

Voluntary National Reviews 2017: Limited Attention to Actions on Sustainable Transport

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set a path for the transport sector to become more sustainable by establishing goals and targets to minimize road injuries and fatalities, provide sustainable infrastructure for urban, rural, passenger and freight transport, increase access to public transport and eliminate fossil fuel subsidies. Transport is important for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); without sufficient sustainable transport infrastructure and services across the world's regions, at least [half of the SDGs](#) are at risk of not achieving their potential.

[44 countries are expected to submit their Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#) in preparation of the upcoming High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in June 2017. The emphasis in this year's SDG review in the HLPF is on SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 14 (Life below Water). Several of these have a direct relevance for sustainable transport. For example, the provisions of transport infrastructure and services can help to alleviate poverty through improved access to market and economic opportunities while increasing agricultural productivity through lower transport costs for farm inputs and marketed outputs. Reliable, safe, and affordable transport infrastructure and services is also a crucial element to provide access to health and other essential services and ensure equal opportunities for women and girls.

The main messages of the 2017 VNRs, which were recently released, show that only few countries have included specific references to transport. Those that have included transport confirm the linkage between transport and the achievement of the SDGs, in particular on the role of transport infrastructure (e.g. all-weather road, rail, and port facilities) and they refer to the overarching theme of the 2030 Agenda to alleviate poverty, ensure social inclusion and equity, and leave no one behind. The [key observations](#) on the treatment of transport in the VNRs 2017 are:

- Only 22% of submitted VNR main messages make specific reference to the transport sector. Most of these transport references are on road infrastructure with the intended impact to alleviate poverty, increase social inclusion and improve access.

- A few countries also make references to implementing SDGs in transport sub-sectors such as rail transport, water transport, and aviation.
- As the main messages only present overviews of the VNRs, specific sectoral policy measures and actions taken by countries are not yet listed by most countries. Only three countries specifically discuss the sustainability of transport. Other countries have made brief statements on budget allocation, investments or projects in transport and other sectors.
- Progress made to improve road safety, which is directly linked to SDG Target 3.6 (“By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents”) is mentioned only by Ethiopia.
- Ethiopia is also the only country referring to the SDG Target 9.1.1 on rural access by providing figures on improvement of all-weather roads and reduction in time taken to access all-weather roads.

Overall, it appears that the 2017 VNRs will not give transport the attention that it deserves as an enabler of sustainable development. This [reflects the 2016 VNRs](#), which also had relatively limited attention for transport. However, as VNR main messages only provide a summary of the full reviews to be submitted in July, they do not yet give a full picture of how transport will be fully reflected in the 2017 HLPF process. A key issue is whether countries will cite good practices and actions taken in different transport sub-sectors to address a range of environment and sustainability issues, such as GHG emissions reduction, access and mobility, connectivity and economic development, transport financing, road safety, and climate adaptation for transport.

The [second SDG Progress Report](#) released by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) Statistics Division is another source to consider when looking at the manner in which transport is addressed in the implementation of the SDGs. The report includes statistics on the global status of air pollution from traffic, road safety, energy consumption, and employment opportunities and economic development driven by the transport sector, which helps to document the linkage between transport and sustainable development. However, it does not include any information on several other transport-related SDG targets, such as SDG Indicators 9.1.1 (rural access), 11.2.1 (access to public transport), and 12.c.1 (fossil fuel subsidies). The absence of data on a range of sustainable transport modes in the progress report shows that there is a need to establish a more structured framework to track progress in the transport sector within the SDGs.

The [Sustainable Mobility for All \(SuM4All\)](#) initiative was established in 2016 as a global partnership with the intention to establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to

document the transformation of the transport sector in support of four objectives: Universal Access, Efficiency, Safety, and Green Mobility. SLoCaT has analysed how the four key objectives of the SuM4ALL initiative are being reflected in VNR main messages. Although the references to these four global objectives is limited, the SLoCaT Partnership believes that there is further potential to demonstrate the critical role of sustainable transport in the SDG implementation and review process making use of the SuM4All framework.

For more information on the analysis on VNRs submitted in 2016 and 2017, please visit <http://www.slocat.net/news/1851> or contact Cornie Huizenga at cornie.huizenga@slocatpartnership.org.