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Linking national, regional and global dimensions of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Synthesis of voluntary national reviews from Asia and the Pacific**

Summary

The aim of this document is to provide an overview on the involvement of State and non-State actors in the Voluntary National Reviews from the Asia-Pacific region. The importance of adopting a whole of society approach in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is supported by a series of country examples to facilitate knowledge exchange and open possibilities for peer learning at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

I. Introduction

1. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda calls for the involvement and participation of the society as a whole. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires multi-stakeholder approaches to governance, where non-State actors are included at every stage of the policy cycle and can shape policy development to ensure strong, resilient, and cohesive societies.

2. The handbook on Voluntary National Review preparation,¹ issued by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, emphasises the importance of multi-stakeholder participation as a founding principle of the 2030 Agenda. The first cycle of Voluntary National Reviews (2016-2019) suggests that many Governments are recognizing the broad society as a key partner in governance; however, institutional mechanisms to meaningfully engage stakeholders and capitalize on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda are yet to be identified.

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** This document is being issued without formal editing.
3. This information note prepared for the Seventh Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, provides an overview of examples from countries in Asia and the Pacific on how different nonstate actors have contributed to the Voluntary National Review report. Most cases were extracted from the Voluntary National Review reports presented at the High-Level Political Forum in 2019. The scope of the analysis lies within the boundaries of the actual Voluntary National Review reports and covers engagement of different stakeholders as stated in the submitted documents.

II. Why a whole of society approach is key for the development and preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews

4. The Voluntary National Reviews provide a space to reflect on the importance of meaningful participation of non-State actors in the implementation of the Agenda and the opportunity to take stock of their contributions towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The principles of inclusion, accountability and transparency shall be at the core of the Voluntary National Review process and guide the overall consultation.

5. Furthermore, Voluntary National Reviews are a vehicle to meet the request detailed in the 2019 Political declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to engage Governments, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in generating solutions and accelerating action to address systemic gaps in implementation, as we embark on a decisive decade for the 2030 Agenda.

6. Beyond engagement in the Voluntary National Reviews, a whole of society approach supports accelerated action by mobilizing diverse stakeholders to act in a coherent way, on various policy fronts. It emphasizes building social capital and improving the quality of governance. As such, a whole of society approach requires measures for building partnerships and trust, for balancing public and private interests and recognizing and mitigating power imbalances. This is a lengthy process. The examples of non-State actor engagement in the Voluntary National Review process shows that in various countries important steps are being taken.

III. Examples of multi-stakeholder engagement in the Voluntary National Reviews

7. The analysis of the Voluntary National Reviews indicates increased recognition from national Governments of the value of the contribution of major groups and other Stakeholders. The Agenda 21 formalized nine Major Groups as the main channel to facilitate broad participation of stakeholders within United Nations activities. However, Voluntary National Reviews allow for contributions from a larger group of actors, including State and non-State ones. Stakeholders are eager to be included in the consultations not only because this

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allows them to share their views on the progress made at country level, but also because Voluntary National Reviews provide them with an opportunity to document their activities related to awareness raising and implementation of the goals.

8. Most reporting countries mention hosting multi-stakeholder public hearings for the preparation of the report, including Parliaments, members of the private sector, Civil Society Organizations, youth, indigenous communities, women’s organizations, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or intersex groups, among others. Yet, from many of the Voluntary National Reviews it can be noted that formal mechanisms to consult and engage with most of these groups are lagging. Also, the depth of the consultation and how the outcomes have been reflected in the reports are often not described into details.

9. The Voluntary National Review reports also show that marginalized groups are often left behind, including in Voluntary National Review processes. More specific efforts and mechanisms are needed to reach out to these groups, such as strengthening dialogue with organizations and networks representing their rights, hosting consultations in a variety of local languages and in remote and scattered locations. For instance, reference to the participation of indigenous groups or ethnic minorities in the Voluntary National Reviews and in the overall Sustainable Development Goals process are limited.5

10. A whole of society approach implies that the relationships among stakeholder groups in society are just as important to strengthen and nurture as the relationship between the government and its stakeholders. The Sustainable Development Goals require comprehensive mechanisms of governance, giving new light to non-State actors along with enhancing capacities of existing State institutions, such Parliaments, Supreme Audit Institutions, Ombudsman, along with others.

11. The Voluntary National Review reports are being delivered in a development context marked by declining trust in institutions6 and among different groups in society. The importance of building trust through effective engagement of stakeholders and the public cannot be understated and the process of preparing a Voluntary National Review can be instrumental to this end.

12. In line with the 2019 High-Level Political Forum theme,7 most of the Voluntary National Reviews presented in 2019 emphasised the importance of including a broad range of stakeholders to meet the expectations of the Agenda, providing several good practices of multi-stakeholder engagement. A few of these are presented here below, depicting some of the actors consulted and frequently mentioned in the reports.


A. Academia

13. Reference to engagement of Academia in the Voluntary National Review consultation process as well as in the overall implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is increasing. Academia is often referred to as one of the stakeholders included in the Voluntary National Review consultation, but less commonly engaged in the drafting of the report.

14. **New Zealand** mentions the key role played by universities in creating awareness of the global goals by hosting a series of national Sustainable Development Goal Summits. By working in collaboration with multiple actors, primarily central and local government, civil society, business sector and youth organizations, Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara – representing the country’s eight main academic institutions, organized the first national Sustainable Development Goal Summit in April 2018.\(^8\) The summit aimed at creating a sense of ownership on the goals, along with fostering cross-sectoral partnerships and mobilizing action. Attendees had the chance to discover how different sectors are embracing the Sustainable Development Goals and how they are measuring progress towards the same. A second edition,\(^9\) sponsored by the New Zealand National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was held in September 2019, focusing on the role of youth as agents of change and innovation. The summit also provided the space to disseminate the Voluntary National Review report.

15. Similarly, Academia in **Pakistan** has been involved in awareness raising activities pertaining to Sustainable Development Goal localization. Several academic institutions have established education programmes on the global goals to promote community and grassroots participation in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, to highlight interlinkages, and to cultivate a culture of behavioral change, including through volunteerism. Academia’s role, however, has not been confined to advocacy as they have also conducted research and produced analytical reports on the goals. In fact, universities and other think tanks have set up Sustainable Development Goal units and Sustainable Development Goal Centers of Excellence to focus their work on specific goals. Plans to broaden universities’ contribution to the monitoring and evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals are currently being undertaken.

B. Civil Society Organizations

16. In many countries, representatives from civil society organizations have been included in the Sustainable Development Goal coordination mechanism structure. A perception survey on stakeholder engagement for the Voluntary National Reviews conducted in 2019 by Together 2030 and Newcastle University\(^ {10} \) reveals progress on increasing civil society awareness and participation in the reporting exercise but points to little follow-up to the Voluntary National Reviews. Civil Society Organizations frequently express

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dissatisfaction regarding their involvement in the overall reporting process, with a growing number of Civil Society Organizations shadow reports produced in parallel to the Voluntary National Review official document. These however lack official status and recognition at the High-Level Political Forum. Civil Society Organizations are commonly engaged in consultations through participation in seminars, public hearings and roundtable discussions.

17. In Cambodia, Civil Society Organizations were encouraged to participate and contribute at different stages of the Voluntary National Review, to verify the collected data, validate the draft report, and provide feedback on key messages. After an inception workshop was organized with a broad range of stakeholders by the Minister of Planning an additional consultation was set up by the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia targeting specifically Civil Society Organizations. In addition, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation held a consultative meeting with International Non-Governmental organizations. The Royal Government of Cambodia has pledged to strengthen collaboration with Civil Society Organizations and engage them in all aspects concerning sustainable development. To this end, the Government has initiated an inter-ministerial working group to systematically hear from Civil Society Organizations and address their concerns.

18. In Palau, a Civil Society Organization platform was set up in 2018, the Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, as the national coordination body for Civil Society Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations and other forms of community-based entities. In the context of the Voluntary National Review preparation, the Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations collaborated with the Sustainable Development Goal coordinating unit and the Office of the President to nominate Civil Society Organization representatives for all Sustainable Development Goal working groups. The Belau Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, the Sustainable Development Goal coordination unit and the United Nations office in Palau intend to keep on collaborating to safeguard meaningful participation of Civil Society Organizations in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. In Timor-Leste, Civil Society Organizations are part of the Sustainable Development Goal Working group, led by the Prime Minister. The Development Partner Management Unit of the Minister of Finance is the body in charge of liaising with Civil Society. Furthermore, a Civil Society Organizations advisory group was introduced to provide advice to the Voluntary National Review secretariat on the design and delivery of multi-stakeholder consultation meetings held in Dili and Baucau, to ensure representation and inclusion of stakeholders at risk of being left behind. Members of the advisory team encompassed the national Non-Governmental Organization Platform, the National Youth Council, the network of women’s organisations, and a conflict-prevention Non-Governmental Organization. The group provided guidance on how to gather substantial inputs and feedback from often disregarded stakeholders, such as young people, children, persons with disabilities, rural populations and the Regulatory Commission for Martial Arts. The Voluntary National Review confirms that the Government is committed to sustain the engagement with the Civil Society Organizations advisory group for future activities.

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20. The Government of Tonga has established multiple channels to reach out and engage Civil Society Organizations, such as through tailor made programs to raise awareness; consultation meetings and public dialogues to enhance collective decision-making; and capacity building workshops.

C. Persons with disabilities

21. The extent to which people with disabilities are included as one of the major groups in the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews tends to vary, with few examples of reports that refer to specific consultations. Yet, an increase of references to the interconnections among the Incheon strategy\(^\text{12}\) and the 2030 Agenda can be noted, and the importance of collecting data on persons with disabilities to leave no one behind.

22. Bangladesh in its first report dedicates a section of the appendix to special initiatives on inclusion and leave no one behind, targeting persons with disabilities. The “Disability Alliance on Sustainable Development Goals” was formed in 2017, consisting of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, Non-Governmental Organizations and International Non-Governmental Organizations. The alliance has promoted several advocacy initiatives to ensure that people with disabilities were engaged in the country’s first report in 2017. The alliance conducted multiple consultations at the national and district level to collect inputs from grassroots levels. The findings of these consultations were summarized in a report\(^\text{13}\) and consequently shared with the Voluntary National Review report drafting committee.

23. Indonesia notes that organizations working with persons with disabilities are very proactive in raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals with peers and local communities, and that their active engagement is reflected in the country’s second Voluntary National Review. Japan’s report in 2017 also mentions that people with disabilities and relative organizations have been very proactive in leading activities to enhance their ability to be engaged in the society and eliminate discrimination against them. Disable Persons Organizations have been involved in the Voluntary National Review preparation through the Civil Society Network, consulted by the Sustainable Development Goal Promotion Secretariat.

D. Youth

24. Across the Voluntary National Reviews assessed, there is often unclarity on the terminology of youth itself, little detail on how youth and children were consulted, and how their inputs were used for the reports. Nevertheless, most reports submitted in the first quadrennium do mention youth’s and children’s involvement in the process, and the past High-Level Political Forum experienced an increase in children’s and young people’s participation in all areas of the forum, including the presentations of the Voluntary National Review reports.

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25. **Australia**’s first Voluntary National Review dedicates a specific session of the report to youth and volunteers, detailing how their involvement enhances implementation of the Goals. The Australian Government, to expand the reach of its consultation, partnered with different actors including the Sustainable Development Solutions Network Youth, in order to ensure young people’s voices would be reflected in the report.\(^\text{14}\) To this end, the report puts forward several youth-led initiatives, which play a key role in raising awareness of the global agenda and aid resource mobilization.

26. **Mongolia** identifies children and young people as most at risk of being left behind. Besides, it also praises the work accomplished by volunteers, acknowledging their key contribution to Sustainable Development Goal implementation. Thus, considering the Voluntary National Review preparation, the Government, in collaboration with World Vision and United Nations Children’s Fund, held focus group discussions with youth and volunteer representatives in March 2019. The outcomes of the debate were used to inform a chapter in the report on air pollution, regarded as one of the most urgent threats to Mongolian youth.

27. To raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals and encourage youth involvement in the overall Voluntary National Review process, the Government of **Singapore** launched a youth video competition on the Sustainable Development Goals to collectively brainstorm on solutions related to the goals under review at the 2018 High-Level Political Forum,\(^\text{15}\) the year the country underwent its first Voluntary National Review. Young people were given the opportunity to share their ideas on the most pressing issues related to those goals and how to face them. The video contest was met with great enthusiasm and saw a very high level of participation from youth and children.

28. As the seventh youngest country in the world and with 39 per cent of its population under 15, **Timor-Leste** views political and economic inclusion of youth as critical to the country’s development, exploring the theme of the ‘demographic dividend’ throughout the report. Youth groups, comprising of the National Youth Council, youth political groups, members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, university students and young entrepreneurs, are depicted as key stakeholder groups involved in the Voluntary National Review consultations. To highlight the key role of youth in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the government has in its follow up to the Voluntary National Review pledged to organize briefings and consultations on sustainable development in 13 municipalities, giving priority to consultations with universities.

### E. Volunteers

29. Several Voluntary National Reviews show that member States have started to capitalize on the power of volunteerism as a vehicle for Sustainable Development Goal implementation, detailing how volunteers are contributing towards the 2030 Agenda. Volunteerism is often regarded to ensure a whole of society approach and as a tool to reach those at risk of being left behind. Volunteers are mentioned not only as agents of change, often involved in

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awareness campaigns, but also as active actors in data collection, particularly when it comes to rural or remote communities.

30. **Cambodia**’s first Voluntary National Review in 2019 praises the importance of volunteerism, especially at the local level, as a vehicle for civic engagement, empowerment and public participation. In partnership with the United Nations Volunteers programme, the Government is piloting three youth volunteering programmes to enhance young people’s capacities to meet the goals. Furthermore, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia has launched a Volunteer Youth Ambassador Program for the Sustainable Development Goals, to create a platform of young volunteers and encourage them to participate actively in the achievement of the goals.

31. Supported by development partners, the Government of **Lao People\'s Democratic Republic** conducted consultations in three different provinces - Vientiane, Savannakhet, and Sekong - with a set of key stakeholders, among which youth and volunteer groups. The consultation shed light on the broad interest of volunteers in becoming agents of change, being key players in a whole of society approach. The report underlines multiple ways volunteers are contributing to the achievement of the Agenda, such as through awareness raising; acting as role models for younger generations; fostering community involvement; being at the core of community radio projects; and contributing to goal specific activities.

32. Similarly, in **Sri Lanka** Volunteer Involving Organizations were included in online and on-site multi stakeholder consultations for the report and beyond. The Government regards volunteerism as a powerful cross-cutting tool that can support a holistic approach to Sustainable Development Goal implementation, contemplating a national policy on volunteerism.

### F. Private sector

33. The private business sector is endorsed as a key contributor to the 2030 Agenda, as well as a valuable implementing partner. Some Voluntary National Review report on how the business sector was consulted, often through business associations or Chambers of Commerce; others refer to the initiatives that private companies are contributing to, clearly depicting an increased interest of the business sector to be part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Private enterprises are appreciated for their ability to create awareness of the goals and for mobilizing funds.

34. In **Thailand**, the private sector is integrated as a member of the National Committee for Sustainable Development an inter-agency and multi-stakeholder platform chaired by the Prime Minister. The Committee focuses on creating avenues for meaningful cooperation among the public and the private sector towards sustainable development. For instance, the Government has embraced a public-private partnership approach to community-based economic development, working in cooperation with large-scale enterprises around the country and building on their knowledge to transfer capacity to small local enterprises. Likewise, the business sector sees the Sustainable Development Goals as an opportunity to define and shape its core activities and Corporate Social Responsibility objectives, mapping them against the global goals.

35. **Turkey** dedicates a session of its report to private sector activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals, talking about the importance of creating a sense of ownership. The private sector, in fact, was actively involved in the Stocktaking Analysis Project. An online database which helped to take stock of what had emerged from the first national report in 2016, and to collect best
In addition to the Business Council for Sustainable Development Turkey, which has existed for the past fifteen years, in 2019 a Business for Goals Platform\textsuperscript{16} was formed. Funded by the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation and the Turkish Industry and Business Association, which represent over 40,000 companies, and in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, the platform enables companies to capitalize on synergies and integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in their core business. In addition, the Istanbul International Center for Private Sector in Development started the “Sustainable Development Goal Impact Accelerator”\textsuperscript{17} project to mobilize and maximize the private sector’s impact on Sustainable Development Goal acceleration.

### G. Local authorities

36. The importance of local authorities and local government associations in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the sub-national level are becoming more evident,\textsuperscript{18} but the consultations for the Voluntary National Reviews run the risk of appearing to correspond more to formalities than to real engagement and co-production of actions. A report from the United Cities and Local Governments shows that, since 2016, subnational governments’ meaningful participation in the reporting process has been quite different according to the region; ranging from 57 per cent of European reporting countries, 37 per cent in the Asia-Pacific, 35 per cent of Latin American countries and 33 per cent in Africa, based on the United Cities and Local Governments country classifications.\textsuperscript{19} There is still a long road ahead to make Local Authorities fully aware and active in Voluntary National Review preparation and reporting, in national coordination mechanisms and in the localization process as a whole. At the same time, empowering Local Authorities is a key pillar of Sustainable Development Goal localization: it promotes devolution of powers and resources for the service delivery to people, ensures subsidiarity and local self-government, and makes Local Authorities more accountable and responsible to their constituencies.

37. In the Philippines, all government agencies including local governments are mandated to implement the Philippine Development Plan (PDP 2017–2022),\textsuperscript{20} which serves as the national strategy and road map for Sustainable Development Goal implementation. To ensure inclusiveness in the Voluntary National Review process, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies tasked by the National Economic and Development Authority to draft the report, shared the zero draft with several non-State actors, including with local and regional governments. Four regional consultation workshops were held in Metro Manila, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, with the scope of validating data at the regional level; documenting best practices at the local level; and gaining insights on Sustainable Development Goal localization, to reduce regional disparities. Furthermore, the National Economic and Development Authority together with the Department of Interior and Local Government have also held workshops on


\textsuperscript{17}SDG Impact Accelerator (SDGIA), updated January 2020, https://www.sdgia.org/.

\textsuperscript{18}United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Towards the Localization of the SDGs: Local and Regional Governments’ Report to the 2019 HLPF, 2019, https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/towards_the_localization_of_the_sdgs_0.pdf.


the localization of the Philippine Development Plan and its alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2018, the national government released a set of guidelines\textsuperscript{21} for localization, inclusive of a Sustainable Development Goal result matrix, to enhance local and regional Governments capacities to monitor progress towards the goals.

38. Building on the experience of its first Voluntary National Review, Turkey adopted a consultative approach for its second reporting exercise, with fifty municipality representatives directly and other 1,400 municipalities indirectly contributing to the Voluntary National Review process, and a specific paragraph of the report dedicated to detailing the role of LRGs in the achievement of the Agenda. The Union of Municipalities of Turkey was appointed as the coordinating institution for local administrations’ contribution to the report and was also assigned the responsibility to mapping and linking municipalities’ projects to the Sustainable Development Goals, in order to strengthen vertical policy coherence. The Union of Municipalities of Turkey collected Sustainable Development Goal practices from the municipalities under its umbrella and held a workshop to present and discuss the draft Voluntary National Review with different levels of governance and other non-governmental bodies. While the Union of Municipalities of Turkey has actively promoted Sustainable Development Goal integration into local strategic plans, some other municipalities, namely Bakırköy, Esenler and Maltepe have acted solo, taking the lead in developing their own local progress reports on the state of Sustainable Development Goal achievement.

II. Parliaments

39. The role of Parliaments in the Sustainable Development Goal implementation, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal coordination mechanisms, is gaining momentum. A growing number of Parliaments formally and actively engaged in the Sustainable Development Goals, especially from a law-making, oversight or representation capacity. Member of the Parliaments’ involvement spans from reviewing legislation and policies related to the Sustainable Development Goals, consulting on Sustainable Development Goal implementation, and participating in monitoring processes or other activities aimed at strengthening accountability and transparency of national implementation efforts. Occasionally, Parliaments have been called upon their budgeting approval function.

40. Since 2016, the Parliament of Fiji has intensified its activities in support to the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. Such initiatives have encompassed capacity-building for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, awareness raising activities for the general public and support towards Sustainable Development Goal mainstreaming, with a focus on gender analysis. Under the guidance and assistance of developing partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Inter Parliamentary Union, in May 2019 the Parliament released a Guidance Note for the Standing

Committee on Sustainable Development Goal integration, featuring concrete actions, methods and tools that can be applied to refine oversight of the Sustainable Development Goals. The note puts emphasis on Sustainable Development Goal indicators, describing how the Committee can make use of them for monitoring purposes, and is intended as a tool for placing the Sustainable Development Goals at the core of parliamentary work.

41. The Parliament of Pakistan was the first to pioneer national and provincial parliamentary Sustainable Development Goal Taskforces within national, provincial and administrative area assemblies to enhance the awareness of Parliamentarians of the Sustainable Development Goals and adopt the Sustainable Development Goals as the top priority national agenda. The Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services supports the Sustainable Development Goal taskforce members by providing technical assistance through five Parliamentary Resource Centres at the national and provincial levels. The Pakistan Institute of Parliamentary Services has rendered capacity building on the Sustainable Development Goals through several multi-stakeholder events that have seen the participation of over 130 members of the Taskforces and 500 other parliamentarians. In April 2019, the Sustainable Development Goal Taskforce of the National Assembly, in collaboration with PIPS, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children’s Fund, hosted a multi-stakeholder national parliamentary consultation to discuss measures to strengthen horizontal and vertical policy coherence.

I. Supreme audit institutions

42. While national governments are aware of the ability of supreme audit institutions to assist Sustainable Development Goal implementation, by supporting monitoring and accountability mechanisms, their engagement in the Voluntary National Review process is still weak. Even so, Governments have shown interest in using audit results as inputs for the Voluntary National Reviews. In fact, supreme audit institutions are supporting governments in several ways:

- awareness raising on the goals and on Sustainable Development Goal audits;
- acting as catalysts in the Sustainable Development Goal achievement process, assessing preparedness and policy alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals;
- reinforcing transparency and contributing to good governance.

43. Indonesia in its second Voluntary National Review states that the Supreme Audit Board - Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan - is playing a pivotal role in Sustainable Development Goal monitoring. The report includes the outcomes of

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a Sustainable Development Goal preparedness audit that analysed how the government is integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into national policies, along with evaluating the achievements of targets set in national and subnational action plans. The audit also examined the mechanisms for follow-up and review that the government has put in place since the submission of the first Voluntary National Review report in 2017. For instance, Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan has encouraged the government to establish stronger regulation for data collection, to ensure more disaggregation of data at the sub-national level. The Indonesian government has welcomed such a recommendation, which has become a concern at the presidential level. The 2019 Voluntary National Review report in fact acknowledges that the participation of Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan is positively influencing the government, strengthening accountability and shedding light on long term strategies for Sustainable Development Goal implementation.

44. In the Kingdom of Tonga, the Office of the Auditor General has carried out a performance audit to assess the ability of the government to ensure adequate institutional and enabling mechanisms for Sustainable Development Goal implementation. To raise the accountability bar, the audit’s results will be put forward at the national Parliament, to enable a public debate. Likewise, the Auditor General’s Department in Sri Lanka has started a performance audit on the country’s preparedness to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, by sending out a questionnaire to collect information regarding Sustainable Development Goal actions in all public agencies. In Turkey, the Turkish Court of Accounts started in February 2019 a thematic audit, to evaluate the Sustainable Development Goal roadmap drawn by the government in its first Voluntary National Review report in 2017.

IV. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific’s support to a whole of society approach

45. ESCAP’s support to the 2030 Agenda puts strong focus on increasing the awareness and capacity for stakeholder engagement. ESCAP provides technical support, advisory services and capacity building on stakeholder engagement to countries engaged in the Voluntary National Review preparation through: (1) country and regional level research; (2) capacity development via on site and online training; and (3) regional knowledge exchange.

46. ESCAP has endorsed the set-up of the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Organization Engagement Mechanism, a platform with the scope to enable stronger cross constituency and sub-regional coordination and ensure Civil Society Organization participation in intergovernmental processes in regional and global level. Since 2014, ESCAP has collaborated with Civil Society Organizations to deliver the Asia-Pacific People’s Forum on Sustainable Development as a preparatory event to the main Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

47. ESCAP supported the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Local Government Coordinating Body for Sustainable Development which since 2017 has united regional local government associations, networks and their partners in the regional follow up and review processes and interventions at the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

A. Voluntary local reviews

48. In an attempt to improve and complement the information provided by national governments on local government initiatives and actions, many cities and regions around the world have used Voluntary Local Reviews to raise awareness, gain visibility, and participate as peers in the global conversation on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Monitoring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for the development of localized indicators and disaggregated data, spatially at regional and local level. Pioneering regions and cities are making progress, but more joint efforts involving all levels of government and local partners are necessary to build adequate local monitoring systems compatible with national ones. Voluntary Local Reviews which contribute to national monitoring and to the global debate, which promote knowledge-sharing and technical cooperation between Local Authorities, are worth pursuing. By producing Voluntary Local Reviews, cities can assess their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and other international frameworks, and thus a leading role in Sustainable Development Goal implementation. Nine cities from the Asia-Pacific have completed their Voluntary Local Reviews (Shimokawa, Kitakyushu, Toyama, New Taipei, Taipei, Hamamatsu, Taoyuan, Shah Alam, and Hawai) and two others (Taoyuan, Shah Alam) have announced their intention to report.27

B. Professional development on effective stakeholder engagement

49. The capacity to effectively engage stakeholders is becoming increasingly important for government institutions and civil servants. In partnership with the International Association for Public Participation, ESCAP has developed material to support the professional development of government officials, including mayors, in the context of the 2030 Agenda. The material is adapted to the context of the 2030 Agenda. It builds on tested methodologies to engage multiple perspectives for the planning, implementation, integration and follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. Support has ranged from professional development workshops to workshops on raising awareness, introducing basic concepts, and supporting the planning in countries delivering their Voluntary National Review reports. The interventions have addressed key issues such as the importance to define a clear purpose for engagement, to understand the context for stakeholder engagement, stakeholder mapping and analysis, and the importance to ensure that stakeholders are provided the opportunity to influence the outcomes of the process in a meaningful way. They have helped to strengthen the planned and systematic contributions of stakeholder groups. However, participating government officials have highlighted the need for consistent institutional support and leadership in order to enable them to utilize these new skills and knowledge.

51. ESCAP in collaboration with the International Association for Public Participation, have also developed a Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Assessment tool for the 2030 Agenda.\(^{28}\) The tool has three integrated elements: four “dimensions” of meaningful stakeholder engagement for the 2030 Agenda; a framework of indicators of meaningful stakeholder engagement; and an assessment guide. The tool responds to the need for a practical way to describe meaningful stakeholder engagement, and to identify gaps that need to be filled.

C. Voluntary National Review twinning

52. In support to the preparation of the 2020 Voluntary National Reviews, ESCAP kicked off the first Voluntary National Review twinning exercise, to facilitate an exchange of experiences and enhance peer learning among reporting countries and different stakeholders. The short-term objective of the twinning exercise is to support two reporting countries from the same sub-region to be well equipped in their Voluntary National Review preparation, while the long-term objective is to establish, in the spirit of South-South cooperation, partnerships to exchange best practices and modalities for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

53. In 2019, the following matches were identified among countries presenting in 2020: Kyrgyzstan (first time) with Armenia (second time); and Uzbekistan (first time) with Georgia (second time). As part of the twinning exercise, ESCAP organized two study tours of national stakeholders from the country reporting for the first time to the partner country, in order to establish a direct connection with their counterpart and share information about the modus operandi of the Voluntary National Review preparation. Participants included representatives, inter alia from the Sustainable Development Goal Coordinating bodies, Civil Society, the business sector and the Parliament. Throughout the trainings, participants discussed in-depth mechanisms and processes to engage stakeholders in each country; the impact and benefits of stakeholder engagement on the quality of the Voluntary National Review report; as well as the quality and inclusiveness of stakeholder engagement processes.

54. The value added through such a twinning modality is the direct partnership by typology of stakeholder. Not only did the study tour give a chance to connect with counterparts, but, through the set-up of an online Community of Practice\(^{29}\) hosted on the Sustainable Development Goals Helpdesk platform,\(^{30}\) the participants in the twinning exercise had the opportunity to exchange on a daily mode any challenge or perspective related to the Voluntary National Review preparation.

V. Conclusion

55. What can be observed from the first reporting cycle is that undertaking a Voluntary National Review does galvanise political will around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and sparks collaborative action from all stakeholders. By identifying deficiencies in implementation, Voluntary National Reviews help mapping and mobilizing resources to fill those gaps. By bringing


stakeholders to the table, Voluntary National Reviews create a sense of ownership and forge the creation of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Besides, Voluntary National Reviews have strengthened inter-ministerial collaboration, helped advance the localization of Sustainable Development Goals, and improved the awareness and understanding of the “realities” of the situation for different groups.

56. Meaningful stakeholder engagement is critical in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Voluntary National Review process provides a suitable platform for Governments to map all the actors involved in Sustainable Development Goal achievement and to leverage on these resources. Yet, the reports reveal little efforts done to provide an enabling environment for stakeholders to contribute to Sustainable Development Goal achievement.

57. In the context of the Voluntary National Review preparation, most reports offered little insights into how stakeholders were selected, and how their inputs were used to inform the report. This could mean that stakeholders are merely being informed, rather than consulted or engaged. Institutionalization of the engagement is therefore critical, with provision for specific mechanisms and channels for sustaining the relationship with multiple stakeholders; and adequate allocation of resources and time to facilitate the engagement.

58. With reference to the governance structures, Voluntary National Review coordination bodies, which are primarily led by the Government, should clearly broaden their outreach to include different stakeholders such as representatives from Academia, business sector and Parliaments as their permanent members. Wherever applicable, these stakeholders could, also, take the lead of some of the working groups created within the coordination body according to specific themes or priorities.

59. It is also recommendable to focus on streamlining the identification of adequate constituents, the selection and engagement process to involve the stakeholders in the Voluntary National Review preparatory activities. Good examples in this respect include governments identifying relevant focal points and subsequently organizing consultations with them, capitalizing on existing institutions - i.e. the Chamber of Commerce for the private sector - to agree on the engagement of the wider group through online and onsite consultations. Self-organization by the stakeholders may also provide a suitable option, for those constituencies that have a more solid organizational structure, like Civil Society Organizations, youth.

60. There is much to be learned from first generation Voluntary National Reviews, which can strengthen non-State actor engagement in future Voluntary National Reviews. There are many opportunities in allowing stakeholders to be included in the overall reporting process, giving them space to raise their voices, and providing joint solutions.