissions embodied in imports of goods and services. This is mainly due to

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[11] Home - E-Waste Monitor, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, June 2022.

the transportation industry and Europe's large imports from Asia. The region's SO2 emissions have stagnated at around 1,250 Gigatonnes per year since 2015[12]. These emissions are of paramount importance when it comes to achieving sustainable consumption levels due to the fact that SO2 emissions have severe health impacts and are a significant cause of premature mortality worldwide. Additionally, nitrogen emissions embodied in imported goods and services is also a uniform issue for the European region. Indeed, reactive nitrogen embodied in European imports translates to emissions of ammonia, nitrogen oxides and nitrous oxide into the atmosphere, but also into bodies of water in the region. Indeed, such chemical levels have been rising overall with the region's imports[13]. As such, this represents an issue for sustainable consumption and production patterns in the region as high nitrogen emissions can be harmful to human health and the environment alike. Finally, the average annual amount of plastic waste exported per capita is another indicator the region is not making any progress on. While this ratio should decrease as the European countries analysed move closer towards 2030, yet, with an average of 8.1 kg per capita[14], Europe is not only far from reaching the goal set for 0 kg/capita, all the countries looked at could not determine whether their respective ratio was decreasing or increasing.

2.1.2.3. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact

Finally, another remaining main challenge for the region is the work ahead to counteract climate change consequences. Indeed, emissions from the combustion and oxidation of fossil fuels from cement production are way off target for all the countries analysed with an average of 6.06 tonnes of CO2 per capita[15]; it is noteworthy to mention that they are all making progress towards reducing CO2 emissions from fossil fuels combustion and cement production. Additionally, looking at the CO2 emission embodied in imported goods and services, the European region is struggling to lower their emissions. The countries reached an average of 3.25 tonnes of CO2 per capita,[16] and with an overall trend going down, meaning that the region is not making forward progress with respect to lowering carbon emissions. Finally, the indicator within SDG13 that poses resistance to the European region is the Carbon Pricing Score. The CPS measures the extent to which countries

[11] China's Trade-Off Between Economic Benefits and Sulfur Dioxide Emissions in Changing Global Trade, Feng Wang,
[12] Yongyuan Li, Wei Zhang, Pan ge, Ling Jiang, Beiming Cai, Jing Zhang, Pengyan Zhang Haoran Pan, Honggiang Jiang, January 2020
[13] Substantial nitrogen pollution embedded in international trade, Azusa Oita, Arunima Malik, Kejichiro Kanemoto, Arne Gescke, Shota Nishijma, Manfred Lenzen, Nature Geoscience, January 2016
[14] Download trade data | UN Comtrade: International Trade Statistics, United Nations, 2021
[15] Data supplement to the Global Carbon Budget 2021, Integrated Carbon Observation System, 2021
[16] China's Trade-Off Between Economic Benefits and Sulfur Dioxide Emissions in Changing Global Trade, Feng Wang, Yongyuan Li, Wei Zhang, Pan ge, Ling Jiang, Beiming Cai, Jing Zhang, January 16, 2020

have attained the goal of pricing all energy related carbon emissions at certain benchmark values for carbon costs. When examining the Carbon Pricing Score in the European region, the 6 European countries looked at are slowly increasing the price of carbon emissions in their territory from energy use with the goal to price it at EUR60 or more by 2030. However, despite a slow incline and progress towards the SDG indicator, the European countries average the regional CPS at EUR 43.16.[17] Consequently, climate action is one of the biggest concerns for the region and should receive urgent attention and budget if Europe is to reach the 2030 Agenda objectives.

2.2. EMERGING CHALLENGES

2.2.1. Czech Republic

The main challenge that Czech Republic is facing is related to SDG 5 that aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This is largely due to the fact that social, economic and structural obstacles remain. While legislation ensures equal access and rights to all women, the reality, however, is quite different. Czech Republic's Gender Equality Index is substantially below the EU average. In 2020, Czech Republic scored 56.2 out of 100, which is 11.7 points lower than the EU average.[18] Sexual education is not incorporated into the Czech educational system. Socially, society holds conservative viewpoints on gender roles within the family unit with the mother being a caregiver and the father being the breadwinner.

Another challenge is related to climate change. Czech Republic's emissions are among the highest in the EU. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions has stagnated. The emissions intensity per inhabitant in Czech Republic is 47.1% higher than the EU average. Czech Republic is struggling with the process of decarbonisation. The challenges are social, technological and economic. Due to the structure of the national economy, decarbonisation will have a larger effect on Czech Republic than on other EU states at the social level.

2.2.2. Denmark

Denmark's greatest challenges relate to the achievement of SDGs 5, 12, 13, 14 and 15, with a special

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[17] Effective Carbon Rates, Carbon Pricing Score, in percent, OECD Stats, 2018
[18] "Gender Equality Index 2020: Czechia". European Institute For Gender Equality, 2020.

focus on the last four cited. The country's rate of consumption and use of resources is very high despite the fact that according to local statistics, 95% of national consumers believe of great importance that products are manufactured in a responsible manner. Just to exemplify the great levels of consumption seen within Denmark, if the world utilised as many resources as this nation does, then it would be needed over 4 times the global annual capabilities that are already in place. Moreover, SDG12 directly affects 13, 14 and 15 as these are highly correlated and intertwined. Nonetheless, it would be worth mentioning that the Danish government is aware of this and is developing different initiatives to tackle the challenges such as conceding "micro-grants for SDG-oriented entrepreneurship among students"[19] and developing a "new model for projecting the climate footprint of Danish imports"[20], among others.

Further, as previously mentioned, other challenges pertain to the reach of SDG5. Although in Denmark there is high participation of both men and women within the labour market, there has been observed a considerably lower number of females within board and management levels. In addition, despite the fact that parental leave can be divided between parents, females tend to be more absent from work during this period as they take the majority of the time available.

2.2.3. Germany

The most significant challenge that Germany has faced regarding reaching its SDG objectives revolves around Climate Action. The reason for this is that Germany is the most off target for SDG13, where the country has not met one of the UN indicators including two of four which present major challenges ahead. Indeed, Germany's carbon emissions from fossil fuels have been on a slow decrease, today representing 59.2% of 1990 CO2 levels.[21] Yet, that figure still reaches 762 million tonnes in 2021. On the other hand, Germany has made significant efforts to pledge money to international climate protection funding organisations, for the reduction of greenhouse gases and adaptation to climate change.

Additionally, looking at Germany's progress on SDG 14, Germany's consumption and production patterns have not headed towards a responsible and sustainable pattern, contrary to the German

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[19] Information directly extrapolated from the Danish 2021 VNR.
[20] Information directly extrapolated from the Danish 2021 VNR.
[21] Data supplement to the Global Carbon Budget 2021, Integrated Carbon Observation System, 2021.

national plan which marked building a circular economy as one of its objectives. This is mainly due to the private household consumption substantially contributing to SO2 emissions with an average of 11.16 kg/capita,[22] as well as consumption patterns leading to a high electronic waste with an average of 19.37 kg/capita,[23] high exports of plastic waste with an average of 10.01 kg/capita[24] and high nitrogen emissions in imports with an average of 15.91 kg/capita.[25]

Finally, while Germany's indicators for SDG14 are all off target, the most concerning is its clean water score with only 51.03% of its water being clean.[26] This is mainly due to the presence of chemicals in the country's waters, where nitrogen input levels are above average in marine and coastal waters via inflows into the North and Baltic seas.[27]

2.2.4. Norway

Out of all the SDG targets, Norway faces the most resistance in achieving its responsible consumption and production indicators, notably, targets 12.2, 12.3, 12.5 and 12.6. The challenge lies in achieving a sustainable consumption of materials and food while implementing frameworks making more space for a circular economy centred around recycling for private household consumption and responsible business alike. Namely, non-recycled municipal solid waste and electronic material waste coupled with CO2 emissions are the targets which require the most attention from the Norwegian government.

Secondly, one of the biggest challenges for Norway is meeting the 2030 Agenda targets and becoming a low carbon emitter country by 2050. While efforts have been made in reducing CO2 emissions from fossil fuels, these are progressing undoubtedly slower than expected in order to reach the 2030 Agenda objective.

Lastly, life on land land-use is one of the main challenges ahead for Norway. Around 17.5% of Norway's mainland is legally protected for conservation, however, 2,355 species out of 21,000 are under the threat of extinction in the country. Achieving sustainable use of national ecosystems will

[22] ibid.
[23] Home - E-Waste Monitor, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, June 2022.
[24] Download trade data | UN Comtrade: International Trade Statistics, United Nations, 2021.
[25] Substantial nitrogen pollution embedded in international trade, Azusa Oita, Arunima Malik, Kejichiro Kanemoto, Arne Gescke, Shota Nishijma, Manfred Lenzen, Nature Geoscience, January 2016.
[26] Download global data and methods, Ocean Health Index, 2020
[27] ibid.

only get more challenging with the negative effects of climate change on biodiversity.

2.2.5. Spain

Spain's most salient challenge in achieving its SDG objectives pertains to SDG 15 and the lack of fulfilment of ecological obligations that the country pledged to undertake. The mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites has remained stagnant at a mean value of 58 /100 as per the UN Indicator for the past decade[28], thus highlighting the lack of legitimate and tangible action that has been destined to Life on Land. When it comes to areas protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity the situation is of tantamount severity, with an achievement of 51% of the long-term goal of achieving an appropriate mean area that is protected for its valuable and endangered biodiversity.

Indicators such as Terrestrial and freshwater threats and Survival of Endangered Species are either in a flat or negative progression, showcasing that Spanish action towards preserving biodiversity has been stagnant since the year 2010. The lack of fulfilment of SDG 15, in contrast with the other 16 objectives which for the most part have been aptly tackled, demonstrates the country's priorities within the past two decades, shifting their focus on policies which have been focused on human development and economic growth as opposed to preservation of nature.

2.2.6. Sweden

Sweden is facing a challenge of being unable to meet the climate targets. The current measures are not sufficient for attaining Sweden's climate goals. Sweden is still in the process of searching for the appropriate innovative solutions that would facilitate meeting the climate targets. Sweden is struggling with reducing consumption-based emissions. In order to meet the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement, the greenhouse gas emissions per person per year have to drop below one tonne per person globally by 2050. Currently Sweden is at eight tonnes per person.

Additionally social and economic inequalities are not decreasing. Asylum seekers, persons with disabilities, certain labour migrants and young people are especially vulnerable. One of the challenging aspects is improving the regulation on migration as migrants tend to remain in the

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[28] Sustainable Report Profile, Spain, UN SD Report Database via https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/spain

vulnerable group even after being in Sweden for a substantial amount of time, especially when it comes to the question of employment and income. Abuse and violence are also not decreasing. It has stayed at the same level as in 2017.

2.3. BEST PRACTICES

2.3.1. Czech Republic

Czech Republic is using technology to find solutions to the challenges related to climate change. For example, the Solar Air Water Earth Resource (S.A.W.E.R.), which was recognized as the best innovation at the EXPO 2020, uses solar energy to obtain water in desert conditions. It can help to transform the desert into fertile soil as a signal system is able to produce up to 200 litres of water in a day.[29] The water can be used for irrigation, livestock and consumption. The production and supply of drinking water can happen without connection to the energy grid. In the meantime, Clever Farm, which is another company based in Czech Republic, focuses on sustainable farming that is cost-effective and automated. It offers a way to save water with Intelligent Irrigation. The data obtained from satellite images and IoT sensors is used to optimise irrigation. IoT sensors collect data about the conditions, such as rainfall and humidity, and it helps automate farming techniques, in this case irrigation. This system saves energy and water as well as labour. Hydal is a company that focuses on naturally biodegradable bioplastics that are made using waste cooking oil. The energy consumption during the production process is 50% lower than what is required in production of ordinary polyethylene.[30] Another company that utilises waste is ERVOeco. It extracts products from waste and generates raw materials. It returns the raw materials for further use in the industry.

2.3.2. Denmark

Denmark has a strong position in the areas of health and well-being, education, sustainable energy, peace, justice and institutions, which correspond to SDGs 3, 4, 7 and 16, respectively.

[29] "ABOUT – S.A.W.E.R.". Sawer.Cz, 2022
[30] "Biopolymer Hydal Is Made From Waste Cooking Oil And Is 100% Recyclable | European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform". Circulareconomy.Europa.Eu, 2022.

A key strength within the nation is the "Cross-sectoral dedication to the 2030 Agenda" created by the engagement of different societal divisions (government, civil society, private sector, academic institutions) in the 17 SDGs, which allows for a deeper integration of the targets within the Danish societal build-up. This has been a core aspect to the development of a national strategy for the recovery of the COVID-19 crisis: "Build Forward Better", focused on rebuilding different sectors according to the SDGs' framework. From these ideas also evolve the "Leave No-one behind" principle, which is also deeply engraved within Danish society and attempts to reduce inequalities by demarginalizing isolated groups found in Denmark. This would only be possible by further connecting people and increasing the sense of community. Therefore, new partnerships linking public and private sectors are arising.

Lastly, Denmark has understood its importance as a global actor and promotes cross-national practices to mitigate challenges that are found world-wide, such as climate change and food insecurity. Thus, it has been more actively engaged within international conferences such as the "Nordic Council of Ministers", where topics such as minorities' empowerment have been discussed.

2.3.3. Germany

The German Innovations for the Energy Transition Program seeks for a holistic approach to deal with policy and address current and arising difficulties.[31] The German program presents an emphasis on innovation and development transfer through the living labs of the energy transition. Additionally, a pillar to this new approach put forward by the panel is a characteristic of readiness for innovative solutions to enter the market. This feature is key because it promotes innovation with a fast pace edge as to research, innovate and incorporate energy solutions in transitioning towards a green energy cycle. What's more, the program puts an emphasis on cross-sectoral and cross-framework issues connecting with energy progress, for example, digitalisation, area coupling and community-centred energy change research.

Another practice is that in an attempt to improve consumption and production patterns, the German government plans to adopt the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) by 2025 to

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[31] Energy research and innovation, Federal Ministry for Economics Affairs and Climate Action, BMWK, 2020

all supreme federal authorities.[32] This measure goes hand in hand with the German Government's Climate Action Programme 2030 which puts a rigorous emphasis on corporate sustainability reporting as a key way forwards for sustainable business. With an increased transparency Germany hopes to pave the way for the way business is conducted throughout the nation.

2.3.4. Norway

Collaborating with the National Committee in trying to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) is creating a platform for the sharing of best practice in higher education. This is in line with Norway's efforts in providing inclusive and equitable education for all. The sustainability platform will serve as an interactive database where academics and students alike will be able to share knowledge and resources about various topics centred around sustainability and sustainable dilemmas. The project tries to bring an innovative approach to a complicated issue. The platform offers two main targets - one focused on research and the other focused on education.

Another practice is the Sustainability County Møre og Romstal, a local authority initiative to help the work on sustainability in the county. The objective is to coordinate the districts' efforts towards accomplishing the SDGs in a purposeful and composed way. To accomplish this, all the municipalities in the region have gathered information and estimated execution and progress, in accordance with the UN-led initiative United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC). This is to guarantee that all the municipalities and the local authority have a common sense base for additional work. Collaboration with organisations, affiliations, volunteering and the research in the province are key efforts made for sustainability in the region.

2.3.5. Spain

Spain has maintained a sustained commitment at the highest level to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Making international cooperation a State policy, it has ensured that the SDG agenda is at the forefront of their political undertakings, even creating a designated Ministry of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda, which has proven fundamental for its foreign

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[32] What is EMAS?, EMAS – Environment - European Commission, 1993.

action in order to use it as a lever and catalyst to achieve the SDGs at a global level, and improving its mechanisms of political coherence. This political move has been reflected in the strength of Spain's performance towards SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, with indicators such as the Corruption Perceptions Index being maintained at a mean of 61% within the past decade, en-route to achieve the 2030 goal of 90%.[33]

Another key aspect that has benefited Spain's achievement of increased Government Spending on Health and Education or its Statistical Performance Index is the country's commitment to SDG: Partnerships for the goals. Spain has constructed a solid political framework within the aforementioned Ministry that allows for deeper cohesion with other Ministries in order to implement the SDG goals. This is tangibly reflected with the creation in the year 2020 of a Council for Sustainable Development within the Ministry for Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda[34] which is set to cooperate with broader government organisations to ensure they are promoting the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

2.3.6. Sweden

Sweden is practising gender mainstreaming. The rights of women and girls and gender equality are crucial for 10 out of the 17 SDGs. Gender mainstreaming makes sure that gender equality issues are not sidelined by other challenges and policy issues. It makes sure that gender equality is a factor that is considered while creating and implementing policies. When reforms are suggested, their implications for gender equality have to be considered. Gender equality is promoted at all levels, which is reflected in how the budget is distributed. Sweden is practising gender-responsive budgeting which is meant to ensure equitable distribution of resources.

Another practice worth mentioning is identifying trade-offs and synergies between the goals through the "SDG synergies tool". The tool was developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute as a way to see how the different SGDs interact with each other, what are the trade-offs and what are the synergies between them. It looks beyond the target interaction and provides a basis for prioritisation as well as cross-sectoral collaboration. A set of targets is chosen and then a cross-

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[33] Sustainable Report Profile, Spain, UN SD Report Database via https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/spain
[34] Spain's Orden DSA/819/2020, de 3 de septiembre, por la que se regula la composición y funcionamiento del Consejo de Desarrollo Sostenible

impact matrix is created.[35] Then the interactions between the different targets are given a score. This can ensure that targets that positively influence many other targets are identified and as a result are prioritised. The tool also facilitates communication between the representatives of the different sectors.[36]

3. PROCESS

Table 4. European countries' main good practices regarding their processes

The following table depicts the best practices the six countries have undertaken when it comes to tracking SDGs' progress, according to the research group.

Countries	Good practices
Czech Republic	A roadmap of the preparatory process A website dedicated to the SDG indicators
Denmark	A roadmap of the preparatory process for visualisation purposes Peer review (Kenya & Norway) Voluntary Local Reviews at the municipality level Diversity of stakeholders to the review (7 different types of parties)
Germany	Local and regional involvement through Voluntary Local Reviews
Norway	Peer review (Indonesia & Denmark) Strong multilateral approach through regional and municipal coordination and implementation of the SDGs.
Spain	Horizontal approach to data gathering and analysis through the integration of central government (through the INE) and the Autonomous Communities. Strong governmental push towards implementing the SDG goals into broader society through non-governmental stakeholders such as educational institutions, trade unions and entities within the private sector. Peer review (OECD)
Sweden	Peer review (Spain & Colombia) Voluntary Local Reviews between municipalities

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[35] An example of a cross-impact matrix will be in the annex
[36] Weitz, Nina et al. SDG Synergies: An Approach For Coherent 2030 Agenda Implementation. Stockholm Environment Institute, 2019

3.1. PLANNING & PROCESS

Table 5. European countries' distribution of VNR phases amongst agencies

This table allocates different national stakeholders to three categories depending on the roles that they have had during the crafting of each country's VNR. Additionally, the partnerships were found in the countries' VNRs.

Countries	Collecting & Publishing Data	Coordinating & Writing the report	Implementing SDG policies
Czech Republic	The Czech Statistical Office Czech Environmental Information Agency	The Ministry of Environment The Government Council for Sustainable Development The Ministry of Regional Development	The government (especially the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Regional Development)
Denmark	The Danish Government (all ministries) Statistics Denmark (Statistical Data[37]) International organisations (Non-statistical data[38])	The Danish Ministry of Finance (coordinating body) The Danish Government (ratification and approval) The Civil Society	The Danish Government (all ministries) The Danish Parliament Folketinget through the 2030 Network and Panel[39] Regional and local governments The private sector (e.g. The Confederation of Danish Industry)
Germany	The Federal Statistical Office Regional and local governments	The German Federal Government State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development	Regional and local governments Sustainable Development Council Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development
Norway	The Office of the Audit General (OAG) Regional and local authorities	Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	All state agencies Regional and local authorities use the SDGs in their planning
Spain	The National Institute of Statistics, Regional Agencies at the Autonomous Level, Eurostat.	Spanish Ministry for Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda	Regional and local governments. Central government through the Council for Sustainable Development.

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[37] Danish data coming within the national domain
[38] Indicators for which follow-up is not within the domain of Statistics Denmark
[39] 2030 Network- A forum for a broad and inclusive debate on the SDGs
   2030 Panel- Panel of experts supporting the Network

Countries	Collecting & Publishing Data	Coordinating & Writing the report	Implementing SDG policies
Sweden	The Swedish Agency for Public Management Statistics Sweden	Government offices of Sweden	Regional and local governments

3.1.1. Czech Republic

The preparation started 2 years before the VNR was due, in May 2019. One of the good practices is that Czech Republic provides a roadman of the preparatory process. Czech Republic started with a "Pilot" report on the implementation of the SDGs. In September 2020 it established the participants for the global workshops, assigning key responsibilities, and coordinated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another good lesson from Czech Republic was launching a website dedicated to the VNR indicators, the creation of which started in November 2020 and the data for it was gathered in April 2021. At the same time the stakeholder engagement plan was developed. In February 2021 the relevant stakeholders and civil society representatives were contacted to invite them to contribute to the VNR. Data gathering tasks were assigned accordingly.

3.1.2. Denmark

The Danish Ministry of Finance is responsible for coordinating the national implementation and follow-up on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It works at synchronising the work of the ministries as well as other stakeholders. One of the first steps of the creation of the Danish VNR is the ministerial assessment based on the 17SDGs progress, which is backed-up by a statistical follow-up process by Statistics Denmark. Moreover, the other stakeholders are invited to contribute to the VNR crafting. The civil society is especially encouraged to build an evaluation on the development towards each goal and to give recommendations. This occurs prior to the meetings held with the whole network of national and international stakeholders regarding the input for the action plan and the VNR. Following that, there are different hearings on both the "Leave No One Behind" vision as well as on the action plan as a whole. After the report has been drafted there occur the different peer reviews, which in 2021 were done by Norway and Kenya. Once done, the Government ratifies and approves the document which is presented and discussed in two different appearances: The Sustainable Development Conference 2021 and the "Exam Preparation"

Event at The People's Meeting.

3.1.3. Germany

The German VNR was built hand in hand with the German Sustainable Development Strategy, and drafted by the German government and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities. Building the VNR started in December 2020 with the last edition of the national HLPF. A few months later, Germany held its first public dialogue forum where civilians could give their opinion and feedback on the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Shortly after in April 2021, Germany hosted the annual national HLPF conference, whose outcome was key in writing the upcoming VNR. The German Sustainable Development Strategy is a key instrument for strategically guiding and implementing sustainability in Germany. In May 2021, Germany hosted another public forum resulting from the recent national HLPF for civil society to give feedback on how the VNR was coming along and on the German Sustainable Strategy overall. In June 2021, societal stakeholders were able to give their opinions on the VNR's first draft. Finally, in July 2021 the VNR was officially presented to the HLPF and included the participation of the societal stakeholders.

3.1.4. Norway

The 2021 VNR was coordinated by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation and directly linked its implementation with the 2030 Agenda. On top of following the UN voluntary common reporting guidelines, the Norwegian VNR was inspired and based on the 2020 Finnish VNR. Prior to drafting the VNR, in April 2020 the State Secretaries' committee for sustainable development goals was formed. Additionally, in February 2021 a redactory group within the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation was given the tasks to write and review the whole process of writing the VNR. In making the document come to life, various ministries and government agencies contributed to its review. Finally, the Danish and Indonesian governments who peer reviewed the draft before its publication. Norway highlights the importance of feedback it received on the VNR draft not only from Denmark and Indonesia but also from national stakeholders from the private sector, from educational institutions such as universities, as well as from its regional and local governments through the form of Voluntary Local Reviews.

3.1.5. Spain

The Spanish tracking and monitoring of SDG achievement is a reflection of the data provided by the Autonomous Communities of the country. Within the VNR one can see a thorough breakdown of the objectives of each Autonomous Community in place to challenge the issues linked to one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The involvement of regional authorities in the data complement process enables for a holistic approach at tracking the SDGs. In this regard, despite the potential procedural density of such a thorough breakdown, it is evident that Spain's commitment to SDG achievement is present at every level of its administration. As per the VNR, more than 68% of the goals within the 17 SDGs must be completed at a regional level.[40]

Furthermore, it is evident that governmental involvement has been present since the beginning of the initiative. Spain at first, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of implementing the goals in Spain implemented a Plan for Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2018, providing Levelled Measures and General Measures for the dissemination of the culture of the 2030 agenda within the whole administration. This was then emphasised with the creation of the Ministry of Social Progress and the 2030 Agenda and the subsequent establishing of the High Council for the Agenda, in a bid to implement inclusiveness amongst the different actors in the VNR, with the inclusion of social policies, an economic dimension and an environmental dimension.

3.1.6. Sweden

Consultations took place for the Swedish government to engage with the different stakeholders and hear out the different perspectives and to make sure that those perspectives are included in the report. For instance, through holding special youth consultations with the United Nations Association of Sweden, the young people and children perspectives were included.

Sweden highlights the importance of learning and partnerships. Peer learning has been an important part of creation of the VNR. Sweden engaged in peer learning with Spain and Colombia and took part in a virtual study trip to Finland. From that Sweden learnt that it is important to base the VNR on established networks and structures. Existing strategic documents and reports

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[40] THE 2030 AGENDA Through the eyes of local and regional governments' associations via https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CEMR-PLATFORMA-SDGs-2020.pdf

should be utilised to the maximum. Sweden also recognizes the importance of recent data and its analysis. In parallel with the VNR, Sweden has also done Voluntary Local Reviews between municipalities.

3.2. PARTNERSHIPS

Table 6. European countries' various partnerships

This table sorts out each nation's partners in three core categories (Governmental, Private and Civil Society) depending on their nature. Additionally, the partnerships were found in the countries' VNRs.

Countries	Governmental Partnerships	Private Partnerships	Civil Society Partnerships
Czech Republic	The Ministry of Environment The Ministry of Regional Development The Czech Statistical Office The Czech Environmental Information Agency Technology Agency of the Czech Republic	Local Action Groups (LAGs)	The Czech Council of Children and Youth
Denmark	The Danish Ministry of Finance The Danish Government (all ministries) The Danish Parliament Regional and Local and regional governments: Danish Regions Local Government Denmark Gladsaxe Municipality The City of Copenhagen Sønderborg Municipality Guldborgsund Municipality Vejle Municipality Aarhus Municipality Government of Norway (peer review) Government of Kenya (peer review) The 2030 Panel and The Council for Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Goals (expert panels related to the parliament and government) The University of Southern Denmark UNESCO	The Confederation of Danish Industry Global Compact Network Denmark The Danish Agriculture & Food Council The Danish Chamber of Commerce	Global Focus and the Danish 92 Group The Danish Youth Council Oxfam IBIS Global Seniors European Anti-Poverty Network Denmark (EAPN) Fødevarebanken Danish Red Cross Save the Children Denmark The Danish Family Planning Association (DFPA) KULU – Women and Development DIGNITY The National Union of Students in Denmark World's Best News Danner The Women's Council Denmark Danish Refugee Council The Danish Society for Nature Conservation Global Aktion Greenpeace Amnesty International Denmark The Danish United Nation Association ActionAid Care Denmark Danish Refugee Council WWF Denmark Our Fish RIKO New Europe

Countries	Governmental Partnerships	Private Partnerships	Civil Society Partnerships
Germany	The Association of German Cities The German Association of Counties The German Association of Towns and Municipalities Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) World Food Programme (WFP) International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	The Federation of German Industry (BDI) German Nutrition Society (DGE) The German Trade Union Confederation (DGB)	German NGO Forum on Environment and Development Jugenddelegierte Für Nachhaltige Entwicklung Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid (VENRO)
Norway	Ministry of Education and Research Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation World Trade Organisation (WTO) Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) The Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU) Council on Ecumenical and International Relations Government of Indonesia (peer review) Government of Denmark (peer review)	Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)	National Union of Students in Norway (NSO) Sex og Politikk (IPPF Norway) The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) The Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment (ForUM) Debt Justice Norway Save the Children The Rainforest Foundation Norway The Church of Norway The Norwegian Federation of Cultural Heritage Organisations Sustainable Living Norway Norwegian Church Aid (member of ACT Alliance) Norwegian People's Aid The United Nations Association of Norway
Spain	Autonomous Community Legislators Ministry for the Economy & Digital Transformation Ministry of Agriculture, Nourishment & Fishing World Health Organisation OECD (peer review)	IBEX Companies through the National Survey Consultation processes. SME Companies that also partook in the Consultation Process.	Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE). Trade Unions (UGT, CCOO)
Sweden	The Swedish Agency for Public Management Statistics Sweden Government of Spain (peer review) Government of Colombia (peer review)	Stockholm Environment Institute the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise Association of Local Authorities and Regions	Barometern 2020 The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (LSU) Barometer Gen Z

3.2.1. Czech Republic

The VNRs are prepared through collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry

of Regional Development, the Czech Statistical Office as well as the Czech Environmental

Information Agency. The assessment reports are made by the ministries through cooperation. The assessment reports are largely used as sources of information included in the VNR. The Ministry of Environment plays a key role in the coordination of the implementation of the Agenda 2030. The Czech Council of Children and Youth provided the young people's perspective through conducting surveys and gathering data. It is evident in the VNR that the young people's perspective played an important role.

3.2.2. Denmark

The coordinating body for both, implementing the 2030 Agenda within Denmark and tracking the SDGs progress within the nation, is the Danish Ministry of Finance. This is responsible for collaborating with all ministries, which are in charge of integrating the SDGs within national policies to upgrade them and make them more efficient and sustainable. Moreover, the Danish Parliament also takes a strategic role in the creation of the VNR, especially since the creation of the 2030 Network. A network who has appointed the 2030 Panel, which works as an advisor to the legislative and has a specific focus on green SDGs as well as on the Leave No-One Behind agenda. Another expert group involved in the elaboration of the report is the Council for Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development Goals. Further, it would be worth mentioning that the Danish Government as a whole operates hand in hand with Statistics Denmark when it comes to curating data.

The civil society, the private sector and other academic institutions also play a part in the VNR's crafting process. For instance, Global Focus and the Danish 92 Group as well as The Danish Youth Council presented an overview of key lessons learned and changes that have occurred since the previous VNR from the civil society's perspective. The Confederation of Danish Industry, among others, has dedicated a chapter on changing views of sustainability within the business community. As for academic organisations, both the University of Southern Denmark and UNESCO contributed with their research. Lastly, Danish regions and municipalities also have described their actions towards achievement of the SDGs and how they are tracking the process. For instance, The Municipality of Gladsaxe is the first Danish municipality to prepare a Voluntary Local Review (VLR).

3.2.3. Germany

Perhaps the most important one is the Federation of German Local Authority Associations whose bodies have taken a key role in enabling the country's sustainability strategy at the local level. Indeed, the three main bodies of the GLA have followed the 2030 Agenda to implement SDG goals as part of the local policies. Their work also included the tracking of SDG activities which allowed for localising SDG programs depending on needs. This work was reported through the Voluntary Local Reviews of German Cities.

Partnerships were also made with the private sector where the Federation of German Industries and the German Trade Union Confederation. The former launched the Circular Economy Initiative in trying to solve conservation issues and supply chain problems with a recycling and upcycling approach in hopes of creating a functioning circular economy via technological tools.

Additionally, public entities such as the German NGO Forum on Environment and Development, the Germany's Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development, and the Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid NGOs gave their feedback on the VNR as well as perspectives as to better implement the SDGs for a transformational future. These included insights such as implementing cross-cutting themes in schools and universities to shape minds and find more innovative solutions in the short and long term future.

3.2.4. Norway

Something Norway prides itself on is the improvements the country has made in terms of partnerships and their effectiveness compared to the last VNR. One of the main Norwegian stakeholders is the Forum for Development and the Environment (ForUM) which is a network of 50 NGOs. The ForUM played a key role in coordinating participation and discussion between relevant actors such as the Advisory Policy Coherence Council and civil society. Moreover, the ForUM took part in the VNR writing process by coordinating the progress report on each SDG in Chapter 6.2

Additionally, Norway received great support from educational institutions such as the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). The institution not only took part in a peer review process

of the VNR but also various research programs all aimed at developing policy mechanisms to facilitate sustainable development. Working hand in hand with the National Committee for the 2030 Agenda, NMBU is currently working on a research database to collect and administer new initiatives and ideas relevant to the SDGs as part of their cross-disciplinary courses and across faculties nationally and internationally in order to promote SDG-focused teaching globally.

3.2.5. Spain

Spain has put a strong emphasis on having educational institutions as a stakeholder in the development of the 2030 SDG Agenda. With regard to the Spanish university community, there are several initiatives to promote this; mainly through the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE). Among them, the creation, in March 2019, of the CRUE Commission for the 2030 Agenda proves particularly important, having been established to promote the implementation of the SDGs in the university system, enabling their later permeation into broader society.

Another key stakeholder for the Spanish development of the SDG Agenda has been Trade Unions with Spanish officials valuing bipartite social dialogue between trade union and business organisations as established by law and tripartite dialogue that includes the Government.

The private sector, however, by volume of participants is the largest non-governmental stakeholder in the Spanish 2030 Agenda. A clear example of this is the public consultation with the private sector that the Secretary of State for the 2030 Agenda has carried out together with the Spanish Network of the United Nations Global Compact in 2020 where more than 1,900 companies participated. The aim was to obtain a clearer diagnosis of the degree of knowledge and contribution of the private sector to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Spain. 81% of the companies consulted are aware of the SDGs and 89% affirm that their activity can have an impact on the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, as per the 2021 VNR, 60% of the SMEs consulted and 40% self-employed workers are developing specific implementation measures related to the SDGs, demonstrating a tangible effort in favour of sustainable development, with numerous private entities, platforms and business groups that are developing actions aimed at achieving the transformations proposed by the Sustainable Development Goals.[41]

[41] Voluntary National Report of Spain, 2021

3.2.6. Sweden

The VNR is based on the report by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, Statistics Sweden's reports and Sweden's government bill. The government created several networks to facilitate collaboration between the different government agencies. A network of government agencies containing 70 relevant agencies within the government has been established and headed by Statistics Sweden. This particular network consists of designated contacts from actors directly responsible for individual indicators who contribute data. This is a way to promote interactive progress on the follow-up.

The government has appointed a group of previously 6 and now 16 state secretaries who hold meetings every month. In those meetings they exchange information on the progress in their area and present reports. The business sector, civil society, particularly the civil society review Barometern 2020, and other non-governmental actors engaged in the creation of the report. The National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations has played an important role as well.

3.3. DATA: CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS IN MEASURING SOME SDGS INDICATORS

Table 7. European countries' main data challenges and limitations

The following table depicts the main challenges the six countries have encountered when it comes to tracking SDG progress. These challenges were identified by the research group with information from the countries' VNRs.

Countries	Data Challenges & limitations
Czech Republic	Missing data; half of the indicators do not have sufficient data Lack of relevant data to assess the impact of public policies
Denmark	38 out of the total 247 indicators' assessments are missing due to shortages of data. Issues transforming UN's global goals into national policies. (e.g: Denmark has not established an official national poverty line and it does not compile continuous and official statistics on extreme poverty)

Countries	Data Challenges & limitations
Germany	Usage of their own indicators instead of following the UN guidelines Lack of data collected to compute trends in which progress has been aheaded
Norway	Lack of data collected to compute trends in which progress has been aheaded (9.3% of the indicators' trends could not be measured)
Spain	Lack of trust in public institutions from the Central Government. Statistical incoherence between Governmental Organisations Lack of continuity at the Spanish INE, hindering statistical continuity Creation of new indicators possibly creates statistical confusion, diminishes clarity
Sweden	The set of indicators used on a local level (municipalities) is inconsistent Limited data on certain topics (e.g. honour-related violence, national minorities, LGBTQAI persons)

3.3.1. Limitations in measuring indicators when tracking SDG progress

In recent years, many European countries have made significant efforts to come up with sustainable development initiatives and implement them as part of their respective national frameworks. Yet, despite substantial improvements, a recurring issue the region faces is measuring key indicators when tracking the progress of specific SDGs. For example, Germany faced challenges in tracking the trends of most SDG12 indicators. While the country's data collection allowed for an adequate assessment of how far Germany was from achieving responsible consumption and production, their VNR failed to measure in what direction this past year's progress leaned. Limitations included measuring the country's trends regarding how much electronic and plastic wastes were produced in 2021 compared with the previous year. Another challenge in terms of measuring progress is that data for certain indicators is missing. For instance, in the case of Czech Republic only half of the indicators have sufficient data and when data is available it is sometimes not processed in a way that allows for an effective assessment of public policies. Spain is also facing challenges due to the lack of homogeneity in the indicators used to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

On the other hand, despite some issues regarding data collection for trends, good practices were introduced. Indeed, while Germany had issues measuring waste emissions and CO_2 emission embodied in imports, the country included measures of raw material waste, energy consumption and CO_2 emissions caused by private households. Consequently, a parallel can be made between

the limitations the region faced regarding measurement of data and the good practices their VNRs included to counterbalance their respective gaps. Another way of combating the limitations regarding measurement of data has been introduced by Czech Republic. Czech Republic has developed 140 indicators of the national set for the quality of life. These indicators aim to integrate the viewpoint of the citizens themselves, their perception. However, it must be noted that such data could be considered quite subjective as it reflects perception.

3.3.2. Challenges in verifying the data collected

Another issue faced in the European region is that certain countries face some distrust within their data verification processes. In the case of Spain, discrepancies between the Central Government and the National Institute for Statistics in data veracity created a sense of statistical insecurity. Another problem is the lack of homogeneity in the indicators used to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Testament to this was the establishment by the Ministry of Economy of an unofficial statistic called the 'Indicator Activity Diary' to contrast it with the GDP; this is a measure that will contrast the GDP figures in a bid to make them more accurate, albeit making the process increasingly inefficient. Additionally, a statement by the Spanish National Organisation of Statisticians has been issued a few weeks ago condemning the quality of some public statistics due to the lack of resources from the Ministry, which made its statisticians work not only on indicators that appear in the the National Statistical Plan but also on other experimental statistics that the INE has launched in recent months. Other countries can learn from this as an indication that national homogeneity is needed in order to provide accurate statistics and ultimately create a climate of trust in the data-producing institutions in charge. These changes have been showcased below as Spain swiftly took action through a pledge to establish the Large Companies Unit, approved through Ministerial Order on April 27, 2022, in response to a request from Eurostat to the member states. The creation of this unit will enable the gathering of consistent data from multinational groups for the preparation of statistics which in turn will improve their quality and will make it possible to deepen the information on Foreign Direct Investment activities.

3.3.3. Limitations in measuring SDG indicators due to lack of information

Another challenge faced in the region is that some of the indicators prescribed by the UN do not fit some countries' analysis given a lack of information and data needed to measure said indicators. This is the case of Denmark where 38 SDG indicators out of the total 247 (15%) are not available due to shortages of information. Moreover, it has been determined that 3% of the total number of indicators cannot be applied to Denmark. These two instances occur due to different causes, the main one being that these indicators proposed by the UN are defined within a global paradigm and, thus, some are fairly complicated to apply at the national level. This is equally true for Norway where the Scandinavian VNR couldn't measure current trends for 23 SDG indicators (9.3%) due to insufficient data available.

In addition, there are 95 indicators, which make up for 38% of the total, that cannot be monitored using Danish data[42]. Therefore, their assessment is based on other international evaluations or on a dialogue with diverse organisations. This is not necessarily a drawback if the sources of information used by the nation are trustworthy as it would make the appraisal more objective. Lastly, another good practice carried out by Denmark is that the national progress is contrasted against the international trend of each particular goal to observe where the country lies within a global framework.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 8. Recommendations extrapolated from the analysis of the best practices selected in the study conducted within the 6 European countries

The following table contains four main recommendations, established by the research group, each targeting a specific strategic area. These have been crafted by identifying the core best practices of the nations analysed or by elaborating solutions for their main challenges.

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[42] Calculated using data found within the Danish 2021 VNR

Area	Recommendation
VNRs preparatory process (structural level)	*Roadmap* Provides for a clear structure onto how the data is collected and utilised, showcasing what is collected and for what purpose.
Evaluation of the VNRs quality	*Peer reviews* Grant further global engagement and promote sharing of practices. However, the current peer evaluation can be seen as not fully impartial as nations can select their reviewers. Therefore, it would be beneficial to have a 3rd body (e.g. UN) arranging and monitoring this cooperation
Multilateral governmental approach	*Regional and local governments involvement* Allows for a greater understanding of needs and more efficient policy implementation at the local level. Also grants for an improved monitoring of results. This decentralised approach in dealing with the Agenda 2030 has proven successful in some of the European countries and could be applicable and valuable to other countries.
Cross-sectoral dedication to the creation of the VNRs	*Multi-stakeholder involvement* Allows for a stronger VNR structure as well as grants further objectivity to the report. Moreover, it also further secures the success of the practices framed under the 2030 Agenda at the policy enabling level.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, SDG progress within a European context proves to be favourable. Denmark, Czech Republic, Spain, Norway, Germany and Sweden expressed a clear commitment to the 2030 UN Sustainable Development plan. At the same time, it is evident that climate action commitment and tangible action towards decarbonisation has been the common challenge faced by the six countries. The quest to achieve lowered emissions, larger natural areas protected, or diminish the industrial resources used has proven to be one where insufficient progress has been made. It is evident that economic goals have been largely prioritised over environmental goals. On the other hand, a number of beneficial reforms have also been identified. These best practices include innovations to combat climate change, as seen in the cases of the Czech Republic and Germany; a clear bid to diminish the negative effects of climate change and the externalities of the economy through research and design. Furthermore, social policies such as Sweden's gender mainstreaming

policies have garnered governmental efforts and resulted in great social advancements. Finally, the six European nations that have been at the focus of this study have shown strong institutions and structural synergies at the governmental level, showcasing that a strong system of SDG implementation is a worthy investment and exists within a symbiosis with the rest of SDGs. These findings highlight the importance the countries put on strengthening their internal institutions as the main tool to achieve their broader SDG objectives.

However, challenges remain. Within the data collection process it has been proven that European efforts lack a cohesive approach to assessing indicators. Certain countries such as the Czech Republic have missing or incomplete data, rendering the statistical efforts insufficient in demonstrating real-life patterns that could then be applicable towards SDG attainment. Additionally, there seems to be a miscommunication issue in Denmark, where the government has not defined a threshold for poverty. This issue is also seen in Spain, where the Ministry for the Economy and the National Institute of Statistics have communicated different indicators for measuring widespread quotas in calculating SDG indicators. The general challenge the six countries analysed are facing is therefore this lack of uniformity, which can be directly seen in their differing approaches at drafting and delivering their VNRs. Moving forward, it is imperative that European countries take advantage of their political position as members of the European Community and engage in statistical synergies with one another in an effort to increase efficiency and thus achieve 2030 objectives with greater ease.

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Analysis of Voluntary National Reviews

African Region

Angola, Cabo Verde, Chad, Madagascar, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe.

FACULTY ADVISOR:

Grace Obado

AUTHORS:

Manuela Santos Blanco (5th year Bachelor's Student – Law & International Relations)

Cristina Ortiz Lòpez (5th year Bachelor's Student –Business Administration & International Relations)

Michael Francis Duffy (4th year Bachelor's Student – International Relations)

Wadad Fady Assaf (4th year Bachelor's Student – International Relations)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.   INTRODUCTION

The present report provides a comparative analysis on the progress of the SDGs in seven African countries: Angola, Cabo Verde, Chad, Madagascar, Namibia, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. This research was conducted through a thorough analysis of the respective Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) submitted in July 2021 at the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development. Through understanding the difficulties of the countries in reaching the UN 2030 Agenda the research question proposed is: *To what extent have partnership building and the limitations to data collection affected the progress of SDG targets in the African region?*

The report carefully evaluates not only the content and the measures taken by each country, but also the structure of each state's VNR. For this reason, the report is organised into SDG Regional Context Analysis and Measurement Process Analysis which is explained by countries in an alphabetical order in each section: emerging challenges, best practices, planning and process, partnerships and data. The content focuses on tracking the measures in each country and analysing to what extent SDG indicators are being reached in order to compare within the region and internationally. Also, the analysis goes further in understanding the impediments and reasons why in some cases very little has been done.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a large setback for the region, as well as the rest of the world, the African region has remained focused on improving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as reporting their progress through the countries' respective VNRs. In this sense, at the end of the present research there are some proposed recommendations to each country in accordance with what was provided in the VNRs. It is important to highlight that each recommendation is done in accordance with the scenario and need of that particular country. Lastly, it is equally important that countries take into account the best practices of "neighbouring countries" - i.e. from the same region - in order to inspire future multi-partner strategic plans.

SDG REGIONAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

I.   BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS IN THE REGION

Throughout each of the respective states' VNRs, there are common difficulties that are descriptive of the current state of African development: poverty, economic and social inequality, and environmental imbalances. Unproductive partnership building and insufficient data collection have been recognized as two vulnerabilities that the studied African countries have in terms of SDG development.. However, with the continued effort to achieve the 17 SDGs around the world, promising results have been seen in Africa, as detailed through the seven states' 2021 VNRs. There has been noticeable progress on the fronts of; health environment, climate resilience, gender equality, and sustainable consumption and exploitation of resources. Though the African states have made progress since the emergence of the Sustainable Development Agenda of 2030 in 2015, the COVID-19 Pandemic is one of the major shocks that have setback much of the respective advancements. Nonetheless, each of the states in this report have made an effort to build back better towards their involvement in the SDGs and sustainable development within their governments. While it is equally important to understand the progress these states have made before the pandemic, understanding how these states have progressed will provide a better picture for the years to come. Finally, the region counts with many national plans, international treaties as well as Africa Union's agenda 2063 which add to the goals set on the 2030 Agenda.

II.   EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE REGION
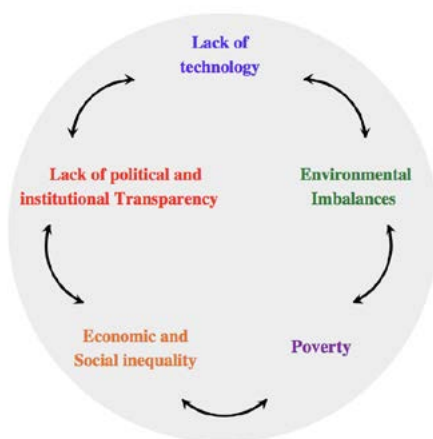
It is important to highlight that the challenges and difficulties faced by the African region should be carefully taken into account when analysing the sustainable development of the countries in order to understand the barriers it creates for the progress and impact of the SDGs.

Angola

Even though the Republic of Angola is part of many national, regional and international strategies, the main challenges faced in the country have shown to be cyclical and interconnected once the combination between: (1) low economic diversification, (2) lack of infrastructure and technology, (3) the effects of climate change, and (4) the large portion of the population working in informal jobs, is what impede the evolution of every sector.

The economic sector in Angola is mainly composed by the commercialization of oil and diamond extraction, that is why there is an aim to accelerate economic diversification while trying to keep the economy stable - especially after the pandemic[1]. In this context, the country faces challenges in terms of basic infrastructure, mostly in relation to access to water and energy. For this reason, technological advancements have shown to be very slow in comparison with other countries, ranking last position on the Global Innovation Index 2021[2]. The will of reducing structural inequality by improving the quality of education and professional skills of young people is shaken by a lack of investment in technology and research. Furthermore, the fact that the Angolan economy is highly dependent on oil extraction directly contributes to gender and social inequalities in the country since the field is strongly predominant by men. Additionally, Angola is located in a region which is subject to environmental consequences which severely affects every aspect in the country (SDG 13). Being vulnerable to floods and droughts as well as the effects of El niño, really impact the development of the cities hitting from the food production until impeding children going to school. This helps understand why 8 in 10 people work informal jobs - specially women - and more than 30% of the population fall under the international poverty line **(SDG 1)**[3].

Cabo Verde

At the time of the Voluntary National Review's production, the Cabo Verdean Government worked with the state's Strategic Sustainable Development Plan (PEDS) 2017-2021 for the national implementation of the SDGs. The PEDS looked to solve the various problems the Cabo Verdean

[1] 2022. Unctad.Org. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/aldcinf2021d6_en.pdf.
[2] 2022. Wipo.Int. https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_gii_2021.pdf.
[3] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/286012021_VNR_Report_Angola.pdf

society faced due to climate change and other risks in relation to sustainable development. However, due to the number of internal and external shocks that put the island at risk, it remains a challenge for the further implementation of the SDGs.

For one, Cabo Verde's municipal and financial weaknesses are impediments to the progress towards the SDGs. Funding of the PEDS plan is also going to remain a challenge as Cabo Verde needed to rely on increasing domestic public revenues due to low domestic savings, soaring public debt, low FDI, and weak financial markets. Additionally, municipal governments receive funding from proportional transfers from the national government and also from tax revenues. With this dynamic, it is clear that with financial problems still at the forefront of the state, Cabo Verde will be tested with the integration of the upcoming PEDS plan 2022-2026. If Cabo Verde is unable to solve some of the root causes of its contemporary challenges, it will continuously experience difficulty in the realisation of its SDG targets.

COVID-19 was also an emerging challenge for Cabo Verde at the time of the VNR production, as it was for every developing country. The pandemic put the economy through a recession of 14.8%, which deteriorated the progress made on the economic front. National unemployment increased to 14.5%, while exacerbating rural/urban inequalities as the rural population saw higher rates of inactivity (Cabo Verde VNR). All of these challenges were a setback for SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), however due to the pandemic, Cabo Verde saw an opportunity in strengthening health security (SDG 3), diversification of the economy (SDG 8), and eradicating poverty (SDG 1), as methods of comeback in the recovery stage.

Chad

In the 2021 VNR, the Republic of Chad evaluated one of three National Development Plans that follow the African Union 2063 as well as the 2030 SDG Agenda. Unfortunately, there are certain challenges that threaten the plan. A lack of mobilisation of resources can be seen in all areas of the country's efforts toward sustainable development. Chad has not had the capacity to create public administrations in areas such as strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation of public policy which is crucial to the implementation of the SDGs.

Chad has faced both an economic recession and environmental depletion but only the impact of

changes in oil prices is captured in the VNR. The depletion of Lake Chad, which has exacerbated poverty and conflict in the region, is barely mentioned. Lake Chad's water level has decreased by 90% since the 1960s[4] which has resulted in acute malnutrition in children **(SDG 2)**, displaced families, and conflict between herders and farmers over the remaining water supply. As a result, more than 85% of the population lives in multidimensional poverty **(SDG 1)**[5]. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had a large impact on unemployment and the health of overall economic activity.

Conflicts in neighboring countries and invasions from terrorist group Boko Haram create larger military and refugee costs as well as the cost of anti-terrorism operations. This leaves a small budget to help fund efforts to redress gender disparity in the country. Women, especially those in rural areas, are disproportionately affected when it comes to economic and political participation and opportunities, education and literacy, poverty, and even survival — there is a high female mortality rate **(SDG 3)**[6] due to inadequate medical care for pregnant and postpartum women.

Madagascar

Like other developing countries, Madagascar faces many problems due to the lack of institutional strength that often comes with development. Madagascar faces difficulties in the financing of policies for the realisation of the SDGs - which remains one of its institutional weaknesses. This dynamic in Madagascar has affected the country's ability to bridge regional divides, such as rural/ urban electricity connectivity and other indicators such as gender equality, both exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic challenges have persisted in Madagascar due to low economic diversification, reliance on external sources of aid, and lack of foreign investment, stunting the progress the government aspires to achieve through the Emergence Plan of Madagascar.

Lacking strong institutions and infrastructure will remain a challenge for Madagascar with the current threat of climate change (SDG 16). Being an island nation, Madagascar's regions of Anasy, Androy, and Ihrombe are noted in the VNR as being the most vulnerable to climate shocks. On a

[4] "Drying Lake Chad Basin Gives Rise To Crisis". 2022. Africa Renewal. https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2019-march-2020/drying-lake-chad-basin-gives-rise-crisis.
[5] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28099TCHAD_ENV_2021_VERSION_FINALE_23_06_21.pdf
[6] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28099TCHAD_ENV_2021_VERSION_FINALE_23_06_21.pdf

national scale, Madagascar also underlines the risk of rice production due to the increased risks of floods, drought, and cyclones, highlighting the island's link between hunger and climate change. This was also seen by a European Union study, underlining that Madagascar did not have a durable food system for national production and consumption (SDG 13).

Namibia

The government of Namibia has set objectives for its economic sector to address the creation of decent work and national economic development (SDG 8). Namibia has experienced weak economic growth due to ongoing droughts, which has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic as evidenced by the country's worst ever economic decline of 8% in 2020 as seen in the country's VNR. The pandemic has also caused an estimate of 3.5% of businesses to close, which resulted in many people losing their jobs, with the tourism sector being one of the most affected. The GDP per capita growth (percent) has also slowed, pointing to a general decline in the average economic worth of its citizens. Despite the government's goal of lowering unemployment rates to 24.2% by 2022, the jobless rate has remained at a high of 33.4% since 2018. Furthermore, the Namibian government has set forward the goal of ending poverty in the country (SDG 1) as a key priority task. According to the 2015/2016 official figures, the proportion of poor and extremely poor households in the population is still expected to be respectively 10.7% and 17.4%, with poverty in Rural areas having a greater rate of poverty 25.1% than metropolitan areas 8.6%.

[7]Ensuring gender equality (SDG 5) is a second objective Namibia has concentrated on and advanced in. In terms of promoting gender equality, women's and girls' empowerment, and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, Namibia has achieved major advances. Out of 156 countries, Namibia is rated sixth on the global gender gap index. However, there is still violence against women in the nation, with 18.4% of child marriages still occurring and young girls still experiencing sexual assault. In Namibia in 2020, 1080 incidents of both physical and sexual harassment were reported. These numbers were mostly attributed to the lockdowns that COVID-19's impacts caused.

[7] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279462021_VNR_Report_Namibia.pdf

[8]Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's Medium Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) follows both the African Union's agenda as well as the 2030 SDG agenda. However, the effects of COVID-19 pandemic halted and even undermined the country's progress. The brunt of the pandemic was felt mainly through Sierra Leone's economy; it was operating below capacity as unemployment increased significantly. This had a large impact on food insecurity in the country, rising by 41% in 6 months (SDG 2)[9] .

Now more than ever, thanks to the impacts of COVID-19 on poverty, it is important for Sierra Leone to improve their resource targeting for the extremely poor (SDG 1). By accurately providing feasible targets that reflect the needs of the extremely vulnerable and unequal communities, resources can efficiently be mobilised accordingly. In addition to resource targeting, there is a need for investment in human capital for long term, sustainable solutions.

Lastly, the 2021 VNR report highlights the challenges to implementation (SDG 17). Efficiency of resources is important to Sierra Leone after so many were used for COVID relief. Optimisation of these resources relies on digital penetration of the country, but there is a divide between regions in this regard and therefore linking the districts has become a challenge. In rural areas especially, financial inclusion is a challenge due to limited mobile network coverage. Also, data systems and reporting require a large investment to manage for development results.

Zimbabwe

The Republic of Zimbabwe, through their National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) contemplates its Vision 2030 in order to properly implement the SDGs in the country. Vision 2030 is Zimbabwe's commitment to improving the lives of their people and sustainably managing their environment without excluding any involved parties from the expected benefits. It seems to be clear that the main challenges that Zimbabwe faces nowadays, in social terms, are related to health issues and management, climate and agriculture, as well as political and economic issues.

[8] Ibid
[9] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279542021_VNR_Report_Sierra_Leone.pdf

Numerous difficulties for the nation fall under this category in terms of the climate and agriculture. Climate change and the deterioration of sustainable food production systems provide obstacles to the urgent need to end hunger, assure food security, enhance nutrition, and progress sustainable agriculture (SDG 2). Droughts, cyclones, and floods have all had a negative impact on the nation as a result of environmental issues. Additionally, drought and erratic rainfall increased the Global Hunger Index (GHI) score from 28.8 in 2016 to 34.4 in 2019 with a decrease in food production.[10] The Covid restrictions also had an impact on agricultural services and delivery, as well as the execution of new initiatives. The rise in neonatal mortality has been one of the biggest obstacles in the fight to promote healthy lives and well-being for all people of all ages (SDG 3). For the past 15 years, the neonatal mortality rate has been about 31 per 1000 live births[11]. Hepatitis B and C, cervical cancer, and HIV testing and treatment are not fully integrated nor is funding. The considerable stigma associated with treating malaria and tuberculosis in Zimbabwean society causes treatment to be postponed. Apart from this, there is insufficient psychosocial patient and family support, and inadequate funding for Malaria control in 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding the country's political and economic difficulties, Zimbabwe has decided to concentrate on eliminating all forms of poverty worldwide (SDG 1). However, the anticipated 6 million individuals living below the food poverty level in 2019 climbed to almost 8 million in 2020.[12] The Covid-19 pandemic also increased inflationary pressures and caused the economy to slow down, further exacerbating the issues and existing weaknesses in the nation.

III.   BEST PRACTICES IN THE REGION

Angola

In each of the areas covered by the SDGs, the Republic of Angola has been actively promoting legislations and policies in order to tackle it apart from numerous Presidential decrees on specific sectors. Assertive programs and policies as well as budget allocations are the main investment strategies in areas such as Health, Environment, Gender Equality, Social Protection, Human Rights,

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[10] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279562021_VNR_Report_Zimbabwe.pdf
[11] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279562021_VNR_Report_Zimbabwe.pdf
[12] Ibid

and Education.

In the health system there has been not only an improvement in the number of health professionals but also an increase in materials and even in the number of hospitals and biology laboratories due to the pandemic. Also, climate actions (SDG 13) have shown to be so successful by working through small communities in preserving it and strengthening the citizens skills that can serve as an example for the region. In addition to that, being a Member State of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) has contributed immensely to the development and preservation of the Angolan environment. Examples such as 90% reduction[13] in coal emission and an improvement on soil fertility management in key production areas, has shaken the growth of the country with long-term strategies.

In terms of gender equality (SDG 5) most projects still need to be approved such as the Gender Observatory, however, the efforts to fight the structural inequality between the genders are clear, and have proven to be efficient. There are numerous legal instruments in place directed to many different obstacles - from cultural rights to representation in politics (Law 22/10). Additionally, the creation of a new ministry focused on the protection of social vulnerable groups and gender equality (MASFAMU) has been playing an important role since its creation by strengthening ties with Unicef and the UN[14] as well as finding different partnerships to implement its projects[15].

Cabo Verde

Though Cabo Verde faces many challenges and vulnerabilities due to its profile as a SID state, the island has made considerable progress on SDG 3 and SDG 13. According to the UN Sustainable Development Report,[16] Cabo Verde has achieved the latter target of climate action.

In terms of health services, Cabo Verde has been regarded as one of the most successful in Africa[17].

[13] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/286012021_VNR_Report_Angola.pdf

[14] "Jornal De Angola - Notícias - MASFAMU Reforça Parceria Com A ONU". 2022. Jornal De Angola. https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/detalhes.php?id=422710.

[15] "Jornal De Angola - Notícias - Masfamu Reforça Apoio A Famílias Vulneráveis". 2022. Jornal De Angola. https://www.jornaldeangola.ao/ao/noticias/masfamu-reforca-apoio-a-familias-vulneraveis/.

[16] BPOA (1994) - Barbados Programme Of Action .:. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform". 2022. Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/conferences/bpoa1994.

[17] Corporation, International Finance. "Healthy Partnerships : How Governments Can Engage the Private Sector to Improve Health in Africa." Open Knowledge Repository. World Bank, January 1, 1970. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2304.

According to the VNR, Cabo Verde has worked with the private health sector to create PPPs, improving national and regional medical infrastructure. Besides infrastructure, Cabo Verde has also seen decreases in preventative diseases such as Tuberculosis, Hepatitis, and HIV from 2017 to 2019. Though Cabo Verde still has to work on other aspects of health, such as circulatory diseases and infant mortality, the work the state has done for preventable diseases and partnership building should stand as a model for the rest of the developing world.

Cabo Verde's VNR also underlines the commitment to climate action as one of its best practices in terms of SDG achievement. Cabo Verde has made it a priority to ratify international conventions to minimise the country's contribution to the damaging effects of climate change as well as incorporating international conventions into domestic policy. Education on climate change alongside the traditional theme of citizenship, is the method through which Cabo Verde personalised the fight against climate change. Cabo Verde, in the end, looks to increase the relationship that the public and private sectors interact with the fight against climate change, which is through improving current climate practices.

Chad

Despite the challenges faced by Chad, the 2021 VNR shows a country determined in laying down the crucial foundation for future sustainable development. Chad has started new programs, reformed regulations and created new institutions to build lasting change. This has resulted in progress in healthcare, the environment, and gender inequality.

Regarding health, there has been improvement in access to health care, hospital infrastructure, and training for doctors and midwives (SDG 3). The government has also implemented universal health coverage, and a Soins Obstétricaux Néonataux d'Urgence (SONU) health facility to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality rates. As a result, there has been an increase in the proportion of births attended by qualified health personnel.

Additionally, as for the environment, there has been an increase in the primary use of clean fuels and technology (SDG 7) due to the subsidised prices of butane gas and regulation prohibiting the excessive cutting of trees. Also, Chad has created a National Action Plan for natural disaster preparedness, response, and risk reduction.

Futhermore, Chad has prohibited child marriage under the National Gender Policy and Action Plan. Human trafficking, labour, and sexual exploitation are now officially criminalised, as well. Lastly, as for gender inclusion, Chad has created a National Commission for the Reintegration of Refugees and Repatriated Women that implements international legal instruments for refugee women and asylum seekers (SDG 10).

Madagascar

The Government of Madagascar, at the time of the production of the VNR, underlined the importance of the Emergence Plan of Madagascar, highlighting 13 points the country must work towards, aligning with the SDGs. Though, Gender Equality is not specified in the list, it is one of the SDGs that Madagascar is more successful in, according to the Sustainable Development Report[18]. Madagascar has also seen progress on an economic level despite its difficulties stipulated in the Emerging Challenges section.

In terms of Gender Equality, Madagascar has seen an increased amount of women serving in the National Assembly and other high importance positions of the government. However, though the proportion of women in the national assembly did not dramatically increase from 2018, the VNR notes an increase in legislatures being presided over by women as noticeable progress. According to the 2021 VNR, Madagascar has also seen more civil society organisations looking to aid in the fight against gender-based descrimination. There has also been legislation passed by the national government to guarantee equal protections in the workplace. Other than the ratio of female-male labour force participation rates and education being equal, Madagascar has made substantive progress towards SDG 5.

SDG 13 is also one of the SDGs that Madagascar has achieved according to the Sustainable Development Report[19]. The VNR also underlines the multiple strategies that the state has taken, with the meteorological sector to improve alert systems and studies on potential natural disasters, exacerbated by climate change. Due to the challenges climate change poses to the island, it has

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[18] 2022. "Sustainable Development Report 2022". Dashboards.Sdgindex.Org. https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/madagascar.
[19] "Sustainable Development Report 2022". 2022. Dashboards.Sdgindex.Org. https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/madagascar.

remained a top priority for the Government of Madagascar.

Namibia

The Namibian government implemented a number of plans and policies as part of its attempts to implement the SDGs for the development of the nation in order to raise the standard of living of its citizens to that of their counterparts in the developed world by 2030. Namibia's fifth National Development Plan (NDP5), which is fully connected with the SDGs, aims to implement and realise the goals and aspirations of Namibia's long-term vision 2030. The SDGs' pillar on inclusive growth and shared prosperity serves as the inspiration for the NDP5, which aspires to promote inclusive, sustainable, and equitable economic growth.

In terms of its economic sector, the government created the Logistics Master Plan with the goal of making the nation an international logistics hub by having safe, effective, and efficient transportation infrastructure and services for social and economic development, creating more jobs, and positioning the nation as one of the African countries with good road infrastructure. This was done in order to ensure a decent workplace and economic development in the country (SDG 8). Namibia's social sector adopted operation Leave No One Behind (LNOB), a commitment by world leaders to eradicate all forms of poverty and to diminish inequalities and vulnerabilities, through social assistance programs. The government was able to use this operation to increase non-contributory grant spending as well as the coverage rate of social grants in the 2020/2021 fiscal year aiding the elderly, the disabled, and children.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Namibian government moved quickly to implement new non-contributory programs in the areas of housing and basic services, economic stimulus and relief packages, that benefited 230 workers as well as the poor and vulnerable population. Additionally, Namibia provided both employee salary protection packages of US$543 million and an Emergency Income Grant of US$37 million, which assisted 769,000 Namibians over the age of 16.[20] Lastly, in an effort to promote women's representation and address gender equality (SDG 5), Namibia adopted a "Zebra-style" parliament, with women making up 48 percent of parliament as of 2019[21].

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[20] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279462021_VNR_Report_Namibia.pdf
[21] Ibid

Sierra Leone

The Republic of Sierra Leone, has mainly focused on two SDGs (4 and 16) which lay down to other goals covering most of them (9 out of 15), so efforts in these two main sectors are expressively present. As an example, the country has made progress in following the commitments of the International Conference on Population Development (ICDP) which address many different goals by mostly focusing on SDG 16. Additionally, by establishing the Special Court within the High Court of Sierra Leone for corruption cases, there has been a significant improvement in the number of cases, being noticeable through the increase in conventions and by international bodies.

Furthermore, the creation of the Government Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSEP) aimed to turn access to education free and equal for all by promoting high quality schools. This program should be specially highlighted as it has improved SDG 4 from the number of children attending schools to even monetary benefits to the parents, improving the quality of life of the families impacted by the program. The money saved from the schools has been used for many other aspects such as their small business or basic health. Investments in education can transform the African region by reaching many other goals in different sectors, aiming for sustainable development in accordance with the 2030 agenda.

Zimbabwe

The Republic of Zimbabwe has previously implemented a wide range of measures to address its flaws. Zimbabwe is concentrating its efforts on making improvements in a number of areas and activities for the first SDG. The country has adopted an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRS) with aims at reducing the number of people below the food poverty line.

Additionally, since 2017, the government has carried out a number of programs aimed at achieving the second SDG, including eradicating hunger, enhancing everyone's access to healthy food, tripling small-scale farmers' agricultural productivity and earnings, and implementing sustainable food production. Production has increased as a result of these activities, which have also reduced the demand for foreign currency. The Climate Smart Agriculture program (CSA), which aims

to teach agriculture students about climate change and best practices, is one of the policies and techniques the government has employed to fight hunger in the nation. Similar to this, the 2020-launched Agriculture Food Systems Transformation Strategy (AFSTS) intends to boost agriculture productivity and output. Last but not least, we learn that Command Agriculture played a significant role in raising maize production, the second-largest contributor to the agricultural sector and to the GDP of the nation.

Regarding the country's efforts to address good health and well-being (SDG 3), the Zimbabwean government unveiled its first-ever Health Financing Policy and Strategy in June 2018, making it the first nation in the WHO AFRO Region to do so. By implementing several targeted initiatives, the nation saw a decrease in the maternal mortality ratio from 614 in 2014 to 462 in 2019, as well as significant advancements in the control of neglected tropical illnesses (NTDs).[22]

TABLE 1: Key Takeaways from Best Practices per African Country

COUNTRY	BEST PRACTICE	OUTSTANDING SDG
Angola	Acting through local communities to improve citizens' skills to enhance climate action.	13 CLIMATE ACTION
Cabo Verde	Worked with the private sector to improve national health infrastructure- making significant gains in preventable diseases.	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Chad	Universal health coverage, improvement in maternal access to health and training in hospitals.	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Madagascar	Improved the number of women working in high political positions as well as civil society participation	5 GENDER EQUALITY
Namibia	Improved women's representation in the government by adopting a "Zebra-style" parliament.	5 GENDER EQUALITY

COUNTRY	BEST PRACTICE	OUTSTANDING SDG
Sierra Leone	Improved number of children attending schools. Promoting free and equal education.	
Zimbabwe	Decreased the number of people living below the food poverty line by adopting an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRS)	

22 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279562021_VNR_Report_Zimbabwe.pdf

MEASUREMENT PROCESS ANALYSIS

I.   PLANNING & PROCESS

Under the standards of the UN, the planning and process for the VNRs have been similar for all countries. The following section gives an overview of the differences in procedure per country.

Angola

Angola's 2021 VNR was a reflection of the creation of the national SDG platform in 2020, which counted with the participation of many national governmental and non-governmental sectors. The SDG Platform is divided into 4 group topics to facilitate the coverage of every goal. The structure of the VNR is organised by SDG, which shows in detail how the country has been tackling each goal. Angola's 2021 VNR has generally a very clear structure and is easy to follow.

Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde's 2021 VNR was coordinated by the national Ministry of Finance and the execution of the report and executed by the Working Group for the Elaboration of the VNR. The VNR was prepared under the guidelines given by the United Nations and heavily referenced its domestic progress in regards to the national Strategic Sustainable Development Plan 2017-2021. Cabo Verde also displayed their progress through listing each of the SDGs and mentioning the progress made on each subgoal.

Chad

Chads' 2021 VNR vaguely mentions how the review process, and creation of the report itself, is undergone. There is mention to it being a participatory process, but no explanation as to which stakeholder played what role. After most of the SDG's assessments, the VNR has tabulated the challenges and opportunities present. This is a great way to visualise progress, however the content must be more specific.

Madagascar

Madagascar's 2021 VNR was conducted by the Orientation and Follow-up Committee and refers to the methodology that was put forth by the United Nations ECOSOC. Madagascar separated their VNR production into 3 main stages, of which included different members of the Madagash Government such as the ministerial positions who received a questionnaire for the implementation of the VNRs. The VNR is separated into sections of; economic progress, social progress, progress in the natural capital environment, and the transversal SDGs, which then take a deeper look into the country's progress towards each of the SDG subgoals.

Namibia

Namibia's 2021 VNR reports the improvement and development of the SDGs as compared to that of 2018. The VNR is divided by SDG and has a thorough analysis of the country's progress as well as challenges faced. Namibia has fully incorporated the Sustainable Development Agenda into its fifth National Development Plan (NDP5), and as a result, statistics for the SDGs report and other developments that have been agreed upon internationally are directly extracted from annual reports.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's 2021 VNR is the result of the labour of all of the stakeholders, yielding a comprehensible and well-informed report. However, it was based on the impact of policy and the testimonies of beneficiaries of household interventions, rather than established SDG targets. Although this is a strategy that is well adapted to Sierra Leone's efforts in achieving sustainable development, the structure creates incongruity with other country reports and neglects the evaluation of certain targets which skews the presentation of progress in the country.

Zimbabwe

The second voluntary national review of Zimbabwe is intended to monitor the advancement of the SDGs. In order to achieve the SDGs, the consultative process made use of already-existing

institutional frameworks. In order to identify and explain the underlying tendencies and what needed to be done differently moving forward, evaluation reports and secondary research were examined. Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic hindered in-person interactions, progress was assessed by societal participation.

II.   PARTNERSHIPS

Angola

In a country where economic and social inequalities reign, partnerships help the central government implement better policies in a more efficient way as well as sustain the advancements already made. It is clear that the Angolan administration lacks infrastructure and capacity to reach the entire territory and ends up usually focusing on the capital and coastal areas, where it concentrates 60% of the population.[23] For this reason, it is important to highlight its importance and the benefits of it. Throughout the VNR not many partnerships were mentioned and when they were, lacked explanation.

Many strategies to tackle most of the SDGs don't seem to have particular partnerships in Angola. In SDG 7 and 11 is expressly desired partnerships with the private sector but still there is no initiative described to push towards it. Additionally, many collaborations to implement each strategy are done among ministries and other institutions within the government. Such collaborations can be particularly detrimental to its success once it is all concentrated under the scope of the national system. It is important to diversify the partnerships in accordance with the needs and specifics of each sector and SDG, in order to understand which type of partnership will be the best fit.

Cabo Verde

Partnership building and multi-stakeholder participation are mechanisms that Cabo Verde has tried to implement, through multinational agreements. Many of Cabo Verde's partnerships that are stipulated in the VNR are of a multinational nature, as the country did not specify many of the PPPs that were in place at the time of the production of the VNR. Though the VNR calls for increased participation between the public and private sector, the private sector in Cabo Verde is

[23] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/286012021_VNR_Report_Angola.pdf

said have a nature of "feeble participation" with the public sector[24]. Nonetheless, improvements in the area of PPPs are goals for the future of the Cabo Verdean government within the next PEDS 2022-2026 plan.

The Samoa Pathway is one of the agreements between SIDS that aim to provide these countries with a platform to voice common concerns while mobilising efforts for marine protection and sustainable exploitation. The pact has called for the further implementation of the Barbados Program of Action[25] and the Mauritius Strategy[26], while taking into account more recent agreements such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement. This partnership allows Cabo Verde to express the common difficulties of his SIDS profile, while maintaining in high regard other global and regional agreements. Cabo Verde has also seen a number of joint-projects within education, improving progress towards SDG 4. The Cabo Verdean Gender Equality and Equity Institute has worked with the national government to supply teachers with pamphlets regarding gender equality as well as advocating for Law Decree n° 47/2017 to help young mothers retain their education progression SDG 4 and 5. The Alcohol and Other Drugs Coordination Council, as well as the Coordination Council of AIDS also worked to focus on public health and peer education. These partnerships are aimed at reducing inequalities (SDG 10) through the breaking of stigma, as well as progressing education (SDG 4) in Cabo Verde.

Chad

Chad recognises that due to its systemic challenges, progress relies largely on partnerships with international bodies. Although there is much work to be done, partnerships have largely helped Chad lay the necessary groundwork for the future achievement of the SDGs. The VNR also includes all the stakeholders in the review process but the report is vague on what roles each stakeholder played.

[24] Jacinto Abreu Santos in the Cabo Verde 2021 VNR "Another obstacle identified by the municipalities for the effective and timely participation of a large number of local actors is, in particular, the feeble involve- ment of the private sector, even though the current legal framework foresees the principle of public-private partnerships"

[25] "BPOA (1994) - Barbados Programme Of Action .:. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform". 2022. Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/conferences/bpoa1994.

[26] "MSI (2005): Mauritius Strategy Of Implementation .:. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform". 2022. Sustainabledevelopment.Un.Org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/conferences/msi2005.

The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Fisheries in particular has significantly benefited from partnerships in aiding the mobilisation of resources and strengthening its institutional capacity. The UNDP partnered with the ministry to implement the Environment Sector Capacity Building Support Project (PARCE) which has resulted in environmental protection law reform and personnel training. Furthermore, the Economic and Social Council of the UN has helped the national government by reforming public finances with the purpose of optimising public revenues and the statistical apparatus for quality and up-to-date data. The IMF has also provided Chad with a framework to help consolidate public finances. These crucial partnerships are yielding a strong foundation for the progress of the SDGs.

Madagascar

In the 2021 Madagascar VNR, it is clear that the state did not stipulate many private-public partnerships throughout the report. Instead, for Madagascar, the partnerships had a nature of multinational agreements such as the Paris Agreement or the Sendai Framework.

Madagascar has worked to incorporate international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to fight climate change and improve national resilience against climate effects. Though the Sendai Framework is not explicitly a partnership, the framework is designed for multinational cooperation, promoted by the Madagash Government for the achievement of SDG 13, Climate Action.

Additionally, the Government of Madagascar elaborated in the VNR the importance of partnerships when it comes to family planning services. Although there is currently a regional and educational divide in regards to contraception use, the country aims to reduce these disparities. Madagascar currently receives much of the financing for contraceptives from the USAID and the UNFPA, the state also looks to bolster contraceptive access through the Global Family Planning 2030 partnership.

Namibia

Namibia has pledged support for the regional and national development objectives outlined in AU 2063 and the global Agenda 2030. The domestication, ownership, and continuity of the SDGs

depend on extensive consultations with all stakeholders and citizens in establishing policies and priorities, including parliamentarians. Through Namibia's NDP5 plan, the promotion of good governance through effective institutions is supported, strengthening the SDGs' calls for good governance and partnerships. The nation has shown a commitment to creating relationships, processes, and mechanisms with CSOs, international organisations, and the UN to encourage and sustain volunteering as a powerful tool for advancing the SDGs and other development goals. As a result, Namibia's cooperation with international initiatives has been crucial to helping it achieve its objectives. By collaborating with the World Food Programme, Namibia, for instance, developed food banks in six additional regions. The WFP and the Focus Area also created the system for cash operations (SCOPE), a biometric system used for beneficiary registration, with 6,277 families registered[27]. Similarly, in the health sector and under the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) a COVID-19 Emergency Response Programme was carried out in collaboration with UNICEF in 2020 having two sanitation programs executed.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has maintained effective and beneficial partnerships for the last couple of years. Established partnerships and extra funding in the wake of COVID-19 from UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA completed the government's financial resources for the 2021 VNR and made the report possible. Partnerships with NGOs and CSOs are crucial for the development of Sierra Leone but they have limitations of technical and financial resources to increase their contribution. It is important to note that the CSO platform on the SDGs took the lead in local-level data collection across the 16 country districts used in the VNR.

The World Bank has contributed to poverty relief for informal low income workers and small businesses by providing them with financial support. As a result, 39,000 vulnerable[28] households have been aided. In addition to that, the World Food Programme has aided in providing food on behalf of the Sierra Leonean government to primary schools.

Lastly, the government has established public-private sector partnerships dialogue to enhance

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[27] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279462021_VNR_Report_Namibia.pdf
[28] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279542021_VNR_Report_Sierra_Leone.pdf

mobilisation and delivery of resources. However, investment in basic infrastructure is needed to boost the private sector as it is dominated by an informal economy which limits revenue.

Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean government has placed a strong emphasis on forming partnerships with the private sector, civil society, and development partners to guarantee the successful implementation of the SDGs in order to ensure that the seventeenth SDG is realised. Through the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF 2016–2021), the Zimbabwean government established a collaboration with the UN Country Team; the ZUNDAF is essential to ensuring SDGs in Zimbabwe. The UN Country Team is now working with the government and other stakeholders to build the UNSCF (United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework).

The UN provided financial and technical support to the process in a tripartite support structure, working with the World Bank and the African Development Bank, improving dialogue and joint planning between Central and Sub-national Governments. The UN also provided support for budget planning and implementation capacities for local authorities and Central Government. The collaboration with the UN Country Team was amplified during the development of the National Development Strategy (NDS). The government is also reengaging the international community and developing a new debt and arrears clearance strategy, and the country has also adopted zero tolerance to corruption and is capacitating the relevant institutions such as the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) and Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) to address financial leakages and enhance domestic resource mobilisation.

III.   DATA

Angola

Throughout the VNR, when analysing each SDG there has been either a lack of data or outdated ones. Because of this only 190 out of 231 indicators were able to be analysed; apart from this on the VNR is recognized that the numbers mostly prove existence rather than achievement, as only 80% of the necessary data available was eligible to be collected. Therefore, this definitely portrays

a huge obstacle for a sustainable development in the country. The fact that access to data is heterogeneous puts at stake the effectiveness and the scope of the analysis on the VNR. In the majority of the SDGs only few indicators are tackled and these ones are mostly outdated data or used proxy indicators. Even though the VNR itself acknowledges the scale of this problem, it seems that little has been done to harmonise both manual and digital data production. Due to its cyclical and interconnected challenges, the collection of data would be evidently improved with more investment in technology. However, due to the social and political scenario in the country a more decentralised way of collecting data could be an efficient option, leaving it to each province and later gathered by the central government.

Cabo Verde

In Cabo Verde's VNR, there are points in data collection where the country can improve, but also display many promising contributions. In Cabo Verde, there is a dynamic of insufficient data collection to fully measure and highlight the progress of the SDG targets. The VNR also does not fully highlight the disparities between the municipalities of Cabo Verde, limiting the horizontal implementation of the SDGs[29]. With this dynamic existing, it threatens to slow the implementation of the SDGs as the targets are transversal targets which cannot be met without proper data collection.

According to Cabo Verde's VNR, there are only four municipalities out of 22 that have carried out disaster risk assessments. Though the country has created national and municipal frameworks to study post-disaster risk, Cabo Verde has 12 out of 22 municipalities that are ranked between medium to very-high risk of natural disaster and population vulnerability[30]. Because risk assessments allow for governments to take preventative measures to minimise the effect of natural disasters and build resilience, neglecting to carry out these assessments puts the Cabo Verdean population at risk and the implementation of the SDGs, and in turn leaves vulnerable people 'behind'.

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[29] Jacinto Abreu Santos in the 2021 Cabo Verde VNR: ""Another weakness identified is the absence of indicators to measure the targets, impact and progress of the SDGs in a de-aggregated manner for each municipality, thus ensuring the depth, horizontality and breadth of the SDG localization process."
[30] 2022. Pdc.Org. https://www.pdc.org/wp-content/uploads/NDPBA_CPV_Final_Report_English.pdf.

Cabo Verde also lacks on the front of private enterprise participation in data collection. In the VNR, Cabo Verde underlines that in the current commercial code, businesses are not required to report on sustainability. However, according to SDG 12.6, it is advised that states encourage companies to integrate sustainability reporting into their "reporting cycle". As Cabo Verde does not require its business to do so, there is minimal incentive to report on sustainability, which puts the state at a disadvantage to achieving a more sustainable economy, which it aims to do in tourism and blue economy.

Chad

Regular production of quality data is imperative to monitoring the progress of the SDGs and providing insights into the root causes of systemic issues. Unfortunately, Chad's National Statistical System has struggled with this. The lack of sufficient human capital, financing, and operational coordination has led to a dependence on external aid to undergo major data collection operations. The VNR highlights that at an institutional level, the NSS has a weak framework and non-completion of regulatory reforms. The NSS has made an effort to decentralise the monitoring of indicators but in rural areas, the monitoring mechanisms are non-operational. However, the implementation of the National Strategy for Development of Statistics and the establishment of the National Statistical Development Fund is a crucial step forward to strengthen the operational capacity of the NSS.

Regarding data collection, Chad's partnership with the World Bank and the National Institute of Statistics, Economic Studies and Demographics (INSEED) are the most beneficial for the VNR. ECOSIT[31], a series of surveys on poverty and living conditions funded by the World Bank, was crucial in assessing SDGs 1, 3, 8, and 10. However, further data is needed to cover the remaining SDGs, mainly in the environmental sector where the majority of data is from 2016.

Madagascar

One of the difficulties that Madagascar understands through the VNR is the access to statistical data to measure the SDGs. In section 2.2 of the Madagash VNR, the government highlights the

[31] Doe, Johnathan. 2022. "INSEED-TCHAD - ECOSIT 4". Inseed.Td. https://www.inseed.td/index.php/blog-with-right-sidebar/ecosit/110-ecosit-4.

fact that despite there being an accordance between the National Strategy for Statistics and the laws, it is noted to remain a difficult task for the state. The state of Madagascar had prioritised 85 indicators to show the progress made on the front of the SDGs, but were lacking in data collection for others, which was a common problem during the MDGs. Without fixing the current climate of data production and collection, Madagascar will go into its next VNR production round with insufficient data, which will in effect, stunt the progress of SDG tracking.

Namibia

Data that has been used to analyse Namibia's progress toward each SDG throughout the VNR has either been outdated or inaccurate. Despite the fact that a few figures have slightly changed, it is challenging to assess actual progress. For example, the VNR recorded a record-high unemployment rate of 33.4 % since 2018, although the World Bank reports that the unemployment rate in 2018 was 19.88 %[32]. This demonstrates how inaccurate data makes it difficult to accurately showcase any progress, as one of the Namibian government's goals was to lower the unemployment rate to 24.22 % by 2022[33]. The ratio of taxes to GDP serves as another example of inaccurate data. The VNR statistics claim that Namibia has one of the greatest tax revenue to GDP ratios in the world, with total revenue and grants (percent of GDP) estimated to be 33.2 and 30.0 % in 2019/20 and 2020/21, respectively (MoF, 2021).[34] However, the greatest tax-to-GDP ratio in the country was 21.5 % in 2011, according to the OECD revenue statistics, while the ratio grew by 0.8 percentage points from 19.4% in 2018 to 20.2% in 2019.[35]

Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone collection of data differential is the level of participation and engagement of all the sectors of the society: from government officials to disable citizens. Indeed, it is possible to see the efforts of the country in listening to every layer of population by promoting polls, meetings and surveys, conducting assessments and collecting testimonies in every district. Additionally, it is relevant to highlight the cooperation between experts from the Ministry of Planning and Economic

[32] "Overview." World Bank. Accessed July 20, 2022. https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/namibia/overview.
[33] 2021. Sustainabledevelopment.un.org. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279462021_VNR_Report_Namibia.pdf
[34] Ibid
[35] "Revenue Statistics in Africa 2021: En." OECD. https://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/revenue-statistics-in-africa-2617653x.htm.

Development in Freetown and UNICEF when providing an online training for rapid impact assessments as well as many other important institutions that helped the government collect and analyse important data for the country such as the World Bank. However, it is important to highlight that most of the targets set by the Agenda in each SDGs were unable to be tackled due to limitations on the instruments and administrative data. Furthermore, some rapid impact assessments can not be considered accurate such as the case of the results from the Government Free Quality School Education Programme at primary level, sampling 83 schools out of 7,154[36]. Lastly, being Sierra Leone a member of the United Nations Statistical Commission, a training by the Commission on how to better manage and collect data of the SDGs could facilitate the track of the 2030 agenda, similar to what was done in Afghanistan[37]. It is possible to see a good effort and manage of data on a small level which must be expanded to the entire territory.

Zimbabwe

There have been significant advances in Zimbabwe's VNR, however there are still areas where the government can improve. In terms of data collection, while the objective of this VNR procedure was to take a whole-society approach, it was not possible to gather submissions or interview all targeted organisations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having insufficient data that does not represent the nation as a whole complicates the SDGs progress representation. Available data on the performance of key SDG indicators as well as lack of credible data for some SDGs remained an issue. For some of the indicators under SDG 2, such as the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on Food Security Experience, there is a lack of trustworthy data. An issue is still the size and proportion of agricultural households employing irrigation systems in comparison to all agricultural households.

[36] "Facts And Figures On S… | TSC HR Manual". 2022. Hrmanual.Tsc.Gov.Sl. https://hrmanual.tsc.gov.sl/books/13-the-teaching-service-in-sierra-leone/page/facts-and-figures-on-schools-teachers-and-pupils-in-sierra-leone.
[37] 2022. Wesr.Unep.Org. https://wesr.unep.org/media/docs/statistics/egm/environmental_statistics_training_afghanistan.pdf.

IV.   RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to implement the SDGs effectively and raise people' quality of living to the level of their counterparts in the developed world by 2030, some advice that could assist these countries in overcoming obstacles and advancing their national development, and improve future VNRs are provided in this section.

Angola

Angola's main challenge is indeed collection of data, and apart from having outdated data, throughout the VNR there has been some data controversy and even grammar mistakes. It is of ultimate importance that several reviews of the information are carried out on future VNRs. Additionally, many sectors in the country suffer from a lack of harmonisation in both the manual and digital data production, having either contradictory information or no information at all about some units. It is recommended that a decentralised collection of data around the country, done by provinces, is done. The Ministério da Economia e Planeamento could be the one responsible for gathering and transmitting to other ministries the data necessary for the operation of the territory. Lastly, a diversification of partnerships taking into account the needs of each sector shall be taken into account.

Cabo Verde

For Cabo Verde, one of the main challenges it must overcome is the PPPs that it has aimed to accomplish, but seemingly neglected to specify throughout the VNR. As the country also lacks an institutional incentive for private enterprises to report on sustainability, it is advised that the state either create reporting partnerships, or legally bind domestically-operating businesses to do so. Additionally, Cabo Verde must, in the next VNR, underline the regional disparities that are present in the state to fully encompass how the SDGs may be falling behind in some municipalities, relative to others.

Chad

This paper recommends that Chad continue pursuing crucial partnerships that aid in providing

the regulatory, institutional, and operational foundation for sustainable development. Given that up-to-date data is crucial, expanding the work of ECOSIT is advised as well as including regional stakeholders in the collection process to alleviate dependency on external aid. To better reflect the state of climate change and its severe consequences on the Chadian people, future VNRs may consider adding a section dedicated to assessing the impact of the decrease in water level of Lake Chad and the respective efforts taken to mitigate displacement of families, conflict, and environmental depletion.

Madagascar

Madagascar for one, must strengthen the data collection framework that is in place in the state, or else it will likely fail to reach its SDG targets. As previously mentioned, Madagascar aimed to look at 85 SDG indicators, but only was able to look at 61 due to insufficient data. Madagascar should aim to create the institutions to collect sufficient data for the understanding of all of the SDG indicators, to in the end, reach their respective SDG goals.

Namibia

Improvements have been made in Namibia's attempts to address the SDGs and push the nation towards growth. Political stability and good economic management have aided the reduction of poverty and assisted Namibia in reaching upper-middle income status. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has exacerbated social inequities, and structural growth constraints have made it challenging to generate new jobs. Namibia should strive to include additional information and data in the upcoming VNR about the country's inequality, with a focus on the economic inequities caused by the dual economy that is now in place. Namibia should also improve relations with its international partners in order to increase aid and ensure accurate and transparent management of the cash allocated.

Sierra Leone

As previously mentioned, Sierra Leone's VNR is marked by the expressive preference over some specific SDGs. Taking into account the country chose as their main focus only 2 goals and through them, to tackle other 9 goals, portrays an insignificancy towards the other 6 goals. For an

analysis that is comparable to other countries and follows the 2030 agenda, every SDG must be included with the indicators assessed, even if it means nothing has been done yet. Additionally, assessments and data analysis must be done with a considerable number of participants in order to come to an effective conclusion for the entire country. It is of ultimate importance that the VNRs have updated information and a prudent analysis of the policies applied.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is one of the nations with the highest levels of corruption in the world. Zimbabwe has to pay more attention to its anti-corruption commission and policies in order to improve data collecting and ensure the achievement of sustainable development goals. Additionally, while the nation is committed to the development of its social and economic sectors, there must also be a focus on having excellent governance and transparency to strive for more effective results in all areas. To handle and manage issues like sexual and gender-based violence, the institutional deficit needs to be rectified.

V. CONCLUSION

The fact that the African region is marked by some common characteristics such as poverty, economic and social inequality, and environmental imbalances, help understand how the applicability of certain policies developed in the territory. In the scenario of the 2030 Agenda set by the UN, the difficulties to target the SDGs falls under limitations to data collection and partnership building. In this sense, with the submission of the VNRs to the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development in 2021, it became clear how the region tries to overcome the challenges and achieve the goals. Even though Africa was the continent with the fewest number of Covid cases, it was however the most affected by the consequences of the pandemic. This was evidently reflected on the VNRs by lacking sufficient updated data to assess the goals as well as efficient partnerships to help the coverage of the territory.

It was possible to conclude that the central government of the countries analysed do not have the necessary tools and power to implement policies to the entire territory in a homogenous way. In this sense, most policies focus only on specific regions within the countries which proves this challenge; therefore, it is hard to evaluate the real impact of these policies in relation to

the country as a whole. Additionally, the lack of investments in technology creates a huge barrier to the collection of data. In all of them, it is possible to see the use of proxy indicators and/or outdated information due to lack of resources to collect them. Also, it is hard to find measurements done yearly once the assessments take time and budget to be reevaluated - usually 2 to 5 years. Because of this, many indicators of each SDG are not able to be assessed or targeted once there is no information available, not providing an efficient review of what has been done in each country; hampering, therefore, the comparison with other regions under the 2030 agenda.

Lastly, partnership building plays an important role in helping the administrations achieve the country as whole when implementing new policies targeting the SDGs. However, a common characteristic seen was not the lack of partnerships but rather questions about its efficiency. Also, missing explanations about the collaborations raised questions about what has been done.

In this sense, the present paper concludes that partnership building and the limitations to data collection affects the progress of SDG targets in the African region by impeding the measurement of indicators and development thus interfering in the notion of the real situation of the analysed countries.

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Lessons learned and good practices in monitoring progress towards SDG in the Americas

FACULTY ADVISOR:

Brian Berezovsky

AUTHORS:

Gabriel Barceló,

Briana Crolle,

Patricia Heras and

Mario Vicente

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This Regional Report is the result of a critical assessment of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) presented by a group of six different countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay) to the High-Level Political Forum convened in July 2021 in New York. These VNRs highlight some accomplishments regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agenda 2030 for their respective home countries.

The overall results extracted from this research highlight that Uruguay is the country that is ahead in many of the indicators analyzed, showing that it is one of the countries that enjoys the highest economic and social progress in the region. Proof of this is that Uruguay takes up first place in economic indicators such as SDG 8 and indicators normally concerned with the protection of the environment such as SDGs 13, 14 and 15.

By contrast, our research shows that Nicaragua and Paraguay are the ones who need to improve in a wide range of indicators to fully meet the targets stated in the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, we expect an advancement from their side due to some of the measures that they have implemented, as could be the case of the "leaving no one behind policy" in Paraguay. If successful, they could greatly contribute to the growth of sustainability in these countries.

Lastly, Colombia, Bolivia, and Mexico rank between these two groups. Although they are not at the same level as Uruguay and have a better situation than Nicaragua and Paraguay, there are still significant defiances that require governmental action through policies. One of these examples is the governmental conditional cash transfer known as the Juancito Pinto bond in Bolivia which aims to reduce the challenge of inequality by providing a direct transfer of resources to the most vulnerable populations.

In short, this regional report introduces how the countries that presented their VNR last 2021 deal with sustainability by partitioning it into different goals such as zero hunger, no poverty, clean water and sanitation, or equal opportunities for everyone with differing results between states. Through the following pages, we will present our conclusions by critically analyzing the VNRs of these countries followed by some of the most relevant insights on the matter.

1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS OF THE REGION

The American region is filled with opportunities and room to grow in many different directions. Despite being rich in natural resources, population, and culture, the last few decades have been characterized by corruption scandals, stumbling democratic systems, and high levels of poverty and inequality that combined with economic growth that has had little impact on people's lives. From what is shown in the VNRs, most countries have only focused on a selected number of indicators and SDGs, which shows a limited image of the situation. This lack of information and data can be misleading and sometimes lead to inaccurate conclusions.

It is unquestionable that the region is suffering from pressing issues regarding some SDGs that directly affect the daily lives of its citizens and their ability to progress and improve their living conditions. SDGs 2 and 3, for example, regarding zero hunger and good health and wellbeing, present a struggle for all countries, which have either major or significant challenges remaining. Moreover, actions towards SDG 5, focused on gender equality, are not sufficient, as either challenges or significant challenges remain to accomplish it. Some other vital SDGs such as clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), life below water (SDG 14), and life on land (SDG 15) present serious problems and challenges in the region. All SDGs are decisive in order to create strong, stable, and sustainable nations, but SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is crucial to achieving it. This SDG concerning the health of institutions is an urgent issue to tackle for all countries except for Uruguay, which performs well in this regard.

Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay also have major discrepancies between SDGs, as Uruguay has fulfilled three SDGs, while on the other hand, Bolivia and Mexico present more challenges. The SDGs that show the biggest differences are the following: No Poverty (SDG 1), Quality Education (SDG 4), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), and Climate Action (SDG 13). All the other SDGs, up to a certain extent, have some kind of consistency with one another.

This divergence reflects how some countries are taking the 2030 Agenda very seriously, showing their full commitment to it, while others are taking longer to implement the necessary reforms. It's

for this reason that there is no consensus in terms of the progress made in the region.

Each country implemented the 2030 Agenda in a different way and to a different degree with a variety of measures, laws, and policies. Here are some examples: efforts from the Bolivian government to make SDG 1 more feasible by implementing different social policies such as that of Juancito Pinto, which has managed to reduce extreme poverty rates and has increased student attendance at primary schools, helping to improve SDG 4 and becoming the main action directed toward the achievement of universal education for all children in Bolivia (Annex 1); projects like the multi-stakeholder platform in Colombia, in collaboration with the OECD, and the Joint Programme Roadmap for an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), in collaboration with UNICEF, UN Women, and the UNDP, highlighting the importance the Latin American country is giving to cooperation and participatory work; the funding of several projects looking to connect the north and south of Mexico, like the Tehuantepec Interoceanic Corridor-Isthmus Project, to ease mobility in the country and tackle SDG 9; the "Viviendas Dignas de interés social" programme implemented by the government of Nicaragua, which has provided the construction of more than 100,000 households (Duhalt, 2021)[1] for people in need, and the Comprehensive School Nutrition Program (PINE) selected as one of the 4 best food initiatives by the FAO; the Paraguayan endeavor to "Not leave anyone behind", through cross-cutting plans that aim to remove barriers (SDG 10); Uruguay's initiative to link the National Budget to the 2030 Agenda, being one of the most important public financing mechanisms available for its implementation is a very good tool that could be implemented in other countries.
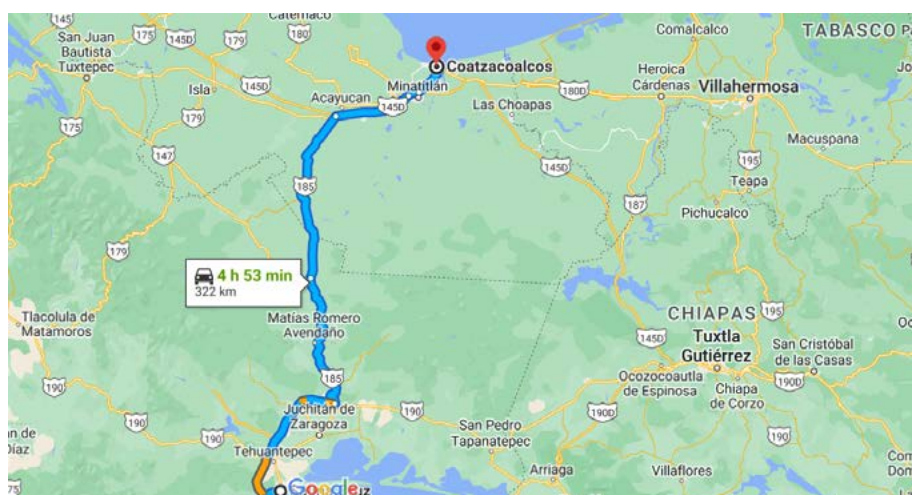
[1] Duhalt , Adrian. "The Interoceanic Corridor of Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec and the North-South Development Gap." Rice's University's Baker Institute for public policy . https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/interoceanic-corridor-mexicos-isthmus-tehuantepec-and-north-south-development-gap.

2. EMERGING CHALLENGES

This section of the report will focus on the potential challenges that have come to light in the analysis of countries. We will do so by focusing on two or three main obstacles that each of them is facing when assessing their performance in the SDGs and the challenges that the governments are facing to achieve the SDGs and comply with the Agenda 2030.

A common challenge to all countries explored in the VNRs deals with SDG 16 concerning strong institutions, peace and justice. We see that some of the countries have a more robust democracy than others.

BOLIVIA

Bolivia's performance in the SDGs worsened due to COVID-19 and its related measures. Due to this, some programs that had been previously implemented became meaningless, like the ones dealing with SDG 4 (quality education). Because of the lockdown, the government of Bolivia promoted all school students to the following year, regardless of their performance during the past academic course. According to the Government of Bolivia, that was harmful for the children since they lost an academic year and that originated a higher risk of school drop out in the years to come.

The pandemic also brought cancellations of healthcare services, ultimately affecting SDG 3, that of good health and well-being. Therefore, some patients who were waiting for the surgery had to wait for a longer time to have their needs covered. The ones that suffered the most from these delays were the elderly population (Annex 3).

COLOMBIA

The three main challenges identified for Colombia in order to achieve the 2030 objectives are eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change leaving no one behind. The main efforts that are being taken in the form of policies and programs are aimed at addressing these challenges. Unfortunately, as happens to all countries of the region, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected many sectors of the economy, further intensifying the previously existing problems. Labor formalization, for instance, a challenge

the country has always had at the top of its list, got even worse due to the pandemic. Informality rates, as of 2020, were at 60%, which causes a huge gap in extremely useful information, especially for SDG 8 (Annex 4). Furthermore, there is a breach between the elements of the diagnosis, the strategic part, and the financial part that make up all initiatives to implement systematic change, especially for climate change. Therefore, focusing on improving the statistical capabilities of the territorial entities for the measurement, tracking and monitoring of SDG targets and indicators is crucial for a better and more accurate analysis of the situation and, as a consequence, a more efficient implementation of policies tailored to its needs.

MEXICO

One of the main challenges observed deals with SDG 9, industry, infrastructure and innovation. The existing regional differences in Mexico make the interconnection between the northern and the southern parts of the country harder. To this end, specific programs aiming to tackle these differences have been designed, such as in the case of the Interoceanic Corridor of Tehuantepec which intends to ease the time dedicated to transportation in that area. If we compare the GDP per capita between regions in Mexico, we will observe that the more centric region, which hosts the capital city, Mexico D.F, shows a GDP per capita of USD 9,843. (Duhalt, 2021)[2] In addition, we find that Northeast Mexico is deemed to be one of the economic centers of the country where the manufacturing industry is very powerful. By contrast, in Southwest Mexico GDP per capita only reaches USD 3,591 (Duhalt, 2021)[3]. It is often depicted as the region presenting the highest levels of inequality in the country.

NICARAGUA

Nicaragua has been falling behind on many vital aspects that other countries in the Americas have been investing in, including clean water and sanitation, quality education, decent working conditions, and sustained economic growth, and strong and independent institutions. In the last decade, Nicaragua has achieved sustained economic growth and social development by improving nutrition indicators, making it one of the countries that have reduced hunger the most in the

[2] Ibidem
[3] Ibidem

region. However, natural disasters, climate change, poverty, and social and economic fragility still threaten the food security of the most vulnerable people, particularly those in rural and remote areas. Targeted and coordinated efforts are therefore needed in order to reach SDG 2 of zero hunger.

In the past eight months, according to UNHCR, the rising political situation has caused the number of Nicaraguan refugees and asylum seekers in Costa Rica to treble to 150,000 (UNHCR, 2022)[4], straining the country's asylum and assistance systems. All of these political issues directly affect the possibility of achieving the SDG targets as major challenges remain on SDG 16. SDGs 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 14 also need special attention since there has been little to no progress in these areas which are vital for the protection and progress of the most vulnerable members of the population.

PARAGUAY

Paraguay has understood that sustainable development is not possible without investment in human capital. The pandemic showed the fragilities of the current education and health system. For instance, the greatest concern of children and adolescents involves virtual education. Many of them reported that the education system does not have the necessary equipment to make virtual education effective. This problem is compounded by the lack of preparation of teachers, the lack of technological tools from which children and young persons can access their classes, and the lack of connectivity.

Another issue is the need for more inclusive education policies that address the needs of children with disabilities and different abilities. In the area of health, mention was also made of the need to address the mental health of children and young persons, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

URUGUAY

Life below water and responsible production and consumption should be the top priority of the Uruguayan government to maintain the positive trend that they have set in the previous years.

[4] "UNHCR: A Record 100 Million People Forcibly Displaced Worldwide || 1UN News." United Nations. United Nations. . https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118772.

Unemployment and GDP growth are very unstable in the country and therefore the government should also focus on implementing measures and policies to tackle these issues and ensure quality employment and sustained growth.

As mentioned above, Uruguay's main priority should be to conserve and use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development. Uruguay has currently major challenges remaining in almost all categories that comprise SDG 13. In order to tackle this issue, both the government and local partners have to reduce waste that tends to end up in the ocean, clean up beaches and river beds, and prohibit practices that put marine species and resources at further risk of harm, exploitation, or depletion among many others.

3.   BEST PRACTICES

The Americas region is focusing its efforts mainly on the SDGs regarding poverty reduction (especially after the COVID-19 pandemic), education, and reduced inequalities, which all go hand in hand. Several social programs, including bonds or direct funds, have been provided by the government to families in need to push their children to attend school as in the case of Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua and Uruguay.

Huge investments have been made in projects for road infrastructure in Bolivia and Mexico, as well as in gender equality programs in Uruguay. All these initiatives help reduce the inequalities between the population, one of the biggest problems in the region. Finally, the need for the government to collaborate with other actors has pushed countries like Colombia and Uruguay to take into account the role of the private sector, and for Mexico and Bolivia to put into practice the multi-stakeholder approach to involve all the actors toward the SDG achievement.

BOLIVIA

The Juancito Pinto bond is a governmental conditional cash transfer that provides funds to every student in need, with the condition that they attend school regularly (minimum 80%). Funds are distributed to parents, otherwise, a legal tutor or their professor oversees them. It helps to give every child the opportunity to attend school regardless of their economic status, thereby being successful in SDG 4, concerning quality education, and reducing school drop-out rates.

Misicuni project: dealing with SDG 7, affordable and clean energy, the public company dealing with water and waste management Misicuni intends to increase the hydraulic power from 479 MW to 734 MW by increasing energy and water provision in Cochabamba, considered to be the energetic pole of Bolivia. Cochabamba's GDP has increased by six times since 1988, from USD 850 million to USD 6220 million[5]; however, environmental protection (SDG 13) is at stake, since the local population has been displaced during the construction. The Government of Bolivia argues that there will be around 1/3 of the local population which will obtain an extra income thanks to tourism that comes to the region.(Misicuni, 2022)[6]

The road system: looking to achieve SDG 8, Bolivia has been building more than 3,000 km of roads, amounting to a total investment of USD 560 million.[7] (Laime et al., 2022) Although there were concerns about the debt generated by the project, thanks to the direct transfer of resources through the Ley de Fideicomiso de Apoyo a la Reactivación de la Inversión Pública, it ended up at a positive rate. Even though building roads generate employment for the local population, there is still work to do because, among regional and provincial roads, only about 5% are paved.

COLOMBIA

Programa Ingreso Solidario

This program was implemented during COVID, providing an amount of USD121,5 to more than 3 million households in a condition of poverty, extreme poverty, and economic vulnerability who were not beneficiaries of any State social program. There was an investment of USD 3.188,6 million by the government[8] that had a positive spillover effect in education, given that the time children dedicated to school activities increased due to the subsidy. Moreover, SDG 5 was taken into account as well, since 64.13% of the households that received the cash transfer were represented by women heads of household (Ingreso solidario, 2022)[9].

Unfortunately, many families saw how their income was affected due to the lack of clear criteria in

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[5] "Empresa Misicuni, Proyecto Misicuni" https://www.misicuni.gob.bo/
[6] Ibidem
[7] Rendón Laime, Santiago, Ricardo Frontanilla Cruz, Danny Ronald Roca Jiménez, Ernesto José Mercado Quintela, and Ricardo del Carpio Jaldín. 2022. "Plan Estratégico Institucional 2016-2020". Abc.Gob.Bo. http://www.abc.gob.bo/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/pei_abc_2016_-_2020.pdf.
[8] Colombia's 2021 VNR Page 12
[9] "Ingreso Solidario - Prosperidad Social." n.d. https://ingresosolidario.prosperidadsocial.gov.co/

the application of these measures. This problem, added to the exclusion of many immigrants from the system, required a refocus of the program.

Multi-stakeholder platform

The Colombian National Planning Department (DNP), in collaboration with the OECD, has implemented the multi-stakeholder platform, which seeks to be a space for dialogue between relevant actors for public policy on sustainability, to facilitate the distribution of information and knowledge, as well as intersectoral and inter-institutional collaboration and coordination. This practice would allow the government to join forces more easily with nongovernmental actors, the private sector, civil society, academia, and international actors. Propacífico, a nonprofit organization, represents the nongovernmental actors; Repsol, a multinational company in the energy industry, is representative of the private sector; the University of the Andes represents academia; the Colombian Confederation of NGOs (CCONG) represents the civil society; and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), together with the United Nations Organizations in Colombia, represent international cooperation. All of these actors work alongside the SDG Commission in order to improve the definition of strategic actions toward sustainability.

SDG Investor Map

The SDG Investor Map aims to identify investment opportunities to facilitate the compliance of the SDGs in target markets and sectors, with efficient integration of the private sector. It works through an interview process with the private sector companies and investors, identifying areas and opportunities with aggregate value for private investment. Thanks to this tool, 22 investment opportunities have been identified, corresponding to the following 7 sectors: renewable and alternative energies, infrastructure, education and services, food and beverages, health, finance, technology and communications. In addition, the results have been presented at the Global Impact Summit and shared with various investors in different countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

MEXICO

Paving program for the roads in the South: eases the communication between cities so SDG 9 is boosted. The program developed in Oaxaca is one of the most popular ones which has helped to reduce mortality rates caused by traffic accidents.

Training programs for professors: tackling SDG 4, the National Institute of Arts and Literature will teach professors skills to foster the learning capacity of students. Additionally, there will be a higher number of professors being hired, lower student ratios, and personalized education.

National fund for the protection of artisan works: in line with SDG 8, the Mexican government will provide artisans in need with monetary funds, in order for them to be able to increase the training of their employees and provide them with health insurance and protection. Additionally, the government will support their production of goods, buy raw materials for them, and help them present their products in fairs and markets, thus protecting and promoting the jobs of artisan workers around the country.

NICARAGUA

Increasing funding for education and incentives for families to educate their children: by increasing the budget expenditure on education by 381% to C$21,191.9 million in 2020 (Ministry of Finance and Public Credit)[10], Nicaragua has shown higher levels of primary, secondary, and tertiary education and better school attendance. Between 2007-2020, 5,760,560 school packages have been delivered to students in initial, primary, and special education and primary and secondary as savings and motivation for families to send their children to school.

Gender equality female participation and the promotion of women's lives: According to the Global Gender Gap Report, Nicaragua has achieved a reduction of inequalities of 80.4%[11], (Pal et al. 2022) which has ranked Nicaragua 5th in gender equality in 2020, surpassing the 90th position it had in 2007 and 10th in 2016, being the country with the greatest gender equality in Latin America. This is due to the prevention of violence in all its forms, care for life, promotion of values, equity and the re-launching of 69 police stations for women and children across municipalities. According to WEF projections, if this progress continues, in 2034 Nicaragua will completely close the gender gap.

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[10] Page 25, VNR of Nicaragua
[11] Kali Pal, Kusum, Kim Piaget, Silja Baller, Vesselina Ratcheva, and Saadia Zahidi. 2022. "Global Gender Gap Report 2022". World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022.

PARAGUAY

Since the presentation of the first VNR in 2018, the country was framed in a process of institutional strengthening of the 2030 Agenda. In order to address the specific challenges imposed by the implementation of this agenda, the SDG Paraguay Commission, constituted in 2016, went through a process of restructuring, with the idea of strengthening the institutional architecture of the SDGs in the country through political, technical, and multisectoral commitment. In the face of the health crisis generated by COVID-19 and the need to respond quickly, this institutional strengthening helped to address the consequences generated by the pandemic.

In the political sphere, the new structure contemplates an expansion of the number of member institutions, from 4 to 17 members, all institutions of the three branches of government. In addition, this new structure provided for the constitution of the High- Level Board of Directors, composed of the highest authorities of the 17 member institutions. At the technical level, working groups and custodians of the different SDGs were established, while at the multisectoral level, spaces for dialogue were created with representatives of the different strata of society.

In addition to the restructuring mentioned above, progress was also made in the constitution of the Multisectoral Thematic Committees, which were defined on the basis of the 5 Ps of development: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership. Thus, for each of the 11 committees formed, a custodial institution was identified in accordance with the SDG or SDGs governing the committee, and a sub custodial institution.

URUGUAY

Educational quality and continuation

The National Board of Public Education (ANEP) intends to promote equity through two types of educational policy interventions: one of a universal nature, a thorough curriculum change throughout the entire system; and another one, with a specific focus, which attempts to reach the students who most need to improve their learning because their current results jeopardize their smooth passage throughout the system.

Public and private investment

According to the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's 2020 SDG Index, Uruguay is now ranked 45th globally (out of 193). This is solid information that the nation may use to optimize its progress toward achieving SDGs 12 (Responsible consumption and production), 15 (Life on land), and 13 (Climate action), whose performance has lagged and are not only dependent on government activity. This coherence is not only aspirational; it will ultimately affect the competitiveness of the domestic business environment and its ability to access foreign markets and finance. The SDGs' integration into the national financial system is consequently a wager on Uruguay's ability to compete. The government recognizes that the private sector must play a significant part in an economic recovery that is socially inclusive and that, in order to achieve this, a sustainable financial market must be established, a road Uruguay has already begun to take.

4. PLANNING AND PROCESS

BOLIVIA

The Inter-Institutional Committee for the objectives of the Economic and Social Development Plan is the leading organization in charge of monitoring the implementation and process of the VNR, working along with the Ministry of Planification, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Environment and Water to keep the information updated.

The Bicentenary Agenda, created in 2013, outlines Bolivia's roadmap to obtain success in sustainability for the coming years. Following the UN Handbook Guidelines, between October and November 2020, the preliminary meetings were carried out; in March 2021 the second stage of the global preparation (via webinars) was concluded and the main messages that were planned to be sent to the HLPF were presented. The deadline for presenting the reports for all countries was on 11 June 2021, to which each ministry, a technical commission, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) and the Unit of Analysis of Social and Economic Policies (UDAPE) contributed. Finally, between 13-15 July 2021, the main meeting was convened gathering the main countries presenting their VNRs, either for the first, second, or third time.

We need to mention that countries located in the Americas are performing especially well when it comes to dealing with statistical data. This is the reason why there is such strong

collaboration with those statistical agencies. This is evaluated via the multi stakeholder approach where different parties collaborating with the Government provide valuable information to the Government who later will use it for the drafting of the VNR.

COLOMBIA

Following the multi-stakeholder nature of the 2030 Agenda, the methodology selected for such preparation was based on participation, meaning that there were contributions from governmental entities (ministries, administrative departments, and agencies), as well as inputs from non-governmental actors (civil society, private sector, academia, international organizations, etc.).

The structure of Colombia's VNR follows the parameters suggested by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). The elaboration methodology consisted of 5 steps:

1. Preparation and recruitment of information: December 2020 - April 2021
2. Main message: May 3, 2021
3. Final document: June 11, 2021
4. Socialization
5. High-level political forum in New York: July 12, 2021

Firstly, the Technical Secretariat of the SDG Commission elaborated the first draft of the VNR that was shared with ministries, administrative departments, and agencies of the country, so that they could provide their feedback and further relevant information, especially concerning the effects related to the COVID-19 pandemic, mitigation measures, and recovery strategies. Regarding the second step, a summary of the contribution of the private sector toward the implementation of the SDGs was made. This was done for the first time thanks to the initiative of the SDG corporate tracker, a platform gathering information from over 400 businesses, the result of a partnership between the UNDP Colombia, the DNP, and the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative).

Thirdly, through a communication campaign on a government website, some workshops, and online surveys, contributions from representatives of civil society, academia, international organizations, and the general public were included in the final version of the report, which was presented at a socialization event where representatives of all the different sectors involved in the

process were present.

MEXICO

Mexico has obtained experience in dealing with the VNR since they are third-time presenters. This gives wings to the multi-stakeholder approach whereby the legislative power works aligned with the executive branch and with several governmental agencies. The 2030 Agenda Bureau, the institution placed at the edge of the system, will be the leading force in developing the actions conducted to the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda targets. It could be said it guarantees that the Government remains keeps committed to the actions directed towards the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030 because of the level of exigency that could be imposed by stakeholders. At the same time, it is likely that stakeholders would not like to see the position of the Government in relation to this particular aspect constantly changing, thereby it is probable that they might keep their usual policy agenda and as a consequence, there is policy consistency in place.

The process of making the VNR is divided between a global preparation meeting and a webinar carried out before the submission of its VNR on June 11 2021 and the subsequent presentation of the document, held between 13-15 July 2021 in New York. The presentation stage is a way to foster accountability and commitment to the policies that have been previously implemented. Consequently, it would be advisable that the government has gathered sufficient support from stakeholders in order to be successful in the meetings with the UN at the time of presenting their VNR.

NICARAGUA

This is the first Voluntary National Report that Nicaragua presents before the High-Level Political Forum of the United Nations. The presentation was in charge of Iván Acosta Montalván, Minister of Finance and Public Credit of Nicaragua. For the development of the VNR, non-governmental actors did not participate.

The document does not mention the institution responsible for implementing and monitoring the objectives of Sustainable Development nor does it detail the incorporation of the same at the national level or the realization of an alignment exercise to national strategies. Likewise, it does

not mention whether an SDG nationalization process took place.

The VNR exposes the degree of implementation of the 17 SDGs in the country, but incompletely and with a clear lack of data. This report shows some misalignment with voluntary guidelines of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, which affects the possibility of knowing the complete map application of the 2030 Agenda in Nicaragua. In issues like the institutionalism of implementation, the steps to follow, or the alignment between national plans and the SDGs, the report of Nicaragua raises some concerns. There is no mention of the existence of a national institutionalism for the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and there are no references to a process of alignment between the SDGs and the national development priorities.

PARAGUAY

The methodology followed for the preparation of this second Voluntary Report of Paraguay was designed through an inclusive review process, participatory, transparent, and comprehensive at national and subnational levels, based on evidence and providing tangible lessons and solutions followed by concrete and collaborative actions that will boost the implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in Paraguay.

The process of drafting the report took as reference the Manual for the preparation of national voluntary reports, published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UNDESA) and the reporting guidelines issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Organization in 2020

URUGUAY

Being Uruguay's fourth VNR, the country is showing commitment and engagement in the SDG completion. This shows the commitment of the Government with the Agenda 2030. The timing and steps of preparation of the VNR include the connection between the national budget and the SDGs, a summary of the current status of the SDG target indicators, and an evaluation of Uruguay and its connection with the SDGs within the frame of "Six transformations to achieve the SDGs" of the VNR, based on the research performed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

Following that, an infographic summarizing the key successes and issues discovered in each example is provided for each of the SDGs that have been analyzed. This information is further explained in the VNR, where each SDG is given its own chapter. This chapter includes information on the main public policies, the current state of the targets, and the challenges associated with each SDG.

5. PARTNERSHIPS

If we think about who a stakeholder is, we can define it as an entity seeking to promote a change in the way policies are defined by the government and thus, positively contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda objective. Stakeholder engagement is a very important feature for the success of the SDGs in general and for the completion of the VNRs in particular. Stakeholders enjoy some rights in this process, which makes them an integral member of the process of preparation of the VNR of that particular country so this is a collaborative task. They have rights included in the law, by virtue of UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290. For instance, they have the right to create a Task Group to assess more in-depth a specific SDG, intervene in specific meetings, attend preparatory meetings of the Forum, make recommendations, and submit documents and present oral contributions.

BOLIVIA

It is crucial for the Bolivian government to have external stakeholders contributing to the preparation of the VNR and indirectly to the SDGs performance, given that these stakeholders will later have a say in the decision-making process and some corresponding rights in the plenary meeting where Bolivia would present their VNR to the HLPF. Stakeholders come from different areas such as academia and research centres, ministries, civil society, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (both national and international) as well as some international cooperation agencies. It is not a static group but rather it shows new stakeholders incorporated from time to time. The stakeholders involved in the meetings prior to the presentation of the VNR to the HLPF need to arrive at a consensus. Therefore, one can conclude that without stakeholder participation, countries will have difficulties in passing their proposals for their VNRs.

In the case of Bolivia, there is a long-lasting cooperation between the government and the stakeholders, but in order to reach that level of cooperation, private enterprises and other stakeholders partaking in the process need the government to have clear ideas and involve themselves in the implementation and identification of proposals as if not, they might lose the confidence of the government and abandon the program. Hitherto, there will be an increase in innovation and efficiency promoted by private enterprises holding the position of stakeholders. Bolivia also has great stakeholder engagement thanks to the way information is presented. There is clear communication coming from the government in the form of information publicly available for everyone on the webpage of the corresponding Ministry.

In short, the most necessary step that needs to be taken when dealing with potential stakeholders is being inclusive so that there is always a certain number of private enterprises interested in being part of the process of drafting the VNR. Otherwise, there would be a lack of innovation and the same companies will keep proposing the same projects which would be counterproductive. Furthermore, it is key to not only include the regular stakeholders, but make sure to create a sense of social awareness, meaning that it is not a project of an enterprise alone seeking to make a profit, but rather a matter of the society as a whole wanting to make a change and positively contribute to the general welfare of the country. Finally, the information available needs to be clear and concise.

COLOMBIA

In order to tackle SDG 1, for the reduction of poverty, the Colombian national government is collaborating with the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank to implement the Social Registry, an interoperable system of information that seeks to unify socioeconomic information and potential beneficiaries with the aim of improving the targeting and contribute to the articulation of information between various entities of the national government.

For a more articulated work between the national government and the other actors in society, the document CONPES (The National Council for Economic and Social Policy) establish the connected work between the DANE (National Administrative Department of Statistics) and the SNU (Interagency group of the United Nations System). The aim of this cooperation is to close the gap between the SDG global indicators, which has been successful for 106 indicators so far.

The previously mentioned SDG corporate tracker, a tool used to measure the contribution of the private sector toward the SDGs, is another great example of effective partnerships, with the collaboration of the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), the DNP (National Planning Department) and UNDP Colombia and the commitment of some of the top private companies in the country.

Finally, the OECD had a huge role in the process of the creation of the Multi- stakeholder Platform, creating partnerships with actors from all sectors, among which the CCONG (Colombian Confederation of NGOs), the SEI (Stockholm Environment Institute), the University of Los Andes, civil society organisations like Fundación Huellas and multinational corporations like Repsol.

MEXICO

Mexico is one of the countries with the greatest diversity of stakeholders. The consultative council works as the central organism intended to channel all the specific requests that arise in the country in relation to one of the proposed SDGs. When dealing with partnerships in Mexico, the way they are progressing is monitored through the decentralized Administration. This implies that each department will contribute to the final outcome of the project differently, thereby considering the specificities of each department, being crucial for a correct assessment of the situation.

Sub-national levels are the ones carrying out the majority of responsibilities and efforts. Each region will have its own say in the process of drafting and implementing the VNR by constantly reporting the success of the measures in their own region and later proposing them to the central Government of Mexico for extrapolation. It also guarantees that every region is committed to the 2030 Agenda since thanks to that extrapolation, the regions will feel the motivation to keep approving policies for the SDG implementation.

A second good practice that is being spotted is the creation of a follow-up body developed by the Mexican government involving the Ministry of Finance. It is meant to fight for a specific SDG and has been created to implement all budgets and policies from the Ministry of Finance. This makes it easier to see the future course of action for a certain objective. Opportunities could be easily spotted and the Mexican Government can promote innovative solutions and they can formulate a more accurate policy response in that regard.

Mexico is strong in partnerships. The reason for that is their multi-stakeholder partnership whereby they have gathered a substantial number of parties that are being involved in the process of coming up with innovative solutions to the problems that they are currently facing.

NICARAGUA

The participation of civil society is identified, the private sector, academia and the governments subnational authorities in the elaboration of the VNR, but without references to other relevant institutions, such as the Parliament. The report also includes examples of interventions of the aforementioned actors and identifies spaces for participation in alliances. So it is with the integration of civil society, the private sector, and the academy in the Interinstitutional Commission and Sector of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene of Nicaragua, which carries out "an articulated planning between public, private and community actors that allows the strengthening of capacities and the generation of information" on water issues and sanitation".[12]

The VNR provides insufficient data for an objective analysis. It is a report with very little agreement with the Secretary-General of the United Nations' optional recommendations, which has an impact on our ability to fully understand how the 2030 Agenda is being used in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan study raises more concerns than it answers in a number of areas, including the institutional nature of implementation, the procedures to be used, and the connection between national plans and the SDGs. There is little to no information on what sources have been used and the objectivity of the VNR could be put into question in certain areas.

PARAGUAY

On the basis of the imperative need to empower all sectors of society, to move forward and accelerate the processes that enable the SDG targets at both national and local levels, the Multi-sectoral Dialogue Spaces SDG 2030 was created in 2020. These spaces were promoted by the SDG Paraguay Commission, with the support of UNDP.

The initiatives led by the different non-governmental actors have played a very important role in the progress achieved in these three years, since these measures allow them to reach more places

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[12] p.46 of the VNR of Nicaragua

and more people.

Among the various actions, we should highlight the role of the Global Pact Paraguay, an organization formed in 2012 as part of the initiative of the Global Pact of the United Nations that currently has 110 member organizations. This organization has continued to implement actions that promote the commitment of the business sector toward sustainable development. In this regard, and in the context of the global pandemic, the local network of Global Compact has joined the call to business leaders around the world, in order to join efforts for the protection of workers, communities, and businesses severely affected by the emergence of COVID-19.

URUGUAY

Uruguay, as mentioned previously, is working very hard and very consistently with many different organizations and their VNR could be considered transparent and objective, as it includes much data from external sources such as the UN. There is a review of the Strategic Priorities of the country within the framework of the 2030 Agenda such as:

1. An innovative economy, employment generator, and ensures sustainable development
2. An efficient State, present in the territory and that is held accountable to the citizens
3. Public policies guaranteeing education, social protection, and quality healthcare
4. A society that leaves no one behind: empowerment of women and gender equality.

A team was also formed to monitor the situation continuously, taking restrictive measures when it was deemed necessary and opening up when it was deemed appropriate. The team appealed to freedom as the highest value, whose responsible exercise is essential to the conception of a democratic society, personal progress, and effective solidarity. This team worked in collaboration with more than 100 state institutions.

6. RELEVANT DATA

In this last section of the report, we want to provide a clearer view of the SDGs performance in some of the countries so that we can explain why some States in the Americas do better than

others when it comes to some of the targets proposed in the 2030 Agenda.

In SDG 1 (no poverty) there are outstanding differences between countries since not all of them have been capable of fulfilling the targets outlined in the plan. Uruguay shows that SDG 4 has been achieved. Bolivia and Mexico are not that far away from being successful in this target. By contrast, there are high levels of poverty in Nicaragua and Paraguay.

By looking at the monetary poverty (resources needed to meet the basic needs of any individual) together with the expense per capita (how much a household expends about an average household) we have that Uruguay's monetary poverty rate is low since on average, according to the Poverty and Equity Brief, dependant of the World Bank it is less than 1%. In Nicaragua and Paraguay, poverty levels are higher.

By looking at multidimensional poverty, we see higher levels of poverty in rural areas than in the capital cities. In sum, we can say that Uruguay has reduced poverty while Nicaragua and Paraguay are still developing policies to reduce it. For instance, Uruguay enjoys a dynamic labor market, sustained economic growth since 2002, and some inclusive social policies targeting those groups of the population that might be suffering the most from poverty. Consequently, Uruguay has become the country in the Americas to rank the highest in reducing poverty and has become a flagship tool for the social welfare system in the Americas (Annex 5).

In SDG 8, on the one hand, we have those countries that lag policies and progress in the matter as is the case of Mexico, Nicaragua, and Uruguay; while on the other hand,Bolivia, is closer to the goal but still needs to improve its implementation process behind in order to ensure the complete fulfillment of the SDG. This last country is the one that surpasses the general situation of the rest of the countries in the Americas because by looking at the wage growth, we can see that Bolivia's wage has been increasing since 2006 due to the excess income that has been generated. A more complete picture of this SDG is seen by looking at the coefficient of industrialization where Mexico takes the lead by having 35% and 5% of industrial growth. Bolivia is behind with a 17% of industrialization coefficient and Nicaragua only with 7%.(Eurostat, 2021)[13]

In SDG 10, Uruguay is again the country with higher scores in the region in contrast to the rest

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[13] "Long Term Developments In Industrial Production - Results From Short-Term Statistics - Statistics Explained". 2022. Ec.Europa.Eu. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Long_term_developments_in_industrial_production_-_results_from_short-term_statistics.

of them. Uruguay's GINI coefficient is 40 whereas Mexico's is 45, Bolivia 44, Nicaragua 46, and Colombia 54. (Pal et al. 2022)[14] With this data in mind, we can conclude that Uruguay is the country experiencing less inequality while Colombia is the one with the highest rates of inequality. The rest of the countries fall somewhere in the middle between them.

CONCLUSION

All in all, this report has shown us that the region of the Americas is one of great contrasts: on the one hand, Uruguay takes the lead in the fulfillment of the targets coming from the 2030 Agenda; on the other hand, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Mexico, Paraguay and Colombia present several challenges. This report also highlights the differences in terms of economic, social and political challenges that the countries analyzed are facing.

This report has equally shown that all the countries in the region of the Americas are pursuing a policy oriented towards improving their performance in sustainability as it is observed in the numerous programmes that countries are implementing. This includes cases like Bolivia with their Juancito Pinto conditional cash transfer, or Paraguay with their " leaving no one behind policy", aligned with the more social goals of the 2030 Agenda like SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) SDG 10 (reduced inequalities or SDG 4 (quality education).

This report has displayed other good practices from other States in the Americas such as the Colombian SDG Investor Map, a tool that helps to identify potential investment opportunities in the country. Nicaragua, despite the fact that significant defiances remain to succeed in the SDGs, has recently increased their expense in education by 381% according to the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit and have provided school material to a percentage of students as well as with more resources to schools to develop their programs and increase their educational materials. This supposes will result in a relevant advance in terms of SDG 4 (quality of education).

Last but not least, it has become apparent that countries like Mexico have been able to make their multi-stakeholder approach a fortress that allows getting the most information from various

[14] Kali Pal, Kusum, Kim Piaget, Silja Baller, Vesselina Ratcheva, and Saadia Zahidi. 2022. "Global Gender Gap Report 2022". World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022. page 281-283

sources. As a result, from the perspective of the central government, they can develop tools that help correct handling of all the data available to them and ultimately, being able to propose policies in accordance.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 - *Number of beneficiaries of the Juancito Pinto bond*

Gráfico 1: Número de beneficiarios del BJP*
(en miles de personas y como % de la población total)
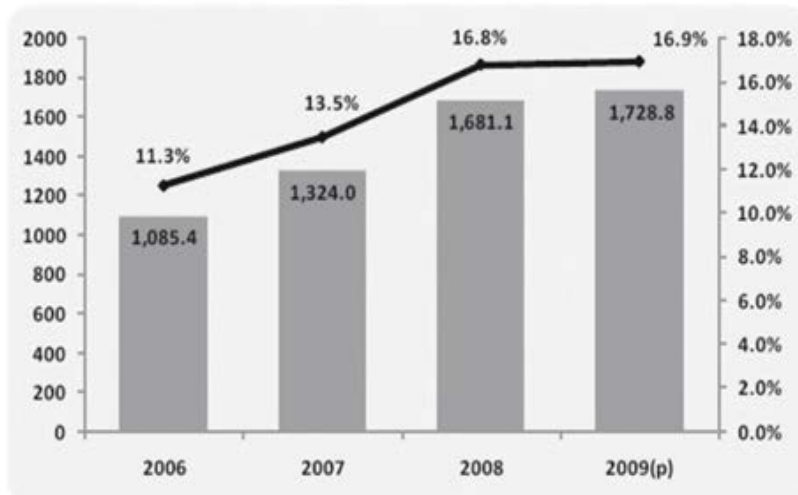
Fuente: Estadísticas educativas de UDAPE y Sistema de Información Educativa del Ministerio de Educación y Culturas.
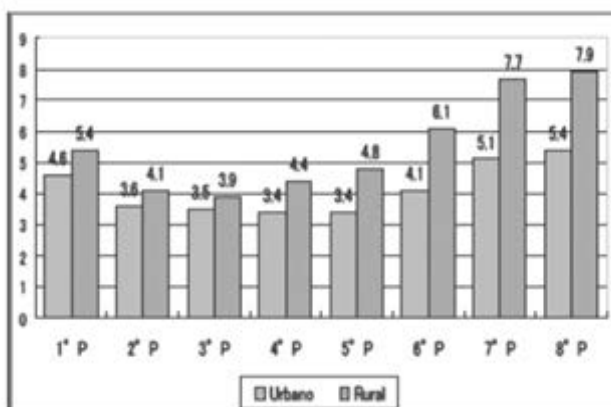(p) Preliminar
* Población entre 6 y 18 años que asisten a algún curso del ciclo primario de dependencia pública.

Annex 2 - *Drop out rate in Bolivia*

Gráfico 9: Tasa de abandono por curso y ámbito geográfico en Primaria, año 2008 (%)

Elaborado en base a fuentes: SIE y Equipo de Indicadores de Investigación Sectorial(EIIS) – ME, 2010

Annex 3 - *Demographical pyramid in Bolivia*

Gráfico N° 1
BOLIVIA: POBLACIÓN POR GRUPOS QUINQUENALES DE EDAD Y SEXO, 2017
(En porcentaje)

Fuente: Instituto Nacional de Estadística – Encuesta de Hogares 2017
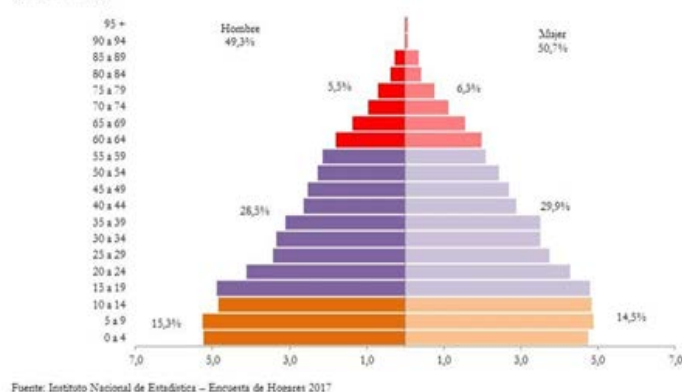
Annex 4 - *Employment changes by formality status in Colombia*

Figure 8. Employment changes by formality status
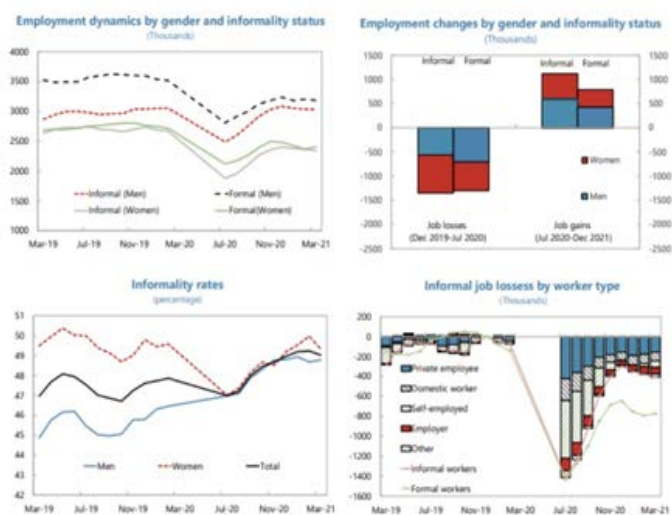
Sources: GEIH, DANE; and staff calculations.

Annex 5 - *Evolution of multidimensional poverty in Uruguay*

Gráfica 4. Evolución de la pobreza multidimensional (M_0) por dominios geográficos de Uruguay 2006-2013 (hogares).

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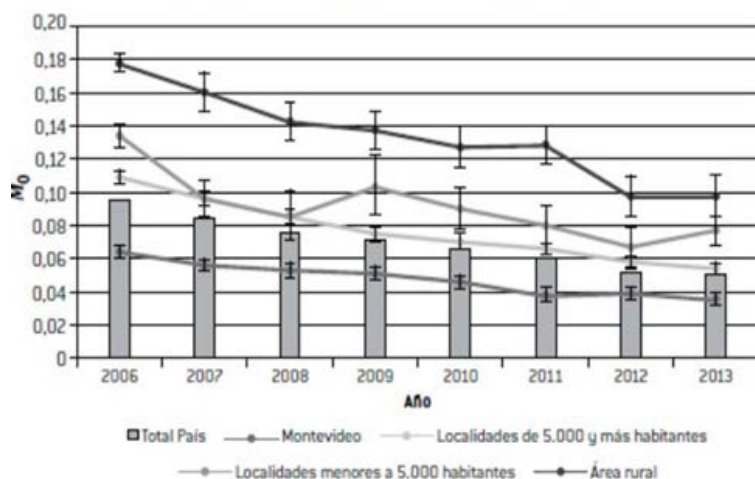Documentation-paper_eclac-side-event.pdf

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Regional Executive Summary of Asia

Lessons Learned and Good Practices in Monitoring Progress Towards the SDGs

SUPERVISED BY:

Jaime De Aguinaga Garcia

AUTHORS:

Aira Hamzehie

Runze Yao

Beltran Garcia-Hinojal

Ghassan Aldoud

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The following report aims to summarize and investigate the main challenges and lessons learnt through the examination of VNRs for the countries of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, China, Iraq and Qatar. The report provides a contextual analysis of the socioeconomic, political, and environmental contexts of each of the nations and the region as a whole using a cross-comparative and analytical approach in order to provide a backdrop and scaffolding to the VNR analyzes. Second, a brief clarification and classification of the data collection methodologies and formats will be done, alongside an investigation into which indicators and indices have been utilized by the nations in their respective VNRs. Finally, an individual and cross-comparative analysis of the progress, planning, data collection, execution, and partnership building in regards to the SDGs emphasized in reports will be executed in order to highlight both the largest challenges and obstacles facing the region, as well as spotlight the best practices and lessons learned for the future.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Although all countries attempted to make progress in various sectors, we selected some representative ones for comparability and conciseness. The 2021 Voluntary National Reports of the Asian region, comprising: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, China, Iraq, and Qatar, revealed SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) as a common thread in the region. Those SDGs are also interconnected, representing a systemic progress.

In addition, we identified three common challenges for these countries: COVID-19 pandemic, data collection, and climate change. Meanwhile, data collection infrastructure, rural investment, and green economy were regarded as best practices in one or more countries.

SDG 1: NO POVERTY

Despite progress with SDG 1, the COVID-19 pandemic has halted and impacted much of the developmental progress in the region. Nevertheless, the impact of the pandemic on the achievement of SDG 1 has impacted Afghanistan, Bhutan and Iraq disproportionately. The VNRs show this worsening of conditions. Tenacious poverty is a major challenge in Afghanistan. The global health crisis has exacerbated structural poverty and further exposed vulnerable groups and individuals to situational poverty. There are, however, other driving factors towards poverty in Afghanistan, which are attributed to the return of four million refugees from Iran and Pakistan in the course of the last five years. The number of internally displaced people has increased, and so has the number of female-led households, which tend to be poorer than other groups in Afghanistan.[1]

In the case of Bhutan, this nation managed to reduce the percentage of people living below the national poverty rate from 12% in 2012 to 8.2% in 2017, however, around an additional 4 % of the population fell below the poverty line in 2020. Another such example would be Iraq, where terrorist shocks and the insecurity brought from Al- Qaida (2007-2014) and ISIS shocks (2014-2018) had made the poverty headcount in Iraq fluctuate between 5.760 million inhabitants at the least, and 8.101 at the highest. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, this number had skyrocketed to 12.680 million inhabitants, clearly demonstrating the devastating impact and development halt Iraq had suffered from. Children remain the most vulnerable group to poverty, making up 57 percent of the poor population, which had been attempted to be reduced by providing pregnant mothers with 10,000 dinars and committing 15,000 dinars to each child's education.[2]

Fortunately, this was not so much the case for China, Azerbaijan and Qatar, which managed to prevent such an economic impact by implementing the following measures. The success of said measures can be shown by Qatar's resilient Social Protection System and China's national agenda. Qatar's resilient and sustainable Social Protection System, which consists of the social welfare systems, family cohesion, and social capital systems had provided the population with economic resilience before and especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This had allowed Qatar to remain

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[1] Afghanistan Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, 2021
[2] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR), 2021

free of the phenomenon of extreme poverty and "secures them sufficient income to maintain dignity and health." The total number of beneficiaries of social security programs had only increased by 300 after the pandemic, showing the impact of a forward-thinking and sustainable welfare system.[3]

The progress on this particular goal has been positive in Azerbaijan, as the country has seen the implementation of State programs that significantly reduce poverty, encourage economic development and protect vulnerable groups. There is a positive trend in poverty reduction as the proportion of the population that live below the national poverty line decreased from 4.9 percent in 2015 to 4.8 percent in 2019. There are two groups that appear more unsusceptible to poverty, men (4.7 percent of men live under the national poverty line compared to 5 percent of women) and those living in urban areas (4.5 percent of the urban population live under the national poverty line compared to 5.2 percent of the rural population).[4]

The resilience of China came from a continuous and effective national plan, which mitigated the impact of the pandemic. The poverty incidence in China steadily decreased from 2015 to 2020. (5.7 percent, 4.5 percent, 3.1 percent, 1.7 percent, 0.6 percent, and 0 percent respectively from 2015 to 2020) The rural area, which accounted for most of the poorest, were not just recipients of transient subsidiaries. From medical insurance to public transportation, the improvement in infrastructure and public services were both indicators and drivers of poverty eradication. Broadband access in rural villages, for example, increased from 71.8 percent in 2015 to 97.3 percent in 2020. The poor also benefited from systematic skill training and job creation. Handicrafts, farming and breeding, e-commerce and tourism lifted a large population out of poverty, including more than 5 million women.[5]

Notably, China was the only major economy to achieve positive growth in 2020 in the world. In 2020, China's GDP stood at 101.5986 trillion, up 2.3 percent from the previous year. The urban unemployment rate stabilized at 5.2 percent by the end of the year. Extreme poverty was eliminated according to the national standard of China. In addition to the long term devotion previously mentioned, the quick and determined response to the initial outbreak of COVID-19

[3] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[4] Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021
[5] China's VNR Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2021

could be another explanation. Nevertheless, it is also noteworthy that the GDP growth rate in China had been 6.7 percent in 2018 and 6 percent in 2019, meaning that the pandemic still negatively affected it.[6]

SDG 8: DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

As with the previous SDG, the global economic downturn caused by the pandemic featured the central impediment for the Asian nations investigated. This was particularly the case for Afghanistan, Qatar, Azerbaijan, and China. While the economic growth rate in Afghanistan was on a rocky pace between 2015 and 2020 (average growth rate equaling 1.5 percent) the trauma triggered by COVID-19 ultimately caused negative growth. Women are more susceptible to unemployment than men, the total unemployment rate was 18.6 percent in 2020, within the female population it was 32 percent, while it was 15.2 percent for men. For the young population aged between 15-24 the unemployment rate was 23.7 percent while youth outside education the rate amounted to 34.4 percent.[7]

Whereas Qatar remains remarkably unaffected. Qatar suffers from relatively low unemployment rates, and so had focused it's efforts on female participation, the reform of the sponsorship system for migrant workers, and the elimination of child labour. Legislative reforms had succeeded in doing so, policies aimed at "the replacement of the sponsorship systems with a work contract that guarantees the rights of the worker" allowed Qatari workers economic autonomy and rights, reducing much of the harm and oppression caused by the sponsorship system. Qatar had also set funds for precautionary measures for workers, increased transparency in order to reduce child labour, and created job search platforms as a support to private sector employment, in addition to unified platforms for complaint submission and resolving disputes.[8]

Azerbaijan has also seen a positive growth in the number of people employed in a diverse spectrum of the economy, with most of the employed population being engaged in agriculture (36 percent of the total employed population). Azerbaijan has implemented "a centralized electronic information system" that assists unemployed and job-seeking individuals to find vacancies,

[6] GDP growth (annual %) - China, World Bank, 2022
[7] Afghanistan Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, 2021
[8] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

as well as vocational training courses for the working-age population. Since the country's last VNR in 2019, two social packages were introduced, the first which raised the minimum wage to meet the subsistence minimum in the country, and the second which exceeded it. In total 4.2 million people reaped the benefit of the social packages. Employment rates in the country have experienced a positive growth overall, the unemployment rate decreased between 2015 and 2019 (from 5.0 percent to 4.8 percent). The most susceptible to unemployment were women, those living in urban areas (Baku, which is the capital and largest city was home to the highest number of unemployed individuals), and young people under the age of 30.[9]

China was remarkably known for its rapid economic growth in the last few decades, so the situation for China was to maintain the growth and reduce inequality in the process. The pandemic impacted different sectors of the economy unevenly. While online education and telecommunications might offer opportunities for digital companies, the real economy was more fragile. China implemented tax cuts up to more than 2.6 trillion for different beneficiaries.[10] Special support had been given to the most vulnerable groups, such as employment subsidies for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, or job guidance for migrant workers. Although the effect was not completely offset, the outcomes were satisfactory in comparison.

Having said so, not all the obstacles and setbacks were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, since some countries had also struggled with a variety of local and contextual forces at play. Iraq, for example, had suffered from instability in addition to its oil dependency making the state and GDP growth highly dependent on global oil prices. Oil profits make up 95 percent of the GDP within Iraq, and whilst this had allowed it to experience 6.6 percent GDP growth in 2017 due to rising oil prices, it had halted SDG development for this goal in 2021. Furthermore, the rentier oil economy caused unemployment, and FDI investment plans with the introduction of Law No. 13 of 2016 failed to attract investment, and sectors beyond the oil sector suffered from a lack of support, especially the banking sector with only 22.7 percent of persons 15 and above having opened a bank account in financial institutions in 2016. Nevertheless, the Central Bank of Iraq has launched a 1 trillion Dinar (668 Euros) initiative to support small and medium enterprises, increase employment, and produce goods and services locally. After the COVID-19 pandemic, interest rates had been reduced to 1

[9] Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021
[10] China's VNR Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2021

percent for large project loans.[11]

SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic significantly halting the development of many SDGs, SDG 16 on the contrary, offered some countries an opportunity to relaunch their systems in a more just manner. Nevertheless, not all nations acted in the same fashion or experienced the same opportunities for growth.

A long history of conflict, insecurity and crackdown on crucial institutions in Afghanistan has affected the country's capacity to reach the SDG 16. The report of the Global Institute for Economics and Peace states that the economic cost of violence was 50.3 percent of GDP for Afghanistan in 2020 (the range of affected countries varies from 23.5 to 59.1 for context). The long-lasting violent and armed conflict led to weakened government institutions, rule of law, and public trust in the judiciary as well as efforts to bridge inequality. Due to the deepening divide between people and the government caused by internal conflict, the youth have been drawn to anti-government elements and activities, fueling further violence in the country. Further violence increases poverty and intensifies conflict and insecurity. The peace negotiations that commenced in September 2020 have also sparked an increase of violence in the country, as noted by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).[12]

Bhutan and Qatar were more focused on the development of strong institutions and legislation. Bhutan established the Government Performance Management System to improve accountability, as well as the proper delivery of public services. Additionally, Bhutan's Government-to-Citizen Project had 155 online services and 19 mobile applications to facilitate access to public services. As a result, Bhutan managed to rank 26 out of 180 in the 2019 Transparency Index.

Qatar had not registered any reports of murder, trafficking, assassinated journalists, kidnapping or arbitrary detention, and 100 percent of participants reported feeling safe walking in the country.

[11] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[12] Afghanistan Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, 2021

Qatar had instead focused its effort on social development in hopes of fostering and maintaining economic prosperity through the emphasis on legislation. It had begun on education curriculum reforms in coordination with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations as well as Qatar's media, in hopes of promoting rapprochement and reducing tensions between cultures, civilizations, and followers of monotheistic religions. Qatar had also focused on introducing legislation to ensure equal access to justice and trial especially for migrant workers, as well legislation on the promotion, protection and empowerment of disabled peoples. Qatar includes a list of most effective and important legislative developments in the VNR 2021.[13]

The improvement in the legal environment and institutions in China reflected very different focuses. The homicide rate of China was even lower than many Western European countries. Safety of civilians was not an issue for China, but the vacuum in environmental law could result in derogation and thus restrain economic growth. China issued policy documents about ecological conservation reform, and ecological and environmental protection, passed a new law on the Protection of the Yangtze River, and amended the Environmental Protection Law and the Law on the Prevention and Control of Atmospheric Pollution.[14] Institutions, from another aspect, were associated with execution and implementation. The coordination of the central government, responsibility for provincial units, and enactment by cities and countries were regarded as a key to eradicate extreme poverty and react to Covid. That being said, there were still remarkable improvements regarding protections of civil rights: the adoption of the Civil Code was a milestone for the rule of law.

Having said so, it is also important to remark how, despite these general advances, Iraq made little progress. The 2020 Arab Sustainable Development Report stated that Iraq ranks second after Comoros in the region on rates of intentional homicide and assassinations, in addition to having high numbers of deaths resulting from battles and internal wars with ISIS. This gender disparity in violence is highlighted especially in a major setback for peace and human rights, when hundreds of Yazidi and Christian girls were trafficked. The legacy of violence also remains in the estimated 200,000 people who have died as a result of terrorist violence and military operations. According to the World Peace Index issued by the Institute of Economics and Peace, Iraq ranked at 160/163

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[13] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 20211
[14] China's VNR Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2021

countries, among the highest countries with a threat to peace. This is the result of violence and deaths from civilian displacement, and a high likelihood of terrorist operations. The one area Iraq had improved in for SDG16 was in the number of unsentenced detainees, which had decreased as reported in VNR2021.[15]

Research Question 1: What methodologies, sources, and processes of validation were used during the collection of data, and which knowledge gaps have been Identified?

Afghanistan:

Afghanistan has mostly used data compiled by the National Statics and Information Authority (NSIA) to assess the progress of the SDGs in the country. Additionally, international sources have been used to complement the data from NSIA. Referrals of reports produced by international organizations and civil society for further data validation and information have been made where necessary, and special attention has been given to data source credibility.[16]

Azerbaijan:

Azerbaijan created the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) in 2016. Representatives of relevant state agencies form part of the Council. The VNR process was led by the NCCSD and the Ministry of Economy. In the process, various stakeholders such as the parliament, public and academic institutions, NGOs, and the private sector have been consulted. Azerbaijan started the third VNR with a development of methodology based on best practices analyzed by international and local experts. Data for the VNR was derived from line ministries as well as other government agencies and the Secretariat of the NCCSD. The process of validation included the direct input from various national stakeholders and external support (UNDP). Some challenges remain in relation to analysis assessment when comparing the current statistical framework to past VNRs. The data available has not been categorized by gender, age groups, residence (rural/urban) and regional/administrative district.[17]

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[15] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[16] Afghanistan Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, 2021
[17] Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021

Bhutan:

When comparing Bhutan's Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for the years 2018 and 2021, it becomes apparent that they followed a similar procedure. Primarily due to the fact that the data collection process was designed according to the UN's guidelines for 2018 this was through the "Voluntary Common Guidelines to support country reporting on the SDGs", whereas for 2021 they adapted questions suggested in the Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews. Additionally, both reports are similar in terms of the broad spectrum of stakeholders that took part in the VNR process, including both key government and civil society organizations; however, it must be said that in 2021 they were capable of engaging with even more stakeholders than in the previous VNR. Having said so, there were also some differences, mainly originated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It must be understood that the consultation phase coincided with Bhutan's lockdown, thus most of the consultations were conducted online, although once restrictions were lifted some discussions and meetings were conducted in-person.

China:

The report of China used various sources according to different functions of institutions. The majority of the data were made available by the National Bureau of Statistics, covering most of the indicators at the macro scale. The Chinese Academy of Science provided the latest and most precise data relevant to environmental protection. The China Center for Disease Control and Prevention explained the trend and achievements in the campaign against COVID-19 pandemic. Some published reports and white books were also cited. The report made visualizations for legibility and comparability at an intra-country level. Some data however, lacks comparability because of its special nature. For example, "273 marine nature reserves and special marine reserves [had] been established." Without knowing a benchmark at the world level, we do not know its significance.

Iraq:

The VNR was prepared by joint efforts supervised by the Ministry of Planning, which supervised the cooperative efforts of local and federal entities, the private sector, NGOs and the parliament.

This included comparative discussion with stakeholders and comparative implementation plans for urban/rural divides, this was in addition to UNDP technical support during the VNR preparation stages. The Government of Iraq promoted an exchange of ideas to best formulate a vision of development for the country, with a great focus on contextualization and localization of efforts. This was in addition to a uniquely useful "electronic consultation and information retrieval" where public opinion was gathered through online interactions. Nevertheless, gaps in data, especially across gender and geographical variance (urban/rural) was a hindrance to VNR production. COVID-19 had specifically hampered communication and statistical collection efforts, nonetheless the data gap was able to be reduced by 7 percent from 2018 to 2020. The total data gap reached 69.9 percent of all SDG indicators, meaning only 67 of 230 indicators had available data. SDG 13's indicators, for example, had no available data.[18]

Qatar:

Qatar had built its data methodology through a collaborative effort between the Cabinet and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, working together to ensure the Planning and Statistic Authority's ability to prepare data for the VNR. This included the formation of an Advisory Statistics Committee and Permanent Population Committee, which consisted of over 17 entities from the public and private sector, civil society organizations, and academic institutions. These committees also ensured the following of the DESA VNR Preparation Handbook. Finally, a robust e-platform was created to manage and collect the data gathered for the VNRs, as well as data gathered for the Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022 and the Qatar National Vision 2030, which DESA showcased as a best practice. This was a successful result of the effort in *"producing national indicators for sustainable development goals and targets, striving towards building an integrated modern statistical system that enhances national development monitoring, follow-up and evaluation."*[19]

[18] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[19] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

Research Question 2: Which partnerships have been formed between stakeholders, and have these partnerships been synergistic in their developmental goals?

Afghanistan:

Through the creation of the A-SDGs (The national Afghanistan SDGs) Afghanistan has shown that as a country it recognizes the enabling role multi-stakeholder partnerships play in mobilizing and sharing knowledge, technology and financial resources. The A-SDGs Executive Committee (EC) as part of the Ministry of Economy oversees the reporting and follow-up mechanisms, and works on data collection and verification. The 2021 VNR was prepared with the participation of stakeholders enabled by the Ministry of Economy through a series of consultations, workshops, and bilateral discussions with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, government bodies, private sector representatives, women's organizations, academia, and development partners.[20]

Azerbaijan:

Azerbaijan has continued its international partnerships regarding sustainable development and plans to pick up the threads in the coming years as well, as demonstrated by the decision to develop the "UN-Azerbaijan Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the period 2021 to 2025". Azerbaijan has partnered with UN agencies and international organizations to achieve the SDGs. A relevant partnership framework is the United Nations-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) during the period 2016 to 2020. Partnerships have been developed on the national level as well, with the participation of government agencies, civil society, youth organizations, private sector and academic institutions in the consultation process and drafting of the new Cooperation Framework (2021-2025) between UN and Azerbaijan, defining the mutual and ensuing areas of cooperation. Azerbaijan has been an active participant in several international fora and events related to the SDGs. [21]

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[20] Afghanistan Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, 2021
[21] Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021

Bhutan:

When developing its VNRs Bhutan has always followed a broad approach that includes as many stakeholders as possible. As such, they do include agents from across key government agencies including line ministries, constitutional bodies and autonomous agencies; as well as local governments, parliamentarians, political parties, development partners, civil society organizations including women and youth groups, private sector, academia, and the media. The fact that they are included at every step in the process ensures that during the following planification and implementation of the developmental programs their broad range of opinions are included. Thus, creating some degree of synergistic tendencies. Nonetheless, Bhutan still has a large room for improvement when it comes to cooperating with international stakeholders.

China:

Partnerships for China could be divided into two categories: international level and subnational level. China supported the framework of the UN, advocated for trade and investment liberalization, and worked for a better international environment for development. China had been "a staunch supporter of, active participant in, and important contributor to the South-South cooperation." The most well-known partnership was the proposal and devotion to the Belt and Road Initiative. Another example was the China-Europe freight trains, which saw an increase in both volume and number of train trips even during the pandemic. Partnership at the domestic level took place in various forms. The coordination between the government and e-commerce lowered the threshold for rural areas to enter a larger market. "According to a World Bank study, households in Taobao villages [villages retailing on Alibaba] that participate in e-commerce earn 80 percent more than those that do not." [22] Another example was to guide migrant workers to get employed nearby. This coordination with enterprises stabilized employment and economic growth during the initial outbreak of the Coronavirus.

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[22] China's VNR Report on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2021

Iraq:

Iraq had built its VNR preparation process off of stakeholder cooperation and consultation, and it had especially seen a greater emphasis on stakeholder engagement in the second VNR, that of 2021, executing seminars as well as several consistent consultations. A committee of stakeholders was formed to be consulted throughout the preparation process, as well as monitor the expectations, views, and aspirations for sustainable development. Iraq's inclusion of electronic consultation with civil society was also rather innovative, curbing communication and freedom of speech restrictions by engaging with the population online. Financing was one of the primary push factors for further stakeholder engagement, in hopes of greater public-private cooperation to provide funds, expand advancement opportunities, and create job opportunities in the meantime. Iraq had also included 'messages' to its various local and international stakeholders highlighting their recommendations and needs for different stakeholders in the 2021 VNR, as well as urging greater cooperation and collaboration.[23]

Qatar:

Qatar too had placed an emphasis on stakeholder participation and synergy. Atop of the aforementioned collaborative efforts in data collection and verification process, a participatory form had also been used. After an identification process to select stakeholders from ministries, private sectors, NGOs, civil society, academic and research institution, government agencies, and UN agencies, a form was sent to gather data, recommendations, opinions and points of interest to the various stakeholders in relation to the 2030 Agenda as well as efforts to contain and counter COVID-19's impact. This identification process also highlighted relations between stakeholders, and relations between goals and the stakeholders. Whilst the commitment to SDG progress by all stakeholders was one of Qatar's identified challenges, synergistic advantages of stakeholder cooperation was seen throughout Qatar's efforts, especially in the areas of food security and agricultural wellbeing, which eliminated the threat of food insecurity, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.[24]

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[23] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[24] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

EMERGING CHALLENGES:

Challenge 1: Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic was hard-hitting and had a universal and far-reaching impact. The pandemic's influence was most significantly felt in the aspects of economic recession, unemployment, and general welfare. The pandemic had also largely impacted the ability to accurately and successfully gather data, as well as obstructed communication between organizations, staff, stakeholders, and other included parties and entities. This had further worsened data and knowledge gaps within many of the nations preparing VNRs, most evidently in the case of Iraq. This was especially obstructive considering the pre-existing data gaps and difficulty in collecting data in rural areas, whether hard to reach geographically or due to security concerns. China was the outlier in this region that countered the influence successfully. Nevertheless, the pandemic still hasn't ended at the point of the report, and we cannot declare a complete victory.

The COVID-19 pandemic had also hit Iraq's population and healthcare system rather hard, as well stagnated economic growth and further deepened economic and social inequality and precarity. The pandemic had made access to food more insecure, poverty more extreme, and resulted in an increase in violence, especially domestic violence and violence against women. The impact of the pandemic increased the stress on an already strained healthcare system, which did not meet International Health Regulation requirements, especially in risk and epidemic management. A 2019 evaluation showed that only 12 percent of essential medicines were available, and it also highlighted the severely low health worker density of 9 per 10,000 people.[25]

Similarly, Bhutan did suffer heavily from the economic effects of COVID-19. In 2020, its GDP contracted by -6.1 percent, unemployment rates rose to 5 percent to 22.6 percent for youth unemployment-, CPI inflation rose to 9.5 by March 2020, trade volume dropped by 30 percent and fiscal deficit reached 7.36 percent of GDP. While these figures may not seem as catastrophic as those shown by other nations, there are some results that Bhutan's weak economy could not afford.

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[25] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

In 2020 GDP declined by 4.3 percent in real terms in Azerbaijan. Value added production in the non-oil and gas sector declined by 2.6 percent, and it declined by 7.0 percent in the oil and gas sector, although the decline in oil industry was also attributed to commitment under the OPEC framework. There is a conflict between the short-term interest of extracting benefits from fossil fuels and the long-term interest of transforming to greener energies. It is predictable that any sharp fluctuations in the global energy and stock markets will have impacts on this structure of the economy.[26]

The situation in China is slightly more complicated. On one hand, China was successful in its initial response to the outbreak and the prevention of the rebound. It was reasonable to be optimistic at the time of the finalization of the 2021 report. On the other hand, there will be ongoing uncertainties at the point of this review: how will new variants with higher infectivity influence its policy and outcome?

Challenge 2: Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, analysis and verification was one of the largest challenges facing the nations during the process of VNR preparation as well as SDG achievement and monitoring. Data collection is a formidable challenge as it requires a small margin of error to be accurate and impactful. Data accuracy and impact is important in planning and implementation and requires robust infrastructure and capital. Even though the Asia and Pacific region improved in terms of data availability in 2020, the region should focus on accelerating data production for indicators with relevant partners and United Nations agencies.[27]

For countries such as Iraq, other severe economic, environmental, political and security- oriented priorities often take precedence over the furthering of data collection infrastructure, and the COVID-19 pandemic had even further increased the pressures on these nations, as detailed above.

Not all nations however were stagnated by challenges in data collection, verification and analysis. Those with more robust data infrastructure, less multifaceted pressures, and more room for expenditure in national funds were able to navigate this challenge successfully. Qatar, for example,

[26] Third Voluntary National Review of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2021
[27] The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021, 2021

has been able to navigate challenges around data collection and analysis rather well, as will be fully detailed later on. The reports of Azerbaijan also reflected a mature data collection and analysis system. This was simply because Azerbaijan submitted voluntary national reviews three times. However, for Azerbaijan the challenge remains to produce disaggregated data, which ensures the inclusion and identification of all. This challenge seems to be prevalent in the Asia Pacific region as only 27 SDG indicators have disaggregated data availability.[28]

Like previously mentioned, the latest report of China included detailed and reliable data, although we also observe rooms for improvements: comparability. Afterall, all data may appear to be preeminent considering the size of this country. It might be more helpful to have more per capita data or data in a comparison context.

Challenge 3: Climate change

Climate change, in its nature, is an existential and global issue that does not stop at a border. Hence, its effects and threats were felt and navigated by all nations included in this review. The largest challenge to many of the oil-dependent countries is in navigating a future of sustainable development and prosperity in an increasingly polluted and carbon-restructured future.

Qatar's oil-dependent economy, for example, must face the challenge of how to navigate the impact of shifts to renewable energy on economic prosperity in the nation. Additionally, questions on social and economic development under circumstances of freshwater scarcity and a near complete Qatari reliance on desalination emerge, as well as questions on civic life in an increasingly harsh environment.[29]

Finally, sea-level rise is too concerning a challenge for Qatar, being one of three Gulf countries who will be impacted by sea-level rises. Qatar hopes to wean off of oil and gas dependency and keep in line with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to phase-out carbon-based fuels eventually. One hopeful light is that Qatar views its current profit and energy availability as an opportunity to develop technologies before damage begins becoming staunchly irreversible and unlivable.

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[28] The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021, 2021
[29] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

Iraq, another oil-dependent economy, must also navigate weaning away from oil-dependency whilst also dealing with violence and political instability. Climate change has also hit Iraq greatly in its droughts, with fluctuating and irregular rainfall patterns, river water quantities impacted rural standards of living, diminished food security, and harshly hit the agricultural sector. Challenges emerge in the development of future agricultural production methods to mitigate climate change impacts on irrigation and water availability to ensure food security and access to water.[30]

Oil exportation is also the pillar industry of Azerbaijan. Similar to Qatar and Iraq, Azerbaijan also sees the need to transform to cleaner energies and the need for more resilience against climate-related hazards and natural disasters. On one hand, a transition will be an arduous process technically speaking, involving research and investment. On the other hand, the awareness of citizens is not enough at the present level, not to mention active compliance. Azerbaijan needs to make the Green Economy feasible in the visible future in both levels.

The environmental issues in China are rather the unwanted remnants of developments in the past. Land and water resources are limited in China as for the large population. In the past several decades, China ran up an overdraft and left some places polluted or fragile. Climate change will worsen the situation if no countermeasures are taken. More frequent extreme weather events could take lives and disrupt productions. The shortage of fossil fuels may hinder manufacturing industries. Pollution itself could harm the lives of thousands.

BEST PRACTICES

The best practices sought after in the comparative study of all the VNRs across the countries in the analysis were those that had in practice or the potential to benefit holistically and positively influence a large and varied number of goals. Best practices necessitate the absence of context-specificity, meaning that these practices are transferable, accessible, and effective outside the contextual and situational reality they were first implemented in. Finally, these practices should also be ones which help in minimizing or reducing the impact current and future emerging challenges pose to SDG achievement and development. Ultimately, the creation of robust and

30 Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021

cooperative internal data systems, localization and rural Investment, and green economies were identified as the best practices to be extracted and highlighted.

Best Practices 1: Data collection systems and infrastructure

Qatar has been able to create a robust internal system for the production, analysis, and collection of qualitative and quantitative data for national SDG indicators and targets. This was built off of a highly-developed technological and human capital infrastructure, as well as the cooperative and interconnected efforts of the strong institutions and organizations backing them. Many different efforts were combined to create a comprehensive, resilient, and large-spanning data infrastructure and system. First, was the creation of VNR preparation sub-working groups, which reviewed reports for accuracy. Additionally, these sub-working groups were also tasked with the preparation of the aforementioned stakeholder form, which included data authentication and verification questions and concerns, for both qualitative and quantitative matters. Furthermore, these teams were also strongly funded by the institutions and governments backing them, allowing them to attend as well as host a variety of data-centered workshops, such as the Virtual Workshop on Preparing Evidence-based VNRs and the workshops of the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) on SDG measurement approaches. Finally, a series of virtual meetings with UN organizations and agencies were sponsored and organized in order to help in the measurement, monitoring, and reporting of matters related to SDGs, targets and indicators. In order to minimize data gaps, a robust internal data collection system was built on cooperation and partnership between public and private sectors, civil society organizations, and research and academic centers. Inventories and archives of quantitative and qualitative data were digitized and made available, as well as consistent assessment of SDG indicator availability and gaps. In addition, an e-platform was created to manage SDG indicators, as well as collect reports relating to SDGs, VNRs, The Second National Development Strategy 2018-2022, and the Qatar National Vision 2030. Some included archived data sources were government statistics, strategies and policies implemented since the pandemic, as well as reviews of regional and international reports. The e-platforms, covering a variety of projects and data sources, were used to accelerate SDG data collection and survey information. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs had ultimately called for the e-platform to be registered as a successful practice due to its success in highlighting measures able to accelerate

the SDGs and best practices, and had been identified as a recommended practice itself, further emphasizing Qatar's success in navigating data gaps and challenges. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that strong political and economic stability and institutions and funds ultimately did play a large role in Qatar's ability to produce such results.[31]

Best Practices 2: Localization and rural investment

Iraq focused on localization efforts, connecting SDG clusters and grouping them with aligned goals of the Iraqi National Development Plan (INDP), and had localized SDG grouping with the INDP development themes, followed by the development of localized teams per local governorates included in the VNRs. Plans for further localization, which were largely obstructed by COVID-19, included furthering localized efforts on a rural scale, considering the large disparities between urban and rural areas in development, SDG implementation, and data.[32]

While Bhutan's rural population accounts for almost 60 percent of its inhabitants, it only represents 30 percent of the nation's wealth. In order to combat this abysmal disparity, Bhutan is prioritizing rural areas precisely where investments would have the most significant effect. As part of this strategy, the Bhutanese government launched the Rural Enterprise Development Corporation Limited, with the mission of providing collateral free loan for rural businesses at an interest rate of 4 percent, as well as the Priority Sector Lending scheme to help the formation of cottage and small industries by facilitating the access to interest-free financing. Furthermore, Bhutan approved the Economic Development Policy in 2016, which identified hydropower, agriculture, cottage and small industries, tourism, and mining as the areas with the largest potential for export, revenue generation and employment creation.

The continuous investment in infrastructure in rural areas of China was briefly referred to in the part about poverty reduction. This part will focus on relocations, which is an alternative for some underdeveloped rural areas. This was the ultimate solution for the areas with extremely tough natural conditions, fragile ecosystems, or frequent natural disasters. Relocation was offered on a voluntary basis. Those migrating elsewhere enjoyed the "dividends" of development in their destination. Many choosing to stay were hired as forest rangers.

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[31] Qatar Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021
[32] Iraq Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2019

Best Practices 3: Green Economies

First of all, green economies are not just limited to big industries such as electric cars or solar energy. Many above-mentioned investments and developments in the great rural areas are usually, by their natures, eco-friendly. For conciseness, we will mainly focus on different parts in this sector.

After the proposal of the SDGs, China attached great importance to the green economy. The previous model that the environment could be sacrificed for economic development was no longer in use. Greener industries were encouraged to replace highly polluting industries. Rising public awareness and perfected legislation further contributed to the shift. The new paradigm recognized several benefits: ecological compensation, green assets in the form of improved ecosystems, agriculture and tourism, new business models arising from ecological conservation, successful brands of ecological products, and trade of ecological products. In that way, both happiness and income of the localities could be secured within the process of the transition, which promises continuity and popular support. In that way, there would be systematic productions, circulations, consumptions and technological innovations.

Azerbaijan was in a slightly different situation. Instead of an accumulated environmental problem, its economy was overly dependent on the oil industry, which was unsustainable. In this regard, a high-quality environment and green energy have been regarded as priorities. Azerbaijan was trying to promote clean energy sources, clean technology, and circular economy. This could be a referential strategy for other oil exporting countries to avoid the potential resource curse.

CONCLUSION:

We have witnessed significant general improvements in all 6 countries in recent years after the proposal of the sustainable development goals. The huge differences in demographic characteristics, levels of development, economic structures, and social and political environment have increased difficulty for comparison. However, we observe some common successful experiences within almost all countries, derive potential good practices from some countries, and presume areas that need improvements from common weaknesses.

First, with sufficient willingness and permitting contextual factors, any country can gradually reduce poverty, maintain positive economic growth and satisfactory employment level, and build a more inclusive and just society. There are many potential mechanisms to achieve those, and different countries have chosen distinctive ways that suit their realities. Nevertheless, there is a difference in speed and resilience, especially in times of turmoil. Further investigation is needed to unveil the mechanism.

Second, it might be helpful to build a national data collection mechanism, invest in rural regions, and diversify the economy, especially the green economy. Since the countries in this group exhibit diverse conditions in many aspects, those suggestions are highly suggested but there might still be differences in outcomes.

Finally, further efforts should be needed to respond to possible sanitary crises and climate change. The climate has been changing, but it is unprecedentedly serious, directly impacting the economic structure of manufacturing countries and oil exporting countries if they want to make solid commitments. The Covid-19 pandemic is also unprecedented, speaking of the coverage and seriousness of the virus itself. While Covid-19 might be transient, there may be other crises in the long future. Both the Covid-19 and climate change bring systematic challenges to society in terms of growth, equality, equity, and quality of life.

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LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES IN MONITORING PROGRESS TOWARDS SDGS

IN LAOS, MALAYSIA, THAILAND, INDONESIA, THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA, AND JAPAN

ADVISOR:

ANGEL ALONSO ARROBA

GROUP MEMBERS:

ÁNGELA CANO,

EMILY ANNE SWANN,

MARINA AUCLAIR,

AND SOOJIN BAE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The research focuses on six Asian countries that submitted their Voluntary National Reviews to the High-Level Political Forum in 2021: Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and Japan. Considering the variety of approaches and policies implemented toward the achievement of the SDGs, the goal of this report will be to answer the question: How have the SDG indicators evolved in Asia since the adoption of SDGs by the UN in 2015? This report starts with a regional context analysis establishing the region's progress, emerging challenges, and best practices. It focuses in a second part on a measurement process analysis looking in detail at the planning and processes implemented, the partnerships put in place, the role of data and the challenges faced in its use for SDGs implementation, as well as reporting processes for the VNRs.

To analyze each country's progress and evolution towards the achievements of the SDGs coherently, we have grouped the SDGs into **three clusters**. The **First Cluster** describes goals that are fundamental to achieve to be successful in the achievement of the following ones and most of the time **represent a matter of life or death for the population**, it includes goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well being), and 6 (clean water). The **Second Cluster** represents **critical goals for the proper development and growth of the country**, they are crucial for the population's well-being without putting their immediate survival at stake if they're not accomplished. This cluster includes goals 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land), and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Finally, the **last cluster** of our classification includes fundamental goals **for optimal quality of life for the populations as well as the future of the planet**. It includes goals 7 (clean energy), 10 (reduce inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), and 17 (partnerships for the goals).

SDG REGIONAL CONTEXT ANALYSIS

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRESS IN THE REGION

First Cluster (Goals 1, 2, 3, 6)

As the Goals included in this group are mostly about fundamental elements of human life, it was expected that the ROK and Japan will share some commonalities while Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand do the same as each group of countries shares a similar status of economic and social development.

As expected, the **ROK and Japan shared multiple similarities** in terms of their approaches toward the SDGs included under this group. As the economic powerhouses of the Asia-Pacific region, the ROK and Japan both aim to tackle these goals by spreading their knowledge and know-how to other developing countries in South Asia and Africa. Instead of focusing mainly on overcoming their national/domestic challenges, the two countries set Official Development Assistance (ODA) related goals as **they have already achieved most of the First Cluster's Goals to a certain level**. This tendency is also identified from the existence of multiple mid-and long-term policy frameworks and policies that are already a second or third version of similar initiatives, meaning that actions targeting such goals have been existing since a long time ago and are now on a mature level.

However, this **does not mean that their approaches to this group's goals are identical**. Because Japan has been a traditional economic powerhouse of Asia since the Second World War while the ROK transformed from a recipient country of Official Development Assistance into the 23rd largest Development Assistance Committee donor and the 16th largest donor by volume for many years, they show some disparities.

First of all, Japan's geographical location creates a unique difference compared to that of the ROK. As Japan is a stretched island where frequent earthquakes and tsunamis disturb the country's water supply, the country has made various efforts to secure water resources and has built a water infrastructure closely related to Goal 6 of the SDGs. Currently, Japan's water supply penetration rate exceeds 98%, and the degree of implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) was 94%--meaning that different stages of development and implementation of IWRM

were almost completely reached--in both 2017 and 2018[1].

Compared to Japan, the ROK is considered **a better model for developing countries** as it achieved astonishing economic growth in less than 50 years. A New Paradigm for Rural Development of the ROK focuses on supporting the developing countries' rural development, particularly those related to Goals 1 and 2, by sharing the Korean experience of Saemaul Undong, "a multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral strategy that buffered large-scale migration from rural to urban areas and the increasing rural-urban income gap during the time of industrialization"[2] As Saemaul Undong significantly contributed to reducing urban-rural disparity during ROK's rapid development period, the ROK government is contributing to the implementation of First Cluster's Goals in developing countries by using its multi-sectoral approach, an incentive-based mechanism promoting competition, village-level development, and education tailored to the needs and circumstances of each community,[3].

Meanwhile, numbers of similarities were identified from Thailand, Laos, Malaysia, and Indonesia's progress in the goals grouped under the First Cluster. **The biggest enemy to fight against for these four countries is 'poverty'**: their VNRs mainly elaborate how each country is achieving a steady reduction in poverty-related indicators such as poverty gap, poverty severity, and multidimensional poverty. Also, **health-related indexes** such as HIV and child mortality rate, in general, **showed an improvement**. For example, Indonesia's child mortality rate and HIV cases are decreasing every year according to its VNRs and Laos, in 2018 and 2021, achieved a reduction in both categories.
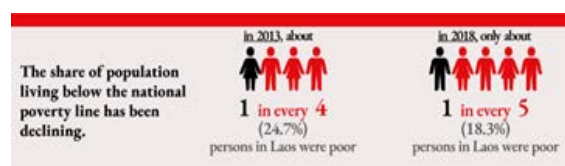
Source: Laos Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, p.27

However, even though poverty was commonly addressed as a major target, the **impact of COVID-19 was not always considered**. For example, most of Malaysia's data used in its 2021 VNR is from 2019, and thus it is impossible to accurately assess the achievements of the First Cluster's

[1] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era ." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2021. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28957210714_VNR_2021_Japan.pdf, 110-111.
[2] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2016. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10632National%20Voluntary%20Review%20Report%20(rev_final).pdf, 15.
[3] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 15.

Goals during the pandemic. On the other hand, the 2021 VNR of Indonesia clearly stated that the **COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the progress of poverty reduction** since various indicators related to poverty experienced a setback by 1.1 years to 3.1 years[4].

The VNR of Indonesia was particularly interesting as it **focuses on women's quality of life** from different perspectives compared to the other three developing countries. Indonesia is a country where issues such as **violence against women are more severe compared to other Asia-Pacific countries**. As a result, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection along with civil society organizations, took part in the process of SDGs implementation, and such involvement was spotted in different parts of its VNRs. In its 2021 VNR, the Indonesian government stated that "the more education a woman has, the more likely she is to make **safe and professional choices about her health**, especially for things like pregnancies". This is a meaningful discovery since it reveals that the government acknowledges the **importance of women's access to education**. Furthermore, the VNR also identified that the adolescent birth rate of women from the lowest 40% of household economic level was six times higher than those coming from the top 20% level[5].
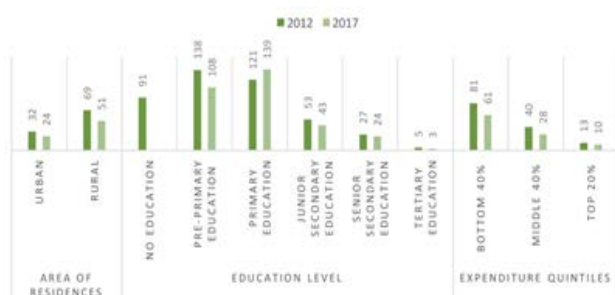
Figure 4.54 Age-Specific Fertility Rate (ASFR) aged 15-19 years, 2017
Source: IDHS (Statistics Indonesia and National Population and Family Planning Board)

Source: Indonesia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 p.121

Thailand, in the meantime, pointed out that **lack of knowledge** is one of the **root causes** of the problems they have been trying to solve. The medical industry is receiving a lot of insufficient data and results occurring due to the lack of technology and technological training. This lack of knowledge and training bleeds into what the general population is being taught. For instance, children under 5 years old are facing increasing levels of malnutrition, which shows that it is not only younger children facing a lack of education but **parents as well**.

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[4] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2021. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/280892021_VNR_Report_Indonesia.pdf, 11.
[5] "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 121.

Second Cluster (Goals 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16)

Under life below water (goal 14) and **life on land** (goal 15), we can start by highlighting that the ROK has a very general approach called the Third Basic Plan for Sustainable Development which has been created to implement the Agenda 2030 effectively. Japan implements several National Action Plans too, including the "National Forest Plan" setting targets for the development and conservation of forests, the area of forestation, standards for operations etc[6]. The "National Plan for Marine Plastic Litter" tackles marine plastic issues, and "The Third Basic Plan on Ocean Policy" deals with marine litter too by making efforts to **reduce the discharge of waste plastics to reduce the discharge of microplastics in the sea**[7]. These plans are listed in the VNRs, commenting on the progress of the plan and of the country, and using them as main arguments. Furthermore, the VNRs are shared internationally, leading to the creation of an obligation to fulfill the plans and projects. Other countries such as Malaysia opt for a more specific approach, focusing on policies and legislation to protect biodiversity by combating poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and encroachment into protected areas. Thailand follows this approach by creating **policies that have decreased wildlife trafficking** and have created plans to learn more about the marine ecosystem. In addition, they **have banned and limited the use of harmful plastics and wasteful water uses**. These environmental issues have meant an **increase in the environmental issues budget**. Finally, Indonesia has invested in policies to protect the environment such as: 1) establishing Forest Management Units to overcome illegal activities, 2) the formation of the peat and mangrove restoration agency, 3) the designation of High Conservation Value areas (33.71 million hectares), and 4) the harsher court cases for violations of the criminal law against trade in wild animals and plants (169 cases in 2019)[8]. It has specifically focused on fishing since Indonesia covers 37% of the world's fish species[9]; it has set the sustainable potential of marine fish resources and the total allowable catch.

Regarding **inequalities and socio-economic gaps**, the ROK's Better Life Initiative aims to establish and develop **an appropriate innovations system** to strengthen the research and development

149

Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 130.

[7]   Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 127.

[8]   Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 339-340.

[9]   Ibid, 335.

capacity in **developing countries**, and to ensure that it is available and offers solutions for every person in that country[10]. On the other hand, Thailand is needing to further develop its own conditions. Thailand's current initiatives **focus more on improvements at a domestic level**. Similarly, Indonesia focuses on its own country because the difference between rural and urban people is very intense. Government sources claim the proportion of individuals who own mobile telephones was 57.48% in 2020[11], which was a decrease from previous years. This reflects the differences between people living in urban and rural areas.

Under gender equality (goal 5), the ROK has brought up The Better Life for Girls Initiative[12]. Japan has brought a similar initiative through the Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement in the Workplace and the Act on Promotion of Gender Equality in the Political Field[13]. Also, Laos has created a policy framework for gender equality and a plan of action. They are making sure that the issue is raised in the Constitution and that laws have been enacted to allow the situation of women to improve. This includes the law on Development and Protection of Women, Preventing and combating Violence, and the Women Union. Gender parity at primary education level has seen many improvements in countries such as Thailand, and has already been completely achieved in Laos and Malaysia (since 1990). This improvement in women's education has led to the share of women being high in Laos' National Assembly[14] and to the share of women in decision-making roles in the public sector of Malaysia reaching its target of 30%[15], while the private sector is still progressing to do so. In Thailand, the improvement in women's education has led to **female children receiving convenient access to the internet and technology** and to **more women taking executive and parliamentary positions**. In Japan, **women's participation in society has increased** with female executives at listed companies increasing 2.2 times in five years[16] and with the proportion of women in managerial positions increasing too.

Quality education(goal 4) is a key factor to consider in the analysis of women's rights progression.

[10] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 15.
[11] "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 311.
[12] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 16.
[13] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 109.
[14] Lao People's Democratic Republic. "Voluntary National Review On the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, July 2018. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19385Lao_Final_VNR_19_June_2018_web.pdf.
[15] Malaysia. "Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2017. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15881Malaysia.pdf, 23.
[16] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era ."

Laos has achieved universal coverage in primary enrollment of 98.8%[17]. Thailand, on the other hand, has been increasing enrollments but has **not yet achieved universal coverage**, nor has Indonesia, which is still experiencing big education gaps between economic groups. Thailand has high percentages in the completion of mandatory schooling, while in Indonesia, this is still a problem since the higher the level of education, the lower the completion rate[18]. Laos has improved in their repetition rate, which was at 3.1% in 2019[19], and has increased the amount of public-private partnerships to promote training and skills[20]. Furthermore, Japan is amending the Child Care and Child Support Law, expanding scholarships in their New System for Higher Education, and revising their curriculum standards to adapt to new technology and rapid globalization[21].

Within the SDG on **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions** (goal 16), corruption and violence are very delicate subjects. **Malaysia** is experiencing **high levels of corruption cases[22]**. The government responded quickly and flexibly through a higher conviction rate in corruption cases (2017-2019) and a higher number of investigation papers by the commission. Indonesia also increased its efforts against corruption resulting in the anti-corruption behavior index improved[23]. Regarding this topic, Thailand was elected as a member of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (UNCCPJ) for the term 2018-2021. Despite their reelection to the UNCCPJ, Thailand has seen a reversal in democratic and civil liberties within their country.

Investigation papers and arrests in Malaysia 2018 - 2019

Type of offence	Investigation Paper			Arrest		
	2018	2019	YoY (%)	2018	2019	YoY (%)
Accepting bribery	267	375	40.1%	394	448	13.7
Giving Bribery	94	98	4.3%	124	122	79%

Source: Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, p.111

Touching on the **Decent Work and Economic Growth** goal, Indonesia has **increased access** to nationwide financial services which has allowed for **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** to have access to finances and credits[24], as well as more adults being able to open a bank account[25]. Malaysia has also increased its access to financial services for the general

17 Lao People's Democratic Republic. "Voluntary National Review: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, July 2021. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279472021_VNR_Report_Lao.pdf.
18 Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 298.
19 Lao People's Democratic Republic. "Voluntary National Review: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."
20 Ibid.
21 Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 102-105.
22 Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2021. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/285982021_VNR_Report_Malaysia.pdf, 106.
23 Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 243.
24 Ibid, 161.
25 Ibid, 166.

population. It now has a universal reach and has a proportion of 95.9%[26] in 2020 of adults with financial accounts. **Indonesia commented on the adoption of a circular economy** in 5 different sectors: which will lead to the increase of their GDP, the creation of jobs, the reduction of CO_2 emissions and water use, and higher savings for households[27]. However, Indonesia's households with the lowest expenditure (40%) are not receiving help yet.

Third Cluster (Goals 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17)

Moving on to goal 13, specifically to **Climate Change and Natural Disasters** the ROK has in place several different mid and long-term policy frameworks and plans for national development: National Climate Change Adaptation Plan and The Fifth Comprehensive Mid-term Plan for Environmental Protection[28]. Thailand has also created a national plan integrating several sub-projects specifically focused on the development of cultural and heritage conservation. Japan has promised to achieve the reduction targets of greenhouse gas emissions for 2030. They created the Act for Partial Revision of the Act on the Revitalization and Renovation of Regional Public Transport for the Purpose of Promoting Initiatives that contribute to the Provision of Sustainable Transportation Services. This act was done to provide continuous transportation services in depopulated areas without suffering loss. Laos is on track with the Phase-out of ozone-depleting substances (ODS), **a decline to near zero was achieved in 2014**. Thailand took a different angle and decided to integrate the knowledge of climate change into the national core curriculum. Including a focus on safely disposing hazardous waste and improving the land-use efficiency.

With **Affordable and Clean Energy** (goal 7), we should mention that Japan has been promoting thorough energy conservation efforts, through regulatory measures under the Energy Conservation Law enacted in 1979, and budgetary and tax support measures. These efforts by the public and private sectors have resulted in a **40% improvement in energy consumption efficiency**[29], which is the highest level of energy conservation in the world. As for renewable energies, the FIT system was introduced in Japan in 2012 resulting in the share of renewable energies to expand

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[26] Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations.", 71.
[27] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 152.
[28] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 11-12.
[29] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era," 112.

from 10% (FY2012) to 18% (FY2019)[30]. They have been **ranked 6th worldwide** for overall renewable energy installations (2018) and 3rd in the world for solar power (2018). Their Strategic Energy Plan is to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.

The goal of **sustainable cities and communities** (goal 11), Japan has witnessed their vulnerability against natural disasters and has been working nonstop to provide public assistance that comprises both hard and soft measures. In Japan, the Basic Act on Disaster Control Measures was enacted in 1961 to **systematize disaster countermeasures** and to develop and promote comprehensive systematic disaster prevention administration. The Basic Disaster Prevention Plan was formulated based on this law and is reviewed every year. In 2020, the plan was revised in response to the COVID-19 pandemic[31]. In Thailand, they took a different approach and developed the National Disaster Risk Management Plan. This plan serves as an integrated and people-centered national framework to implement capacity building for multiple sectors on crisis management. Thailand also developed The Baan Mankong Project/Affordable Homes Project or the Sufficiency Rural Homes project to continuously try and help **low-income, slum dwellers, and people with disabilities** to find decent housing.

For **Responsible Consumption and Production** (goal 12) Malaysia developed a green recognition and government procurement for registered products to gain recognition as well as incentives from the government. In 2016 only 17.4% of the government expenditure was being used, compared to the most recent statistic in 2019 of 20.7%. This increase shows that more companies are taking more sustainable actions and are thus being able to be registered as a green product.[32] Indonesia had a similar approach by issuing an ecolabel logo for registered eco-friendly products[33], and creating a Companies' Rank Performance Rating Program (PROPER) to assess and award companies that actively reduce their environmental damage and maintain their reputation. **2,038 companies have participated in PROPER** and reduced their pollution up to 46.16 million tonnes[34].

When it comes to access to technology and electricity, we can see deep divisions between the rural and urban communities too. Investing in **information and communication technology**

[30] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era," 112.
[31] Ibid, 121-122.
[32] Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations.", 89.
[33] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 213.
[34] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda," ix.

(ICT) access and quality education has been the recent strategy of Laos to promote peace. This has been done through initiatives focused on ICT trainings in education; creating private sector partnerships for ICT development; connecting rural communities through linking farmers; and establishing online early warning systems[35]. Indonesia has seen a near to **100% coverage in access to electricity**[36].

Looking at the **partnerships for the goals** (goal 17), the ROK has established a Multilateral Cooperation Strategy that strengthened the linkages between multilateral partnership and bilateral cooperation, increased development effectiveness; and aligned diverse cooperative projects from **25 ministries and agencies**[37]. Laos has regional and international cooperation, and integration stand at the top of their agenda[38]. They demonstrated this by adopting the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and by adapting the Round Table Process to ensure a more modern development vision including policy dialogue, discussions, and inclusion of non-traditional partners[39]. Laos has moved traditional practices to more comprehensive and inclusive partnerships[40]. Thailand is increasing cooperation through opting to focus on cooperation with the private sector to **improve consumption and production** of products.

In order to raise awareness through the use of partnerships, Japan references a survey conducted by Dentsu in 2020 where the recognition rate of the term "SDGs" was 29.1%, an increase of 13.1 percentage points from the FY2019 survey. The **awareness rate is growing among younger generations**. As for local governments, only 1% of **local governments were implementing SDGs in 2017**, but this figure rose to **39.7% in 2020**[41].

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[35]   Lao People's Democratic Republic. "Voluntary National Review On the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

[36]   Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda," 319.

[37]   Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 16-17.

[38]   Lao People's Democratic Republic. "Voluntary National Review On the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

[39]   Ibid.

[40]   Ibid.

[41]   Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 132-133.

EMERGING CHALLENGES IN THE REGION

Up to this point, each level has explained what these countries have gone through in terms of showcasing the data in the VNRs. Each had their own unique and special way of showcasing this, as well as different areas they needed to highlight in order to show the state of their country in respect to the 17 SDGs. However, **every country has to deal with issues and obstacles that may hinder or threaten their progress**. In this following section, there will be a brief analysis of the emerging challenges within this region. While all of the challenges will be categorized under the three clusters, it is easy to see the intersectionality some of these challenges hold.

First Cluster (Goals 1, 2, 3, 6)

When looking at the **emerging challenges each country is facing**, we are able to further see their similarities and differences, as well as the **effects the COVID-19 pandemic** has had on them. Under the first group, all of the countries, with the exception of Thailand and the ROK, take note of the **physical and mental health issues** that are occurring. Within Laos and Malaysia, the countries are **not prepared or on track to end HIV/AIDs by 2030**. Both have seen an unwavering level of the virus that is accompanied by the fear of it actually increasing in the future. Looking at Malaysia specifically, there has been a clear **burden on the health care system** due to the presence of malnutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). "NCDs currently account for around 74 per cent of all deaths in the country."[42]. In Indonesia and Japan, mental health is seen to be worsening. Japan already has a high suicide rate and, similar to Indonesia, COVID-19 has prompted their societies to **suffer even more due to the isolation** and other dampening circumstances[43].

Laos, Indonesia, and Malaysia also take note of how there is a strong need to diminish the **socio-economic polarization** that is occurring within their societies. Social welfare and other benefits need to be improved through government reinforcement to help this polarization. These gaps are also present in Japan due to their **large elderly population,** which has led to weaker social welfare funds stemming from their inverted population pyramid.. In Thailand's VNR, there are mentions of

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[42]   Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations.", 64.
[43]   Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 100-101.

similar issues within the population; however, the amount of data gaps in the Thai research allow for issues to slip under the radar. Despite the civilian feedback system the Thai government has set up, recent years have shown a decrease in civilian liberties. Since 2020, Thailand has **restricted the freedom of expression** specifically when it comes to criticizing the Royal Family or national government[44]. Before 2020, speaking out or being against those in charge have shown accounts of torture and forced disappearances which have largely been left unresolved and/or uncharged[45].

Second Cluster (Goals 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16)

The challenges included in the Second Cluster seem to focus on two main areas: **labor market and social injustices**. In regards to the labor market, in this region, countries found this area to be a multi-sided issue. The situations of the ROK, Japan, and Laos are all similar in the fact that **gender inequality and discrimination are still a pressing issue in the workforce**. Japan shows a wage gap between men and women which is reinforced by the societal pressure for women to work as non-regular employees in order to take care of their families[46]. The working environments in the ROK and Laos are similar in the sense of women not feeling comfortable or having equal standing with their male counterparts. These situations do nothing but add on to the unemployment rates that these countries are suffering, especially during current times due to COVID-19. While Malaysia does not directly mention anything in regards to gender inequalities in the workplace, it is mentioned that there is still a **very small percentage of representation and involvement in the political system**. This is able to show that there is still some form of gender inequality taking place.

The social injustices that are challenges in Indonesia, Japan, and Laos are all focused on different areas of injustice. Indonesia is finding that the amount of **law violations in environmental protections and instances of corruption have increased**[47] and caused significant challenges in their SDG progression. Meanwhile, Japan is seeing **child abuse reports and consultations increasing consistently** over the years. For example in 2019, there were 193,780 child abuse consolations

[44] Freedom House. "Thailand: Freedom in the World 2022 Country Report." Freedom House, 2022. https://freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2022.
[45] "World Report 2022: Rights Trends in Thailand." Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2022. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/thailand.
[46] Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2017. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16445JapanVNR2017.pdf, 21.
[47] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 340.

happening across the country[48]. Laos' injustice relates back to the labor market. The labor market is proving to have very poor conditions and **inadequate social protection** that is leaving workers at a greater disadvantage than they may already be in.

Third Cluster(Goals 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17)

The **environment and climate change are areas of great importance** when it comes to this region. The ROK, Laos, and Malaysia, specifically, put great importance on the fact that their societies and governments have to start working harder to better the environment. In Malaysia and Laos, their territories are very **vulnerable to natural disasters**, which is worsened due to the lack of preparation and worsening conditions caused by climate change. With this lack of preparation, businesses and individuals cannot do their best to help themselves and the country. The ROK has the resources but is unable to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The **living standards are also seen as a challenge** due to the fact that Malaysia is seeing gaps in basic living amenities such as clean water, and Indonesia is facing high urbanization but lower-income individuals have inadequate living situations. While Thailand mirrors some of these struggles, they are having a lot of data gaps and inefficient results from different resources due to the lack of knowledge the general population has on SDGs. In order to build and have a sustainable society, those living within the society have to know how to foster that sustainability. It is extremely difficult for SDG progression to happen if the obstacle in the way is the people who allow for any progression to take place. This is something even the government acknowledges and is trying to overcome.

BEST PRACTICES IN THE REGION

Some policies, processes, or projects stood out as they produced good outcomes after being followed in their respective countries. They can be described as "best practices". For clarity purposes, they have been grouped in five categories focusing on specific areas but were not ranked or classified. The best practices are grouped into the following categories: ensuring

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[48] Japan. "Voluntary National Review 2021 Report on the Implementation of 2030 Agenda Toward Achieving the SDGs in the Post-COVID19 Era .", 131-132.

the implementation of the SDGs, making sure development programs reach their targets, the development of partnerships, education as a way to promote women and youth empowerment, and environmental policies.

Ensuring the implementation of the SDGs

To ensure that the SDGs remain a priority and appropriate policies are adopted, countries have put in place different mechanisms, out of which two seem to be particularly efficient compared to others. The ROK's government put in place a Quadruple process to establish a coherent government mechanism for the implementation of the SDGs. It **adjusts the government's goals and tasks of existing policies and institutions to fit the SDGs' needs.** This ensures efforts are made by ministries to mainstream the SDGs into their policies, and to accelerate government discussions to establish a coordinating mechanism for the implementation of SDGs, **including the aspirations of the SDGs in its international development cooperation plan**[49].

The idea of including the SDGs in the development plan is also followed by Malaysia, where **SDGs are incorporated in the national planning framework**. Therefore, for Malaysia putting in place the country's development means going towards the achievement of SDGs[50]. It is also a strategy used in Indonesia, where SDGs are integrated into national and subnational development plans. One of the strengths of Malaysia's development plan is that it **follows a phased implementation**. Indeed, the national development plan is set for five years and includes the SDGs. This **allows for flexibility** since they can adjust their strategies depending on achievements, challenges encountered and lessons learned in the previous plans. It also provides for a better and more reliable assessment of emerging trends and circumstances that may affect the desired development outcomes. Finally, it also allows for feedback and greater participation from stakeholders[51].

Another crucial part to ensure that policies adopted align with SDGs targets is that SDGs are funded adequately and efficiently, strategies are put in place to tackle the SDGs, and their implementation is monitored. The Malaysian government conducted a **mapping exercise to ensure better funding of the SDGs**. The goal was to stop allocating budget based on needs-based

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49 Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 30-31.
50 Malaysia. "Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017.", 42.
51 Malaysia. "Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017.", 44.

consideration, which tended to result in financial gaps for certain SDGs[52], and to **allocate budget in a more equitable way to all SDGs** by adjusting the development expenditure allocated to projects depending on which SDGs they tackle.

Another strategy used is the concept of **Bio-circular-green-economy implemented by the Thai government to tackle multiple SDGs**. It consists of four strategies all tackling building, strengthening, and promoting ways people can create sustainable cities with knowledge, technology, and innovation. Those strategies focus on five sectors: food and agriculture, medical and wellness, bioenergy, biomaterial and biochemical, tourism and creative economy, and biodiversity and cultural diversity.

Regarding the **monitoring of SDGs**, the ROK and Malaysia have different methods that can be considered best practices. On the one hand, the ROK established a **Committee for International development cooperation** composed of the Prime Minister, Ministers of relevant ministries, the heads of the relevant government agencies, and various stakeholders such as academics and non-governmental actors. This committee acts as a control tower for the ROK's Official Development Assistance policy that is committed to implementing the SDGs[53]. On the other hand, part of Malaysia's procedure to monitor the implementation of SDGs is the process of **Voluntary local reviews that are a tool used by local and regional governments to report on SDG progress** to support national development frameworks and for cities to drive innovation and advance their local priorities[54].

Making sure that development programs reach their targets

Another key practice to ensure the efficiency of the policies and programs put in place is the **targeting of the programs**. They need to be accurate to avoid including or excluding some people or groups by accident. This happens when data access is limited, or agencies have inaccurate data. While Malaysia has committed to developing its statistical capacity to measure additional indicators[55], **COVID significantly impacted agency capacity in data monitoring**. Because of movement restrictions, fieldwork was made impossible, and online surveys became more

[52]   Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations.", 35.
[53]   Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 4.
[54]   Malaysia. "Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021 - United Nations.", 36.
[55]   Malaysia. "Malaysia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2017.", 56.

common. However, a paradox came with the spread of their use. On the one hand, there was a higher reach and more people were responding to them as people became more used to their use. On the other hand, only people with access to a computer and the internet could respond, altering the representativeness of the survey. It is mainly a problem in rural areas where access to knowledge about technology is not as common or diverse as in urban areas. This situation has slowed data collection improvements and current methods, widening the gaps that were already there. Both Thailand and Indonesia have worked to prevent that. Thailand has put in place the Thai People Map and Analytics Platform. It is a **data analytics tool that policymakers can use to derive precise poverty alleviation programs** that suit the specific needs of people living in different provinces. The end goal is to improve the quality of life of Thai citizens by contributing to achieve SDGs 1 and 10. Similarly, Indonesia has developed a Unified Database for Social Protection Programs to **more efficiently target recipients of poverty alleviation programs**. This database is managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction and is made available for ministries and institutions but also for the general public through a website as a more limited version[56]. By targeting the people in need of the social programs more accurately, it ensures that the funds are spent efficiently and those in need benefit from the help designed for them.

Development of partnerships

Partnerships are at the center of SDG 17 and are crucial to achieving the rest of the SDGs. For this reason, partnerships between donors and recipient countries as well as between the public and private sectors are fundamental.

The ROK gives great importance to Official Development Assistance, because of its unique development trajectory the country pays great attention to its role in **bridging the divide between donors and partnering countries**. This is why it supports the Addis Ababa Action Agenda which provides a comprehensive framework to **maximize the potential of all development actors and resources for financing sustainable development**, it also takes part in the Addis Tax Initiatives and has continued to provide assistance to developing countries to modernize their tax administration

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[56]   Republic of Indonesia. "VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 'ERADICATING POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY IN A CHANGING WORLD." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2017. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15705Indonesia.pdf, 21.

systems and to bolster their capacity, incorporating its own experience into aid policies[57]. As for the ROK, Official Development Assistance is key for Japan. The country **supports developing countries in establishing their own SDG implementation systems**. Some of the notable cases are: the support provided to the Indonesian government to set 1) national targets and indicators for the SDGs, 2) action plans to achieve the SDGs and 3) a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating their achievement; the formulation of the action plan for "The Sustainable Development Goals Center for Africa", an independent and non-profit international organization in Rwanda to enhance efforts towards achieving the SDGs by 54 African nations; and finally the Implementation of the ASEAN ESC Model Cities Programme and the High-Level Seminar in partnership with ASEAN countries and its cities[58].

Partnerships between the different levels of governance are also key for the achievement of SDGs targets. While Thailand is a highly centralized country regarding power allocations and regions have little say in overseeing policies, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are more decentralized, and Japan is moving towards decentralization. **Decentralization is a double-edged sword** as it allows sub-national levels to be in control of the policies implemented knowing their territory best, but it can also be harder to implement SDGs as regions can have different priorities than national governments. It is the case of Malaysia, where the decision-making system is very decentralized, and it is **challenging to make regions consider SDGs a priority**. Regarding Indonesia, the switch from a centralized to a decentralized country was fast and not as prepared as it could have been. Moreover, centralization has lasting effects on the organization of the country, and it will **take some time to see the benefits of decentralization** in the implementation of policies.

Businesses are also fundamental in achieving the SDGs, and their inclusion is key. For this reason, Japan **established a scheme for businesses to engage in the achievement of SDGs**. They launched the "Feasibility Survey for SDGs Business" and the "Preparatory Survey for BOP business" to respectively promote enterprises contributing to the achievement of SDGs and contributing to solving problems faced by people at the Base of the Pyramid[59].

The private sector is also key to achieving multiple SDGs such as goals 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, and 10 by

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[57] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 30.
[58] Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.", 46-49.
[59] Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.", 47-49.

offering decent employment opportunities. However, they are limited in their capacity to offer positions if the population is not educated enough or if there is a mismatch between the skills taught to students and the skills needed in the labor market. To counter this problem, Indonesia has **involved the private sector in preparing curriculums, certification, and distribution of apprenticeship programs** to match the education provided with the industry's needs[60]. By giving them the appropriate skills and field practice, graduates from vocational schools and training are better absorbed in the labor market.

Education as a way to promote women and youth empowerment

As stated before, education is key for decent employment opportunities, to foster a high level of education, Laos created **centers of excellence throughout the country which have promoted advanced research and teaching**. They have also invested in technical, vocational skills, and competencies in rural and urban settings. These policies go hand in hand with their work for gender equality with domestic laws that have been passed, as well as a concrete plan of action for a policy framework for gender equality. They also included the matter of gender equality in their plan to manage the shift to commercialization. This plan encompasses a better integration of nutrition with an effort for equitable communication as well as addressing women's workload and empowerment in the agricultural sector.

Environmental policies

Finally, **environmental policies are also key to achieve the SDGs by 2030**. Two countries stood out with the policies described in their VNR: Laos and Japan. The first, set up an **innovation and knowledge hub to foster IT and non-IT-based innovative thinking to address issues and solve problems**, and focuses on key initiatives to improve science and technology. It also shifted to more comprehensive and inclusive partnerships through the Round Table Process for a more modern development vision. Secondly, Japan developed a "Basic Plan on Water Cycle" to promote "River Basin Management" efforts in which **relevant stakeholders in the watershed such as administrations, business operators, and other organizations work together**[61]. It also promotes

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60   Republic of Indonesia. "VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS (VNR) Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality." Voluntary National Reviews. United Nations, 2019. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2380320190708_Final_VNR_2019_Indonesia_Rev3.pdf, 110.
61   Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.", 31.

R&D regarding satellite applications that contribute to solving global issues (such as R&D that leads to the construction of flood forecasting and warning systems through Global Satellite Mapping of Precipitation)[62].

MEASUREMENT PROCESS ANALYSIS

PLANNING & PROCESS

Laos and the five other countries have two distinct approaches to tackling the planning stage of their VNRs: general versus specific approach.

Instead of establishing a special committee that takes care of the SDGs in a general manner or appointing a team whose task is to work as a control tower of the SDGs-related projects, Laos has made a **clear distinction when deciding who will take charge depending on the specific target related**. For example, Goal 1 and Goal 2, although they belong to the same cluster that we established at the beginning of this report, have different actors and institutions involved. For Goal 1, a 5 year household survey on expenditure and consumption conducted by the National statistics Center plays a key role together with the government monitoring program assisted by annual administrative data. Meanwhile, a tracking of undernutrition from food balance sheets and food consumed carried out by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) along with the five yearly Laos household expenditure and consumption survey (LECS) are the ones that back up Goal 2.

On the other hand, Republic of Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia tend to take a **general approach where few ministries, agencies, or organizations take the initiative as a whole** regardless of the specificity of the targets involved. Usually such ministries/agencies/organizations involve high-level officials such as ministers and prime ministers and tend to incorporate various people from different sectors, such as academia, businesses, and CSOs. Such entities held multiple meetings--both internally and externally, inviting different stakeholders outside of the government--in order to coordinate the process as a whole. However, this does not

[62]   Ibid, 2017.

mean that all five countries share the common process of planning the VNR.

ROK, Thailand, and Malaysia, first of all, have put **strong emphasis on their national statistics offices** (Statistics Korea for the ROK, the National Statistical Office for Thailand, and the Department of Statistics for Malaysia). First, in Thailand, the National Statistical Office consists of The Working Group along with many other government ministries in order to have a few meetings throughout the year to establish how and what the VNR should be built upon. It is similar in the ROK considering that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) held a series of meetings joined by other government bodies including the Office for Government Policy Coordination (OGPC), the Ministry of Environment (MOE) and the National Statistical Office in the beginning of the preparation stage. Similarly, Malaysia's Department of Statistics is also regarded as a national focal point for SDG indicators and a coordinator of data collection and compilation for various ministries and agencies.

Meanwhile, the ROK and Thailand shared another feature: a strong role of the MOFA. In both countries, the MOFA takes a role of promoting other departments' participation and encouraging an active creation of networks between multiple stakeholders. By doing so, the two countries approach SDG implementation as a **process that requires not only domestic but also international cooperation** in order to make the best out of it. This is particularly interesting considering that some countries do not classify the task of SDGs under the umbrella of the MOFA. Instead, various ministries were given the task. Malaysia's National Steering Committee that supports the National SDG Council is chaired by the director general of the Economic Planning Unit while Indonesia's Minister of National Development Planning takes the role of the National Coordinator.

Malaysian National SDG governance structure

Source: Malaysia Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2021, p.13

PARTNERSHIPS

All countries commonly highlighted the **importance of incorporating both public and private sector to the progress towards SDGs**. Not only the government and United Nations entities but also CSOs, academia, business sector, and scientists have taken part. Usually the process of incorporation is as following: first, government officials who are in charge of the project assess the nationwide progress and status of SDGs; then, such public officials encourage engagement of private parties such as CSOs in order to collect diverse views and promote smooth implementation throughout the country (as central management alone has limitations); and finally, both public and private entities evaluate the ongoing project together and provide feedback in order to better accomplish the goal in the future.

Japan and the ROK emphasized the involvement of local governments for effective achievement of the SDGs. Because it is impossible to fully achieve nationwide implementation of the SDGs without the cooperation and coordination of local governments, Japan and the ROK put **considerable weight on partnership with local governments**. For example, the Japanese Cabinet Office designated eleven cities across the country as model cities of value creation for self-sustaining development in order to promote its Future City Initiative[63]. Another example of Japan's Kanazawa Institute of Technology's "SDGs Business Award" which gives awards to business cases that have shown significant progress and showcasing them abroad is a model example of how the well-constructed partnership can be mutually benefitting for both the central and local governments[64].

Meanwhile, **CSOs** around the world--such as the Institute for Strategic and International Studies of Malaysia, Civil Society Network on the SDGs of Japan, and Korean Civil Society Network for SDGS of the ROK--**were performing active roles**. According to its 2017 VNR, the Malaysian government held SDG symposiums with multiple CSOs in order to promote awareness and participation of stakeholders. Furthermore, an independent research organization called the Institute for Strategic and International Studies Malaysia also takes a crucial role in Malaysia's Journey to achieve SDGs by collaborating with the UNDP. In case of the ROK and Japan, CSOs such as the Korean Civil

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[63]   Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.", 15.
[64]   Ibid, 16.

Society Network for SDGs established in June 2016[65] and the Japan Civil Society Network on the SDGs established in April 2016[66] are performing vital roles in both governments' mission of 'not leaving anyone and any goal behind' by engaging multiple sectors of the society with the idea of sustainable development and the corresponding SDGs. Thailand, moreover, was interesting in the sense that the government created a separate section at the end of their VNRs where various stakeholders, including the CSOs, can share their thoughts and opinions on the overview, challenges, and recommendations for the Thai government.

Contrary to the three aforementioned countries where CSOs involvement has already reached a mature level, **Laos is a totally different example of how a country which just started incorporating the private sector to SDG projects** can approach the topic. According to the 2018 and 2021 VNR of Laos, 28 different CSOs were made in 2018, while the private sector started providing their opinions and support not very long ago. As a result of such progress, CSOs in Laos can now provide concrete feedback to the government actions related with the SDGs.

Indonesia is also particularly interesting due to the **involvement of the Audit Board in SDG projects**[67]. The Audit Board has established a criteria framework for reviewing Indonesia's VNR 2021, consisting of the following: (i) consistency of VNR 2021 with the VNR 2017 and 2019; (ii) data validation and analysis of VNR 2021 with the audit results of the Audit Board, and; (iii) alignment of due process with Handbook for the Preparation of VNR- The 2021 Edition.

Finally, the **involvement of the United Nations organizations/agencies/entities** was vivid in developing countries such as Laos and Malaysia. According to the 2021 VNR, UN agencies started providing their opinions and support to Laos and its effort to achieve SDGs. They have facilitated work for Laos Statistics Bureau by supporting and improving the monitoring and reporting processes; this has been done with surveys, administrative data and census' for the majority of the SDG indicators, and especially by strengthening the administrative data collection. Meanwhile, the United Nations Country Team in Malaysia played a key role in Malaysian efforts to promote SDG-based developments by supporting the process of the National SDG Roadmap development. The

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[65] Republic of Korea. "Year One of Implementing the SDGs in the Republic of Korea: From a Model of Development Success to a Vision for Sustainable Development.", 58.
[66] Japan. "Japan's Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.", 16.
[67] Republic of Indonesia. "INDONESIA'S VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW (VNR) 2021 Sustainable and Resilient Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic for the Achievement of the 2030 Agenda.", 13.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) also partnered with the Institute for Strategic and International Studies Malaysia to conduct a study on the policy coherence, governance, human capital, and data responses for SDGs.

DATA

All six countries showed a similar trait of **relying on national statistics** and the office/department that takes care of its collection to assess their SDGs indicators and evaluate the ongoing efforts.

The strong coordination role of the national statistics office is especially notable in the ROK. Collaborating with Seoul National University, Statistics Korea has been working on a feasibility study on the establishment of the national indicators of SDGs corresponding with the global indicators. Also, the government is planning to launch a new project that compares the existing official statistics (the National Indicator System) and the definitions/meanings of global indicators.

Thailand also imposes great importance on its National Statistical Office. The Office collaborates with the National Economic and Social Development Council to collect, manage, and analyze the data points. However, for some of the SDG analysis, Thailand pulls from international organizations such as the World Health Organization.

Compared to the ROK's well-achieving example, **Laos is suffering from several problems in data collection and management**. There are no specific monitoring systems for the health and well-being of adolescent girls and quality education of children with disabilities. Goal 3 on good health and well-being needs greater development and reviews of measures to be achieved since the inadequacy of the data is affecting the quality of services and the data extracted from them. Regarding climate action needs, greater monitoring based on specific timelines and action points is required as there is a **lack of systematic disaggregation of data**.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, **COVID represented a major challenge and setback for achieving the SDGs**, but countries are on a good path to rebound from the consequences of the pandemic. It affected all the areas of society, from economic growth to access to legal aid passing by poverty, malnutrition, and education. It is interesting to see the divide in processes and approaches between the ROK and Japan and the other countries analyzed. These two countries **share commonalities because of their development level and their higher integration into the global economy**. However, despite their common difference in wealth compared to the rest of the countries, they adopt different approaches to other countries, and the ROK is now focusing itself on being a model for other developing countries.

While the four developing countries share areas that need improvement, they all have their own **unique capabilities that they need to utilize to overcome the challenges they face**. Malnourishment is something that is consuming many parts of these countries. For Thailand, the issue is about education and knowledge of food consumption, whereas in Indonesia and Laos the focus is on closing the gap between rural and urban communities. The plans and policies in place are helping these countries rise in their region but there is still plenty of work to be done.

Regarding the next steps, countries must set **SDGs as a priority** if they want to achieve them by 2030 despite the challenges they're facing. With the pandemic, their progress was slowed and frequently reversed. It will require **major financial and human resources investments** to go back on track; moreover, as stated previously, this region has clear means to try and meet these goals. In the coming years, there is reason to be optimistic for positive improvement within the region.

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