

Citizen's Review of SDG Progress in Bangladesh

A Contribution to the National VNR Process

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Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

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1. Voluntary National Review (VNR) and Bangladesh

1.1 Definition

- Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are part of the **follow-up and review** of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- The VNRs aim to **facilitate sharing of experiences**, including successes, challenges, gaps, and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- From the perspective of SDGs implementation, VNRs also seek to **strengthen policies and institutions of governments** and **mobilise multi-stakeholder support and forge partnerships**

1.2 VNR journey of Bangladesh

- **In July 2017**, Bangladesh submitted its first VNR report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) of the United Nations, along with 42 countries. It **reviewed seven goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17)**
- **In July 2020**, Bangladesh, along with 46 other countries, presented the second VNR report on SDGs at the HLPF. That year, **all 17 goals were reviewed**

1. Voluntary National Review (VNR) and Bangladesh (cont.)

1.3 Contribution to VNR 2025 of Bangladesh

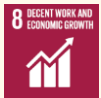
- **Bangladesh is committed to presenting its third VNR report at the HLPF in July 2025, along with 38 countries**
- **The 2025 VNR will review five goals (SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17)**



SDG 3: Good health and well-being



SDG 5: Gender equality



SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth



SDG 14: Life below water



SDG 17: Partnership for all the goals

- **Among the three VNRs, the four common goals for review are (SDGs 3,5, 14 and 17)**

1. Voluntary National Review (VNR) and Bangladesh (cont.)

1.4 Global structure of the VNR report for the HLPF

1. Opening statement (*By head of the Government: 700 words*)
2. Highlights (*A synthesis of one or two pages in length*)
3. Introduction
4. Methodology and process of preparation of the review
5. Policy and enabling environment
 - a) Ensuring ownership of the SDGs and the VNRs
 - b) Integration of the SDGs in national frameworks
 - c) Integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions
 - d) Leave no one behind
 - e) Institutional mechanisms
 - f) Systemic issues and transformative actions
6. A review of progress of Goals and targets, and evaluation of policies and measures taken thus far
7. New and emerging challenges
8. Assessment of means of implementation (*Finance, Technology, Capacity Development, Trade, Policy and Institutional Coherence, Multi-stakeholder Partnerships, Localization of SDGs in the context of Bangladesh, Data, Monitoring and Accountability, Key Areas of International Cooperation*)
9. Conclusion and next steps
10. Annexes

1. Voluntary National Review (VNR) and Bangladesh (cont.)

1.5 Important timelines set by Government of Bangladesh (GoB)

- Preparatory workshop (1st week of December) to be arranged by UNDESA
- Regional Preparatory Meeting to be arranged by APFSD, UNESCAP, (3rd week of February)
- Main Message (700 words: 1st week of April)
- Final VNR (2nd week of June, one month before HLPF)
- Audio/Video materials (3rd week of June)
- Presentation of VNRs at the HLPF (3rd week of July; 10 minutes for PPT with AV & 15 minutes for QA)

Source: Islam, M. M. (2024). *Bangladesh in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of SDGs @HLPF in 2025* [PowerPoint slides]. Chief Adviser's Office (CAO).

2. Past Experiences & Reflections

2.1 Preparation process of VNR 2017

1. Guiding documents

- **UN HLPF guidelines** for country-specific VNR
- **Two key documents of the Government**
 - *“Mapping of Ministries by Targets in SDG Implementation aligned with the 7th FYP (2016-20)”* (Published on September 2016)
 - *“Data Gap Analysis for SDGs”* (Published on January 2017)

2. Data availability

- **70 indicators readily available**
(Source: General Economic Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission, GoB)

3. Framing & Drafting

- **Consultations with stakeholders** (students, youth, marginalised groups, CSOs, NGOs, private sector, development partners, academia and media)
- Consultations with **ministries**
- **Review and feedback received from Ministries, Agencies, and National Statistical Organisation (NSO)**

2. Past Experiences & Reflections

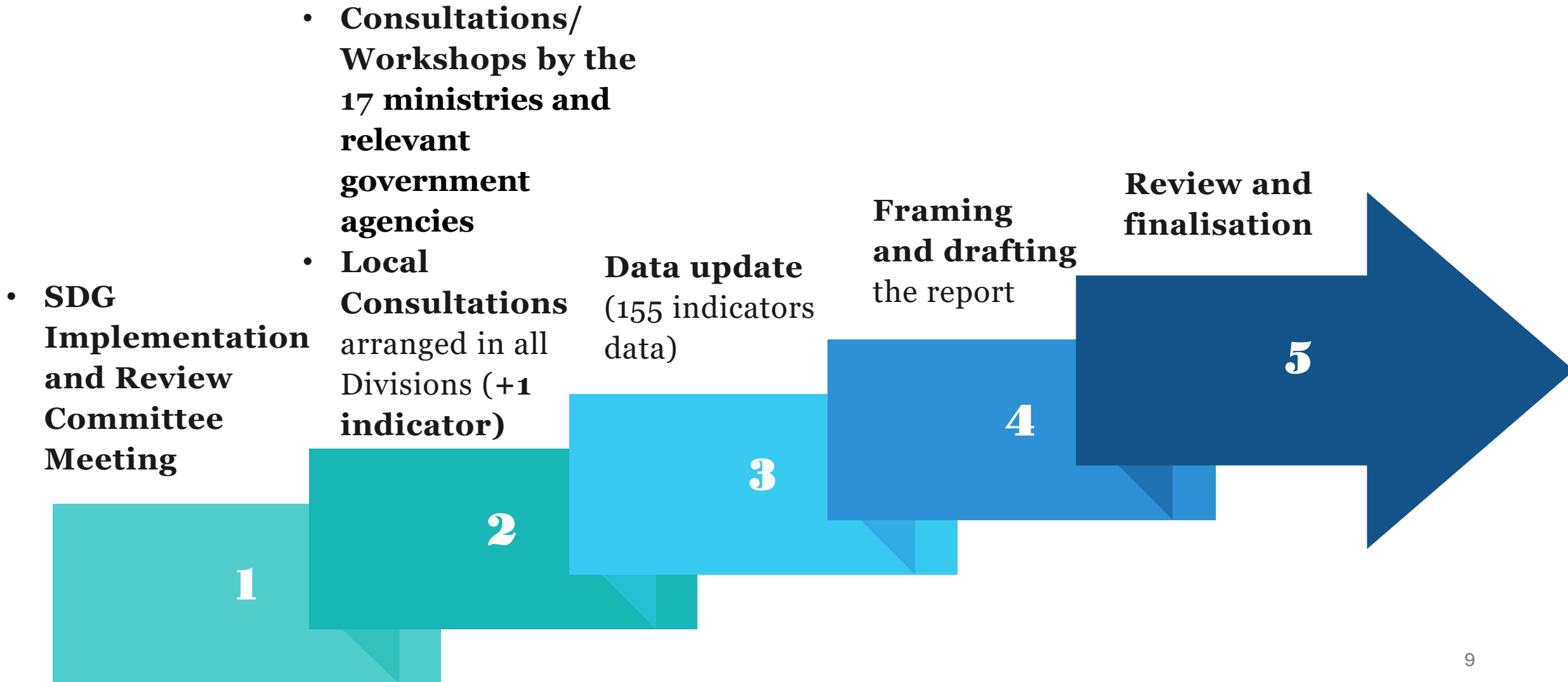
2.2 Observations regarding VNR 2017

As regards VNR 2017

- **The number of consultations with stakeholders and ministries were not clearly stated**
- **The only source of data referenced was to the report from GED**
- **The finalisation and validation of VNR was conducted through a process steered and led by the bureaucracy**
- **There was no clear indication about participation and engagement of NSAs concerning the review process**

2. Past Experiences & Reflections (cont.)

2.3 Preparation process of VNR 2020



2. Past Experiences & Reflections (cont.)

2.4 Observations regarding VNR 2020

- **Several consultations were organised with the collaboration of relevant ministries** including
 - Consultation with youths, sponsored by the Ministry of Youth and Sports
 - Persons with Disabilities (PWD), arranged by the Ministry of Social Welfare
 - Religious leaders (all religions), arranged by the Ministry of Religious Affairs
 - Local Government Institutions (LGIs), sponsored by the Local Government Division
 - Human Rights Activists, arranged by the National Human Rights Commission
- **Inclusion of LNOB perspectives** in the VNR 2020 **is not explicitly reported** as it primarily reflected goal-wise status and organisational achievements or success stories
- **Actual number of consultations remained unknown**
 - The **VNR 2020 emphasised the number of stakeholders engaged rather than the number of consultations** held.
 - As a result, it **overlooked the depth and quality of the stakeholders' engagement process**

2. Past Experiences & Reflections (cont.)

2.4 Observations regarding VNR 2020 (cont.)

- **Consultations** held between February and March, 2020 **were disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic** since the first three patients were detected on March 8, 2020
- **Grassroots involvement** in the VNR process **was rather low**
 - **Local consultations were conducted only in two Divisions (Rangpur and Chattogram)**, rather than across all the eight divisions
 - However, **written reports were received from all (eight) Divisional Commissioners.** Consequently, grassroots participation in the preparation of the reports was unclear
- **Contributions and engagement of NSAs**, also which NGOs were engaged in the process, **remained unknown**
- **Feedback was only received from the coordinating Ministries/Divisions.** NSAs were not involved in the finalisation and validation process

2. Past Experiences & Reflections (cont.)

2.5 Reflections from the perspectives of non-state actors (NSAs)



Limited representation and participation of NSAs (including private sectors, NGOs, CSOs and CBOs) and LNOBs in the preparation of the VNR process



Lack of disaggregated view beyond gender and location



**Input vs impact & outcome
(Absence of LNOB group-specific analyses)**



Out of 231 indicators, data were available only for 155 indicators, but no attempt to include citizen generated data or qualitative information



Development strategies of the previous VNR reports were more ‘governmental’ than ‘national’

3. New Context, New Opportunities

3.1 Government's Approach to the VNR 2025



3. New Context, New Opportunities (cont.)

3.2 Major concerns as regards the VNR 2025 approach

- **Concerns arise** regarding the approach of selecting the best cases/innovative cases/business cases of CSO/NGOs for inclusion in the VNR **due to the tendency to highlight individual-organisational achievements/success stories undermining collective/national achievements**
 - **Priority** needs to be given to the **collective roles of NSAs**
 - Moreover, it **may result into the ‘influencing NGOs’ selling their own credibility**
 - **It will also undermine the role of CSOs beyond the traditional NGOs**
- **NSAs’ input needs to be highlighted particularly in the context of SDG progress and their contribution** to it
- Currently, **data on 206 indicators** out of 248 indicators (unique 231) **are available**, however, the **absence of disaggregated data remains a major concern**
- **FBCCI is given the responsibility to contribute from the private sector**
 - **It is important to ensure that all major private sector organisations and labour groups are also involved**

3. New Context, New Opportunities (cont.)

3.3 Citizen's Platform's approach to the VNR process

Objectives of the initiative

- To **address the information gap at the disaggregated level** through broad-based participatory approaches focusing on the rights of LNOBs
- To **promote collective participation of CSOs** to pursue evidence-based policy advocacy in favour of LNOBs
- To generate knowledge and evidence that will be deployed as a tool to **establish the accountability process** on behalf of LNOBs
- To **contribute to the strategies and future work programmes on SDGs delivery**
- To **establish ownership and collective oversight of the NSAs**

3. New Context, New Opportunities (cont.)

3.3 Citizen's Platform's approach to the VNR process (cont.)

Group-specific analysis

Six LNOB groups

1. *Children*
2. *Climate vulnerable*
3. *Dalit and Adivasi*
4. *PWDs*
5. *Women*
6. *Youth*

Methodology

- *Co-creation (One or two partner organisations to anchor. More partner organisations to be associated)*
- *Group-specific consultations for preparation and validation*
- *Review of SDG progress and policy challenges*

Report drafting

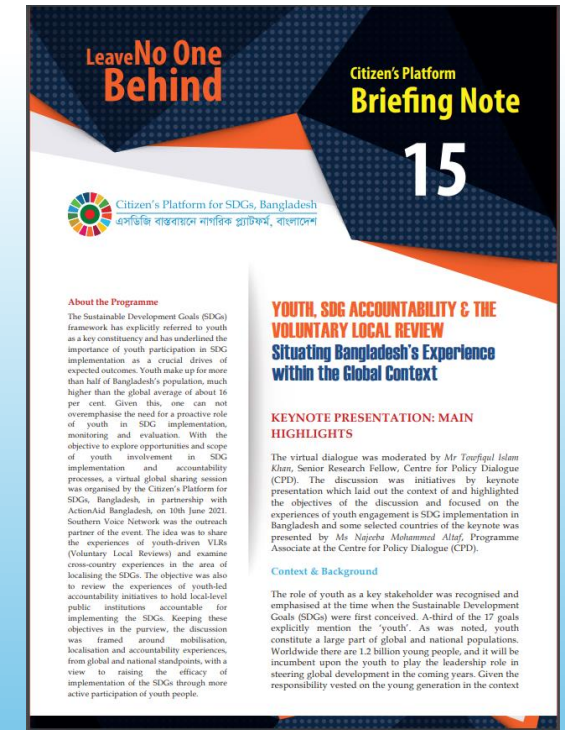
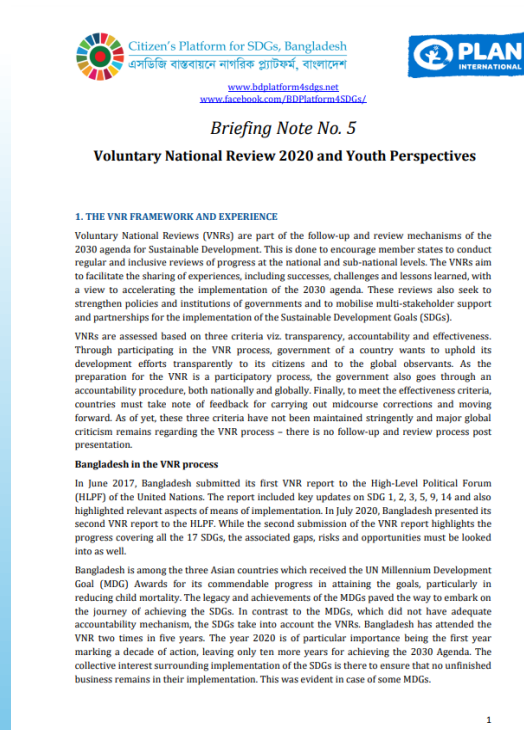
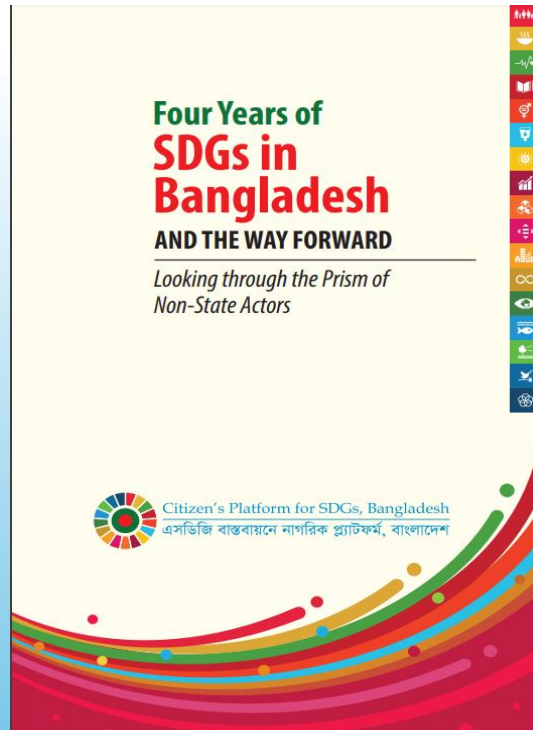
- *Preparation of six group-specific thematic reports (2000-2500 words)*
- *One overview report based on the six reports above*

Dissemination and outreach

- *One Citizen's Conclave*
- *Participation in the global and regional platform*

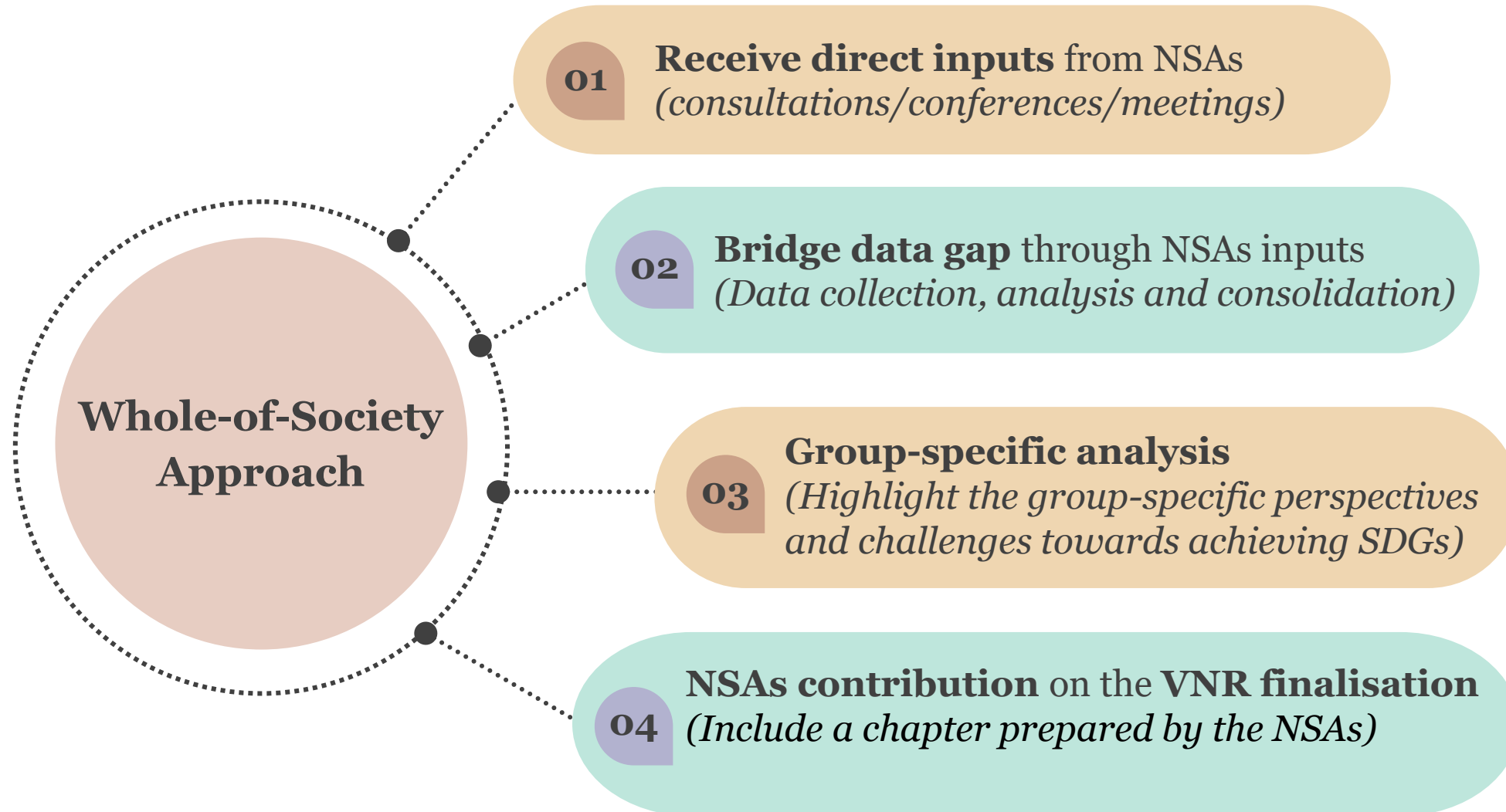
3. New Context, New Opportunities (cont.)

3.4 Citizen's Platform's past initiatives



4. Learning from cross-country experiences

4.1 Scope of incorporating NSAs inputs



4. Learning from cross-country experiences (cont.)

4.2 Examples of good practices from previous VNRs

Several **examples of good practices** of the countries as regards involving NSAs in the VNR process

Ireland's VNR 2023

- The **government adopted “open drafting” approach** to collect NSAs inputs
- **Irish NSAs were given complete autonomy to write a dedicated chapter** (*Chapter 9: Stakeholder Assessments*). The chapter was **published unedited**.
- Moreover, the **assessment of each indicator included a separate assessments from civil society** (*which highlights the challenges and recommendations for each indicator*)
- *The report also included two separate chapters on LNOB and Youth based on consultations with these groups*

Iceland's VNR 2023

- **Iceland's final report included both a government and a civil society assessment for each goal.**
- It also included **contributions from the SDG Youth Council**, a message from the **UN Youth Delegate**, and a **civil society assessment made by a group of civil society actors**
- To support it's VNR and Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), **a survey was conducted to receive citizen's inputs**. The survey **findings and results were included in VNR**

4. Learning from cross-country experiences (cont.)

4.2 Examples of good practices from previous VNRs (cont.)

Armenia's VNR 2024

- Due to lack of official data, **Armenia conducted supplementary data analysis** with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Leave No One Behind team **and made use of the data in the report**
- **Armenia presented the final VNR to stakeholder consultations for validation before final approval**

Combodia's VNR 2023

- **Combodia mentioned the process of collecting CSOs inputs through a separate consultation with them**
- Inputs collected were **shared with the MOP and UN agencies** to be reflected as a **complimentary inputs on the VNR process**

Burkina Faso's VNR 2023

- It mentioned the role “**Multi-stakeholder Technical Editorial Committee**” for **data collection, analysis and consolidation**
- The **permanent secretariat of NGOs (SPONG)**, on behalf of the civil society, **contributed to national and regional dialogues and frameworks**

4. Learning from cross-country experiences (cont.)

4.2 Examples of good practices from previous VNRs

Moreover, many countries adopted group-specific analysis to achieve a disaggregated view

- **India selected 14 LNOB groups using its CSOs network** to reflect the voice of grassroots
- **Ghana conducted group-specific analysis on PWDs, children, the aged, youth, and women and girls**

5. Outlook: A truly national VNR process

Allowing neutral participation of CSOs can help the interim government to undertake an objective assessment of the 'state of development' in the country and, in that process, highlight the achievements, challenges and next course of actions (including the reforms)



Ensure NSAs participation in the preparatory workshops, regional preparatory meeting, report drafting and finalisation phases while youth may be given separate attention



Provide NSAs the autonomy to draft the LNOB part of chapter 5 (Policy and enabling environment) along with the planned annexes and chapters 6 and 7 to highlight their perspectives on SDGs progress and challenges



Conduct Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to ensure independent assessments of progress and present this alongside the official reports



Acknowledge NSAs' contribution to SDGs as a collective (small and large, international, national and local, organisations beyond NGOAB-registered and platforms



Report on progress in collecting disaggregated data on targeted groups to ensure good quality data collection

Thank You



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