



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

HANDBOOK

FOR THE PREPARATION OF

**VOLUNTARY
NATIONAL
REVIEWS**



The 2020 Edition



**Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
United Nations**



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Purpose and aim of this Handbook

This is a handbook for countries in preparation of presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs). It should be read in conjunction with the Secretary-General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The Secretary-General's guidelines are attached in the handbook as [Annex 2](#).

This handbook supplements the Secretary-General's guidelines in that it provides elementary building blocks and the basic, practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing VNRs. It is not an exhaustive document. A range of other sources of information may further assist countries, some of which are indicated in the text.

This document has been updated to reflect new information and dates.

Foreword



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in September 2015, provide a visionary roadmap for all countries and stakeholders to strive for a world of sustainable prosperity, social inclusion and equality while at the same time preserving our planet and leaving no one behind. By no means is this an easy mission. We need to undertake this journey together if we are to succeed, learning from each other. Effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through peer learning is essential for renewed action and progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked SDGs. At the heart of this process are voluntary national reviews (VNRs), which have become a critical component of the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

One hundred and forty-two VNRs have been presented at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) since 2016, with a further 51 due to be presented in 2020. This handbook, which is produced by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs serving as the Secretariat of the HLPF, elaborates on the Secretary-General's guidelines on VNRs and reflects four years of shared experience in undertaking and supporting VNRs at the HLPF.

Prepared through a collaborative effort, the handbook provides practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing a VNR. It explains in a practical way all stages in VNR preparation - from communicating the intention, to organizing and preparing the review, including its key building blocks and related preparatory workshops, to presenting at the HLPF. As more countries are presenting their VNRs for the second time, it also contains some recommendations how to prepare subsequent VNRs.

As often emphasized, VNRs are not an end, but a means to exchange experiences, identify challenges and accelerate implementation. In that spirit, the handbook further proposes what to do after the VNR presentation. It also contains two useful annexes to be used in conjunction with the handbook: a checklist for VNR preparations and

the revised Secretary-General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs.

Though it can hardly be expected to do full justice to all the richness of the follow-up and review at the national level, I hope this handbook will be a useful reference for countries undertaking the VNRs. It is meant to be a tool to assist the countries in their journey to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will be further refined and updated as more experience and knowledge are acquired along with the deepening of the VNR process including any new guidance by the General Assembly based on its review of the resolutions on the HLPF.

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink on a light background. The characters are '刘振民' (Liu Zhenmin), written in a cursive style.

LIU Zhenmin

Under-Secretary-General

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Handbook for preparation of Voluntary National Reviews

A. Getting started: how to initiate a review

Introduction

Voluntary national reviews (VNRs) are part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As stated in paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, regular reviews in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.¹

VNRs make possible the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They are most meaningful when they involve an inclusive, participatory, transparent and thorough review process at the national and sub-national levels, when they are evidence-based, produce tangible lessons and solutions, and when they are followed by concrete action and collaboration that drives SDG implementation. Four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, VNR can also be a useful tool to show progress in the implementation and impact of policies and strategies that have been put in place. It is especially important for countries presenting their second or third VNR to show progress that has been made since their first VNR. They are encouraged to address in particular those areas which they identified in their previous VNR as challenging and not to repeat what has already been presented in their previous VNR. The emphasis should be on implementation and progress.

The process of carrying out the voluntary national review should not be seen as separate from implementation of the SDGs. Rather than an end in itself, the VNR is a process by which countries take stock of and assess progress - and shortcomings - in implementation of the goals

¹ Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, [GA resolution 70/1](#). See also [GA resolution 67/290](#), para 8, for more on the reviews and the mandate of the HLPF.

and targets. It can be useful in acting as a catalyser for the national implementation of the SDGs and strengthening coordination and whole-of-government and whole-of society approach. It can strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the progress in the implementation and identify areas where more help is needed. It can also be a powerful communication tool to raise awareness in government and society about the 2030 Agenda and SDG implementation.

The VNRs are intended to track progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the SDGs and targets, in all countries, in a manner that respects their universal and integrated nature and all dimensions of sustainable development. The principles guiding follow-up and review at all levels, contained in paragraph 74, provide, among other things, that reviews will be substantive, and knowledge based, as well as open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people, with a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.²

The HLPF meets annually in July for eight days under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).³ Every four years the HLPF also meets under the auspices of the UN General Assembly at the level of heads of state and government. Accordingly, the HLPF met twice in 2019, once in July under the auspices of ECOSOC and in September under the auspices of the General Assembly, the “SDG Summit”. In 2020 the HLPF will meet once, in July under the auspices of ECOSOC, when the VNRs will be presented. Twenty-eight (28) countries conducting their first VNR will present them during the three-day ministerial segment of the HLPF with thirty (30) minutes allocated to each presenting country, while twenty two (22) countries presenting their second VNR and one (1) country presenting its third VNR will start presenting them on 13 July in a panel format with twenty (20) minutes allocated to each presenting country⁴.

² [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 74.

³ [GA resolution 70/299](#).

⁴ By letter dated 12 September 2019, the President indicated that the list of 28 countries presenting on 14-16 July for the first time are: Austria, Barbados, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Comoros, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Federated States of Micronesia, Mozambique, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Zambia. Twenty-two countries conducting their second reviews and 1

For the 2020 HLPF, the ministerial segment will be held from 14 to 16 July, at UNHQ in New York⁵.

These meetings of the HLPF are convened by the President of ECOSOC, who is an ambassador and permanent representative of a Member State, elected for a one-year term of office. The President convenes the HLPF when it meets under the auspices of ECOSOC and as such approves the programme of the HLPF, including the VNR presentations. The current President of ECOSOC is Her Excellency Ms. Mona Juul, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations in New York. She will chair the 2020 VNRs, with the help of four Vice-Presidents of the Council.

One hundred and fifty-eight VNRs have been conducted (22 in 2016, 43 in 2017, 46 in 2018, and 47 in 2019) by 142 countries, with 15 countries having conducted more than one VNR. Their VNRs, and the Main Messages, are available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>. 51 countries will present their VNRs in 2020.



Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of VNR countries 2016-2019

country conducting its third review, will present on 13 and 14 July 2020 during the last day of the first week of the HLPF, and part of the 14 July. These countries are: Argentina, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Honduras, India, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Samoa, Slovenia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

⁵ Please see section G below.

The HLPF also carries out thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs, including on cross-cutting issues.⁶ At the current session of the General Assembly there will be a review of the resolutions on HLPF⁷ which will decide the future programme of work of HLPF.

How to communicate the intention to conduct a VNR

Given that the President of ECOSOC convenes the HLPF, the practice is for countries to notify the office of the President of the intention to conduct a VNR. There is therefore no registration form or template. Once a country has decided to carry out a review, the decision is communicated to the President by means of a letter from the Permanent Representative of the country concerned. For a sample, see below (Figure 2).

The President notifies countries of matters related to the VNRs by means of letters addressed to their Permanent Missions in New York. In September 2019, the President informed countries that the list of VNRs for 2020 had been closed, with a total of 51 countries presenting at the HLPF.⁸ Those that did not make it onto the list for 2020 were encouraged to come forward for the subsequent years, with the understanding that priority will be given to those countries presenting for the first time. A list of volunteering countries for all years is available on the [HLPF website](#).

H.E. [Name of Ambassador],
President of the Economic and Social Council,
United Nations

Excellency,

I refer to the [year] high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), to be convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July [year].

With reference to General Assembly resolution 70/1, I have the honour to request that [Name of country] be inscribed on the list

⁶ [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 85.

⁷ [GA resolutions 67/290](#) and [70/299](#)

⁸ See note 4.

of countries participating in the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to take place at the [year] HLPF.

[Name of country] attaches great importance to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and looks forward to sharing experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned.

I look forward to early acknowledgement of receipt of this letter.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed)

Figure 2: Sample text of letter communicating decision to conduct a VNR

B. Organisation and Preparation of the Review

First and subsequent reviews

The review typically consists of several broad phases, with some occurring at the same time. These include the following phases: initial preparation and organisation; VNR preparation, including stakeholder engagement; and HLPF presentation. The latter aspects are discussed later in the document.

Second or third reviews will increasingly begin to predominate at future HLPFs: at the 2020 HLPF, 22 countries are slated to carry out their second VNR and 1 country its third VNR. Against this backdrop, the first report, which often is a baseline assessment of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, could be followed in subsequent reports by a summary and analysis of initiatives and actions rolled out since the last VNR; how challenges in implementation, including persistent challenges, were overcome; a more in-depth coverage of good practices adopted or followed by the country and lessons learned; and an analysis of new or emerging issue. It might also contain description of a roadmap for implementation and a financial framework.

Country examples

In 2016, **Colombia** presented its first Voluntary National Review. It showed experiences of including SDGs into the National Development Plans 2014-2018 and Territorial Development Plans 2016-2019, creating intersectoral cooperation for the implementation of SDGs. In this VNR, two years after, with the signing of the Peace Agreement, the country reports that it is well on its path in implementing sustainable development and this VNR shows national indicators, quantifiable targets, institutional responsibilities, prioritization and sub-national implementation through strengthening statistical system in order to achieve SDGs.

From: the VNR of Colombia, 2019

Indonesia in its second 2019 VNR underlines that for the past two years, lessons learned in the 2017 VNR serve as a reference to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Indonesia's national and subnational policies. The data used in the 2019 report is mainly from Statistics Indonesia and relevant ministries and agencies. Thus, for

example it shows improvement of SDG 4 by saying that in 2015-2018, adjusted net attendance rate at preprimary education increased from 79.4% to 83.3%, Gross Enrolment Rate at Junior Secondary School increased from 91.17% to 91.52%, at Senior Secondary School increased from 78.02% to 80.68% and Tertiary level increased from 25.26% to 30.19%.

From: the VNR of Indonesia, 2019

The experience of most VNR countries is that the preparation time is very short. It is advisable to begin the process as early as possible, drawing up a work plan that covers the main deliverables and deadlines for the national preparatory process.

Consider the following when drawing up the work plan / roadmap for the review:

- **Develop a workplan / roadmap with key deliverables aligned with the HLPF deadlines.** Finalized workplans / roadmaps and timelines should be broadly disseminated to government partners and stakeholders. Plan around delivery of Main Messages, 1 May 2020 and the VNR report, 12 June 2020, both covered in greater detail in section F below. Audio / visual materials need to be submitted to DESA by 19 June 2020.
- **Coordination structure.** An entity within the government needs to be responsible for the overall coordination of the VNR. This could be an existing body / institution or an *ad hoc* arrangement, e.g. lead department / agency, or an integrated, inter-ministerial group, coordinating office or committee. A small advisory group could be considered to lead the process of writing of the VNR. Collaboration with other relevant government ministries, agencies and relevant stakeholders is needed in order to provide information and data. In the interest of country ownership, it is highly desirable that the drafting process is led by government in all respects with the engagement from other stakeholders from the very beginning of the process.

- **Resources.** Determine estimated costs of carrying out and writing the review, as well as identify possible sources of funding, as required. Costs may arise for organisation of stakeholder consultations and meetings, travel of officials, production of the review (editing, layout, translation), and preparation of audio-visual material, including videos, for the VNR presentation at the HLPF. Human and technical resources will need to be dedicated to the VNR preparation.
- **Scope of the VNR.** It would be important that a VNR shows how the VNR is part of the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and indicate steps that the country intends to take to accelerate their implementation as part of the decade of action and delivery launched at the SDG Summit in September 2019.⁹ . As VNRs are national reviews, the SG guidelines encourage countries to report on the progress in relation to all 17 SDGs. Where priority goals have been identified nationally, countries could cover those in greater depth. The report could consider where the country is in the national planning cycle and whether the national strategy or plan, legislation, budgets, policies has been updated or aligned with the SDGs and how this has helped national implementation including examining policy coherence and interlinkages. The countries are encouraged to be specific in identifying the main challenges and difficulties experienced in implementing the SDGs as a whole and how they foresee overcoming these barriers.
- Consider the candid inclusion of successes, challenges and lessons learned in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and identify areas where assistance is needed.
- **Draft outline and information gathering.** Draft a preliminary outline and decide on length and structure of the review. Experience suggests that it is helpful to set a page limit at the beginning of the process. To gather inputs, prepare a list of bodies and agencies that will be providing data and information for the VNR. The national statistical office (NSO) and the relevant

⁹ Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly adopted on 15 October 2019 (<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4>)

line ministries are of special importance, but there should also be other contributors, e.g. academia and think tanks.

- **Develop a stakeholder engagement plan.** Identify key stakeholders, methods of engagement and consider online and other means through which stakeholder contributions could be gathered. All sectors and levels of government, civil society, private sector, trade unions, members of parliament and national human rights institutions, should be considered (see Figure 4). The identification of a focal point to liaise with stakeholders can facilitate communication and follow up. It can also be considered to establish a more institutionalized mechanism to engage stakeholders, which can be used for future involvement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Data.** Access to high quality, up-to-date, and disaggregated data is vital for the VNR. Contacts with the national statistical office and other providers of data should be part of the planning process. If a statistical annex is included in the review, more extensive statistics on progress can be included there.¹⁰ The [UN Open Data Hub](#) could be a good resource if national data is not available.
- **Draw on existing reports.** Use existing national platforms and processes that could contribute to the VNR writing and analysis process. Examples include:
 - national frameworks such as national development plans and national sustainable development strategies;
 - reports submitted to international bodies, including human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), other international treaties and conventions, and other reports such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) relating to the Paris Agreement as well as reports to multilateral environmental agreements;

¹⁰ The global indicator framework was adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017. See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

- the SDG reports prepared at the national level together with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) if available or applicable.
- **Allocate time.** Establish a process and a timeline for technical editing as well as for a high-level review of the VNR and its Main Messages. This should allow for the integration of contributions from within government and other stakeholders. Also bear in mind the production time and clearance process for audiovisual materials focused on SDG implementation to be used during the VNR presentation.

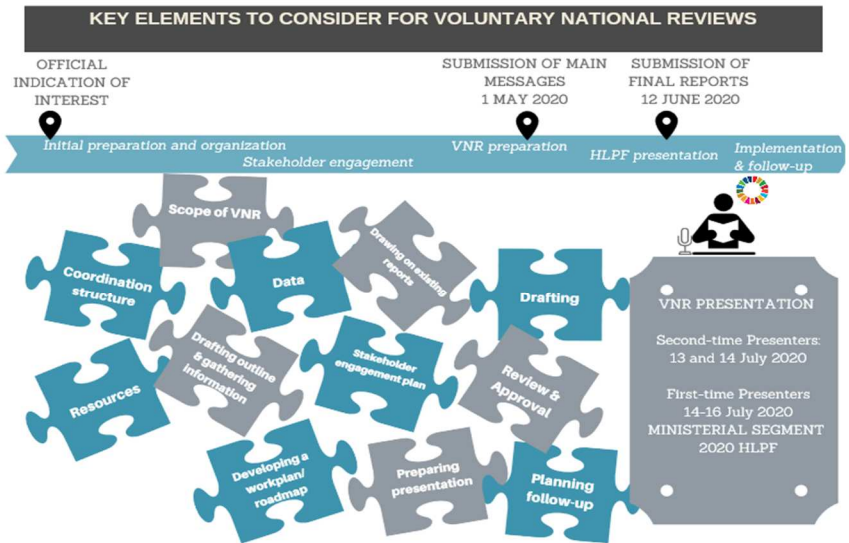


Figure 3: Elements for organisation and preparation of review

Tips:

- ✓ The *Guidelines to Support Country Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals* (2017) prepared by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) contain tools and suggestions for preparing reviews at the national level, which can be used in the preparation of the VNR.¹¹ There exists a

¹¹ Available at: <https://undg.org/document/guidelines-to-support-country-reporting-on-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

number of other web-based resources designed to assist and support countries in SDG implementation.¹²

- ✓ Countries are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries. The country examples provided below have been taken from the 2019 VNRs, but countries can also use any of the VNRs as a benchmark for their own preparations.
- ✓ Capacity building support is also available for countries. DESA organises workshops for all participating VNR countries, which are designed to facilitate peer learning about the VNR preparations. They are discussed further below. Further capacity development building support is available from the UN system, including upon request from DESA by sending a letter to the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs requesting support.

C. Multi-stakeholder participation

One of the founding principles of the 2030 Agenda is the requirement for all implementation and follow-up processes to be participatory and inclusive, including all levels and sectors of government, civil society and the private sector, members of parliament national human rights institutions, among others. This participation and consultation build wider societal ownership of the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda has a revitalized partnership for sustainable development at its core, and stakeholders are recognized as valuable partners in implementing the goals and raising public awareness. Stakeholders have been actively engaged throughout the process of design, implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda at all levels in many countries around the world.

The participation of stakeholders promotes effective decisions, by giving groups affected by those decisions the opportunity to communicate their needs and interests and support governments in tailoring, implementing

¹² See for instance:

<http://www.2030agenda.undp.org/content/2030agenda/en/home/resources/tools-and-guidelines-for-development-practitioners.html>

<http://data.un.org/>

and reviewing public policies. Participation and consultation also build ownership of the 2030 Agenda, and therefore contributes to a whole-of-society approach to the implementation of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda calls upon stakeholders to be actively engaged throughout the process of design, implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda.

A stakeholder engagement plan can be used, among other things, to frame the strategic purpose for consultations; set up a process to identify stakeholders to be consulted; means; techniques and methods for consultation (face-to-face workshops, online platforms, focus groups, written comments); and how the consultation process will be documented. Consideration could be given throughout the process as to how to support reporting by relevant stakeholders and how those contributions will be reflected in the final report, and how ongoing stakeholder involvement will be reflected in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Efforts could include reaching out to legislative bodies, sub-national and local governments, the public, civil society and the private sector, and communicating entry points for stakeholder participation in VNR preparation and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, efforts could be taken to identify representative voices from marginalized groups and to enable their meaningful engagement in the process. Awareness raising efforts encompass a range of activities such as simplifying and translating the SDGs into local languages and including the SDGs in school and university teaching programmes.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What mechanisms and platforms are available for stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to contribute to the VNR and implementation of the SDGs?
- Who can participate? Are there umbrella bodies that can be consulted or is there a need to create targeted consultation processes in situations where no multi-stakeholder bodies or fora exist?
- What is the desired mix of in-person or online engagement options?
- How does the Government take into account the views of all stakeholders in developing its implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda?

- What partnerships, including with the private sector, have been put in place for implementation of the SDGs? Consider examples that could be showcased as good practices.
- How can contributions from stakeholders be showcased in the VNR report?

Country examples

Lesotho's participation in the 2019 VNR process has been a good learning experience for the Government across ministries, departments and agencies, the private sector, CSOs, academia, and special groups like children, the youth, women and people with disabilities. Through this process, advocacy, public education and awareness about SDGs across districts in Lesotho – rural and urban, and among various stakeholders, have been reinforced. Lesotho's National Technical Steering Committee for the implementation of sustainable development agenda is chaired by the Principal Secretary for Ministry of Development Planning, with a multi-stakeholder membership including: Ministries Principal Secretaries (PSs), UN Country Team (UNCT), Development Partners, Heads of Government Agencies, Heads of CSOs, Heads of NGOs; Chief Executives, and Heads of Trade Unions. Its responsibility is to give technical direction and quality assurance to the implementation, monitoring of and reporting on SDGs.

From: The VNR of Lesotho, 2019

In **Guatemala**, public sector consultations for the VNR report covered the departmental, municipal and regional level. The 22 departmental workshops were held convened by departmental technical units, which included representatives of civil society and mayors. The regional workshops, meanwhile, were made through the regional urban and rural development councils (COREDUR), with the facilitation of community organizers with whom they work. The community organizers were able to replicate these workshops from the central level at the local level. Finally, the municipal consultations were carried out via *ad hoc* questionnaires that were prepared with the assistance

of regional experts. This resulted in 152 responses, which represents a 44% of municipalities in the country.

From: the VNR of Guatemala, 2019

Tips:

- ✓ Stakeholders from different countries and sectors have been coordinating efforts to produce ‘spotlight reports’, reflecting their perspectives on implementation of the 2030 Agenda. National civil society coalitions on the SDGs have been established in several countries¹³ and usually take the lead on drafting those reports.
- ✓ Since 2016, DESA and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) have partnered to develop a facilitated online course for government officials in charge of the mainstreaming and review of the SDGs. Information can be found at: <https://www.unitar.org/stakeholders-engagement-implementation-sdgs-giving-countries-best-chances-succeed>
- ✓ UN DESA webinars for MGoS

D. Key building blocks for preparing the review

The following headings are generally presented according to the sections of the updated Secretary-General’s guidelines, referred to above.¹⁴ A number of the steps described below may take place simultaneously and continuously. The guidelines make clear that each country will decide on the scope of their review and the format in which they wish to present their findings. However, countries may voluntarily use the components which are presented in the guidelines to help them frame the preparations for their VNRs.

¹³ Examples of national CSO coalitions on the SDGs can be found here: <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/FINAL-Mapping-of-National-CSO-coalitions-on-SDGs-March-2018.pdf>

¹⁴ The examples given in this section are illustrative of what countries which have already presented their VNRs have done. More good practice examples are available in the VNRs themselves as well as in the annual VNR Synthesis Reports prepared by UN DESA. The guidelines are attached hereto as annex 2.

The review is expected to show what steps the country has taken to implement the 2030 Agenda, including the goals and targets, and provide an assessment of the results on the ground. Implementation needs to be more visible over time and the country should indicate exactly what concrete, tangible steps it has taken to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is met. The progress and advancement in the implementation should be supported by data, monitoring and evaluation.

In the first parts of the review (**Opening statement, Highlights, Introduction, Methodology for the process of preparation of the review**), countries are invited to give an overview of their own context and overall national objectives and information on the overall process. Countries may provide two or three examples of good practices, lessons learned and challenges on which it wishes to hear about from other countries. Countries may also provide a snapshot of the voluntary national review, including the preparation process and involvement of different sectors and levels of government and multi-stakeholders, and areas where they would need support, including in terms of finance, capacity building, technology, and partnerships. Countries could provide information on how the Government has responded to the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs, and the principle of leaving no-one behind. Countries are also encouraged to integrate a gender perspective across all sections of the report. The introduction could also provide links to other international agreements such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Ownership of the SDGs

Tied in directly with the section on multi-stakeholder participation described above, is national ownership of the SDGs. Awareness raising and dissemination of information about the SDGs throughout all branches and levels of government and among stakeholders is a crucial and ongoing dimension of creating an enabling environment, and participatory and inclusive processes, a central requirement in the 2030 Agenda, can help to create a sense of ownership. Creating ownership is about ensuring that all in society are made aware of the 2030 Agenda and are brought fully on board in implementation, reporting and monitoring. Keeping the goals and targets under constant national review and ensuring the sustained involvement of all stakeholders,

including through monitoring and review mechanisms, is important to maintain ownership of the SDGs.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How are all sectors and levels of government (local and subnational) being engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? Have they prepared their own voluntary local reviews?
- How is parliament involved in the preparation of the VNR and the implementation of the SDGs?
- What is being done to keep the SDGs under inclusive and participatory review at the national level? Have the SDGs been taken up by bodies, such as supreme audit institutions, or included in performance monitoring and evaluation systems?
- How is outreach targeted so that marginalised and vulnerable groups are reached and that no-one is left behind?
- Have the actions of all levels of government and all actors been adequately reflected in the VNR report?

Country examples

Cambodia has engaged in advocacy and citizen engagement. As the closest level of government to the people, local administrations are well-placed to raise awareness and the relevance of the SDGs. Subnational governments bridge the gap between the central government and citizens and will play a strong role in fostering the involvement of civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and other community-based organizations. Locally elected leaders, in particular, have a democratic mandate to lead local development and can be held accountable. Awareness-raising activities will aim to increase the engagement of citizens and local communities in order to promote their sense of ownership of the agenda and their participation in the achievement of the SDGs at local level. Subnational governments will be supported to recognize the 2030 Agenda as a framework for action and set up mechanisms that enable citizen participation and institutional accountability.

From: the VNR of Cambodia, 2019

The Republic of Congo launched the 2030 Agenda in December 2016 under the high patronage of the Prime Minister who presented the SDG architecture and roadmap. The roadmap defined activities for parliamentarians and locally elected officials, academia, civil society, youth and the general public. The ownership of SDGs was carried out through the SDG contextualization workshops as well as by distributing information through traditional media like advertising, TV and radio, as well as social networks and through awareness campaigns.

From: the VNR of the Republic of Congo, 2019

In **Iceland**, particular emphasis is placed on disseminating information on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, as it is clear that they will not be achieved without the widespread participation of the general public, academia, civil society and the private sector. To this end, in 2018, a special communications officer for the SDGs was appointed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, to develop and produce information material to raise awareness and understanding of the goals and to pay specific attention to their integration with the activities of Government Offices. In March 2018, a promotional campaign was launched on all the country's main media about the SDGs under the title "Let's Have Good News to Tell in 2030". As the goals aim at progress in all major areas of society on a global scale, the campaign attempted to identify what some of the good news might be in the future, if the goals are met. The objective was to draw attention to the SDGs in order to promote public participation in their implementation. Short videos were shown on television, social media (Facebook and YouTube) and in cinemas, and online advertising banners and full-page advertisements were published in Icelandic media.

From: the VNR of Iceland, 2019

In **Timor-Leste** due to the country's unique context as a conflict-affected country, the priority was to use the VNR process as a platform to deepen awareness and discussion on sustainable development in Timor-Leste. The aim was to ensure space was provided to enable citizens at all levels, with different backgrounds, to give feedback on their experiences of sustainable development in the country.

From: the VNR of Timor-Leste, 2019

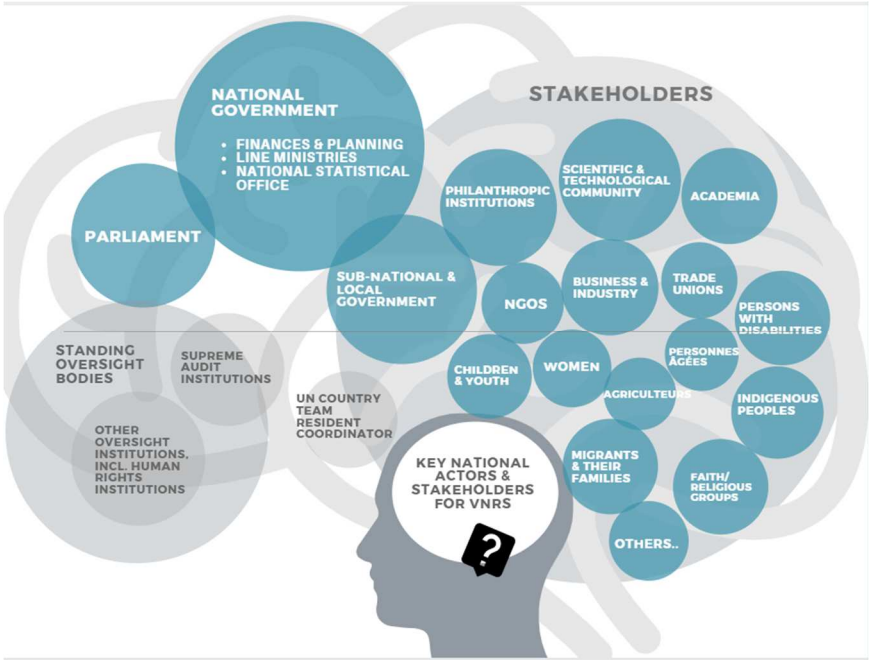


Figure 4: Indicative map of key national actors and stakeholders (DESA)

Incorporation of the SDGs into national frameworks

The effective implementation of the SDGs depends on their incorporation into all relevant national frameworks. The VNR needs to analyse how well such frameworks are aligned with the SDGs and determine whether there are critical gaps. Countries should be specific about the main challenges and difficulties they face in implementing the SDGs and are encouraged to provide an analysis of the causes of these challenges and difficulties and how they foresee overcoming these barriers. There are various laws, regulations and policies that should be examined to assess a country's alignment with the SDGs including:

- national vision documents;
- a national development plan or sustainable development strategy;
- integrated financial frameworks and other fiscal policies;
- sectoral policies, strategies, plans and programmes;
- legislation; and

- local government and sub-national development plans; as well as laws, policies, strategies, and programmes.

Simple grid-based tools are a way to begin to explore the alignment between existing national frameworks and the SDGs. Below is a simplified representation from the Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) tool of UNDP.

Policy Area/Sector	SDG-1: Poverty							SDG-2: Food security								
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.a	1.b	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.a	2.b	2.c	
Health Strategy	X								X							
Water Sector Development Policy	X				X					X	X					
National Biodiversity Strategy				X							X	X	X			
Land Policy Act	X			X						X	X					
National Smallholder Policy	X			X			X		X	X						
Justice System Reform Programme				X			X									
Prevention of Violence Against Women Policy					X											
Early Childhood Development Programme		X							X							
	4	1	0	4	2	0	2	0	3	3	3	1	1	0	0	

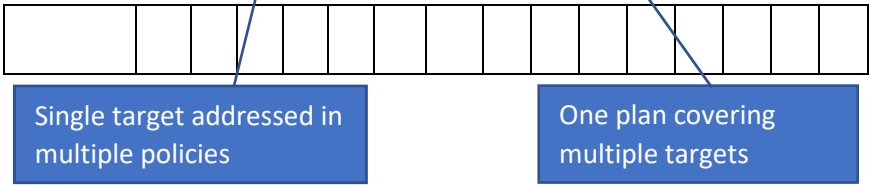


Figure 5: Mapping of existing policies to the SDGs (DESA, adapted from the RIA of UNDP)

Where gaps and convergences are identified, the VNR could propose steps to better incorporate the SDGs into national frameworks. The review could provide an overview of adjustments to existing policies and strategies, or the adoption of new policies and instruments for achieving the SDGs. Specifically, the country may describe how the policy makers are coordinating through national planning, budgetary, financial and investment processes, which may help bring about a deeper, faster and more ambitious response to the challenges which their economies are facing.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- Has the country conducted a gap analysis of the SDGs and its national frameworks?
- What has been done to integrate the SDGs into legislation, strategies, policies, plans and programmes and to what extent can the implementation of the SDGs be advanced through existing plans and strategies? Do they need to be updated or revised to implement the SDGs?
- How have the SDGs been aligned with national policy frameworks?
- To what extent have the SDGs been integrated into the policies and programmes of line ministries?
- What are solutions and good practices to ensure policy coherence and identify benefits and minimize trade-offs?
- What are the main results of policy changes or new policies and plans in place?
- What are the main challenges and difficulties that the country faces in implementing the SDGs?

- What actions have been undertaken by sub-national and local government to implement the SDGs?

Country examples

In 2017, **The Fijian Government** launched its 5-Year & 20-Year National Development Plans (NDP) with the vision of transforming Fiji. The NDP proposes two mutually inclusive and mutually reinforcing development strategies:

- Inclusive Social-Economic Development which aims to further improve the living standards of Fijians; and
- Transformational Strategic Thrusts which aim to cement Fiji as the regional hub of the South Pacific through continuing the momentum of key reforms and building on locational, infrastructural, and institutional advantages.

The NDP is the outcome of a nationwide consultation process that involved the private sector, civil society, community groups, government and the general public reflecting the aspirations of the Fijian people and their Government's commitment to build a more prosperous and inclusive Fiji. Mainstreamed and integrated within the various thematic areas of the NDP are the SDGs – 15 SDGs are explicitly integrated into the corresponding 29 strategic priorities of the NDP while SDG 10 (reduce inequalities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 13 (climate action) are treated as cross-cutting issues across the NDP. Consequently, the SDG implementation and its monitoring hinge on the NDP processes including the overall monitoring and evaluation. At the sector level, SDGs have already been integrated into sectoral strategic plans and policies in many sectors including but not limited to education, health and agriculture. Fiji also recognises that, while Government holds the important responsibility for achieving the SDGs, it is in everyone's interest and everyone's responsibility including private individuals, private enterprises, NGOs and CSOs to advance the sustainable development agenda. Working with these stakeholders, the Fijian Government is helping advance socio-economic development that empowers all Fijians.

From: the VNR of Fiji, 2019

Eswatini has mainstreamed Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 into its National Development Strategy and National Development Plan. The institutional arrangement to implement SDGs involves technical working team and the steering committee. Members of the technical team are representatives of government, business society, civil society organizations, academics and experts to ensure inclusiveness and no one left behind principles. The SDGs metadata was very instrumental in guiding stakeholders on the definition of each goal and method of computing indicators to assure comparability among regions and ensure no one leave behind principle is in place. Faced with limited resources, there is strong need to prioritize development issues and efforts to attain maximum results in a cost-effective manner considering multiplier effects and means of implementing the goals. The country prioritized and ranked the SDGs giving due attention and consideration to domestic contextual realities and future development potentials. Special attention was given to objective realities prevailing in the country particularly perceived national focus areas for development and prevailing development gaps. In addition, consideration was given to challenges, potential for development and promotion of human development dynamics when prioritizing the SDGs.

From: the VNR of Eswatini, 2019

Table 5. Interaction between SDGs

	Target Interaction Ratio (Average %)	Number of Goals with Target Interaction Ratio of 40% or Higher	Number of Goals with Target Interaction Ratio of 60% or Higher
SDG 1 (7 targets)			
Impacted	74	15	12
Impacting	40	8	5
SDG 2 (8 targets)			
Impacted	41	8	5
Impacting	35	7	3
SDG 3 (13 targets)			
Impacted	38	3	1
Impacting	13	2	0
SDG 4 (10 targets)			
Impacted	20	3	2
Impacting	39	6	5
SDG 5 (9 targets)			
Impacted	57	10	7
Impacting	23	5	2
SDG 6 (8 targets)			
Impacted	27	4	2
Impacting	27	4	2
SDG 7 (5 targets)			
Impacted	53	11	7
Impacting	26	4	2
SDG 8 (12 targets)			
Impacted	45	9	4
Impacting	52	9	6
SDG 9 (8 targets)			
Impacted	36	9	2
Impacting	48	12	4
SDG 10 (10 targets)			
Impacted	25	4	0
Impacting	25	5	2
SDG 11 (10 targets)			
Impacted	34	5	3
Impacting	35	8	3
SDG 12 (11 targets)			
Impacted	26	3	2
Impacting	36	8	3
SDG 13 (5 targets)			
Impacted	55	15	8
Impacting	53	10	8
SDG 14 (10 targets)			
Impacted	28	4	3
Impacting	21	2	1
SDG 15 (12 targets)			
Impacted	34	8	3
Impacting	24	4	2
SDG 16 (12 targets)			
Impacted	6	1	1
Impacting	43	9	4
SDG 17 (19 targets)			
Impacted	8	1	1
Impacting	76	12	12

Tips:

- ✓ The Rapid Integrated Assessment Policy Tool developed by UNDP may help countries gauge their readiness for SDG implementation. This assessment tool provides an initial overview of a country's alignment with the 2030 Agenda through a gap analysis of SDG targets. It can be used as a starting point for more focused analysis. The RIA Tool is available here. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/rapid-integrated-assessment---mainstreaming-sdgs-into-national-a.html>

Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development

An integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda means that reviews should discuss the interlinkages that exist between SDGs, both in the form of synergies and also in trade-offs and conflicts taking into account the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. A clear understanding of inter-linkages will, in turn, allow countries to manage them, notably through optimum cooperation and coordination between sectors and institutions.

Under this section, the VNR could provide a brief overview of analysis of interlinkages and institutional arrangements undertaken and designed for integrated policy-making, and examples of policies that integrate the three dimensions.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What are the most important national interlinkages, or nexus of interlinkages, between the goals and targets covered in the VNR?
- What are the main barriers to the better integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and the 17 SDGs?
- How does the country engage in discussion and find effective solutions to trade-offs that have to be made?
- What actions are being taken to ensure that all levels of government work together (horizontally across sectors, and

vertically from national to local) to integrate the three dimensions and the SDGs?

- Are there examples of the positive impact of more integrated national policies?

A simple example can be used to illustrate how certain policies/strategies have multiple benefits. Unconditional cash transfers to young girls in Africa can reduce poverty, keep girls in school, reduce unwanted teen pregnancies and decrease HIV transmission by as much as two thirds. Thus, an intervention motivated by a ‘social protection’ objective ends up advancing other goals such as the reduction of poverty, education, health and gender equality goals.¹⁵

A basic template can be used to explore interlinkages between SDG targets, such as this one below, taken from the VNR report of **Ghana**, 2019.

Figure 5.1: Ghana: major synergies and trade-offs of infrastructure-related targets



Such an initial mapping of potential interlinkages can be used to identify targets where more than one government agency has responsibility,

¹⁵ This has been adapted slightly from the example used in *UNDP Support to the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* available at: http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/SDGs/SDG%20Implementation%20and%20UNDP_Policy_and_Programme_Brief.pdf

which suggests areas for integrated policy-making and implementation. The initial mapping can also be used for more in-depth analysis of interlinkages between targets of special interest, e.g. national priorities, by means of focus groups or more specialised modelling tools. This could include examining synergies and possible strategies for tackling trade-offs.

Country examples

Mongolia, in order to strengthen policy and planning mechanisms, has developed a methodology for ensuring policy coherence and identifying policy targets. This methodology has approved and amended into the Regulation for Developing Development Policies by Government Resolution No.294 of 2018. This amendment enables policymakers to strengthen policy coherence of newly formulated policies. But it is also necessary to review all policy documents approved prior the passage of the Law using the same methodology in order to improve coherence between the long and medium-term policies. Furthermore, to systematically ensure coherence of policies approved prior to the adoption of the above-mentioned methodology with long and medium-term goals, including the SDGs, a Working Group including all state organizations with a mandate to formulate policies was established by the Prime Minister’s Order No. 2 of 2019. While the Cabinet Secretariat is in charge of the overall management, the NDA is responsible for providing technical guidance to this Working Group.

Roadmap for aligning Mongolia’s Long Development Policy with the SDGs



From: the VNR of Mongolia, 2019

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) is the UK's principal development education programme. £38 million is being invested in CCGL, from 2018 to 2021 and aiming to reach 3 million children. CCGL focusses on children aged 7 to 14 and supports partnerships between primary and secondary schools across the UK and developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Through their participation, the children will gain the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that they will need to live and eventually work in the global economy. The programme provides training for 60,000 teachers and school leaders in the UK and developing countries, on topics such as working together on the Goals, teaching global citizenship, teaching transferable skills and ensuring education is inclusive.

From: the VNR of the United Kingdom, 2019

Tip:

- ✓ UNESCAP has developed a framework and tools for integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development. This and other tools are available here:

<https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/knowledge-hub/thematic-areas>

Leaving no one behind

Countries could set out actions they have taken to mainstream the principle of leaving no one behind in the implementation of the SDGs. This could include actions to prioritise outcomes for vulnerable groups, as well as looking beyond population averages to identify who they are, where they are located and their specific needs. Countries are encouraged to go beyond social policies and include macroeconomic policies and technology that impact on the situation of the furthest behind. Particular attention should be placed on efforts to empower women and girls. Starting points for addressing the area of 'leaving no one behind' could include actions to end extreme poverty, policies aimed at reducing inequalities and policies aimed at discriminatory barriers, including those arising from geography as well as efforts to ensure inclusive and effective participation in implementation. The impact of

multiple and overlapping inequalities – being a woman and living in a rural area, for example, could also be considered.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How are vulnerable groups and those furthest behind being identified?
- Who is being left behind and what are the underlying reasons for their vulnerability?
- What disaggregated sources of data are available and what are the data gaps?
- What actions are being taken to determine the needs of the vulnerable and furthest behind?
- What is being done to support the empowerment of vulnerable groups?

Country examples

Iraq has taken steps towards integrating and empowering people with disabilities and their special needs and enhancing their participation in society. In December 2017 Iraq was on schedule with the launch of the results of the first National Disability Survey for the year 2016, which was implemented by the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Ministry of Planning and covered 13 of the provinces of Iraq, except the provinces of Kurdistan and the provinces of Nineveh and Anbar because of military operations, The importance of this survey stems from the provision of a database for the disabled that will help decision-makers to draw up policies for this segment.

Framework (7): No one is left behind: The care for the people with disabilities act No. 38 of 2013



In mid-July 2017, the MoLSA's People with Disability Care Unit issued the first edition of the Care for the People with Disabilities Act No. 38 of 2013 in Braille language to enable the beneficiaries to know their rights under the law.

This law considers the social inclusion of this group and the modern techniques of communication with the community. The Act has positive aspects including:

Article 4 provides for the establishment of a care unit for persons with disabilities and special needs.

Article 15 provides benefits in higher education, travel tickets, and health insurance.

Article 16 determines an employment quota for people with disabilities (5% in the public and joint sectors and 3% in the private sector).

Article 17 exempts from tax 10% of income and soft loans.

Article 18 is related to tax exemptions for individual and collective transport means and traffic number.

From: the VNR of Iraq, 2019

The Federation of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is in the process of drafting a development strategy that will incorporate the SDGs and their implementation in accordance with the socioeconomic context in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the cantons and municipalities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The drafting process for the development strategy foresees the creation of four thematic groups with twelve subgroups covering all aspects of socioeconomic development (for example, competitiveness and smart specialization, human resources, food production, social inclusion, etc.). Activities of all subgroups will be based on the 'leave no one behind' principle. This means that each thematic group will implement this principle giving special attention to marginalized groups and will make decisions to ensure their equal participation in socioeconomic processes in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From: the VNR of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019

Inclusion within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, is often presented by the principle of leaving no one behind, which defines the need to include all citizens, all social classes, notably the most disenfranchised, vulnerable and those exposed to shocks (related to climate, economy and finance, etc.) as beneficiaries of public support. The vulnerable social groups of **Cameroon**, include women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, children in conflict with the law,

refugees, etc. The measures undertaken by the Government for the promotion of social inclusion are legal, institutional and political and operational. By way of example, at the institutional and political level, it should be emphasized that in view of the social inclusion being a cross-cutting issue, several ministerial departments provide support with assistance by many social partners involved in this area, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, which produces and regularly updates the statistical yearbook on vulnerable population in Cameroon.

From: the VNR of Cameroon, 2019

Institutional mechanisms

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda will require countries to examine and often strengthen their institutional tools, ensuring that existing and/or new mechanisms are robust and inclusive. In many countries, institutions have been put in place and/or strengthened. Institutional mechanisms are often multi-faceted and integrated, characterised by inter-ministerial coordination and multi-sectoral involvement, seeking to harmonise different workstreams and involving all agencies in cross-cutting efforts to achieve the SDGs. Responsibility for coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda is often shared and allocated among various levels of Government (national, subnational and local).

Country examples

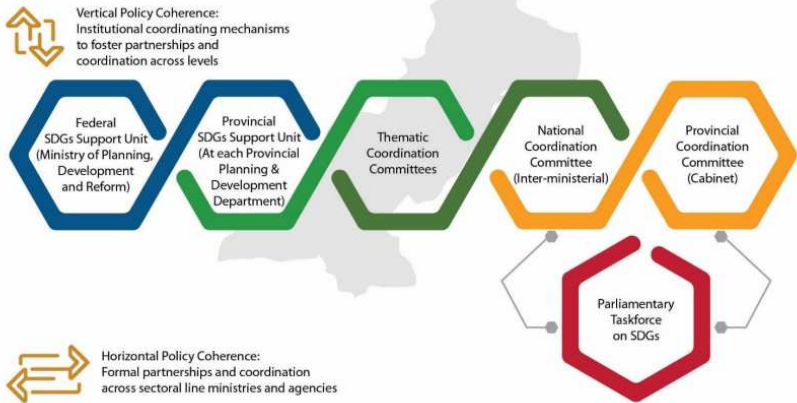
From the outset, the **Liechtenstein** government chose a systematic approach to analyse the level of implementation of the SDGs in Liechtenstein and to define the need for action. To that end the government established an interdisciplinary working group led by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture and tasked it with the following:

- Performance of a gap analysis with respect to the level of implementation of the SDGs
- Analysis of the need for action to ensure implementation
- Review of data availability for measurement of the SDGs

In a detailed analytic process, the working group drew up an overview of the individual SDGs and their targets and also studied the available data for measuring progress. At the same time the public was informed at various events about the SDGs and discussions were held with stakeholder groups. Based on the results and the recommendations of the working group and according to the priority given to the identified need for action, the government decided to define the SDGs together with the “2017–2021 Government Programme” as one of the strategic guidelines for the government’s work. It aims for the SDGs to be implemented as broadly as possible but wishes to focus on the SDGs where it perceives the greatest need for action or the most challenges for the future. (...) The relevant ministries are responsible for implementing the various SDG-related projects. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Justice and Culture was tasked with coordinating implementation and with producing this report.

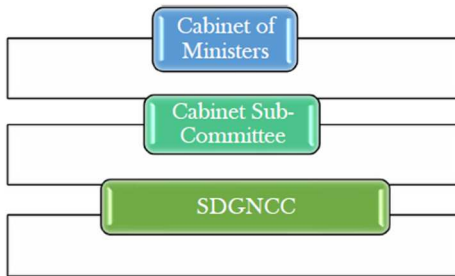
From: the VNR of Liechtenstein, 2019

SDGs Mainstreaming - Institutional Mechanism for Coordination & Oversight



From: the VNR of Pakistan, 2019

Institutional structure for sustainable development in Saint Lucia



National Coordination Mechanism for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

From: The VNR of Saint Lucia, 2019

The institutional mechanism should remain relevant across political cycles and should overlap with rather than follow the electoral cycle of the country in question. This ensures that the institution’s work extends beyond the term of the present government to which both current and future decision makers and political parties are committed. The review can provide opportunity to include information on how the views of different ministries, agencies, levels of government and non-governmental stakeholders, including representatives of vulnerable groups, have been mobilized around the 2030 Agenda and how their views are considered. Countries may also consider including information,

on the institution(s) / mechanism(s) in charge of coordination and integration for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, on their interaction with relevant national bodies, such as the national planning entities, oversight bodies or national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. This section could also include a reflection of how the country has ensured that the institutional mechanisms supporting SDG implementation are effective, accountable, and inclusive. The review could consider highlighting efforts to successfully mobilize institutions around the SDGs, improve their functioning, make them more responsive, accountable and transparent and promote collaboration and change to achieve policy coherence and integration across sectors. It would be useful to highlight how the country is reviewing progress in implementing the SDGs, including mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures. possible plans for the conduct of national reviews that take into account the presentation of the VNR. The review could also highlight how the preparation and follow-up to VNRs at the HLPF are embedded in the ongoing processes.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How does the institutional framework incorporate different actors and stakeholders and their interests? How do the overall institutional arrangements relating to the SDGs involve key line ministries, sub-national and local levels of government, parliament, human rights institutions, civil society organisations, and the private sector, oversight bodies and/or national mechanisms for follow-up and review?
- What is the involvement of the highest level of government in the institutional arrangement?
- How does the institutional arrangement work to mobilise all stakeholders around the SDGs and promote change?
- Are there examples of how the institutional arrangements have had an impact, for instance through more integrated policy-making?
- How does the country review progress in implementing the SDGs, including possible plans for the conduct of national reviews that take into account the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF?

Structural issues

Countries could reflect on the cross-cutting / transversal / structural issues that impact on the implementation of the SDGs of, for example, gender equality, inequality, trade, peaceful societies, production and consumption patterns, and structural transformation of the economy. The analysis could consider relevant institutional barriers to change at the national, regional, or international level. Countries could also provide examples of policies they have implemented that have resulted in transformative changes and/or show institutional changes they did to address structural issues or barriers and how to avoid trade-offs among the SDGs.

Goals and targets

Countries are encouraged to provide brief information on progress and the status of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals contained in the 2030 Agenda. The consideration of Goals could focus on trends, successes, critical challenges, interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs, emerging issues, and lessons learned, and describe what actions have been taken to address existing gaps and the challenges that have been identified. While countries are encouraged to report on all 17 SDGs, more in-depth analysis of a few selected goals and targets seen as national priority and their related gaps and challenges may also be reflected in the VNRs. This in-depth analysis may be guided by the country in light of its priorities but could also be provided because countries have best practice examples in implementation or innovative policies to share at the global level. Examples that are particularly interesting for peer learning and in an international context are encouraged. The review of goals could include a qualitative and / or a quantitative dimension. If countries are doing their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous review, along with any specific efforts that have been undertaken to address recommendations from the previous review.

VNRs have covered the goals and targets in a range of different ways, including providing:

- a snapshot of the status of the goals and targets;
- achievements and good practices;
- the impact of country interventions at home and abroad;




























- gaps and challenges;
- challenges and opportunities;
- interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs with other goals;
- an analysis of emerging issues; and
- plans for future enhanced implementation.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- Has a baseline for the SDGs been established and used? Have specific efforts been undertaken to address recommendations from the previous review and the findings of the national processes to prepare the VNR?
- Has the country prioritised certain SDGs? What criteria /process was used to derive priorities and who was engaged in prioritizing the SDGs?
- How are the various levels of government, parliament, and stakeholders working together to achieve the goals and targets?
- What progress has the country made on the goals and targets? What are the trends? Are there emerging issues of concern? Consider how the VNR can analyse progress/challenges, rather than describing existing/planned policies.
- Where gaps and challenges have been identified, what measures have been put in place, or are planned, to address them?
- What efforts have been made to ensure that all policies, plans and programmes reach the most marginalised and leave no one behind?
- Are there good practice examples of achieving the goals and targets which other countries would find useful?

Country examples

<p>Strategic issues for Israel, 2015, relevant for Israel's planned course on implementation of the SDGs</p>

Strategic issues for Israel	Relevant SDG goals
Digital Israel	    
Human capital development and utilization	    
Regional economic development	    
Financing infrastructure	  
Productivity and competitiveness	  
Strategy in the housing field	  
Preparing for population aging	  

From: the VNR of Israel, 2019

Mauritius outlined challenges and opportunities for each SDG, here SDG 14:

CHALLENGES	OPPORTUNITIES
Scarce financial capacity and lack of skills and technology for exploring, studying and utilising the immense potential offered by the marine environment.	Bilateral and Multilateral partnerships are required to support sustainable management of our marine areas.
Continued effect of climate change on the coral reef ecosystem undermines the restoration and conservation efforts.	We have set up a National Coral Reef Network in 2018. Its objective is to enhance collaboration and consultation for conservation of the coral reef system. This will provide us with an opportunity to carry out research on coral species which are more climate resistant and fast growing to rehabilitate degraded areas.
There is lack of monitoring capability and facilities for the marine ecosystem and species on remote Outer Islands such as St Brandon.	There is need to establish facilities in remote islands.
We have to rely on opportunistic research cruises to provide information, especially in Outer Islands.	A permanent station can be set up on these islands for regular monitoring.
	Increased regional coordination and participation in surveillance missions.

From: the VNR of Mauritius, 2019

Means of implementation

The review process should discuss how means of implementation are mobilised, what difficulties are being encountered, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, looking at the full

range of financing sources (public/private, domestic/international) and non-financing means of implementation, such as capacity development and data needs, technology, and partnerships. Gender-responsive budgeting can be highlighted, if applicable.

Countries could elaborate on their financing strategy for the SDGs / integrated national financing framework where applicable, and the appropriate policies and reforms in place to finance this strategy. Countries could also provide an overview of the institutional set-up and coordination mechanisms (intra-government and with other stakeholders) which help implement the financing strategy. The review could indicate how financial systems, statistical data and resource allocations are being aligned to support the realization of the 2030 Agenda and its pledge to leave no one behind. Coverage of domestic resource mobilization could include the contribution of the private sector. Countries are also encouraged to identify concrete technology, capacity development and data needs.

Partnerships, including public, public-private and multi-stakeholder, as an effective vehicle to implement the SDGs could be elaborated upon. Costing and budgeting for the SDGs, as well as strengthening institutional and human capacities for implementation should also be considered when preparing the review.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What are current resource flows? Summarise steps taken to mobilise domestic resources, official development assistance and additional sources of funding, such as foreign direct investment and remittances.
- What steps have been taken to identify critical gaps and estimate additional resources that are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda? Relevant aspects include financing, capacity development needs, including for data and statistics knowledge sharing, technology and partnerships.
- How can financial systems and resource allocations be aligned to support the realisation of the 2030 Agenda?
- How is the country engaging in international cooperation? Examples could include South-South, North-South and other forms of cooperation.

- How is the Addis Ababa Agenda being used to mobilise means of implementation? Has the country adopted a financing strategy/ integrated national financing framework, where applicable? What policies and reforms are in place to finance this strategy?
- What partnerships is the country involved in? Are there opportunities to expand partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda? What role does/can the private sector play?
- What capacity development services does the country need for more effective implementation of the SDGs? This is an opportunity to identify specific needs for the country.

Country examples

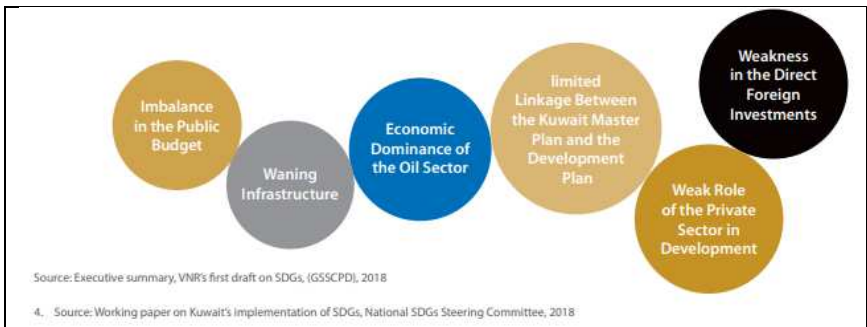
Tonga reported its commitment to improve the links between national (and sector) plans and budgets in order to ensure that development priorities are resourced for implementation as planned. A tailored tool (called One Process) has been operationalized in order to better allocate resources for targeted outputs. Overall, the One Process Tool is intended to help improve the service delivery performance of whole-of-Government through eight components outlined in the figure below.

Figure 5: Eight components of One Process Tool

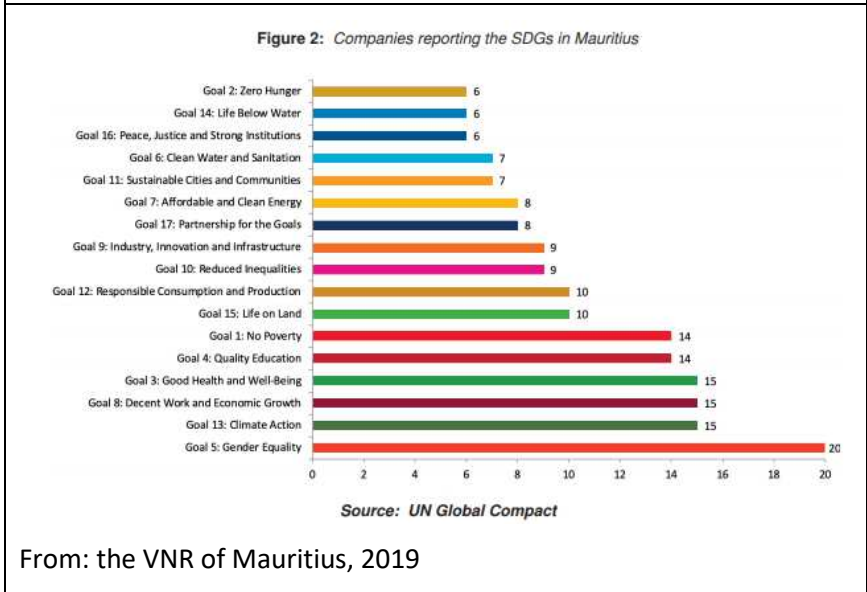


From: the VNR of Tonga, 2019

Major gaps and challenges faced while achieving the 2030 Agenda in **Kuwait**



From: the VNR of Kuwait, 2019



Conclusion and next steps

Based on the outcomes of the review, countries could outline what steps are planned to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the coming four years. Countries could also indicate their plans for keeping the SDGs under review at the national and sub-national levels, including dissemination of VNRs and other national reviews and their findings. The section could highlight what lessons the country has learned from the review process, how it will apply them in the continuing implementation and what support it would need in the future for preparing such reviews.

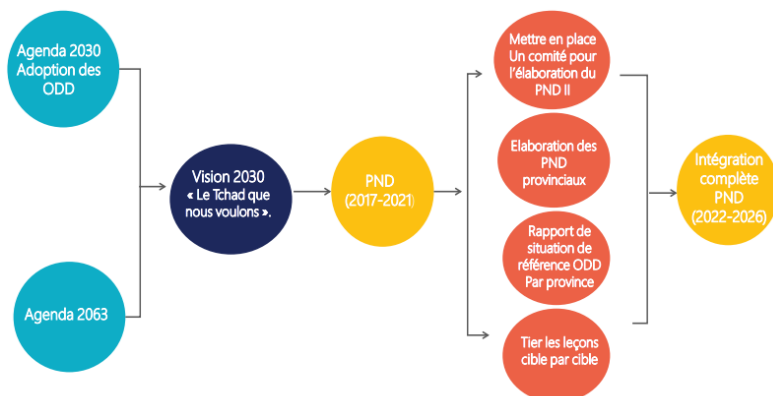
The following issues/questions could be addressed:

- A summary of the analysis, findings from policy bodies, the public, civil society and the private sector
- New and emerging issues
- What lessons can be learned from the review process?
- What support does the country need to prepare future reviews?
- What adjustments should be made to the voluntary national guidelines to ensure that they are useful?

Countries are encouraged to reflect on how the VNR will contribute to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through identifying concrete follow-up actions. Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- How are the outcomes of the VNR being taken up at national level? Is the review being disseminated?
- What additional steps are planned to integrate the SDGs into government activities, e.g. the budgeting process and policies and programmes of line ministries, other institutions or legislation?
- Are there plans for regular review of progress at the national level on the implementation of the Agenda?
- What follow-up actions are being defined after the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF?

Prochaines Etapes --- Où allons-nous?



From: the VNR of Chad, 2019

Croatia informed that the Voluntary National Review, which is prepared in parallel to the 2030 NDS, is an opportunity to objectively assess performance in different sectors and to plan follow-up activities related to the achievement of sustainable development goals. To ensure the implementation of sustainable development goals under the 2030 NDS, Croatia will focus its follow-up activities on the following:

- improvement of the institutional architecture with a clearly defined organisational, coordination and supervisory structure;
- defining an interventional logic to form connections between strategic goals, planned implementation mechanisms, structural reforms and strategic projects under the 2030 NDS;
- strengthening national statistical capacities;
- implementing permanent outreach and educational activities in order to raise awareness about sustainable development and living and the implementation of SDGs on a national and global level.

From: the VNR of Croatia, 2019

Annexes

Countries are encouraged to include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goals indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate. They may highlight whether statistics, including gender statistics, were collected from the national statistical system and pinpoint major gaps in official statistics on indicators.

Some questions that could be considered in relation to a statistical annex include the following:

- What criteria were used for selecting the indicators in the annex?
- How does the annex supplement and support the content of the review? Consider what is more effective – a very comprehensive presentation or a selection of the most relevant indicators?
- What is the most user-friendly format for presenting the data?
- Is it feasible to present time-series data?

Countries may also consider including additional annexes covering, for example, best practices and/or policies and strategies that have advanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda, interlinkages between the goals and targets as well as the global impacts of national actions (spillover), comments and inputs from stakeholders, as well as a list of all the actors that contributed to the report.

If countries so wish, they can send other reports to UN DESA for posting on their national page in the VNR database, including complementary reports by stakeholders.

E. Monitoring and Review

Effective monitoring and review processes are key to the 2030 Agenda. Monitoring national implementation of the SDGs requires the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of reliable, timely, accessible and sufficiently disaggregated data. This includes the global SDG indicator framework for the follow-up and review of the progress adopted in 2017 which contains 232 indicators towards achieving the SDGs. Countries are developing their statistical capacities and contributing to the definition of

global indicators identifying indicators that best reflect national challenges.¹⁶

Many countries have different institutions for monitoring the achievement of the SDGs, including their national institutional frameworks which reflect various issues, such as aligning the SDGs with national and international human rights obligations.

Many countries also recognize the value that audit institutions can bring to the implementation and review of the SDGs.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- What efforts are being made to strengthen national statistical systems and the availability of quality data? Are there any institutional innovations to support the collection of data?
- What efforts are being made to disaggregate data? What constraints do countries have in this regard?
- What challenges are being faced with data collection and management?
- What data gaps have been identified and what steps are being taken to address these gaps?
- What efforts are being made to monitor the indicators and ensure transparency and accountability?
- What efforts are being made to follow up on and review implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including multi-stakeholder participation and mobilizing support through partnerships?
- Are monitoring efforts presented in a way that allows for sufficient review and dialogue by all stakeholders?

Country examples

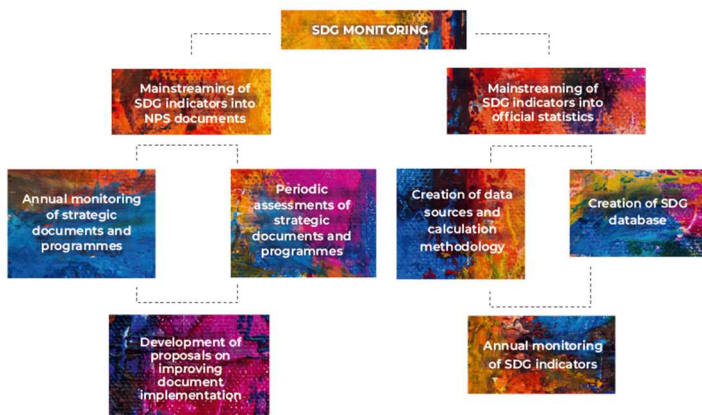
The Philippines initiated two online sources of SDG information: the SDG Website of NEDA (sdg.neda.gov.ph) and the SDG Watch of PSA (psa.gov.ph/sdg). The SDG Website aims to provide an online platform to engage different stakeholders on the SDGs and aims to serve as a tool for policy coordination. The main sections are the programs for the 17 goals, policy coordination and mainstreaming, and stakeholder

¹⁶ See note 8.

engagement. The SDG Website also expounds on the VNR report, more details on the achievement of the focus goals are in the website. The SDG Watch of PSA provides statistical information on the SDGs in the Philippines. It provides a listing of the Tier 1 indicator and baseline information for these indicators. A report on the pace of progress of the achievement of each target based on the national numerical targets of the SDGs is also in the pipeline.

From: the VNR of the Philippines, 2019

Kazakhstan's national SDG monitoring and reporting system



From: the VNR of Kazakhstan, 2019

F. Preparatory workshops and submission of VNRs¹⁷

The preparatory process for the VNRs includes workshops based on countries' previous experiences in participating in the VNR process. The workshops are organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and are designed to facilitate peer learning and interaction, providing a space for exchange of views, lessons learned and experiences in preparing VNRs. The workshops are intended for working-level officials who are closely engaged in the national preparatory process. Subject to availability of funding, it is anticipated that support

¹⁷ Dates in this section refer to the 2020 HLPF

may be provided for one participant per developing country. Additional participants from presenting countries may attend on their own funding.

The preparatory process for the 2020 VNRs includes the following:

First global workshop (19-20 November 2019, Oslo, Norway): Based on peer learning and exchange between countries conducting VNRs in 2020 and countries that have carried out VNRs in previous years (2016-2019). The workshop is also designed to cover key components of the preparatory process.

Second global workshop (Spring 2020): Will facilitate a sharing of experiences among the 2020 VNR countries, including on lessons learned and challenges encountered in the process up to this point. It will also feature more in-depth exchange of knowledge and guidance on the preparation and presentation process and will facilitate discussion on how to draft sections of the report and make VNR presentations at the HLPF.

Third global workshop (12 July 2020, New York, USA): Scheduled to take place on the Sunday prior to the presentation of the VNRs at the HLPF, the meeting will cover final preparatory matters and engage countries in a discussion of anticipated follow-up to the VNRs.

UN Regional Commissions

The Regional Commissions support countries in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in the preparation for the HLPF and VNRs. For the 2020 HLPF, it is expected that five regional VNR workshops will be held on the margins of the regional fora for sustainable development convened by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The regional workshops discuss the specificities of each region and provide for an additional exchange of experiences and lessons learned among the VNR countries.

Regional Preparatory Meetings

- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA): 24-27 February 2020, Victoria Falls Town, Zimbabwe

- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA): 7 - 9 April 2020, Beirut, Lebanon
 - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): 19 - 20 March 2020, Geneva, Switzerland
 - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP): 25 - 27 March 2020, Bangkok, Thailand
- United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC): 28 – 31 March 2020, Havana, Cuba

Review – deadlines for submission to UN DESA

Two documents are to be submitted to the Secretariat, and there is a deadline for each of them.

VNR countries need to submit **Main Messages** for their VNRs in one of the six official UN languages by 1 May 2020. The Main Messages allow preparation by stakeholders, including other countries, for the HLPF. The Main Messages need not be a conclusive summary of the VNR but can contain emerging conclusions from the review. The Main Messages provide an indication of some of the principal findings of the review. They should try to already highlight good practices and challenges and areas where the country would need support or advice from other countries or institutions.

The word count of the Main Messages **may not** exceed 700 words. Main Messages are translated by the Secretariat into all six official UN languages and are issued as an official document of the UN. The Main Messages are posted online.¹⁸

The final **VNR report** should be submitted in electronic format to DESA by 12 June 2020 (a month before the HLPF).¹⁹ The final reviews are posted online. It is important to leave time for national approval of the review before the submission, and to translate it into English if desired. The VNRs are not translated by the Secretariat but are posted on the HLPF website in the UN language/s in which they are submitted.

¹⁸ Main Messages from the 2019VNRsVNRs are available at <https://undocs.org/en/E/HLPF/2019/5>

¹⁹Only reviews that conform to UN resolutions can be posted on the UN website

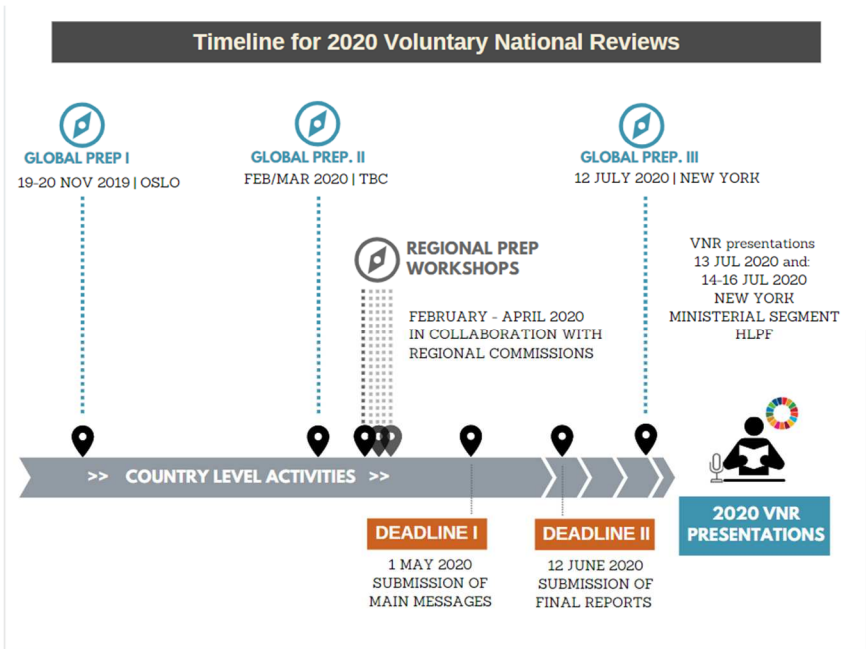


Figure 6: Timeline for 2020 Voluntary National Reviews (DESA)

Audiovisual materials for the VNR presentation should be submitted to UN DESA by **19 June 2020**. The material must highlight the implementation of the 2030 Agenda or the VNR. The technical team requires sufficient time to check all audio-visual materials for technical accuracy and compatibility with UN equipment and to liaise with countries to make the necessary adjustments if problems arise. If submission is delayed and not enough time is provided, the Secretariat will not be able to guarantee a seamless presentation should any technical issues or error arise during the presentation.

G. Presentation of the VNR at the HLPF

Preparations related to the presentation at the HLPF are an important part of the process. Coordination between country's focal points in both capitals and the Permanent Missions in New York is key for a successful VNR presentation at the HLPF. The presentation should convey the key findings of the VNRs, including good practices, challenges and areas for support and advice.

Questionnaire

To gather relevant information, UN DESA sends a questionnaire to countries a few months before the HLPF. This questionnaire seeks to establish:

- whether the country presenting for the first time prefers the panel or individual-style presentation format for its presentation (see below);
- preliminary information on the composition of the delegation and who will present the VNR;
- information on audio-visual materials, including videos, that will be used; and
- any other special requests, including dates on which the lead presenter (minister) is/is not available, so that the draft schedule for the VNR presentations can be prepared.

Format of presentation: In the *panel format*, the countries in a VNR session (between two and four) each make their presentations. Presenting countries may also consider having a dialogue among themselves on their VNRs. Once all countries in the session have presented, questions are posed to the presenting countries. Second-time presenters will present in the *panel format* only. In the *individual format*, a country presents, followed by questions from countries in the audience, as well as from major groups and other stakeholders. This is then followed by the next VNR country in that VNR session. Unless agreed to otherwise by the presenting countries, the order of presentations within a particular session is by protocol level of presenter. For the same level, order of presentations is by presenting country name in English alphabetical order.

VNR schedule

The draft schedule for the VNR presentations (13-16 July) is prepared based on the principle of universality, so that sessions seek to reflect regional diversity and different levels of development. Consideration will be given to accommodating the time constraints of presenting ministers if this is communicated timeously to UN DESA. Countries may also propose their own grouping, bearing in mind the above-mentioned

regional diversity. The President of ECOSOC shares a draft schedule with the VNR countries' representatives in New York.²⁰

In advance of the presentation at the HLPF, the country should prepare to:

- submit any audiovisual material on the SDG implementation of the VNR by the deadlines communicated by UN DESA;
- finalise details of the composition of the delegation;
- coordinate with its Permanent Mission in New York;
- finalise the person/persons to be seated on the podium, taking into account available seating; and
- consider whether national stakeholders will be allocated time to speak as part of the VNR presentation.

Presentation at the [HLPF](#)

Under the current modalities, the time provided for countries to present at the HLPF is limited.

In accordance with past practice, countries presenting a VNR for the first time will have 15 minutes for their presentation, followed by a similar amount of time for questions from other countries and stakeholders and factoring in time for podium changes. The 15-minute time allocation includes the use of audio-visual material, including videos.

Countries presenting a VNR for the second time will be allocated a total of 20 minutes each in a panel format: 10 minutes will be allocated for the VNR presentation and 10 min for Q&A.

The presentation at the HLPF could highlight the key messages from the review and touch on critical issues in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is recommended that a minister or person of higher rank lead the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF. In previous years presenters have included prime ministers, deputy prime ministers, and ministers from a range of portfolios.

²⁰ See Note 4 above

To effectively use the limited presentation time, countries may further wish to consider the options below:

- Submit the VNR report well in advance of the HLPF to inform a substantive interactive debate at the HLPF
- Use focused infographics, data visualization, and where meaningful videos, to communicate complex messages on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the VNRs such as preparatory process, linkages, priorities, innovations, progress and challenges in a very short period of time.
- Providing space for stakeholders such as civil society, youth and the private sector and others to share their contributions to and views on SDG progress.
- Working informally with other presenting countries in advance to compare review processes and findings, for example twinning for peer learning, with a view to facilitating an exchange of lessons learned and good practices during and after the VNR presentation. A Group of Friends of VNRs has been launched in 2019 which stands ready to support the preparation of the interactive discussion following a given country's VNR presentation at the HLPF, if the respective VNR presenting country so wishes. It is chaired by His Excellency, Juan Sandoval Mendiola, the Deputy-Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations in New York.
- Making best use of the allocated time, including possibly written questions and answers, to allow for interactive discussions and Q&A sessions during the HLPF, which can strengthen peer learning and exchange of best practices.
- Consider actively using the regional sustainable development forums in the five regions as a preparatory step to share progress and challenges and best practices on the preparation of the VNRs and reflect on the follow-up to the VNRs.
- Think about your audience and which experiences of your country's 2030 Agenda implementation efforts could speak to other countries? Which messages would you want to highlight for potential partners?

Tips:

- ✓ Videos of past VNR presentations are available in the archives of UN Web TV: <http://webtv.un.org/>
- ✓ Power-Point presentations of past VNR presenters are posted on the presenting country's national page in the VNR database: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

Countries may also wish to consider how best to use the time around the formal meetings of the HLPF to further engage on the lessons emerging from the review process and seek feedback on their VNRs, including through actively participating in special events and VNR Labs, by co-organizing side events or using other means to share relevant experience and lessons learned. Presenting countries are encouraged to make sure that their presentation panels are gender-balanced.

H. After the presentation

In order to get full benefit from the resources invested in the VNR, countries could consider concrete follow-up steps. Points to consider are the following:

- Ensure wide dissemination of the VNRs. For example, countries could convene a press conference to present outcomes of the VNR presentation at the HLPF.
- Debrief the VNR project team on the outcomes of the presentation at the HLPF. This could include a summary of lessons learned and good practices from other countries which presented during that session.
- Promote concrete action on priorities contained in the VNR. For example, convene a cabinet meeting or other appropriate decision-making body to consider VNR follow-up.
- Develop an action plan/road map covering who, what, where and when for priority follow-up.
- Consider meeting, where applicable, with the Resident Coordinator's Office and the UN Country Team as well as with

bilateral donors on follow-up and support for priorities identified in the VNR.

- Take initiatives to simplify the review for wider public consumption.
- Consider presenting an annual report to Parliament on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Consider sharing the VNR and lessons learned at the regional level.
- Institutionalise the collection of the material for the VNRs.
- Use lessons from the VNR process to refine and enhance institutional arrangements.
- Consider initiating a decision on preparation and presentation of a follow-up VNR.

Annex 1: VNR preparation checklist

Item	Actions
<p>1. Initial preparation and organisation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send letter to the President of ECOSOC to communicate the decision to conduct a VNR. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign responsibility for coordinating and preparing the VNR. <input type="checkbox"/> Estimate and identify resources required. <input type="checkbox"/> Consider scope of review. Countries are encouraged to provide brief information on progress and the status of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals <input type="checkbox"/> Develop work plan/road map with deliverables aligned to HLPF deadlines (e.g. submission of Main Messages, VNR Report and audiovisual materials). <input type="checkbox"/> Map key national actors (e.g. Parliament, line ministries, national statistical office, local government officials, stakeholders). <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare draft outline of VNR and develop key messages. Consider the storyline behind the VNR: what is your country's sustainable development story? <input type="checkbox"/> Assign information- and data-gathering tasks, including drawing on existing national documents and previous VNR reports. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign the preparation of infographics, data visualization etc. for the VNR presentation.
<p>2. Stakeholder Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Contact relevant government departments (line ministries) and agencies, setting out basic details, e.g. about the VNR, the information/data requested, and establishment of a focal point. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a stakeholder engagement plan which identifies key stakeholders, and method of engagement (consider offline and online options). <input type="checkbox"/> Establish awareness-raising and public outreach component to disseminate avenues for stakeholder

	<p>engagement in the VNR process, making use of government communication services, social media, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure targeted efforts are made to reach groups that are marginalised and at risk of being left behind.
<p>3. VNR Preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review and incorporate material received, including data, other reports and previous VNRs. <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up with government colleagues/information providers to secure missing material or provide additional analysis. <input type="checkbox"/> Decide on participants for the preparatory global and regional workshops. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare zero draft, including identifying remaining gaps, together with stakeholders. <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare draft of Main Messages (not more than 700 words) for approval and submission to DESA by 1 May 2020. <input type="checkbox"/> Carry out internal review of VNR, including quality control, allowing time for resolution of possibly contentious issues. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish comment period and circulate draft to relevant government officials. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opportunity for stakeholders to comment and integrate comments from all national actors and stakeholders to the greatest extent possible. <input type="checkbox"/> Edit the VNR and arrange for translation into English, if needed/desirable, and design and layout. <input type="checkbox"/> Submit for endorsement and approval if required (for example to the Minister, Prime Minister, Cabinet). <input type="checkbox"/> Transmit electronic copy of the VNR to DESA by 12 June 2020.
<p>4. HLPF Presentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fill out questionnaire on the preferred presentation format (panel / individual), presenter, and composition of delegation, and return to DESA

(deadline will be indicated) for information on HLPF presentation.

- Produce visual materials for the VNR presentations and submit to UN DESA by 19 June 2020.
- Select key messages for VNR presentation, with time limit scheduled for that year in mind.
- Coordinate logistical arrangements with the Permanent Mission in New York.

Annex 2: Secretary-General's Voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs

Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF)

I. Introduction

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are the cornerstone of the follow-up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda. They culminate in a country report to and presentation at the HLPF. They are most meaningful when they involve an inclusive, participatory, transparent and thorough review process at the national and sub-national levels, when they are evidence-based, produce tangible lessons and solutions, and when they are followed by concrete action and collaboration that drives SDG implementation.

The common reporting guidelines seek to support member states in conducting VNRs. They were initially prepared by the Secretary-General in December 2015.²¹ They were first updated in December 2017 to reflect lessons learned during the two years that followed and were most recently updated in November 2019 taking into account experiences from the first cycle of the HLPF.²² They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances.²³

II. Guiding principles

In paragraph 74 of the 2030 Agenda, Member States identified a number of principles to guide the follow-up and review process at all levels. In preparing the voluntary national reviews, it is important that these principles be taken into account:

- a) The follow-up and review processes will be voluntary and country-led, will take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities. As national ownership is key to achieving sustainable development, the outcome from

²¹ See annex to Secretary-General's Report on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, [A/70/684](#).

²² See para 8 of resolution [70/299](#) of 29 July 2016.

²³ It is important to note that the UN Development Group in 2017 released guidelines for the preparation of national SDG reports, with a view to providing coherent support by UN Country Teams in preparing a national SDG report. While they can serve to complement the present Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines, it should be noted that the VNR is different from an SDG progress report, notably due to the extensive consultation process expected at national level,

<https://undg.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/Guidelines-to-Support-Country-Reporting-on-SDGs-1.pdf>

national-level processes will be the foundation for reviews at the regional and global levels, given that the global review will be primarily based on national official data sources.

- b) They will track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development.
- c) They will maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices. They will help to mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, support the identification of solutions and best practices and promote the coordination and effectiveness of the international development system.
- d) They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.
- e) They will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.
- f) They will build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances, capacities, needs and priorities. They will evolve over time, taking into account emerging issues and the development of new methodologies, and will minimize the reporting burden on national administrations.
- g) They will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.
- h) They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes, particularly in African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries.
- i) They will benefit from the active support of the United Nations system and other multilateral institutions.

III. Structure and content of a report for the HLPPF

Countries are encouraged to structure the report along the lines highlighted below, which will give an overview of the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda and promote consistency and comparability between reports of different countries. Doing so will also help inform the process of review and generate reflections on implementation at national, regional and global level. Countries are encouraged to develop each of the proposed points in a balanced manner.

1. Opening statement. An opening statement by the Head of State or Government, a Minister or other high-ranking Government official could highlight the current status of SDG progress and how the Government is responding to the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including through its national development plans, strategies, policies or other relevant documents, including sectoral policies and specific action and financial plans. It could highlight outcomes/results accomplished since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and indicate steps that the country intends to take to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development as part of the decade of action and delivery launched at the SDG Summit in September 2019²⁴.

2. Highlights. A one-to-two-page synthesis highlighting:

- the core elements of the country-level review process
- the status of SDG implementation based on statistical data, using SDG indicators to the extent possible and outlining the factors of success or failure to achieve progress
- how the Government has responded to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs and whether that helped address trade-offs and accelerate implementation
- how the Government has responded to the principle of leaving no one behind;
- two or three examples of good practices and lessons learned that may be relevant for other countries, preferably with a focus on measures with a transformative potential, considering the interlinkages and synergies among the SDGs
- two or three examples of challenges encountered on which the country wishes to hear about other countries' and other stakeholders' experiences including the United Nations system
- areas where the country would need support in terms of finance, capacity-building, policy advice, data gathering and analysis, technology, partnerships, etc. It is hoped that this would lead to mobilizing support through international cooperation and continued collaboration/twinning with one or more other countries.

3. Introduction. The context and objectives of the review could be presented here. The introduction may briefly describe key features of the country context as it pertains to the 2030 Agenda, the national review cycle, and whether and how existing national reports to regional and international mechanisms have been used. It could outline how the 2030 Agenda was reflected in the national development plans and strategies and in the financing and budgetary frameworks. It could outline how the policy architecture supports the implementation of all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) and what policies and mechanisms have enabled this integration. It could highlight links to other international agreements such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Samoa Pathway, Istanbul or Vienna Programme of Action, etc. This could include describing how synergies among those agreements are being pursued in the national plans so as to create meet multiple objectives in an efficient manner.

4. Methodology and process for preparation of the review. This section may discuss the methodology that was adopted for the review, including its scope, depth and limitations and how the principles on follow-up and review from the 2030 Agenda, including paragraph 74, were used. Information on the process for preparation of the national review may be presented, including, for example, how different levels and sectors of Government contributed to the review and whether and how the whole-of-Government approach was used to work across sectors and institutions in the

²⁴ Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly adopted on 15 October 2019 (<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4>)

implementation of the SDGs²⁵; whether parliaments were engaged; whether national evaluation/oversight or human rights institutions contributed; what mechanisms have been used to meaningfully and effectively engage stakeholders from civil society, whether representatives of vulnerable groups, academia, youth and the business sector and, where applicable, whether the UN Country Teams were engaged. The section could describe how the national report to the HLPF was discussed at the national and local level and who was engaged in the discussions. The countries presenting a VNR for the second and subsequent times could explain how this report builds on previous one(s) and the most significant changes since the last review.

5. Policy and enabling environment.

(a) Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals and the VNRS. The review could outline how stakeholders, such as national and local governments; legislative bodies; national oversight/auditing, human rights or other institutions; the public, civil society and the private sector, were involved in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, including goals and targets. The review could address how different groups, particularly women and youth, as well as children, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons, migrants and other vulnerable groups have been engaged and contributed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and how direct engagement of people has been facilitated.

(b) Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks. The review could outline how the integration of the Goals into the country's legislation, policies, plans, budgets and programmes, including the sustainable development strategy, if there is one, has helped with successful implementation of the SDGs and targets. This would include examining policy coherence and interlinkages²⁶. The countries are encouraged to be specific in identifying the main challenges and difficulties experienced in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole and how they foresee overcoming these barriers. Specifically, the country may describe how the policy makers are coordinating through national planning, budgetary, financial and investment processes, for example to bring about a deeper, faster and more ambitious response to the challenges which their economies are facing. Countries are encouraged – even in cases of incomplete data – to provide, as far as possible, an analysis of the causes of their SDG implementation challenges and possible ways forward, including how the engagement of different actors can help bridge these gaps. Countries could consider outlining how cities, local authorities and communities have been pursuing the 2030 Agenda and how they have supported their efforts. Countries could also refer to major efforts undertaken by local authorities and non-State actors to implement the Goals, the role of scientists and academia in advising the government and benefits arising from multi-stakeholder partnerships. They are also encouraged to integrate a gender perspective across all sections of the report.

(c) Integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. The review might discuss how the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are being

²⁵ Under this heading, countries may wish to report on the national institutional arrangements for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as well as the extent of collaboration with governmental structures established to coordinate reporting to other international and regional bodies.

²⁶ In this vein, the review might discuss how analysis, guidance and recommendations from regional and international mechanisms have been incorporated in national frameworks and policies in support of SDG implementation

integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration including an analysis of the relevant interlinkages among the goals and targets. This can also include an analysis of progress and initiatives related to the high-level political forum's theme for that year.

(d) Leaving no one behind: The review could also assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. This would also address how this principle has been translated into concrete actions for tackling inequalities and discrimination, as well as efforts to ensure inclusive and effective participation in implementation efforts. In this regard, the review could detail how the people who are the furthest behind and vulnerable groups have been identified, including through improved data collection and disaggregation, as well as what policies and programmes are being implemented to address their needs and support their empowerment. Countries are encouraged to go beyond social policies and include macroeconomic policies and technology that impact on the situation of the furthest behind and provide support to the social, economic inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. Particular attention should be placed on how national efforts seek to empower women and girls.

(e) Institutional mechanisms. The review could provide information on how the country has adapted its institutional framework in light of the 2030 Agenda. This could include information on how the views of different ministries, agencies, levels of government and non-governmental stakeholders, including representatives of vulnerable groups, have been mobilized around the 2030 Agenda and how their views are considered. Countries may also consider including information on the institution(s)/mechanism(s) in charge of coordination and integration for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, on their interaction with relevant national bodies, such as the national planning entities, oversight bodies or national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up. This section could also include a reflection of how the country has ensured that the institutional mechanisms supporting SDG implementation are effective, accountable, and inclusive. The review could consider highlighting how it was possible to successfully mobilize institutions around the Sustainable Development Goals, improve their functioning-making them more responsive, accountable and transparent- and promote collaboration and change to achieve policy coherence and integration across sectors. Information may also be provided on how responsibility is allocated among various levels of Government (national, subnational and local) for coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. This section could highlight what has been done to ensure that relevant data, information and analysis is systematically gathered, shared, analyzed and used across sectors and how this has helped with implementation of the SDGs. It would be useful to highlight how the country is reviewing progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, including mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures. The review could also highlight whether and how the preparation and follow-up to VNRs is embedded in these ongoing processes. This may include the preparation of national SDG reports, supported by the UN Country Team, where applicable.

(f) Structural issues. Countries are encouraged to report on relevant structural issues or barriers they have faced in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including the possible external consequences of other countries' domestic policies on their economy and societies and the impact of their own policies

on other countries. Countries can highlight the transformative policies, tools, or institutional changes they have used to address these issues or barriers and avoid trade-offs among the goals.

6. Progress on Goals and targets: Countries are encouraged to provide brief information on progress and the status of all Sustainable Development Goals. It would be desirable to describe critical difficulties encountered in reaching them and how they could be addressed, referring to data provided in a statistical annex. The review could indicate whether a baseline for the Goals has been defined and, if not, what are the remaining obstacles to doing so. Countries are encouraged to review all 17 SDGs; however, some could be addressed in more depth, for instance, to illustrate innovative policies to achieve goals, or examples that could be especially interesting for peer learning in an international or regional context. The consideration of Goals could focus on trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, and lessons learned, and describe what actions have been taken to address existing gaps and challenges. It could support the identification of gaps, solutions, best practices, synergies, trade-offs and spillovers and areas requiring advice and support from other countries or institutions. The review may examine the agreed global indicators for SDGs and related targets, but countries may also choose to refer to complementary national and regional indicators. Conclusions presented in this section should be based on said empirical evidence, in order to have concrete elements to measure progress. Countries presenting their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews could report on progress made, and specific efforts undertaken to address findings from the previous review. Countries could identify steps that they intend to take in the near future and over the coming years to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda, as a result of the Decade of Action and delivery for the SDGs launched at the SDG Summit in September 2019.

7. Means of implementation: Based on the above challenges and trends highlighted, the review may discuss how the means of implementation (financing, technology, capacity building, etc.) are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, looking at the full range of financing sources (public/private, domestic/international) and non-financing means of implementation, such as capacity development and data needs, technology, and partnerships. Countries could elaborate on their financing strategy / integrated national financing framework where applicable, and the appropriate policies and reforms in place to finance their strategy. The review could indicate how financial systems, statistical data and resource allocations are being aligned to support the realization of the 2030 Agenda and its pledge to leave no one behind. Coverage of domestic resource mobilization could include the contribution of the private sector. Experiences with gender responsive budgeting, where applicable, should be reflected. Countries are also encouraged to cover technology, identify concrete technology and capacity development and data needs, and the contribution of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Countries could also provide an overview of the institutional set-up and coordination mechanisms (intra-government and with other stakeholders) which help implement the financing strategy. Donor countries could describe how they have reviewed their development cooperation guidance to align with the 2030 Agenda.

8. Conclusion and next steps. Based on the outcomes of the review, the country could outline what steps are planned to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, notably as part of the Decade of Action for sustainable development. It could also indicate how it is planned to keep the Goals under review at the national and sub-national levels, including dissemination of VNRs and

other national reviews and their findings. It could highlight what lessons the country has learned from the review process, how it will apply them in the continuing implementation and what support it would need in the future for preparing such reviews.

Annexes. Countries are encouraged to include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate. They may highlight whether statistics, including gender statistics, were collected from the national statistical system and pinpoint major gaps in official statistics on indicators. Countries may want to include additional annexes where they would showcase best practices and/or policies and strategies that has advanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Countries might consider including an annex specifically on interlinkages between the goals and targets as well as the global impacts of national actions (spillover). They could also include a list of all the actors consulted in the preparation of the report. They could also include comments from stakeholders on the report in an annex. If countries so wish, they can send other reports to DESA for posting on their national page in the VNR database, including complementary reports by stakeholders.

IV. Making presentations at the HLPF

Under the current modalities, the time provided for countries to present at the HLPF is limited. Countries may therefore wish to consider a number of options when conducting their presentations at the HLPF:

- Submit their written report well in advance of the HLPF to inform a substantive interactive debate at the HLPF
- Use focused infographics, data visualization, and meaningful focused videos, to communicate complex messages related to SDG implementation (such as VNR preparatory process, linkages, priorities, innovations, progress and challenges) in a very short period of time;
- Providing space for stakeholders such as civil society, youth and the private sector to share their contributions to and views on SDG progress in the country.
- Working informally with other presenting countries in advance to compare review processes and findings, for example voluntary twinning for peer learning.
- Making best use of the allocated time during the HLPF to allow for interactive discussions and questions and answers, which can strengthen peer learning and exchange of best practices. This may include written questions and answers.
- Consider actively using the regional sustainable development forums in the five regions as a preparatory step to share progress and challenges and best practices on the preparation of the VNRs and reflect on the follow-up to the VNRs.

The ECOSOC President has created a group of countries that are “friends of VNRs” and will prepare the discussions on specific VNRs at the HLPF.

Countries may also wish to consider how best to use the time around the formal meetings of the HLPF to further engage on the lessons emerging from the review process and seek feedback on their VNRs, including through actively participating in special events, and VNR Labs, and by co-organizing side events. Presenting countries are encouraged to make sure that their presentation panels are gender-balanced.