

Sultanate of Oman Voluntary National Review 2019

Developing a Child-Sensitive and Child-Inclusive SDG Voluntary National Review



Introduction and Background

Since the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development was announced in September 2015, the Sultanate of Oman has worked tirelessly to honour its international commitment to achieving these goals. The integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into both the 9th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) and the Oman 2040 Vision is testament to this.

Last year, Oman opted to conduct a Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) to showcase its plans, activities and results with respect to the national implementation of all 17 SDGs. Oman held consultations at national and local level, with various development partners representing the government, the private sector, civil society, academic institutions and UN agencies. The Sultanate presented its VNR report at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the UN Headquarters in New York in July 2019.

In Oman, including children, adolescents and young people in the consultation process was paramount. Oman has a very young national population: 45.7 percent is under the age of 20. This demographic demonstrates that children and young people really **are** the country's future. It goes without saying, therefore, that the extent to which Oman meets the 2030 SDGs will directly affect and depend on the children of Oman.

Child Rights Advocacy within the VNR Process

The VNR provided a strong platform to advocate for children's rights and child-centred planning. It presented a unique opportunity to illuminate issues that are of concern to children, adolescents and young people. It also empowered young people to speak up and voice their concerns and aspirations at the very highest political level.

To ensure young people's views and opinions were incorporated into VNR, and to amplify their voices in setting priorities towards achieving the SDGs in Oman, the government invited civil society organisations and UNICEF to facilitate consultations with children, adolescents and young people. Included in this group were children and adolescents with disabilities and other vulnerabilities.

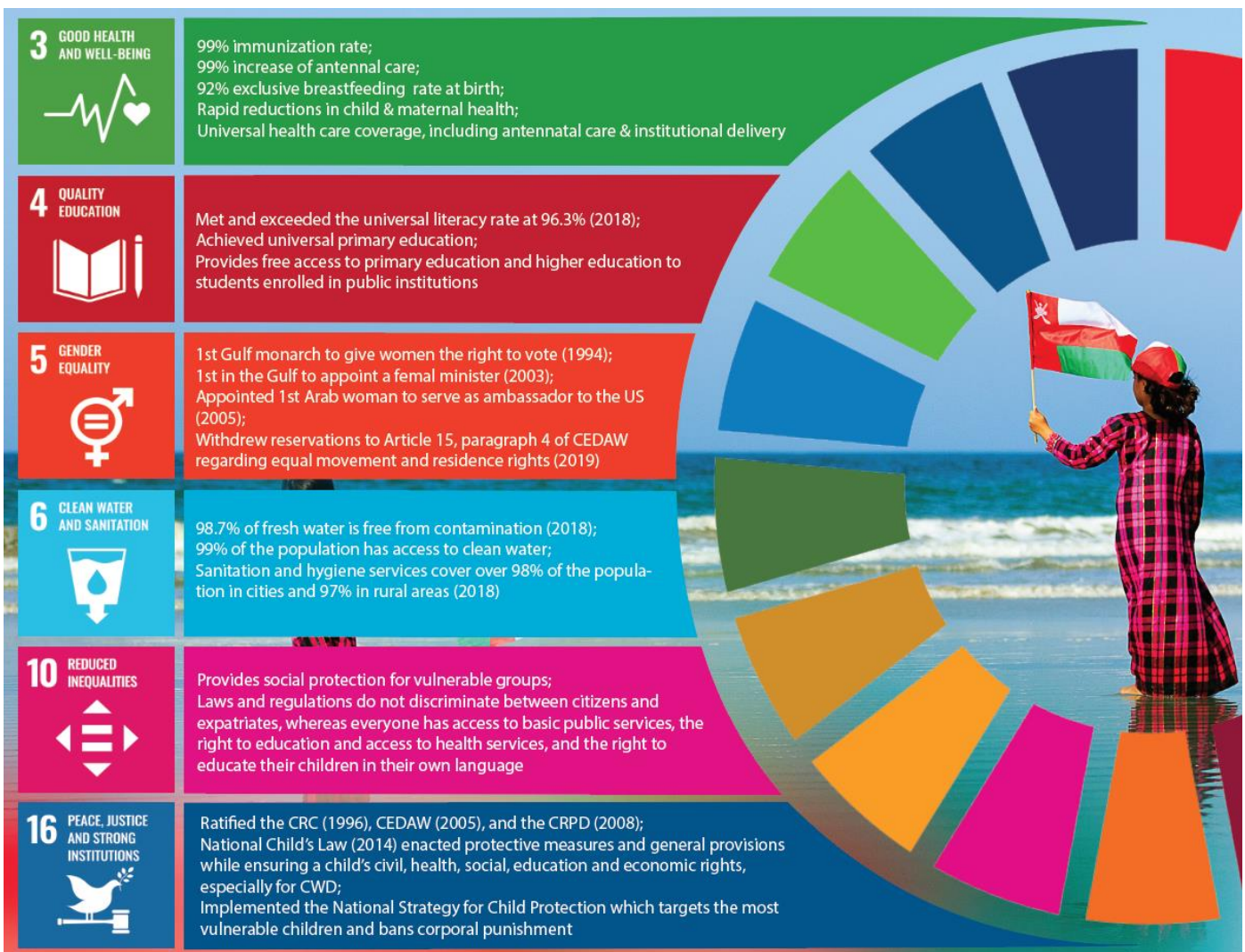
The process equipped children and adolescents with an understanding of the SDGs and the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and with practical tools for voicing their opinion on priorities and goals that are important to them. These consultations were guided by the principles enshrined in the CRCs: non-discrimination and equality; children's best interests; survival and development; and participation and inclusion.

This short report therefore first presents the progress Oman has made towards achieving the SDGs. It then highlights the multiple ways Oman engaged children and adolescents, heard their voices, and reflected their views in the VNR. It sets out the ways in which young people were empowered to

speak up and to become themselves important agents of change. The report also outlines some of the other ongoing initiatives to engage children and adolescents in Oman, and to ensure their views are integrated in a meaningful and systemic way into the national development agenda. The report concludes with some reflections of Omani children about the SGDs.

Finally, to underscore its commitment to youth inclusion, the Oman delegation to the HLPF welcomed young people at side events and actively encouraged their participation. These included, the Safe to Learn campaign event, and the joint Government of Oman-UNICEF event on Progress Towards SDG Target 16.2: End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

Key Achievements

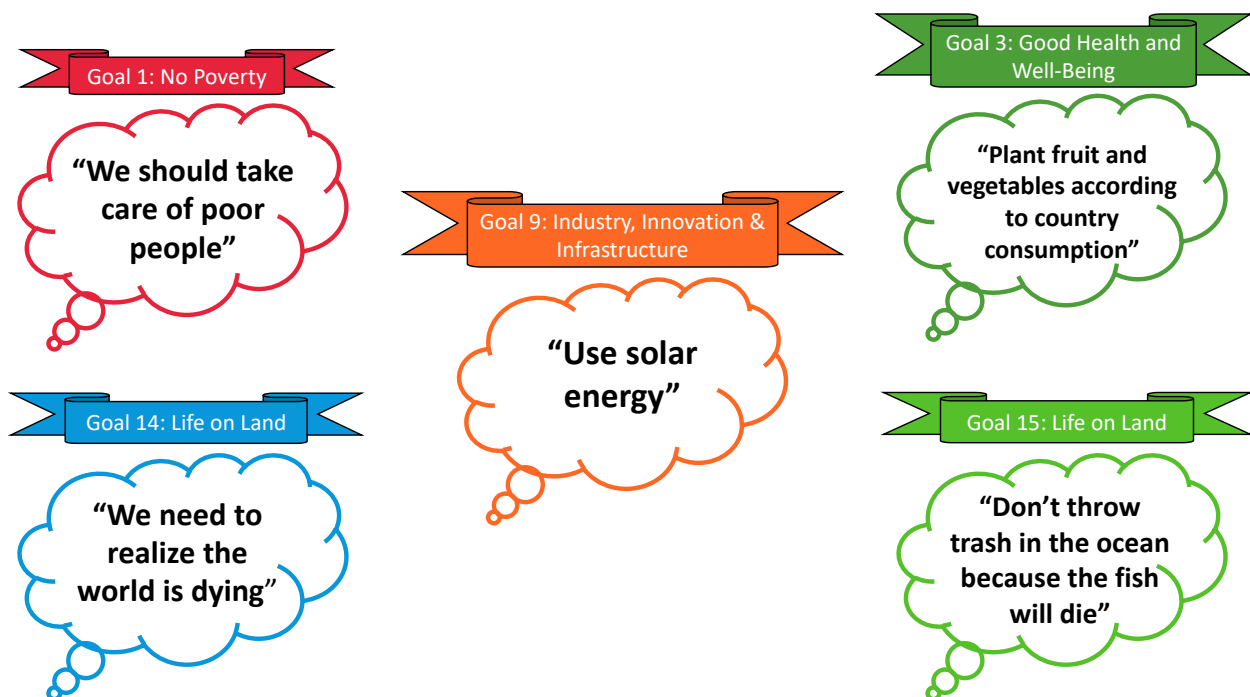


Key Initiatives in Develop a Child-Inclusive VNR

SDG Children's Workshop

At the invitation of the Government of Oman and in advance of the VNR, UNICEF and Children's First Association (CFA), an Omani NGO, organized a workshop on the SDGs for children between the ages of 8 and 14 including those with disabilities. The aim of the workshop was to increase the children's understanding of the SDGs, emphasize the importance of their role in achieving the goals, and to hear how well they thought the Sultanate was doing in achieving the SDGs. At the end of the workshop the children's suggestions and comments were collated into a report which in turn fed into the VNR process. To amplify their learning, the participants were encouraged to facilitate additional discussions with their peers.

Sample Feedback from Youth Participants: How Will You Help Accomplish the SDGs?



Digital Engagement

Children's First Association (CFA) and UNICEF engaged with children and young people and solicited their opinions on the SDGs via social media. UNICEF also ran an SDGs quiz on its Instagram channel.

Evidence Generation and Data Mapping

The Government of Oman and UNICEF mapped administrative data systems across a wide range of sectors against key child-related SDG indicators. The findings support the Government in addressing gaps to strengthen and monitor Oman's progress towards Agenda 2030 and an improved second VNR.

Other Initiatives Reinforcing Children's Voices in Oman

The Government of Oman seeks to include children's views and to empower children as agents of change in an on-going and systemic manner. The following are some of the initiatives adopted to achieve this.

Children and the Future Media

Since 2018, UNICEF and CFA have held a seminar called "Children and the Future Media" as a side event during the Muscat International Book Fair. Discussions in these seminars have focused on topics such as the importance of media education for children; the major role the media plays in influencing children's behaviours, opinions and attitudes; and the importance of developing innovative media content – especially in Arabic – for children in Oman and the region. Participating children were encouraged to develop digital journalism and storytelling skills, and their videos and pictures were subsequently displayed publicly.

Child Protection Ambassadors

The Government of Oman developed its Child Protection Ambassadors initiative to train children at a young age to identify issues such as bullying or peer pressure, and advocate on behalf of themselves and other children in their communities. The benefits of the programme are manifold: Young people are better informed, their self-esteem and confidence grow, schools become safer places, and children become true leaders within their communities.

Private Sector Partnerships

Children "Take Over"

On 20 November each year – World Children's Day – the Government of Oman raises awareness about children's rights by supporting young people in "taking over" key roles in media, politics business, sport and entertainment. In 2019, with the support of Oman's Ministry of Education UNICEF, children "took over" operations and management of Muscat International Airport. Children with disabilities participated in this event. In previous years, children have "taken over" at Omantel, Siemens and the Oman Chamber of Commerce, run the newsrooms at Public Authority for Radio and Television, and participated in an emergency simulation exercise evacuating Salalah hospital.

Oman Technology Fund

The COVID-19 outbreak and the economic fallout have unarguably compounded many of the most challenging problems facing young people today: access to good-quality education and training, and obtaining decent work opportunities. In recognition of this, Oman Technology Fund partnered with

UNICEF in June 2020 to host a COVID-19 Youth Technology Challenge to encourage young people to develop solutions to tackle these problems. During a three-day “hackathon” 140 participants from Oman and across the Middle East worked on 60 tech-based projects. Judges chose six top projects to receive funding and incubation support to grow and scale up across the region.

Improved Policies and Public Financing for Children

The Government of Oman, with UNICEF support, conduct evaluation and analysis to identify gaps in policy and financing for children and the SDGs. The objective is to enable decision makers to better prioritize children’s issues within the national budget framework and thus ensure investment in relevant social services that are essential to human capital formation. As such Investment cases for selected issues that have a high return will be developed e.g. investments in early child development and in adolescents. With technical support, the government will develop child-sensitive budgeting guidelines as well as measures to increase the equity, effectiveness, and efficiency of public finance for children.

Strengthening the Child Protection System (including case management)

The Government of Oman is working with UNICEF to strengthen the child protection system. This is being done through improved information management and the development of a child-centred, and streamlined approach to helping child victims of violence. In addition, Oman is developing a harmonized national system for disability classification, which will facilitate early detection, referral, and timely intervention.

Strengthening the Social Workforce

The Government of Oman, with UNICEF support, is strengthening the social workforce through training and the development of an accredited professional development programme. This will benefit in particular the social workforce supporting children with disabilities and other children in need of special protection.

VNR Lab Speakers: Biographies



HH Sayyida Dr Mona bin Fahd Al Said

Holding a PhD in Special Educational Needs and Policy from Kings College, London, HH Sayyida Dr Mona bint Fahd Al Said currently serves as the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). Founder and chairperson of Children First Association, HH is also a patron to Oman Cancer Association and speaks on varied social issues. HH has also received the HH Sheikh Isa bin Ali al Khalifa’s Award for her voluntary work.



HE Ambassador Dr Mohamed Al Hassan

Holding a PhD in Economics from the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Information (MESI), HE currently serves as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary/Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, New York and Vice President of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. HE Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Al Hassan has 31 years of experience in the Diplomatic Corps and has represented the Sultanate of Oman at various international conferences.



Maitha Ahmed Mohammed Al Issai

Ms Al Issai is currently acting Head of Childhood Programmes Department within the General Directorate for Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development. She is part of a working group following up on the implantation of the SDGs. She has been with MoSD since 2013. Ms Al Issai was part of the team which prepared the Social Work Strategy 2016-2025 and the National Strategy for Childhood 2016-2025. She holds a BA in Early Childhood Education.

For More Information

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