



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2025 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report



Prepared by the



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



With the coordination by the Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) from 14 to 23 July 2025, marked the tenth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



At this year's Forum, 35 countries presented voluntary national reviews (VNRs). Since 2016, a total of 402 presentations from 190 countries and the European Union have been made. Nearly 150 countries have now presented two or more VNRs, demonstrating a continued global commitment to monitoring and follow-up of implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The VNR process strengthens national monitoring mechanisms, provides continuous real-time data and feedback and facilitates timely adjustments to policies aimed at achieving the SDGs. Over the years, VNRs have illustrated good practices in governance, institutional capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis, and means of implementation that engage both local and national actors, grounded in the principle of leaving no one behind.

I am therefore pleased to introduce the tenth annual VNR Synthesis Report, which distils the main themes and trends in national SDG implementation by the 35 reporting countries that presented their VNRs at the HLPF in 2025.

This year's VNRs reflected greater reliance on evidence-based decision-making, integrated institutional frameworks and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Several countries also advanced efforts to localize the SDGs, including through voluntary local reviews (VLRs).

As we are approaching 2030, the VNRs remain essential for visibility, learning and partnership-building. I hope this report may serve as a useful resource for Governments, stakeholders, the United Nations system and others, providing examples of how countries are accelerating progress towards the SDGs by domesticating and localizing their efforts and embedding the principle of leaving no one behind in their institutions and communities.

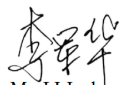

Mr. LI Junhua
Under-Secretary-General
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Table of contents

Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
1. Institutional mechanisms for coordinated integration of the 2030 Agenda in national and subnational contexts	7
2. Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for leaving no one behind	15
3. Ensuring ownership and engaging stakeholders.....	22
4. Data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs.....	29
5. Means of implementation	33
6. Evolution of the voluntary national reviews	35
Conclusion	38
Annex I: List of VNR countries in 2025 and links to online reports.....	39
Annex II: National SDG implementation and coordination structures.....	40

Executive summary

The VNRs in 2025 are defined by several overarching themes and priorities, reflecting a collective commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while adapting to unique national contexts and emerging global challenges.

Countries have achieved progress in aligning the SDGs with their national development plans, strategies and budgeting frameworks. There is also a growing trend of integration and localization of the SDGs through VLRs and voluntary subnational reviews (VSRs) to strengthen accountability at subnational levels, promote local-level action and integrate local strategies with national and global agendas through multi-level governance.

Global crises and cross-cutting challenges continue to impact progress. Efforts towards climate resilience, adaptation, green growth, disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources are prominent in the VNRs. Many reports address the need for resilience against geopolitical events, natural disasters, disinformation threats, ageing populations and health crises. Focus areas include youth employment, poverty reduction, decent work, economic diversification and sustainable financial flows, often in the face of external shocks.

The principle of leaving no one behind remains a central and unifying theme across almost all VNRs. Countries emphasized their efforts to focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups such as youth, women, persons with disabilities, rural communities and internally displaced persons, while also addressing various forms of inequality, including geographic and social disparities.

Gender equality and women's empowerment is a consistent cross-cutting theme and a frequently prioritized SDG for in-depth review, and some countries identify SDG 5 as a key driver, significantly influencing other Goals. Chapter 2 of this VNR Synthesis Report includes an assessment of gender-responsive VNRs (see page 15).

The fundamental methodological principle of fostering whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches is embedded in this year's reports. Inclusive, participatory and multi-stakeholder engagement in both the VNR preparation process and broader SDG implementation is growing. Multi-level governance increasingly includes active collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, academia, local authorities, youth groups and other development partners.

The VNRs emphasize evidence-based reporting and data improvement. Countries are working to strengthen the availability and use of robust, reliable and disaggregated data from national statistical offices, administrative records, surveys and international datasets to measure progress, identify gaps and inform policymaking. However, data

limitations including availability, completeness, coverage and disaggregation remain a persistent challenge that was highlighted by many countries.

Strengthening partnerships and international cooperation through multilateralism is a crucial means of implementation. This includes fostering South-South and triangular cooperation, global solidarity and collaboration with UN agencies and development partners. Countries are engaged in partnerships for digital transformation, including building digital economies, bridging the digital divide and leveraging digital innovation for governance and service delivery.

Many countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs this year often underscored the importance of achieving the SDGs, and with this year's reports often representing a country's third or fourth review, there is a clear indication of consistent engagement and a "last push" to accelerate progress in the final five years leading up to 2030.

Beyond reviewing progress, many VNRs adopt a future-oriented approach. In this way, the VNRs serve not only as a record of progress but also as a catalyst for future action, setting strategic directions, outlining roadmaps, identifying future opportunities and starting to look beyond 2030, to envision possibilities for a post-2030 sustainable development framework.

Introduction

The present report provides a brief synthesis of the 35 VNRs presented at the 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which was convened from 14 to 23 July 2025 under the auspices of ECOSOC at United Nations Headquarters in New York. All 35 countries presented their VNR reports over the course of the meeting, on 18 July and during the ministerial segment from 21 to 23 July 2025.¹

This year, four countries reported for the fourth time,² 22 for the third time³ and nine for the second time.⁴ Of the 35 VNRs presented, nine were from the African region, 14 from Asia and the Pacific, three from Eastern Europe, five from Latin America and the Caribbean and four from Western Europe and other States.

¹ Angola, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Czechia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Micronesia, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sudan, Suriname and Thailand.

² Guatemala, Indonesia, Philippines and Qatar.

³ Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Czechia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, India, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Nigeria, Saint Lucia, Sudan and Thailand.

⁴ Angola, Bulgaria, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles and Suriname.

35 VNRs Presented at the 2025 HLPF

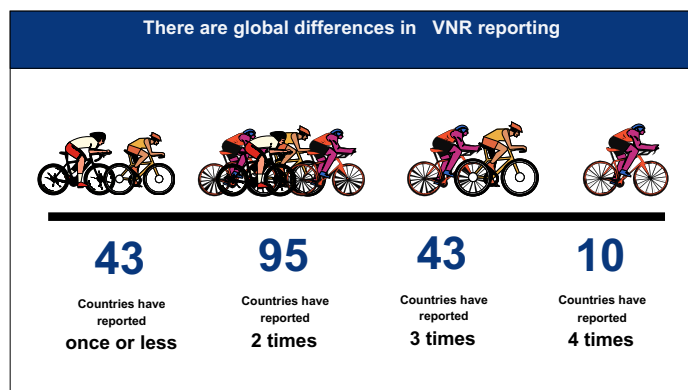
Number of Times Presenting/Region	2 nd time (9)	3 rd Time (22)	4 th Time (4)
Africa (9)	Angola, Seychelles	Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Nigeria, Sudan	
Asia Pacific (14)	Kyrgyzstan, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iraq, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand	Indonesia, Philippines, Qatar
Eastern Europe (3)	Bulgaria	Belarus, Czechia	
Latin America and the Caribbean (5)	Suriname	Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Saint Lucia	Guatemala
Western Europe and Others Group (4)	Israel, Malta	Finland, Germany	

Since 2016, 190 countries and the European Union have conducted VNRs, with 147 countries having conducted more than one review. All 54 African countries and 23 Eastern European countries have conducted at least one VNR. There are currently only a few countries that have not yet volunteered to conduct a national review of progress.

The engagement of local and regional governments in national reporting processes continues to grow, and they continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to SDG localization through the preparation VLRs. Since 2016, Nearly 400 local and subnational reviews have been prepared by local governments from all regions of the world, and many of the VNRs presented in 2025 were prepared with varying types of involvement and input by local governments.

The 2025 VNR Synthesis Report highlights many examples of how reporting countries are integrating the 2030 Agenda into national development plans, building institutional capacities, localizing the SDGs, implementing best practices for inclusive monitoring and evaluation processes in

partnership with stakeholder groups, improving measures for data collection and enacting policies for leaving no one behind. It is necessarily selective rather than



exhaustive. The examples included are illustrative, and their selection does not imply that the 2025 VNRs do not also contain many other equally valid and useful instances of good country practices.

Individual VNR country reports from 2016 through 2025 are archived in the online VNR database at <https://hlpf.un.org/countries>, which also includes a repository of tools, resources and key documents such as the VNR Handbook and the Secretary-General's updated voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs at the HLPF.

1

Institutional mechanisms for coordinated integration of the 2030 Agenda in national and subnational contexts

The coordinated integration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into national and subnational contexts relies heavily on robust institutional mechanisms. An examination of country approaches shows a continuing global trend towards establishing comprehensive governance frameworks that emphasize whole-of-government coordination, policy coherence and contextualized implementation through localization and multi-level governance. These structures are essential for implementing the SDGs and achieving tangible, on-the-ground results.

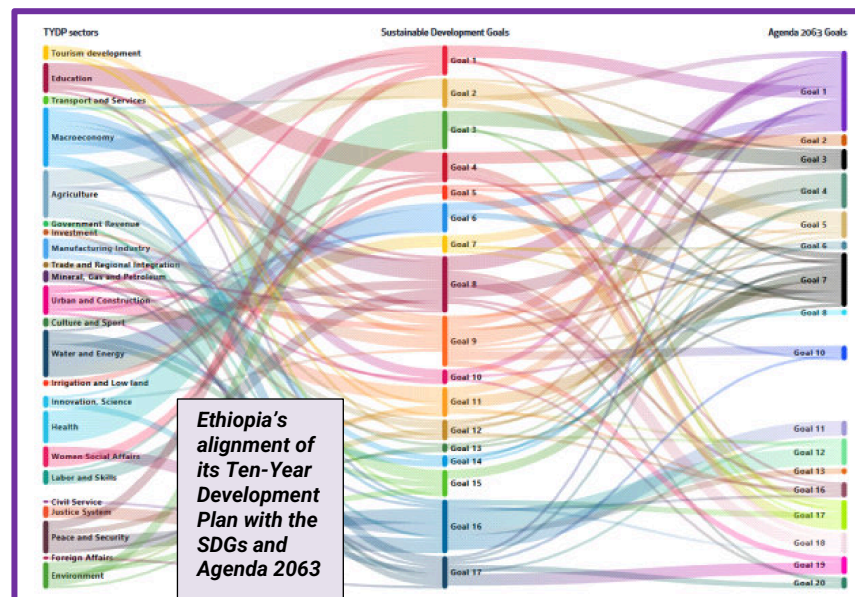
National integration, coordination bodies and institutional frameworks

This year's VNRs show that countries continue to embed the 2030 Agenda into national and local development plans and long-term strategies, with multi-level efforts to ensure policy coherence. Integration typically involves strategic alignment of national and local plans, targeted budgetary allocations, collaborative institutional frameworks and comprehensive monitoring systems, often emphasizing inclusive, multi-stakeholder participation.

Countries reported on how the SDGs were mainstreamed into national development plans and strategies, with many using their national development plans as the primary framework to embed the SDGs. In Africa, Ghana embeds the SDGs into its Medium-Term National Development Policy Framework (2022–2025), while Ethiopia has mainstreamed the SDGs into its Ten-Year Development Plan (2020/21–2029/30). Angola's 2023–2027 National Development Plan is based on United Nations guidance for aligning with the SDGs, with 74.6 per cent of its priorities directly impacting SDG targets.

This trend is also evident in Asia and the Pacific, where Kazakhstan requires all documents within its national planning system to reference national SDG indicators, which are enshrined in key documents like the National Development Plan until 2029 and the Strategy for

Achieving Carbon Neutrality by 2060. Other countries including Bhutan, Indonesia and Malaysia follow a similar approach, integrating the SDGs into their successive five-year or medium-term national plans.



Micronesia has fully integrated the SDGs into its Strategic Development Plan 2024–2043, which serves as the nation's primary roadmap; each of the Plan's nine thematic areas is explicitly mapped to SDG clusters, ensuring that national priorities are tracked alongside global targets.

Similarly, Papua New Guinea has strategically integrated 84 key SDG indicators into its Medium-Term Development Plan IV (2023–2027), building on previous efforts. The Philippines has fully embraced the SDGs, integrating them into the Philippine Development Plan, Regional Development Plans and sectoral plans, ultimately anchored in the country's long-term vision, “AmBisyon Natin 2040”.

All countries reported on their efforts to establish or strengthen dedicated institutional structures to guide SDG implementation and ensure a whole-of-government approach. Many have established inter-ministerial coordination bodies, SDG commissions and technical committees that facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue, prevent policy silos and ensure unified action.⁵

In Africa, coordination is frequently led by high-level Government bodies. Nigeria established the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs, while Ghana uses a multi-tiered architecture that includes a High-Level Ministerial Committee. Similarly, Sudan has a High National Committee, and Lesotho has a National SDGs Forum chaired by the Prime Minister as part of a decentralized structure led by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. Ministries often play a central coordinating role, such as the Ministry of Planning and Development in Ethiopia and the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development in Eswatini. Some countries have established inclusive multi-stakeholder bodies, such as Angola's National SDG Platform. Seychelles relies on the United Nations Sustainable

⁵ See Annex II: National SDG Implementation and Coordination Structures, page 40.

Development Cooperation Framework Results Groups, overseen by a Joint Steering Committee co-chaired by the Government and the United Nations.

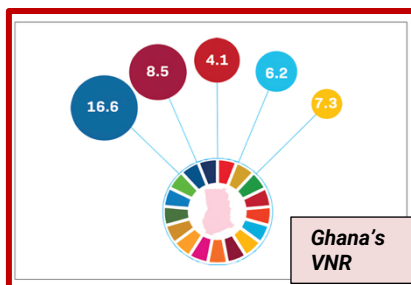
In Asia and the Pacific, leadership from the highest levels of government is also a common feature. Prime Minister-chaired bodies lead the efforts in several countries, including the National SDG Council in Malaysia and the National Committee for Sustainable Development in Thailand. Similar high-level bodies include Kazakhstan's Coordination Council on SDGs, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, and Bangladesh's SDGs Implementation and Review Committee, led by the Chief Adviser's Office. In Bhutan, the Prime Minister's Office handles strategic planning.

India has established a national SDG Task Force, while also creating state-level SDG Coordination and Acceleration Centres to drive localized action. The Philippines has a unique structure where its Subcommittee on the SDGs is placed under the Development Budget Coordination Committee to ensure resource allocation, which is mirrored by a Stakeholders' Chamber. Other approaches include Japan's SDGs Promotion Roundtable for stakeholder engagement and Indonesia's National SDGs Coordination Team, led by the National Planning Ministry. Qatar's National Planning Council leads coordination, awareness and data collection efforts. Similarly, Iraq's Ministry of Planning serves as the central coordinating body for SDG implementation and VNR reporting. Micronesia and Papua New Guinea are both in the process of establishing and improving their national coordination mechanisms.

In Europe,⁶ SDG coordination is often integrated into existing government structures through networks and councils. In Finland, the Prime Minister's Office leads a Sustainable Development Coordination Network with representatives from all ministries. Malta's Sustainable Development Act provides a strong legal foundation that designates Permanent Secretaries as coordinators in every ministry, all managed by a Sustainable Development Directorate. Czechia's Ministry of the Environment manages the Government Council for Sustainable Development, and Belarus has a National SDG Coordinator and a Council for Sustainable Development. Germany employs a decentralized approach, with federal, state and municipal levels all involved in sustainability policy. In contrast, Israel's efforts are led by an inter-ministerial team, but the country lacks a mandatory, formal mechanism for integrating the SDGs across all government work.

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean often utilize high-level national councils. Coordination is led by bodies chaired at the presidential or vice-presidential level in Guatemala, through the Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural, and in El Salvador, through the Consejo Nacional para el Desarrollo. Saint Lucia has a three-tiered mechanism that includes the Cabinet of Ministers and a National Coordinating Committee. Other countries use designated commissions or committees, such as Dominican Republic's Comisión ODS República Dominicana and Suriname's National SDG Committee, which is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

⁶ Including Eastern Europe, Western Europe and other States.



Some countries have also adopted strategic foresight by identifying “accelerator” Goals, targets and indicators, which focuses resources and addresses national priorities with high synergistic potential. For example, Ghana has identified five priority targets as national accelerators: effective, accountable and transparent institutions (SDG 16.6); full employment and decent work (SDG 8.5); free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (SDG 4.1); access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6.2); and doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency (SDG 7.3).

Micronesia’s Strategic Development Plan accelerates the SDGs by integrating them across nine priority thematic areas including cultural heritage, sustainable economic development, gender equality and social inclusion, which are mapped directly to the five priority areas of the 2030 Agenda (people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership).

Micronesia's VNR						
FSM SDP Thematic Areas		PEOPLE (SDG 1-6)	PROSPERITY (SDG 7-11)	PLANET (SDG 12-15)	PEACE (SDG 16)	PARTNERSHIP (SDG 17)
Cultural Heritage		1	4	1	2	0
Education & Human Capital		6	5	0	0	3
Health & Well-being		11	1	0	2	3
Gender Equality & Social Inclusion		9	5	0	4	1
Governance & Institutional Strengthening		2	4	1	4	9
Peace & Security		2	1	5	5	3
Sustainable Economic Development		5	9	9	0	3
Environmental Sustainability & Climate Resilience		2	5	13	0	4
Infrastructure Development & Sustainability		4	7	3	0	4

Kazakhstan conducted an analysis of interlinkages between SDG targets to identify accelerators, finding that progress on SDG indicator 16.6.1 (primary government expenditures as a proportion of the original approved budget by sector) influences 64 other SDG indicators. This strategic approach extends to key policy areas, with a growing emphasis on aligning education systems with labour market needs and promoting lifelong learning through vocational and digital skills programs to tackle youth unemployment.

Institutional frameworks for SDG monitoring and evaluation are being developed to ensure accountability. Many countries have launched digital platforms to track progress, with efforts often led by National Statistical Offices. Belarus operates a National SDG Reporting Platform with 232 national indicators, including 174 aligned with global data, and a Regional Data Platform. Ethiopia uses a Tracking Tool for the 2030 Agenda and Africa’s Agenda 2063, along with a Digital Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation System to link performance to planning. Thailand utilizes the Thai People Map and Analytics Platform to provide granular,

local-level data for targeted policymaking. Finland and Malaysia both report on expanding data collection to cover more global and national indicators.

Involvement of parliaments and legislatures

Parliaments and legislatures are increasingly recognized as essential accountability institutions in the 2030 Agenda's implementation, performing critical oversight, budgetary and legislative functions. This said, only 10 countries out of the 35 presenting VNRs this year included any mention of parliamentary engagement in the process.⁷ On the plus side, seven countries that had submitted VNRs in the past reported consulting with parliament for the first time this year. Two countries that submitted two or more VNR reports over the years consistently engaged parliament on each occasion.⁸

Several countries have established dedicated parliamentary bodies to oversee SDG progress. In Kazakhstan, a Parliamentary Commission on the SDGs was established in 2023 under the leadership of the Speaker of the Senate to monitor the implementation of national targets. This commission serves as a dialogue platform for parliamentarians, experts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, and works closely with the Government and with civil society to monitor and analyze SDG progress. Finland's Parliament engages in a structured dialogue with the Government, wherein an annual government report on SDG implementation is reviewed by all parliamentary committees, with the Committee for the Future collating feedback and communicating Parliament's resolutions back to the Government. In Germany, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development monitors the Government's sustainability policy and scrutinizes sustainability impact assessments for all new legislation. In a similar vein, Malaysia's All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs (APPGM-SDG) provides a bipartisan platform for lawmakers to collaborate with stakeholders on SDG-related issues.

In Indonesia, the House of Representatives (Parliament) plays a strategic role in aligning legislation, particularly those related to mainstreaming the SDGs through relevant House Apparatus. Its legislative, budgetary and oversight functions are seen as driving forces for a responsive legislative system to meet the SDGs with Presidential Regulation No. 111 of 2022 providing a legal foundation for ministries, agencies and subnational governments to integrate the SDGs into their development planning and implementation. In Lesotho, the National SDGs Forum engages Parliament, and oversight is reinforced by the Cabinet and the Parliament Oversight Committee for SDGs, which scrutinizes legislation and budgets through an SDG lens. In Ethiopia, the Parliament reviews and provides oversight on all public investment plans, national budgets and implementation progress through its standing committees, reinforcing accountability. In Suriname, the National SDG Committee includes representatives from Parliament, emphasizing Parliament's role in overseeing Government policy and drafting legislation to ensure SDG integration.

⁷ Finland, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Suriname and Thailand.

⁸ Data drawn from the Inter-Parliamentary Union's survey of Parliamentary Contributions to the VNRs 2025.

These parliamentary bodies are not only observers, but also active participants in the VNR process, and in have contributed to the reports of Finland, Kazakhstan and Malaysia, thereby enhancing national ownership and democratic accountability. Parliamentary initiatives are also driving tangible action on the ground: Malaysia's APPGM-SDG has executed over 1,000 community-driven micro-solution projects across 143 constituencies, directly localizing the SDGs; in Kazakhstan, the Senate's Public Project Office launched a university-based accelerator to develop legislative recommendations and pilot innovative local solutions. Such examples illustrate the vital role legislatures play in holding Governments accountable for accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda through legislative action, budgetary oversight and direct engagement with citizens.

Localization

A critical aspect of integration is localizing the SDGs to address specific subnational and community needs. This involves the decentralization and domestication of the SDGs through the empowerment of local governments, fostering inclusive and participatory governance and strengthening local institutions. Countries are increasingly empowering subnational governments to lead SDG implementation, recognizing that local authorities are best positioned to address community-specific needs. Forty-six per cent of countries presenting VNRs in 2025 reported a medium to high level of involvement by local governments in VNR preparatory processes.

Nigeria supports its 36 states to mainstream the SDGs into their development plans, using Conditional Grant Schemes to motivate subnational action. Bangladesh has a substantially decentralized governance structure comprised of district, sub-district and union councils responsible for delivering essential services. Ethiopia explicitly identifies localization as a priority in its national development agenda and mandates its regional and municipal governments to cascade the national plan into localized plans, reinforced through targeted capital budget transfers specifically for SDG acceleration. Similarly, Lesotho's decentralization efforts are championed by District SDG Working Groups, which are uniquely co-led by government and non-state actors. In Micronesia, a nation of over 600 islands, local autonomy is crucial, with state governments actively involved in shaping the national plan. Developed nations also prioritize localization; Germany, for instance, views its municipalities as central agents and drivers of sustainable development and provides direct support to embed the SDGs at the local level.

Many countries have formally recognized SDG localization as a strategic priority. The Philippines identifies localization as a "vital prerequisite" and has launched Regional SDG Catch-up Plans to address regional disparities. All 15 regions have formulated plans for 2025-2030, with monitoring to be done through existing mechanisms like the Regional Project Monitoring and Evaluation System, encouraging local government units to participate in SDG monitoring, emphasizing private sector involvement and civic engagement as key drivers for development and guiding member stakeholders in setting targets and measuring outcomes.

In Malaysia, the strategic importance of localization was highlighted at a national SDG Summit and is demonstrated by the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on SDGs. Bangladesh employs a unique "39+1" indicator model, requiring each of its districts and sub-districts to track 39 national priority indicators plus one additional indicator chosen to reflect specific local needs.

The active engagement of all community members is highly regarded as a cornerstone of successful localization. Micronesia grounded its VNR process in extensive state-level consultations that included traditional leaders, youth and women's organizations. Bangladesh utilizes participatory tools such as community meetings and open budget sessions to empower citizens, while Kazakhstan implements a "People's Participation Budget" in several regions, allowing citizens a direct say in allocation of public funds. Ghana uses community durbars and town hall meetings to consult with a wide range of local stakeholders, and Ethiopia has pioneered a Government-People Partnership model that has mobilized domestic financing through citizen-led campaigns.

India's SDG localization model is decentralized, data-driven and participatory, with subnational governments taking leadership roles and preparing SDG vision documents. Japan has seen a significant increase in municipalities working on the SDGs, with many establishing cross-sectional promotion headquarters and formulating ordinances or plans. Czechia's municipalities have legal and financial autonomy to initiate SDG-related development activities tailored to local specifics, and regions contribute through territorial planning and budget support for sustainable development projects.

Strengthening local judicial systems and embedding the rule of law are also critical. Ethiopia has moved to formally recognize and scale up community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, with over 7,000 customary courts in its Oromia region successfully resolving over a million cases. In Papua New Guinea, the Village Courts Revitalization Program aims to restore and strengthen customary justice systems, while Micronesia has adopted culturally grounded strategies to reform its justice services.

For their part, local and regional governments have continued to embrace the SDGs, as evidenced by the ever-growing practice of carrying out voluntary local reviews. VLRs are not just standalone reports; they are increasingly used to inform national reviews and build networks for peer learning. Since the presentation of the first VLRs in 2018, some 400 have been prepared by local governments in all regions of the world. The VNRs of Eswatini, Finland, Ghana, Japan and the Philippines included key messages or findings from VLRs in 2025. Germany initiated a collaborative Voluntary Local Government Review this year, where 15 local authorities jointly prepared a contribution for the national VNR.

Finland's largest cities have established an "SDG46" network for peer-learning and international twinning projects, with a total of 15 VLRs. In Ghana, the City of Accra and six other local authorities have prepared VLRs, and SDG implementation is anchored in a decentralized planning system where metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies are key actors, supported by initiatives like the Joint SDG Localization Acceleration Project.

Malaysia is rapidly scaling its efforts, with 15 VLRs published and 29 more expected. Guatemala includes its Subnational Voluntary Reviews as a formal annex to its VNR. The practice of conducting a VLR is also gaining traction in Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Philippines.

Eswatini has adopted an integrated approach for its VNRs and VLRs, aimed at building capacity for local and national government officials to integrate SDGs into their plans. Germany's sustainability policy involves strategies at federal, subnational and municipal levels, with municipalities acting as key drivers and supported by local initiatives, including VLRs.

Multi-level governance

Multi-level governance, referring to the coordinated action among national, subnational and local authorities, as well as with non-state actors, is essential for coherent SDG implementation. Effective multi-level governance requires national strategies that guide the integration of local initiatives. Kazakhstan adopted Methodological Guidelines for Localizing the SDGs in 2024 to provide a systematic framework for regional planning. In The Gambia, the Recovery-Focused National Development Plan serves as the central anchor for SDG integration, requiring local government plans to align with it. Belarus integrates local initiatives through its National Strategy for Sustainable Development, and Finland exemplifies multi-level governance through close collaboration between state, regional and local levels. In Papua New Guinea, the National Planning Monitoring and Responsibility Act of 2016 made it mandatory for all subnational governments to align their development plans with the national plan, ensuring vertical policy coherence.

The multi-level governance approach is increasingly characterized by dynamic partnerships with the private sector and academia, leveraging innovation and digital transformation. In Kazakhstan, the private company Aitas Holding is a key partner in SDG localization, investing significantly in rural education and development. Belarus is leveraging digital transformation through its "Smart City (Region)" platform to optimize city administration, while in Ethiopia, digital platforms enhance evidence-based policymaking at all levels of government. In Micronesia, digital transformation is a key enabling condition for development, with a focus on expanding digital skills and using new technologies to improve connectivity in remote islands.

Many countries emphasize a whole-of-society approach along with a whole-of-government approach. Academic institutions are increasingly involved as key partners in implementation. For instance, Malaysia has established SDG Centers at over 63 universities to serve as hubs for research and subnational innovation, while the university-led MIND Accelerator in Kazakhstan helps develop legislative recommendations and pilot projects for SDG localization. Ethiopia's implementation is guided by stakeholder participation, institutionalized through mechanisms like the Development Partners Group and CSO SDG Working Group. India's approach is anchored in the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas' (Together with All, Development for All, Trust of All, and Efforts

by All), bringing together civil society, the private sector, academia and media. Bhutan also adopts a participatory, whole-of-society approach involving government agencies, civil society, the private sector and development partners. Finland promotes multi-actor cooperation among states, businesses, NGOs and private sector donors. The Gambia continues to engage the private sector, civil society and development partners, recognizing that increased stakeholder participation enhances ownership of the 2030 Agenda.

National SDG implementation is increasingly aligned with regional frameworks to foster synergies and promote collective progress. Countries including Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana and Lesotho have explicitly integrated the African Union's Agenda 2063 into their national development plans, creating policy coherence between national, continental and global goals, while also looking to leverage opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area. Micronesia aligns its national vision with frameworks like the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Belarus is deepening its partnerships with regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, and Kazakhstan has taken a leading role in regional cooperation by collaborating with other Central Asian countries to develop a shared Monitoring Platform for SDGs tailored to the region's characteristics.

These diverse approaches demonstrate a strong global commitment to integrating the 2030 Agenda and SDGs across all levels of governance, with legislative and other bodies playing increasingly defined roles in ensuring accountability and policy coherence.

2 Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for leaving no one behind

With its central principle to leave no one behind (LNOB), the 2030 Agenda calls for a transformative approach to development that is inclusive and equitable. Accordingly, countries are adopting science- and evidence-based solutions to identify and address the needs of their most vulnerable populations. This chapter highlights how the 2025 VNRs leverage gender-responsive approaches, data-driven strategies, targeted social programs, enhanced access to skills, economic and digital inclusion and innovative health solutions to advance the SDGs.

Spotlight on gender-responsive VNRs

A gender-responsive VNR is one that ensures women's meaningful representation within the governance and coordination mechanisms of the review; integrates gender analysis across all SDG targets, wherever feasible, drawing on disaggregated data (by sex, age, disability and other relevant characteristics), gender statistics, and consultations with women, women's rights and feminist organizations; assesses progress in fulfilling normative commitments and implementing gender-responsive laws, policies, and

programmes; and identifies and evaluates the effectiveness of existing institutional and accountability mechanisms for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, while outlining priority measures to strengthen them.

The 2025 VNRs underscore both significant progress and persistent challenges in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly under SDG 5. Most VNRs explicitly aligned their narrative structure with interdependence of SDG 5 and other Goals, particularly other SDGs under review this year (SDGs 3, 8, 14 and 17), while also framing it as a cross-cutting priority essential to achieving the entire 2030 Agenda. Member States have adopted diverse approaches, including legal reforms, inclusive governance, data-driven policymaking and multi-stakeholder participation. While many showcased achievements in combating gender-based violence, strengthening women's leadership and participation, expanding economic opportunities, and improving maternal health and sexual and reproductive health and rights outcomes, the VNRs also revealed enduring structural gaps in this regard, and in other areas.

Most reports emphasized the inclusive and consultative process through which the 2025 VNRs were developed. Some countries⁹ highlighted specific efforts to include women (i.e. women's groups) in the various consultation mechanisms (i.e. multi-stakeholder dialogues and workshops). Kazakhstan noted support provided by UN Women, among other partners.

Several countries reported on gender equality as catalytic to achieving the 2030 Agenda, while others reported on enhancement to gender-responsive approaches to development. Qatar's VNR emphasized the empowerment of women and protection of women's rights as central pillars of its national development strategy. Ethiopia underscored gender equality as a national priority, reflected in targeted policies and programs supporting the empowerment of women and girls across all spheres of development, while Saint Lucia reported enhancement to its gender-responsive approach to development reflected in its Medium-Term Development Strategy 2021-2026, National Adaptation Plan and Sectoral Adaptation Plans. As part of these efforts, the Ministry of the Public Service, Labour and Gender Affairs of Saint Lucia promotes the theme "gender on every agenda."

Similar approaches have been taken by Papua New Guinea with the institutionalization of its National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy across public agencies and microfinance institutions, and Micronesia with its State-level gender action plans and scorecards that track progress on key indicators. Kyrgyzstan highlighted its efforts to harmonize national legislation with international gender equality standards, including through mandatory gender analysis of draft laws, stricter accountability for discriminatory practices and the institutionalization of gender impact assessments in policymaking.

⁹ Bhutan, Eswatini, Ethiopia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Micronesia, Nigeria, Seychelles and Suriname.

Nigeria's VNR includes an assessment of key institutional advances, such as the 2025 Federal Budget Call Circular mandating Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), which has led 26 states to develop GRB-integrated work plans or establish gender commissions. Likewise, the Dominican Republic reported on progress in fulfilling normative commitments, introducing and utilizing gender-responsive planning and procurement practices, including a public expenditure classification system with a gender focus. In Guatemala, Indigenous and ancestral authorities have called for the enforcement of existing laws protecting Indigenous women's rights and for strengthened institutional support through dedicated budgets, including budget allocations for the Vice Ministry of Interculturality within the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

Aligned with the principle of LNOB, several countries reported on the role of data-driven governance, data disaggregation, gender statistics and accountability for closing gender gaps. Although some noted limited data availability and inadequate resources as a challenge to advancing progress on SDG 5, others highlighted good practices in this regard. The Dominican Republic outlined the use of information disaggregated by gender, territory and vulnerable populations across all 80 indicators used for the VNR, addressing gender equality in key sectors such as housing, citizen security, tourism, and sports. Indonesia called for the use of disaggregated data and targeted interventions to support vulnerable groups, including women and children with disabilities; Papua New Guinea reported similar efforts. Nigeria committed to strengthening sex-disaggregated data systems via its Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan (2023-2028), which promotes inclusive data for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities.

Qatar integrated over 119 SDG indicators into its planning frameworks, deploying the "Q-Insight" real-time tracking platform to strengthen gender data reporting. Bangladesh's VNR reported on the launch of the Women's Financial Inclusion Data Dashboard, which aggregates a wide range of indicators to help stakeholders understand gender disparities and drive strategic planning. Similarly, Angola highlighted the launch of the Angola Gender Observatory to support effective public policies and fulfil its commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls through the compiling and disseminating of qualitative and quantitative gender-related statistical data. Additionally, some VNRs described working with United Nations entities and regional bodies to strengthen gender data systems, including the use of VLRs to localize gender commitments.

Maternal health and access to healthcare have emerged as priorities in some countries, underscoring integrated approaches linking health gains (SDG 3) with gender equality outcomes (SDG 5). Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia and Kazakhstan reported substantial declines in maternal mortality. The Dominican Republic underscored progress in reducing adolescent pregnancies, while Belarus reported tailored services for women with disabilities.

Gender-based violence remains a central concern. Some countries¹⁰ presented comprehensive new measures to address gender-based violence, while Bangladesh and Suriname acknowledged enforcement gaps and cultural barriers, underscoring the need for stronger justice systems.

Women's leadership and participation were highlighted as critical to achieving SDG 5. Many countries¹¹ reported measures to elevate women's participation in governance, with progress through quotas, legislative reforms, institutional policies and capacity-building initiatives. Yet challenges of underrepresentation by women in various governance roles persists, with some countries noting that representation remains low¹² or has regressed.¹³ Nigeria's VNR recommended prioritizing key legislative frameworks, notably the Gender Equality Bill and the Reserved Seat Bill, to achieve gender parity in governance and decision-making in public life.

Education, skills development and women's economic empowerment all emerged as recurring themes across the VNRs. Many countries¹⁴ cited the economic empowerment of women as a catalyst for sustainable development and poverty alleviation, reporting on adopted measures and progress. Several countries¹⁵ reported progress towards achieving gender parity in education, while Indonesia and Malaysia also stressed the importance of digital inclusion for girls and young women, linking digital skills and connectivity to future-ready employment and to women's access to health and protection services.



Iraq's VNR highlighted the Al-Thaqalayn Vocational Preparatory School, which offers girls access to modern technical fields like cybersecurity and medical device maintenance. Saint Lucia has introduced the SWAG (Smart, Worthy, Ambitious Girls) initiative, which focuses on empowering disadvantaged young women, including single teenage mothers and rural youth, through training in

financial literacy, leadership, social skills, and sports.

Cooperation and intersectionality were noted in Germany's VNR, through the Guidelines for Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist Development Policy. Israel highlighted inclusion of women's empowerment in international cooperation through its Agency for

¹⁰ Angola, Czechia, Dominican Republic, Finland, Gambia, Guatemala, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Lesotho and Papua New Guinea.

¹¹ Angola, Belarus, Bhutan, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Nigeria and Seychelles.

¹² Bangladesh, Bhutan, Ghana, Lesotho, Malaysia, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Thailand.

¹³ Kazakhstan, Nigeria and the Philippines.

¹⁴ Angola, Belarus, Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Guatemala, India, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Nigeria and Suriname.

¹⁵ Bhutan, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and Seychelles.

International Development Cooperation, and Qatar's VNR focused on domestic survivor support and international assistance. Regarding intersectional approaches, Bhutan reported on the decriminalization of same-sex relations, while Malta reaffirmed LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Ethiopia situated women's empowerment within peacebuilding and conflict contexts.

Overall, countries are increasingly adopting gender-responsive policies. The breadth of initiatives reflects a growing recognition that accelerating gender equality and empowering women is essential for achieving the 2030 Agenda. However, despite the commitments and progress reflected in the VNRs, dedicated financing and accountability mechanisms for SDG 5 remain limited. While several countries referred to national SDG frameworks and commissions, few presented specific measures for monitoring SDG 5 implementation or tracking gender-focused financing.

Data-driven identification and monitoring of vulnerable groups

A fundamental step in leaving no one behind is knowing who is being left behind, where they are being left behind and why. Countries are increasingly employing data-driven methodologies to identify and monitor vulnerable groups. Micronesia, in collaboration with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), conducted a comprehensive LNOB assessment using disaggregated data from its 2023 Population and Housing Census, applying dissimilarity indices and intersectional profiling. Similarly, Bangladesh has developed a conceptual framework with 12 criteria for assessing vulnerability and uses supervised machine learning to classify individuals by shared circumstances. Bhutan and Papua New Guinea also utilize the ESCAP-supported LNOB analytical tool with nationally sourced data to identify and support those furthest behind. Kyrgyzstan has also used the ESCAP methodology with its national survey data to identify disparities.

To ensure data systems are fit for purpose, countries are investing in statistical capacity and developing innovative data sources. Ghana has strengthened its data systems, progressively increasing the number of reported SDG indicators from 66 in 2019 to 105 in its third VNR, and is expanding its use of VLRs to gather local-level insights. In the Philippines, the national statistics authority produces a regular SDG Pace of Progress report, complemented by a Community-Based Monitoring System that generates disaggregated data at the local level. Malaysia has developed PADU, a central database hub, to enable a more holistic understanding of socioeconomic realities and design more effective interventions. Ethiopia has moved beyond linear projections, adopting a milestone-based progress assessment approach for a more nuanced picture of SDG progress, supported by integrated digital monitoring platforms. Kazakhstan incorporates the voices of its youth through surveys, and its national SDG monitoring system now includes 200 indicators, 25 of which are localized. Belarus operates both national and regional data platforms for reporting on SDGs.

The SDGs are also increasingly embedded into recovery and peacebuilding frameworks.

Sudan's Post-Conflict Economic Vision for Reconstruction incorporates SDGs to guide rehabilitation, while Ethiopia's peacebuilding efforts are supported by a Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Recovery Plan aligned with SDG principles. In El Salvador, inclusive schools have been established as community-oriented spaces offering technical training, the arts, sports, technology and psychological support, with flexible schedules to reach those previously excluded from public policies due to social fragmentation. Qatar established the Sport for Development and Peace Initiative, leveraging the transformative power of sport to advance humanitarian and development goals in less developed countries.

Within these efforts, however, data challenges remain. Many countries, including Lesotho, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Sudan, cite persistent data gaps, especially disaggregated data by disability, location and income, that hinder effective policy targeting.

Targeted social protection and basic services

Once vulnerable groups are identified, targeted social protection and the provision of essential services are critical to building resilience and creating opportunities. **Several countries reported on having scaled up their social safety nets.** Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program is a prime example, supporting 9.7 million vulnerable people with public works, direct support and livelihood services. Angola's Kwenda Programme provides social cash transfers to over a million vulnerable households, and the Dominican Republic's *Supérate* program combines cash transfers with training and livelihood support to combat poverty using a comprehensive approach. Suriname expanded its social assistance programs and launched targeted relief for vulnerable groups during its recent economic crisis. In Lesotho, the Pathways to Sustainable Livelihoods Project targets poor, labour-constrained rural households. Belarus allocates 13 to 14 per cent of its GDP to social protection programs for vulnerable groups. In India, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has been instrumental in expanding financial inclusion as a form of social protection.

Although many countries are expanding social protection, coverage can remain low. Micronesia reports only 20 per cent coverage, and Ghana notes that spending on essential services has been inadequate due to limited fiscal space.

Expanding access to basic services is another cornerstone of inclusive development.

Micronesia is accelerating solar electrification in remote communities and scaling up telehealth services, and Bhutan has achieved universal access to basic drinking water and electricity. In contrast, the ongoing conflict in Sudan has devastated basic services, forcing grassroots organizations like *Takaya* (communal kitchens) to step in to provide essential food aid, highlighting the fragility of progress in crisis contexts.

Achieving universal health coverage and promoting well-being are central to leaving no one behind. Countries are implementing innovative models to expand access to healthcare. Dominican Republic has achieved over 97 per cent health coverage through its Family Health Insurance program. Ethiopia's Community-Based Health Insurance scheme now covers nearly 53 million people, or 46 per cent of the population. In Indonesia, the Maternal and Child Health Handbook has been adapted as a strategic tool to improve service quality and health outcomes. Thailand's Universal Health Coverage scheme has been instrumental in reducing out-of-pocket health costs.

Public health initiatives are also being driven by communities. As countries like Bhutan make progress on communicable diseases, many are shifting focus to address the rising burden of non-communicable diseases and mental health issues, which require a system-wide response. Iraq, for example, has taken measures to address the legacies of conflict and terrorism through establishment of the Al-Amal Center for Psychological Rehabilitation and Community Integration, which is designed to support the reintegration of thousands of Iraqi families, especially women and children, returning from displacement camps like Al-Hol in Syria, providing psychological and social support to foster reconciliation and community healing.

Twenty-three VNRs included references to sport and physical activity, in the context of health and well-being, education, gender equality and peacebuilding.¹⁶ Some countries¹⁷ have incorporated sport into efforts to prevent non-communicable diseases and to promote healthy lifestyles. Malta's National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing (2023–2030) emphasizes an active lifestyle and equitable healthcare access for the elderly, with a focus on preventative measures for healthy ageing. Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture employs strategies to increase physical activity and well-being across all age groups to promote learning, work capacity, mental health and resilience. Guatemala, Israel, Micronesia and Suriname have employed sport for youth engagement, promotion of mental health and community integration.

Inclusive and equitable quality education is a powerful enabler of sustainable development, and countries are leveraging technology to bridge educational divides. Schools in Belarus have introduced electronic educational platforms, and the Government of El Salvador has provided computers or tablets to every student. The installation of Starlink in Micronesia provides connectivity to over 150 schools, clinics and community hubs, enabling not only education but also e-health and access to government services for the first time in remote atolls. Malta's Scholarships Unit within the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation promotes a diverse range of scholarship opportunities aligned with a holistic approach to education, with sports and the arts playing an equally vital role in enhancing overall well-being and cultural enrichment. To ensure the next generation of students is fully equipped with the skills needed to navigate an evolving global landscape, Seychelles has integrated

¹⁶ Angola, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles and Suriname.

¹⁷ Bulgaria, Eswatini, Ghana, Indonesia, Malta, Papua New Guinea, Qatar and Seychelles.

subjects such as entrepreneurship, financial education, environmental management and physical and social education into the school curriculum.

To address geographic and social disparities, targeted programs are being implemented. Kazakhstan's "Auyl Mektebi" Rural School Development Program aims to overcome the educational gap between regions, supported by private initiatives like Aitas Holding. In Malaysia, Comprehensive Special Model Schools integrate primary and secondary education in a single institution to reduce dropout rates in remote and Indigenous communities. Ethiopia's Homegrown School Feeding Program provides daily, locally sourced meals to over 800,000 learners. In Bhutan, the number of schools offering Special Education Needs programs has more than doubled since 2019. Finland is mainstreaming sustainability and green transition skills throughout its educational system, while Nigeria's Adolescent Girls Initiative for Learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project focuses on improving secondary education opportunities for girls.

Creating decent work and ensuring digital inclusion are vital for empowering individuals, and digital infrastructure is a critical enabler. Malaysia is prioritizing rural digital inclusion to expand its digital economy. Ghana has a youth employment strategy that supports young entrepreneurs, and Germany leverages social enterprises to provide jobs for people with disadvantages in the labour market. Suriname's SURGE programme aims to strengthen micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), with a focus on women and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Ethiopia's "5 million Ethiopian Coders" initiative is preparing youth for the digital economy. In the Philippines, the Community Empowerment thru Science and Technology (CEST) program delivers science and technology-based solutions to foster economic enterprise development.

3 Ensuring ownership and engaging stakeholders

Countries continue to show a strong commitment to involving a wide array of stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, in both the implementation of the SDGs and the preparation of their VNRs. Most countries highlighted the participatory process that led to the development of their reports, emphasizing that the LNOB principle is central to all efforts.

Stakeholder participation in SDG-related coordination and decision-making mechanisms

Numerous VNR reports underscore stakeholder participation as a vital component of SDG decision-making.¹⁸ In Czechia, NGOs were represented in the Government Council for Sustainable Development. In Eswatini, stakeholders contribute through the SDGs

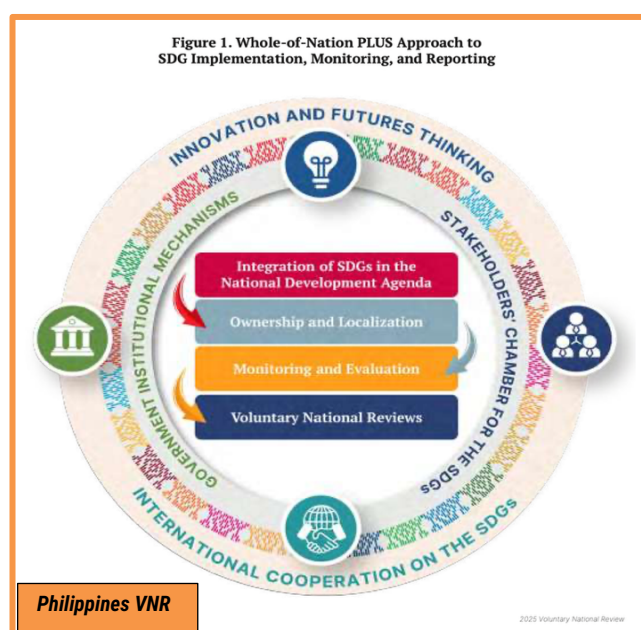
¹⁸ Angola, Belarus, Bangladesh, Czechia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta, Nigeria, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Suriname, Sudan and Thailand.

Technical Working Team. In Finland, The National Commission on Sustainable Development, which is made up of 108 key stakeholders, was kept informed of the preparation of the review and encouraged to take part in the various VNR engagement processes, while in The Gambia the VNR National Steering Committee includes representatives from community-based organizations, the private sector, local councils, persons with disabilities, women and youth. Germany has set up various participatory and advisory mechanisms, including stakeholder commissions, to provide support for a range of transformational processes on a time-limited basis.

The engagement of civil society is crucial for facilitating citizen-government dialogue, offering independent oversight, monitoring SDG localization and identifying exclusion risks. Bhutan recognizes CSOs as key actors in ensuring program effectiveness. Finland's action plan against racism is implemented by public authorities and civil society actors, inviting organizations to develop more inclusive structures. Indonesia reinforces the involvement of non-state actors, including philanthropy and the private sector, through multi-party partnership platforms. Suriname's ministries partner with NGOs and use civil society partnerships as coordination mechanisms. The Dominican Republic strengthens CSOs through alliances with universities to provide training programs, promoting professionalization and active citizenship. Papua New Guinea supports NGOs that carry out activities in local communities related to promoting behaviour change and awareness. Thailand's civil society recommends increasing funding and resources to grassroots organizations working with vulnerable populations.

Stakeholder engagement in the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda

Nearly all VNRs underscored the role of stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with many reporting on the creation and reinforcement of mechanisms for stakeholder consultation on progress towards SDG implementation.¹⁹ Members of the Stakeholder's Chamber in the Philippines participated in consultations; shared inputs on potential challenges and opportunities; recommended strategies, solutions, and best practices;



¹⁹ Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lesotho, Malta, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sudan and Suriname.

and contributed to discussions on how to accelerate progress on the SDGs. Belarus organized the second National Forum on Sustainable Development in Minsk in June 2024, which included representatives of scientific and academic circles, business and youth, including SDG Youth Ambassadors. Bulgaria organized roundtables and public consultations, while in Finland, CSOs and the private sector had the opportunity to give their independent assessment of the country's progress on all SDGs. In Saint Lucia, national consultations were held in November 2024 and March 2025 with around 20 stakeholder groups.

Countries reporting in 2025 also reflected a stronger effort to localize mobilization efforts in preparing their VNRs. As previously noted in Chapter I, many countries have referred to the preparation of VLRs and focused on the organization of regional and subnational consultations.²⁰ India organized over 30 regional and national consultations with 13 “LNOB groups”, while local universities hosted regional consultations in Thailand. In Bangladesh, Divisional Commissioners conducted consultations with officials from districts, sub-districts (upazilas), local governments and other stakeholders. In Eswatini, municipalities coordinated data validation through back-and-forth communication with stakeholders during the analysis and technical drafting stage of the report. Micronesia's VNR was culturally grounded in values drawn from all four states: Yap's Tarag (planning), Chuuk's Fairo (respect), Kosrae's Lulafongi (spiritual reverence), and Pohnpei's Kairoi Ehute (unified vision).

Stakeholders were engaged in different ways during the VNR preparatory process, including:

- ❖ Through the collection and provision of quantitative and qualitative data²¹
- ❖ By featuring examples of good practices on SDG implementation lead by stakeholders²²
- ❖ Participating in workshops, roundtables, focus groups and interviews²³
- ❖ Providing written inputs and replying to questionnaires²⁴
- ❖ Contributing to digital platforms and SMS surveys²⁵
- ❖ Attending national and/or subnational validation workshops²⁶
- ❖ Coordinating contributions through stakeholder networks or umbrella platforms²⁷

For example, Bulgaria organized two competitions to provide proposals for good practices in the implementation of the SDGs. The Dominican Republic's VNR included the review of 66 stakeholder initiatives.

²⁰ Bangladesh, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malaysia, Micronesia, Nigeria, Philippines and Thailand.

²¹ Angola, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Indonesia, Lesotho, Malta, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Qatar.

²² Angola, Dominican Republic, Finland and Ghana.

²³ Bhutan, Bulgaria, Finland, Guatemala, Papua New Guinea, Qatar and Suriname.

²⁴ Dominican Republic, Germany, Malta and Sudan.

²⁵ Ghana and Malaysia.

²⁶ Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Micronesia, Nigeria, Saint Lucia and Suriname.

²⁷ Ghana, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Seychelles.

Stakeholder contribution

"We welcome the fact that the German Government is now addressing negative spillovers in all areas of transformation. Negative spillovers are, for example, human rights violations at supplier companies along the supply chain and harmful greenhouse gas emissions from German industrial enterprises. [...] Moreover, spillover effects not sufficiently reflected in the indicators. The German Government also fails to differentiate between effects at the national, regional and local levels, which is necessary as the spillovers can have different impacts depending on the level."

Umbrella organisation of development and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Germany (VENRO)

Germany's VNR

Germany's VNR included boxes with stakeholder quotations. In Guatemala, the "citizen coffee" methodology invited input on actions, perceptions and challenges. Indonesia's VNR features qualitative evidence from good practices contributed by stakeholders that were

collected through stakeholder submissions and curated by a panel of experts. Kazakhstan's VNR included a section called "Civil Society Assessment" after the review of each SDG. Qatar featured case studies of SDG good practices implemented by stakeholders throughout its VNR.

In Ethiopia, a national stakeholder database was used to ensure broad participation, and additional contributors were identified through the UN Country Team's partnership network. In Ghana, the CSO Platform on SDGs comprised over 400 civil society organizations. Finland's report includes an NGO assessment portion integrated to the review of the 17 SDGs. In Guatemala, consultations with civil society groups were carried out with the support of institutions that facilitated outreach to targeted organizations. Japan facilitated a process to collect written public comments on its draft VNR report from stakeholders.

Sectoral engagement and participation

Ensuring ownership of the VNR process and engaging stakeholders demands inclusion and participation of a wide range of stakeholders. As highlighted in the previous two chapters, Governments are collaborating with parliaments and local authorities to advance the 2030 Agenda, and they are increasing engagement with various sectors of civil society, particularly women, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Most countries also reported on efforts to engage the private sector.²⁸ In Bangladesh, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries contributed to highlighting private sector contributions to the SDGs. In February 2025, India mobilized over 100 stakeholders during a one-day consultation on the Role of the Private Sector in Accelerating SDG achievement and Towards Viksit Bharat 2047, which addressed the role of the private sector in social impact spending, the corporate social responsibility mandate, philanthropy and start-up ecosystems, as well as the lens of responsible business practices. Indonesia's Financial Services Authority requires financial institutions to integrate sustainability into their practices, leading to training programs in sustainable finance and engagement of private sector stakeholders, especially those

²⁸ Angola, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malta, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Suriname and Thailand.

in the financial sector and publicly listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange, who report on their contributions through corporate sustainability reports.

There is a growing trend of businesses adopting Environmental, Social and Governance Principles and participating in policy dialogues. In Lesotho, the private sector is aligning investments via the SDG Investor Map, a market intelligence tool helping the private sector identify investments aligned with the SDGs. Czechia encourages private sector involvement through non-financial reporting and programs like the B2B grant program. Suriname views the SDGs as a source of business inspiration and innovation, with the Business Association integrating the SDGs into business management and hosting CEO breakfast meetings to facilitate knowledge exchange. The UN Global Compact Network in Thailand supported the compilation of perspectives from the private sector for Thailand's VNR. The "Plataforma Empresas Sostenibles RD" (Sustainable Enterprises Platform) in the Dominican Republic allows for businesses to report SDG initiatives online. Indonesia reinforced the involvement of non-state actors, including philanthropy and the private sector, through multi-party partnership platforms.

Most VNRs supported MSMEs as a critical means to eradicate poverty, create jobs and elevate shared prosperities. National strategies and supporting programmes in many countries are formulated to strengthen an enabling policy environment for MSME competitiveness and growth,²⁹ often expanding their contributions to sustainable consumption and production.³⁰ In others, fiscal incentives and concessional loans are provided to expand MSME access to affordable finance.³¹ In some countries, MSME supporting programmes are established to foster digital transformations,³² enhance entrepreneurship skills³³ and formalization,³⁴ along with optimizing MSME contributions to circular economy, climate risks and greenhouse gas reductions.³⁵ The VNRs also report on financial and policy initiatives targeting support to women and youth entrepreneurs.³⁶ However, limited access to financial resources and market opportunities, combined with capacity gaps, remain as barriers restricting the full potentials of MSMEs in advancing solutions for the 2030 Agenda.

Efforts to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind were reflected in many reports.³⁷ In Malta, stakeholder engagement was facilitated by a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise using an interest-influence matrix. This tool categorized stakeholders based on their level of interest in the SDGs and their capacity to influence outcomes. Nigeria collaborated with Sightsavers in the organization of dedicated regional consultations to ensure inclusive participation by persons with disabilities in

²⁹ Bulgaria, El Salvador, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Philippines, Qatar, Saint Lucia and Suriname.

³⁰ Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Malta, Qatar and Thailand.

³¹ Angola, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Saint Lucia, Seychelles and Suriname.

³² Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Nigeria, Seychelles and Suriname.

³³ Belarus, Finland, Gambia, India and Malta.

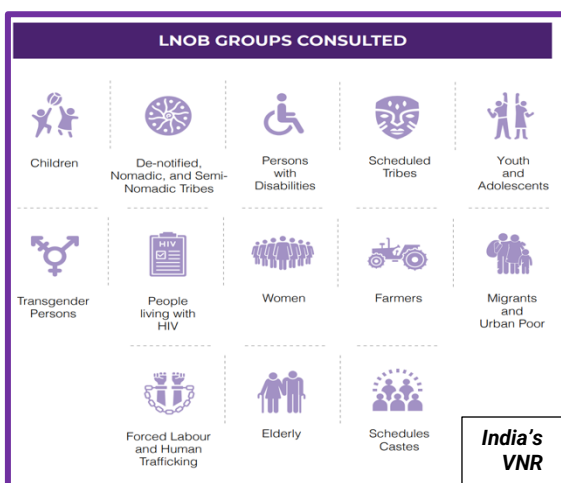
³⁴ Bangladesh, India, Malta and Papua New Guinea.

³⁵ Czechia, Malaysia, Malta and Thailand.

³⁶ Gambia, Ghana, India, Japan, Lesotho, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Saint Lucia.

³⁷ Angola, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Ghana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guatemala, Japan, Lesotho, Malta, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sudan and Thailand.

the process. In Sudan, the selection of the civil society groups took into consideration groups severely affected by conflict, including women, internally displaced persons and persons with disabilities.



Almost all reporting countries referred to or featured initiatives to engage children and young people.³⁸ Bulgaria flagged the “Youth Initiative 16x16” aimed at contributing to the implementation of SDG 16. In Czechia, meetings were organized focusing on representatives of the youth from secondary schools who discussed cross-cutting and priority themes. In the Dominican Republic, the National Network of Young Volunteers for the SDGs, a platform led by youth organizations in partnership with

universities and public sector entities, has implemented more than 50 awareness-raising and community action events in 20 provinces across the country, addressing topics such as mental health, climate change, environmental education, and sexual and reproductive rights. Malta conducted extensive consultations, including a dedicated SDG Youth Meetup, that provided platforms for youth to recognise and discuss progress, challenges, and future directions related to the SDGs. The SDG Youth Champions also took on an active role in Malta’s VNR by submitting a chapter integrating the perspectives of youth and children. In Nigeria, UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund co-hosted a national consultation for children and young people aged 9 to 18+, supplemented by an online survey with 1,477 respondents. In Kazakhstan, an essay competition among school students and an online survey among youth were organized, and those considered as best submissions were incorporated into the VNR, which also includes a section entitled “SDG Generation”, featuring insights, evaluations and proposals from youth, NGOs and activists, as well as their vision for the country's sustainable development future.



Several countries noted collaboration with academia and the scientific community for SDG implementation.³⁹ Eswatini reported that schools and universities have incorporated SDG education into their curricula, raising awareness among students and future generations. In Germany, the Science Platform Sustainability 2030 (wpm2030)

³⁸ Bulgaria, Czechia, Dominican Republic, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Malta, Micronesia, Nigeria, Philippines and Seychelles.

³⁹ Eswatini, Germany, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Philippines.

facilitated the participation of the scientific community. Japan is proactively engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in dialogues, with an eye toward the post-2030 period, and working collaboratively to ensure evidence-based initiatives and assessments of progress. Indonesia actively encourages universities to establish SDG Centers, aimed at strengthening stakeholders' capacity for scientific, data-driven and measurable SDG implementation. Papua New Guinea partners with universities and research institutes to strengthen the evidence base for decision-making and encourage nature-based solutions.

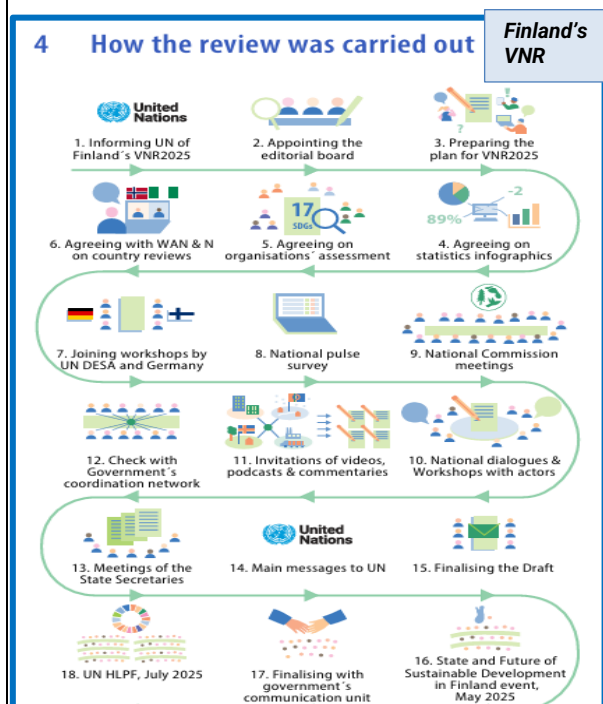
Additional sectors and stakeholder groups highlighted in the VNRs include persons with disabilities,⁴⁰ Indigenous Peoples,⁴¹ traditional leaders and actors in rural areas.⁴² The Philippines reported on engagement with trade unions, and Malta described outreach to persons in prisons.

Awareness-raising

Countries continued to highlight initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda across different sectors of society. Belarus, Czechia and The Gambia developed communication strategies in connection with SDG implementation and the VNR process, while others translated the SDGs and related materials into national languages⁴³ or organized awareness campaigns on social media.⁴⁴ Czechia organized a

dedicated meeting with media representatives, on communicating green and sustainable topics to the public and combating misinformation, as well as a “world café” on global development issues. The Government of Lesotho has led sustained awareness and advocacy campaigns since 2016 to engage a wide range of stakeholders through workshops, media outreach and public consultations.

In Malta, social platforms enhanced communication and increased public awareness of the SDGs and the VNR. In The Gambia, a Communication and Outreach subcommittee was constituted to take responsibility for



⁴⁰ Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Japan, Lesotho, Micronesia, Nigeria, Seychelles and Sudan.

⁴¹ Bangladesh, Finland, Guatemala and Suriname.

⁴² Eswatini, Finland, and Ghana.

⁴³ Angola, Kazakhstan, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles.

⁴⁴ Czechia, Gambia, Lesotho, Malaysia, Malta and Suriname.

the VNR multi-stakeholder engagement process, and community radio stations were used to deepen community understanding of the 2030 Agenda and the VNR process. Finland's review process included outreach via a "national pulse survey" sent by the Prime Minister's Office.

Some countries highlighted challenges in connection with stakeholder engagement.⁴⁵

Eswatini indicated that although community consultations were conducted, systematic engagement by civil society, youth, persons with disabilities and the private sector was not seen as consistent across all areas, and there was limited awareness of the SDGs among grassroots stakeholders, affecting ownership and accountability. Malta reported that efforts to engage stakeholders and the public achieved varied participation levels and noted challenges associated with ensuring timely and accurate submissions from all stakeholders. Israel reported lack of a mandatory mechanism for integrating SDGs into government work, or a formal national cross-sector scheme involving stakeholders in the implementation process. The Gambia indicated that inadequate funding hindered capacity for extending consultations to local and community levels.

4

Data for monitoring progress towards the SDGs

Harnessing data for sustainable development

High-quality, timely and disaggregated data remain the foundation for tracking progress towards the 2030 Agenda and informing evidence-based policymaking. In the 2025 VNRs, countries consistently underscored the central role of strong national statistical systems to the credibility and inclusiveness of SDG monitoring. Sudan, for example, reported that its Central Bureau of Statistics served as the backbone of its evidence base, complementing official statistics with administrative data from line ministries and state institutions to support an evidence-driven VNR.

Many countries emphasized that the development of their 2025 VNRs was grounded in extensive consultation processes. Thirty of the 35 reporting countries described broad and inclusive consultations that involved national statistical offices, sectoral ministries, parliaments and subnational authorities, alongside civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and development partners.

By integrating diverse perspectives, countries aimed not only to validate the evidence presented in their VNRs but also to strengthen accountability, ensure responsiveness to national priorities and foster public ownership of SDG monitoring. For example, Suriname established an SDG Platform in 2022 that brings together government, civil society and the private sector to discuss indicators and strengthen accountability, although its effectiveness is constrained by limited funding and institutional capacity.

⁴⁵ Eswatini, Finland, Gambia, Ghana, Israel, Malta and Micronesia.

Many countries emphasized national data strategies as a tool to close persistent gaps.






Micronesia launched a comprehensive National Data Strategy that prioritizes interoperability, open data platforms and alignment with Pacific regional databases, and sets an ambitious goal to close data gaps by 2030. Iraq's VNR employs a data-driven methodology to analyze progress at the subnational level and track changes between reporting periods. It recalculates and compares two custom indices for all governorates between 2021 and 2025: the "Comparative Development Achievement Index" measuring performance against global benchmarks and the "Comparative Development Perseverance Index" measuring relative ranking among governorates. This provides a granular, evidence-based analysis of which regions are progressing, and which are lagging. Such initiatives highlight how investments in governance and infrastructure are integral to advancing evidence-based policymaking.

The use and presentation of data in 2024 VNRs

A growing number of countries presented their VNRs with statistical annexes, progress charts, and disaggregated data to complement narrative analysis.

Statistical annexes: Of the 35 countries reporting this year, 19 (or 54 per cent) included statistical annexes in their VNRs. This is an improvement from 2024, when 15 of 36 countries (40 per cent) included such annexes.

From Thailand's statistical annex

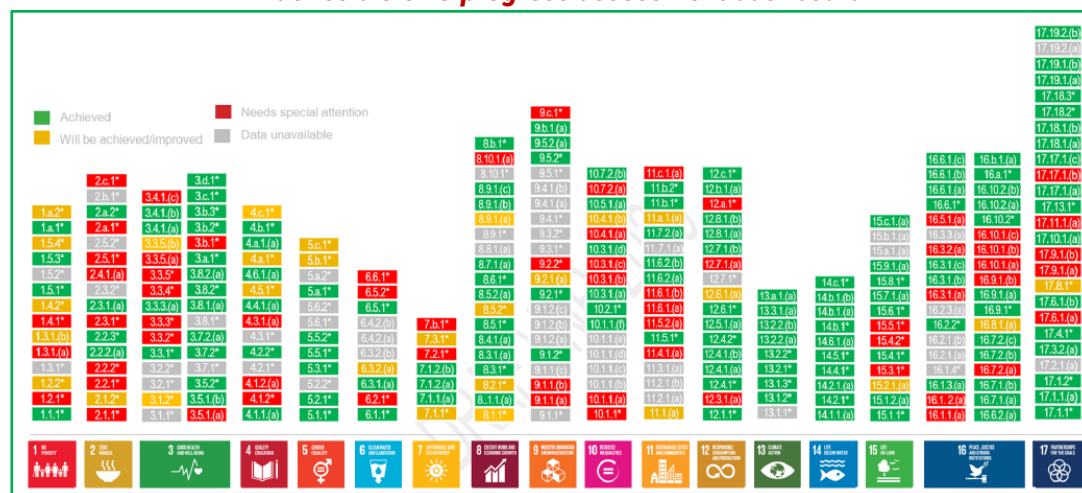
Indicator Name		Global / Proxy	Unit	Year											Status	Source
				2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024			
	SDG 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere															
1.1	By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day															
1.1.1	Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural)	Global	%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-		Global SDG Indicators Database	
1.2	By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions															
1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	Global	%	7.19	8.60	7.83	8.30	6.26	6.83	6.32	5.43	3.41	-		NESDC	
1.2.2	Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definition	Global	%	-	21.5	-	-	21.6	-	-	-	-	-		NESDC	
1.3	Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable															
1.3.1	Percentage of household members living in households that received cash-based social welfare or any form of benefit during the past three months	Proxy	%	-	-	-	-	69.0	-	-	71.2	-	-		MICS, NSO	

Thailand attached an extensive statistical annex with official SDG indicator data in detailed tables, including time series data where available to show progress since the 2015 baseline.

Israel's statistical annex presented not only current values for indicators but also an analysis of "distance to targets" based on an OECD progress assessment methodology, providing policymakers with a forward-looking tool for prioritization.

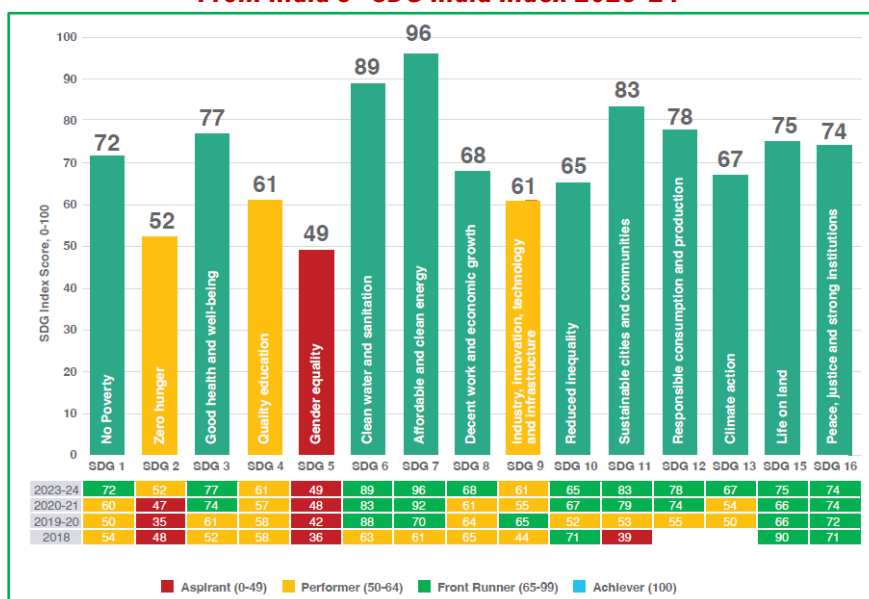
Progress assessment and charts: Two-thirds of countries (22 of 35) used visual tools to communicate SDG progress in their 2025 VNRs. Countries including Indonesia employed dashboards and “traffic-light” systems that combined statistical indicators with color-coded assessments of progress.

Indonesia's SDG progress assessment dashboard



India's VNR highlighted the “SDG India Index Score” as a central tool for monitoring and communicating national progress. The Index is a composite measure (0–100 scale) that tracks performance across all 17 Goals, using a mix of global and nationally adapted indicators

From India's “SDG India Index 2023-24”



Data disaggregation: Disaggregation is improving: 26 of 35 countries presented disaggregated data in some form in their 2025 VNRs, compared to 18 out of 36 countries last year.

Disaggregated data by dimensions in 2025 VNRs

Disaggregation Dimension	Number of Countries*
Gender	20
Age	21
Geographical Location	9
Income Level	7
Race/Ethnicity	6
Disability	9
<small>*Aggregations are not mutually exclusive. Some countries provide indicators in more than one dimension, and not all indicators are disaggregated.</small>	

However, large gaps persist. For example, Seychelles noted major challenges in assessing wage disparities due to insufficient disaggregated payroll data, complicating efforts to address unequal pay across sectors, genders and demographic groups. Lesotho also reported that limited disaggregation and statistical capacity constrain evidence-based policymaking, particularly at subnational levels. These examples confirm that while progress has been made, significant efforts are still needed to ensure no one is left behind in national data systems.

Spotlight on data challenges and innovations

Data quality and availability: Across many reporting countries, weak institutional capacity, funding shortages, and fragmented systems were cited as major barriers to producing high-quality data and improving data coverage. Nigeria noted the lack of credible data as a recurring challenge, calling for integrated data management systems and universal reporting templates for ministries and local governments. Some Small Island Developing States highlighted particularly acute gaps: for instance, Micronesia reported that only 42 per cent of its national SDG indicators currently have data coverage.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging digital technologies: Several countries highlighted the potential of AI and digital platforms for improving SDG monitoring. Indonesia reported advances under its “One Data Indonesia” policy, including the use of small area estimation, spatial data and AI-driven dashboards for more precise targeting of interventions. In 2023, Qatar launched the Qatar Social Observatory, an early warning system that combines surveys, AI-powered digital monitoring and community dialogues to track emerging social trends. These examples reflect a gradual but notable shift towards leveraging AI and digital technologies for more sophisticated analyses that move beyond the exploratory use cases described in the 2024 VNR Synthesis Report.

Composite indices and subnational monitoring: Countries are increasing efforts at SDG monitoring and reporting at subnational levels. For instance, India's national SDG monitoring (the SDG India Index described above) is now complemented by the North-Eastern Region District SDG Index, Multidimensional Poverty Index, School Education Quality Index, State Health Index and India Innovation Index to extend monitoring to state and local levels. Ethiopia is embedding SDG monitoring in its federal structure by requiring regional and municipal governments to prepare localized development plans with context-specific indicators and allocating capital budget transfers to those governments for SDG acceleration.

5

Means of implementation

In their VNRs, countries highlighted progress and challenges in strengthening the means of implementation to support their efforts in delivering the 2030 Agenda, underlining the need to diversify sources of funding to increase their financial resilience to shocks and capacity to invest in the SDGs. In a growing number of countries including Angola, Bhutan, The Gambia and Seychelles, these efforts have been supported by the development of an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), which provides a framework for a comprehensive approach to financing national sustainable development priorities and the SDGs at the country level.

To ensure financial resources support SDG implementation, countries are integrating SDGs into their budget processes. Malta began aligning its national budget measures with the SDGs in 2019, with the Public Service undertaking an annual assessment of how ministerial initiatives contribute to the SDGs. Seychelles aligns its national budget with the SDGs through its INFF and SDG budget tagging. Indonesia leverages public finance alongside innovative mechanisms such as green bonds and blended finance, with a key milestone being the issuance of SDG Bonds and Blue Bonds. Lesotho utilizes the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework and Performance-Based Budgeting to operationalize national priorities, requiring ministries to justify expenditures based on SDG-linked outcomes.

Many countries maintained strong emphasis on mobilizing additional domestic resources to finance SDG implementation. Several countries highlighted that the proportion of the domestic budget funded by domestic taxes remains inadequate to meet their growing fiscal needs. To increase domestic public resources, a range of countries implemented reforms aimed at digitizing tax and customs systems, broadening the tax base and increasing compliance. The Philippines highlighted how it reallocated 20 percent of the total revenues from excise taxes on alcohol products, heated tobacco products and vapor products to be allocated towards the achievement of the SDGs, under the Program Convergence Budgeting approach for the SDGs.

Several countries also underlined the efforts to stimulate private sector investments, despite declining trends of foreign direct investment (FDI) that many countries reported. Most countries mentioned their ambition to develop public private partnerships (PPP), particularly in infrastructure. The Gambia developed a PPP bill to facilitate PPP financing and launched the Public-Private Dialogue Forum as a platform for engaging with the private sector and addressing challenges that hinder its growth.

Countries also highlighted the crucial role of remittances as a stable source of external finance at a time of declining FDI and official development assistance (ODA). To harness the potential of remittances, countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria have launched various initiatives, including bonds, digital remittance platforms and targeted financial incentives to encourage the redirection of funds toward productive investment.

To increase financial resources for the SDGs, a growing number of countries plan to issue thematic bonds. Thailand, for instance, recently adopted a financing approach that included the issuance of Environment, Social and Governance Bonds and in 2024, the ministry of Finance issued the country's first sustainability-linked bond. Indonesia issues a Sustainable Development Goals-themed bond and Blue Bonds directly supporting SDG financing. Qatar issued its first sovereign green bonds in 2024 earmarked for financing environmentally friendly projects, including renewable energy initiatives, clean transportation, sustainable water and waste management, energy efficiency improvements and the development of green buildings.

This interest in thematic bonds comes despite a wide range of countries noting a rise in debt service, which could threaten macroeconomic stability. Countries also noted that increasing debt repayments come at the expense of social services. To reduce debt burden and find alternative financing options, debtor and creditor countries are considering the use of debt swaps. Germany, for instance, noted its launch of a detailed bilateral debt conversion program of up to EUR 150 million per year.

Regarding international development cooperation, the 2025 VNRs show a mixed picture. While some countries such as Bulgaria, Czechia and Malta reported increases in their provision of official development assistance, other providers reported decrease in ODA in 2023 after years of increase linked to the COVID-19 disbursements. Moreover, they highlight limited possibilities for ODA expansion in the future given their current fiscal situation. On the recipient side, a few countries highlighted the fragmented donor landscape as a challenge to effective development cooperation, but examples such as the Malaysia-UN SDG Trust Fund, a multi-donor platform to catalyse investments to marginalized communities shows the opportunities for donor coordination. Next to traditional donors, a growing number of countries engage in South-South and triangular cooperation.

Looking at trade and technology, some countries mentioned the need to diversify their exports and to leverage trade agreements. Following the adoption of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018, the Seychelles developed a National

AfCFTA Implementation Strategy aimed at optimizing the country's engagement with the AfCFTA to promote intra-Africa trade in goods, services and other trade-related aspects. Several countries also emphasized the need to support international cooperation for technology transfer.

Evolution of the voluntary national reviews

6

Countries are continuously evolving and strengthening their VNRs as a central mechanism for implementing the SDGs. This evolution reflects a growing commitment to more comprehensive, participatory and evidence-based assessments, with a strong emphasis on improved monitoring of progress and the integration of lessons learned from previous review cycles. The VNR process is increasingly viewed not merely as a reporting exercise but as a vital catalyst for action, reflection and mutual learning. Most countries are engaged in iterative VNR processes, with many submitting their second, third or even fourth reports, signifying a sustained commitment to the 2030 Agenda. As a result, the VNRs have been significantly strengthened and improved in several key areas.

VNRs have moved from initial stock-taking exercises to more in-depth, self-critical and comprehensive assessments of national progress. There is a growing focus on nationally led and country-owned processes, ensuring that reviews reflect national priorities and contexts, and the SDGs are increasingly mainstreamed into national development plans, strategies and policy frameworks. The VNR process in The Gambia, for example, is designed to create national ownership and a better understanding of the SDGs. Ethiopia has fully integrated the SDGs into its Ten-Year Development Plan and other medium-term plans, ensuring coherence across sectors.

The scope of the reports has also expanded. Malaysia notes that its 2021 VNR focused on nine SDGs, whereas its 2025 report is its “most comprehensive to date,” covering all 17 Goals. This trend reflects a growing capacity and ambition to address the 2030 Agenda in its entirety. Suriname's second VNR provides a comprehensive overview of all SDGs, expanding significantly from the four goals covered in its first report. Saint Lucia also broadened its coverage from nine SDGs in 2019 to fourteen in its 2025 VNR.

VNRs are increasingly strengthened by VLRs. A notable improvement is the systematic integration of VLRs into national VNRs, providing localized insights and strengthening multi-level governance for SDG implementation. Countries like Ghana, India, Indonesia, Japan, Nigeria, the Philippines and Thailand highlighted the growing role of VLRs in complementing national assessments, identifying local challenges and opportunities and promoting awareness and partnerships at the subnational level. Thailand has developed a VLR Framework based on municipal experiences to guide other local administrative organizations. Kazakhstan presented the first VLR in its history from the city of Almaty in 2023, a landmark for SDG localization in Central Asia.

Governments are becoming more focused on accountability, for example by including parliaments in their initial VNR consultation plans. The contribution of parliaments to the VNR report enriches the process and enables it to be more substantive. In several countries, including Japan and Thailand, parliaments contributed steadily from the beginning to the end of the development of their 2025 VNRs.

The VNR preparation process is also widely adopting more inclusive whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, bringing together diverse stakeholders from governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, youth and local communities. India's VNR marks a conscious paradigm shift to a whole-of-society approach, reflecting insights from over one thousand civil society organizations.

The VNRs are more evidence-based, with reporting through enhanced data systems and statistical capacity, and more focused on disaggregating data to identify and address inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind. Countries are prioritizing robust data collection and statistical systems to support evidence-based decision-making. Ethiopia introduced a milestone-based assessment approach in its 2025 VNR, moving beyond linear projections to measure performance against concrete, time-bound progress points. India developed a National Indicator Framework and encouraged its states and Union Territories to develop their own, leading to a rise in the SDG India Index, indicating accelerated progress in data collection and monitoring. The Philippines established the SDG Pace of Progress, adopting the UN ESCAP methodology to measure achievement and expected progress. Its regional offices now maintain "SDG Watch" dashboards to improve transparency and data accessibility.

Countries also reported on expanded indicator coverage. Belarus, for instance, increased its national list of SDG indicators from 230 in 2022 to 246 in 2025, with a data availability rate of over 94 per cent. Ghana progressively increased its reported indicators from 66 in 2019 to 105 in 2025. This quantitative expansion is matched by qualitative improvements. And, while countries including Angola, Lesotho, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Sudan highlighted that challenges and gaps persist in data availability, completeness, coverage and disaggregation, the 2025 VNRs are generally more transparent about these limitations and increasingly outline specific strategies to address them. Bhutan and Micronesia explicitly identify the need to strengthen data systems as a key priority for accelerating SDG implementation. Japan also noted a lack of data-driven evaluation and analysis of progress in its previous VNR and highlighted the need for improvement.

Countries consistently emphasize that previous VNRs serve as crucial learning opportunities that directly inform and improve subsequent reports and policy actions. Eswatini explicitly considered the findings and recommendations of its 2022 VNR when developing its current National Development Plan (2022/23–2027/28). Ethiopia's 2025 VNR builds on the experiences of its 2017 and 2022 reviews and highlights lessons such as the importance of national ownership, community mobilization and adaptive

governance. Ghana's 2025 VNR includes a dedicated section highlighting the outcomes of recommendations from its 2019 and 2022 reports, detailing improvements in statistics, the expansion of local reporting and how past VNRs have informed national policy adjustments. Nigeria, also presenting its third VNR, offers a comparative analysis of its three reports, showing a strategic evolution from focusing on institutional frameworks in 2017, to priority SDGs in 2020, to a comprehensive whole-of-society approach in 2025. Similarly, Bhutan's third VNR builds directly on the findings of its 2018 and 2021 reports, with specific sections dedicated to initiatives undertaken to address the recommendations of the 2021 review.

Learning is also evident in policy and governance reforms. El Salvador's 2022 VNR identified the need for a unified national development strategy; its 2025 report documents the subsequent creation and implementation of the Estrategia Nacional de Desarrollo Integral (ENDI) in 2023, a direct outcome of the previous VNR cycle. Finland and Germany both acknowledge that feedback from past VNRs and peer reviews helped correct national "blind spots" and catalysed a shift from single-solution thinking to more holistic, systems-based approaches to sustainability.

The Gambia's VNR process has increased knowledge of the SDGs among the populace and prompted renewed commitments, with lessons revealing the need for more proactive and innovative implementation approaches. Indonesia's Audit Board notes that recommendations from the 2021 VNR review had a significant impact on enhancing SDG policies, data management, and program evaluation. Papua New Guinea conducted a post-mortem of its 2020 VNR to identify areas for improvement in its second VNR process and broader SDG implementation. Lessons from the 2020 VNR also informed current multi-sectoral approaches, such as on safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) integration and nutrition governance. The Philippines' 2022 VNR identified stronger monitoring as a way forward, which led to the establishment of the SDG Pace of Progress, and its current VNR highlights actions taken based on previous commitments.

Several countries actively participated in peer-learning groups and workshops to share experiences, challenges and innovative approaches in VNR preparation. Finland engaged in two-way country-to-country peer reviews with Nigeria; Indonesia participated in a VNR Peer Learning Group with Finland, Germany, Guatemala, Nigeria and Thailand, and engaged in a UN ESCAP Twinning Program with the Philippines.

Perhaps the most significant evolution is the shift in focus from merely reporting on past progress to strategically planning for accelerated implementation. The 2025 VNRs are overwhelmingly forward-looking, serving as roadmaps for the final five-year push to 2030. They move beyond describing interventions to analyzing what is needed for systemic transformation. Many reports explicitly identify SDG accelerators and high-impact areas where investment can generate catalytic, cross-sectoral benefits. Kazakhstan, for instance, conducted an analysis of interlinkages between all national

SDG indicators to identify which act as the most influential accelerators for the entire agenda. Such analytical approaches enable more strategic resource allocation.

The call for transformation is clear. Germany has established inter-ministerial “transformation teams” to drive change in key areas like the circular economy and energy transition. Ethiopia highlights its flagship national programs, such as Community-Based Health Insurance and the Green Legacy Initiative, as transformative, system-wide innovations. The need for accelerated financing is another dominant theme, with countries like Ghana, Ethiopia and Suriname emphasizing the operationalization of INFFs to mobilize and align public and private resources for SDG investments.

These strategic frameworks are often presented in detailed “way forward” or “next steps” sections, which propose concrete national commitments, such as Micronesia’s pledge to achieve at least 50 per cent of its electricity from renewables by 2030. This forward-looking orientation firmly positions the 2025 VNRs as tools for future action rather than static reports.

Conclusion

The 2025 VNRs represent significant progress in global reporting, presented at a critical juncture for the 2030 Agenda against a backdrop of multiple global crises. They are snapshots of how Governments are explicitly building on past lessons learned, leveraging data, championing transformative pathways and evolving beyond foundational progress-tracking. They are increasingly self-reflective and strategic, with data-driven approaches, a robust commitment to SDG localization and a whole-of-society ethos that embeds the SDGs within national development plans and engages a wide spectrum of stakeholders to foster genuine national ownership.

The VNRs are no longer merely retrospective assessments. They have transformed into forward-looking roadmaps, articulating clear national priorities, identifying SDG accelerators and outlining concrete commitments designed to drive the transformative change required to leave no one behind in the final five years of the Decade of Action for delivering on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Annex I: List of 2025 VNR countries

Including frequency and links to online VNR reports

Country	VNR Presentation Years
Angola	2021, 2025
Bangladesh	2017, 2020, 2025
Belarus	2017, 2022, 2025
Bhutan	2018, 2021, 2025
Bulgaria	2020, 2025
Czechia	2017, 2021, 2025
Dominican Republic	2018, 2021, 2025
El Salvador	2017, 2022, 2025
Eswatini	2019, 2022, 2025
Ethiopia	2017, 2022, 2025
Finland	2016, 2020, 2025
Gambia	2020, 2022, 2025
Germany	2016, 2021, 2025
Ghana	2019, 2022, 2025
Guatemala	2017, 2019, 2021, 2025
India	2017, 2020, 2025
Indonesia	2017, 2019, 2021, 2025
Iraq	2019, 2021, 2025
Israel	2019, 2025
Japan	2017, 2021, 2025
Kazakhstan	2019, 2022, 2025
Kyrgyzstan	2020, 2025
Lesotho	2019, 2022, 2025
Malaysia	2017, 2021, 2025
Malta	2018, 2025
Micronesia	2020, 2025
Nigeria	2017, 2020, 2025
Papua New Guinea	2020, 2025
Philippines	2016, 2019, 2022, 2025
Qatar	2017, 2018, 2021, 2025
Saint Lucia	2019, 2025
Seychelles	2020, 2025
Sudan	2018, 2022, 2025
Suriname	2022, 2025
Thailand	2017, 2021, 2025

Annex 2: National SDG implementation and coordination structures

Country	Lead/Coordinating Body(ies)	Key Features & Structures
Angola	National SDG Platform	This inclusive platform fosters political and technical coordination, involves government, civil society, the private sector and development partners, and aims to align public policies with the 2030 Agenda and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
Bangladesh	SDGs Implementation and Review Committee, chaired by the Principal Coordinator at the Chief Adviser's Office	The institutional framework brings together actors from government, civil society, the private sector, and development partners for inclusive and transparent coordination.
Belarus	National SDG Coordinator and a Council for Sustainable Development	The country has established a comprehensive national architecture for SDG implementation.
Bhutan	Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (for strategic planning) and the Ministry of Finance (for resource mobilization)	A multi-sectoral VNR Task Force, with representatives from key ministries, provides technical guidance for the VNR process.
Bulgaria	A special directorate within the Council of Ministers	A national coordination mechanism was established by a Council of Ministers decree in 2023, which also created a permanent expert working group to monitor SDG implementation.
Czechia	Ministry of the Environment	The ministry manages the Government Council for Sustainable Development, a coordinating body responsible for implementing the national "Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030" and coordinating a network of focal points in each ministry.
Dominican Republic	Comisión ODS República Dominicana	The Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development leads the preparation of the VNR.
El Salvador	Consejo Nacional para el Desarrollo, chaired by the Vice President of the Republic	A high-level body created in 2024 to coordinate and monitor the national development strategy.
Eswatini	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development	The institutional framework includes an SDGs Technical Working Team comprising government, private sector, civil society, academia, and experts, and an SDGs Steering Committee.
Ethiopia	Ministry of Planning and Development	The ministry serves as the national custodian for the SDGs and leads coordination through the National SDG Steering Committee and a Technical Committee, which include multi-sectoral representatives.
Finland	Prime Minister's Office, in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Statistics Finland	A Sustainable Development Coordination Network, with representatives from all ministries, meets monthly to address sustainability issues and is coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office.
The Gambia	Not specified, but integrated into the National Development Plan (RF-NDP) framework	SDGs are mainstreamed into the RF-NDP, which creates a holistic approach that ensures active roles and strong accountability among all stakeholders.
Germany	No single body specified; policy exists at federal, state, and municipal levels	Municipalities are key drivers of sustainability policy, which emphasizes institutional cooperation with all relevant social groups and vertical integration with Länder (states) and municipalities.
Ghana	High-Level Ministerial Committee	A multi-tiered architecture is in place, which also includes an SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee and a Technical Committee.
Guatemala	Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural, chaired by the President of the Republic	This council serves as the main body for SDG coordination and follow-up.
India	SDG Task Force	The task force brings together Union Ministries, State Governments, and think tanks. SDG Coordination and Acceleration Centres at the state level drive localized action and data-driven decision-making.
Indonesia	National SDGs Coordination Team, led by Bappenas (Ministry of National Development Planning)	The SDGs are embedded into national planning and budgeting systems, with coordination involving all levels of government, the private sector, academia, and civil society.
Iraq	Ministry of Planning	A high-level writing team and a technical team bring together representatives from various ministry departments and the national statistics authority to conduct the VNR.
Israel	Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	An inter-ministerial team was formed for cooperation, but Israel still lacks a mandatory mechanism for integrating SDGs across all government work and a formal national cross-sector scheme.
Japan	SDGs Promotion Roundtable	This body led the revision of the SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles and gathers opinions from a wide range of stakeholders. Japan also holds annual SDGs Stakeholders Meetings.

Kazakhstan	Coordination Council on SDGs, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister	The Council was established in 2018 to develop proposals for a unified SDG policy. A Committee on SDG Monitoring was created in 2021.
Kyrgyzstan	Platforms under the Cabinet of Ministers	The country uses mechanisms for inter-agency coordination such as coordination councils and thematic working groups.
Lesotho	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning	The decentralized architecture includes a National SDGs Forum chaired by the Prime Minister, a Policy Coordination Committee, a Steering Committee and a Technical Coordination Committee.
Malaysia	National SDG Council, chaired by the Prime Minister	A dedicated National SDG Centre coordinates implementation efforts.
Malta	Sustainable Development Directorate	The Sustainable Development Act underpins the governance mechanism, designating Permanent Secretaries as coordinators and establishing a focal point in every ministry. Bodies like the Guardian of Future Generations and the Sustainable Development Network foster dialogue.
Micronesia	No current body	A dedicated coordination mechanism has been proposed to align national and subnational development efforts.
Nigeria	Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs	This office coordinates implementation at national and subnational levels, supported by inter-ministerial committees and focal persons.
Papua New Guinea	Improved national coordination mechanisms	SDG 17 is a foundational pillar of its Medium-Term Development Plan IV. The government has also reactivated its Aid Information Management System for better transparency and accountability.
Philippines	Subcommittee on the SDGs (under the Development Budget Coordination Committee)	A "Whole-of-Nation PLUS" approach is used. The Stakeholders' Chamber on the SDGs has working groups that mirror the subcommittee to ensure policy coherence.
Qatar	National Planning Council	The Council leads coordination, awareness sessions, and data collection. It also houses the National Statistics Center, which reports on SDG indicators.
Saint Lucia	National Coordinating Mechanism for the SDGs	The mechanism operates at three levels: Cabinet of Ministers, SDG Cabinet Sub-Committee of Ministers, and the SDG National Coordinating Committee.
Seychelles	No single body specified	The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Result Groups play a central role in guiding implementation. A Joint Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Ministry of Finance and the UN Resident Coordinator, oversees progress.
Sudan	High National Committee	A technical committee, headed by the Undersecretary of Planning and composed of ministries and the Director General of the Central Bureau of Statistics, was formed under the High National Committee.
Suriname	National SDG Committee, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business and International Cooperation	The committee includes representatives from all 17 ministries, the Parliament, the Planning Office and the General Bureau of Statistics.
Thailand	National Committee for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Prime Minister	The committee has four sub-committees and one working group focusing on areas like private sector and youth engagement. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council serves as its secretariat.