

● Purpose and Survey Methods

For stakeholders inside and outside Japan, there are many reasons the year 2023 marks a critical juncture for the sustainable development goals (SDGs). One reason is that countries will pass the midpoint in the 15 years scheduled for achieving the SDGs. Another reason is the achievement of the SDGs is in jeopardy due to the lingering impacts of COVID-19 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A third reason is the SDG Summit will be held in conjunction with the UN General Assembly in September. A fourth reason is that Japan's SDG implementation guidelines are scheduled to be revised by the end of the year. For all of the above reasons, the time is good to make suggestions on how to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs in Japan and abroad.

To help offer those suggestions, this report provides the results of two sets of survey on SDG implementation in several countries. One set of surveys updated progress on the SDGs in Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and France (based on a previous report). The five selected countries can offer useful insights because they have been rated at the top of international assessments of SDG implementation over the past two years (i.e., from FY2020). A second set of survey examined progress on the SDGs (including management and monitoring systems for SDG) in four developing countries in Asia: namely Bhutan, India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These additional countries have also adopted innovative approaches to implementing the SDGs. The report summarizes the results of both set of surveys. Those results can inform discussions on the revision of the SDG implementation guidelines while contributing to the development of a progress management and monitoring system in Japan. In so doing, they could help accelerate the implementation of the SDGs at a critical period of time.

The report used to the following methods to gather relevant data and information. For the five countries where collection of updated information was required, a literature review was conducted. For the four Asian countries, a combination of literature review and interviews were conducted. For the literature review, the latest information was obtained through desk study, while also referring to information collected through the past research on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) (IGES completed a study on VNRs in collaboration with UNEP in early 2023). For the interviews, the focus was placed on finding out why and how the SDG progress management and monitoring system were adopted, with a particular emphasis on gathering information that could be utilized in Japan. The interviews were conducted based on a semi-structured approach; questions were sent to interviewees in advance and the responses were further elaborated through the natural course of discussion during the interview.

Below is a summary of the nine countries (five high performing countries and four Asian developing countries) in which the survey was conducted.

- **Survey results on updates of the top five countries implementing the SDGs.**

Finland

“The 2030 Agenda Roadmap” was adopted in February 2022. It outlines six areas of transformation to facilitate the achievement of the SDGs and 32 specific goals to achieve the vision of each transformation area. The following month (March 2022), “Strategy of the National Commission on Sustainable Development 2022–2030: A prosperous and globally responsible Finland that protects the carrying capacity of nature” was adopted. In order to monitor the implementation of this strategy, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development monitors progress in each area of transformation on an annual basis. A mid-term review of the strategy is scheduled for 2025, together with the next VNR. In February 2023, an evaluation report of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Finland was published, which assessed that it would be difficult to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

Denmark

The 2021 SDG Action Plan was developed by a new “centre-left” Socialist Democrat political leadership that was elected in 2019. To help improve monitoring, this action plan has set of 50 national targets for the government’s follow-up and review. The action plan calls for the government to submit an annual progress report to the Parliament. Denmark conducted VNR in 2021. Its VNR includes chapters written by actors of the parliament, civil society, the private sector, organizations, academic institutions, municipalities, and regions. During its preparation, Norway and Kenya have supported Denmark by reviewing the draft report and engaging in a peer dialogue on good practices and valuable recommendations. Another area that could be potentially important is that Statistics Denmark has worked with the private sector in Denmark to develop a report and set of indicators for businesses.

Sweden

The Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) passed its national SDG law in December 2020, which sets out the overall direction for the country’s ongoing efforts to strengthen the integration of the SDGs. The law emphasises the correspondence between the Riksdag priorities and international SDG targets. More concretely, 120 of the 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda are nationally relevant. Further, there objectives set by the Riksdag correspond well with 97 of the targets and correspond partly with 21 of these targets. The law includes two noteworthy reporting provisions. One of those provisions involves biennial (every two years) communication on progress to date. The other reporting provision involves an in-depth quadrennial (every four years) report. Statistics Sweden's SDG portal (scb.se/agenda2030) was launched on March 15, 2021. Then, updates of existing indicators with new figures and 22 additional indicators were published on March 22, 2022. Sweden conducted the VNR in 2021. An interesting feature of this VNR is it draws upon a series consultations and peer learning between Sweden, Colombia and Spain.

Germany

Germany revised the German Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS) in March 2021 and conducted a VNR in the same year. The 2021 GSDS identifies six areas of transformation that are critical to achieving the SDGs. In addition, six new indicators were added and targets were adjusted for 10 existing indicators. A progress report on this strategy has been issued every two years by the Federal Statistics Office. After the progress report is issued, the ministries prepare a joint report on their progress in achieving the targets and measures to address the off-track indicators. The 2021 VNR report included in the appendix six independent reviews by organizations and institutions, including industry, trade unions, municipalities, and civil society, that have been continuously participating in the HLPF. After the change of government in December 2021, the Minister of State Sarah Ryglewski was appointed as head of sustainability in the Federal Chancellery. In September 2022, the decision was made to establish seven new transformation teams, adding international responsibility and cooperation as a lever to the six transformation areas.

France

Over the past two years, France has not introduced significant institutional reforms or developed new laws or strategies on the SDGs (due to elections and concerns that a new political leadership would want to change direction on the SDGs). Even so, there were some more modest proposals involving linking the SDGs with legislative reviews that could lead to stronger efforts in the future.

● Survey results for four Asian countries

Indonesia

Indonesia has been committed to promoting sustainable development, as reflected in their national development plans even before the adoption of the SDGs. The SDGs implementation is led by a Presidential Decree (59/2017) and is mainstreamed into long-term development plans (RPJPN) with regular updates. The Ministry of National Development Planning (BAPPENAS) leads the country's SDGs implementation. The country has developed a comprehensive framework for SDG follow-up and review, with BAPPENAS and Statistics Indonesia responsible for monitoring and reporting SDG data and progress. Indonesia has developed a set of 289 SDG indicators under four broad pillars. The country has also developed detailed metadata of the SDG indicators and reported its indicator-level SDG data in its VNR 2021. The Audit Board of Indonesia conducts the follow-up and review of the country's SDG implementation and provides necessary recommendations (based on that follow-up and review). In addition, the SDG Dashboard provides various types of national and subnational analysis, including trend analysis and disaggregation by province, area of residence, sex, age group, and disability. In October 2022, the Indonesian government updated its Presidential Regulation (59/2017) to (111/2022), which includes new targets for SDGs' national targets for RPJMN 2020-2024.

Bhutan

Bhutan's long-running history of championing sustainable development predates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by nearly twenty years. Its commitment to sustainable development is clearly demonstrated by the country's embrace of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Because of the close relationship between the GNH concept and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, Bhutan's GNH Commission has served as a high-level SDG committee. In practice, that has meant that the GNH Commission has overseen the submission of two Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) held in 2018 and 2021. Both VNRs make clear reference to how SDG implementation has been guided by national policy development and monitored annually through mid-term reviews of Five-Year Plans (FYPs). Ongoing institutional reforms and restructuring of civil service agencies has led to some uncertainty about future planning, budgeting and monitoring of SDG-related activities beyond 2023.

India

India's progress towards sustainable development goals (SDGs) has been remarkable, and the strong leadership of Niti Aayog has led the country in decision-making at various levels. Through the implementation of cooperative and competitive federalism, the country has fostered cooperation and competition among states to achieve national and state-level targets. Its success in meeting these targets has been recognized in two VNRs, which acknowledge both achievements and areas for improvement. One effective tool for assessing progress towards the SDGs has been the development of a multidimensional poverty index. This innovative approach considers a variety of factors beyond income, such as education, health, and living standards, to provide a more comprehensive picture of poverty in India. With this tool, India can continue to track its progress towards the SDGs and make informed decisions about the focus areas.

Philippines

Under the country's long-term vision of AmBisyon Natin 2040, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) has integrated all 17 SDGs into its policy and strategy framework, making it essential for national budget planning and appropriations. The PDP contains the country's main development priorities and desired outcomes for the next five years, with progress measured using indicators and annual targets, some of which draw from the SDG indicators. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is responsible for coordinating SDG implementation in the Philippines and works with the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) to monitor the country's medium- and long-term development plans. For SDG monitoring, the Philippines has established a set of 155 national indicators, with 102 based on global indicators and supported by supplementary and proxy indicators. SDG Watch and Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) are used for SDG monitoring at the national and subnational levels. The SDG Watch provides information on baseline data, latest data, target data, pace of progress, and source data for each Philippine SDG indicator to the public. Currently, the Philippine Statistical System (PSS) is updating its indicator framework to improve measurement of the SDGs and AmBisyon Natin 2040.