

## HLPF 2025 Highlights: Friday, 18 July 2025

The day was dedicated to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), with the first 11 countries – out of a total of 36 VNR submissions – presenting their progress reports. Following each group of country presentations, delegates engaged in an interactive dialogue delving into specific data points or further reflecting on learnings for other countries.

### Voluntary National Reviews

**GUATEMALA:** Carlos Antonio Mendoza Alvarado, Secretary of Planning and Programming of the Presidency, Guatemala, highlighted progress on, among other targets: reducing maternal mortality and teenage pregnancies; inclusion of people with disabilities in the labor market; and domestic resource mobilization. He outlined insights from two voluntary sub-national reviews that informed assessments of regional inequalities. On persistent challenges, he said that social and territorial inequalities continue affecting Indigenous Peoples, rural women and the young. Ana Lopéz, Presidential Secretary for Women, added that rural women continue to be excluded from progress to date even though they are community leaders for improving quality of life.

**Discussion:** Following questions from SWITZERLAND, JAPAN, BOSTWANA, CZECHIA, CIVIL SOCIETY, and DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, Alvarado explained that a sound institutional framework that can withstand threats to democracy is essential to ensure continuity in SDG implementation. He said that a detailed rural census is underway, and interventions are forthcoming to tackle persistent challenges of malnutrition in rural areas. Lopéz added that interventions to reduce maternal mortality and teenage pregnancies include improved access to contraception and sexual and reproductive health services.

**SUDAN:** Mohamed Bashar Mohamed, Undersecretary of Planning, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Sudan, said that until early 2023, Sudan made progress in areas of access to electricity, education, economic growth, and reducing maternal mortality. However, these achievements were reversed as conflict resumed in April 2023 leading to, among other impacts, a surge in unemployment, destruction of factories, markets, and health centers, and a collapse of cooling chains for drugs and vaccines. He explained that his government is restarting basic services, providing agricultural inputs to improve food security, and rebuilding infrastructure, while developing an SDG-aligned vision for reconstruction.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from MOROCCO, TANZANIA, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Mohamed said that most Sudanese states that were not affected by the conflict are back on track in their SDG implementation, while addressing the additional burden of providing services to internally displaced persons. He noted that two large NGOs and other countries are providing humanitarian assistance in affected states. He also explained that for VNR consultations the country was divided into four regions, each led by one state, and said this allowed VNR preparation “in a reasonable manner” despite the conflict.

**MALAYSIA:** Ahmad Faisal Muhamad, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the UN, outlined progress in poverty reduction, gender equality and stable institutions, noting that his country is on track to meet 43% of SDG targets by 2030. He described the VNR process as equally driven by government and non-governmental actors, adding it is the first VNR in which all SDGs are covered by a data-driven approach. Pointing to regional inequalities, unequal labor market access, climate impacts, and institutional fragmentation as remaining challenges, he said his country will continue to align national plans with the SDGs as it prepares to graduate from middle-income to high-income status.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from INDIA, LESOTHO, the ASIA-PACIFIC CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, and QATAR, Muhamad underlined that VNR preparation was supported by integrated strategic planning embedded in SDG principles, robust data systems, and multi-stakeholder engagement. He added that SDG localization was achieved through multiple platforms connecting local decision makers and civil society to national and subnational parliamentarians and other decision makers and 29 voluntary local reviews (VLRs) prepared by cities over several years. Acknowledging challenges raised by civil society, including systemic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQI, youth and displaced people in certain regions and their absence in official data sets, he reiterated his government’s commitment to inclusive growth and decision making.

**KYRGYZSTAN:** Presenting his country’s second VNR, Bakyt Sydykov, Minister of Economy and Commerce, Kyrgyzstan, reported progress in modernizing infrastructure, clean energy, reducing poverty, digitalizing sustainable farming practices and learning processes, increasing water use efficiency and support for rural women, and building a climate-resilient green economy. He highlighted enhanced rule of law, streamlined administrative

procedures, inclusive decision-making processes, and stronger international support, noting remaining challenges on expanding economic growth and social protections.

**Discussion:** HONDURAS, MONGOLIA, UZBEKISTAN, and the WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP requested more information. Sydykov responded noting Kyrgyzstan's climate vulnerability, with temperatures increasing 1.2°C since 1960. He stressed preserving water resources and glacial ecosystems while building resilience through green economic development. He said strengthened legislative and institutional frameworks support women's leadership, access to education, fair justice, and equality. Sydykov further outlined programmes on employment for low-income families; legal and safe labor migration; and temporary "food for work" jobs. On data disaggregation and broader inclusivity in preparing the VNR, he stressed close collaboration with Kyrgyzstan's non-governmental sector, with alternative NGO data sources. He said data collection is guided by international standards, with 217 indicators available now, up from 159 in the 2020 VNR, and cited progress on data disaggregation.

**SAINT LUCIA:** Shawn Edward, Minister of Education, Sustainable Development, Innovation, Science, Technology and Vocational Training, Saint Lucia, presented his country's second VNR, citing several civil society success stories. Noting that the majority of Saint Lucia's population of 180,000 has a decent living standard, he emphasized its whole-of-society approach and continuing progress regarding Ocean, energy, consumption and production, chemicals, health, education, domestic violence, citizen security, legislation, justice, and information access.

**Discussion:** KAZAKHSTAN, NGOs, BAHRAIN, and the STATE OF PALESTINE posed follow up questions. Edward responded that Saint Lucia focuses on comprehensive education and sensitization of citizens to climate change and climate adaptation. He noted that his country's GDP can disappear with one Category 4 hurricane, which necessitates borrowing to rebuild because international promises of help are frequently not met. Emphasizing the urgency of building resilience, Edward explained that after Saint Lucia lost its preferential treatment due to World Trade Organization rules, they have stopped relying on banana cash crops – which previously accounted for 75-80% of the country's GDP – moving the focus to tourism, which currently comprises 65% of GDP. He noted plans to regulate marine activities to harness economic potential from the Ocean, confirming marginalized and vulnerable Saint Lucians' seat at the decision-making table.

**ANGOLA:** Maria do Rosário Teixeira de Alva Sequeira Bragança, Minister of State for Social Affairs, Angola, presented Angola's second VNR. A video noted achievements in Angola's collaborative National Development Plan (NDP) process, although Teixeira de Alva Sequeira Bragança acknowledged remaining challenges in disaggregating data. She highlighted alignment with the 2030 Agenda, including in valuing human capital, developing modern infrastructure, economic diversification, and food and nutrition security. She noted gains in health, education, social protection, and gender equality and highlighted Angola's role in pursuing peace in Africa, fighting poverty, and building climate resilience.

**Discussion:** SOUTH AFRICA, INDIA, the PHILIPPINES, BOTSWANA, and the AFRICAN CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM requested clarifications. Teixeira de Alva Sequeira Bragança reported 70% alignment of Angola's current National Development Plan with the SDGs. She highlighted identifying gaps and aligning priorities through improvements in monitoring for mid-term national development planning adjustments. She further noted a focus on empowering rural women through education, vocational training, and access to finance, citing a gender-sensitive budget and classification of government measures according to their contributions to gender equality. She also highlighted the growing focus on infrastructure with "light environmental footprints," noting numerous projects being co-implemented with multilateral development banks and the private sector.

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:** Martín Francos Rodríguez, Vice Minister of Planning and Public Investment of the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development, Dominican Republic, shared his country's progress on various SDGs, emphasizing the higher level of private sector and civil society participation. Among the main achievements, he highlighted: reduction of poverty, which reached its lowest historical level in 2024; improvement in health, with health coverage of more than 97% of the population; enhanced gender equality, with reduction of domestic violence and the adoption of a law prohibiting child marriage; and unemployment reduction, though high informality persists, especially among women. Regarding future steps, Rodríguez cited strengthening planning and monitoring and localizing the SDGs.

**Discussion:** Delegates from ISRAEL, the PHILIPPINES, NGOs, GUATEMALA, VIETNAM, and SIERRA LEONE posed questions. Responding, Rodríguez said adopting an SDG cross-sectional approach requires developing methodologies, training institutions, and facilitating experience exchange. Regarding border policies, he highlighted over 90 initiatives aimed at strengthening institutions and ensuring the Government's active presence in all territories, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas. Regarding financing, he stressed a roadmap involving all actors and 96% of the State's overall budget for 2024 aligned with SDG targets.

**ESWATINI:** Appolo Maphalala, Minister for Housing and Urban Development, Eswatini, said his country is on track to achieve SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) and 7 (affordable and clean energy), with 88% of households connected. He described activities to tackle non-communicable diseases and to preserve freshwater ecosystems, including through improved waste and wastewater management. As future priorities, he listed climate adaptation, sustainable food systems, youth unemployment, and preventing gender-based violence.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from ZIMBABWE, LESOTHO, CHINA, EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA STAKEHOLDER GROUP, and VIETNAM, Maphalala outlined that Eswatini is addressing data challenges through strengthening of the national statistics system, capacity building, and leveraging administrative data and non-traditional data sources. He explained that electricity access was achieved through targeted

investments in transmission infrastructure in rural areas supported by development partners to make grid connections affordable for rural households. He further explained that the coordinated production of VLRs alongside the VNR was achieved through deliberate planning under the national development plan with international capacity-building support.

**BELARUS:** Siarhei Khamenka, National Coordinator, Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, Belarus, presented his country's third VNR, highlighting that Belarus has achieved 80.5% progress toward the SDGs. He shared on the country's progress in different SDGs, including: gender equality, with equal pay and women entrepreneurs gaining strength; and health, prioritizing preventive measures through the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and ensuring quality and accessible medical care. Khamenka underscored Belarus' focus on "individual needs," with the creation of mechanisms to create synergy among government, civil society organizations, and the private sector. He also noted investments in peace and global security, and strengthening cooperation with regional and international organizations.

**Discussion:** Khamenka responded to questions from the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, INDONESIA, the ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE, and LITHUANIA. He noted measures now used to monitor the SDGs were established in 1997, citing the creation of a national platform and a regional data platform for reporting on the implementation of the SDGs, and underscored a National Strategy for Sustainable Development targeted for conclusion in 2040. On youth inclusion, Khamenka said the government is actively engaging young people "as citizens," providing training and support for education through grants and initiatives aiming to foster "patriotism, constitutional order, and tradition." On SDG 3, he highlighted Belarus' focus on inclusive healthcare, ensuring free access for all citizens, particularly women and people with disabilities.

**BANGLADESH:** Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh, noted stagnation on nine SDG goals, which he attributed to the mismanagement of the previous government that was overthrown in 2024. He cited new progress on human rights, nondiscrimination, judicial independence, accountability, and institutional and electoral integrity, reinvigorating the SDGs. He noted the VNR process is now nationally owned, evidence-based, and includes 25,000 participants, adding that the SDGs are fully integrated into Bangladesh's national plans. Progress has also been made in repealing restrictive legislation; improving data, women's rights, and worker dignity; and increasing financial inflows. Chowdhury also cited new programmes in energy efficiency, disaster preparedness, ecosystem protection and other reforms as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from Least Developed Countries (LDC) status.

**Discussion:** Questions came from SWITZERLAND, BHUTAN, the PHILIPPINES, THE ASIA-PACIFIC CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, and CZECHIA. Chowdhury explained that Bangladesh's VNR approach was unique in linking democratic reform to LDC graduation and climate action, organized by SDGs, in a whole-of-society approach. He said Bangladesh's Constitution enshrines dignity of all individuals and everyone's rejection of all discrimination. He noted 11 commissions pursuing reforms in different areas and recommendations on implementation for sustainability.

**FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA:** Elina Akinaga, Secretary, Department of Resources and Development, Federated States of Micronesia, presented her country's second VNR, noting significant achievements, including protecting 30% of marine ecosystems, doubling renewable energy capacity, implementing a gender action plan, and connecting remote schools with technology. She highlighted remaining challenges, including 30% of youth not in education, employment, or training, and persons with disabilities having less than 13% access to essential services. She mentioned national priorities, including cultural preservation, climate resilience and adaptation, human capital development, governance, and institutional strengthening with a focus on data transparency and accountability, economic self-reliance, and infrastructure development. She called for more coherent, accessible, and just finance, stressing the need to "deepen partnerships rather than make more promises."

**Discussion:** Akinaga answered questions from PAPUA NEW GUINEA, NEW ZEALAND and CHILDREN AND YOUTH. Concerning the transition from aid dependency to economic self-reliance, she mentioned investing in ecotourism, engaging youth in traditional agriculture, enhancing food security, and exploring green and innovative financing. Regarding innovative approaches to achieve SDG 3 (health and wellbeing), Akinaga highlighted improving access to primary healthcare, including the expansion of electronic health record systems, with an emphasis on prevention programmes, particularly for non-communicable diseases, saying this is supported by new legislation and expanded collaboration with health partners. On youth participation, she mentioned national initiatives to encourage youth and NGO participation, including updating youth policy.

### *In the Corridors*

Thursday's well-attended and well-received dialogue with Major Groups and other Stakeholders continued to inspire discussions in the corridors on Friday. While some participants saw their fears confirmed that a combination of funding cuts and geopolitical dynamics would reduce in-person attendance at the HLPF, others argued that the voice of civil society remains strong and determined. Asked how they would compare civil society participation across different processes, a group of delegates suggested that the numbers at HLPF may be substantially lower than at other UN fora, such as the UN climate conferences or the recent fourth Financing for Development Conference. At the same time, though, civil society organizations are generally happy with the level of access to official HLPF sessions. One participant explained that the recent removal of limitations to side event participation has opened up new opportunities for informally engaging with official delegations. However, some also feared that such engagement remains superficial as there is limited accountability at the country level for what states say in New York.

One delegate highlighted the near absence of the private sector or multilateral finance institutions in HLPF sessions, noting their importance as they are the recipients of many requests for enhanced partnership and finance. "The kind of stakeholder and the quality of the conversation are just as important as the number of people getting badges," concluded one observer while heading back to the VNR presentations.

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