



**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM  
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



**United  
Nations**

Department of  
Economic and  
Social Affairs

# **First Global Workshop for 2024 VNR Countries**

Organized by

**UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs**

Hosted by

**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa**

With financial support of

**European Union**

**4-5 December 2023**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa





## Table of contents

Welcome and Opening

Session 1: Roadmap for preparing the Voluntary National Reviews

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

Session 3: Data roadmaps and lessons learned from VNR Preparations

Session 4: Assessing and improving financing and other means of implementation for the SDGs as part of VNR Preparations

Session 5: Contribution of voluntary local and subnational reviews to the VNR process

Session 6: Lessons from cooperation among VNR Countries at regional level

Session 7: Ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement in the preparations of the Vnr and in the implementation of the SDGs

Session 8: Voluntary national reviews at the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Next Steps and Closing

---

## Welcome and Opening

The First Global Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews to be presented at the July 2024 High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF) took place on 4 to 5 December 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The workshop was held in-person, with virtual participation. The workshop brought together government officials engaged in coordinating and preparing VNRs from over 30 countries. The workshop focused on peer-to-peer learning and provided an opportunity to build countries' capacity for inclusive and evidence-based follow-up and review by sharing good practices and lessons learned. The workshop facilitated practical exchange of experiences and knowledge among the participants. It also explored specific issues and challenges related to the VNR preparations. It featured sessions on institutions, stakeholder engagement, data and statistics, means of implementation, and SDG localization.

The workshop was opened by H.E. Paula Narváez, Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations in New York and President of ECOSOC by video message. Mr Antonio Pedro, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) provided welcome remarks. Mr. Neil Pierre, Acting Director, Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination, DESA, gave an overview of the workshop and thanked UNECA for their collaboration in hosting the workshop, as well as the European Union its financial support.

An online database of all VNR reports is available at: [hlpf.un.org/countries](https://hlpf.un.org/countries).

# 1

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

Ms. Maame Agyeben from OISC, DESA gave a presentation highlighting the timeline and key guidelines related to the preparation of the 2024 VNRs. So far 329 VNRs have been conducted and 41 countries are scheduled to present their VNRs in 2024. Key dates were flagged, including:

**3-5 April 2024** - Second Global VNR Workshop (tbd)

**24 April 2024** – submissions of “Main Messages for VNRs” (700 words maximum);

**14 June 2024** – Deadline for VNR report submission;

**21 June 2024** – Submission of video or audio materials to be presented during the HLPF;

A final workshop is scheduled to take place at the HLPF, before the VNRs, and it will focus on the scenarios and details for VNR presentations. The VNR presentations would take place from 12 to 17 July 2024.

VNR countries were invited to build on previous processes and recommendations from previous VNR reports. They should consider the key principles for the elaboration of the reports (voluntary, state-led, promote partnerships, learning experience, national coordination, national circumstances). Countries were also encouraged to reflect on how they are building resilience in response to crisis. Information about the updated guidelines for the preparation of VNRs, recommended structure for the reports and examples of roadmaps were shared.

A number of questions and comments were raised during the interactive segment, including whether VNRs should cover all SDGs, or cover only those that will be under in-dept review at the HLPF. It was clarified that countries are encouraged to cover all SDGs in their VNRs although some may want to identify priority goals and go more in depth in their analysis.

In relation to the VNR “main messages” submission, it was noted that a link to compilations of key messages from previous years would be shared with the participants. The Main Messages document will be translated into all UN official languages and will be posted in the VNR database. VNR Main messages typically cover main findings of review – key issues, including impact of conflict or other emergencies in sustainable development, among others. The VNR Main messages should target the international community but also be relevant to the national audience. VNR Reports are not translated – there is no limit in terms of length, although Member States are encouraged to consider balancing comprehensiveness with bringing strategic messages. Countries were encouraged to reach out to the RC Offices when they identified a need for technical support. Additionally, Regional Commissions and UN entities at HQ will be able to contribute.

---

During the group discussions participants broke into small groups to discuss the following questions:

- What do you think makes a good and meaningful VNR report?
- How are you considering building on your previous VNR report?
- Share a good practice from the previous VNR report and something you intend to do differently this time around?

When reporting back, participants highlighted the following outcomes from the discussions, including:

- The need to focus on how to involve and manage stakeholders in the VNR process, including the private sector. Experience on stakeholder engagement from previous VNR should be considered and built upon.
- The need to prioritize SDG Financing as part of the VNR process and report, including institutional arrangements.
- Consider a country's readiness to address conflict and post-conflict challenges.
- Identify a few key priority SDGs and related acceleration strategies as well as data gaps.
- A good VNR is a 'country' document, meaningful to the people and not only a 'government' or 'state' report.
- Caution on the use of consultants in the VNR process – experience with drafting team may make the document more relevant and inclusive.
- VNR presentation at the HLPF should build upon recommendations from previous VNR, including achievements and gaps.
- VNR reports should also consider changes in circumstances and how those will be addressed.
- There was interest in learning from the experience of countries who presented in 2023.

Ms. Maame Agyeben from OISC, DESA finalized the session with a presentation summarizing key considerations and good examples.

Those include the recommendation for VNRs, and examples connected to:

- Report on all the 17 SDGs and deepen analysis.
- Highlight synergies, trade-offs, and interlinkages.
- Details how the 2030 Agenda has been integrated into national policies, strategies, and frameworks.
- Connect the VNR process with other reporting processes.
- Consider new and emerging challenges.
- Reflect on the "leaving no one behind" principle.
- How issues identified in previous VNRs addressed and what gaps remain.
- Second and subsequent VNRs were encouraged to:
  - Highlight the progress from previous VNRs.
  - Relevant actions intended to be taken to accelerate implementation.
  - Evolution of institutional structure.
  - How innovative data solutions were integrated.



All VNR countries were encouraged to consider the commitments in the [2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration](#) and the calls for bold and transformative actions.

# 2

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

During this session Ms. Lisa Ainbinder, Department of Public Institutions and Digital Government (DPIDG), DESA introduced a framework for assessing SDG institutionalization with a focus on the key milestones beginning with integration of the SDGs into national development plans, creation of a high-level coordination structure for SDG implementation, formulation of national SDG indicators, national reporting on SDG progress and evaluation by non-state actors. The session explored how countries can reflect various SDG institutionalization milestones in their VNR reports.

The session also explored opportunities to strengthen stakeholder participation, enhance oversight, transparency, and accountability as well as improve effective implementation of SDGs. Based on a study of 24 countries undertaken in 2021, the session zoomed in on four milestones: national SDG roadmaps, central SDG Hubs, effective involvement of Parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) in the assessment of institutional arrangements for the SDGs. For each of the milestones, the session discussed good practices from various countries and ways of addressing associated challenges in such areas as long-term planning, alignment of programs and policies with SDG goals and targets, vertical integration, institutional duplication, and stakeholder engagement, including in the preparation and review of VNR reporting.

Following the opening presentation, one representative shared audit and review practices of a Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) in assessing SDG preparedness, undertaking performance audits, elevating the credibility of VNRs, and creating a culture of accountability and transparency. The representative highlighted results from the review of 2021 VNR and how the audit findings and recommendations were taken onboard. The representative also drew attention to challenges such as data validity risks and the absence of benchmarks from other SAIs, as well as key success factors such as mutually agreed review frameworks and early SDGs audit planning.

Another representative presented their country's SDGs Recovery and Acceleration Strategy (2022-2030) aimed at stimulating economic recovery and accelerating SDG implementation. The representative provided an overview of the SDG coordination structures in place, how SDGs are mainstreamed in the country's planning and monitoring frameworks and tracking of implementation progress through the National Integrated M&E System. Notable early results from the Strategy included modest reduction in overall poverty and child mortality rates, increased access to health care, clean water and sanitation services. Lessons learned included the resource intensive nature of SDG implementation, the imperative of identifying new sources of financing, the need for timely and accurate data for M&E.

---

To benefit from non-traditional data sources for SDG monitoring, data-driven insights and decision-making, the country developed a framework for validating citizen-generated and administrative data. Putting in place an SDG institutional framework that succeeds in bringing all stakeholders together and promotes the SDGs as “everyone’s business” was emphasized. Some of the challenges faced in the development and implementation of the Strategy included: low level of awareness of the SDGs, lack of data for M&E, and inconsistency in the frequency of surveys, which made year-to-year comparisons difficult.

During the Q&A, participants exchanged experiences on the design and launch of SDG data portals, SDG impact assessments, partnerships between parliamentary caucuses and CSOs in providing joint oversight on SDG implementation, the application of guidelines on the collection and use of citizen-generated data, and civil society participation.



# 3

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

This session was facilitated by Mr. Daniel Esthetie, United Nations Statistics Division, DESA. He noted that statistics and data are critical for reviewing progress towards the SDGs. Countries, however, often identify the availability and analysis of statistics as a key challenge in the preparation of their VNR. At the same time, preparations for the VNRs provide a key opportunity to build on countries' statistical capacities and understand countries' progress towards the SDGs.

In this session, an advance version of a "[Practical Guide for Evidence-based VNRs](#)" was presented. The Guide lays out in detail how a data roadmap for the VNRs can be developed and executed, all within the framework of the leading time of the VNR presentation at the HLPF. In the roadmap, a first step would focus on preparation and planning would, would focus on establishing a VNR data team, and review of institutions available. The second step would consist of a solid assessment of available data, in mapping data and consulting with data stakeholders. The step would result in a clear identification of data gaps. In the third step of data compilation, data would be collected and processed, data gaps would be filled, and existing data could be analyzed. This last major step was typically to be completed between January and March of the review year.

The data roadmap included in the Practical Guide and illustrated below is a systematic and stage-focused tool with examples of the sequence of steps that a country can undertake to ensure a more evidence-based VNR. The roadmap, though, will likely not reflect each countries' experience, considering the myriad approaches to collecting and processing SDG data for VNRs. For some countries, many of these steps will be addressed concurrently or could take longer than the estimation provided. The steps of the data roadmap are intended as a guide to getting started and the following guiding questions can be used to help identify any potential overall gaps and/or opportunities.

Group work focused on questions related to main data challenges in the preparation of the VNR. Many countries reported that they were still developing a roadmap for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data in support of their VNR. There was also a discussion on the main lessons learned on data and statistics since the first VNR was presented by the participating countries. There was a case study presentation by a country representative. A representative from ECA also provided an introduction into the capacity support activities that were available to the VNR countries from the Africa region.

# 4

## Session 4: Assessing and improving financing and other means of implementation for the SDGs as part of the VNR preparations

The session looked into the challenge of securing financial and technical resources necessary for SDG implementation. It underscored the vital role of the VNRs in enabling countries to evaluate resource allocation, enhance budgeting processes, and refine resource mobilization strategies. Throughout the session, practical examples and guidance were provided, addressing crucial elements like assessing allocated resources for each SDG in the national budget, exploring diverse methods employed by countries to acquire resources for SDG initiatives, identifying the existence of an Integrated National Financing Framework, and seeking guidance to optimize VNRs for bolstering resource mobilization strategies aimed at achieving SDGs.

Mr. Oliver Schwank, of the Financing for Sustainable Development Office, DESA, delivered a presentation on SDG Financing and Means of Implementation (Mols), contextualized within the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and a global financing framework. Emphasizing the existence of a significant 'great finance divide' within the broader development divide, he underscored the resulting substantial gaps in both SDG and climate financing. The discussion highlighted how recent global shocks have exacerbated this inequality, necessitating immediate action. Mr. Schwank also mentioned the interventions by the Secretary-General, which encompassed an SDG stimulus and proposed reforms of the international financial architecture. He recommended that countries' reviews should encompass resource identification, aligning allocations with the 2030 Agenda, and the adoption of effective financing strategies. He stressed the critical importance of capacity development services for successful SDG implementation. Additionally, the session spotlighted commendable practices including budget analysis, gap assessment, financing strategies, and commitments to Official Development Assistance (ODA) made by various countries.

Ms. Carmen Arguello, from the UN Development Cooperation Office, highlighted the importance of coordinated support mechanisms aligned with the UN Development system's business model. She specifically emphasized the pivotal roles undertaken by Resident Coordinators and UN country teams in assisting governments with VNR preparation and the 2030 Agenda's implementation, utilizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Additionally, the discussion focused on valuable lessons, emphasizing the essential nature of data-driven strategies and the adoption of a whole-of-society approach to VNRs. Moreover, the presentation showcased concrete support extended to two countries during their VNR preparation.

During the session one country shared their experience on SDG budgeting, outlining a three-stage implementation process: initially linking budget programs directly to SDGs, followed by identifying the nature and extent of this linkage, and ultimately defining various degrees of contribution. These contributions were classified into direct and

---

indirect categories, reflecting their impact on SDG achievement. Furthermore, it was noted that country's forthcoming VNR would focus on demonstrating the nation's comprehensive adoption of the 2030 Agenda. This involves prioritizing flagship projects, conducting impact analyses, and executing qualitative assessments via interviews with pertinent project stakeholders.

Mr. Bartholomew Armah, of UNECA, introduced the Integrated Planning and Reporting Tool (IPRT), a digital platform designed to streamline the execution of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs). This innovative tool establishes critical connections between budgets, National Development Plans (NDPs), and the SDGs/Agenda 2063/Doha Programme of Action. Notably, the IPRT encompasses a Financial Dashboard, providing a comprehensive overview of a country's developmental financing sources. Moreover, it empowers enhanced reporting capabilities within VNRs and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) through visually intuitive dashboards focused on Alignment and performance tracking. Going beyond financial alignment, the IPRT extends its support to align national development plans (NDPs) with the overarching objectives of the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and the Doha Programme of Action, specifically targeting Least Developed Countries.

Participants followed up with each presenter on further clarification on the type of support provided by the entities and how countries should follow up with them, respectively. Speakers clarified the process and reiterated their full commitment in supporting the countries during the VNR process.

# 5

## Session 5: Contribution of Voluntary Local and Subnational Reviews to the VNR process

Mr. Amson Sibanda, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), DESA, provided a presentation during the session and highlighted that the localization of the 2030 Agenda is important to ensure ownership and implementation. Increasingly local governments and municipalities are preparing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), and VLRs and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have grown in popularity. Countries are recognizing and incorporating the work done on the SDGs at the local government and municipal levels. According to available records, since 2016, 240 VLRs have been prepared in 45 countries, covering over 600 million people. Additionally, since 2020, 37 Voluntary Subnational Reviews have been prepared in 35 countries, covering more than 170 000 local and regional governments, and over 1.4 billion people.

VLRs and VSRs support the SDG localization process through which local and regional governments, citizens, and local stakeholders operationalize the principles of the 2030 Agenda in their specific contexts and pursue the achievement of the SDGs in an integrated manner. They also serve as processes that entail political ownership by national, regional, and local leaders, and promote inclusion and participation of all stakeholders.

Mr. Sibanda stated that a publication from DESA containing [global guiding elements for VLRs](#) provides a proposed shared structure for the reports, and at minimum, gives a checklist of issues that could be reflected in the process.

Actions to engage local government and include more diverse sets of stakeholders have led to VNRs that encompass more in-depth reports of the state of national progress from a top-level perspective and in terms of scalability and feasibility of policy shifts toward more sustainable development practices.

The session also presented several country case studies and one of the key conclusions of those examples had been that VLRs broaden the scope for inclusive multistakeholder consultation. While breaking silos or promoting horizontal policy coherence across sectoral departments of local and regional governments and countries to manage tradeoffs across policy domains was not an easy process. Nevertheless, VLRs had unequivocally contributed to building strong institutions and multilevel governance for SDGs, especially sound policy making, vertical and horizontal coordination, and data availability.

Ms. Lusungu Kayani, of UNECA, presented the Africa Voluntary Local Review guidelines. She stated that there had been a strong momentum in Africa in presenting VLRs. Past sessions of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development had underscored

---

importance of local reviews to embed meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement, to integrate into national reviews, and to improve accountability, transparency, and public ownership of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

Mr. Omar Siddique, of ESCAP, provided a history of VLRs in Asia and the Pacific, and shared some “quick tips” for including local and regional data and perspectives into the VNR and localizing SDGs. He asked participants if subnational authorities in the participating countries had developed or are planning to develop VLRs and or SDG action plans. A good practice was to engage the ministry in charge of local government or the national local government association in establishing a plan for local engagement. He stated that a national report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda could be a good starting point for VLR activities supporting the national follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

# 6

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

This session, facilitated by Mr. Ashebir Mengesha, Regional Commission New York Office, featured presentations on the national experiences from countries across the different regions. It also saw presentations by the Regional Commissions (ESCAP, ESCWA, ECLAC and ECA).

One country representative highlighted an inclusive national coordination mechanism that was set up, with the Prime Minister having overall responsibility for SDGs coordination and conducting annual meetings to review SDG performance. He also noted that a roadmap was established, and that an audit was conducted on the country's preparedness to conduct SDGs. Further, the country had developed mechanisms for stakeholder engagement that are based on citizen engagement and a whole-of-government approach. A national coordination framework was put in place in 2020, which has twice carried out a review of the SDG road map. The country has also taken concrete steps to align the 2030 Agenda with the national development plan and AU Agenda 2063. Furthermore, 12 districts in the country have conducted VLRs, and a further 16 districts are planning to conduct VLRs.

Another country noted its bilateral exchange of VNR experience, supported by ESCWA. The country representative highlighted that a technical team had been established to support the work and virtual meetings between the two technical teams were held. Bilateral cooperation focused on indicators and monitoring tools and technology used and stakeholder engagement. Field visits were also arranged in order share experiences on using administrative data and surveys and methodology used to calculate indicators, use of software tools was discussed.

Another country highlighted its experience with the "twinning" programme, facilitated by ESCAP in 2019. Noting the challenging nature of the VNR process for any country, she said that her country had benefited from the twinning programme. She also highlighted how establishing an electronic monitoring system has contributed to the preparation of the country's VNR. She also underscored that her country's VNR will be focusing on all 17 SDGs.

Another country highlighted the experience with ECLAC's Community of Practice on VNRs for Latin American and Caribbean countries, which brings all stakeholders together to share experiences and good practices. The country has been involved in this process since 2021, when it has presented its VLR preparation guide and shared the country's experience on the involvement of different stakeholders in the preparation of VNRs. The country has made considerable progress preparing VLRs; however, it has over 1,500 municipalities, and many are indigenous communities. She also highlighted that ECLACs

---

offers support in SDG policy analysis, including SDG progress assessment, policy advice on leaving no one behind, and a social protection simulator.

During discussions, one country informed the workshop that it started SDG localization in 2021 and the country has a localization plan of action in place. The aim is for all municipalities to be covered by the end of 2025. At the beginning, the country started by identifying local goals and indicators as these were considered foundations for the VNR. Mayors are involved in the process, and the country has champions ready to start VLRs, with local governments excited about contributing to global goals.

Another country noted that its national secretariat overseeing VLRs has created awareness in all districts. There is a council in charge of SDGs at a district level. In that regard, any district that is interested in SDG localization and VLRs works with the national secretariat which deploys its staff to support interested districts. Regional festivals and forums are used to gather information on SDGs that is then presented at the national forum.

The presentations by Regional Commissions focused on good VNR practices and the elaboration of regional guidelines for VNRs and VLRs.

- The ESCAP presentation by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano highlighted that support is both substantive and process related, and covers elements that include data, SDG tracking, the VNR process, resource requirements, stakeholder engagement, presentation, and preparation of VNR. ESCAP has also developed an algorithm to identify LNOB and identify policy measures to help them escape poverty. The presentation also highlighted ESCAP's twinning programme, which started in 2018. The twinning is done in coordination with RC Offices and national counterparts, and it involves study tours to visit key institutions and exchange good practices, peer review of VNR drafts and plans. Support is now being extended to the preparation of VLRs as well.
- The ESCWA presentation by Ms. Jana El Baba focused on its compendium of good VNR practices in the Arab region. The compendium is a body of knowledge containing 35 VNRs from 21 Arab countries and is complementary to global efforts to document good VNR practices. Three areas were highlighted under lessons learned: continuity of VNR support, in particular the cycle of implementation, monitoring and peer learning; VNR approach that works for countries experiencing conflict and fragility; and VNRs as a tool for securing the needed means of SDG implementation. The next steps for ESCWA's VNR support include posting the compendium of good practices online, translating it into English, making yearly updates, providing twinning and VNR support to countries and promoting regional peer exchanges.
- ECA's presentation by Mr. John Sloan focused on Africa's regional approach to reviewing progress towards the SDGs and Agenda 2063. After the 2024 HLPF, all African countries will have presented a VNR. The presentation also touched on the upcoming COP28 where African countries would highlight that they produce

---

little greenhouse gases but are bearing the brunt of climate change. To address these challenges, green value chains are providing African countries with opportunities. It was pointed out that ARFSD is a key step towards HLPF as it presented opportunities for peer learning. It was highlighted that ECA provides support to VNR countries, including providing technical support, leveraging its convening power, VLR guidelines, and bringing the 2030 Agenda and the 2063 Agenda to identify regional priorities using tools such as IPRT.

- ECLAC's presentation by Ms. Mareike Eberz highlighted ECLAC's support to VNR countries, including the Community of Practice, the elaboration of a regional guide on VLRs, the 7th Meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, and the SDG Gateway. It was highlighted that between 2016 and 2023, a total of 32 LAC countries had submitted 57 VNRs. Further, the territorialization (localization) of the 2030 Agenda is high on the agenda in the region. ECLAC continues to support countries through its statistical platforms such SDG Gateway, Statistics Knowledge hub, and SDG Geoportal.



# 7

## Session 7: Ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement in the preparations of the VNR and in the implementation of the SDGs

This session was facilitated by Ms. Naiara Costa, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA. It focused on how to effectively engage all stakeholders in the VNR process. The session began with a presentation by Mr. Oli Henman and Ms. Nelya Rakhimova, from the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) Coordination Mechanism for the HLPF, who provided an overview of the MGoS and their organizational processes. It was noted that the MGoS Coordination Mechanism help to guide and connect the work of the different groups enabling a diverse inclusion of stakeholders, particularly for the inputs from national civil society groups. During their presentation the MGoS representatives asked governments to consider various to engage stakeholders, including developing a stakeholder engagement plan for the VNR process which identifies key stakeholders and ensures broad-based consultations with all stakeholder groups in different geographic areas; developing fully accessible methods of engagement; establishing awareness-raising and public outreach components for stakeholder engagement in the VNR process; making targeted efforts are made to reach groups that are marginalized and at risk of being left behind; considering the previous MGoS statements in VNR preparation; organising dialogues with key stakeholders before and after the HLPF; and connecting with UN Country Teams to coordinate support and consider support to stakeholders to attend the meeting in New York.

The presenters also shared various ways in which governments could feature stakeholder input in their VNR report and plan their timeline for stakeholder engagement. In conclusion the Mr. Henman and Ms. Rakhimova share the process and timeline on how the MGoS prepare their national statements for VNRs at the HLPF.

The session also featured a presentation by a 2023 VNR presenter, who outlined how the country engaged stakeholder national through stakeholder committees, forums and “SDG Champion” programmes. The country also engaged stakeholders at a sectoral level, in sectors such as business sector, civil society and community engagement, libraries, youth engagement, education and disability sector. Among key lessons learnt from stakeholder engagement were the following: start early to build engagement; identify and draw from all sectors of society – Leave No One Behind; bear in the mind requirements of stakeholders; keep in touch with your stakeholders through regular ‘check-ins’; be creative in your approach, for example the country included a dedicated youth chapter in VNR; allow stakeholders to have a clear voice; and consider anyone who

---

contributes to the VNR to be a stakeholder, for example holding regular meetings with the Central Statistics Office.

Another country presented their approach to stakeholder engagement for their 2024 VNR. The country outlined the composition of their National Commission on the SDGs. It was noted that the National Commission on the SDGs is responsible for: governance of the 2030 Agenda in the country, including territorialization; monitoring dissemination of the Agenda; and partnerships and means of implementation. The country also outlined their commitments related to the 2024 VNR, noting that the VNR fulfils the role of mobilizing government, civil society and multiple stakeholders making SDGs a national priority. It was noted that the country aims to create a country report that represents the multiculturalism and diversity of the country. The country representative also noted that the country had voluntarily adopted an 18<sup>th</sup> SDG, in which they seek to achieve racial equality.

In her presentation Ms. Naiara Costa, DSDG, noted some of the key reasons to engage stakeholders in the VNR process, including stakeholders' provision of technical inputs, data; connecting perspectives from different sectors on SDG implementation; Leaving No One Behind; compilation of good practices; discussion of priorities and next steps; strengthening dialogue and partnerships. Stakeholders could be engaged through broad consultations; tailored approaches; focus groups; expert support; submission of inputs; review of drafts; and forward-looking discussions.

It was noted that countries tend to report on stakeholder engagement in five key ways:

- engagement through coordination and government structures that support 2030 Agenda implementation;
- outreach and awareness-raising;
- through the development of national priorities for implementation and follow-up;
- consultations and engagement on VNRs; and
- engagement through partnerships with non-state actors.

Furthermore, stakeholder contributions have been reflected in VNR reports through: stakeholder written chapters; annexes with summaries of stakeholder consultations; excerpts from stakeholders' networks; co-drafting of specific parts of then report; outcome of online consultations; review of VNR drafts; good practices/partnerships; and boxes, figures, infographics, pictures. The session also provided some DESA resources, including the publication [Stakeholder Engagement and the 2030 Agenda: A Practical Guide](#), which includes sample budgets, engagement plans and stakeholder mapping.

Countries were encouraged to diversify methods in the consultation process – online, in-person; virtual platforms. Engaging with established networks as well as sectoral

---

engagement was also highlighted in the session. For countries conducting their second, third or fourth VNR, they may wish to consider what has changed in the stakeholder engagement processes since the last VNR. Countries may also wish to report on the process and report on the challenges. Countries may also consider the capacity of stakeholders to collaborate and the main structures for follow-up and dialogue.

During the discussions some countries noted the various ways in which they intend to engage stakeholders in the VNR process.

- It was noted that one country plans to use their SDG council and thematic working groups as the institutional setting for implementation of SDGs. The country also stated that it planned to share the VNR publicly on government websites.
- It was noted that the private sector is a significant sector to consult as without financial resources it would not be able to reach any SDG targets or goals. One country noted that it would also include a separate chapter on the private sector, as micro- and medium enterprises are an engine of the economy. Responding to a question about good practices for involving the private sector, one country stated that its domestic private sector prepares a voluntary review of the SDGs. Another country noted the benefits of working through the local Global Compact network.
- One country noted that they had gathered initiatives from stakeholders across different sectors and included them on the webpage. It was also noted that stakeholder engagement is also about managing expectations, by providing clear objectives and communicating these with the stakeholders. It was also noted that it was important to build trust with the stakeholders.
- In reaching vulnerable groups, one country carefully considered how they could share the sessions and the space also asked the stakeholders how they wanted to be engaged. Furthermore, different strategies are required to reach stakeholders in different sectors. It was noted that when asking for sectoral inputs to the VNR reports umbrella organizations could facilitate the gathering of the input and that civil society should be encouraged to self-coordinate and self-organize.
- The session also highlighted it would be possible to give specific task to a sector/ stakeholder group as way to direct inputs. Furthermore, it was emphasized that it is important to be clear in the inputs that you would like to gather.
- One country noted that they have established a civil society helpdesk in the office of the president. Another country has launched a multi-stakeholder platform and encourages stakeholders to build consensus and craft priorities for the government.
- It was noted the UN Country team can help with civil society engagement.

- 
- The need to build the capacity of civil society to engage and contribute to the VNR process was recognized.
  -

It was also highlighted that stakeholder engagement can help raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda. One country noted that in raising awareness about the 2030 Agenda, local and municipal elections were used. Awareness raising campaigns also focused on journalists and schools. One country noted that it would be having an SDG dialogue through its national council on sustainable development.

The discussion also covered how to feature contributions from stakeholders in VNR reports and how to address disagreements between sectors. A country representative stated that stakeholder could be given autonomy in the drafting of their contribution or chapter to the report. One country noted that the stakeholders were included in the drafting team of the VNR. It was also noted that a country had developed a template using the VNR guidelines for each SDG and provided this to the key stakeholders.

# 8

## Session 8: Voluntary National Reviews at the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Mr. Joop Theunissen of UN DESA addressed the mixed picture of progress achieved towards the SDGs, with the midpoint of implementation of the 2030 Agenda having passed. Despite advances and gains, just 15 per cent of the Goals are on track to be achieved by 2030, and there is regression in some areas. He stressed that the VNR is not an end in itself, but that it continues to serve as a tool for accelerating progress, as well as an accountability mechanism and a means for promoting inclusive multistakeholder engagement.

Mr. Theunissen reviewed highlights from and common threads across the 2023 VNRs. In particular, common challenges were environmental devastation due to the worsening effects of climate change and accelerated biodiversity loss, ongoing conflicts, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Common solutions related to dynamic and evolving governance and institutional arrangements, working with stakeholders to implement inclusive and homegrown solutions at local levels, national efforts to overcome setbacks, and building resilience and peace.

Among the highlights were that many countries have positioned leadership and coordination of SDG implementation at the Prime Ministerial or Ministerial level. A whole-of-government approach to SDG implementation is key, involving parliaments, supreme audit institutions, human rights institutions, and other entities as well as subnational and local levels of government. VNRs increasingly reflect voluntary subnational and local reviews. A whole-of-society approach is also critical, facilitated by institutionalized mechanisms for engagement. It was emphasized that process can be more important than product. VNR reports should neither be expected to, alone, bring about the trust of stakeholders nor signal the end of their engagement. Regarding data, many VNRs noted the importance of reviewing progress at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda and of using the results as an impetus for accelerated action in the second half of the implementation period. As for means of implementation, some countries have adopted an integrated financing framework to improve the efficiency of public spending and investment. Taxation is also an area in which countries reported progress.

Most VNRs contain a chapter covering what countries will do next to implement the SDGs. Mr. Theunissen underscored that, as repeat VNRs are conducted, it is valuable to also review achievements since the last report. Above all, transformative action that leaves no one behind is imperative.

---

Mr. Neil Pierre of UN DESA, referring to the VNRs as building blocks and to their evolution, invited questions and discussion among participants on how they could draw lessons from last years' VNRs to prepare this years'.

Some questions raised included how to use information on the monitoring of targets to determine whether a country is on track to the 2030 mark, and how to make the report accessible to the public to mobilize stakeholders and the policy environment to support the transformations required. There was also a query about assessing barriers to SDG progress, to enable national recommendations for accelerating progress.

Governments conveyed a range of efforts that respond to many of the point made. For instance, some noted that they are working to build public trust, to mainstream, prioritize and monitor the SDGs, and to develop integrated finance strategies. One Government emphasized recognizing and tapping the value of domestic resources, an area in which there is innovation, including on women's unpaid work. Also noted was the need for accountability for the judicious use of resources that are mobilized, including through SDG budgeting. Yet another government highlighted its plan to be more inwardly critical and frank for this VNR, focusing attention on regions making inadequate progress and on the intersections of the goals.

Mr. Pierre concluded the session by noting that given the accumulation of experience, countries should now be able to assess where they are at in their SDG implementation, how policies have or have not served them, and what is needed going forward. It was advised that reports be both honest and hopeful – stating what can be done to address the challenges through institutional structures and processes, policies, and stakeholder action. It was further suggested that participants try to anticipate the direction of the Summit of the Future and position the VNR report accordingly.

---

## Next Steps and Closing

Mr. Neil Pierre concluded the workshop by reminding participants of the next steps and deadlines. He thanked the presenters from UNDESA and the Regional Commissions for sharing their expertise and facilitating the workshop sessions. He thanked European Union for its generous support to the workshop. He also thanked UNECA for partnering to host the workshop. He concluded by thanking the participants for their active and enriching engagement in all of the workshop's sessions.