

Enabling Transformation:

The Role of UN Resident Coordinator Offices and Country Teams in Support of the Voluntary National Reviews on the 2030 Agenda

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Introduction

This study has been developed as an independent assessment for UN DESA Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development, to consider lessons learnt by UN Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in consulting with, and supporting governments in the preparation, drafting and follow-up of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presented at the High-Level Political Forum.

The study aims to consider a diverse range of developing countries, taking into account different contexts, geographic spread, socio-economic characteristics and countries in special situations. It aims to identify key trends for each of the following steps: a) Preparation of VNR; b) drafting of VNR; c) follow up post VNR.

The analysis seeks to highlight challenges, best practices and lessons learnt by Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) and UN Country Teams (UNCTs) in consulting with, and supporting governments in the VNR preparation, with a view to informing VNR countries, as well as future support of the Office to the VNR preparations and presentations, including its update of the Secretary-General's Voluntary Reporting Guidelines and its global preparatory workshops for VNR countries.

Consideration is given to specific challenges and good practices identified in key countries. The study aims to acknowledge expertise and key recommendations and provide a basis to enable further sharing of expertise and enhance future VNR processes.

The study has benefitted from an open and collaborative approach from many UN RCOs and a strong willingness to share knowledge and experiences.

The report is based on 16 interviews with representatives from a diverse range of countries and offers key trends and good practices that have been observed through the various interviews. The countries covered in the interviews were: Angola, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chad, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Mongolia, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

The study took place over the months of January - February 2022 through a series of 1-hour interviews hosted online, following a standard set of questions. Many of the country representatives had been active over a number of years and included exchange with several agencies at country level. You can find at the end of this study:

- The country teams listed in Annex I;
- The full set of interview guide questions listed in Annex II.

In terms of each step along the path for the delivery of VNRs, a number of key trends, good practices and areas of mutual learning are set out below.



Key Trends

Overall, several general trends have been observed as follows:

- It was noted that there was significant variation in the level of engagement by governments in each context and that the UN Country Teams often played a key bridging role between different ministries, agencies and stakeholder groups.

- In almost all cases the strong engagement of RCOs with national governments and wider stakeholders has led to a more integrated, inclusive and holistic VNR process.

- A steady process of deepening engagement has taken place in countries where a second or subsequent VNR has been undertaken, particularly in terms of wider 'whole of society' consultations, including at least one case of ongoing national annual reviews (Ukraine) and two cases of regular parliamentary committee scrutiny (Indonesia, Sierra Leone).

- Many cases of multi-stakeholder advisory bodies on the SDGs were shared. These provide an essential space for mutual exchange and participation across the full range of stakeholders, such as engagement with civil society groups, academia, youth organisations and women's networks, to ensure delivery of the important principle enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of 'leaving no one behind'.

- Clear commitment to alignment with national development plans is noticeable in several countries, VNRs often provide an evidence base for national planning by government ministries and a way to quantify national milestones for development.

- A number of UNCTs provided direct resources to the VNR process in terms of staff capacity, consultants, support to consultations and contribution to drafting of the report. This resource can provide additional support for the VNR process, while respecting national ownership of VNRs, for example it is often shown to be more effective to provide a consultant to facilitate engagement processes rather than one to help draft the report.

- Increasing alignment has been established with UN planning via the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF) process, with several country teams noting that the VNR process provided an evidence base for the CCA

and established a method for gathering broad inputs for the CF, however the new systems for common assessment and coordination across all UN entities are still being refined and embedded.

- The role of RCOs is increasingly recognised as a key anchor for wider coordination, however budget constraints for implementation mean that this coordination often relies on goodwill of other entities.



Preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR)

The approach in each country has varied on the preparation of the VNRs. All the countries surveyed for this report had conducted at least one VNR and in a number of cases they had already delivered two or three. It was therefore noticeable that in those countries which had conducted more than one VNR, that the commitment and engagement in the process had deepened from the first to the subsequent VNRs, including a more systematic approach across all UN entities, a clearer working relationship with relevant government ministries and broader stakeholder engagement.

Although we are now approaching the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, awareness of the SDGs still varies significantly and the unprecedented reality of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last 2 years will have a lasting impact on the delivery of the Goals. These impacts include direct reductions in achievement of health and education outcomes, while the broader economic effects remain to be seen over coming years.

In this context of a volatile and politically unsettled picture in many regions, there is a clear emphasis on the need for political will to ensure that the key decision-makers are engaged in the delivery of the VNRs to ensure achievement of the SDGs.

In several cases, it was highlighted that the office of the Head of State or Government was in a leadership role or in other cases this role was played by the Ministry of Planning and/or Development. For such a cross-cutting agenda, political will on the part of the Head of State or Government is important to ensure delivery is integrated across all areas. In fact, several UNCTs noted that elections and changes in administration had led to re-appraisals or reductions in budgets, which could lead to delays. However, the most successful examples were those where the support for the 2030 Agenda was demonstrated as a cross-party priority and supported as a longer-term aspiration from one administration to the next, such as in the Dominican Republic.

In terms of the preparation of the VNR, many of those who were interviewed highlighted that there is a clear need to ensure that all line ministries are engaged as part of a coordinated approach to deliver a comprehensive VNR. Furthermore, where governments can see a close affinity with their own national priorities, the VNR is more likely to receive support and gather wider attention, such as in Chad.

While a number of countries highlighted that the first VNR was often prepared at quite short notice, it was highlighted that where countries have prepared a second VNR, this has usually resulted in a longer lead in time with stronger preparation and commitment from the relevant government offices.

Given the challenging economic situation of recent years and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in several countries it was highlighted that the UN entities were able to provide crucial resources, staff time and direct support for consultations, which enhanced the government's own capabilities and enabled a wider range of views to be heard.

It is perhaps worth noting that without the UNCT involvement, VNR engagement would likely have been much weaker in several countries. It is also noticeable in some countries, that the UNCT involvement enabled a

much broader range of stakeholders to be included, due to pre-existing relationships with many civil society partners.

For example, in the case of Bangladesh, it was noted that UNDP organised a specific capacity development programme over several years to ensure 2030 Agenda monitoring and implementation, which included consultants hosted directly within the government Planning Commission, who were able to assist in establishing systems for monitoring from statistics gathered by each ministry.

Similarly in Angola, the RCO provided technical support and an external consultant to assist the Ministry of the Economy and planning, as well as the SDG National Platform to connect with a wide range of stakeholders in a series of workshops.

In the case of Ukraine, specific consultants were hired for a 7-month process of consultation hosted in partnership between the RCO and the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers in the Government, different UN entities were involved in supporting consultations related to different SDGs, such as UN Women on Goal 5, WHO on Goal 3, etc.

This coordination role across the different UN entities was highlighted as a significant change in many countries, with a willingness to pool resources and identify a shared process for engagement.

The UN reforms have taken place since the start of the 2030 Agenda, so the new role of the UN RCO is still taking shape in some countries. The role of RCOs is assisting in giving greater coherence across different UN entities and has led to a more connected approach, however budgets are still held by individual entities, thus the ability of the RCO to provide direct support is still limited in some cases.


It is very important to note that the most effective planning took place in countries where the VNR is connected to wider national development plans. For example, in the case of Samoa, the VNR process was closely tied in with the SAMOA Pathway and the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, so the second VNR, which took place in 2020, built upon a broader process for joint planning and linking of essential agendas to ensure a strong joined up approach.

Furthermore, countries reporting for a second time were able to connect their VNR presentations with their own national reporting cycle, such as Samoa's multi-year strategy from 2016 until 2020 or in the case of the Dominican Republic from 2018 until 2021, where the government established clear annual plans in line with the overall strategy. In the case of Guatemala, the government has even gone further to establish a regular VNR report every two years, so far these have taken place in 2017, 2019, 2021. Harmonizing VNR preparation with national policy and planning cycles makes VNRs most useful to countries and increases their impact for delivery of the SDGs.

CASE STUDY: SAMOA

Samoa reported for the first time in 2016 and for the second time in 2020. The SDGs were embedded into a clear multi-year strategy and there was a strong oversight mechanism called the Samoa Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting Framework (SMERF). The plan included localising all the SDGs by working closely with an SDG Taskforce led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, including the Samoa Bureau of Statistics, a range of line ministries, UN entities, as well as civil society and the private sector. This Taskforce established an SDG Framework with a series of indicators, including localising the global indicators and identifying proxy indicators at a country level.

At the point when the second VNR was undertaken, all relevant agencies who were identified as custodians of the data for evaluation were invited to



engage with the SDG Taskforce and were supported to define the sources of data that were needed for each indicator. The Samoa Bureau of Statistics also shared their own data and there was a 10-day validation workshop of the Taskforce to populate the overall framework and validate the data to be included in the VNR. The whole Taskforce was invited throughout the meetings and this ensured a joint sense of ownership across all the members of the SDG Taskforce in defining the framework and delivering the joint data.

Drafting of the Voluntary National Review

INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO REPORTING AND COORDINATION ACROSS AGENCIES

As highlighted above, the VNR process can often provide a crucial opportunity for broader coordination if it is seen to be integrated into wider national planning processes. The VNR process aims to provide a ‘whole of government’ approach so the overall responsibility generally lies with the head of government. However, in practice different agencies have taken on the lead drafting role.

Where possible, there has been a clear opportunity to go further and aim for coordination across different ministries and to engage with all relevant UN entities, academia, civil society and the private sector. This coordination can take a range of different forms and it may depend on the relevant ministry providing a convening role for broader partners.

In the medium term, to ensure the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, it is crucial to support a process that enables integration across relevant ministries and wider agencies.

As set out above in the case of Ukraine, it was the Cabinet of Ministers which acted as the coordination body across the different line ministries

and in the case of the Dominican Republic, the government established an 'Inter-Institutional Commission', which includes all relevant government bodies and UN entities, and operates through 5 sub-committees to cover each of the 5 'P's of the 2030 Agenda:- People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships.

In the majority of cases, it is the Planning or Development Ministry that plays a coordinating role across different ministries, such as in Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Mongolia and Tajikistan.

In the case of Mongolia, when the VNR was conducted in 2019, the relevant body was the National Development Agency and this body is now in the process of being 'upgraded' to a new Economic Development Ministry, demonstrating a clear political commitment to this agenda.

In the case of Samoa, it was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade which guided the process in coordination with a wide range of partners in the SDG Taskforce. In the case of Chad, it was the Ministry of Economy which led the team but the inputs were brought together via an Inter-Ministerial Committee chaired by the President.

In the case of Kenya, the Ministry of Planning established an SDG Directorate which also works closely with the Treasury Ministry to ensure that budgets are aligned with the SDGs. While from the point of view of the UN entities, the RCO has established a 'multistakeholder technical working group', which ensures a joint approach across UN entities, including for example UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP. This technical working group collaborates closely with the Ministry of Planning, as well as with 'SDG Champions' at the sub-national level in all Kenya's 47 counties.

CASE STUDY: GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, the VNR process was carried out by the national planning office Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia (SEGEPLAN). There is a commitment from the government to review the

SDGs every two years and this has led to 3 VNRs to date, respectively in 2017, 2019 and 2021. The team at SEGEPLAN has been effective at identifying a substantive expert to act as a focal point in each agency who can collect relevant information to fit into the overall SDG reporting framework.

The VNR process in Guatemala involved all the line ministries and also a range of key UN entities, for example UN Women and UNFPA, who inputted relevant data within the agreed framework. The UN entities also provided logistical support and resources for meetings with stakeholders in the capital and at a sub-national level. The reporting is closely connected with the government's own national development plan and annual reporting cycle, whereby each annual report is aligned with the SDGs and this in turn fits into a long-term sustainable development plan until 2032. In the coming cycle, there is also an intention to add a further element to this reporting, which will be an SDG-based budgeting approach to ensure that all the government expenditures are delivering on the agreed plans and the overall commitments of the SDGs.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND ADVISORY BODIES

The process for stakeholder engagement is seen an important element for support from the UNCTs, with a strong focus on enabling wide dialogue across diverse partners.

In several cases, specific Task Groups or Working Groups were established to consider inputs on each goal- UN agencies then engaged on each relevant goal and the RCO maintained a list of different agencies active in each area (Guatemala, Indonesia, and Ukraine provided a detailed list of inputs by each agency per goal). In many cases, these Task Groups were also open to wider stakeholders to ensure a broad range of inputs and views could be included in the overall reporting.

As has already been outlined above, in Samoa there was a strong multi stakeholder SDG Taskforce which established the reporting framework and provided feedback and data on each of the indicators.

Another useful example comes from India, where the report was drafted by Niti Ayog, a government advisory body which acts as a policy development unit reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office. This body developed a review of official data from all ministries guided by a team of researchers who were able to bring together existing information on each SDG. At the same time, the RCO in this case provided direct resources to enable a wide range of consultations with populations that are most often left behind. There were 17 consultations with marginalised groups including persons with disabilities, Dalits, Adhivasis, indigenous peoples, women, youth etc., and the consultation meetings were in fact co-hosted with civil society networks who already have trusted relationships with these key communities. Inputs were then received from each of these consultations and a number of recommendations were included in the final VNR.

In the case of Brazil, a National Commission for the SDGs was established in 2017 alongside the country's first VNR and a wide range of stakeholders were included, from across government agencies, local authorities, the private sector, academia and civil society. They were actively involved in the development of the VNR, which was closely aligned with the national development plan for 2017-2019. Initial plans were also underway to establish thematic working groups and the UNCT offered to support the government to develop a further VNR and establish wider data on delivery of the SDGs. However, the change in administration after the elections in 2018 led to the closure of the National Commission and the SDG's ceased to be mentioned in the national development plans.

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In the case of Indonesia, working groups were established to follow the drafting of the VNR process, with the involvement of a range of stakeholders including government agencies, civil society organisations (CSOs), philanthropy, business and academia. There was a particular focus on ensuring the voices of vulnerable communities could be heard, including disabled persons organisations (DPOs), young people and women's organisations. There was also a broad online public consultation to gather views from diverse stakeholders. The working groups were able to comment before the drafting began and were also given the chance to give feedback after the first and second drafts; furthermore, the final draft was then reviewed by a 'representative team of stakeholders' before completion by the Ministry.

CASE STUDY: MONGOLIA

Mongolia undertook its first VNR in 2019 and while the drafting was led by the government, there was a strong commitment to work with a taskforce which included civil society and academia. This taskforce worked closely with the National Council for Sustainable Development. In Mongolia, this council is chaired by the Prime Minister and includes all relevant Ministries, development agencies and stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector and academia. The draft of the VNR was reviewed by the council to input suggestions and a national workshop was held in April with a range of stakeholders, the workshop was even broadcast on television to raise broader awareness.

The National Council for Sustainable Development aims to ensure an ongoing process of dialogue, linking the VNR with the national development plans, the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (CF). There are 8 working groups within the council and they meet to provide advice on a review of all the SDG indicators to ensure they are measured at the national level. The CCA was completed in 2021, building on the knowledge of the VNR and the key areas for recommendation have formed the basis of the CF. The draft of the CF will be presented to the National Council for Sustainable Development alongside a results framework for each outcome.

Thereby the Mongolia case has embedded the findings of the VNR (in 2019), into the preparation of the CCA (in 2021), which is now leading to a new draft of the CF, all of which are presented to the National Council for Sustainable Development in an integrated cycle.

RESOURCING AND PARTNERSHIPS

The drafting process of the VNR has generally been coordinated by a specific government agency, often the Planning Ministry, however RCOs and UNCTs have usually been closely involved in terms of informing, shaping and drafting key aspects of the report. It is crucial to note that the support of the RCO should be carried out in support of national plans, while preserving the country's ownership of the analysis and conclusions.

As highlighted above, in a number of countries, resources were provided by UN entities and in several cases at least one consultant or some elements of design of the VNR were paid for by these resources, this includes Bangladesh, Chad, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ukraine and Samoa.

With variations in each country, the resources from UNCTs seem to have come from a range of UN entities, including the largest inputs from UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA and FAO.

The consultancy has generally been embedded into the Ministry of Planning to enable dedicated staff time on the VNR drafting and a focal point to connect across all relevant data sources.

In the case of Iraq, the fragile post conflict situation delayed the start of SDG implementation, but the interim government was able to develop a process within the Ministry of Planning to support a VNR in 2021. In this case the UN entities also played an essential role as resource partners to develop the methodology and support the gathering of data from key ministries and development partners. The role of UNDP was particularly emphasised as the chair of the SDG Working Group, which convened meetings across all UN entities and supported the Country Team in hosting small group consultations. The VNR also provided crucial information which has been integrated into the new CF for Iraq.

Resources from broader partners have also been provided in the form of access to data held by different agencies, as well as convening and awareness raising. These forms of partnership also enable a wide range of development partners to work together to ensure the wider population is aware of the 2030 Agenda and is able to contribute public views. In several cases, it was highlighted that UNICEF plays a particularly strong role in communicating the 2030 Agenda with its strong reach to youth networks and communications expertise.

There is perhaps an opportunity to go further and develop longer lasting partnerships to ensure ongoing awareness-raising of the SDGs in between the VNR reporting. As has been noted earlier, public awareness of the SDGs remains limited in a number of countries, so stronger partnerships with stakeholder groups such as academia, youth groups and civil society can enable stronger communication and a clearer understanding of the agenda across different demographics who would identify with key elements of the SDGs.

In the case of Angola, resourcing came from the RCO to ensure technical support to the Ministry of Economy and Planning, as well as direct support for the SDG National Platform, including workshop hosting costs and a focus on stakeholder engagement. There were 5 thematic working groups and at least one UN entity representative was present in each group. The groups were provided with step-by-step guidance on working methods and each group gathered its own information from across relevant ministries and development partners. The information was then brought together by an expert consultant who was able to collate and analyse the information, to identify gaps and encourage further assessment before updating the draft. The final draft was then presented at an in-person meeting with the presence of the Minister.

CASE STUDY: SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone conducted its third VNR process in 2021. The process was led by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, at the same time some support was provided from UN DESA 'New Deal' programme budget. In the period between February-June 2021, a series of consultations were hosted with a wide range of stakeholders, guided by the team at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, with the support a consultant from the UNCT who provided technical assistance.

Across the UNCT, there was a technical committee to support the development of the VNR and engagement was discussed at a bi-weekly meeting during the preparation of the VNR. Focal points were identified in each entity, and they were all able to share their inputs and suggested data for the drafting of the VNR.

At the same time, the work of the UNCT is complementary to the government's own clear commitment to aligning the national development plan with the 2030 Agenda. In fact, all ministries' plans are tied into the overarching framework of the national development plan and this is in turn

aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Regular assessment by the government and by the Parliamentary Committee for the SDGs also enables updates and reviews to take place between each VNR.



Follow-up Post Voluntary National Review

DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT

It is noticeable in the evidence provided that there has been a clear enhancement of the VNR processes in second and subsequent VNRs. As highlighted above, although the first VNR process was often undertaken very quickly, subsequent VNRs have been more clearly connected to national development plans and have generally been built over a longer period of 9 months up to a year.

At the same time, from the interviews, there is little doubt that the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be seen. A number of countries highlighted setbacks in SDG delivery, in terms of healthcare but also growing inequalities and the diversion of budgets away from core socio-economic delivery. One direct impact on UNCTs is also the reductions in budgets, which is leading some to focus on strengthening capacity for resource mobilisation and development partner engagement.

One clear way to deepen engagement is for UNCTs to provide support to build broad multi-stakeholder Task Groups, as highlighted in Angola, Guatemala, Indonesia, Mongolia, Ukraine and Samoa. The UN support to this broader dialogue provides a strong complementarity to the national government coordination and can ensure wider awareness and ongoing engagement on the 2030 Agenda beyond and between the VNR cycles.

Another important approach to establish a greater sense of national 'ownership' of the agenda is by working with cross-party committees in the parliament or congress. This was highlighted in several cases, such as the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Kenya and Sierra Leone as a way to ensure longer-term support and greater scrutiny of implementation of the agenda. These committees can also provide the forum for annual assessments of the SDGs and can maintain momentum towards delivery across government.

NEED FOR CLARITY ON MONITORING ALL SDGs

In terms of the actual VNR reporting, several UNCTs highlighted that the SG Voluntary Reporting Guidelines still leave some ambiguity on the proposed structure of the report. There was a recommendation that the guidelines should be clearer that all SDGs are to be reviewed each year, a number of countries still interpret the 'thematic focus' of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to apply to VNRs as well.

One good practice in this area is that several RCOs highlighted the development of regular national SDG reports by the relevant ministry or SDG Task Group at the national level on an ongoing basis, such as in the Dominican Republic, Tajikistan and Ukraine. These are not linked to the HLPF but rather focus on national accountability and a demand to show more regular progress within national monitoring and public awareness raising across all SDGs. These reports can provide a further review in between the VNRs, they should be country-led and entail ongoing

consultation and analysis by the country, including regular data collection and assessment.

In the case of Tajikistan, a national SDG Report was prepared for the subsequent years after the VNR in 2017, this has been supported by the National Agency of Statistics as part of their commitment to transparency and they intend to provide the data to be shared on a regular basis via the UN DESA platform. Similarly in Ukraine, yearly reports are provided on all SDGs by the national statistics office with support from the RCO.

CLOSE LINKAGES FROM VNR TO THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK

A very noticeable aspect of this study is how closely the VNR processes are being aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. Just as the second or subsequent VNR enables greater engagement, so the UNCTs are increasingly building the new round of Cooperation Frameworks on the basis of the VNR experience.

In the case of Mongolia, the VNR was delivered in 2019 and the process to prepare the Common Country Assessment then followed in 2021 and the same process has continued to build to the CF which will be agreed in 2022.

Similarly in the case of Bangladesh, the latest VNR was delivered in 2020 and the UN-led process for the CCA ran in parallel, with the CF agreed in 2021. While in India, after the VNR in 2020 the process of the CCA is currently underway with a similar consultation approach and will lead to a new CF from 2023.

In the case of Egypt, there was an innovative approach whereby UNDP resources were allocated to an International Futures Foresight approach prior to the VNR, which enabled scenario planning to be considered for the coming years. This led into the development of the VNR in 2021, the information gathered for the VNR ran in parallel to the CCA and is now underpinning the CF process. At the same time, the RCO engaged with the UN ECA secretariat to provide support to the Ministry of Planning to establish a baseline for a quantitative SDG Progress Assessment linked to the outcomes of the VNR. It is now intended that this methodology can be used to enable a regular annual assessment of progress with official data from the national statistical office.

DIRECT CONNECTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

One of the most important aspects in ensuring the VNR recommendations are embedded at the national level is linking these into the national development plans of each country. There has been a growth in the number of countries that are identifying a direct connection from the VNR recommendations into the national development plans, thereby enabling clear implementation of the priorities established in the VNR. It is only by ensuring national implementation through clear national plans that the 2030 Agenda can be achieved, these include Chad, the Dominican Republic, Indonesia and Ukraine, see below.

In the Dominican Republic the national development strategy actually started in 2010 and runs until 2030. From the start it had a focus on sustainable development, each annual plan is based on the overall strategy and when the laws were evaluated against the SDGs in 2019, they were found to have 84% alignment across all laws.

In the case of Indonesia, the experience of the VNR has informed the core government approach to development planning and the SDGs provide a basis for the annual plans, with 118 government targets linked to the SDGs

and the next 5-year plan will be closely aligned with SDG implementation.

In Ukraine, the National Economic Strategy runs from 2021-2030, it builds on the recommendations from the VNR in 2020 and refers directly to the implementation of the SDGs.

In Chad, the reporting cycle has also been aligned to the national planning process. The first VNR was delivered in 2019 and the second in 2021, while the national development plan ran from 2018 until 2021. The second VNR will therefore provide a basis for the current dialogue on the next development plan for 2022-26 and also considers a longer-term link to 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

CASE STUDY: KENYA

Kenya conducted its first VNR in 2016 and the second one in 2020. The RCO has worked closely with the Ministry of Planning and with the SDG Multistakeholder Technical Working Group. In the second cycle, a concept note and roadmap was prepared a year in advance, in 2019, and lessons learned from other countries were also included in the planning.

The joint approach included diverse stakeholders in a series of consultation meetings, including relevant ministries, UN entities, the private sector and civil society, as well as sub-national levels of government. The consultations were hosted according to thematic groups under the 5 'P's: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership; with a key convenor for each 'P'. The Multistakeholder Technical Working Group was able to provide initial inputs and also regular feedback to the drafts.

The drafting of the VNR itself was delivered by the SDG Directorate in the Ministry of Planning, it was felt important to build internal capacity rather than to hire an external consultant. The SDG reporting is directly tied into the national planning framework, with the VNR providing a review

mechanism for the Medium-Term Plan which runs until 2022. At the same time, the Treasury was active in the VNR process and built SDG reporting into the annual budget priorities.



BROADER CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE VNR SUPPORT

Overall, from these interviews, there is a clear impression that UNCTs and the RCO system are succeeding in establishing close working relationships with governments on the VNRs and in several cases, facilitating the engagement of wider stakeholders.

Through this process there is room for optimism that while the impact of COVID-19 has led to a number of setbacks on SDG implementation, nevertheless the moment of recovery presents opportunities for greater coherence and participation.

It is increasingly apparent that the RCOs have an essential role to play as enablers and convenors of crucial dialogues across the UN system, with government agencies and with wider stakeholders. This role could provide a missing element to ensure effective integration and greater policy coherence.

This support could include sharing expertise, identifying relevant data sources, supporting event logistics and also providing resources for enabling multi-stakeholder dialogue, as well as drafting and carrying out analysis of the VNR. This should be part of a process that is aimed at strengthening the country's ownership and leadership of 'whole of society' VNRs.

It is useful to consider further sharing of good practice between RCOs in different countries, perhaps including multistakeholder dialogues to share

learning in terms of data gathering, monitoring and engagement methodologies.

There are a number of innovative approaches highlighted for embedding the VNRs into a wider delivery cycle, such as the use of 'foresight' methods to consider future scenarios and the probability of different outcomes; the integration of SDG delivery with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; as well as the importance of linking the VNRs more closely into national planning and budgeting cycles.

It would also be helpful to ensure the Voluntary Reporting Guidelines reinforce the importance of a review of all SDGs, as well as the suggestion to establish annual reviews at a domestic level in addition to the VNRs.

It is important to emphasize the essential role of multi-stakeholder task groups, as a way to gather inputs and broad expertise from a wide range of stakeholder groups, including academia, private sector, trade unions, youth groups, women's organisation and wider civil society.

It is also worth noting that it is important to continue to support political will to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and for this there is an important role to be played by cross-party parliamentary or congressional committees. These committees can maintain momentum and enable a continued focus on the SDGs in the event of changes of administrations.

Finally, from the point of view of the wider UN teams in each country, there is a strong opportunity for collaborative partnership-working for awareness raising. It has been noted that knowledge and awareness of the 2030 Agenda remains variable, but a number of UN entities can play an essential role in sharing information with a much broader range of partners to mobilise awareness on the SDGs.

It is hoped that these steps can assist UN RCOs to continue to play an even stronger role to assist in the realization of the 2030 Agenda, to transform our world for a more just and sustainable future, over the coming years.

ANNEX I SUMMARY OF KEY INTERVIEWS (JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2022)

Country	RC	RCO Team Leader/ Additional Contacts	Interview Date
Africa			
Sierra Leone	Babatunde Ahonsi	Dr. Pa Lamin Beyai, UNDP RR	19 Jan
Kenya	Stephen Jackson	Julius Chokerah	20 Jan
Chad	Violet Kakyomya	Simon Fouda	24 Jan
Angola	Fatima Santos	Simao Muhongo	28 Jan
Asia			
India	Renata Dessallien & Shombi Sharp	Radhika Kaul Batra	04 Jan
Bangladesh	Sudipto Mukerjee	Subhra Bhattacharjee	05 Jan
Mongolia	Tapan Mishra	Doljinsuren Jambal	05 Jan
Indonesia	Valerie Julliand	Afke Bootsman & Diandra Pratami	05 Jan
Samoa	Simona Marinescu	Klem Ryan	18 Jan
Arab Region			
Iraq	Irena Vojackova- Sollorano	Brian Mau	21 Jan
Egypt	Elena Panova	Arun Jacob	24 Feb
LAC			
Brazil	Silvia Rucks del Bo	Haroldo Machado Filho	24 Feb
Guatemala	Miguel Barreto	Peride Blind	18 Jan
Dominican Rep	Mauricio Ramirez	Pilar Palomino	27 Dec
Europe & CA			
Ukraine	Osnat Lubrani	Dennis Besedic	29 Dec
Tajikistan	Sezin Sinanoglu	Ana Lukatela & Manuchehr Rakhmonov	6 Jan

ANNEX II INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

PREPARATION FOR THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW:

- 1). How many times has the country presented a VNR?
- 2). Please describe what support was provided by the RCO for the VNRs in your country? Were UNCT members involved? If yes, how?
- 3). Were there particular areas of requested support from the government?
- 4). Which was the lead agency on the government side?
- 5). When did the process begin and was there a roadmap for preparations developed?
- 6). How regular was the interaction between your team and the government team?
- 7). Any additional points on the preparation prior to the VNR?

DRAFTING THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW:

- 1). How was the process of drafting the VNR implemented? Was there in-house capacity to undertake such a comprehensive review? Eg. ministry lead or external consultant
- 2). What level of engagement was undertaken by the UN RCO team in hosting or drafting the VNR?

- 3). How was coordination with other institutions carried out?
- 4). How were other relevant processes being coordinated and reflected to strengthen VNRs and improve synergies between the processes?
- 5). How widely were broader stakeholders included in the process?
Eg. was there a stakeholder engagement consultation mechanism?
- 6). Was the report presented to the national parliament/public session before the HLPF?
- 7). Did you find particular challenges in the country's development of the VNR?
- 8). Any other good practices on the development of the VNR?

FOLLOW-UP TO VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW:

- 1). How did the VNR process connect with longer term national planning processes? E.g. national development plans?
- 2). How did the VNR process connect with longer term UN planning processes? E.g. Common Country Analysis and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework?
- 3). What has been the follow up to the VNR in the country after the presentation at the HLPF?

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