Summary

First Global Workshop for 2025 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs): Supporting Evidence-based VNRs

Incheon, Republic of Korea
3-5 December 2024

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Opening

The First Global Workshop for the 2025 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) took place from 3 to5 December 2024 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The Workshop, which was organized by United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and hosted by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD), was held in-person with virtual participation. The Workshop brought together government officials responsible for the coordination and preparation of the VNRs and from national statistical offices (NSOs) engaged in SDG reporting and the VNR process, with the aim of sharing best practices for developing evidence-based VNRs and SDG reporting. Over 70 participants from the 2025 VNR countries participated in the workshop. 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 VNR preparations. It featured sessions on institutions, stakeholder engagement, data and statistics, means of implementation, and SDG localization.

The workshop was opened with a video message from H.E. Bob Rae, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations in New York and President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In his opening remarks, the President commended the countries that had volunteered to present their VNRs at the 2025 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, as it is a clear indication of the countries' commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also welcomed the fact that this was the first VNR workshop which had brought together VNR coordinators as well as National Statistical Offices (NSOs). He underscored the importance of robust disaggregated data to ensure effective monitoring and reporting on progress. He encouraged countries to ensure inclusive reviews that incorporate meaningful stakeholder engagement. The President of ECOSOC noted that he would be inviting all VNR countries to be represented at the ministerial level or higher at the 2025 HLPF and encouraging countries to ensure that the presentations of their reviews at the HLPF are at the highest possible level.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. Chun Kyoo Park, Head of the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development, (UNOSD) Division for SDGs, UN DESA, expressed gratitude to the participants for their attendance and anticipated a productive workshop. Noting considerable challenges for the implementation of the SDGs by 2030, with only 17 per cent of the targets currently on track, he underscored the immense potential of peer-learning and the sharing of best practices, policy tools and experiences in workshops such as this one. He informed the participants that the workshop will explore various themes crucial for enhancing the quality of VNR submissions.

In her remarks, Ms. Lotta Tahtinen, Director, Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development (OISC), UN DESA, provided an overview of the programme. Referencing the recently adopted Pact for the Future and the Political Declaration from the 2023 SDG Summit, she recognized that the VNRs have generated valuable lessons learned and have helped countries monitor progress and integrate the SDGs into national plans and policies more effectively. She underlined that the VNRs form a key component of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The workshop was an opportunity for participants to learn from each other, to share experiences and build capacity to develop robust, inclusive, evidence-based VNRs. She informed the participants that the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines on the voluntary national reviews had recently been updated. The updated guidelines encourage VNRs to shift towards analytical and action-oriented approaches, to address gaps and obstacles in SDG implementation. She reaffirmed the commitment of her office to support VNR countries in their preparations in the leadup to the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2025.

Session 1: Overview of the Voluntary National Review Process

Ms. Maame Agyeben from OISC, DESA presented the timeline and key guidelines related to the 2025 VNRs. So far, 366 VNRs have been conducted.39 countries are scheduled to present their VNRs in 2025, all of which have presented at least once before. Eleven countries will be presenting VNRs for the second time, 24 for the third time, and 4 for the fourth time.

A timeline was shared including a few key dates:
- March/April 2025 - Second Global VNR Workshop
- **24 April 2025 – Deadline for the submission of "Main Messages for VNRs"** (700 words maximum to be submitted as a word document);
- **17 June 2025 – Deadline for VNR report submission** (Must be submitted in an easily accessible format and in one of the UN official languages);
- **24 June 2025 – Submission of video or audio materials to be presented during the HLPF;**
- A final workshop is scheduled to take place closer to the HLPF focusing on the scenarios and details for VNR presentations;
- The VNR presentations will take place from 18 to 23 July 2025.

Countries were reminded that VNR reports should cover **all the SDGs** and not only on those under review during the 2025 HLPF (SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17). At the HLPF, presenting countries will have 10 minutes in panel format, followed by 15 minutes for Q&A.

Ms. Agyeben highlighted that the updated Secretary-General's Voluntary Common VNR Guidelines (November 2024) include an encouragement for reports to focus on analysis of root causes of challenges and on fostering a culture of evaluation and learning that informs broader policy actions. The presentation included several good practices from previous VNR countries.

A few questions/comments were raised during the interactive segment, including how to feature the outcomes of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) when they do not cover a large percentage of the country. DESA indicated that 60 per cent of VNRs now incorporate inputs from VLRs. There is no set standard for how countries may feature VLRs in their VNRs. Examples of how other countries have incorporated VLRs in their VNRs were also discussed during the workshop.

Representatives from two countries presented their roadmaps for VNR process. The presentations focused on their experience with their VNR preparatory processes, including lessons learnt and changes to their methodologies. The presenters also shared proposed content for their VNR reports, as well as their plans to involve stakeholders and carry out peer-reviews with other VNR countries.

During the ensuing discussions, participants discussed the following questions in breakout groups:
- 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, including, among others:
- A meaningful report is one that:
  - is evidence-based and has ensured inclusive stakeholder engagement;
  - goes beyond just another PDF document, for instance, by incorporating data and evidence.
  - considers what will be done after the VNR presentation at the HLPF;
  - considers a decentralized approach in the compilation of data.

Ms. Maame Agyeben concluded the session with a summary of key considerations and good examples, including that VNRs should:
- Report on all 17 SDGs and deepen analysis;
- Showcase synergies and trade-offs;
- Contain integrated analysis of progress towards the goals, showcase interlinkages;

- Be taken up and incorporated into national policies, strategies and frameworks;
- Address systemic issues, analysing the root causes and showcasing impact of policies and measures;
- Link to other reporting processes;
- Build on previous review processes.

The session also shared examples and best practices from previous VNR reports.

Session 2: Data Roadmap for developing VNRs & lessons learned

Mr. Daniel Eshetie from United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), DESA facilitated this session and highlighted the indispensable role of robust data in preparing meaningful VNRs. Throughout the session, participants explored challenges and opportunities in integrating data-driven approaches to enhance VNRs, with a focus on leveraging statistical annexes, progress charts, and online data portals to ensure transparency and accessibility. Despite advancements, data coordination, availability, and quality were identified as persistent challenges requiring attention.

The session presented a five-step data roadmap for VNR preparation based on the Practical Guide for Evidence-based VNRs. The first step highlighted the importance of preparation and planning, including establishing dedicated data teams led by national statistical offices (NSOs) and integrating SDG monitoring frameworks. An example was provided on effective coordination in data research and validation through strong institutional mechanisms. The second step involved assessing the data ecosystem to identify gaps and existing sources. An example was provided where the reliance on external data sources underscored the need for capacity strengthening. During the third step, the data compilation phase, innovative approaches such as citizen-generated data and geospatial technologies were explored, with one example demonstrating the successful application of geospatial tools to address data gaps.

The discussion on data incorporation into VNR narratives, the fourth step, emphasized the value of compelling visualizations to communicate progress effectively. In some instances, participants described how data dashboards and participatory approaches fostered a sense of ownership among stakeholders and supported integrated reporting. Examples were shared of integrating environmental monitoring data, participatory dashboards, and innovative visuals to strengthen reporting and address challenges.

Discussions centred on mechanisms for bridging statistical insights with policymaking and enhancing the inclusivity of stakeholder engagement. Best practices such as feedback loops

between data producers and policymakers and consultations with diverse stakeholders were highlighted. Some participants shared experiences of challenges related to data disaggregation. Others discussed efforts to leverage private-sector data, noting mixed results and varying levels of utility.

The session concluded with a call to strengthen NSO capacities, foster collaboration across sectors, and prioritize innovative data solutions. Emphasis was placed on the need for user-friendly visualizations, as well as platforms and mechanisms for ongoing feedback from stakeholders to enhance data governance.

Session 3 A: Institutional frameworks for the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

This session was facilitated by Ms. Ana Thorlund, UNPOG, DPIDG, UN DESA, who highlighted various milestones that countries could utilize to assess SDG institutionalization in their countries. These milestones could include: integration of the SDGs into a national sustainable development strategy (NSDS) or national development plan (NDP); 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; publication of a national SDG roadmap / action or acceleration plan for SDG implementation; creation of a central SDG hub – electronic portal; involvement of parliament; involvement of the supreme audit institution (SAI); and evaluation by non-state actors.

During this session, participants discussed, in four working groups, how they could use their VNRs to assess whether this trend applies or has continued in their respective countries, especially in the context of the on-going crises. They reflected on how VNRs can help to assess SDG institutionalization across several areas and to identify gaps and solutions. Finally, countries exchanged information on their institutional arrangements for conducting their VNRs and how they intend to mobilize the whole –of government in the VNR exercise. The four groups focused on: publication of a national SDG roadmap or action plan for SDG implementation; involvement of the supreme audit institution (SAI); involvement of parliament; and creation of a dedicated electronic portal that serves as a central SDG hub.

National SDG Roadmaps
Participants highlighted the importance of action plans and the integration of SDGs within national frameworks. Many countries have developed roadmaps to align their policies with the SDGs, but challenges remain, particularly regarding the self-sustaining nature of these initiatives.

Strengthening institutional frameworks is crucial to ensure long-term effectiveness and adaptability to evolving priorities.

Efforts to address these challenges include building robust mechanisms for policy coherence and resource allocation. Institutionalizing SDG integration can bolster governance structures and improve the alignment of national priorities with global goals.

Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs)
SAIs are pivotal in assessing SDG readiness, budget allocations, and expenditures. While some governments actively engage with SAIs, others are either unaware of their role or lack adequate participation. Key activities of SAIs include readiness audits and annual follow-ups on the recommendations made during Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

Despite progress, communication challenges persist. For instance, SDG performance audits often lack clarity and accessibility, limiting their impact on policy formulation and implementation. Examples like Indonesia demonstrate the value of sustained annual reviews to track progress, implement recommendations, and improve monitoring frameworks.

Opportunities lie in enhancing SAIs' capacity to communicate findings effectively, fostering collaboration with other stakeholders, and integrating their insights into national development plans.

Parliaments and SDG awareness
Parliaments are essential in advancing SDG implementation through legislative oversight and resource allocation. However, several challenges hinder their effectiveness, including limited awareness or interest in SDGs. Other obstacles include insufficient human resources, inadequate institutional frameworks, and absence of focal points within relevant ministries.

These challenges necessitate a tailored approach when engaging parliaments, as traditional methods of addressing governments may not resonate with parliamentary structures. Solutions include increasing awareness campaigns, empowering citizens to work with parliaments, and building partnerships with civil society organizations. Strengthening institutional capacities within parliaments can create champions for SDG integration and foster accountability.

Portals as Catalysts for SDG Implementation
Dedicated portals are emerging as vital tools for SDG implementation and monitoring. These platforms offer diverse ways of gathering, managing, and sharing data. Many are stakeholder-driven, providing a collaborative space to strengthen partnerships and track progress. However,

maintaining and updating these portals presents challenges. Interactive features, such as virtual reality tools, require significant resources to sustain. Regional and sub-regional portals, such as those in Central Asia, demonstrate how localized approaches can enhance the relevance of data and solutions.

Opportunities for improving these platforms include organizing hackathons to mobilize youth, leveraging their creativity to address data and resource challenges. High-quality content and regular updates are critical for sustaining user engagement and ensuring the platforms' effectiveness as decision-making tools.

Session 3 B: Data Roadmaps for VNRs – part II

This session was facilitated by Mr. Daniel Eshetie and Ms. Heather Page, United Nations Statistics Division, DESA. The session provided a deep dive on VNR data roadmaps, including sharing of country experiences and highlighted the importance and need for National Statistical Offices (NSO) to be actively involved in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. Varying levels of participation were noted, with some NSOs in fact leading the VNR process, while others are removed from the VNR process, and only consulted as data provider.

Participants used Slido, an interactive tool, to answer questions about their countries' experiences, indicating that most countries are carrying out their second, third, and in some cases fourth reviews. It was also revealed that 60 per cent of participants were involved in previous VNR reports. Most countries have developed or are developing an overall VNR roadmap. A few countries who are developing a VNR data roadmap shared their experience.

Group work discussed lessons learned, particularly focusing on data-related insights from previous VNRs, highlighting the importance of integrating NSOs more deeply into the VNR process from the start of the process. Participants recognized that establishing a centralized monitoring mechanism for SDG reporting, supported by multi-stakeholder coordination, enhances accountability and ensures comprehensive data coverage. They emphasized that regional and international partnerships strengthen national priorities, while capacity building and leveraging non-traditional data sources help address data gaps. Identifying these gaps through the VNR process can inform policy decisions and resource allocation, and the involvement of experts ensures efficient and high-quality reporting. Participants also suggested to make VNRs more analytical, improving data analysis for a comprehensive representation of SDG progress and aligning SDGs with local context.

A country example was presented focusing on previous and ongoing efforts in developing a VNR data roadmap, emphasizing a voluntary and participatory approach led by the Monitoring and Evaluation Poverty Reduction Unit and the Central Statistical Office under the Ministry of Economy and Planning. The VNR process relies on SDG-related data from household surveys and administrative records across various sectors and ministries, with data disaggregated by national, regional, and residential areas. Indicator selection is guided by data availability, relevance to local development, and alignment with global goals. A coordinating committee of economists, planners, and statisticians oversees the process, working to address challenges such as harmonizing data from diverse sources, filling data gaps, resolving inconsistencies caused by limited stakeholder cooperation, and overcoming the infrequent collection of household survey data.

Participants developed draft data roadmaps in another group exercise incorporating insights from the shared experiences and applying the guiding questions per roadmap step to identify data challenges and solutions for their countries' VNR process. Participants then discussed the updated VNR guidelines and the specific key points on data that were included in selected sections of the guidelines. Discussions by participants on the need to improve capacities and address gaps to support robust data storytelling and visualization in VNRs was particularly noted.

Session 4: Policies and tools for 'leaving no one behind'

This session provided an overview of policies and initiatives that countries had implemented to leave no one behind (LNOB). It also focused on the identification by VNR countries of national data disaggregation priorities, tools and practices to improve the collection of data on disadvantaged groups. There were five presentations in the session, with multiple reflections by participants.

Ms. Naiara Costa, Division for SDGs, DESA, made an overview presentation on policies and tools for LNOB. Drivers of vulnerability included discrimination, demographic and socio-economic factors, exclusion from government programmes, and subsequent fragility. Policies addressing LNOB focused on eradicating poverty, enhancing human capital, enhancing access to basic services, and creating more inclusive decision-making processes in support of sustainable development. Various good practices were shared from VNR reports published in 2023 and 2024.

Ms. Heather Page, UN Statistics Division, DESA, by stressing the need to "count the uncounted", she stated that the lack of sound disaggregated data for many of these vulnerable groups exacerbated vulnerabilities by masking the extent of deprivation and disparities. As a result, planning and budgeting for necessary services along with effective policymaking had suffered. Linking policy priorities to specific national SDG indicators, some new sources and technologies

were discussed that had, in many VNR reports, helped to uncover new sources of data on vulnerable groups. Participants were asked to reflect on the intersectionality of various inequities in their VNR reports with the help of these new sources. Ultimately, the use of disaggregated data would help to design better polices aimed at leaving no one behind.

Mr. Selsah Pasali, Division for Social Development, UN ESCAP, presented an overview of the ESCAP LNOB tool. Reiterating that LNOB was a critical aspect of the performance evaluation of the SDG review architecture, he presented an overview of the quantitative analysis undertaken by ESCAP that helped to capture the intersectionality among various disadvantaged groups. To this end, an online LNOB platform had assisted VNR countries in the Asia-Pacific region to uncover multiple vulnerabilities through classification and regression tree analysis (CART). A number of examples of how the concept of LNOB had been mainstreamed in various VNR reports were also highlighted.

A country representative made a presentation on how the country used a data-driven model to ensure no one is left behind. It showed how disaggregated data on vulnerable groups were collected through the country's National Health and Morbidity Survey. The data analysis focused on some key health indicators such as hypertension, diabetes, mental health, and others, among vulnerable groups. The targeted methodology had led to significant reduction in non-communicable disease rates among marginalized groups through more targeted interventions.

Another country representative briefed participants on the monitoring of SDG indicators relevant to LNOB in their country. The country had been able to develop a national set of 171 SDG indicators. Various disaggregated multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS) data had been produced, as part of surveys undertaken in 2014, 2019 and 2023, including subsets on households, women, children under age five, and children aged 5 to 17. The country had been able to strengthen national capacities in building the evidence base in support of policies that reduced inequality and accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, by making sure that policies and programmes were inclusive, had reached the furthest behind permitting the full realization of human potential, and contributing to shared prosperity.

Session 5: Whole-of-Society Coordination for 2030 Agenda Implementation: Stakeholder Engagement

The first portion of the session was facilitated by Ms. Naiara Costa, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA, who focused on enhancing stakeholder and civil society's role in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), as well as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

implementation. Strategies to ensure meaningful participation of diverse groups, including marginalized communities, were discussed, along with practical examples of successful engagement practices.

The session began with a presentation by a representative of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) VNR Task Group, who introduced the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) Coordination Mechanism, which is composed of nine groups and 12 stakeholder groups. The MGOS Coordinating Mechanism facilitates engagement through webinars, forums, and collaborative statements addressing key issues like participation, SDG progress, and concerns. She noted the self-organized space for stakeholders to engage in HLPF through the HLPF Coordination Mechanism, which is designed to facilitate broad and inclusive participation of various stakeholder constituencies. She also explained the process for MGoS statements at HLPF. During HLPF 2024, it was observed that 65 per cent of governments responded to these statements. The discussion underscored the need for disaggregated data, inclusion of citizen-generated data (CGD), and the importance of safe spaces for civil society engagement.

One country representative gave a presentation describing the country's integration of the 2030 Agenda into a 10-year national plan and highlighted stakeholder mapping to ensure participation, consultations, and local-language dissemination of VNRs to ensure accessibility. Another country highlighted experiences from their previous VNR, involving the public, civil society, and international cooperation sectors. Key achievements included cross-sector collaboration and plans to improve SDG indicators and stakeholder feedback. The presenter also stressed the need for continued cooperation among the public, civil society and international partners for SDG implementation and outlined plans for coordinating SDG implementation and involving civil society in the consultation and implementation process.

During the ensuing Q&A, participants emphasized accessibility support for marginalized groups (e.g. disability and informal sector), coordination with government entities to identify appropriate stakeholders, and leveraging professional associations for research and data for meaning participation of CSO groups which was crucial for VNR process. Recommendations included codifying inclusive consultation methodologies and integrating marginalized voices into SDG planning. It was also noted that while there may not be direct incentives, civil society participation was important to reflect local realities, challenges, and priorities in the VNR process.

During the latter half session, Ms. Naiara Costa noted the various levels of stakeholder engagement in the order of low to high—inform, consult, involve, and collaborate—highlighting the importance of fostering meaningful partnerships for SDG implementation. Governments at the "inform" level share balanced information about policies, while the "consult" level involves gathering stakeholder

feedback through surveys and consultations. The "involve" stage allows stakeholders to directly influence implementation strategies, and the "collaborate" stage represents the highest level of partnership, with stakeholders co-drafting policies. Examples were shared of how VNR countries had incorporated parallel civil society reports into VNRs and used web platforms for consultations. Ms. Costa emphasized the importance of transparency and sustaining engagement through documentation of the process and institutionalizing mechanisms like umbrella networks and innovative methods, including hackathons and co-created chapters.

One country shared their experience with citizen-generated data (CGD) for SDG monitoring from statistical service which addressed gaps in traditional data sources. Since 2020 the country has implemented pilots focused on gender-based violence, waste management, and marine pollution, and later expanded to public policies for persons with disabilities. In collaboration with UNDP the country has used CGD to monitor public service satisfaction. Key takeaways included the importance of public education, co-created methodologies, and feedback loops to ensure trust and participation. The country compared CGD with traditional data sources and found consistent insights that informed advocacy and policymaking. It was also stressed that there is a need for incentives for participation, co-creation of tools with citizens, public education campaigns, and strengthened feedback mechanisms to scale up this approach.

Mr. Narendra Mishra of UNV highlighted the critical role of volunteers in global development and national policies, particularly in health, education, and disaster risk management. He noted that over 862 million people volunteer at least once a month globally and informal volunteers, especially women, contribute 2.5 per cent of global GDP. Country examples demonstrated how volunteers exceeded targets in literacy programs, supported healthcare, education, social protection and contributed to disaster response strategies. Despite these contributions, only a portion of VNRs include volunteerism, underscoring the need for better policy integration. Mr. Mishra recommended institutionalizing volunteer engagement, leveraging platforms like UNV's Knowledge Portal, and ensuring volunteer contributions be visibly reflected in VNRs. He called for stronger data collection and reporting support to maximize the impact of volunteerism on sustainable development goals.

The group discussions that followed focused on scaling successful practices from previous VNRs, such as effective stakeholder engagement strategies and volunteer-led initiatives. Participants explored innovative methods like technology integration, hackathons, and co-drafting reports to enhance engagement, while addressing gaps in data and inclusivity. Discussions also emphasized building trust through transparency, mediating conflicting priorities, and institutionalizing long-term stakeholder collaboration. Suggestions for improving VNR documentation included better reflecting stakeholder contributions through annexes, case studies, and standardized methods.

Actionable recommendations were made to overcome challenges such as resource constraints and data gaps, ensuring more comprehensive and impactful VNR processes.

The second portion of the session was facilitated by Mr. Jurgen Gafke, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), DESA, who provided a presentation on SDG localization, emphasizing its critical role in adapting and customizing the SDGs into local strategies and actions. Localization is anchored in the principles of multilevel governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration, which are essential for achieving the SDGs. He highlighted that local and regional governments (LRGs) are responsible for approximately 65 per cent of SDG indicators, depending on the country context.

In 2024, over half of the VNRs included contributions from local and regional governments (LRGs), highlighting their growing role in achieving the SDGs. These contributions ranged from participation in national SDG coordination to drafting VNRs, with decentralization emerging as a key strategy for addressing local needs effectively.

Notable practices included the involvement of local and regional governments and local government association involvement in VNR drafting in countries like Brazil and Costa Rica, and the integration of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) into VNRs in Ecuador and Honduras. Stakeholder consultations, featuring LRGs, were also held in Austria, Peru, and Sierra Leone. These initiatives are detailed in the 2024 VNR Synthesis Report and the Global Taskforce/UCLG report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Key elements for integrating VLRs into VNRs involve assessing contributions from all governance levels, fostering stakeholder engagement at all levels, and harmonizing national and local reporting to align with the 2030 Agenda and SDG targets. This approach ensures a unified and inclusive narrative of progress.

Country presentations

Countries shared their experiences with VNRs and VLRs, detailing consultative processes with government ministries, NGOs, regional development teams, faith-based organizations, and marginalized groups. Collaborations with UN agencies like UN Habitat and UNDP were highlighted, supporting the preparation of VLRs. Progress was mapped at provincial levels, showcasing strengths in specific SDGs. VNR processes included comprehensive SDG profiles and capacity-building strategies, such as workshops and consultations to engage stakeholders across provinces. Localization efforts emphasized addressing provincial SDG challenges and enhancing monitoring and reporting capacities.

The session also highlighted best practices and challenges in implementing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). Awareness-raising through webinars and workshops emerged as a key strategy for engaging stakeholders and building capacity. Mapping local indicators and aligning VLR workplans with Voluntary National Review (VNR) timelines were also identified as effective approaches to ensure coherence and timely integration. However, significant challenges remain. Securing resources to support VLR workplans continues to be a hurdle, alongside ensuring that marginalized communities are adequately represented in consultations, a critical aspect of inclusive SDG implementation.

During the interactive discussion, participants debated whether VLRs should be developed in parallel with VNRs or as standalone processes. They also explored strategies to enhance local capacities for aligning VLRs with VNRs and the difficulties in incorporating VLR findings into national reviews.

The panelists emphasized the importance of parallel processes where local insights inform national strategies. They highlighted capacity-building initiatives and multistakeholder engagement as essential to achieving effective SDG localization. Integrating local and national perspectives is vital for inclusive, data-driven decision-making and advancing the 2030 Agenda.

Session 6 A: Financing and means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This session was facilitated by Mr. Joop Theunissen, OISC, DESA. He provided an overview on financial strategies for identifying the resources needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, aligned with the seven Action Areas of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda: Domestic public resources, private business and finance, development cooperation, trade, debt and debt sustainability, addressing systemic issues, science, technology, innovation, and capacity building. He emphasized a significant finance divide between developed countries and developing countries, the latter spending five times higher percentage of their revenue on debt payments.

The session spotlighted several country examples. One country carried out a detailed needs assessment and financing gap analysis of the SDGs, determining the financing gap from public and private investments for key sectors. Another country mapped government budgets to the 17 SDGs to ensure alignment. One country increased tax-generated resources by 25 per cent through improved tax compliance and digitalization. Development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) was highlighted as effective tool to finance national development priorities

establishing critical connections between budgets, National Development Plans (NDPs), and the SDGs. Practical examples were provided to channel private sector funds into environmental SDGs or public-private partnerships to increase financial bases for the SDGs. A participant presented his country experience when conducting the first VNR tracking the country's SDG implementation progress. The current VNR process is building on the experience and lessons learned and is led by the Presidency of the country.

Another presentation emphasized transparent, equitable, and efficient resource management while highlighted the importance of trust among stakeholders, enhanced governance and fiscal discipline driving investments in key development areas.

Mr. Wonsuk Choi of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Incheon provided an overview of the funding modalities to support developing countries to transition to low-emission, climate-resilient societies. GCF is improving access to funds by simplifying processes and documentation, and focusing on the most vulnerable countries and sectors, including renewable energy and resilience infrastructure.

Discussions among participants further focused on how to leverage natural resources like gold, oil and forests for economic growth, social development and protecting the environment intact. To adopt sustainable practices, countries are partnering with international organizations and other nations with experience in managing natural resources responsibly. The focus is on achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) while utilizing international support and frameworks such as the Green Climate Fund. Participants also stressed the importance of data and the strategic use of VNR for attracting international attention and resources. Overall, the discussions emphasized the importance of sustainable resource management, economic diversification, and the need for innovative funding mechanisms to support lasting development across the participating nations.

Session 6 B: Data innovation and non-traditional data sources

This session emphasized the importance of expanding data sources to address gaps in SDG monitoring and reporting. Challenges associated with traditional data collection, include time lags, high costs, limited granularity for marginalized groups, and resource constraints. To complement these limitations, innovative methods such as satellite imagery, mobile phone data, social media, and citizen-generated data (CGD) have emerged as crucial tools to improve timeliness, fill data coverage gaps, and provide insights into new dimensions like environmental changes and social trends.

Examples of successful applications underscored the potential of these methods. One participant shared a poverty estimation initiative using geospatial technologies and night-light data to provide granular insights down to small administrative units. This approach significantly enhanced data accuracy and timeliness, offering a pathway to fill gaps between survey periods. Another participant described using administrative data to monitor disaster risk, supported by collaboration with various government agencies, which resulted in specialized environmental statistics and effective policies. In another case, non-traditional data sources, including earth observation and machine learning for extracting data from documents and websites , enabled innovative monitoring of multidimensional poverty, marine litter, and educational access.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. Ensuring data quality, privacy, ethical standards, and addressing biases were recurring themes. Participants noted that technical capacity and coordination outside NSOs often pose barriers, but collaborations have proven essential. Partnerships with space agencies, universities, private-sector companies, and civil society organizations have been important for integrating diverse data sources into national systems.

Several participants discussed the importance of inclusive data strategies. One example involved community-based monitoring systems at the local level, combining geospatial and statistical data to produce indicators across multiple SDG goals. This approach provided critical insights into service delivery and local development needs, including access to health and education for vulnerable populations. Another example demonstrated how integrating census data with public transport and geospatial data revealed gaps in transport accessibility for elderly populations, informing targeted policy interventions.

The session also emphasized the role of innovation in bridging data disaggregation gaps. Automated systems for tracking vessel movements, real-time tourism statistics derived from mobile positioning data, and agricultural mapping using satellite imagery were highlighted as scalable solutions. The collaborative development of frameworks, such as those for citizen-generated data, was identified as an important step to ensure quality and maximize utility.

Session 7: Regional Commissions and regional support for the VNRs

This session, facilitated by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano and Ms. Juliet Braslow of UN ESCAP, featured presentations on the role of regional commissions and national experiences from various countries. Ms. Juliet Braslow delivered a presentation on the support provided by the five regional commissions—ESCAP, ESCWA, ECLAC, ECE, and ECA—for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), highlighting their diverse contributions to advancing the SDGs across different regions.

In her presentation, she highlighted the critical role of the five UN regional commissions in guiding countries toward achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. These commissions focus on fostering regional collaboration, building capacity, and addressing the unique challenges of sustainable development. ESCAP supports Asia-Pacific nations with tools like the National SDG Tracker and the VNR Twinning Program to enhance reporting and data integration. ECLAC emphasizes the integration of local and national SDG efforts in Latin America through initiatives such as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). ESCWA addresses the specific challenges faced by Arab States, particularly conflict-affected areas, by promoting robust coordination structures and fostering transparency. In Europe, UNECE enhances SDG reporting through tools like the Roadmap on Statistics for the SDGs and a centralized Knowledge Hub. ECA aligns Africa's SDG initiatives with Agenda 2063, addressing data gaps, promoting inclusive growth, and fostering regional cooperation.

The session also featured presentations from selected countries showcasing their collaboration with regional commissions. This was followed by discussions on strategies and challenges in preparing and integrating Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and VLRs. Participants emphasized the need for comprehensive VNRs covering all 17 SDGs, integrating insights from VLRs at the national level, and ensuring robust stakeholder engagement. A country participant shared the experience of strong institutional coordination, innovation, and inclusive stakeholder involvement in its VNR process. Challenges such as data quality and the alignment of national strategies were highlighted, with UNECE's support for regional cooperation viewed as a valuable tool for peer learning.

A country from the Asia-Pacific region presented its SDG progress, noting its first VNR in 2019 and its second in 2022, which prioritized poverty, health, education, water, and economic growth. The country is preparing for its 2024 VNR, with plans to incorporate youth perspectives and deepen consultations, reaffirming its commitment to "leaving no one behind."

A country from the Western Asia and Arab region highlighted its progress in integrating SDGs into national strategies, with a focus on gender equality, digitalization, financing, and localization. The country's updated roadmap and Rapid Assessment Report aim to strengthen data systems and foster regional cooperation ahead of its 2024 VNR. Their approach emphasizes continuous engagement, high-quality data, and political support.

One country from the Africa region showcased its structured VNR process, involving stakeholder mapping, capacity building, and high-level approval to ensure comprehensive participation. The country underscored the importance of media in raising SDG awareness and improving data

management. Similarly, another country from the Latin America and Caribbean region stressed data preparedness and inclusive coordination, particularly on sensitive issues like justice and gender.

Discussions also explored private sector involvement in SDG implementation through roundtables, competitions, and structured stakeholder input. Regional collaboration examples, such as a study exchange between two Asia-Pacific countries, demonstrated how businesses contribute to SDG progress. The session concluded with a collective commitment from regional commissions to continue supporting peer learning, collaboration, and capacity building, to advance SDG implementation at a global scale.

Session 8: Communication for the VNRs: Building the narrative, data storytelling, and data visualization

During the session led by Ms. Heather Page, Ms. Maame Agyeben, and Ms. Naiara Costa from DESA, the focus was on effective communication strategies for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). They highlighted the significance of narrative-building, data storytelling, and visualization to engage audiences and convey essential messages. The discussion emphasized that visual elements and clear storytelling can transform complex Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) data into actionable insights.

Ms. Page introduced key practices for data storytelling and visualization in VNRs based on the Practical Guide on Data Storytelling in VNRs and SDG reporting, asserting that these skills should be accessible to all report drafters, not just statisticians. Participants discussed the importance of avoiding complicated language and utilizing interactive content while addressing challenges like the high cost of software for content development. She outlined the components of a successful data story, which should derive from raw data insights framed by clear key messages, a SMART title (specific, measurable, action oriented, relevant and time bound), and effective visuals. Best practices included maintaining consistent chart design and employing the "Remove to Improve" framework for data visualization.

The session featured presentations from two participants regarding their country's approaches to data visualization in VNRs. The first presenter emphasized using various tools such as infographics, dashboards, and podcasts to communicate SDG progress effectively stressing local community involvement as crucial for ensuring the VNR's relevance and impact, although they acknowledged challenges in graph interpretation that necessitated simplified visuals.

One participant showcased the country's SDG coordination structure, illustrating how collaboration informs the VNR process. The participant presented a detailed report from the National Statistics Office that helps identify successful policies and areas needing improvement. Their recent VNR report incorporated numerous infographics and consistent design elements throughout the document, marking a shift from previous approaches that relied solely on graphic designers for cover pages.

One participant elaborated on their approach to integrate inputs from various stakeholder groups. Each of the 17 SDGs has a separate report written by external experts and discussed in sectoral working groups. The reports with varying formats and writing styles are then consolidated into a comprehensive country report.

The latter part of the session was facilitated by Ms. Naiara Costa and Ms. Maame Agyeben and focused on communication strategies in the VNR process. VNR countries were encouraged to develop communication strategies to ensure the messages of the VNR reports are widely disseminated. The participants were encouraged to consider who the audience for the VNR reports would be and to use the data and inputs to the VNR to develop compelling and tailored communication materials. One country representative shared their public awareness initiatives resulting in significantly increased recognition of SDGs from 29.1 per cent in 2020 to over 90 per cent in 2021. Effective communication was outlined as a three-stage process: preparation (data collection and coordination), launch (using platforms like the High-Level Political Forum for dissemination), and post-launch activities (engagement with stakeholders). Audience analysis was deemed essential for tailoring messages to diverse groups, ensuring accessibility through multiple languages and formats.

Stakeholder engagement emerged as a cornerstone of effective VNR communication, with discussions emphasizing the need for inclusive platforms involving various sectors. Public awareness campaigns featured collaborations with media and youth engagement through innovative channels like podcasts or talk shows. Participants stressed the importance of creating accessible content and leveraging technology to enhance engagement.

Key action items included inviting communication specialists to VNR teams, developing inclusive materials, utilizing media platforms for dissemination, and compiling success stories from local communities. The session concluded with discussions on measuring awareness and enhancing storytelling through technology to maximize VNR impact and advance SDG awareness.

Session 9: Next step in VNR process and Way Forward to the HLPF

Ms. Lotta Tahtinen, DESA, reviewed the next steps in the VNR process as well as the way forward to the HLPF. The HLPF will start on 14 July in New York and in the first week will include an in-depth review of selected SDGs. The latter part of the HLPF will include high-level ministerial discussions. Presentations of the VNRs will occur on the final three days of the HLPF. It was noted that there will be a call for HLPF side events, along with an open registration for stakeholders to attend. In addition, reports are being prepared to inform discussions at the HLPF, details of which are all included in a roadmap on the HLPF website.

The session also reviewed the VNR preparation timeline, noting the following important dates and milestones and emphasizing the importance of adhering to the deadlines established:

Global Preparatory Workshops: **1) First Workshop**: Workshop in Incheon, Korea concluded successfully. **2) Second Workshop**: Planned for March-April next year, with decisions on dates and venue forthcoming. **3) Final Workshop**: Scheduled for July in New York, aligned with the HLPF session to address last-minute matters and presentations.

VNR Deadlines and Submission Guidelines:
- **Main Messages Submission**:
    - **Deadline**: 24 April 2025
    - **Language**: One of the six official UN languages
    - **Content**: Emerging conclusions, main findings
    - **Word Count**: Maximum of 700 words; submissions exceeding this will be returned for revision.
    - **Format**: Editable Microsoft Word document for translation and official dissemination. Main messages will be translated into all six official UN languages and issued as an official document for the HLPF and hosted online.

- **Final VNR Submission**:
    - **Deadline**: 17 June 2025
    - **Language**: Official UN languages
    - **Format**: PDF machine-readable format. Final VNRs are not translated given expected volume and length, but will be posted on the HLPF website in the language they are submitted in.
    - **Considerations**: Ensure national-level approvals and necessary translations are completed in advance.

Regional Sustainable Development Forums: Regional commissions will host their Sustainable Development Forums throughout the first quarter of 2025. The schedules will be available on the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) website.

The session also reiterated the updated Secretary General's Guidelines for the VNRs (see Annex 2 in the Handbook for the Preparation of the VNRs) and reviewed some of the elements. As countries are quite far in the VNR and SDG processes, there is a request for the reviews to not only be inclusive and evidence-based, but also a more in depth on analytical assessment of what progress has been made in implementing the SDGs, the gaps, main challenges and lessons learned. In addition, countries are invited to identify priority areas for action to address those gaps and challenges as well as include a review of all 17 SDGs. Another chapter included in the SG Guidelines focuses on including a section in the VNR on new and emerging challenges that countries are encountering, including efforts being made to enhance resilience toward new and existing shocks like climate change, environmental and biodiversity degradation, increasing debt burdens, etc. In addition, countries are encouraged to include impact analysis on the effects of emerging challenges on achieving the SDGs, potentially including the creation or marginalization of vulnerable groups. The guidelines are not binding but it is hoped they can assist in thinking through the different types of issues to be included in a well-rounded VNR. For statistical colleagues, a data roadmap was provided for assisting in the preparation and compilation of data for the VNRs.

Closing

The workshop's closing session emphasized participants' key takeaways and learnings while exploring how these insights would inform their VNR processes and preparations. Participants shared plans to incorporate the knowledge gained into their national reviews and highlighted strategies for sustaining the peer learning initiated during the Incheon workshop. They noted the value of the collaborative environment fostered, the diverse perspectives shared, and the practical tools and approaches discussed throughout the event. They also emphasized the importance of thorough preparation, a multi-sectoral collaboration, and technical capacity building. Many participants highlighted the necessity of starting VNR planning well in advance and integrating diverse stakeholders to ensure comprehensive and evidence-based reporting. A key learning was the shift from traditional data sources to innovative methods such as satellite imagery and non-traditional datasets, enabling a more robust and data-driven approach.

Participants also underscored the significance of effective communication and stakeholder engagement in the VNR process, both during preparation and in post-report dissemination. Many noted the need to better utilize communication tools to involve the public and explain the value of

achieving SDGs beyond the core working groups. Practical examples from countries showcased innovative practices, such as youth engagement, using opposition voices for transparency, and leveraging apps for citizen-generated data.

Finally, the session emphasized participants' commitment to leveraging their newfound networks for continued engagement and support beyond the workshop. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn from other countries' experiences and identified actionable steps to enhance their VNR processes, ensuring that they are more inclusive, data-driven, and impactful.

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