

UNEP Asia-Pacific Regional Review of SDG VNRs (2016- 2021): Knowledge and experiences on environmental dimension of the SDGs

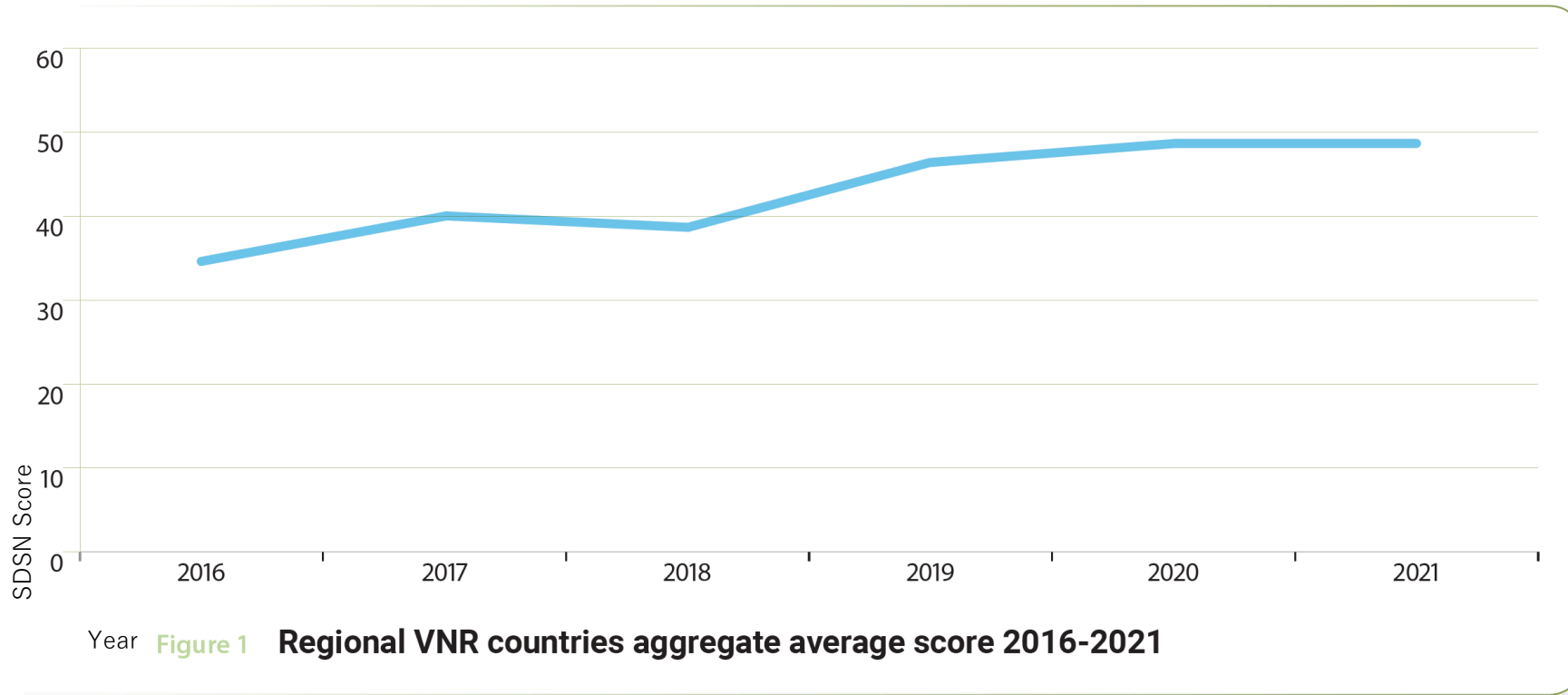
HLPF Side Event 7 July 2022

Simon Høiberg Olsen

Outline

- 1. Regional Context**
- 2. Key Questions of focus**
- 3. VNRs Production**
- 4. VNRs and the Environment**
- 5. Governance**
- 6. Stakeholder Engagement**
- 7. Data and Indicators**

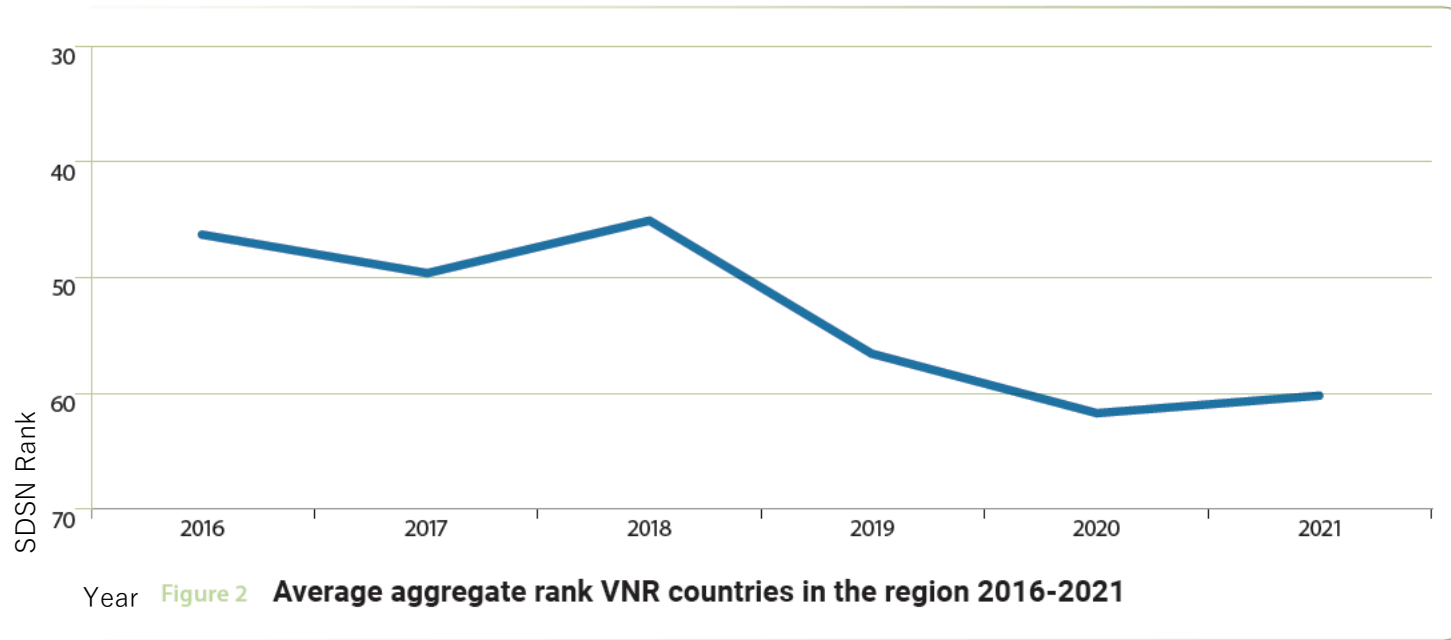
Context 1: SDG performance is improving--but perhaps too slowly



Score 2016-2021 ranges from a high of 80.2 (2017) to a low of 36.5 (2016)

- The **average** SDSN Index Score has increased over time between 2016-2021 in the reviewed countries.
- Although some countries pull this average up and down

Context 2: Countries in Asia-Pacific SDSN rank relative to other countries has fallen

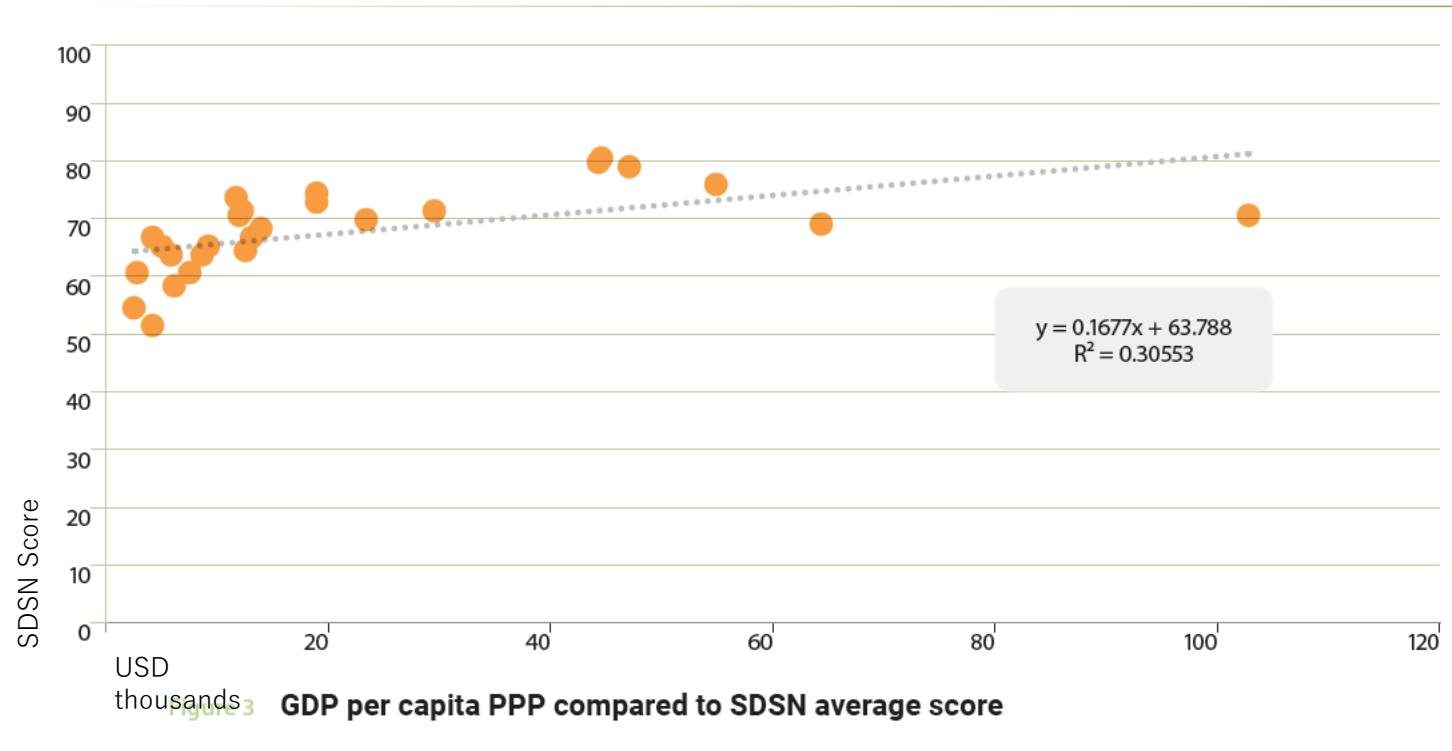


Rank ranges from 153 (2019) to 11 (2017)

This indicates that countries in this region should ramp up action on the SDGs in general between now and 2030.

- The Asia-Pacific average rank has decreased in the reviewed period.
- The reviewed countries in the region are underperforming when compared to global performance.

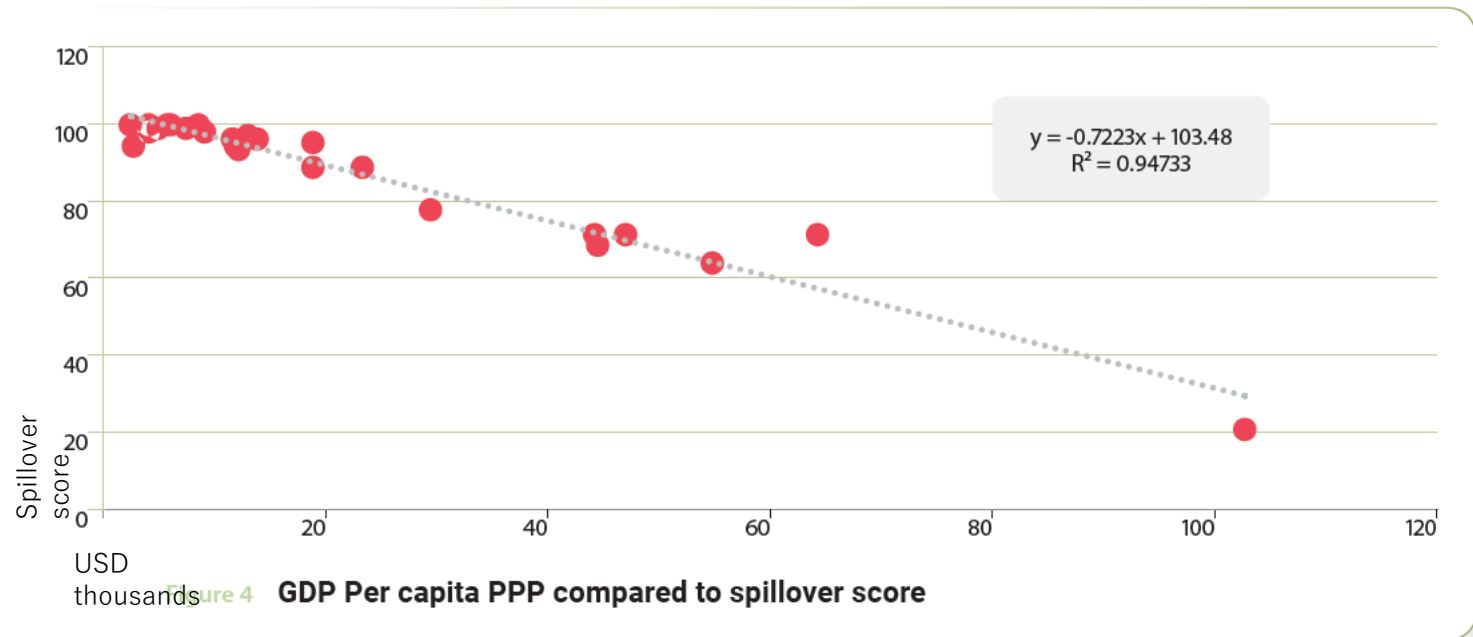
Context 3: SDG Performance is correlated with GDP per capita



- But there is variation around the trend and wealthier countries may be imposing costs on other countries with spillovers

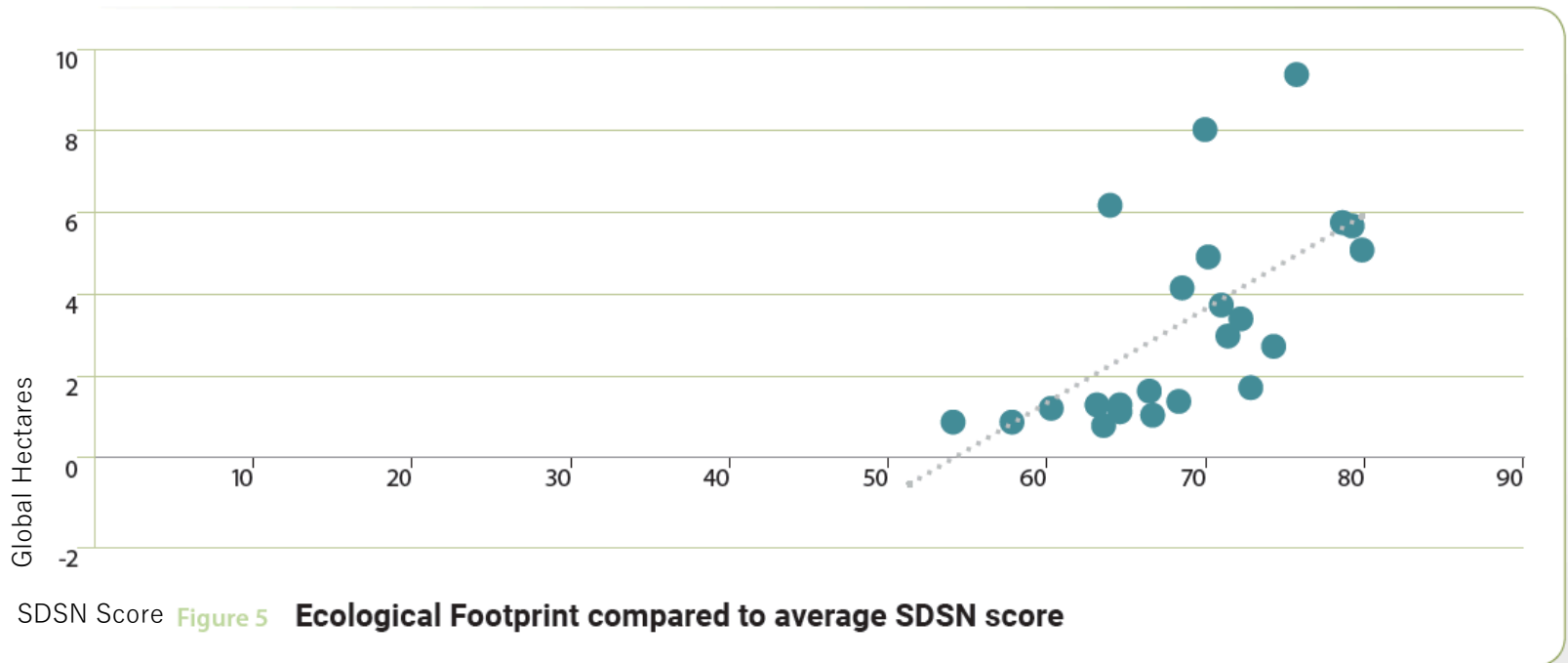
- Countries with higher GDP per capita score higher on the SDG Index than countries with less GDP per capita.

Context 4: Wealthier countries also have higher spillovers



- The performance increase of some countries also correlates with an increased spillover score.
- *Spillovers (see notes) are grouped in (i) environment, (ii) economy, finance, and governance and (iii) security.
- This is not sustainable, as the spillover also closely correlates to specific environmental footprint

...and higher ecological footprints...



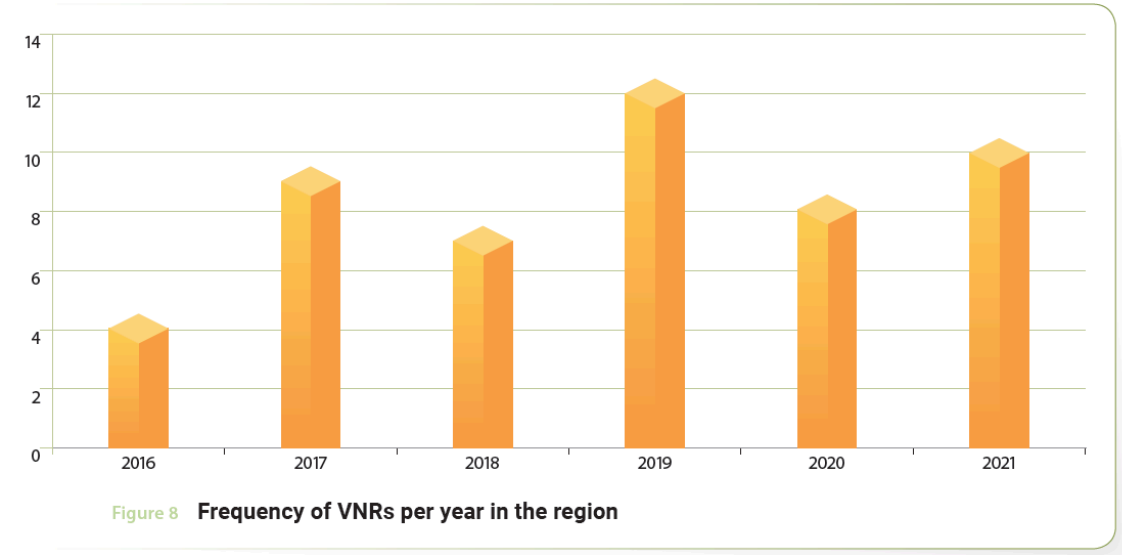
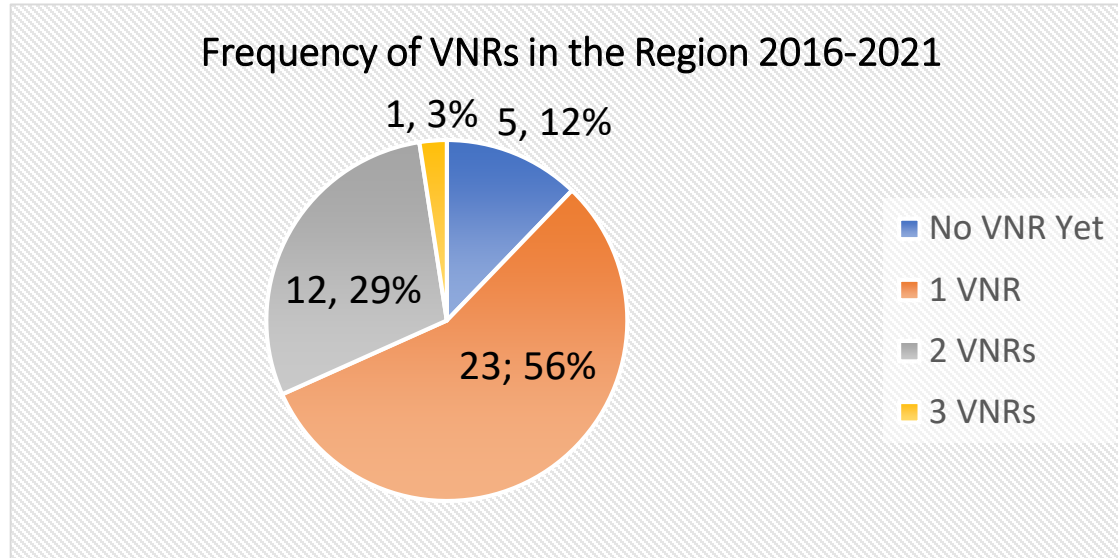
SDSN Score **Figure 5 Ecological Footprint compared to average SDSN score**

- Development gains still happen too much at the cost of the environment
- At macro level, environment is still the *trade-off* of development.

Focus areas of study

- 1. The VNR process;**
- 2. Environmental content and challenges;**
- 3. Data and indicators;**
- 4. Institutional arrangements,**
- 5. Financing and governance; and**
- 6. Others.**

Frequency of VNRs in Asia and the Pacific



- A total of 50 VNRs between 2016-2021
 - Slight increase over time
 - Slightly above average (total volume) compared to other regions of the world.
 - Countries tend to produce longer subsequent VNRs compared to their first ones
 - Second and third VNRs tend to engage deeper with the SDGs.
 - VNRs are an important exercise for countries to tackle the complex and interlinked SDGs.

Sections most frequently included in VNRs

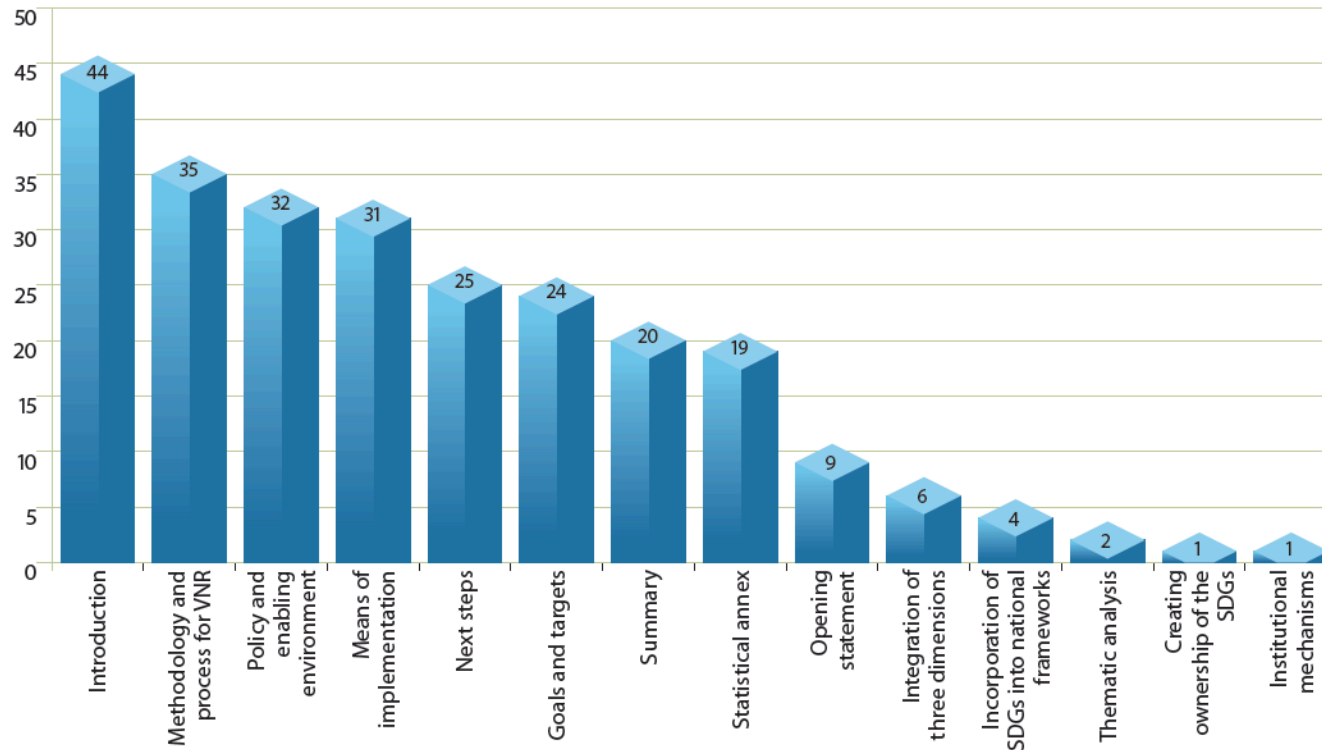


Figure 10 Common Sections in VNRs

- Sections and chapters that were **not** as often included involve 1) integration, 2) statistical data, and 3) institutional mechanisms.
- These could benefit from more focus in future VNRs.

How Much is the Environment Featured in VNRs?

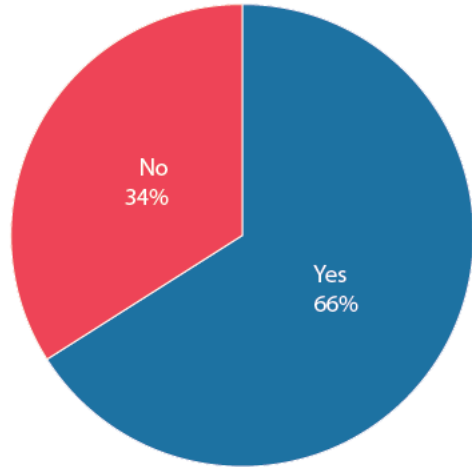


Figure 13 VNRs with dedicated environmental sections

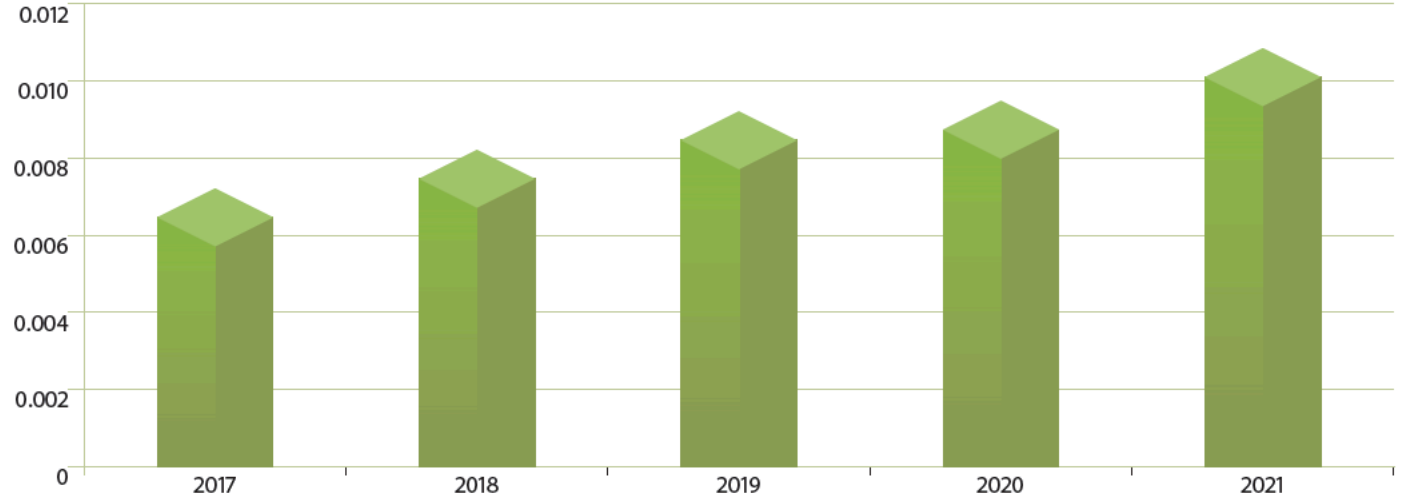


Figure 16 Comparison of environmental key words over time

- Two thirds of the reviewed VNRs had dedicated environment chapters or sections discussing the environmental situation. SDG focus of HLPF cycles have impacted this result to an extent.
- Did later VNRs have more environmental content than earlier ones?

What percentage of VNR Content was environment related?

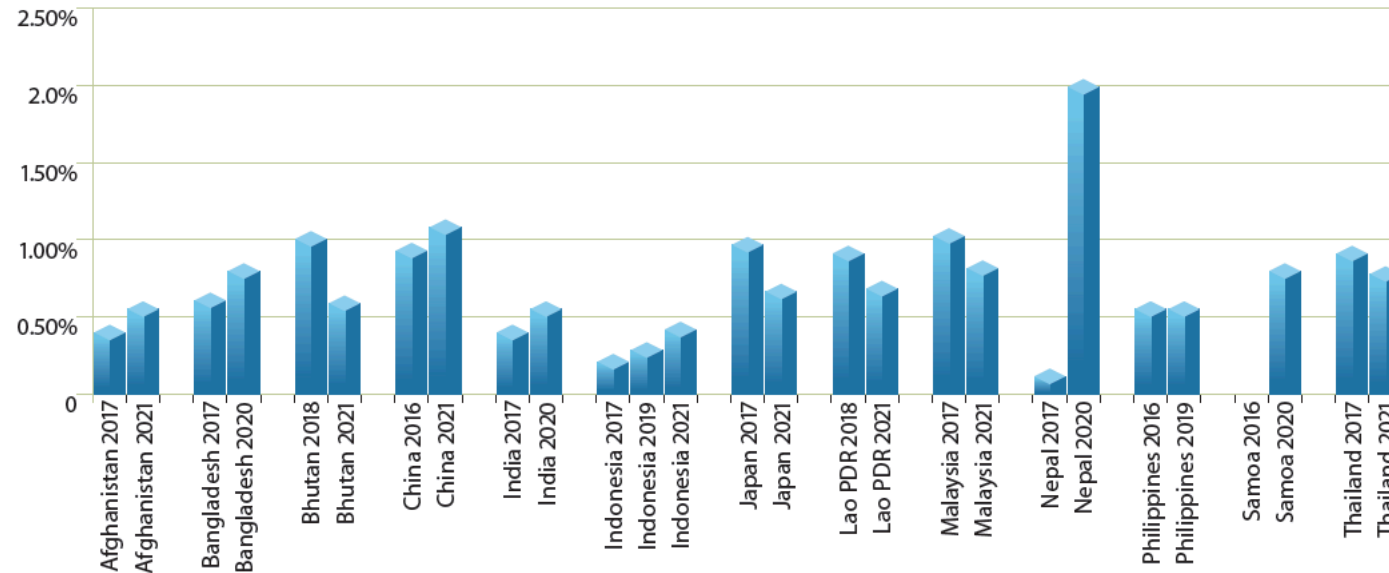


Figure 17 Proportion of environmental key words in successive VNRs

- Frequency of environmental terms counted show limited discussion of environmental issues in most VNRs—21 out of 50 had 1% of environmental terms or more.
- Discussion of environmental issues should be stronger in future VNRs.

Balance of 3Ds in VNRs

Table 5 Frequency of thematic key words across VNRs

Environment		Society		Economy	
biodiversity	1584	child	5468	economy	8460
climate	6242	birth	1670	business	3438
environment	4148	education	11116	employment	3972
forest	2776	gender	3682	finance	3836
water	7456	health	12298	gdp	2554
green	1958	human	3848	growth	5434
emission	1564	justice	1634	infrastructure	4402
ecosystem	1454	inclusion	4198	technology	4018
pollution	1356	poverty	5901	income	3188
renewable	1346	social	7484	innovation	2630
Total	29884	57299		41932	

- Environmental key terms only mentioned half as often as social terms
- Social issues are predominately featured in the VNRs, followed by economic focused terms, with environmental terms occurring least frequently
- Climate (PA) increasingly mentioned in VNRs

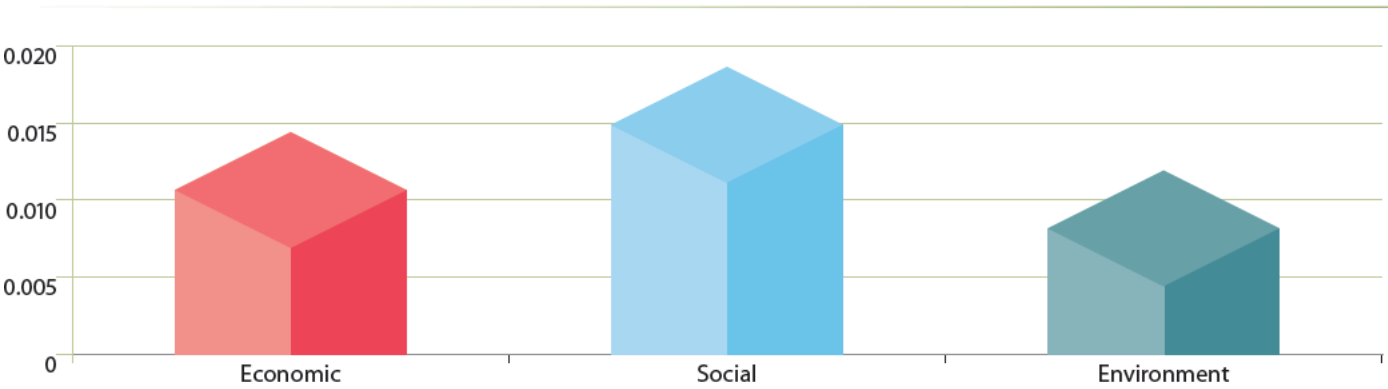


Figure 15 Average frequency for top-10 words

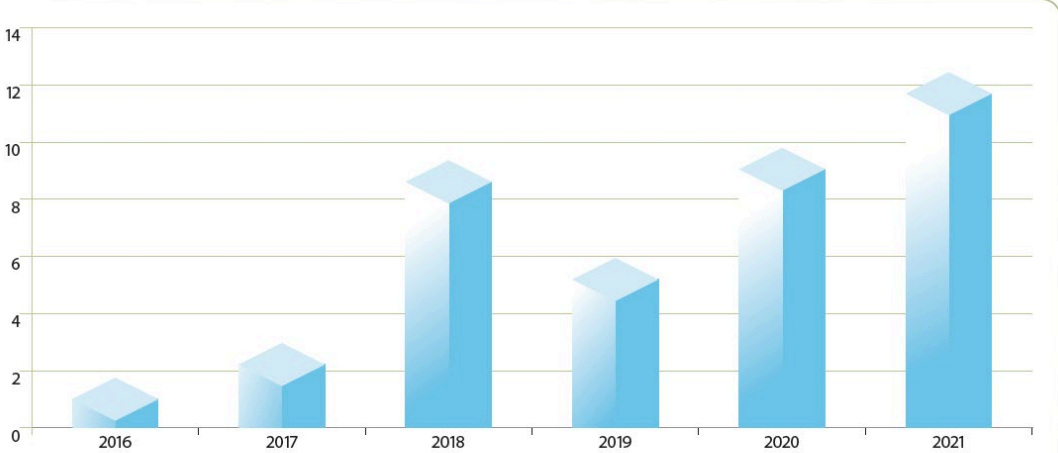


Figure 18 Climate agreement terms over time

The Type of Governance May Influence Performance

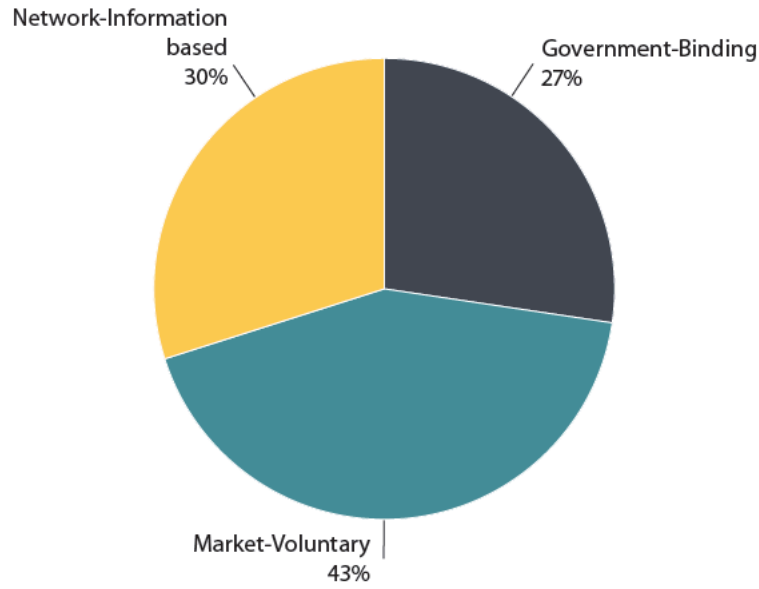


Figure 12 Share of governance focus across reviewed VNRs

Governance Styles Key Words		
Government - binding	Market - voluntary	Network – information based
Protect	Growth	Cooperate
Law	Corporate	Stakeholder
Conserve	Market	Engage
Monitor	Promote	Participate
Tax	Technology	Consultation
Enforce	Business	Network
Justice	Compete	Academia
Rule	Partner	Society

- Text analysis suggests the region favours using market-oriented governance styles for the SDG
 - Few exceptions include DPRK and Viet Nam
- But market oriented/voluntary approaches on their own may not be sufficient to improve performance on the SDGs, especially environment.
 - Need regulatory approaches?

Environment-related indicators reported in VNRs across the SDGs: Large variation

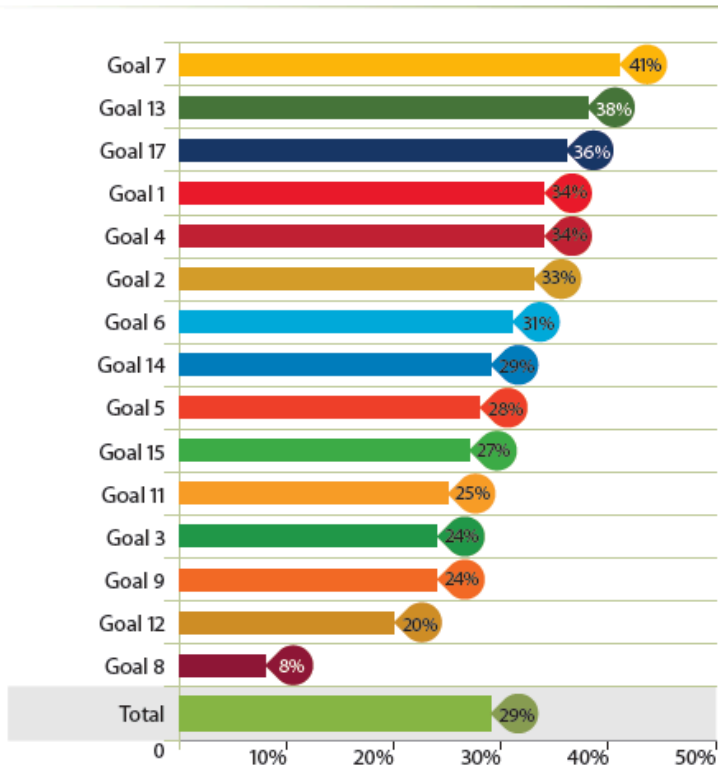


Figure 19 Level of reporting on the 92 environment-related SDG indicators across the 50 VNRs

- The 92 environment-related SDG indicators was used to assess the level of environment-related indicators reported in VNRs.
- Overall, only 29% of the 92 SDG indicators were reported in VNRs--varying from 3%-100% across countries.
- Environment-related indicators under energy (SDG 7) and climate change (SDG 13) were reported more and those under SDG 8 (material footprint and material consumption) and SDG 12 on SCP were less reported, with variations.

The Use of Local/Global Indicators also Varied

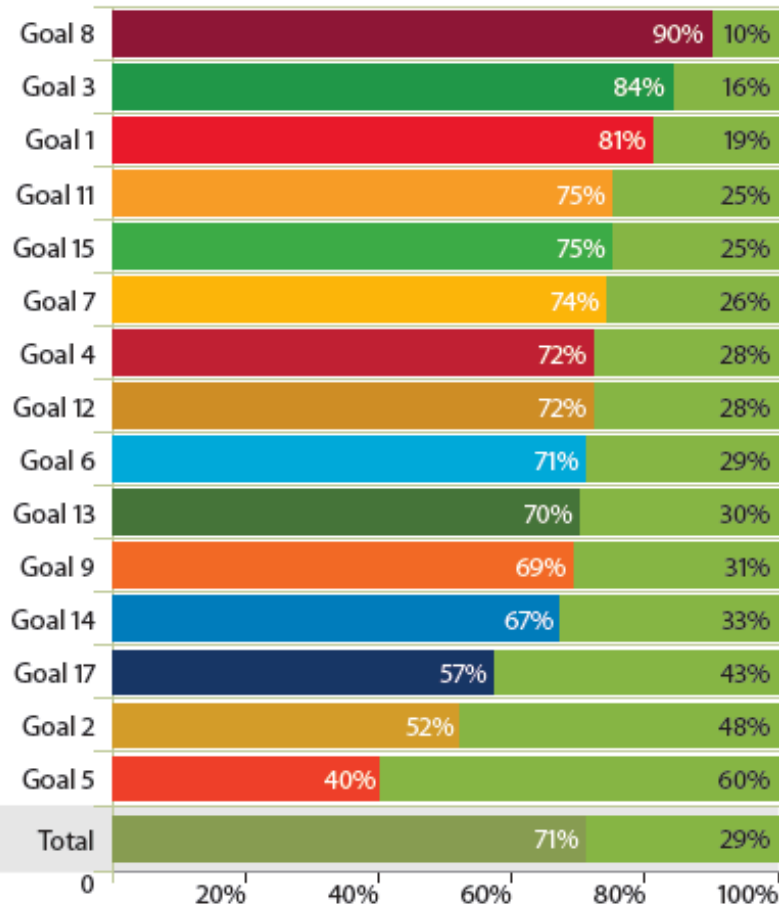


Figure 20 Proportion of global indicators use across SDGs in the VNRs

- Overall, about 70% of the environment-related indicators reported in VNRs adopted global SDG indicators or similar ones
- This varied from almost 0% to almost 100% across countries.
- In the remaining 30%, countries used local indicators* in the VNRs.
- Environment-related indicators under SDG 8 and SDG 3 used global SDG indicators more often than those under SDG 5 and SDG 2-- with a variation ranging from 40% - 90% across the goals.

Note: * An example of the local indicator for 12.4.1 is:

Global indicator: 12.4.2 (a) Hazardous waste generated per capita; and (b) proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment

Local indicator: 12.4.2 (a) Release reduction of POPs to the environment and 12.4.2 (b) Release reduction of Hg to the environment.

Recapping some key messages

- AP region is only on track to achieve around 10% of the SDGs by 2030
 - Should increase the frequency of VNR preparation up until 2030.
 - VNRs need to go beyond the capital cities and include entire country in review (rural urban disparities)
 - VNRs should be coherent over time and check what was achieved since previous review.
 - Should increase links between MEAs and SDGs
 - UN can organize regional capacity building workshops to examine discrepancies, build awareness and promote peer learning on good practices on environmental SDGs.
 - Spillovers, synergies and trade offs (env still main trade-off)

Thank you!