



**National Development
Planning Commission**

**REPORT OF THE
2022 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
HELD FROM 5TH TO 15TH JULY 2022 AT THE
UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK**

**SUBMITTED TO THE CHIEF OF STAFF,
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, JUBILEE HOUSE**

**NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
COMMISSION
(NDPC)**

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1.0 Introduction



Ghana's Delegation at the 2022 HLPF

The 2022 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development was held from 5th to 15th July 2022 in New York at the United Nations Headquarters. A total of 44 countries including Ghana presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The delegation from Ghana, led by Professor George Gyan-Baffour, arrived in New York on Sunday, 3rd July 2022 while some other members arrived a day after. The delegation comprised of representation from the National Development Planning Commission, SDGs Advisory Unit at the Office of the President, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, Ghana Maritime Authority, Ghana Statistical Service, National Disaster Management Organisation, African Peer Review Mechanism-Governing Council, Ministry of Information and a representative from the Faith-Based Organisations. The institutions were selected based on the SDGs that were under review for 2022. A total of 29 people across these 10 institutions made up Ghana's delegation.

Ghana presented its second Voluntary National Review after the first was presented in 2019. The VNRs make possible for sharing experiences and lessons learnt in the course of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The HLPF provides the avenue for countries to share with other countries and stakeholders, the status of implementation of the SDGs and the innovative approaches to addressing the challenges faced. The HLPF was on the theme, 'Building Back Better from the Coronavirus Disease while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' The focus of the 2022 HLPF was in-depth reviews of five SDGs: 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land), and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). Ghana's VNR report preparation process was open and inclusive as stakeholders such as Youth and Children groups, Persons with Disability, Women's groups, Civil Society, Academia and Traditional Authorities were consulted.



2.0 Opening of the Conference

The President of Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), H.E Collen Vixen Kelapile on addressing the forum, noted that the world is struggling to recover from COVID-19 amidst continuing crises. He underscored that, the HLPF will reflect on how recovery policies can overcome the crises, reverse the negative impacts of the pandemic on the SDGs and move countries onto a path to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The President of ECOSOC expressed concern about how conflict, COVID-19 and climate are challenging survival with the most affected being women living with disability, children and the youth. The need to have disaggregated data and identify women who need reproductive services; investing in children at the early stages were noted as key in achieving the SDGs. Food security issues have heightened especially in the midst of the conflict in Ukraine, the

culture of mistrust between the youth and political actors must be a matter of concern, he emphasised. At the opening session of the forum, speakers noted that, Global Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) can play a significant role in solving the world's problems and that both domestic and international efforts are needed in addressing the challenges faced by the world.

The discussions on the SDGs under review in the 2022 HLPF continued with calls for actions on goals and indicators that needed specific attention for implementation. Panelist recommended that, there is need for equal access to employable skills, inclusive market sector economics; decent jobs; curb sexual harassment at the workplace; ensure equitable representation of women; and address issues of neglect on reproductive health.

2.1 Towards the 2023 Summit

The second "SDG Summit" of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the General Assembly will be convened in September 2023 in New York. The Summit will mark the mid-point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. According to the president of ECOSOC, the world is trying to embark on a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that advances the SDGs, amidst the impacts of the current geo-political situations. At the Summit, the Heads of State and Government will comprehensively review progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and provide political guidance for the way forward and new science-based solutions for accelerating the full implementation of the SDGs in the remaining years towards 2030. This year's HLPF was used to launch the preparations towards

the mid-term review of the SDGs and the September 2023 SDGs Summit.

The overarching issues to work on towards the SDGs Summit in September 2023 include climate change, peace and security and as such the outcomes expected of the Summit must be tied to these two issues. The Summit is expected to rekindle a business of implementation and not business as usual by tasking the political class to commit more to the SDGs because they hold the financial resources.

The European Commission indicated its full commitment to the SDGs and that the 2023 summit is key to the success of VNRs and the EU's internal processes of the implementation of the SDGs. Sustainable financing and skills provision, energy, transportation and technology are key areas of attention and as such, the EU has made available



300 billion euros to support the implementation of the SDGs. The representative from the EU noted that, globally we need a renewed political commitment;

an inclusive approach where the private sector and the CSOs are deeply involved in order to successfully implement the SDGs.

2.2 Presentation on Disaster Reduction and Prevention

It was also noted, the UN office of disaster reduction (Sendai Framework) got lost along the way: the prevention aspect of disaster has not been effective; the preventions in food insecurity have not been good enough; governments should thus be in the driving seat for risk reduction and prevention. The need for innovation and scale up of interventions such as putting money into areas to build more resilience and make risk informed decisions. Risk informed sustainable development must be the focus. The key message for the 2023 summit should there be “Implement, Implement, Implement”, -3Is. Simple action plan is what is needed for the 2023 summit particularly actions of interlinkages and focusing on trade-offs. The submit should be an avenue where people and companies and not governments alone come onboard to make the SDGs happen. Countries are encouraged to be bold, radical and proactive and disruptive and that is what makes the SDGs

profound. There is need for recommitment to the SDGs by member states. Countries were encouraged not to only talk about the results at the summit but also be concerned about the process leading to the results; inclusivity and participation should be key in the SDGs.

The CSOs underscored that the summit must be an avenue where governments come with concrete commitment, be inclusive of civil society, people centered and involve people in the very decisions that concern them. Multilateralism and partnerships are very important and as such commitment must be on top of it. The small islands groups appealed to governments to fully implement the NDCs to address the challenges pushing islands into difficulties. The need to pay attention to international spillovers and the need for the scientific community to build a more robust system to attend to emergencies were highlighted.

3.0 Other VNR Labs and Side Events Attended

Aside the events and programmes that were Ghana led, there were other VNR labs and events for which Ghana was invited to participate. In some of the programmes, the Chairman of NDPC and other Ghanaian delegates were invited to join at the panel discussion session. There were labs:

3.1 Food and Agriculture Organisation Side Event

The Food and Agriculture Organisation organised a side event under the team “Agrifood Systems transformation for a Resilient World: Responding to Global Crises”. The side event showcased opportunities to support the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda through transitioning towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agri-

food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life. At the event, a panel was organized in collaboration with representatives from the wider UN system and from National Conveners, who showcased their efforts to design and implement National Pathways for Food Systems transformations, country led policy plans



to accelerate efforts to transform food systems, submitted by several Member Countries in the context of the 2021 Food Systems Summit. Contributing to the panel discussion, the Chairman of NDPC, Prof. Gyan-Baffour indicated that the Ghanaian government, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, had already set in motion a national agricultural programme as part of its industrialisation policy and the Ghana Beyond Aid Vision. He submitted that, the programme included Planting for Food and Jobs, Planting for Export and Rural Development, Rearing for Food and Jobs and Agricultural Mechanisation that are intended to enhance and facilitate Ghana's industry focused development programme - Known as the One District One Factory (1D1F).

The panel discussions also centered on Agrifood systems and SDGs in an environment of increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Some of the themes addressed by panelist were: Investing in gender equality and environmental protection for inclusive agrifood systems; assessing progress in land control, access to finance and natural resources control; Understanding trade-offs and synergies between multiple SDGs to ensure food security and environmental protection in times of conflict. The panel suggested that, it has become critical for deliberate efforts to be made to share information and knowledge between countries and across regions to enable the world fortify itself against future challenges, whilst supporting developing countries to build more resilient societies.

3.2 German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) and The Partnering Initiative (TPI) side event.

Ghana also participated in the VNR side event organised by Germany on the sides of the HLPF under the theme “the role of multi-stakeholder advisory bodies in VNR processes and their potential to accelerate SDG delivery”. Prof. Gyan-Baffour made a presentation on behalf of Ghana. The VNR-Lab focused on various national stakeholder engagement formats for delivering the 2030 Agenda and contributing to VNR drafting processes with society as a whole. The event also discussed VNR stakeholder engagement processes and

how it can be translated into permanent national multistakeholder institutions and vice versa; the prerequisites needed for permanent and inclusive multi-stakeholder engagement formats as well as the establishment of stakeholder structures support for the acceleration of SDG delivery. Prof. Gyan-Baffour elaborated the stakeholder engagements during the VNR process were involved right from the VNR launch of the process- confirming the “whole of government and whole of society approach” to implementing the SDGs in Ghana.

3.3 Building Effective Models to Accelerate SDGs in Post COVID-19 Era: Lessons for Uganda

This side event was organised by Uganda to share with other countries on effective models that can accelerate the SDGs Post COVID-19 pandemic. The event shared with participants the mediums used in stakeholder engagements in the midst of the

pandemic. Other countries including Ghana shared their experiences in the entire VNR process. Ghana, represented by the Director-General of NDPC, highlighted the implementation architecture for the SDGs and government flagship programmes that



are contributing to attainment of the SDGs such as the Free Senior High School, the School Feeding Programme among others. One other experience

Ghana shared was coordination of the support from the Development Partners through the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office.

4.0 The Third Global Workshop

The Third Global Workshop for 2022 VNR Countries was organised during the period of the 2022 HLPF at the premises of the Pakistan's Permanent Mission to the UN, New York. In his address to VNR countries, the President of ECOSOC mentioned that, countries remain hopeful and with concerted effort to build-back better and that the need for political will is pivotal. Most African countries so far have shown commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The reviews show how agreements at the UN can be translated to better the lives of people. The president envisaged that, VNR at this year's HLPF would provide more time for countries to share experiences on the common challenges facing each other.

The permanent representative of Pakistan on his part stated that VNRs are critical for the implementation of the SDGs. The VNRs require data but also provides space to prioritise projects. There has been increase in biodiversity as well as inequalities within and between countries. There are countries facing economic collapse to the extent that some countries are not able to access basic essentials like food, he noted. He concluded that the VNRs should lead to the progress of the SDGs. The friends of the UN in their submission highlighted their duty to put forward key questions that challenge the success stories of the implementation of the SDGs. The VNR countries were urged to engage in informal interactions which provide opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other.

5.0 Meeting held at the Ghana's Permanent Mission, New York

A meeting was held on 10th July 2022 at Ghana's Permanent Mission to the UN, New York. The meeting was called to discuss the arrangements for Ghana's presentation at the HLPF on 12th July 2022. Ghana's ambassador and permanent representative to the UN welcomed the delegation to the forum and pledged his support to ensure full representation at the programme. The meeting agreed on persons to answer questions that would be posed to Ghana as well as the questions Ghana would ask other countries. The meeting was also used to conduct the final review of Ghana's power point presentation.

6.0 Ghana's Presentation at the High-Level Political Forum

Ghana mounted the stage and presented the VNR report at the HLPF on 12th July 2022. The leader of the government delegation, Prof. George Gyan-Baffour, supported by Mrs. Gladys Osabutey presented Ghana's VNR report at the forum. In his presentation, Prof. Gyan-Baffour highlighted the main areas of progress in the SDGs under review, government

interventions that are driving the changes as well as the challenges impeding progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.



Prof. Gyan-Baffour @Ghana's 2022 VNR Presentation, NY.

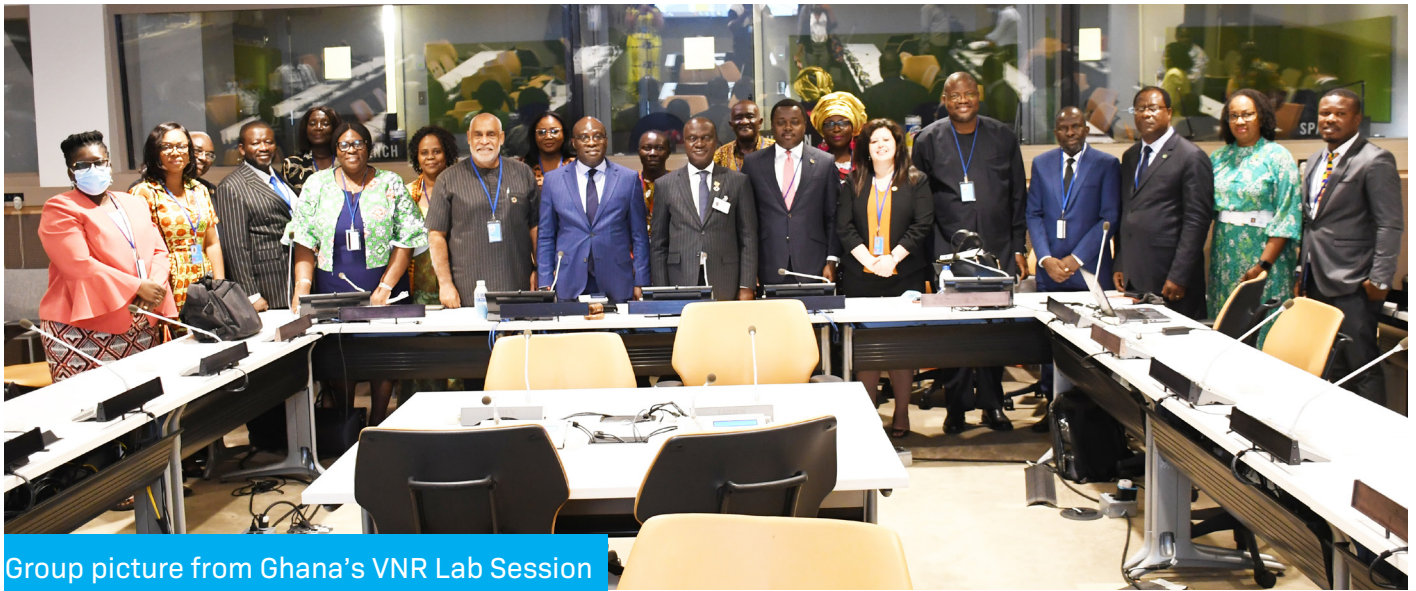
He informed the forum that significant advancements albeit the pandemic were made in “quality education” (SDG4) which is a transformative tool for national development. “Following the easing of restrictions, improvements have been recorded in children who engaged in any type of learning activity – increasing from 62.2 percent to 71.3 percent from June to September in 2020”, he added. The Free SHS Policy, introduced in 2017, continues to provide access to education particularly for low-income households. He also highlighted the 100 percent completion rate achieved at Primary level while JHS continue to record improvements reaching 83.1%. “In addition, Gender parity in access to education which was achieved in 2018 has been sustained at all levels with exception of the Senior High School level, which is currently close to parity - at 0.96”.

Professor Gyan-Baffour again informed the HLPF that, there has been consistent improvement in forest cover over the years. Aggressive tree planting campaign is being undertaken under the Green Ghana project and as a result, 20 million trees were planted this year (2022) with the target of planting at least 100million trees cumulatively by 2023. This ties well with “life on land” (SDG15). “The use of internet has increased by about tenfold over a decade, reaching 80.6% of the population, bringing the people closer than ever before”. This shows progress in Partnership for the Goals (SDG17). He noted that this achievement provides an enabling environment for the digitization agenda of government.

In his presentation at the forum, he emphasized that, all the achievements and progress made by government of Ghana demanded more efforts to scale up sustainable solutions. Prof Gyan-Baffour made a call for multi-stakeholder partnership for innovation and resource mobilization, the establishment of an effective link between planning and resource allocation, availability of quality data and the continuous coordination of the United Nations Country Team to appropriately solidify the achievements made by Government. Ghana responded to questions across different issues: girl child, leave no one behind, food security and data.

6.1 Ghana's Voluntary National Review Lab Session at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

Ghana in partnership with African Union – African Peer Review Mechanism (AU-APRM) on Wednesday 13th July 2022, organized a Voluntary National Review (VNR) Lab on the sides of the HLPF to facilitate experience sharing from the 2022 VNR process. The lab brought together experts from countries submitting their VNRs, United Nations and African Union Agencies, Civil Society representatives. The VNR Lab provided a platform for an open conversation and dialogue among countries, stakeholders and partners on experiences and lessons learned, as well as innovations on the engagement of stakeholders from different sectors towards the preparation of Voluntary National Review report. The implementation mechanism of the SDGs; reporting of SDGs at the local level (Voluntary Local Review); response on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDGs implementation; facilitation of SDGs implementation through partnerships were the issues chiefly discussed.



Group picture from Ghana's VNR Lab Session

The Lab received key presentations from the Deputy Minister for Education, Ghana; the Resident Coordinator of the UN System, Ghana; Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ghana to the United Nations, New York; and APRM Continental Secretariat, Johannesburg. The discussants from Ghana were the Director-General, National Development Planning Commission (NDPC); the Director, Resource Mobilisation and Economic Relations, Ministry of Finance, Ghana; and the Deputy Minister for Economic Management, Liberia. The discussants from Ghana highlighted the existing interventions including expansion of access to basic education and the introduction of the Free Senior High School which are the major catalytic flagships that were established to ensure no child is left behind in the provision of basic and senior high education. The success story around the FSHS is the absorption of about 362,775 students at the inception of the intervention who could not have made it to SHS after completion of the basic education for reasons ranging from systemic and economic. The Ghana COVID-19 Alleviation and Revitalization of Enterprises Support (Ghana CARES Programme) through which a GHC 100billion facility was made available to businesses to mitigate the impact of the pandemic in order to stabilize, transform and build resilience against future pandemics. The use of timeous data for the 2022 VNR report which was derived from the 2021 population and housing census conducted using technology; the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda and SDG indicators as well as the Agenda 2063 indicators; the costing of SDGs implementation giving a very good sense of the resources needed to implement the 2030 Agenda in Ghana were highpoints at the Lab.

The APRM underscored the need to be deliberate about localising the SDGs and preparing Voluntary Local Reviews. Ghana was highly commended for the VLR conducted for the city of Accra in 2020 which has become a model for other countries to emulate. The highlights on countries mainstreaming the SDGs into national plans and policies as well as preparations of VLR reports shows a steady progress. Liberia shared their experiences on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place to address them.

In conclusion, the Chairman of NDPC and leader of government of Ghana's delegation underscored the need to strengthen partnerships in order to fill the annual funding gap of about US\$43 billion in order to fully implement the SDGs. The education sector, implementation of Ghana's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), provision of social infrastructure as well as addressing housing deficit were mentioned as areas



much collaborations and support are needed. The Chairman of NDPC and leader of Government delegation to the HLPF, also used the VNR Lab opportunity to launch the Ghana VNR Virtual Reality Experience. Ghana's virtual exhibition under was under the theme 'Demonstrating resilience through innovation and partnerships to build forward better from CoVID-19 in the decade of action'. The Virtual Reality showcases impactful interventions including projects with a collection of images, documentaries, interviews, publications and stories which also reflects the experiences of marginalized groups in Virtual Reality. These initiatives of government, development partners, CSOs, private sector and traditional authorities were captured in videos in a navigation friendly format for viewing by the public.

7.0 Some recognised impact after Ghana's presentation at the 2022 HLPF

After Ghana's presentation of its VNR in New York, the report was launched in Accra by the representative of the President - Prof. George Gyan-Baffour- on 28th August 2022. This was followed by a regional dissemination of the report. The report has triggered discussions among stakeholders and as such the intended impact is being met. From the world perspective, Ghana's 2022 VNR has once again put a shine on the country. Ghana's presentation of the VNR at the HLPF was very much received by dignitaries and other world leaders at the forum because of the structure of the review and highlights of the approach used amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidently, all of Ghana's VNR reports displayed at the foyer of the HLPF room were taken within a short while and other countries and stakeholders continued to ask for copies of it.

The VNR report and the presentation at the HLPF also deepened Ghana's credentials in the quest to abide by the dictates of her international commitments. This also goes re-emphasise the deserving role the President, H.E. Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo Addo plays as a global advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals. It thus implies Ghana is leading in such a capacity by example while sharing experiences among sister countries and Africa as a whole.

Economically, Ghana has made strides through the VNR. The government delegation and individual institutions met with some international bodies such

as the World Bank and the European Union which led to discussions on pulling resources together to champion initiatives that are propelling the achievement of the SDGs in Ghana. The report and the presentation highlighted the areas where support is needed and these have come to the attention of world and international bodies. Also, following the coordinated approach of the DPs in supporting the VNR report preparation, much attention has been drawn to the areas where Ghana's progress in achieving the SDGs is slow. This has indirectly informed DPs working in such areas to upscale their support in order to fastrack the implementation of the SDGs in Ghana.

Again, the dissemination of the report to the regions ignited discussions on the role of the local level in implementing the SDGs. Whereas the national averages may hide the extent of the challenges at the local level, there are regional breakdowns in some of the indicators that has highlighted the regions that need to put in more effort. Some regions for instance have pledged an increased campaign to end the menace of open defaecation after the report showed how poorly they had performed in that fight.

The numerous media engagements and publication has also enlarged public interest in the attainment of the SDGs. The VNR report dominated the media space for a long while which in one breath showcased governments progress towards implementation of



Daily Graphic Report Aug 22, 2022

the SDGs and as well provided the platform to rally support from Civil Society Organisations, private sector, Persons with Disabilities, philanthropist, academia among others intimating the role they must play for the country to attain the SDGs. The

continuous collaboration and support from these key stakeholders are critical especially in this decade of action if the SDGs must be attained.

Finally, the VNR report and its intensive dissemination across the regions and districts have increased a strong desire for voluntary local reviews (VLRs) by the local authorities. A lot of foreign and local partners are showing keen interest in supporting MMDAs in country to conduct their own VLRs. This will serve as a great achievement for Ghana given that only AMA has been able to conduct its local review of the SDGs in 2019/20. It will largely complement national level reporting by highlighting district specific progress and challenges across all the 17 SDGs.

8.0 Conclusion

The Voluntary National Review report and its essence cannot be overemphasised. It is in itself a heed to an international obligation as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The processes involved in the preparation of the VNR engendered partnership and collaboration as many institutions made inputs into the report. The report provided good feedback on the progress Ghana has made in the implementation of the SDGs. The challenges highlighted in the report indicates areas that need strengthening and greater efforts to achieve the SDGs. It is important to continue in such reviews due to the enormous potential it garnered over the years by bringing together policy makers and implementers of plans and projects to deliberate on significant issues that has the potency to facilitate the attainment of the SDGs in Ghana.

9.0 Recommendations

This year marks the mid-point for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. The National Development Planning Commission and the Implementation Coordinating Committee (with key sector representatives) spearheading the SDGs in Ghana must use the upcoming opportunity of the SDGs Summit in September 2023 to evaluate key government interventions facilitating the achievement of the SDGs. The 2023 SDGs Summit will further re-position Ghana to attract partnership for an accelerated implementation of the SDGs and national agenda. Given the President's role in the scheme of the SDGs, Ghana stands the chance to attract more investors into supporting government and critical development areas. The increasing desire for MMDAs to conduct their own voluntary local review (VLRs) of progress and challenges in the implementation of the SDGs is in the right direction and should be supported. This will result in a comprehensive SDGs reporting with a focus on identifying both national and local solutions in achieving the SDGs.

