Environmental performance, indicators and data: Lessons learned from regional VRN review

Side event on Child and Environment Related SDG Indicators: adoption, gaps and sources
23 August 2022 Bangkok

Simon Høiberg Olsen & Mustafa Moinuddin
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)
Rationale and background

• Review of Asia-Pacific countries VNRs (2016-2021)
  • 50 VNRs prepared by 36 countries.

• Objectives
  • Harness knowledge and experiences on VNRs production
  • Extract common elements, good practices, challenges, lessons learnt,
  • Particular attention was placed on the environment and challenges, governance, and data and indicators.
Context 1: SDG performance is improving--but perhaps too slowly

The average SDSN Index Score has increased over time between 2016-2021 in the reviewed countries. Although some countries pull this average up and down.
Context 2: Countries in Asia-Pacific SDSN rank relative to other countries has fallen

- The Asia-Pacific average rank has decreased in the reviewed period.
- The reviewed countries in the region are underperforming when compared to global performance.

Rank ranges from 153 (2019) to 11 (2017)

This indicates that countries in this region should ramp up action on the SDGs in general between now and 2030.

Sources: SDSN SDG Index Reports (2016-2021)
Context 3: SDG trends AP region

• NOT on track to achieve the SDGs
  • AP region may - achieve no more than 10% of the 169 SDG targets (UNESCAP, 2021, 2022).
  • World currently on track to achieve SDGs by 2065.

Sources: ESCAP (SDG Progress Reports 2021;2022)
Balance of 3Ds in VNRs

Environmental key terms only mentioned half as often as social terms
Social issues are predominately featured in the VNRs, followed by economic focused terms, with environmental terms occurring least frequently
Climate (PA) increasingly mentioned in VNRs
Increase focus on env necessary
The Type of Governance May Influence Performance

Text analysis suggests the region favours using market-oriented governance styles for the SDG
- Few exceptions include DPRK and Viet Nam
- But market oriented/voluntary approaches on their own may not be sufficient to improve performance on the SDGs, especially environment.
  - Govt’s not abdicate responsibility to private sector
  - Need regulatory approaches?
Recommendations regarding VNRs and the environment

• Countries produce several/frequent VNRs between now and 2030.
  • VNRs should be coherent over time and linked thematically
  • VNRs should have standardized annexes that present statistical indicators and list consulted stakeholders.

• Environmental content in VNRs is increasing but env is weakest link
  • More coverage of environmental challenges is needed.
  • Increase links between Multilateral Environmental Agreements (UNFCCC, CBD, CITES etc…) and the SDGs

• Greater attention on international dimension *(spill-overs)*
  • but how to measure?
Environmental data and indicators

- Review of the status of the environment-related indicators, data availability and statistical reporting in the VNRs
  - Compared with SDG targets and indicators under UNEP custodianship (15 goals, 71 targets and 92 indicators)
- The following structured form was used for reviewing these indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Global SDG Indicator</th>
<th>Reported (Y)</th>
<th>Same/Similar/Different</th>
<th>Progress</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Key challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Status of reporting

Level of reporting on the 92 environment-related indicators

• Overall reporting (50 VNRs): 29% of the 92 indicators

• At the goal level, reporting rate varies from 41% for Goal 7 to 8% for Goal 8.

• However, even though these indicators are reported, it does not necessarily mean that the statistical data is available.
Status of reporting in the individual VNRs

• Reporting rate ranges from 100% (Bangladesh VNR 2020) to nearly zero (Samoa VNR 2016)

• Countries with more than one VNR show an increasing trend in reporting environmental indicators
  • Example of Indonesia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indonesia VNR 2017</th>
<th>Indonesia VNR 2019</th>
<th>Indonesia VNR 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Share of global indicators used

- Increasing trend in using global SDG indicators for reporting on environment-related indicators
  - Example of Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japan VNR 2017</th>
<th>Japan VNR 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Overall results based on the 50 VNRs show that 71% of the environment-related indicators are global indicators.
- At the goal level, Goals 8, 3 and 1 account for the highest use of global indicators (90%, 84% and 81% respectively). Goal 5 has the least share (40%) of global indicators used.
- Reported national indicators are often based on national policies and mechanisms for SDG implementation.
Resource intensity in Asia-Pacific region

Trends in resource intensity, 1990–2015 (kg per US$)

Source: ESCAP, 2017. Analysing Resource Efficiency Transitions in Asia and the Pacific
Trends in carbon dioxide Emissions in Asia-Pacific, sub-regional level, 2000-2018

Source: ADB Key Indicators Database (accessed 18 August 2022)
Summary of key findings: Environmental data and indicators

• SDG monitoring and reporting framework adopted by many countries
• Good use of global SDG indicators by the majority of the countries
• National indicators are also used when appropriate
• Wide disparity across the countries and VNRs in the inclusion of statistical information
  • Sometimes a structured table is included
  • In other instances statistical data is presented as part of broader discussions of the goals or by other means
• Common issue: data gap
Recommendations: Environmental data and indicators

• Need to strengthen the reporting of environment-related indicators
  • The role of UNEP and UNDESA in providing guidance
  • Guidelines needed on how to use global SDG indicators and national indicators
    Special focus should be given to the environment-related indicators under Goals 8, 12, 9, 3, 11, 15, 5 and 14

• Advice from UNEP and UNDESA expected to help countries find the most effective methods for reporting on the status and progress of the SDG targets
• Thank you!
Context 3: SDG Performance is correlated with GDP but...

- But there is variation around the trend and wealthier countries may be imposing costs on other countries with spillovers.

- Countries with higher GDP per capita score higher on the SDG Index than countries with less GDP per capita.
Context 4: Wealthier countries also have higher spillovers

- The performance increase of some countries also correlates with an increased spillover score.
- *Spillovers (see notes) are grouped in (i) environment, (ii) economy, finance, and governance and (iii) security.
- This is not sustainable, as the spillover also closely correlates to specific environmental footprint
...and higher ecological footprints...

- Development gains still happen too much at the cost of the environment
- At macro level, environment is still the *trade-off* of development.
How to account for international footprints?

- GHG: Scope 1, 2, 3
- Ecological Footprint
- Spillover score (OECD, SDSN)