



## **First Workshop for the Voluntary National Reviews to be presented at the 2023 United Nations High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development**

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## Summary key messages

- The VNRs have been fundamental in maintaining the 2030 Agenda as a key priority at the national, regional and international levels especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The VNRs *support the delivery of the 2030 Agenda and the pledge to leave no one behind.*
- *VNRs need to cover all the SDGs* – but that countries will naturally place greater emphasis on goals of national priority. For instance, some countries will place the greatest focus on poverty and hunger because is their critical challenge. It also reflects the principle to start with furthest behind first. Participants agreed on the importance of implementing the LNOB principle.
- On the overall message emanating from the VNRs, participants were aware of the risks of presenting a rosy picture. They noted that the *VNRs should reflect the process of implementation, good practices, but also challenges and negative experiences.*
- On the "second generation of VNRs", participants explained about going further: deepening the analysis to showcase impacts; improving localization; better review of financing arrangements; broadening consultations with stakeholders; improving engagement with the private sector; and enhancing the use of science and dat. *Second generation VNRs could show developments since previous VNR*, outlining progress, gaps, new trends, impacts of policies you launched, what you did to improve things. They should also refer to the unsolved and difficult questions – this will be especially important this year with on-going crises.
- The VNRs promote open dialogue among countries and stakeholders on national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The VNRs can serve to promote national reviews of 2030 Agenda is a way that is *focused, evidence-based, conducive to peer learning and experience-sharing and that identify gaps and good practices and forge partnerships.*
- Many participants highlighted concerns about data and the use of data. Clearly, no country has data on all indicators. Some countries find that the VNR is an excellent opportunity to go locate, compile, and consolidate data. *Data disaggregation and availability of timely data remain major challenges* especially with growing inequalities and rapid changes in demography. Some participants spoke of using experimental data and proxies.
- The 2023 VNRs will allow countries to learn from their respective experiences to improve implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, which *serve as global blueprint for sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- The 2023 VNRs will *also contribute to national sustainable recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic*, while shifting to a track to realize the sustainable development goals (SDGs) during the Decade of Action and Delivery. In the process, it is critical to use existing mechanisms, be it national plans, policies, oversight institutions, multistakeholder bodies, censuses and surveys, and so on. This is how countries can maximize the impact of the SDGs and the VNRs across the board. The SDGs should not be an added burden or an additional track but part of the country's core business.

## Opening and main purpose of the workshop

Ms. Marion Barthelemy, the Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development (OISC) in the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) opened the first global VNR workshop for the 2023 VNRs and welcomed all participants. She emphasized the importance of the VNRs presented during the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), but also at the national level. She highlighted that the VNRs are a success story and an indispensable tool for deepen commitment to the 2030 Agenda at the global and local level. Furthermore, the VNRs give countries the opportunity to reflect on ways to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. VNRs can also support countries in strategizing for implementing the SDGs and in mobilizing donors in the case of developing countries. Ms. Barthelemy stressed the importance of creating networks and large partnerships among the countries, noting that the VNRs have an enormous potential to offer a rich exchange of experiences as well as give countries the opportunity to learn from each other especially in times of crises. Therefore, Ms. Marion Barthelemy expressed high expectations on the 2023 VNRs as a framework that can be used for reflecting on the current impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and can contribute towards the recovery process. She thanked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the generous support, which had made it possible to hold the workshop.

## Session 1: Roadmap for preparing the Voluntary National Reviews and recap on the VNR process

Session 1 provided a reminder of the key expectations as well as the principles and steps that need to be taken to prepare the VNRs. It also provided recommendations regarding the timeline for preparation of the VNR; discussions of the current status of the preparation by VNR presenters; the session also provided country examples and case studies from previous VNR reports. Furthermore, there was an interactive portion where countries were able to discuss progress in developing their roadmaps for their VNRs.

The session was moderated by Ms. Maame Agyeben and Mr. Friedrich Soltau, OISC, DESA. Ms. Agyeben gave a presentation providing an overview of the VNR process and the key deadlines. The deadline for the VNR main messages is 3 May 2023, which is a hard deadline, on account of the time required for translation. Unlike the VNR reports themselves, which are not translated, main messages received by the deadline are translated into the other UN languages. The deadline for the submission of the final VNR report is 9 June 2023. The deadline for the submission of the audio-visual material for the VNR presentation is 16 June 2023. First time presenters will have 15 minutes for

their presentation (inclusive of any videos) and around 20 minutes for Q&A, for a total of 35 minutes. Second time presenters will 10 minutes for the presentation and around 15 minutes for the Q&A, for a total of 25 minutes. They will present in the panel format.

Mr. Friedrich Soltau introduced the Updated Guidelines on the structure of the VNR report and other factors for the VNR countries to consider in preparing their reports. It was also shared that the VNRs would need to cover all the SDGs, but that countries will naturally place greater emphasis on goals of national priority. For example, some countries may place the greatest focus on poverty and hunger because is their critical challenge. It also reflects the principle to start with furthest behind first. It was also noted that many of the SDGs are interrelated, and this may impact how countries will conduct their VNR report. In the session countries also agreed on the importance of implementing the Leaving No One Behind principle. The session shared various approaches that countries are taking regarding the LNOB principle and the vulnerabilities they are looking at.

During the session participants asked questions, including concerns regarding the lack of data availability and depth. It was emphasized that VNRs are rather narrative than statistical reports that, nonetheless, should be evidence-based. VNR countries are encouraged to think about their subsequent VNRs as a movie rather than a set of still picture of country progress. Furthermore, the participants noted that the reporting on the SDGs within the VNR should be based on each country's national needs and priorities since some goals may be of greater importance than others.

It was further highlighted that the structure that is presented in this VNR workshop serves only as a guideline and can be modified according to each country's needs. In the end, it is essential for each country's own reflection but also for mutual learning and productive knowledge exchange among countries. Therefore, it is important the VNRs share both good practices as well as challenges and bottlenecks and avoid only communicating the 'rosy picture'. Other than the VNR reports, the 10-minutes presentations of them at the HLPF in 2023 should highlight the key messages by focusing on some SDGs including best and worst practices.

During the group discussion the countries focused on the following questions:

- *What do you think makes a good and meaningful VNR report?*

It was emphasized again that it is important to be honest in the VNR report including good practices and progress but also the challenges that have occurred in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, it was noted that a good and meaningful VNR report includes the current status of each country's development, lessons learned and the perspectives of as many stakeholders as possible in a clear and concise manner. The participants shared their 'key word' which is that they must be honest.

- *How are you considering building on your previous VNR report?*

Participants raised the issue of political bottlenecks and highlighted the need to withstand political pressures that aim on ‘window dressing’ the VNR report. Instead, the country representatives noted that their intention to build on their previous VNR reports by displaying recent developments and current challenges. Furthermore, to focus stronger regional cooperation including the engagement of all stakeholders in order to address leaving no one behind. Finally, it is important to reflect on what has been done about raising awareness of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Participants also explained that they will go one step further with their second VNR and deepen the analysis to showcase impacts. Countries also noted their intentions to improve localization, review SDG financing, broadening consultations with stakeholders, engaging the private sector, improving the use of science and data, and working at regional level. Countries agreed that second generations VNRs should show developments since previous VNRs. Furthermore, VNRs should show progress, gaps, new trends, impacts of policies. VNRs can also highlight the unsolved and difficult questions, which is especially important this year with on-going crises

- *Share a good practice from the previous VNR report and something you intend to do differently this time around?*

It was highlighted that the SDGs are highly interrelated and therefore some countries are seeking to include more cross-sectoral analysis is intended for the 2023 VNR report. Some countries noted that they would highlight their country’s specific vulnerabilities, such as small island developing states (SIDS). Furthermore, some countries noted the need to improve stakeholder engagement in their subsequent VNRs. Some countries noted their intended to have more data driven reports and work more closely with local authorities in the preparation of the report.

## **Session 2: Are your institutional frameworks fit for purpose for the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

Session 2 focused on issues related to the institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. During the session participants shared their experience in integrating SDGs into national strategies, programmes and policies and budgets. Participants also discussed how they could use their VNRs to assess whether there is an increasing trend of institutionalization, especially in the context of the on-going crises. They reflected on how VNRs could help to assess SDG institutionalization across several areas and to identify gaps and solutions. Countries exchanged

information on their institutional arrangement for the conduct of their VNRs and how they intend to mobilize the whole of government in the VNR.

The session began with a presentation by Ms. Lisa Ainbinder of the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government, DESA, who introduced the following list of milestones on assessing SDG institutionalization. The milestone included: Integration of SDGs into national development plans; Creation of a high-level piloting structure for SDG implementation in government; Publication of national SDG indicators; Government reporting on SDG progress at the national level; Evaluation of SDG progress non-state actors; Publication of a national SDG roadmap or action plan for SDG implementation; Creation of a central hub – electronic portal; Involvement of parliament; Involvement of the supreme audit institution. Furthermore, Ms. Ainbinder gave country examples, including how countries have involved parliaments, supreme audit institutions and established SDG portals. She noted the involvement of such institutions and mechanisms can support countries in evaluating the SDGs and assessing national performance. The session also included two country presentations outlining country experience and lessons learnt.

In order to increase federal engagement, one country implemented the SDG Data Hub, which is responsible for awareness raising and stakeholder engagement (e.g. by using the mobile app). It was highlighted that such an SDG Data Hub can help countries concerning budgeting issues and the geographic allocation of funds. Key challenges of the SDG Data Hub include the need to update it regularly. Furthermore, for such a Data Hub training is necessary and continuity must be ensured. Furthermore, the country established an SDG Unit and help to conduct nationwide consultations on the 2030 Agenda. The country also established a Federal Implementation Plan which reaffirms commitment to the 2030 Agenda and enhances federal coordination as well as leadership. Furthermore, the supports governance and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda by publishing an annual whole-of-society progress.

Another country also shared lessons in how they involved their supreme audit institution (SAI) in SDG implementation. It was noted that the SAI can support to the country in assessing the SDGs preparedness; undertake performance audits on SDGs; and support transparency and accountability in SDG implementation. The SAI worked with the government to establish the objectives of the review. The SAI conducted an assessment and provided a conclusion and recommendations to deepen the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the country. Some of the key success factors for involving the SAI included the need for strategic SDGs audit planning, which can help the SAI to conduct reviews of the VNRs; an agreed review framework between the SAI and government can help to overcome potential resistance in the review process; and a mutual understanding and awareness are important in having rigorous and evidence-based VNR. It was noted that the audit and

review of practices on the VNR can increase the credibility of a country's VNR and build a culture of accountability.

During the discussion it was noted that countries have made great progress in the areas of institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda. Participants noted that was useful to have a dedicated SDG roadmap or a national 2030 Agenda to supplement their core policy documents and guide implementation efforts by the ministries. It was also noted that the SDG roadmaps and national plans should be costed. The meeting also noted that it is important the VNR addresses policy coherence across the SDGs. The participants also stressed the importance of taking an integrated approach for planning, delivering and monitoring policies and interventions.

Several countries also shared their long-term strategies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Countries also shared their experiences in engaging parliaments and SAIs in reviewing SDG implementation. Involving SAIs can be a source of invaluable advice for government implementation, but it does not guarantee that there will be a sustained political response overtime. Some countries also shared that they have a dedicated electronic portal that serves as a central SDG hub. Participants also discussed how consultations with civil society can be critical for the VNR. It was mentioned that NGOs might show government the real issues and help the government to strategize.

### **Session 3: Data roadmaps and lessons learned from VNR preparations**

Session 3 focused on the issue of statistics and data for reviewing the progress towards the SDGs.

Statistics and data are critical for reviewing progress towards the SDGs, however, countries, often identify the availability and analysis of statistics as a key challenge in the preparations of their VNR. At the same time, preparations for the VNRs provide a key opportunity to build on countries' statistical capacities and understand their progresses towards the SDGs. This session supported the countries in developing a data roadmap for the VNR process, based on the national SDG monitoring framework and exploring additional opportunities to fill data gaps. Lessons learned on the use of data and statistics in the VNRs were further discussed, from countries presenting a subsequent VNR. Additionally, the session focused on identifying data gaps and what specific support is needed by countries.

Ms. Heather Page of the United Nations Statistics Division, DESA, began the session with a presentation emphasizing the importance of data and statistics and that the VNR should be evidence-based underpinned by data. She noted that some of the common challenges to data and statistics in VNRs remain, including coordination; limited evidence and data availability; limited disaggregated data and collections; and human and financial constraints. She introduced UN Statistics Division

Practical Guide for Evidence-Based Voluntary National Reviews, which includes an example of a Data Roadmap. The Data Roadmap starts with a preparation and planning phase, which includes the establishment of a VNR data team, institutional mechanisms for SDG monitoring; a data assessment phase; data collection phases; data incorporation phase; and the presentation and post-analysis. Ms. Page recommended close collaboration between policymakers and statisticians and consultations with data stakeholders to facilitate data assessment. Ms. Page also recommended that countries consider including a stand-alone data chapter within their VNR report.

Session 3 also included two countries presentations highlighting their experiences on data roadmaps, including some lessons learnt. Countries discussed how they aligned their SDGs to their National Planning Frameworks. Some participants noted that there was the gap between the ambition of the SDGs and the available financial and humanitarian resources for the implementation and incorporation of data from vulnerable groups. To address the latter issue, it was recommended to regionalize data and seek information at lower organizational levels.

During the discussion it was noted that data itself should be consistent with the report on the VNR and presented in an attractive way (e.g. charts, infographics) to facilitate understanding and communication. Participants commented that it is crucial to use recent data, in order to reflect the current reality of SDG implementation. It was noted that whether data deviates massively on some indicators often depends on the methodology that was used and needs to be communicated to the statistics office.

The participants discussed whether there were quantitative criteria, a methodology or a target achievement index in order to assess real progress on the SDGs. It was explained that there are a few different methodologies available to measure progress of the SDGs since many of the targets do not have established quantitative targets. Furthermore, a review of some available methodologies is included in the UNSD Practical Guide for Evidence-Based VNRs (p. 49-51).

One country noted that data collection digitalization had been adopted for all the censuses and surveys by the National Statistics' Office, which required all sector working groups to report and add SDG indicators in their annual reports. Participants discussed lessons learnt, which included bringing all partners on board using the National Development plans, strategies and other frameworks, in order to mobilize resources and harmonize initiatives on data. To the disaggregate data the use of technology in data collection is highly recommended as it can help to identify data gaps. ,

It was noted in the discussion that no country has data on all indicators. However, some countries find that the VNR is an excellent opportunity to find and consolidate data. It was also suggested that countries should the global indicators framework as a reference, as it is based on national data and

UN definitions, although it has gaps. Data disaggregation and availability of timely data remain a major problem especially with growing inequalities and rapid changes in demography. Countries also discussed experimental data and proxies and using data from multiple sources. It was also noted that countries should do what they can with the available data and should supplement with other analysis in the cases where data is missing.

## **Session 4: Means of implementation, including financing, for SDGs as part of the VNR preparations**

Session 4 focused on the challenge of mobilizing the means of implementation for implementing the SDGs that has deepened with the ongoing crises. Ms. Natalia Aristizabal Mora, Financing for Sustainable Development Office (FSDO), DESA gave an introductory presentation focusing on how integrated national financing framework (INFFs) can help mobilize funding. She highlighted the building blocks of an INFF include assessment and diagnostics of the complete picture of financing needs, sources, risks, and constraints as well as a financing strategy on actions to finance national development strategies and goals and to align financing with national priorities. Ms. Mora noted mentioned that the INFF should consider not only financing but also reporting, gaining an overview of financing and potential sources of financing, including public, private, domestic and international funding sources. She noted that the volume and impact of financing could be articulated in the VNR report, including initiatives such as gender- and climate-responsive budgeting.

Ms. Mora also shared some key lessons learnt from early implementers of INFFs. She noted that it is important to ensure national ownership and sustainability. It was noted that there is a need to build support at the highest level of government, complemented by leadership at a senior technical level. Furthermore, to ensure effective implementation it is necessary that national government are in the lead, although technical assistance can be provided by development partners. A gradual, targeted and adaptive approach is needed to prioritize policy actions and ensure implementation.

During the discussion it was noted that there is lack of financial resources to meet the ambition of the SDGs. It was noted that the VNR presentation is opportunity to flag a country's financing needs. It was noted that there is a need for non-traditional sources of funding in many countries and participants sought further examples of good practices and innovative financing for the SDGs. ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum will be an opportunity to learn more about how countries have managed to mobilize resources from traditional and non-traditional sources. It was noted that financing for development will be a critical dimension in preparing the SDG Summit. The discussion

also noted that there is hope for making progress in reforming the international financial system and improving financing for development as part of the preparations for the SDG Summit and the Summit of the Future.

## **Session 5: Ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement in the preparations of the VNR and in the implementation of the SDGs**

Session 5 covered the topic of meaningful stakeholder engagement, since a key principle of the VNRs is that they should be inclusive and serve as a platform for launching partnerships for implementing the SDGs. Therefore, countries are encouraged to consult and engage non-state actors and civil society in their VNRs and use it to analyze barriers and obstacles to stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the SDGs as well as to improve mechanisms for consultation and participation. This session further provided guidance and discussed lessons learned on how to effectively mobilize stakeholders throughout the VNR, including mapping stakeholders to be engaged in the VNRs.

The session was moderated by Ms. Naiara Costa of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA, and began with a presentation by Mr. Oli Henman, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) VNR Task Group. Mr. Henman provided an overview of the MGoS and introduced the MGoS Self Organization tool, which is a self-organized space for stakeholders to engage in HLPF that ensures broad, open, transparent and inclusive participation. Mr. Henman recommended countries develop a stakeholder engagement plan within the VNR process, which identifies key stakeholders and ensures broad-based consultations with all stakeholder groups in different geographic areas. Furthermore, he advises countries to create (offline and online) methods of engagement, which are fully accessible to all stakeholders including vulnerable groups as well as to establish awareness-raising and public outreach components to disseminate avenues for stakeholder engagement in the VNR process (e.g. by using government communication services and social media). He also suggested to include specific chapters from different stakeholders and case studies from experts or representatives into the VNR report. He noted that some countries have chosen to feature the view of stakeholders prominently in the VNR reports. Oli Henman concluded his presentation with the following process for stakeholder engagement and suggested to involve them in an early stage of VNR preparation using multiple channels (e.g. questionnaires and workshops) in order to make sure that all of them are being reached

Following the presentation of Mr. Oli Henman, a country shared its experiences of its stakeholder engagement process, which was followed by a discussion with the audience. It was noted that the

country started with a mapping exercise that aimed on listing all the stakeholders it wanted to engage, e.g. including Parliament, media, private sector and businesses. The country emphasized the importance of involving all stakeholders in the whole VNR process and therefore, regularly organized meetings with them (moving from the national to regional and local level) that led to rapid assessment of key challenges (e.g. concerning the Covid-19 pandemic). It was suggested that countries engage stakeholders in broad discussions in a very early phase, organize more specific discussions and enable them to express their area of expertise in a later stage of the VNR preparations.

Session 5 that focused on meaningful stakeholder engagement into VNR preparations was completed with a presentation by Ms. Naiara Costa on key questions in the stakeholder engagement process. She explained that it is important to engage different stakeholders into VNR preparations in order to provide different views from different sources that consequently generate a different kind of data. It was noted Purpose of engagement of stakeholders varies, i.e. collecting data, understanding their engagement in SDG implementation, collecting good practices, discussing national priorities and next steps, increasing engagement in the longer term. Stakeholder engagement can also be reflected in various ways in the VNR process, such as engagement in governance structures; engagement in awareness raising; engagement in priority setting for SDG implementation; engagement in partnerships; and stakeholders' engagement in drafting of the report. The importance of involving vulnerable groups as like women, indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities into the VNR process was highlighted. It was suggested that it was important to structure communication for the target group of stakeholders.

There are various tools for engaging stakeholders. Participants discussed their stakeholder engagement plans, strategies, roadmaps. It was noted that both new and existing institutions can be used to engage stakeholder and governments can have a stakeholder engagement team or dedicated coordination focal point. It was noted that having a timeline and starting early is critical in stakeholder engagement and the January through May is the critical period. It is useful to consult at various points. There can be a phase of open discussion and a phase where stakeholders respond to questions from government or comment on the report. The VNR team may choose to host public meetings. Hybrid forms of consultations, digital platforms, on-line consultations, and social media may be used. It was noted that engagement based on the VNR report is often used as it can help to focus the inputs.

It is an area where governments often face challenges which were compounded by the impact of COVID-19. Some participants noted that, in some cases, one challenge is that the input of civil society is too broad for the purpose of the VNR and has to be narrowed down and organized by

SDGs. A key step and best practice is identifying stakeholder groups that need to be engaged—bearing in mind the LNOB principle. MGoS network can help in identifying key groups. The variety of stakeholder groups and their needs has to be recognized. This also requires disaggregated data including at local level. Youth (including LGBTQI youth) and private sector need to be engaged along with civil society and academia. People can also be directly engaged, and the modalities will vary depending on the group.

It was noted that it is good to enable stakeholder groups to identify areas where their input is most critical and that engaging stakeholders in the various regions is important. Groups that have umbrella organizations or national councils (youth) or chambers (private sector) can be easier to consult. It was noted that some special groups are reluctant to engage or are not connected enough, and that ways should be found to contact them and there may be need to provide resources so stakeholders groups can organize their engagement. Stakeholders can inform the government about how to communicate with their constituency. Communication should be focused on issues addressed by the SDGs (rather than on SDGs per se) so people can relate to them. Smaller group consultations may be needed to get everyone's input. It may be useful to train government officials who will analyze inputs of non-state actors.

The workshop also highlighted the ways to reflect the views of stakeholders in the VNR report. This can be done through including boxes, annexing the CSO report, asking stakeholders to draft certain parts of the, including messages from on-line consultations in text of report, inviting comments of stakeholders on report. It was noted that the engagement of stakeholders should not be window dressing. A public launch of the report is useful to keep stakeholders and people in the loop about the outcomes of the VNRs as it would be important to keep the stakeholders engaged after the VNR.

The session also discussed about the role of local authorities in implementation and review of the SDGs. It was noted that the local authorities need to be supported by the central government in order to deliver. The meeting discussed how parliamentarians can be engaged in the VNRs, in some cases through institutions comprising parliament and government representatives. It was also noted that it is useful for other countries and stakeholders if VNR report countries includes details on how the country engaged stakeholders in their VNR.

UN entities can support stakeholder engagement, such as UNICEF for youth. It was noted that UNCTs also provide support to the VNR process. The Global Compact national network can be used to consult the private sector. UN DESA has a guide on stakeholder engagement during and after VNRs and can provide some support. The UNDESA - UNITAR training course on Strengthening Stakeholder

Engagement for the Implementation and Review of 2030 Agenda, which includes a module leaving no one behind in consulting stakeholders.

## **Session 6: Lessons from cooperation among VNR countries at regional level**

Session 6 focused on lessons in cooperation among VNR countries at regional level. As countries undertake the VNR. As countries undertake the VNR process, there have been growing interests from countries to engage in exchanges where they can learn about good practices and share among countries their own experiences and reflections on accelerating SDG progress. Many of these exchanges are facilitated at the regional level including through the United Nations Regional Commissions. For example, the VNR twinning programme, through which dialogues are facilitated between two or more countries to learn from each other, share innovations, and deepen cooperation for implementing the SDGs. The session focused on will introduce the ways through which exchanges across countries are facilitated at the regional level such as the VNR twinning programme and communities of practices; identify good practices and opportunities for further strengthening exchange and collaboration across countries.

VNR countries have reported that peer-to-peer learning through various programmes is the most useful component in the VNRs. The session highlighted the role of the Regional Commissions and the regional forums on sustainable development in supporting peer exchange among VNR countries. Ms. Van Nguyen, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) shared about ESCAP's twinning programme, which includes twinning of VNR coordinating bodies; study tours, joint virtual meetings; joint on-line platforms (three twinning countries in ESCAP); peer reviewing VNR drafts and plans. The twinning process can benefit countries as they can learn from peers and exchange approaches (i.e. better VNR preparation and problem-solving), build practical knowledge of good practice and reforms that are already taken place in other countries (e.g. engaging Parliamentarians and how they structure SDG institutions) as well as contribute to South-South cooperation and demonstration of SDG leadership.

Mr. John Sloan, ECA, also noted that ECA is working with countries to begin a twinning programme, particularly working with this year's 7 African VNR countries. The workshop also highlighted ESCAP, ESCWA's and ECLAC's communities of practice for VNR countries. ESCWA and ESCAP and ECLAC's programmes have addressed issues related to localization and presentation of VLRs. Ms. Mareike Eberz of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) note that ECLAC's Community of Practice brings countries from both regions of Latin America and the Caribbean together and engages, among others, UN and private sector representatives, experts and universities. Ms. Jana El Baba shared that ESCWA is trying to address global issues that do not have

great visibility in the region or are sensitive such as migration. ESCAP has also focused on COVID, FFD, climate change among other issues. Three twinning countries in ESCAP have discussed regular updates on VNR process, nationalizing SDG indicators and using the SDG trackers as well as lessons from cooperation at regional level. They identified best practices from which they could learn. ESCAP encourages twinning countries to present their VNR side by side at HLPF official meetings or side events. The session highlighted the experiences of three countries who had undertaken twinning arrangements.

During the discussion it was noted that it is easier if twinning and CoP bring countries with similar backgrounds (e.g. landlocked this year in ESCAP, first time VNRs in ECA, regional community in Western Balkan) or which face common challenges. Countries can focus on issues of common concerns, such as SIDs. It is also beneficial if countries have an interest in continuing cooperation after their VNR is finalized. Some countries who presented their VNR in the past participate monthly in the CoPs to share their knowledge. Twinning and CoP also involve stakeholders, local authorities, civil society and MPs, youth depending on topic, experts -- along with government.

Twinning, CoP and regional exchanges are the opportunity for countries to engage in peer learning and exchanging good practices. They allow countries to share how they are tackling challenges with SDGs and rolling out reforms need for SDGs to take root. Advantages of twinning and CoP include peer learning leading to improved VNR preparations, enhanced SDG problem solving; increased visibility of VNR presentation at HLPF; support to South-South cooperation. It was noted that the processes have improved peer learning on engaging stakeholders including parliamentarians. CoPs also allow frank discussions on difficult issues and challenges. Countries noted that participating in the CoPs and twinning programmes have increased awareness on the need for integrated policies, including social policies. They have allowed better understanding of issues related to data.

Some participants expressed interest in twinning programmes or regional exchanges. It was mentioned that there is and should be spontaneous engagement of countries although regional commissions offer the platform for exchange, community of practice or twinning. Some countries pointed out that the period for preparing the report is a bit too tight to allow twinning and peer learning while conducting the VNR, therefore planning and starting early is important. It was noted twinning can be an integral part of preparing the VNR. Furthermore, it was noted that the Group of Friends of VNRs at the UN in New York, has as one of its purposes facilitating contacts between VNR countries, to identify other countries that will help preparing the discussion on their VNR at the HLPF.

## **Session 7: Knowledge Exchange**

Session 7 focused on the Knowledge Exchange were organizations and entities that can support the preparation of the VNRs and the implementation of the SDGs are invited to present the kind of assistance they can provide (including tools and methodologies) during an interactive session.

Ms. Olena Ovchynnikova of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) introduced the FAO 2030 Agenda Follow-up and Review Toolkit and the VNR Preparation Guidance Note. The latter one serves as a science-based guidance that includes details on the main steps and “how to” annexes on gathering and processing data, assessing and analyzing progress, trade-offs and synergies as well as putting it into context, moving from the SDG-by-SDG to an integrated analysis and towards drivers for future transformation, following-up action points and next steps. Ms. Van Nguyen of ESCAP introduced the National SDG Tracker, which is a free online tool to calculate progress on SDGs and can serve as an analytical basis of the VNRs. It includes global SDG data as well as national data and indicators. She introduced a Leaving No One Behind tool and classification tree, which can serve as an analytical basis for stakeholder engagement. Ms. Jana El Baba of the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) introduced the Arab SDG Gateway, which includes the SDG Data Collection Tool and the Disability Dashboard. Ms. Heather Page of UN Statistics introduced the Practical Guide for Evidence-based VNR and Resources, which includes the Practical Guide for Data Storytelling. She further highlighted the upcoming virtual workshop on data for VNR preparation and concluded by naming additional resources as like the Global Indicator Framework, Data Disaggregation and Administrative Data Collaborative.

## **Session 8: Forward looking vision for recovering from crises and reaching the SDGs: preparing the September 2023 SDG Summit**

The last session focused on preparations for the 2023 SDG Summit and a forward-looking vision for recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the food, energy and financial crises that have reversed years of progress on many SDGs. Recovery efforts are the opportunity to launch new policies and structural reforms to address the gaps and shortcomings revealed by the crises, reverse lost ground and embark in accelerated progress towards the SDGs. The SDG Summit, to be held in September 2023 at the UN in New York, will review the implementation of the entire 2030 Agenda. It will be the opportunity to not only take stock of the situation regarding the SDGs but also to discuss the vision of Heads of State and Government on how they will realize the SDGs by 2030, building on their national policies, plans and institutions.

The VNRs could be used to inform discussions at the SDG Summit by identifying transformative approaches, plans, and policies that could be showcased by leaders at the SDG Summit. Countries could consider including a special section of in their reports, which elaborate or outline this kind of vision or policy if it exists already. The Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines for VNRs already invite countries to identify next steps in their reports; this year, there is ample reason to be more ambitious and comprehensive in identifying these next steps and looking ahead at 2030.

During the session, the country representatives and regional commissions shared their expectations and visions on the 2023 SDG Summit. It was highlighted that countries need to fully commit on the achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda to overcome the current crises. The issue of resilience at the national, regional and global levels was highlighted. Furthermore, the need to address the COVID-19 pandemic was emphasized. Concerning the VNRs it was emphasized that the reporting should be rather analytical than descriptive and cover, among other topics, the environment, equality, climate change as well as discuss the means of implementation to create an understanding on how to reach transformation. Therefore, it is important to promote the localization of the 2030 Agenda ("the SDGs belong to everyone") and innovative action as well as using innovative tools (e.g. green bonds), technology, lessons learned and best practices, e.g. for finance and resource mobilization, addressing (data) gaps as well as areas of improvement and increasing stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, there was a strong and repeated emphasis that VNRs need to tell honest stories about what difficulties countries face regarding the implementation of the SDGs to the rest of the world. During the session it was stated that VNRs have the enormous potential as they bring together all the development actors. One participant stated that "When we work together, we can aim on reaching all the goals and ensure that no one is left behind".

## **Next steps and Workshop Closing**

During the closing session of the workshop UN DESA provided some updates and next steps and milestones for the VNR countries. The session also included closing remarks by Mr. Filippo Lonardo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy, who highlighted the importance of the VNR preparations and the commended the VNR countries for the continued commitment to implementation of the 2030 Agenda. UN DESA also thanked the Ministry for the generous support and expressed appreciation for the facilities provided by the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO).