This regional report compiles a comparative analysis of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of four sub-Saharan African countries for the year 2022. These contributions come from the governments of Ghana, Malawi, Liberia and Somalia.

This analysis aims to inform the efforts of the United Nations (UN) Women Evaluation Division on their assessment of progress on gender equality around the world. The methodological framework used in this report mimics the evaluation framework proposed to our team by UN Women following a discussion with Ms Florencia Tateossian, Evaluation Specialist at UN Women EvalGender+, about how this framework may be used to assess the most recent VNRs.

The subsections of this framework include the dimensions of 'Keywords', 'Governance', 'Methods', 'Evaluation', 'Gender Policies', 'Leave No-One Behind' and 'Looking Ahead'. Each of these categories has been examined in detail for all four countries to highlight trends in the progress and challenges that these African nations are facing while they work to achieve their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Our analysis covers the entirety of each of the country VNR reports but focuses in particular on Goal 5 on Gender Equality and the ways in which gender is addressed throughout the report.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRPB</td>
<td>Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LNOB</td>
<td>Leave No-One Behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Development Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PECGs</td>
<td>Pillar and Enabler Coordination Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERD</td>
<td>Planting for Export and Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPAD</td>
<td>Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VNR</td>
<td>Voluntary National Reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Voluntary National Reviews constitute an essential component of the review mechanisms designed by the UN to monitor progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda states that countries should "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (paragraph 79). Progress is reviewed in terms of the advancements that have been made in a series of 17 Goals that states should collectively aim to achieve by 2030. These goals cover a wide range of development indicators that aim to tackle various global issues such as poverty, hunger, education, water, energy crisis, gender equality and peace, among others.

UN Women is the UN organization responsible for delivering programs, policies and standards that promote women’s rights. The Evaluation Division of UN Women works within this organization to regularly conduct evaluation work which informs the decisions around gender equality of the organization. As part of the UN Women Evaluation Strategy 2022-2025, UN Women seeks to strengthen the use of evaluation and implement strategic corporate, regional and country portfolio evaluations. One of the main ways this objective is being addressed is through the analysis of the annual VNRs for countries across the world which can be easily accessed through the UN online portal. These reports outline the efforts being taken by countries in all SDGs. By undertaking a program evaluation of these VNRs, UN Women can assess the extent to which gender is prioritised in various countries and for all SDGs. Furthermore, this evaluation allows for the assessment of these over time.

Our report focuses on the most recent 2022 VNR contributions of four sub-Saharan countries: Ghana, Malawi, Liberia and Somalia. For this evaluation, we undertook a program evaluation approach for the entirety of the national report focusing on the specific dimensions that had been provided to us by UN Women. We conversed with Ms Florencia Tateossian, Evaluation Specialist at UN Women, who kindly shared insights on how UN Women undertakes its gender evaluation. We also received guidance from Ms Abeer Hakouz who worked on the VNR analysis for the previous few years.

A template was provided to our team which addressed seven key subsections. These subsections are 'Keywords', 'Governance', 'Methods', 'Evaluation', 'Gender Policies', 'Leave No-One Behind' and 'Looking Ahead'. Our report compares and summarizes each of these subsections for the VNRs of Ghana, Malawi, Liberia and Somalia.
Methodology

The (1) ‘Keyword’ analysis required a word count for a few terms throughout the report such as ‘woman’, ‘gender equality’, ‘violence’ and ‘gender sensitive’. The (2) ‘Governance’ section required a more qualitative analysis of the report to examine how governing authorities and institutions in each country are collaborating to achieve the SDGs. The next dimension of our evaluation is that of (3) ‘Methods’ which required us to review the methodological frameworks being implemented in each country. This section required us to pay special attention to aspects like sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive assessment. The fourth subsection (4) was on ‘Evaluation’ which required an assessment of the role of evaluation in the monitoring and evaluation components of the report. Again, this required a consideration of the extent to which gender-responsiveness mechanisms were being taken into consideration. The aspect of (5) ‘Gender Policies’ asked what national policies and frameworks are being considered and implemented at a national level in each country. This required us to identify specific policies and their specific roles. The subsection of (6) ‘Leave No-One Behind’ inquired about the representation and participation of marginalized groups in the creation of the VNR and more specifically asked us to research examples of good practices in this area. Finally, we considered the ‘Looking Ahead’ dimension of the report to examine the future of these policies. To do so we studied the structure of the report to confirm whether there were specific sections dedicated to future steps and investigated what these steps are and how they may relate to gender.

Ultimately, the findings for each of these subsections were compiled into one database; and this report presents an in-depth discussion of these findings in the format of a comparative analysis for the region of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Visualizing Key Words:
A Word-Cloud Analysis of Goal 5 from each VNR
Keywords

The sub-Saharan African VNRs were analysed using several keywords which emerged from the UN EvalGender+ framework. **Somalia** and **Malawi** utilized more direct keywords to refer to gendered groups such as “Woman/en” over thirty times in both reports. **Ghana** and **Liberia** were prone to using terms such as “Monitoring” and “Evaluation” when referring to gender policy or oversight of gendered communities. Collectively, the Sub-saharan countries paid little to zero attention to LGBTQ and disabled individuals within their reports. The only mention of the LGBTQ population was in the **Liberian** VNR which mentioned “men who have sex with men” while discussing the AIDS epidemic. Further VNRs could benefit from paying more attention to these vulnerable groups, as their positionality and intersection with gender could be disproportionately affecting the level of support they receive from the community and the government. Moreover, future reports could be enhanced by providing more precise gender-responsive frameworks.

Overall, the countries have a clear baseline of gender keywords by referring to “Woman/en” in their reports. Going forward, future VNRs could specify other keywords for communities which intersect with gender identities such as Sexual Orientation, Disabled and Rural individuals to amplify how gender policies in each country are affecting sub-groups within the larger gender community.
The 2022 VNR suggest that Liberia currently holds the largest centralized governance framework to implement the SDGs. This flows from the commitment of the Liberian government to align its National Development Plans with Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, Liberia has placed emphasis on evidence-based data from multiple sources for generating their VNRs. Malawi, Ghana and Somalia still operate under a decentralized framework to assess the progress of SDGs. VNRs from these nations do not specify the extent to which data is collected and gender policies are implemented effectively. The Ministry of Finance and Economics of Malawi is primarily responsible for the implementation of SDG-centric policies yet how each of these policies is being implemented remains relatively unclear. Ghana relies on the High-level Ministerial Commission, an Implementation Coordinating Committee and a Technical Committee for primary oversight of data and monitoring of the SDGs. Moreover, Ghana relies on collaboration from the WHO Secretariat for oversight of certain SDGs such as Goal 3. They refer broadly to “Women’s Groups” as stakeholders in the consultation process for the governance of gender policy but do not specify who these groups and the agendas that they promote. Somalia also has a decentralized system and refers to the Ministry of Women for consultation on Gender Policy and Governance.

Overall, countries have made the initial steps in governance and monitoring of SDG policies. Future reports would benefit from more precise and specific language on which government bodies and stakeholders are responsible for monitoring each SDG and the successes and challenges they face. Further, gender-responsive data should be incorporated into the VNRs to amplify existing gender policies and data reported in the countries.
Mock Parliament to Promote Women's Participation in Liberia
The ‘Methods’ section of our analysis addresses the structure and components of the VNRs monitoring and evaluation component. Special attention has been paid to gender components of monitoring and evaluation such as gender-responsiveness strategies and the use of sex-disaggregated data to assess the extent to which the various Goals are being met for Malawi, Ghana, Liberia and Somalia respectively.

With regard to the overall methodological framework used to assess the SDG implementation process of each country, Malawi and Ghana appear to lag behind Liberia and Somalia. The VNR reports for both countries demonstrate a clear overall framework in which each SDG is addressed separately and in their corresponding order. However, the framework in both reports is poorly defined and fails to implement gender-responsive assessments and gender-specific data. Both Malawi and Ghana mention the terms ‘monitoring’ and ‘evaluation’ throughout the report but there is no specific evidence of the implementation of such policies. Somalia’s VNR report demonstrates a slightly more gender-aware approach in its methodological framework for assessing SDG progress. The use of gender-responsiveness assessment comes through in Somalia’s analysis of progress in Goal 5 and sex-disaggregated data is used when exploring the intersection between infant mortality rate and maternal mortality. Liberia has gone a step further and distinguished itself from the other countries in this regional analysis for its commitment to gender mainstreaming in its VNR report. Liberia’s methodological framework consists of a stakeholder assessment, an inquiry into institutional arrangements and an evaluation of the capacity of government officials to go through with different aspects of SDG implementation. Throughout the report, Liberia flags the importance of gender-specific objectives and issues and uses sex-disaggregated data to contextualize how issues are affecting the more vulnerable groups across the country.
Evaluation

Evaluation refers to the systematic collection and analysis of information to make judgments about the extent to which policy goals and initiatives are being achieved or not. In this analysis, we are particularly interested in the intersection between evaluation and gender and the extent to which gender has been taken into consideration in each of the country’s evaluation strategies.

It is important to note that evaluation strategies for all countries are fairly recent and are advancing at different paces. Somalia, for example, acknowledges in its VNR report that proficient monitoring has not taken place yet and has monitoring goals in place to address this. Liberia, on the other hand, has developed a framework before conducting the 2022 VNR which is based on a comprehensive analysis and assessment of the last VNR submitted by Liberia in 2020. This updated framework has been integrated into all ministries to focus on the progress of SDGs and its National Plan titled ‘Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development’ (PAPDs). Ghana and Malawi have a long way to go to achieve this level of application of evaluation strategies. Although evaluation is mentioned throughout both reports, it is unclear how evaluation is being used and there is a lack of specificity regarding the methods and criteria. In Ghana’s report, in particular, evaluation is mostly mentioned in the phrase “monitoring and evaluation” which fails to distinguish between these two practices and address how each is used. Liberia’s report recognizes that there are clear gaps in the monitoring and evaluation relating to the challenges faced by data processes in the country when attempting to assess the national performance of the SDG implementation process.
On International Women's Day, UN Calls for Somali Women’s Enhanced Political Participation and Applauds Somali Women on the Frontlines to Defeat the Pandemic
Gender Policies

The ‘Gender Policies’ section of our analysis addresses the national frameworks, strategies and policies mentioned in the VNR. Special attention has been paid to national gender equality strategies and their implementation in each country.

All countries acknowledge the significant gender disparities that exist within their borders. Accordingly, all four countries have implemented national gender policies aimed to address the specific challenges women are facing in their countries in line with Goal 5 in a variety of areas such as tackling teenage pregnancy, Female Genital Mutilation and improving women’s political representation. However, both Malawi and Ghana lack details on how these policies are being implemented and whether or not they are effective on-ground. The government of Malawi has implemented the ‘National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security’ but the discussion around national monitoring and evaluation strategies for this is vague and does not prioritise gender equality. Similarly in Ghana, the ‘National Gender Policy’ is flagged as a vital step to achieving gender equality but the VNR report does not discuss the policy in detail. Somalia has taken important steps by promoting the role of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights in overseeing the implementation of gender equality in the country. The Ministry has enacted Women’s Charters across its national policies for a range of SDGs. Finally, Liberia stands out among these countries for the range of gender-oriented policies and national initiatives. Liberia has outlined a National Gender Plan and has set up Social Inclusion Units across its national-level ministries. In addition, it has developed a Country Gender Equality Profile to provide an in-depth analysis of the differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and property rights, development planning and control of assets, decision-making powers between girls, women, boys, and men in their assigned gender roles.

Overall, there is evidence across all countries of national gender policies and initiatives that are being implemented by a range of ministries. However, the VNR reports still lack more in-depth discussions on the implementation of specific policies and their effectiveness. This can be partly attributed to how recent these strategies are and the lack of available data to undertake an evaluation of these. This echoes previous sections of the report whereby there is a lack of gender-aggregated data, making it hard to assess whether policies aimed at achieving Goal 5 are effective. These countries should monitor gender-specific strategies closely and collect data to ensure that an evaluation can be incorporated into their future VNR reports.
The ‘Leave No-One Behind’ section analyses whether countries have sufficiently considered the perspectives of marginalized voices while preparing the VNRs. This is especially important when considering improving the level of gender equality in the region, as without inputs from women and other marginalised identities, SDG Goal 5 is unlikely to be met.

There is mixed evidence regarding the LNOB principle in the regional context. Both Malawi and Ghana mention that they have considered the perspectives of marginalized groups, but do not specify how and to what extent these groups were consulted during the VNR process. Liberia goes further to mention specific frameworks that include marginalized groups in the planning and development process of its National Plans and the making of its VNR. Similarly, Somalia also mentions ‘inclusive participation’ by marginalized groups including ‘Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs), women from rural areas, youth and male gender advocates and religious leaders.’ Overall, although efforts have been made to include voices from marginalised groups, it is clear that there is room for improvement in the domain.
Looking Ahead

The final section assesses the future plans for a regular and annual review of the SDGs implementation progress at the national level. In addition, it examines if the VNR includes recommendations on how evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations will be used to strengthen future reviews.

Although all countries have implemented national framework tools related to achieving SDG 5, there is a lack of detail on how governments plan to improve gender-responsive data and evaluations. All countries except Somalia failed to outline recommendations on how evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations can be strengthened in reviews annually. Furthermore, recommendations to improve gender inequalities also do not mention how often the strategies would have to be used. These recommendations also lack details on how to implement them effectively in the future. This presents a relatively bleak picture in terms of achieving SDG 5 by 2030 in the region.
While analysing the 2022 VNRs from Somalia, Ghana, Liberia and Malawi, there are a few commonalities. Each country has implemented national strategies and plans to address gender issues, however, a lot more needs to be done. Extremely appalling issues like FGM, sexual violence, sexual harassment and teenage pregnancy still plague the region. In the domain of governance and policy, some efforts have been made by all the aforementioned countries to achieve gender parity.

The most promising governance and evaluation strategies are emerging out of Liberia, where the government has included the Sustainable Development Goals as part of its national development plans. Additionally, Liberia has prioritised 11 out of the 17 SDGs and aligned them with its policy agenda on a national stage, thereby scaling up the progress. SDG Goal 5 to achieve Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment has also found space in this priority sector, thus incentivising the policymakers, the executive machinery and private partners to focus on the domain. While there are specific dashboards and frameworks dedicated to monitoring the progress of the SDGs and the Liberian government’s PAPD plan, there is still a need to incorporate gender-responsive data and evaluations into future steps.

Other countries in the report i.e. Somalia, Ghana, and Malawi, have lagged behind from a gender-parity and governance standpoint. There is also a lack of specific frameworks, and actionable plans to strengthen the evaluative evidence for gender equality and equity considerations. Across the board, there is a lack of detailed next steps for every goal, and any recommendations suggested throughout the reports do not adequately mention how often the strategies would have to be used or how to implement them. Incorporating gender-responsive data and evaluations into future steps can help strengthen these countries’ commitment to achieving gender equality.
In conclusion, the report presents a program evaluation of the 2022 VNR contributions of four sub-Saharan countries, namely, Ghana, Malawi, Liberia and Somalia. The evaluation focused on seven key subsections identified by UN Women EvalGender+, which included 'Keywords', 'Governance', 'Methods', 'Evaluation', 'Gender Policies', 'Leave No-One Behind' and 'Looking Ahead'. The report presents an in-depth comparative analysis of the region and highlights the efforts made by each country to achieve gender parity under Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Although it is promising that these countries have developed national policies aimed at reducing gender inequality, it is clear that more work needs to be done. In particular, this report shows a need to incorporate gender-responsive data and evaluations into future policies. Overall, the report underscores the need for more specific frameworks and actionable plans to strengthen the evaluative process and achieve the SDGs in the region.
Activists celebrate the launch of the Malawi Chapter of the African Women Leaders Network.