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High Level Statements and the 2030 Agenda: From Aspiration to Implementation?

*A Review of Statements
delivered during the General
Debate of the 71st United
Nations General Assembly
(September 20 - 26 2016)*

From policy to action

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1. Introduction

One year after the [United Nations Sustainable Development Summit](#), Heads of State and Government gathered again at the United Nations for the [71st General Assembly](#) (UNGA) General Debate. The main theme of this UNGA, as proposed by the President of the UNGA (PGA) is: “*The Sustainable Development Goals: A universal push to transform our world*” and it was expected that leaders would be using this most prestigious public space to layout the steps taken so far in the implementation of the [2030 Agenda and of the SDGs](#).

Are countries actually moving from the aspiration reflected in the Summit to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

This report analyses a series of official statements delivered during the UNGA 71 General Debate and how the theme proposed by the PGA was presented by them. The main question guiding the analysis was: *Are countries actually moving from the aspiration reflected in the Summit to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?*

The research analysed references to the 2030 Agenda and to the SDGs as well as to national implementation plans and engagement of civil society and other stakeholders on the statement. An [Annex](#) to this report includes the list of all countries researched, the full text related to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as well as the links to the complete statement.

2. Methodology

This review is based on the research of **115 statements** ([Annex 1](#)) delivered by Heads of State and Government during the UN 71st General Assembly General Debate, from September 20-26 2016. From the 115 researched statements, **14 were not available** at the [UN official website](#) (list below) and **three statements** did not include any reference to the 2030 Agenda.

The review included statements delivered and/or made available in English, Spanish and French. Statements only available in the other official UN languages (Chinese, Russian and Arabic) were not reviewed due to capacity issues. Statements that were not available at the UN official website were not analysed as the focus

was on texts officially part of the United Nations files.

The review targeted how member states referred to the 2030 Agenda and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation as a “package” and it does not analyse how specific goals were addressed, prioritized or detailed.

The research checked for messages related to the “domestication”, “adaptation” and “internalization” of the SDGs into the national development plans and strategies. We searched for references to national accountability structures or frameworks to track the implementation and if member states mentioned the inclusion and participation of civil society and other stakeholders in the implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda at national level.

It is important to clarify that this report only analyses statements delivered during the General Debate and does not include other statements delivered during side-events held at the margins of the UNGA.

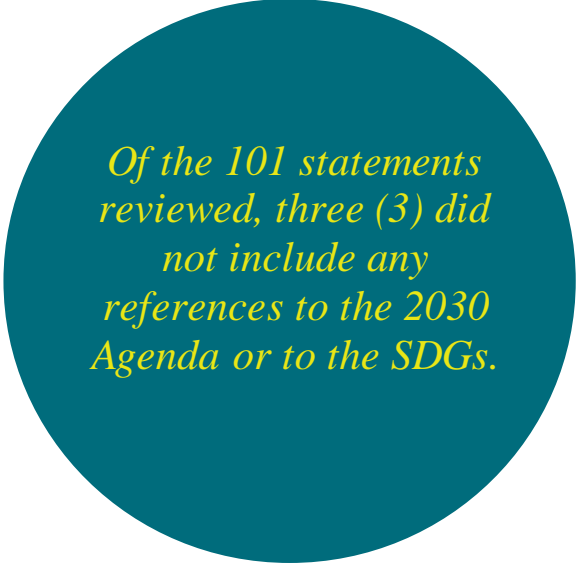
Additionally, although some countries may not have detailed their implementation plans at the UNGA statements this may not necessarily mean that they are not actually undertaking measures to internalize the 2030 Agenda at national level.

The General Debate is “the” space for all Members of the United Nations to express their views on the most pressing global and national issues and some Member States decided to either prioritize other issues or to not expand on their national commitments towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The reason behind those decisions are beyond the scope of this report but we invite colleagues to use it as a basis for further discussions and advocacy work.

3. Data and Analysis

This study researched **115 statements** delivered during the 71st UN General Assembly General Debate, from September 20-26 2016. It encompasses countries from all regions of the world, including developing and developed countries.

From the 115 statements searched, 14 were not available at the UN official website and were not included in the analysis. Of the 101 statements actually reviewed, three (3) did not include any references to the 2030 Agenda or the SDGs.



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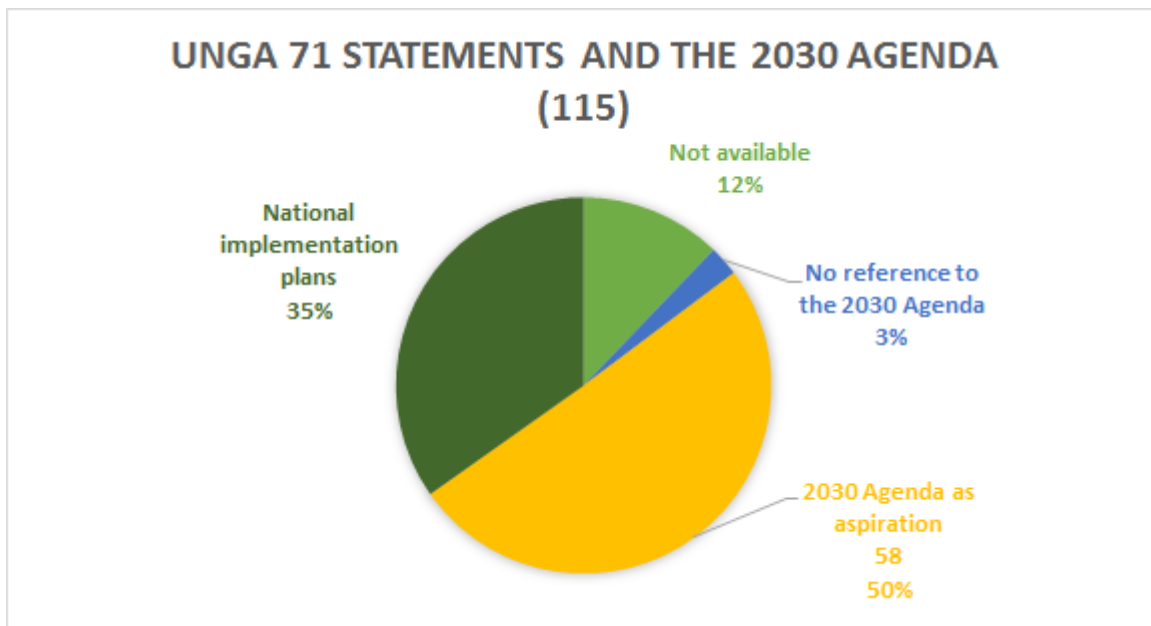
(A) *Statements not found at the UN website (14):* Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Canada, China, Hungary, Italy, Korea, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Sri Lanka, Uganda and United States.

(B) *No reference to the 2030 Agenda identified (3):* Ecuador, Jordan and Lebanon.

But implementation is necessary to deliver on the goals we set. And it is necessary for this organisation to remain

relevant and credible. To survive. (Netherlands)

98 of the countries (or 85%) researched had at least a **minimum reference** to the 2030 Agenda in their statements. At first sight, this is a very positive number and shows that the 2030 Agenda remains a priority at the highest governmental levels. However, the references vary enormously between countries, from mere references to the official theme of the 71st UNGA, to “reaffirmations” of commitments to the presentation of fully-fledged national multi-stakeholder implementation plans.



In this analysis, we divided countries that referred to the 2030 Agenda between:

- (1) those that mentioned to the 2030 Agenda as an “**aspiration**”, including countries that only referred to the 2030 Agenda to congratulate the PGA for proposing it as the main theme for the UNGA71, those that “recalled” the commitment towards the SDGs or “reminded” that it was time for implementation and
- (2) those that outlined their **implementation plans** in at least some degree.

Detailed data follows below:

- (1) **58 countries or 50%** of the statements researched referred to the 2030 Agenda as an **aspiration**, mainly using the statement to remind and reinforce the commitments and to **call for** its implementation.
- (2) **40 countries or 35%** of the statements researched not only reinforced the **aspirations** of the 2030 Agenda but also referred to their **implementation plans**, including the “domestication” of the SDGs, alignment of national sustainable development plans, setting up of follow up structures and

work with stakeholders, including civil society.

2030 Agenda Review	Number of Statements	Percentage (%)
<i>Statement not available at UN Website</i>	14	12.17391
<i>No reference to the 2030 Agenda</i>	3	2.608696
<i>2030 Agenda as aspiration</i>	58	50.43478
<i>Reference to National implementation plans</i>	40	34.78261
<i>Total</i>	115	100

“Les Objectifs du développement durable et les Accords de Paris sur le climat nous fournissent un cadre volontariste. A nous de travailler d'arrache-pied pour les implémenter. C'est notre devoir pour les générations qui vont nous suivre. C'est notre devoir pour un monde plus sûr et plus respectueux de notre planète ». (Belgium)

“Today, let us get organized to ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals fare better. Since it is about "transforming our world and leaving no one behind", let us then find wherewithal to realize our ambitions ” (Cameroon)

(1) *The 2030 Agenda as an Aspiration to be reaffirmed (58 countries)*:*

Angola, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guyana, Iraq, Ireland, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malawi, Mali, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Monaco, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia

** Includes congratulatory remarks for the theme of the 71st General Assembly*

“The Sustainable Development Goals have already been adopted into law in our country, we were the first country to



do this”. (Colombia)

“La Suisse a été l'un des premiers pays à présenter des mesures nationales en vue de la réalisation de l'Agenda 2030. Elle est déterminée à poursuivre son engagement”. (Switzerland)

At least **40 countries** used the UNGA General Debate to share their experience and plans towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and of the SDGs. Messages included information about the “domestication” of the SDGs; the review of national development plans; the setting up of national structures to follow up on the implementation and even the commitment to a 18th Goal (Lao PDR).

(2) *Translation of the 2030 Agenda to the national level: **National Plans (40)***

Albania, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cote D' Ivoire, DRC, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, Georgia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Lao PDR, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mongolia, Mozambique, Netherlands, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Swaziland, Switzerland, Tanzania, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Zimbabwe

“Ces Objectifs que nous avons tous voulu universels, ne concernent pas seulement les Pays en développement ou pauvres. Ils s'adressent à tous les pays en s'adaptant aux réalités locales et au différentiel de développement, sachant qu'un monde durable ne saurait se construire sans une transition écologique au Nord ni un développement responsable au Sud. (Madagascar)

It is interesting to see that, from the 40 countries that referred to national plans, **only 6 (or 15%)** were developed countries¹: Bulgaria, Finland, Netherlands, Estonia, Switzerland and Japan.

This raises some concerns about how developed countries are perceiving the 2030 Agenda as a universal commitment, one that must be implemented by ALL countries and not only a framework for (although most needed) development cooperation.



For instance, **Denmark** shared very positive news about the mobilization of resources to support the implementation of the SDGs in developing countries (see below) but was not very clear about its own national implementation:

“That is why the Prime Minister of Denmark last week announced a new Sustainable Development Goals investment fund. The Danish Government has initially allocated 15 million US Dollars to this fund, and intends to allocate more in the coming years. The goal is to raise capital from private investors and reach a capital base of up to 750 million US Dollars. Investments will be made across the Sustainable Development Goals, to improve energy, climate, industry and infrastructure, food production and health in order to generate sustainable growth, jobs and tax revenue in developing countries” (Denmark).

¹ According to: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/wesp/wesp_current/2014wesp_country_classification.pdf

Only **four countries** - all developing countries - mentioned national institutional frameworks for the accountability of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: **El Salvador, Indonesia, Mozambique and Timor-Leste**. All those countries presented national multi-stakeholder structures already in place.

“We need to mainstream SDGs’ goals and targets, universal principles such as human rights, in all activities and work of the committees, agencies, and related bodies under the UN system”. (Indonesia)

 <p>El Salvador</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First country in the world to sign up an agreement with the United Nations for a long-term collaboration towards an accelerated implementation of the SDGs. ● Have coordinated the SDGs with the 5-Year National Development Plan (“El Salvador productivo, educado y seguro”). ● Developing their national sustainable development agenda aligned with the 2030 Agenda. ● Have created a National Sustainable Development Council, a joint government and civil society mechanism to consult, agree and coordinate at national level the implementation of the SDGs. 	 <p>Indonesia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indonesia is fully committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda and have taken concrete measures in this direction. ● Mainstreamed the SDGs into National Development Plan. ● Finalized legal and institutional frameworks for national implementation. ● Engaged all stakeholders, including local governments, academics, civil society as well as philanthropic organizations. ● Developed national and sub-national action plan guidelines; the SDGs database; and monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanism.
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Mozambique

- The 2015-2019 Government Five Year Programme, their governance blueprint, already reflects part of the principles and the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- In order to mainstream, monitor and report on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, have recently established a National Reference Group involving representatives from the Government Parliament, Civil Society, Private Sector and Cooperating Partners.
- Reference Group will follow up progress on the indicators selected to assess targets until 2030, as well as deal with policy measures, funding possibilities. Reference Group intended to make the implementation of the SDGs more inclusive, consistent and transparent, “which all different stakeholders can feel part to”.



Timor-Leste

- Joined a group of eight countries to share good practices and experiences on implementing the Agenda.
- Formed Inter-Ministerial Working Group in collaboration with civil society and development partners.
- Mapped indicators for the 17 Goals and selected 20 targets to monitor implementation.
- Convened high-level international conference to discuss ways to advance the Agenda on March 2017.
- Attempted to harmonize the SDGs with planning of activities and budget.
- Will include the SDGs in the review of the strategic development plan.

“En el marco de este trabajo conjunto con las Naciones Unidas, es fundamental el empoderamiento de una diversidad de actores en el proceso de implementación. Con este fin, estamos creando el Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo Sostenible, un mecanismo conjunto entre gobierno y sociedad civil encargado de consultar, concertar y coordinar a nivel nacional del cumplimiento de los ODS. En El Salvador, estamos convencidos que los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible deben convertirse en una agenda de la sociedad”. (El Salvador)

From the statements reviewed, we identified **15 that flagged the participation of civil society** and other stakeholders with regards to the 2030 Agenda:

*References to **civil society and stakeholders, participation** (15)*

Bulgaria, El Salvador, Finland, Georgia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Mongolia, Mozambique ,Switzerland, Tanzania, Timor-Leste and Zimbabwe.

“Within Georgia, our goal is to ensure maximum inclusion of all stakeholders in the decision making process. We have created several platforms where we have regular dialogue with civil society and private sector representatives. (Georgia).



The General Debate was also an opportunity for several countries to call upon developed countries for a stronger international cooperation. At least **18 developing countries** shared this message in their statements in connection to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

The 2030 Agenda and the call for stronger international cooperation (18)

Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, Côte D’Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and Vietnam.

“In 2015, we adopted a transformative development agenda with a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The political will behind the agenda needs to be translated into concrete and meaningful support for countries that are lagging behind. In order to catch up, the developing world needs access to transformative technologies”. (Bangladesh)

“We have decided to dedicate one day in each session of our Parliament for discussions only on SDGs. This will enable us to constantly monitor their progress and this will give us good results”. (India)

Four (4) countries mentioned the role of **Parliamentarians** in the implementation and follow up of the 2030 Agenda: India, Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

From our past experiences of implementing Millennium Development Goals at the national level, we learned that regular follow up and review mechanisms are essential to achieving the SDGs. Therefore, accountability and the quality of governance will eventually define the success of SDGs. (Mongolia)

This report analysed if and how governments presented their national implementation plans during the UNGA General Debate, one year after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Although it was positive that at least 85% of the countries used this high level space to highlight this universal Agenda, it was also concerning to see the disparities in those references.

Some countries took the opportunity to outline clear multi-stakeholder implementation plans but several others only reaffirmed commitments or called for their implementation.

From the statements reviewed, it was clear that developing countries seem to have taken the lead in “domesticating” the 2030 Agenda at the national level and several of them mentioned the support of the United Nations to do so. Member States may need to have further discussions about what (if any) role the UN could play to support them in

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internalizing the universal commitments reflected in the SDGs.

Civil society partners should remain vigilant and advocate for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and of the SDGs to continue featuring as a priority in the statements delivered at the UN General Assembly General Debates. The maintenance of the highest levels of priority will be critical for this global commitment to bring the expected changes for the people and the planet by 2030.

5. Annex

The link below includes the list of all countries researched, the full text related to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as well as the links to the complete statements.

Check here: <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/T30-Tracking-of-HoS-Statements-UNGA71-2016.pdf>

This report was prepared by Naiara Costa, Together 2030 International Secretariat. We thank World Vision International for the support with some research material and Irene Ezra for supporting part of the statement research.

November 2016





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