Progress on the Implementation of The 2020 Uganda Voluntary National Review Report Commitments

Survey Findings

August 2021

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Acronyms

BDSF	Business Development Services Facility
CG	Central Government
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
GIZ	German Development Cooperation
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development
ICT	Information, Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGs	Local Governments
LGDP	Local Government Development Plan
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
MoING	Ministry of Information and National Guidance
NCCRG	National CSO Core Reference Group
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPA	National Planning Authority
NSI	National Statistical Indicators
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PDM	Parish Development Model
PSFU	Private Sector Foundation Uganda
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Solutions Network
TWGs	Technical Working Groups
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNNGOF	Uganda National NGO Forum
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
VLRs	Voluntary Local Reviews

Executive Summary

In July 2020, Uganda presented the second VNR to the HLPF with follow-up recommendations. In order to ascertain the progress in implementing the VNR 2020 recommendations/commitments, UNNGOF with support from Action for Sustainable Development undertook an assessment study.

The Government recommended specific action on the following overarching themes; Stronger partnerships, coordination and collaboration; Deeper localization and popularization of the SDG agenda; Building a leadership culture for the SDG agenda at all levels; Promoting SDG-focused innovation by all the people in Uganda, especially young people; Focusing on Financing for SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential; and Strengthening Technology and Information Systems in SDG Reporting.

Key Findings:

- In order to strengthen SDG partnerships, coordination and collaboration, the Government has reviewed the SDG Coordination Framework and the SDG Roadmap. This review has informed the new SDG Roadmap 2021-2025. The new roadmap provides strategic guidance on the roles and responsibilities of key institutions and stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs.

- The SDG Advocacy and Communication Plan has also been revised to fit into the new SDG Roadmap. Further, the SDG Secretariat developed a Post-HLPF work plan that detailed the implementation of the VNR 2020 recommendations.Accordingly, the SDG Technical Working Groups have been empowered and strengthened to effectively localize and report on the SDGs.

- However, according to perceptions from the online survey, the knowledge and visibility for the SDGs to attract broader stakeholders' participation is still low. Further, the online survey revealed that the partnership between the CG and LGs on the SDGs implementation is still below average. This has implications on local resource mobilization, articulation of the SDGs into planning and citizens'participation. It also derails the concept of leaving no one behind. This assessment also found out that besides the limited LG linkages in the implementation of the VNR recommended actions, there is limited interaction between LGs on the SDGs.

- This assessment also observes limited interaction between the private sector and LGs on SDGs. On the other hand, the SDG engagement with young people is still highly centralized. Similarly, the promotion of SDG-focused innovation is still centralized with scattered efforts.

Key Recommendations:

- There is a need for a multi-sectoral integration of VNR commitments at both local and central government levels and across sectors to harness the inter-sectoral linkages that contribute towards achieving the SDGs.

- Streamline the youth and innovation hubs through the local government structures, the youth councils to enhance youth participating in planning and policy-making processes. Through the integrated programme approach across sectors, youth participation in programme implementation will be enhanced.

- There is a need to strengthen the public-private partnership model across sectors aligned to the SDG commitments. The role of the private sector can never be underscored in advancing the national commitments on SDGs. Building a shared purpose with the private sector on the SDGs will enhance localizations, domestic resource mobilization, sustainability and ownership of the development agenda by communities.

- CSOs needs to embrace a collective policy advocacy agenda and galvanize efforts to ensure a more progressive SDG agenda.

- Strengthen the data revolution among CSOs, the private sector, academia and the government in skills and systems.

1.1   The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Six years ago, after a rigorous and consultative process, a new global development agenda; the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the 193 members of the United Nations. The SDGs are transformational towards sustainable economic growth and social development with 17 goals and 169 targets [1].

Uganda recognized the importance of the SDGs' contribution to Uganda's social development and long-term development planning framework. Consequently, in 2016 the Government instituted a National Coordination Framework under the leadership of the Office of the Prime Minister that created an enabling environment for the state and non-state actors to achieve the implementation of the SDGs [2]. In Uganda, the SDGs have been implemented under the five-year National Development Plans (NDP II 2015/16 – 2019/20 and NDP III 2020/21 – 2024/25) and in the long-term development agenda of Uganda Vision 2040.

As a reporting mechanism on the SDG implementation progress, member states are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The VNRs are country-led and are a fundamental part of the SDG follow-up and review framework. The VNRs are presented at the annual High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) alongside annual thematic reviews of the SDGs and the global SDG progress report prepared by the United Nations. Since the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, 111 countries have carried out VNRs. Uganda has presented two VNR reports; in 2016 and 2020.

Section One presents the background and introduction to the online survey, including the objectives and approach. Section Two covers the findings on the progress on the implementation of the VNR 2020 recommendations/commitments, focusing on the six overarching thematic areas. Section Three provided the conclusions and recommendations.

1.2   Key Highlights of the Uganda VNR June 2020 [3]

In July 2020, Uganda presented her second Voluntary National Review (VNR) report at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

The report highlights the progress made in integrating and implementing the SDGs within its development planning framework. The report also provides policy, institutional and programmatic enablers, successes and challenges in delivering each SDG.

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1 UN General Assembly. 2015. UN Resolution 70/1: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. New York
2 The Republic of Uganda: Roadmap for Creating an Enabling Environment for Delivering on SDGs in Uganda October, 2018.
3 The Republic of Uganda: Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, June 2020. Published by Office of the Prime Minister.

The report also observes that Uganda is more than 50 percent of the way towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. This was premised on the Sustainable Solutions Network (SDSN) ranking, which place Uganda in 18th place out of the 52 African countries. The ranking was based on 97 indicators across all 17 goals. Overall Uganda scored 54.88 compared to the regional average of 52.7.

The VNR notes that Uganda is on track on some of the SDG 13 targets on climate and stagnation on performance targets on poverty, hunger, education, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, sustainable cities, life on land and peace and justice. Uganda reported improvement in scores on health, gender equality, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure and partnerships.

Over the NDPII period (2015/16–2019/20), the report observes, progress was made in allocating resources and implementing the SDGs as evident in relation to SDGs 1, 4, 5 and 16, with an average of over 75 percent, while SDGs 6, 8 and 17 have an average of over 70 percent. The report is also cognizant of the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of NDP III.

Though Uganda has registered significant progress in allocating resources and implementing the SDGs, the improvement is still below targets. There are concerns about the likely negative impact of COVID-19 on the progress realized over time. Similar views were also raised in the CSO Rejoinder to the VNR noting that the world is in an unprecedented global emergency occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic thus need for actions that will ensure that the SDGs are back on track towards the intended targets.

Thus, in Uganda's VNR 2020, the Government made recommendations to undertake specific actions on the following overarching areas and themes;
  1. Stronger partnerships, coordination and collaboration;
  2. Deeper localization and popularization of the SDG agenda;
  3. Building a leadership culture for the SDG agenda at all levels;
  4. Promoting SDG-focused innovation by all the people in Uganda, especially young people.
  5. Focusing on Financing for SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential; and
  6. Strengthening Technology and Information Systems in SDG Reporting

In order to ascertain the progress in implementing the VNR 2020 recommendations/commitments, UNNGOF with support from Action for Sustainable Development undertook an assessment study. Since 2015, Civil Society Organisations have continuously played an important implementation and watchdog role in advancing the SDGs. They provide critical and grassroots perspectives on SDG implementation and also make contributions to the national review processes.

In Uganda, Civil Society under the auspices of the 2030 Agenda Reference Group has made significant strides in establishing structures for improved coordination, public awareness creation and implementation of specific activities and projects towards the realization of the SDGs.

1.3   Objective of the Study

The overall objective of the study was to assess the status/progress in the implementation of the 2020 Uganda's Voluntary National Review (VNR) recommended actions and plans for the post-COVID-19 recovery as we implement the decade of action for achieving the SDGs. The specific objectives were to;
* Undertake an online survey on the progress made in implementing Uganda's VNR commitments.
* Assess/Identify the Government's post-COVID-19 recovery plans towards the implementation of the decade of action to achieving the SDGs.
* Document the findings into a synthesized report showing the progress in implmenting the commitments.

1.4   Approach

The assessment study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Two sets of online survey questionnaires were designed to collect information/perceptions from NGOs/CSOs and Local Governments respectively, on the implementation of the VNR 2020 recommended actions.

Key informant interviews were conducted with the SDG Secretariat and Heads of the SDG Technical Working Groups as means of data triangulation and enhancement. A desk review was also undertaken focusing on key reference materials/literature including; Uganda VNR 2016, Uganda VNR 2020, the National SDG Coordination Framework, the National SDG Roadmap (2021-2025) and other progress reports as guided by the SDG Secretariat. The matrix below summaries the respondents:

Category	Number
Local Governments	24
SDG Secretariat	3
SDG Technical Working Groups	2
CSO's	25
Total	**54**

2.1   Introduction

Over the period of SDG implementation, the Government of Uganda committed to pay close attention to six broader thematic areas as a means of delivering the SDG targets by 2030.

These include; Stronger partnerships, coordination and collaboration; Deeper localization and popularization of the SDG agenda; Building a leadership culture for the SDG agenda at all levels; Promoting SDG-focused innovation by all the people in Uganda, especially young people; Focusing on Financing for SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential; and Strengthening Technology and Information Systems in SDG Reporting (see Annex I for detailed proposed actions under each of the commitment).

This section attempts to assess the actions and progress on Government commitments/recommendations around these thematic areas in the VNR June 2020, and document the challenges and lessons. The section also explores the likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery and achievement of the SDGs.

After the presentation of the VNR in July 2020, the SDG Secretariat developed a Post-HLPF work plan detailing the implementation of the VNR recommended actions.

The plan has been shared with all key stakeholders i.e. development partners, CSOs, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Local Governments (LGs) and some of the private sector actors who expressed interest in the SDGs. Several stakeholders have come on board to support the work plan. The work plan intends to;
- Make the aspirations of the SDGs relatable and real to all stakeholders including district technical and political leadership, individuals, households, and communities, particularly those who are at risk of being left behind.
- Meaningfully disseminate knowledge to encourage all persons to be engaged and play their role in the implementation of the SDGs.
- Achieve collective action nationally to achieve the SDGs and transform the lives and livelihoods of all the people in Uganda, including through inclusivity and accountability, as well as participatory planning and service delivery.

The work plan also outlines strategies for its implementation including; conducting research and case studies on SDGs; SDG popularization activities; youth engagement in SDGs implementation; localization of SDGs within MDAs and Local Governments; private sector engagement to finance SDG implementation; nationalization and data production for SDG indicators; and engagement of the Technical Working Groups.

2.2   Stronger Partnerships, Coordination, and Collaboration

The work plan also outlines strategies for its implementation including; conducting research and case studies on SDGs; SDG popularization activities; youth engagement in SDGs implementation; localization of SDGs within MDAs and Local Governments; private sector engagement to finance SDG implementation; nationalization and data production for SDG indicators; and engagement of the Technical Working Groups.

Under this thematic area, as the next step of action, Government committed to conduct a Process Evaluation of the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) for lessons and strengthening as part of the Government's routine monitoring and reporting mechanisms on SDGs that are results-focused.

The SDG Coordination Framework is anchored on the existing coordination structures for implementing government business and provides strategic guidance on the roles and responsibilities of key institutions, steered by a multi-stakeholder SDG National Taskforce.[4]

In February 2021, the Government of Uganda conducted a review of the SDG Coordination Framework and the SDG Roadmap. The evaluation covered SDGs implementation period of 2016-2020. This evaluation resulted in a new SDGs Roadmap – 2021-2025. The Roadmap outlines key actions and timelines of different TWGs for localizing and reporting on Agenda 2030.

The five TWGs are one of the most important layers of SDGs coordination framework, these include the; Planning and Mainstreaming chaired by National Planning Authority (NPA), Resource Mobilization and Financing chaired by the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), Coordination, Monitoring & Evaluation and Reporting chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Data chaired by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and Communication and Popularization chaired by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance (MOING).

The evaluation covered the performance of the TWGs from 2016 to 2019, before the formation of the SDG Secretariat. The review report noted that TWGs are relevant and appropriate and are anchored on the existing coordination structure of government. The review observed that the TWGs created visibility for the SDGs through broader stakeholders' participation and increased knowledge of the SDG indicators. However, the reviews observed irregularities in the flow of SDGs implementation-related activities from the TWGs into policy and planning due to inactiveness and incoherency of the TWGs from the time of formation 2016 – 2019.

Interviews with the SDGs Secretariat revealed that the TWGs have been empowered and strengthened within the Coordination Framework and are active with regular meetings. The establishment of a fully-fledged SDG Secretariat in late 2019 was a result of the recommendations from the Auditor General's report on SDG readiness in 2018. However, in the period under review, the Resource Mobilization and Financing TWGs chaired by the Ministry of Finance,Planning and Economic Development, has been inactive largely due to the impact of COVID-19 and its attendant resource demands. Further, the advocacy and communication plan is being revised to fit into the new roadmap.

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4 The Republic of Uganda: Review of the SDG Coordination Framework, SDG Roadmap. Evaluation Report, Office of the Prime Minister, February, 2021.

The online survey responses, as in Figure 1, shows that the majority of the CSOs (48%) and LGs (42%) reported that the partnership and collaboration between the Central Government (CG) and Local Governments (LGs) on the SDGs implementation are still low. Only 30% of the LGs observed a high level of partnership and collaboration with the central government on SDG implementation. Figure 2 also shows that partnership and collaboration between LGs on SDGs are similarly low.
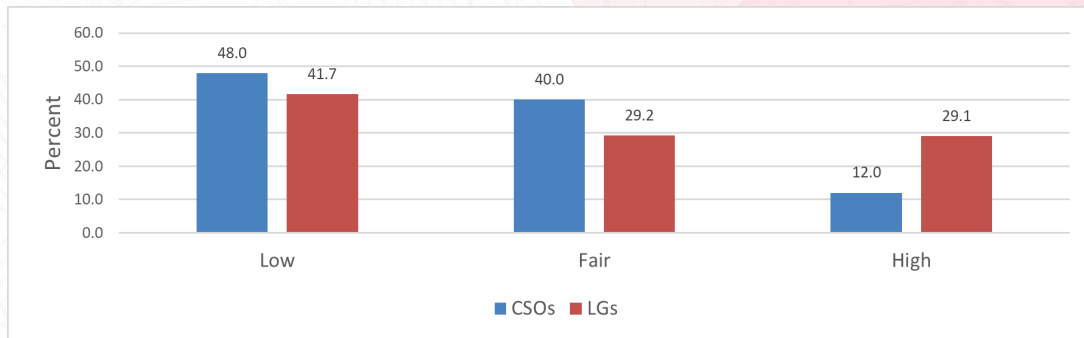
Figure 1:   CG partnership and collaborating with LGs on SDGs
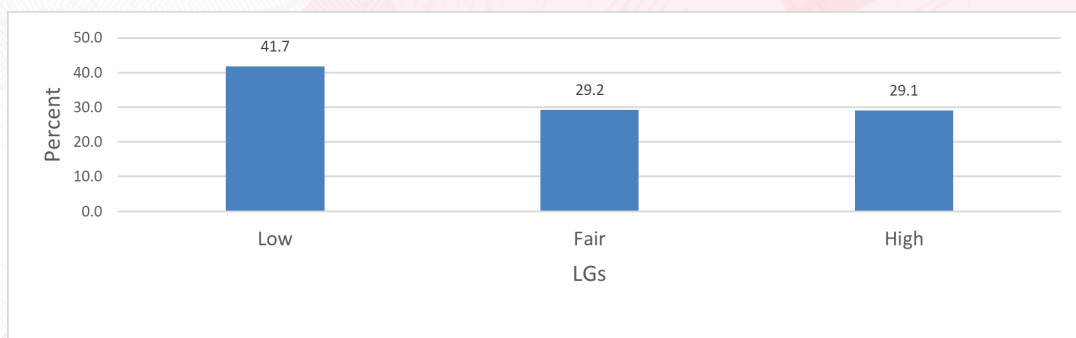
Figure 2:   LGs partnership and collaboration with other LGs on SDGs

The LGs reported that although the CG has tried to integrate the SDGs in the implementation for the NDPs and the LGDPs, there is limited sensitization on SDGs and inadequate support and supervision in the SDGs implementation in the LGs. There were also voices of lack of deliberate efforts to foster collaboration among LGs on SDGs, safe for LGs that implementing joint projects.

Figures 3 and 4 show that the partnership and collaboration on SDGs between ministries and agencies are more with LGs than with the CG. Figure 3 show a fair (44%) partnership for the CG and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), while on the other hand Figure 4 illustrates a high (58%) partnership between LGs and MDAs on SDGs.

Figure 3: CG partnership and collaborating with MDAs
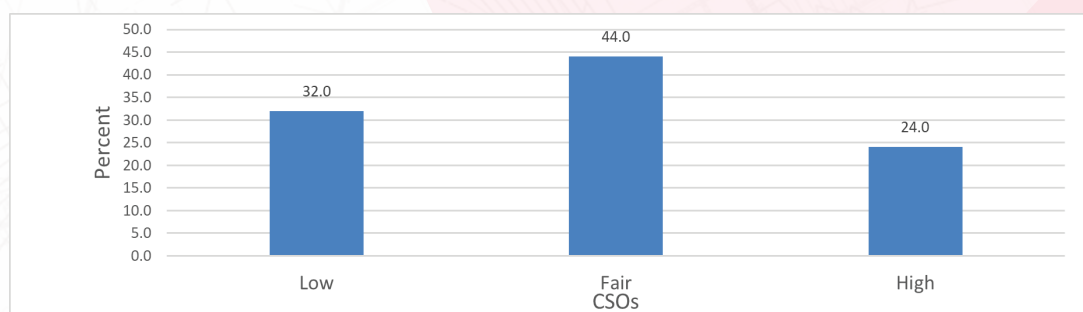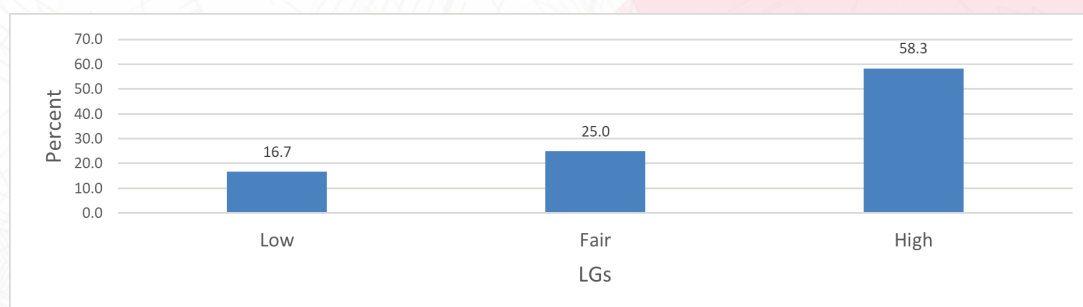

Figure 4: LGs partnership and collaborating with Government Ministries and Agencies on SDGs

The LGs reported that there are regular engagements with MDAs on SDGs as implementation partners in line departments. In addition, LG work plan targets and services offered are in tandem and directly contribute to the MDAs. Besides, MDAs offer LGs support supervision and compliance checks.

Secondly, Government committed to reflect on collaboration with all partners outside Government to ensure deeper collaboration for both critical and constructive input from a diversity of partners into the SDGs delivery. Weak multi-sectoral implementation planning, coordination gaps, week public-private partnerships have been highlighted as challenges to the achievement of the SDG targets.

Thus, to a large extent, the achievement of sustainable development depends on the ability of the Government to engage meaningfully with partners from all sectors of society. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are recognized under SDG 17, as contributors to the mobilization of resources, sharing of knowledge and expertise, and technology towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Figure 5: CG partnership and collaborating with CSOs in the SDGs
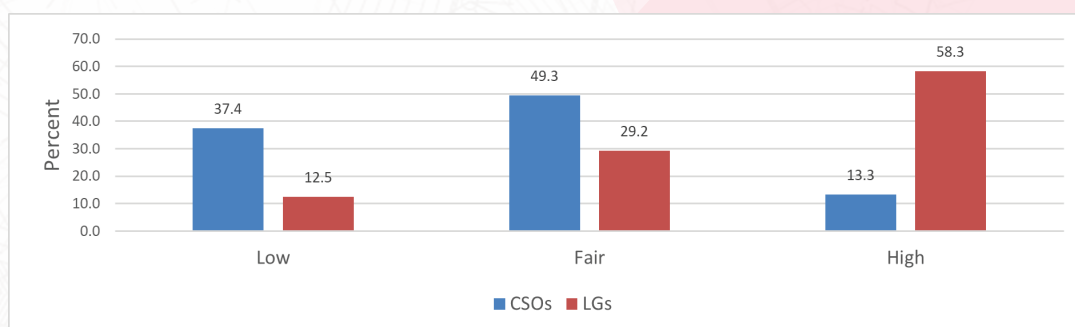
Figure 6: LGs partnership and collaborating with CSOs in the SDGs

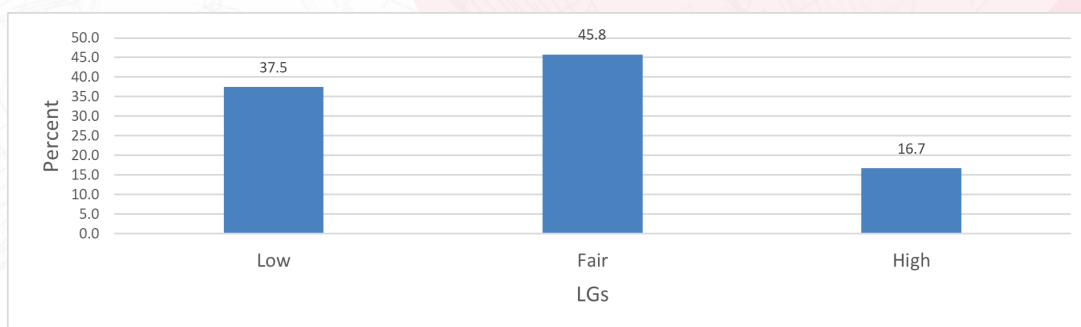Partnership with the Development Partners: In collaboration with UN agencies (UNDP, UN Women, UN Capital Development Fund, UNFPA, etc.), the Government of Uganda led by the Office of the Prime Minister established the SDG Partnership Hub and Converging Centre. The GIZ has also supported building the Knowledge Hub at the SDG Secretariat.

The SDG Secretariat is designed to provide space for sharing knowledge and expertise among different actors that are engaged in multi-stakeholder SDG-related partnerships. However, interviews with the SDG Secretariat revealed that issues around partnerships and coordination have been hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, as working from home is the new normal.

Partnership with CSOs: The SDG Secretariat is working together with CSOs through a partnership MoU with CSOs led by the Uganda National NGO Forum. This is in recognition of CSOs capacity to increase accountability, creating awareness and promoting citizen participation in SDGs. The Uganda National NGO Forum hosts the National CSO Core Reference Group (NCCRG) on SDGs, a consortium of CSOs engage in SDGs work. The online survey also revealed a fair working partnership on the SDGs implementation between the CSOs, the CG and the LGs as shown in Figures 5 and 6 below.

The fair collaboration between the CG, LGs and CSOs was attributed to the CSOs' passionate interest in the implementation of the SDGs. Besides, CSOs supplement Government efforts. Thus, it was observed that the CG and LGs regularly guide the CSOs on service delivery gaps in line with the SDG framework.

It was also reported that some CSOs have working/collaboration MoUs with the CG and LGs. Similarly, sentiments were expressed by the majority of the CSOs who responded to the online survey, adding that the SDG coordination structure provides space for CSOs to have an entry point into involvement in the SDGs implementation.

Partnership with the Private Sector: In May 2021, Government launched a Private Sector SDG Platform for private sector collaboration. The purpose of the Private Sector Platform is to mobilize the private sector in Uganda to provide continuous support toward the implementation of the SDGs and NDP III. The primary objective of the Private Sector Platform is to rally the private sector on the SDGs and leverage the opportunities that exist within the SDGs for the private sector – for example, the growth of enterprises and access to markets.

The platform hopes to benefit the private sector holistically and contribute to the growth of the economy with an SDG lens, by mapping business activities to individual SDGs, and setting priorities that can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. The platform is chaired by Government (OPM), co-chaired by the UN (Resident Coordinator's office) and PSFU on behalf of the private sector.

The Private Sector SDG Platform has four pillars; **i)** Coordination, coordinated by the Office of the Prime Minister/SDG secretariat; **ii)** the Business Development Services Facility (BDSF); **iii)** the Knowledge Hub (working with academia to generate data and knowledge available for the private sector on investment opportunities); and **iv)** the SDG Challenge Fund for capital and mentorship, start-ups support and innovation, especially, for young people to contribute to the SDGs.

The online survey revealed mixed perceptions on the CG and LGs' partnerships with the private sector on the SDGs. Figures 7 shows that CSOs (68%) perceived the CG partnership on SDGs with the private sector as low, while LGs (42%) perceived the CG partnership with the private sector on the SDGs as fair. On the other hand, 38% of the LGs reported the LGs partnership with the private sector on the SDGs is low as shown in Figure 8.
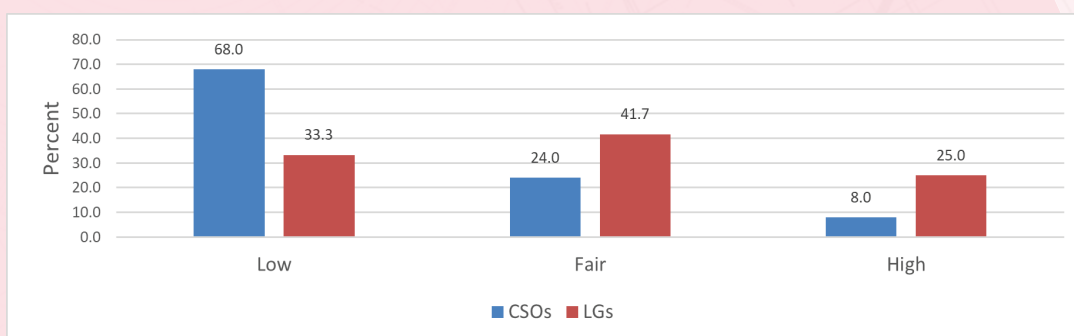
Figure 7: CG partnership and collaborating with the private sector in the SDGs
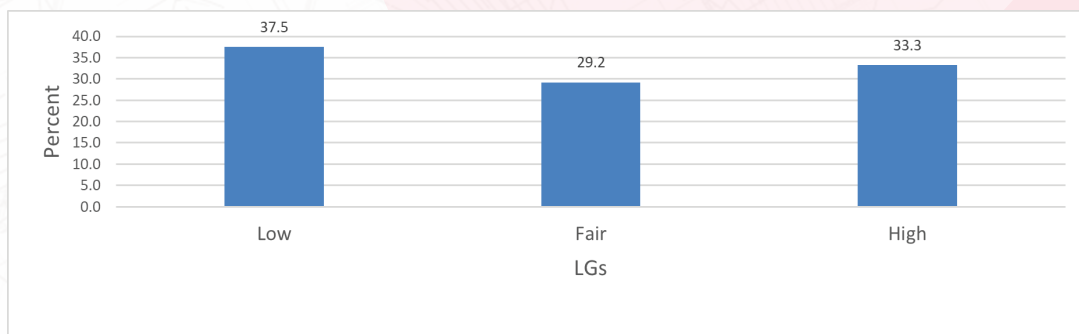
Figure 8: LGs partnership and collaborating with the private sector in the SDGs

Both the LGs and CSOs were of the view that there are limited undertakings by the CG to seek support from the private sector involvement in the SDG implementation, especially at lower-level governments.

"I have not seen or heard or attended any workshop concerning SDGs with the private sector," LG respondent. Some respondents were not sure of the private sector's involvement in the SDGs implementation beyond being profit-oriented and CSR activities. It's not clear how the private sector has mainstreamed the SDGs in their business activities, plans and budgets.

Partnership with young people: The Youth Coalition for the SDGs brings together more than 30 youth organizations that focus on SDGs implementation and awareness. The youth coalition was created in 2019 for the youth to share ideas. It is operated under the auspices of the SDG Secretariat with support from UN Coordinator's Office. Through this platform, ABSA Bank has come on board, to create a youth hub to facilitate the coordination and mobilization of the youth to play their role in achieving the SDGs, and support youth-led SDG awareness activities. The youth hub is intended to provide a space for young people for knowledge and innovation sharing.

2.3   Deeper Localization and Popularization of the SDGs Agenda

In the Uganda VNR, 2020 under this thematic area, Government committed to the following actions; Identify SDG focal persons and agencies at all levels; Identify SDG champions at all levels, from community to national level; Build and promote promotion initiatives for each SDG; Government to strengthen collaboration with civil society actors across the country to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda; Government to encourage young people to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda; and Government adopts a rural development strategy (an inclusive sustainable community model that promotes self-help, community empowerment and participation) for localizing the SDGs.

The localization of the SDGs is the process of taking into account Uganda's contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. It accounts for domesticating the SDGs into Uganda development goal settings and targets, with clear means of implementation and measurable indicators. Linking the LGs in SDGs localization, the LGs supports through SDGs-related actions from the bottom-up and provide a framework for local development planning.

Thus, in Uganda, the achievement of the SDGs depends on the embarrassment of this agenda into local development planning and investment cycles. The key drivers for SDG localization are the same as those in NDP III, rallying all actors i.e. CSOs, private sector, development partners to align and localize SDGs in their work. For example, the private sector should engage communities with the SDGs beyond SCR.

SDGs Alignment: Uganda reports a significant effort in domesticating the SDGs priority areas of action in the NDP III framework.[6] Interviews with the National Planning Authority (NPA) and the SDG Secretariat reported that the NDP III is almost 95% aligned to the SDGs. Thus, whatever is planned in the National Development Plan, is planned for the achievement of the SDGs, which is similarly reflected in the national budget since the budget delivers the NDP.

However, there is no comprehensive study on the alignment of the Local Government Development Plans (LGDPs) to the SDGs. The assumption is that since the SDGs are part and parcel of what LGs do in terms of planning and service delivery i.e. education, water and sanitation, health etc., these contribute to the SDG indicators. On the other hand, NPA and SDG Secretariat observed that since the NDP III is over 90% aligned to the SDGs, it's a good indicator that even the LGDPs are well aligned to the SDGs. Nevertheless, the online survey as in Figure 9 also indicates that 88% of the LGs reported that the LGDPs are well aligned to the SDGs.

LGs noted that work plans are SDG sensitive and all outputs are linked to the NDP III and SDGs. However, interviews with the SDG Secretariat reported that the interrogation of the SDG indicators at the LG is limited. The monitoring and reporting according to the SDGs indicator framework are the responsibility of the Central Government.
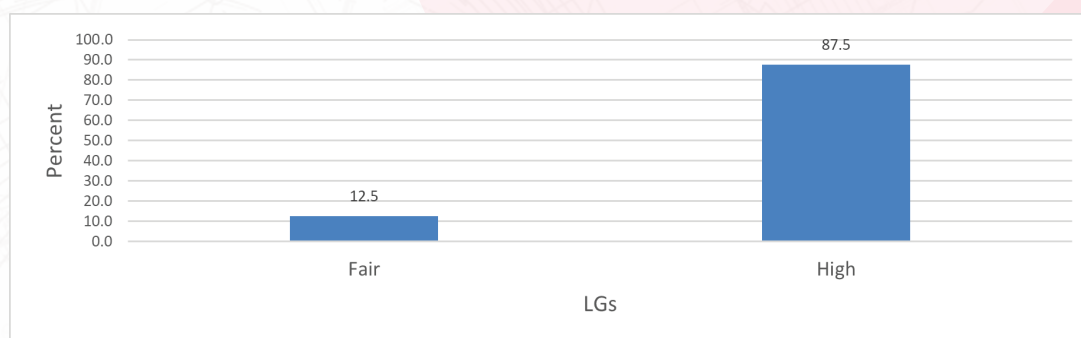
Figure 9: Alignment of LGDP to the SDGs

The SDG Secretariat further reported that for deeper engagement with the SDGs, Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have been conducted in seven districts of Ngora, Nebbi, Bugiri, Sironko, Kitagwenda, Sheema and Kyotera. Further the NPA guidance notes on the LGDP development process, include alignment of the LGDPs to the SDGs.

SDG Focal Persons and Champions: The SDG Secretariat also reported that SDG Focal Persons have been identified in over 80 districts, and plans are underway to cover all districts in Uganda. Ordinarily, the District Planning Unit is the SDG Focal Office, to have a lead person who is responsible for the SDGs integration in planning. The online survey shows that 54% of the LGs have a designated SDG Focal Person, while 68% of the CSOs also indicate they have an SDG focal person as illustrated in Figure 10.
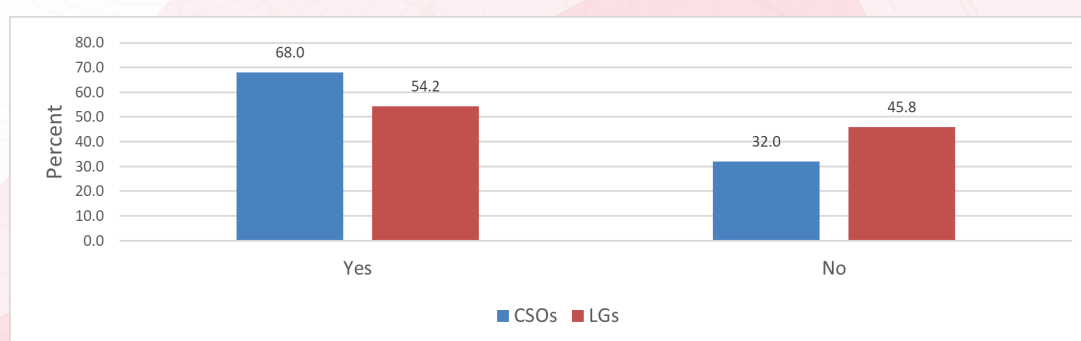
Figure 10: Designated SDG Focal Person

The SDG Secretariat observed that ordinary, the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is the SDG Champion in the district. Most of the SDG Champions are selected by the virtue of their positions to embrace the SDGs. It's also a requirement under the new Parish Development Model (PDM), to identify the SDG Champions up to the community level.

It is the Government's commitment in the PDM to extend SDG Champions to the community level to ensure no one is left behind. The purpose of champions is to have lead persons that can articulate SDGs at LGs and lower levels – have people who have knowledge on SDGs and can support localization and rally people in the implementation of the SDGs.

SDG Promotion, Localization and Popularization: To promote SDGs at all levels, the SDG Secretariat has visited over 80 districts in Uganda, made presentations on the SDGs, and distributed materials on the SDGs including the VNR 2020.

Accordingly, this has increased the level of awareness of the SDGs in LGs, as indicated in Figure 11. The figure shows that LGs rated the CG between fair (38%) and high (35%) on SDG popularization and localization. However, 48% of the CSOs reported that SDG popularization and location by the CG is still low.
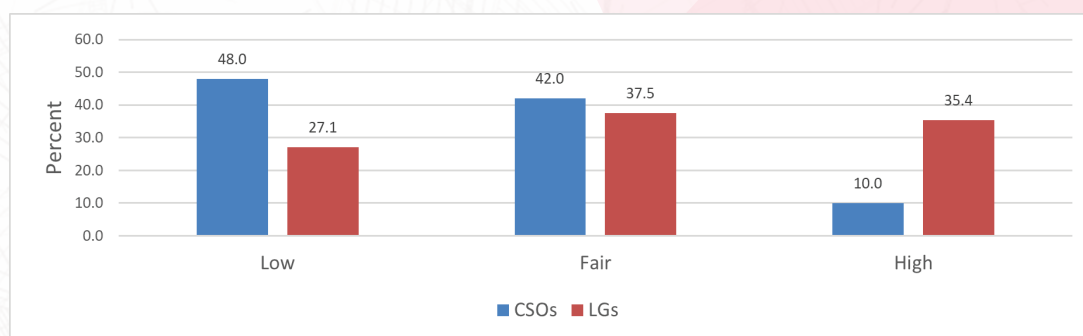
Figure 11: CG on SDGs popularization and localization

All LGs that participated in the online survey reported that there haven't been any deliberate efforts by the LGs to popularize and localize the SDGs beyond mainstreaming in development plans and budgeting. The limited popularization of the SDGs by LGs was mainly attributed to a lack of funds.

Government collaboration on SDG innovations: The government committed to strengthen collaboration with civil society actors across the country to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda; and also, to encourage young people to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda.

The SDG Secretariat has been largely working with the Uganda National NGO Forum, on several initiatives to promote the SDGs, including consultations on VNR 2020. The SDG Secretariat has also continued to work with individual CSOs to promote SDGs through coordination and information flow.

Results in Figure 12 from the online survey shows that 54% and 33% of the LGs reported that Government has fairly and highly respectively, collaborated with CSOs on SDGs innovations. However, the Figure also shows that 64% of the CSOs reported a low collaboration with the Government on SDG innovations
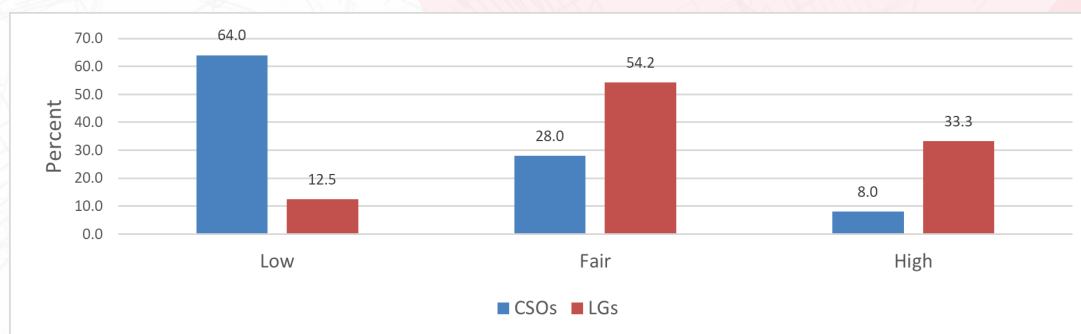
Figure 12: CG on collaboration with CSOs on SDGs innovations

Further, it was observed by respondents at the national level that CSOs are good advocates for especially these international agendas such as the SDGs. This is largely because many of the CSOs are rooted in communities through community outreach projects. Thus, by the nature of their work, CSOs can cascade these international agendas up to the community level. As a lesson, the Government views CSOs as strong partners to collaborate with, especially on the SDGs localization, through leveraging on their infrastructure, resources and strength in advocacy.

Collaboration with young people on SDG innovations: In September 2020, the Government of Uganda and the UN in Uganda launched October as the SDG Awareness Month with a webinar themed "The Role of the Youth in Accelerating Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals". The youths are involved in SDGs related innovations under individual organizations with support from the Government or donors.

Figure 13 shows that 88% of the LGs and 64% of the CSOs reported that the Government collaborating with young people on SDG innovations is still low. Interviews with the SDG Secretariat revealed that plans are underway in partnership with the UN System and Youth Coalition for SDGs.

The overall objective of the initiative is to identify and mobilize youth with solutions that are changing lives in order to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The initiative hopes to cement partnership with young people as development partners at all levels, connect youth innovations to solutions especially with the private sector and provide support and motivation.
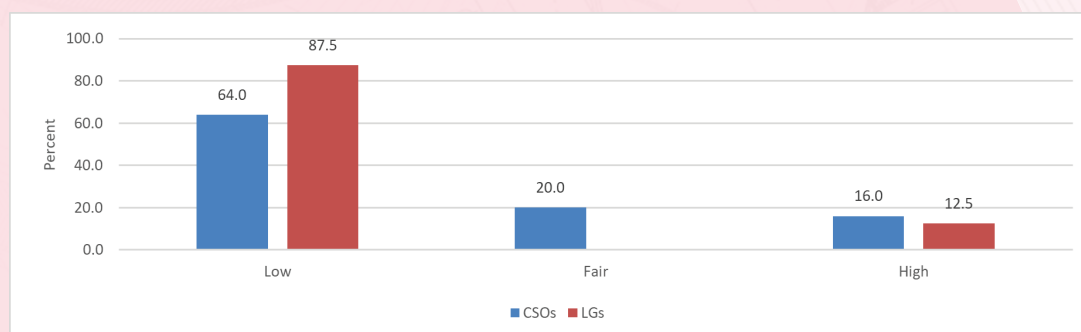
Figure 13: CG on collaborating with young people on SDGs innovations

2.4 Building a Leadership Culture for The SDG Agenda at All Levels

The leadership/political will is critical in achieving any country's investment and development agenda. The VNR, 2020 is cognizant that SDG 'war' may perhaps be won or lost in the arena of leadership.

Under this theme, the Government committed to building strong leadership for the SDGs front runners in all local agencies and stakeholders. The intention is for all technical officers in agencies to have a technical understanding of the SDGs and make sure that monitoring of government projects has an SGD lens.

The SDG Secretariat has had engagements with Parliament and presented the VNR 2020. It has established a partnership with Parliament Forum for the SDGs and plans are underway to sensitize the new MPs on the SDGs - more than 180 MPs have subscribed to the forum.

However, it was reported that although the framework on awareness was created in 2016, not much effort and resources were allocated for implementation – keeping in mind that most of the awareness approach requires a lot of financial resources.

Figure 14 shows that 42% of the LGs reported that Government is fairly building strong leadership for the SDGs, while 48% of the CSOs view the progress as low. On the other hand, Figure 15 shows that at the LG level, are fairly well on progress on the same aspect of strong SDG leadership.
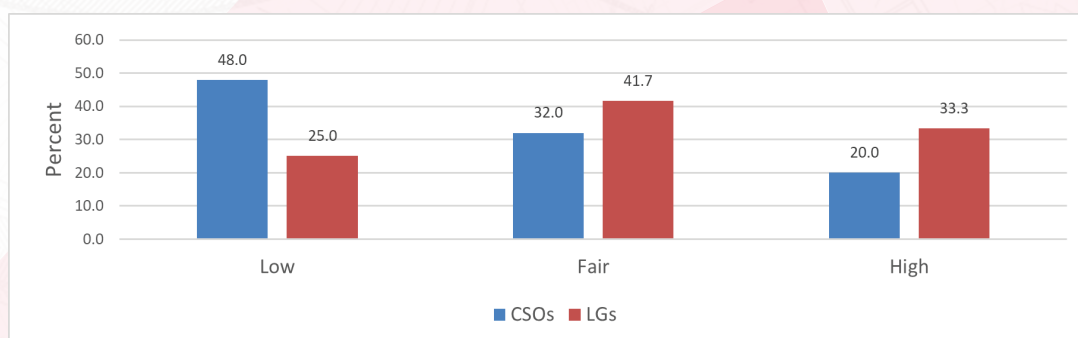
Figure 14: CG on building strong leaders to champion the SDGs
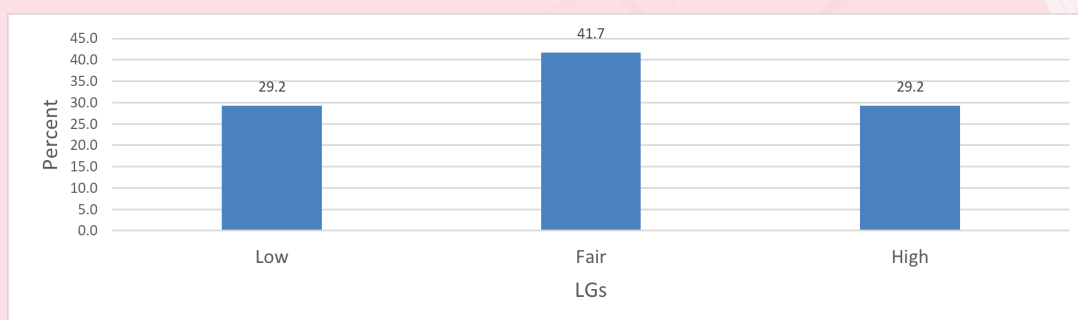
Figure 15:   LG on building strong leaders to champion the SDGs

It's worth noting that the success of SDGs will require a set of transformative leaders determined to spearhead change at all levels of government planning and programming. This needs to be aligned to the deepening localization agenda where community champions are trained and empowered with leadership skills in fast-tracking SDG implementation.

2.5 Promoting SDG-Focused Innovation by All Citizens, Especially Young People.

In order to promote SDG-focused innovation across the population, Government committed to; customize and implement in an interconnected manner, SDG creative innovations that have worked elsewhere to our local conditions; and experiment (test, pilot and share) new methods of building partnerships at all levels to drive innovative and integrated approaches to deliver the SDGs.

The promotion of SDG-focused innovations has been advanced through youth innovation initiatives such as the National SDG Challenge Fund under the Ministry of ICT that connect the youth to technology and working with the private sector to spur SDG-related innovations. For high impact on SDG innovations, the Government is looking at modalities on having one funding basket for innovations as opposed to scattered efforts in different government agencies and private sector.

The online survey as shown in Figure 16 and Figure 17, indicates that both the CG and LGs are fairly promoting SDG-focused related innovations, although still low at the LG level. The LGs only interact with the youth through the implementation of government-supported youth livelihood programmes.

Figure 16: CG in promoting SDG-Focused innovations

Figure 17: LG in promoting SDG-Focused innovations

The above results call for a need to decentralize innovation centres that pilot and test innovations within the diverse local contexts and youth orientations. This will lay a good foundation for local economic development, ownership and sustainability. Exchange le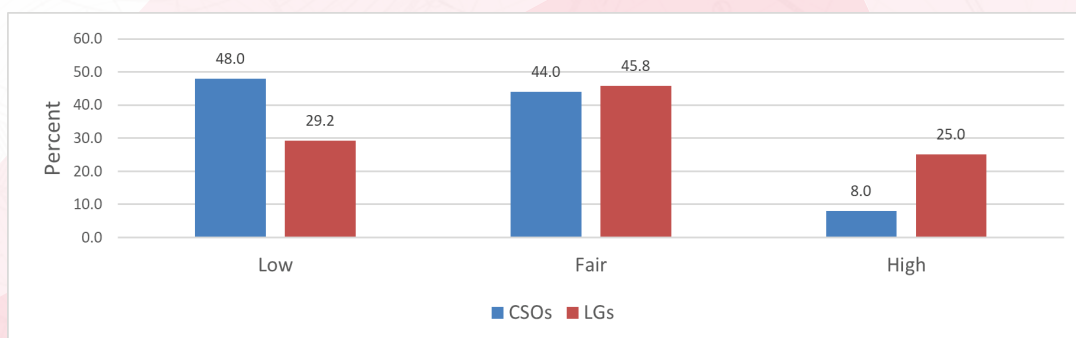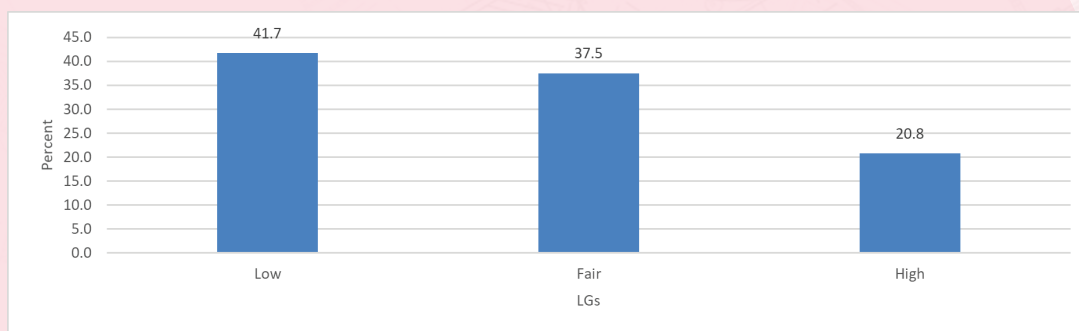arning programmes for the youth countrywide with areas that have progressive youth engagement programmes will be critical in empowering youth skilling and innovations. The Parish Development model comes as another opportunity for harnessing youth potentials through enterprise development but with expert guidance.

2.6 Focusing on Financing for The SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential

The above results call for a need to decentralize innovation centres that pilot and test innovations within the diverse local contexts and youth orientations. This will lay a good foundation for local economic development, ownership and sustainability. Exchange learning programmes for the youth countrywide with areas that have progressive youth engagement programmes will be critical in empowering youth skilling and innovations. The Parish Development model comes as another opportunity for harnessing youth potentials through enterprise development but with expert guidance.

Under this thematic area, Government committed to; prioritize the discussion on mobilizing financing for SDGs in the wake of COVID-19 and the global economic recession; and harness local resources innovatively. The Government has continued to leverage the private sector to mobilize financing of the SDGs. It is anticipated that through the SDG Private Sector Platform, the private sector and development partners will be able to see opportunities around investments linked to the SDGs, and market growth for different players.

The Government is adopting new ways of working in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, through virtually working, social media, online platforms for mobilization, and new technology to shape the engagement with stakeholders. According to the online survey, Figure18 shows that both CSOs and LGs are fairly involved in resource mobilization towards SDGs implementation. The LGs reported over-dependency on the CG for funding. The LGs also reported limited participation in PPPs as a resource mobilization strategy.
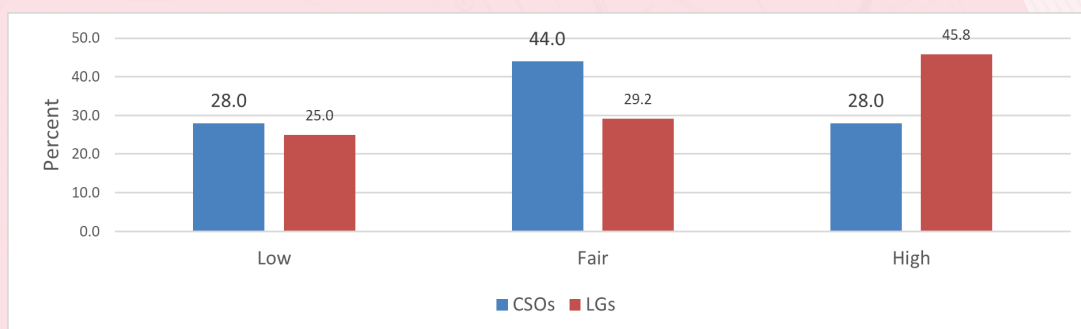

Figure 18: LGs and CSOs involvement in resource mobilization for SDGs

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country also needs to address the deepening debt burden that may jeopardize efforts in achieving the SDGs. Local resource mobilization towards the achievement of the SDGs is possible as long as the government addresses the financial leakages through corruption at all levels of government.

2.7 Strengthening Technology and Information Systems in SDG Implementation

The Government recognizes that digitalization is increasingly becoming a precondition for growth, poverty reduction and job creation and it's a driver in the public and private sector. In the area of strengthening technology and information systems, the Government committed to; more timely and relevant data to achieve the SDGs; make the best use of the various forms of data within Government, CSOs, Private Sector, Academia, etc.; and build a strong culture of data consumption and production.

The SDG Secretariat activated the Data Technical Working Group (DTWG) in terms of its functionality and activeness. The DTWG has continued to review the SDG indicator matrix with 93 indicators currently covered. UBOS with technical support from the SDG Secretariat has engaged with and made follow-ups with different MDAs with data on currently covered indicators. UBOS has continued to update the SDG Dashboard.

The SDG Secretariat is partnering with SDG Analytics of Kigali to create analytics SDG scorecards to track progress. This partnership will create a system that will be used to generate reports and visualization for various Agenda 2030 goals. It will also allow easy integration of the SDGs indicators in the National Development Plans.

However, data for SDG indicators is conditioned to official surveys and administrative data, which makes it difficult to utilize data from CSOs, the private sector and academia. UBoS observes that data produced by the CSOs and the academia are largely non-representative and do not fully fit into definitions of the indicators [7]. Furthermore, some SDG indicators have no standard methodologies for data generation, besides some are hard to compile data on.

The following achievements were outlined by the DTWG headed by UBOS; Developed an action plan for the production of more Tier I and II SDG indicators; completed the integration of the 201 national SDG indicators into the NSI framework under review; UBOS in collaboration with UNDP and the SDG Secretariat finalized and launched the Data Gap Analysis Report for SDG 16; updated the Open Data Portal on Africa Information High-Way with 7 additional SDG indicators that meet the global metadata requirements raising the number to 52 indicators on the portal; and Developed a 5-year roadmap with strategies for improving the production of Tier I and II indicators. The strategy covers the period 2020/21-2024/25.

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7 Uganda Bureau of Statistics: Data Gap Analysis for SDG 16 in Uganda, June 2020.

2.8   Progress on the Implementation of the CSOs Commitments

In their rejoinder to Uganda's VNR 2020, CSOs in Uganda committed to; continue to partner with Government and other key stakeholders especially at the local government level to build SGD awareness; operationalize their key messages in the rejoinder into a strong advocacy campaign in pursuance of global and local agenda towards 2030; promote domesticating of SDGs at the national and local level through community outreaches.

The CSOs also committed to work closely with the SGD Secretariat to promote participatory citizen monitoring of SDGs; and support the implementation of SDGs through resource mobilization for SDGs.

The participation of citizens in the SDG agenda creates a sense of ownership towards the achievement of the SDGs. One of the ways that can increase citizen engagement with the SDG is awareness-raising.

The CG, LGs and CSOs have used awareness-raising strategies to empower citizen's participation in government programmes. Figure 19 shows that building awareness on the SDGs is average for the CSOs and the CG, but still low for the LGs. Figure 20 shows that majority of the CSOs (52%) and 38% of the LGs indicated that CSOs and LGs respectively, have fairly embraced the popularization and localization of the SDGs.
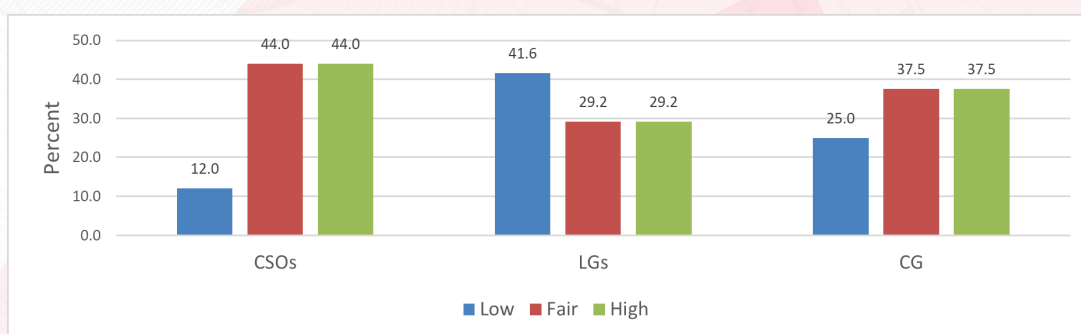

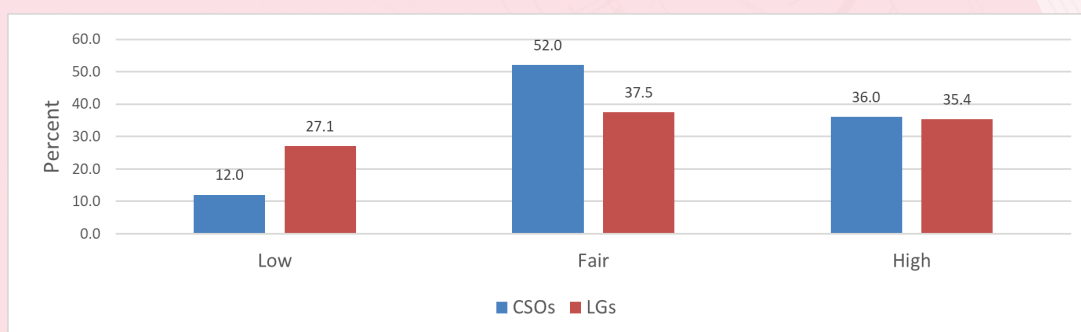Figure 19:   CG, LGs and CSOs on building SDGs awareness

Figure 20:   CSOs on SDGs popularization and localization

It should be noted that progressively, CSOs remain critical in deepening and fast-tracking the achievement of the SDGs in Uganda. They are closer to communities and play a watchdog role in ensuring the government's commitment to achieving the SDGs. An enabling operating environment with progressive legislation will build a strong foundation for CSO contributions towards the achievement of the SDGs.

More ingredients such as capacity strengthening of CSOs in digital skills, building acceptable and harmonized data systems that are authentic and aligned to government standards will enhance the monitoring of SDGs. Furthermore, collective advocacy and resourcing especially local resource mobilization will guarantee the sustainability of CSO engagements at the community level in deepening the SDG agenda.

2.9   The Impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs

The emergence of COVID-19 has forced many global economies into recession, impacting the projected growth rates. Uganda's growth rate is expected to stagnant or reduce below 2.9 percent over the NDP III period [8].

There is no doubt that the achievement of the SDGs is likely to be compromised by the pandemic. For example, the lockdowns that are instituted as measures to reduce COVID-19 transmission, slow down economic activities causing revenue shortfalls thus hampering the financing of the SDGs. They also equally negatively impact the social development indicators and human development index.

COVID-19 is still a matter of learning as we go – no concrete recovery plan. Thus COVID-19 could become one of the new cross-cutting issues in planning and budgeting. By April 2020, the payroll size for elementary workers declined by 71.3% compared to 3.5% and 25.2% for managers and professionals. The report further notes that 87% of the households in Uganda suffered a reduction in income.[9] According to the ILO, by the end of 2020, an estimated 400 million full-time jobs were lost due to the pandemic.[10]

The growing unemployment levels and lockdown effects may see many households backsliding into abject poverty, thus increasing vulnerability and low quality of life for the majority of citizens. The government needs to start by reviewing its national food systems and enhance production beyond hand to mouth and eventually household incomes will increase, which ultimately guarantee a quality population and a progressive human capital development index. The rest of the SDG goals will be easy to achieve with a healthy and productive population.

According to the UN, the COVID-19 pandemic will have far-reaching implications for the 2030 Agenda. It predicts that the pandemic is likely to precipitate a prolonged global economic slowdown, with an adverse impact on the achievement of the SDGs as illustrated in Figure 21 .[11]

8 Uganda VRN, 2020
9 Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: Microeconomic Indicator Dashboard, June 2020.
10 ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Fifth edition, ILO, 2020,
11 United Nations: Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to The Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19, March 2020

13 CLIMATE ACTION

Reduced commitment to climate action; but less environmental footprints due to less production and transportation

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Conflicts prevent effective measures for fighting COVID-19; those in conflict areas are most at risk of suffering devastating loss from COVID-19

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Aggravate backlash against globalization; but also highlight the importance of international cooperation on public health

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Population living in slums face higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 due to high population density and poor sanitation conditions

1 NO POVERTY

Loss of income, leading vulnerable segments of society and families to fall below poverty line

COVID-19 pandemic

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Economic activities suspended; lower income, less work time, unemployment for certain occupations

2 ZERO HUNGER

Food production and distribution could be disrupted

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Supply and personnel shortages are leading to disrupted access to electricity, further weaking health system response and capacity

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Devastating effect on health outcomes

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Supply disruptions and inadequate access to clean water hinder access to clean handwashing facilities, one of the most important COVID-19 prevention measures

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Women's economic gains at risk and increased levels of violence against women. Women account for majority of health and social care workers who are more exposed to COVID-19.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

School for many closed; remote learning less effective and not accessible for some

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Source: UNDESA

Figure 21:   How COVID-19 is affecting the SDGs

A closer look at Figure 21 above shows, for example, that the likely loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic will push a large number of people into poverty. It has been estimated that 2.6 million Ugandans will be pushed into poverty for the[12] first time.   Further the pandemic is keeping[14] schools closed, affecting 17 million learners in Uganda[13]   and over 1.2 billion learners in 170 countries, with a far-reaching impact on the human development index.

Section Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1   Conclusions

This section summarises progress made on the VNR 2020 recommendations. The Government recommended specific action on the following overarching themes;
- Stronger partnerships, coordination and collaboration;
- Deeper localization and popularization of the SDG agenda;
- Building a leadership culture for the SDG agenda at all levels;
- Promoting SDG-focused innovation by all the people in Uganda, especially young
  people;
- Focusing on Financing for SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential; and Strengthe-
  ning Technology and Information Systems in SDG Reporting.

In order to strengthen SDG partnerships, coordination and collaboration, the Government has reviewed the SDG Coordination Framework and the SDG Roadmap. This review has informed the new SDG Roadmap 2021-2025. The new roadmap provides strategic guidance on the roles and responsibilities of key institutions and stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs. The SDG Advocacy and Communication Plan has also been revised to fit into the new SDG Roadmap.

Further, the SDG Secretariat developed a Post-HLPF work plan that detailed the implementation of the VNR 2020 recommendations. Accordingly, the SDG Technical Working Groups have been empowered and strengthened to effectively localize and report on the SDGs.

However, according to perceptions from the online survey, the knowledge and visibility for the SDGs to attract broader stakeholders' participation is still low. Further, the online survey revealed that the partnership between the CG and LGs on the SDGs implementation is still below average.

This has implications on local resource mobilization, articulation of the SDGs into planning and citizens' participation. It also derails the concept of leaving no one behind. This assessment also found out that besides the limited LG linkages in the implementation of the VNR recommended actions, there is limited interaction between LGs on the SDGs.

12 Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, March, 2020.
13 Ibid.
14 UNESCO. https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse (2020).

Development Partners continue to support the Government and the SDG Secretariat on SDGs. Through such partnerships, the SDG Secretariat capacity to engage and share information on SDGs has been enhanced through several interventions. On the other hand, the Government and the SDG Secretariat continue to engage with CSOs on the implementation of the SDGs through the Uganda National NGO Forum which hosts the National CSOs Core Reference Group on the SDGs.

There is also a fair working partnership on the SDGs implementation between the CSOs and LGs. However, this assessment observes limited interaction between the private sector and LGs on SDGs. SDG engagement with the youth is still highly centralized and not integrated into all policy formulation and government programming.

There has been progress on SDG localization through the integration of SDGs into planning at both LG and CG levels. However low progress was observed in the areas of SDG innovations, popularization and localization, to effectively engage with citizens especially young people on SDGs to harness their participation and potential. The promotion of SDG-focused innovation is still centralized with scattered efforts, does not have a clear mechanism to bring aboard citizens in their diversity.

This assessment also observes that the SDG Secretariat has had engagements with members of Parliament and technical officers at all levels, to build leadership for the SDGs. However, progress on building SDG leadership is still hampered by limited resources and the effect of COVID-19 on the working environment.

The Government is cognizant of the likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs and is looking for innovative ways of harnessing resources to finance the SDGs implementation. However, SDG financing and resource mobilization remain centralized. There is limited participation of LGs in PPPs resource mobilization strategies for SDG financing.

On strengthening technology and information systems in SDG reporting, the Data Technical Working Group continues to review and update the SDG indicator matrix with 93 indicators currently covered. UBOS continues to update the SDG Dashboard, and efforts to create analytical scorecards to track progress for each SDG in the advanced stage. However, there is limited effort to enhance the private sector, CSOs and academic data generation capacity, for the SGDs to leverage on data from these sectors leading to data deficiency for evidence-based advocacy.

In deepening and fast-tracking the achievement of the SDGs, CSOs continue to work with the Government as SDG strategic implementation partners. However, CSOs efforts are scattered and not well coordinated leading to limited impact.

3.2   Recommendations

1. There is a need for a multi-sectoral integration of VNR commitments at both local and central government levels and across sectors to harness the inter-sectoral linkages that contribute towards achieving the SDGs.

2. Local government development planning should integrate the national SDG priorities and commitments which are pivotal in actualizing programme implementation. The focus should be on ensuring buy-in by both technical and political leadership at the local government level. Massive sensitization of the new leadership on the SDG is critical in deepening localization.

3. Streamline the youth and innovation hubs through the local government structures, the youth councils to enhance youth participating in planning and policy-making processes. Through the integrated programme approach across sectors, youth participation in programme implementation will be enhanced.

4. Digitalizing communities with cheaper costs of data and digital tools like phones and computers will increase access to digital knowledge and skills and thus enhance innovation and creativity for a productive population, especially among the youth.

5. There is a need to strengthen the public-private partnership model across sectors aligned to the SDG commitments. The role of the private sector can never be understated in advancing the national commitments on SDGs. Building a shared purpose with the private sector on the SDGs will enhance localizations, domestic resource mobilization, sustainability and ownership of the development agenda by communities.

6. Civil society remains one of the critical drivers in localizing the SDG agenda in the world. In order to have a vibrant civil society sector, there is a need to have progressive laws that guarantee civic engagement and oversight of government programming. The COVID-19 restrictions have kept several CSOs locked down and unable to effectively monitor the quality of government services, mobilize communities to participate in government programmes and contribute techncally in informing the national policy-making process. CSOs also will need to embrace a collective policy advocacy agenda and galvanize efforts to ensure a more progressive SDG agenda.

7. Strengthen the data revolution among CSOs, private sector, academia and government in skills and systems. This will ensure disaggregated data is availed toinform policy change, practice and prioritization of the critical goals that need to be fast-tracked. Lack of a harmonized data system deters evidence-based advocacy, accountability and innovation.

8. There is need for a concrete post-COVID-19 recovery plan across all sectors.

The following matrix unlocks the 2020 Uganda's Voluntary National Review (VNR) commitments and actions.

Thematic Area	Commitment/Actions
1. Stronger Partnerships, Coordination, and Collaboration	• Conduct a Process Evaluation of the Technical Working Groups • A reflection on the collaboration of partners outside Government to ensure deeper collaboration and constructive input from a diversity of partners.
2. Deeper Localization and Popularization of The SDG Agenda	• Identify SDG focal persons and agencies at all levels • Identify SDG champions at all levels, from community to national level. • Built and promote promotion initiatives for each SDG • Government to strengthen collaboration with civil society actors across the country to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda • Government to encourage young people to innovate and popularize activities to implement the SDG agenda • Government adopt a rural development strategy (an inclusive sustainable community model that promotes self-help, community empowerment and participation) for localizing the SDGs

3. Building a Leadership Culture for the SDG Agenda at All Levels	• Government to build strong "leadership (Front Runners) for the SDGs" in all focal agencies and stakeholders
4. Promoting SDG-Focused Innovation by All Citizens, Especially Young People	• Customize and implement in an interconnected manner, SDG creative innovations that have worked elsewhere to our local conditions • Experiment (test, pilot and share) new methods of building partnerships at all levels to drive innovative and integrated approaches to deliver the SDGs
5. Focusing on Financing for The SDGs – Harnessing Uganda's Potential	• Prioritize the discussion on mobilizing financing for SDGs in the awake of COVID-19 and the global economic recession • Harness local resources innovatively
6. Strengthening Technology and Information Systems in SDG Implementation	• More timely and relevant data to achieve the SDGs • Make the best use of the various forms of data around us (Government, CSOs, Private Sector, Academia, etc.,) • Build a strong culture of data consumption and production

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