

JORDAN

Stumbling in moving forward on the track of Sustainable Development

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Back in 2017, the then Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan presented its Voluntary National Review at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) that was held in New York during the July 2017 session. Through its participation, Jordan aspired "to further strengthen national ownership of the 2030 Agenda, build a proactive momentum around it, and accelerate its realization¹". The preparation of the voluntary national review (VNR) was led by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) with the support of the United Nations Country Team in Jordan, including non-resident and regional agencies, while the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development provided overall strategic guidance and supervision. A comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy, which ensured the widest participation of all major groups and organizations (MGOs) in the SDGs implementation and VNR preparation, was prepared by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. During this Phase, the government also stressed the importance of building a robust and lasting partnership for realizing the SDGs, as this responsibility could not rest solely on the Government.

Although the VNR report has been a remarkable step forward in creating an inclusive strategy to achieve the SDGs 2030, the lack of concrete and effective implementation of this strategy, as well as the failure in

implementing an effective monitoring system, dramatically affected its effectiveness as a tool for integrating the SDGs in the national agenda. This report highlights the importance of the SDGs and analyzes why, following the positive preparation phase of the VNR and its successful submission, the government did not continue to further pursue the incorporation of the SDGs into national frameworks, thus shading the light on the main challenges that hindered the process of creating ownership of the SDGs.

The preparation and submission of the VNR: Elements of good practice carried out by the Jordanian Government

In the period from 2000 to 2015, Jordan was one of the first countries, both globally and in the Arab Region, to take action towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Considerable achievements were obtained in many priority areas like poverty eradication, maternal and child health, communicable diseases, universal primary education and environmental sustainability. In the 2015 National Millennium Development Goals report another set of key challenges was identified confirming the need to address the following: limited economic and political participation of women, high unemployment rates especially among women and youth, raising mortalities due to non-communicable diseases and increased water

¹ The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Jordan's Way to Sustainable Development, First National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda", 2017, p. 20, Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16289Jordan.pdf>

shortages². In view of these new priorities identified by Jordan, the government committed to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Despite the various challenges that the Hashemite Kingdom is currently facing, among those the ongoing economic slowdown, the Syrian refugee crisis, regional instability and security concerns, which represent a complex and real threat to national resilience, the country has embarked on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the SDGs.

Within this framework, the submission of NVR was not only an important step forward towards integrating the SDGs into the Jordanian national agenda, but also a crucial opportunity in establishing a dialogue with various stakeholders and major groups and organization, ensuring their meaningful and respectful participation and placing equal importance on both the process and the final product.

Firstly, the preparation phase, that preceded the official submission of the report and took place between March and May 2017, was accurately prepared by the MOPIC in and was positively marked by the efforts of conducting extensive consultations with various stakeholders in Jordan using a variety of approaches. The MOPIC organized meetings and workshops with CSOs, promoted the engagement of Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIOs) and those working with youth, as well as other institutions and sectors like workers' unions, the private sector, local councils and committees, academia and science. The final VNR reflected the discussions and the suggestions that were proposed by the numerous stakeholders involved in the preparation phase.

Another element of good practice carried out by the Jordanian government consisted in inviting some civil society representatives to participate in the national delegation to the presentation and discussion of the report that was held at the High Level Political Forum in New York . This was another notable indication of the strong will of the government in the direction of enhancing and fostering a fruitful cooperation among different stakeholders and sectors of the society.

Moreover, in April 2017 the government updated the role of the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development in order to ensure better alignment with the 2030 Agenda, and it expanded it in order to include Jordan's two major civil society's alliances - the Jordanian National Coalition for Sustainable Development and the Coordination Commission of Civil Society Organizations (HEMAM). This was another excellent step forward in the direction of establishing and fostering a dialogue among all different relevant actors. The committee is headed by the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation with membership from relevant line ministries, CSOs, the private sector, and representatives of Senate (upper house), House of Representatives (lower house), women, youth and local communities. The committee provides guidance and follows up on all decisions, recommendations and priorities related to the 2030 Agenda and plays a key role in the integration of the SDGs into relevant national plans and strategies.

Finally, it is worth spending some words on the same SDGs inclusion strategy outlined in the VNR. It is easy to notice how cooperation and dialogue among different stakeholders are here further emphasized. The main tool introduced in the VNR, the so-called 'roadmap', which is the result of a consultation that was carried out in March 2016, to which approximately 100 representatives from the Government and MGOs, and women and youth representatives participated, is a good example of this emphasis placed on cooperation and dialogue. The roadmap includes various priority action points - raising awareness, mainstreaming the SDGs into national development plans, mainstreaming within sub-national plans or at the governorate level (localizing), gender mainstreaming, further strengthening of institutional mechanism enhancing monitoring and evaluation

² The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Jordan's Way to Sustainable Development, First National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda", 2017, p. 15 - 16, Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16289Jordan.pdf>

systems, strengthening national statistical systems and availability of data, etc.- which were further expanded as a result of subsequent consultations with various MGOs. These priority action points were then supposed to be implemented within the main national frameworks, blueprints and plans³ in order to ensure a concrete action towards the attainment of the SDGs⁴.

After New York: Political inconsistency, economic slowdown and the need for a broader dialogue and cooperation

Despite the numerous good practices implemented by the government, as well as the detailed implementation and coordination plan that was carefully designed in the VNR, Jordan did not succeed in progressing towards the implementation of the agenda and in thoroughly including the SDGs into national frameworks. Most of the effort remained at the abstract level of policies and strategies written on paper, failing to enter the implementation phase. Additionally, while national development strategies will surely benefit from further and more pervasive integration of SDGs and their indicators into the national agenda, Jordan's ability to monitor SDG-related indicators remains severely limited. The Department of Statistics is able to measure only 71 out of the 231 performance indicators contained in the 2030 Agenda⁵. Another clear example of the lack of implementation that has affected the SDGs strategy in Jordan is the absence of econometric models. These models are extremely important, as they enable the government to assess the cost of the integration of the agenda into national development programs.

This general climate of governmental indifference towards the SDGs agenda that followed the submission of the VNR caused Jordan to fall behind in the Sustainable Development Goals Index (2018 Edition), moving from position number 80 to position number 91 globally⁶, and from position number 5 to position number 7 in the Arab region.

Certainly, the inconsistency that characterizes the political scene of the kingdom is one major factor to take into consideration in analyzing why, after such a laudable start, the efforts for including the SDGs into the national frameworks have apparently come to an end. During a recent interview⁷, the former Head of the Development Unit at MOPIC declared that back in 2017 the government had relatively integrated the SDGs into the national strategy. However, since the submission of the VNR during July 2017, three different Ministers of Planning and International Cooperation were appointed by the Prime Minister who, in turn, has also changed during this time span. In light of the above, it is natural to understand why Jordan's development strategies and policies have lacked continuity and consistency, with successive governments often eschewing their predecessors' programs. Furthermore, the general tendency of the government to halt at the mere level of policy drawing has also impacted negatively the concrete implementation of the strategy outlined in the VNR. Unfortunately, few programs access the implementation phase and most efforts remain theoretical and preparatory.

3 I.e.- Jordan 2025 National Strategy, Executive Development Programs, Governorate Development Programs, The Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis (2017-2019), The Economic Growth Plan (2018-2022), as well as other national plans and strategies.

4 <http://mop.gov.jo/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=268>

5 <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/17719>

6 Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, "SDG Index and Dashboard report. Global Responsibilities, Implementing the goals", July 2018, Available at:

<https://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2018/02%20SDGS%20Country%20profiles%20edition%20WEB%20V3%20180718.pdf>

7 Interviewed given by the former Head of the Development Unit at MOPIC to the Phenix Center for Economic and Informatic Studies, May 2019

Other relevant reasons for the government's evident reticence in implementing the strategy outlined in the VNR can be surely found in the ongoing economic slowdown that affects Jordan and got worse in 2018, as well as in the absence of cooperation between the central and local administrations on one hand, and, on the other, between the government and civil society.

The registered GDP grow rate of Jordan in 2018 was of an estimated 2 percent, being therefore marginally lower than the grow rate of 2017. The unemployment rate remains high - 18.6 percent annual average in 2018 compared to 18.3 percent in 2017. Additionally, the reduction of remittances and official inflows and investments from the Gulf countries and the high dependency of Jordan on grants posed a serious challenge to the economy of the country⁸. Jordan's economy during the year 2018 was growing at less of 50% of the growing rate required to achieve three of the main SDGs by 2030 (namely SDG2 zero hunger, SDG5 gender equality, SDG 8 decent work and economic growth)⁹. To meet these crucial challenges, the government redefined its priorities and the focus on further pursuing the incorporation of SDGs into national frameworks took a back seat.

Finally, the absence of formal and continuative cooperation between the central government and a variety of stakeholders (local governments, parliament, civil society actors and private sector) hinders the development of a unified strategy. This cooperation among different actors is one of the key components in the path towards achieving development targets, as it strengthens national ownership of the 2030 Agenda, builds a proactive momentum around it, and accelerates its realization. Unfortunately, the Jordanian government still fails to further develop a dialogue between the different social, economic and political actors in the country.

Considering all of the above, the total indifference of the government in calling the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development for meetings can be interpreted as a clear stance for not continuing with the further implementation of the SDGs at a the National level.

The role of Civil Society Organizations in implementing SDGs

Undeniably, civil society organizations are a preeminent actor for attaining the implementation of SDGs. However, since the end of the preparatory phase of the VNR and its submission, CSOs were not further formally invited by the government to take action on the SDGs agenda and the progress they made in this direction was scarce. For example, the Ministry of planning had created several national committees which included members of CSOs, but in reality these committees are effectively non-functional, with no activities such as a meeting having taken place since inception. In addition, the government has so far only involved a limited number of civil society organizations in its development strategies, none of which champion a human rights-based development model.

Moreover, CSOs have also repeatedly called the National Higher Committee for meetings, but these efforts were in vain as the government never showed interest in responding to their requests.

The challenges faced by the organizations working in the field of development and defence of human rights are many and are positioned at the level of both legislation and practice. Obtaining governmental approval for projects and activities in the development field is problematic. Additionally, the government has so far involved in its development strategies only a limited number of civil society organizations, none of which promote a human rights-based development approach. However, in order to be able to achieve the 17 SDGs, Jordan will need to make their future efforts in strategy and policy drawing far more inclusive.

⁸ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview>

⁹ <http://sigi-jordan.org/ar/?p=4505>

And here, is important to highlight that this inclusion will have to be as comprehensive as possible and based on the principles of rights based Democratic Ownership; an approach that will strengthen CSOs' sovereignty and independence in determining and implementing appropriate aid and development policies.

Per contra, despite the fact that CSOs continue to meet many challenges in their work, they are characterized by a certain lack of eagerness in demanding a proper implementation of the SDGs agenda. This lack of ambition prevents them from taking a stronger stand in front of the government, demanding for an effective and concrete action in integrating the SDGs into the Jordanian national agenda, therefore practically realizing the strategy that was outlined in the VNR.

CSOs have surely made some efforts to encourage the government to focus on the implementation of the SDGs and to increase their ownership. However, in the future, continuing this task with more confidence and not being afraid of taking a strong and firm stand in what they believe should be the priorities of the government will surely be a very important step forward and a significant achievement for Jordanian CSOs¹⁰.

Conclusion: The importance of incorporating SDGs into the national strategy

In conclusion of this report, it is important to further highlight the importance of realizing the SDGs Agenda through its implementation in national frameworks, plans and strategies. The 17 SDGs, also known as the Global Goals, are a global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people live in peace and prosperity. They were built following the success of

Millenium Development Goals and updated to include new pressing key areas like climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among other priorities¹¹. Each of these 17 goals consists of targets which should be achieved by each participating country within the next 15 years. With specific regard to Jordan, the four main areas that emerged as critical for Jordanians and were selected to become the main focus of the development strategy include: strengthening the link between education and the labour market, combating stereotypes to achieve gender equality, reducing poverty and ensuring equal access to social services, enhancing the respect of human rights, contributing to regional stability, enhancing awareness of environmental issues, promoting renewable energy and addressing water scarcity¹². In light of these priorities, Jordan set out to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

SDGs and the agenda are important for a variety of different reasons; first of all, having time-bound and universal goals result in greater mobilization of the global community, promote innovation and sharing of expertise and best practices and enhance dialogue, collaboration and networking of stakeholders across all sectors, countries and regions.

Moreover, while, most governmental programs have a rather short life span of about 4-5 years and the changes in the government and political agenda can highly impact the priorities of sustainable development plans, this approach promotes a long-term development model, based on targets that are set and fixed for the upcoming 15 years.

10 Arab NGO Network for Development, " دور المجتمع المدني في خطة " التنمية المستدامة لعام ٢٠٣٠

"التنمية المستدامة لعام ٢٠٣٠", 2018 Available at:

<http://2030monitor.annd.org/data/manual/arabic/5.pdf>

11 <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

12 The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, "Jordan's Way to Sustainable Development, First National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda", 2017, p. 18, Available at:

<https://www.sdgindex.org/assets/files/2018/02%20SDGS%20Country%20profiles%20edition%20WEB%20V3%20180718.pdf>

Having a long-term agenda and targets promotes sustainability of actions and reinforces commitment of the states, regardless of changes in the national political context¹³.

Finally, on the list of reasons why the SDGs Agenda is important, it is worth mentioning that the major challenges of today's societies, like poverty among many others, are multidimensional and therefore require multi-faceted, integrated and holistic approaches. The SDGs can offer a more holistic approach to sustainable development that will surely promote a deeper and more radical solutions to the most pressing issues of our contemporary societies¹⁴.

Considering all the above mentioned advantages offered by the holistic, inclusive and long term SDGs framework, it is advisable that the Jordanian government will get back on the track of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving the SDGs, despite the numerous challenges that the country is facing. The success of the Millennium Development Goals strategy previously implemented in Jordan and its achievements and successful mechanisms should neither be forgotten nor overlooked, and the SDGs Agenda will be the logical consequential continuation that will further help the country build a more resilient, prosperous, just and inclusive future.

13 Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2018", July 2018, Available at: <http://www.annd.org/english/itemId.php?itemId=715#sthash.NkVKZeQ1.dpbs>