

Lebanon VNR presentation to HLPF 2018, UN Headquarters
18 July 2018

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be here today to share with you Lebanon's experience in launching the SDGs process and preparing the country's first Voluntary National Review.

At the outset, I wish to reiterate the Lebanese government commitment to Agenda 2030 and the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

As you may know, Lebanon is a small upper middle-income country, with a democratic political system, a liberal economy based on entrepreneurship and largely reliant on services, and a society characterized by cultural diversity and openness.

Located at the center of one of the most volatile regions of the world, Lebanon has demonstrated remarkable resilience to numerous security, political and economic shocks since the end of the 1990s. More recently, Lebanon has been heavily affected by the conflict in Syria, and it continues to bear, for the 8th consecutive year, the economic, social and environmental burden of hosting more than 1.5 million displaced from Syria.

These developments Notwithstanding, Lebanon's 1st VNR takes place at a time when Lebanon has successfully conducted parliamentary elections and a new government should be formed soon. Moreover, the international community has made it clear that Lebanon's political and economic stability is key, including for the overall region, and needs to be preserved.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Lebanon achieved at **least seven MDG targets, mainly in health, primary education and gender equality in education**. The remaining targets showed mixed results, were either not applicable, or not expected to be achieved on time.

Almost a year ago, we have **officially launched the SDGs** process with the following **objectives** in mind:

First, Localize the ambitious global agenda according to national needs, challenges, and resources.

Second, Report on status and progress on all of the 17 SDGs (1st VNR).

Third, Advocate an effective engagement & ownership of stakeholders, including civil society & private sector.

Fourth, Adopt a Bottom-up, inclusive, participatory and whole-of-government approach.

Regarding the **institutional set-up**, a **National Committee (NC) on SDGs** was established by a Cabinet decree, **chaired by the Prime Minister**, and includes in addition to Directors General of public administrations, **two** representatives from **civil society** and **two** representatives from the **private sector**.

The **Role of the National Committee** is to coordinate national efforts and Integrate SDGs into national programs and strategies, develop a national database for SDGs indicators, and contribute to the preparation of the VNR.

Moreover, **Four Thematic Groupings** were formed on People; Planet; Prosperity; and Peace. The fifth 'P' for **Partnership** is a cross-cutting issue for achieving SDGs. A **task force for statistics** was formed to collect SDG-related statistics.

A **Parliamentary Committee** for SDGs was also established to monitor and advance SDGs in Parliament, including mapping of existing legislation.

To enhance outreach and awareness, an **SDGs Lebanon website** was established, and several **workshops** were conducted.

Moreover, **an active engagement with CSOs and the private sector was launched**.

Regarding Civil Society Organizations, the **autonomy** of CSOs representatives to the NC was ensured, a Civil Society **statement was drafted, consolidated and included** in the VNR, **300 NGOs** were

consulted, including in **remote areas**, and an **official channel of communication** between CSOs and GoL was established.

On the Private sector level, the **Chambers of Commerce** conducted consultations, identified integration of SDGs and challenges faced. Also, the VNR emphasizes work achieved by the UN **Global Compact Network Lebanon** (GCNL), to raise awareness about the importance of SDGs within the private sector and civil society.

During the VNR preparation, we followed **UN guidelines** and **drew on other countries' best practices** and experience. We used primary and secondary sources as well as National and UN data sources.

As for the **methodology and validation process**, a questionnaire was sent to line ministries and administrations to gather information about national policies, strategies and initiatives related to the SDGs. A first draft of the VNR was then synthesized, **based on inputs received from stakeholders**, and was later reviewed by the secretariat of the National Committee **with support from UNRCO & UNDP**, before the final **validation, in sections per goals**, by all stakeholders.

As you can conclude from the VNR document, Lebanon has achieved progress on many of the SDGs, including **in education, health, women affairs, poverty, and SMEs development**. However, a lot of work remains to be done.

I wish to point out to some of the **Challenges** faced during the VNR **process**:

1. The **Time frame** to prepare for the 1st VNR was short. Within less than a year, GoL formed the NC, organized awareness raising workshops, and launched and finalized the VNR drafting process.
2. Many of the **stakeholders' knowledge** of the SDGs and Agenda 2030, was **limited at the beginning** of the process.
3. **Consolidating input from a large number of stakeholders** required major efforts.

Notwithstanding the challenges mentioned above, it is also important to emphasize the following:

1. The **Stakeholders' active participation** in the process from **its early stages**, ensured **stronger national ownership, better localization** of the global agenda, **participatory and whole-of-government approach**.
2. The **Validation** of the VNR by the various Lebanese administrations **reinforced collective work** and efforts as well as cooperation among government administrations.
3. The VNR **process promoted cooperation** between the **Government** of Lebanon and **non-governmental** stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Going forward, Lebanon's progress on Agenda 2030 faces a number of **challenges** that need to be addressed and considered:

1. **Lack of robust statistical system and database** of SDGs targets and indicators: **capacity building and technical assistance** is needed.
2. **Institutional capacities of public sector administration** need to be strengthened, with **support from UN agencies and International partners**.
3. Lebanon's development agenda will need to be **financed through highly concessional lending and grants** and through **mobilizing private sector resources**, under the **public-private partnership framework**, given the high fiscal deficit and public debt ratios.
4. Advancing on Lebanon's development agenda will be more challenging given the **ongoing Syrians displaced crisis** and its unprecedented repercussions on Lebanon's economy, environment, public services, and infrastructure.

Going forward, our work will **focus** on:

1. Prioritization of the goals or prioritization of the targets within each goal.
2. Ensuring an integrated approach to development.
3. Elaborating a medium term vision for development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, in Lebanon, are determined to take our economy to a new level, improve the livelihoods of Lebanese citizens, and achieve sustainable development in all regions of Lebanon. Also, we are keen on preserving our natural resources and rich heritage of cultural diversity.

The parliamentary elections held in May this year and the subsequent government formation will constitute new grounds for taking forward the government's vision for growth and employment with a clear prioritization of reforms.

We greatly appreciate the valuable support of our friends in the international community, including all UN agencies, and we look forward to strong future cooperation to achieve our targets and goals for sustainable development and a better prosperous future for all the Lebanese.

In particular, the Government of Lebanon greatly appreciates the valuable and timely support of the **UN Resident Coordinator Office and the UNDP Country Office** during the SDGs roll-out process and the VNR preparations.