

## **Summary**

### **Background**

This summary is based on a study commissioned by Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to survey i) institutional arrangements, ii) means for assessing progress; and iii) other unique actions on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in five countries: Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and Sweden. These countries generally perform well on international rankings of SDG progress such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) SDG Index. Understanding the institutional structures and means of assessing progress in these countries could therefore help strengthen SDG implementation in other countries, including Japan.

The reports were produced based on a mixed method of desk research and interviews. Countries' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), national SDGs action plans and similar documents were reviewed as part of the desk study. The information gathered from the desk study was supplemented with semi-structured key informant interviews with relevant government institutions in the five countries. This summary is divided into sections focusing on i) institutional arrangements; ii) assessing progress. The sections highlight good practices identified in each of the countries that may have relevance for Japan and other countries' efforts on the SDGs.

### **Institutional arrangements**

One of the keys to making progress on the SDGs is effective institutional coordination and clear divisions of labour between relevant agencies. The countries reviewed for this study exhibit many of these traits. In each of the surveyed countries, coordination of national SDG actions is led by the Ministry of Ecological Transition (France), Ministry of Finance (Denmark), the Chancellor (Germany), the Prime Minister's Office (Finland), and the Ministry of the Environment (Sweden). At the same time, ministries of foreign affairs or agencies with similar remits usually oversee international cooperation on the SDGs. Meanwhile, national statistics offices typically handle data management.

The above structures are often complemented by other institutional arrangements intended to ensure coherence with relevant policies and practices. Some of the institutions that fit this characterisation include Denmark's 2030 Network and Finland's Sustainable Development Coordination Network. Another pertinent example is Germany's State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, which meets regularly to discuss sustainable development issues at a high level. Germany has also dedicated a working group at the working level. Sweden and Finland have similar committees in place. Meanwhile, in all surveyed countries, focal points are assigned for the SDGs in each ministry to help ensure consistency across actions on the SDGs and relevant domestic policies.

The surveyed countries also created institutional arrangements that helped strengthen the alignment between the SDGs and existing policies and plans. For instance, in Finland the SDGs were incorporated in the long-term vision toward 2050. Sweden adopted a 2020 bill on Agenda 2030 "Sweden's implementation of Agenda 2030". Examples in other countries include green

budgeting in France and a SDG impact assessment tool to assess policy proposals on their positive and negative impacts on the SDGs in Denmark. In a similarly motivated effort, Germany developed eNAP, an online tool to check the sustainable development implications of relevant legislation.

Other important institutions that are external to the policymaking process aim to provide technical advice to policymakers. Some of these committees or advisory bodies consist of one particular stakeholder group such as academia or youth, and others consist of a broad array of stakeholders from research, academia, civil society and the private sector. Such bodies include the 2030 Panel in Denmark, the Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) in Germany, Sweden's former National Delegation on Agenda 2030, and Expert Panel on Sustainable Development and the Agenda 2030 Youth Group in Finland. In addition to the Swedish Delegation for 2030 Agenda, Sweden also hosts a number of specialised councils – or loose forums – that offer expert advice resulting from their collaboration to government bodies on various issues, including the SDGs. While these institutions and fora may be established and funded using public funds, they have independent mandates and therefore aim to achieve a degree of technical and scientific objectivity in the counsel they offer.

Institutional arrangements also covered civil society actors. For example in Denmark and Finland, civil society organisations (CSOs) publish independent civil society reports which are included in country Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting. The government can, but is not obliged to, listen to the inputs from such independent bodies in Germany. Furthermore, in Denmark, CSO coordination networks, and media initiatives for reporting on the SDGs are funded by the state budget though they aim to remain independent in their analyses and activities.

### **Means for assessing progress**

An additional factor contributing to performance on the SDGs are mechanisms for assessing and reviewing progress on the SDGs. The starting point for creating these mechanisms is determining which indicators are most relevant to national contexts. In Denmark, a nationwide consultation on “Our Goals” project was conducted in 2019-2020 with Statistics Denmark and other stakeholders. As a result, that consultation identified 197 indicators to track progress on the SDGs in Denmark. In France, the 97 selected indicators were also developed through a consultative process (with 10 of the indicators corresponding to so-called new wealth indicators that go beyond GDP and are already mandated for use in domestic laws). Other surveyed countries held similar multi-stakeholder consultations to arrive at nationally appropriate sets of indicators.

Another aspect of assessing progress involves reporting and reviews of performance based on selected indicators. For example, the French and German statistical agencies report regular updates and maintain a degree of independence from other agencies in that reporting. In Sweden, plans prepared by ministries are reported on every two years, and the Swedish parliament assesses whether plans had been translated into commensurate action or not (if action is lacking, the relevant ministries must provide an explanation to Parliament). A similar example exists in Finland, where the government sends Government Reports to Parliament for review. The Parliament monitors whether the Government's actions have addressed parliamentary

requirements and it then requests the Government to carry out specific actions with regard to the 2030 Agenda implementation. These requests remain in effect until resolved.

Denmark, Germany and Finland have independent national audit systems that can review whether the budget has been spent for its intended purposes. In Denmark, the National Audit Office writes a report with recommendations that are presented to parliament based on the review. Any citizen can gain access to the audit upon request. Further, transparency adds an element of credibility to the assessment of progress. Other than an audit, there are also independent reviews by experts on efforts to the 2030 Agenda in Germany and Finland.

Reporting the assessment to the public enhances public accountability and is linked to communication and awareness raising on the 2030 Agenda. For example, Sweden is upgrading its assessment of progress with a new web platform, launched in March 2021, based on analysis of 130 national indicators. In many of the surveyed countries, there is a wide range of communication tools that improve accountability and raise awareness on the SDGs. These include a dedicated publishing house that writes articles in various media on 2030 Agenda (Denmark), social media influencers (Finland), youth awareness raising (Germany), government press releases, official bulletins broadcasted on Parliament's website (Sweden) and online classes, an interactive website, and social media (France).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Across the reviewed countries, research found that surveyed countries have created relatively well-designed institutions for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Pertinent traits include coordination across relevant agencies, alignment with existing policy and budgeting processes, engagement with science community and civil society. They have also introduced systems to monitor nationally appropriate indicators with some independent checks and public accountability of monitoring. While many of the institutional structures and monitoring processes are used for the SDGs, in several cases they trace back to pre-2015 efforts to work on sustainability issues.

Although the surveyed countries rank among the highest in the SDSN SDG index, they still face challenges in achieving the SDGs. In fact, all the surveyed countries face significant hurdles, especially in the environment-related areas such as climate, responsible consumption and production, water, and biodiversity. These areas often have trade-offs with conventional economic priorities. It might be useful to undertake a more in-depth study of these other areas to see how trade-offs can be reconciled and dealt with in these and other countries.