Summary of Third Global Workshop for VNR Countries 2020

15 June 2020

Welcome and Opening

H. E. Amb. Juan Sandoval Mendiolea, Vice-President of ECOSOC and Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations and Chair of the Group of Friends of VNRs, follow up and review, remarked that the VNRs are in essence the primary link between sustainable development at the national level and policies at the global level. They can showcase successes, highlight experiences and provide guidance to the UN on how to help countries going forward. The decision to use VNRs to guide development of countries shows the resilience of multilateralism and the commitment to the 2030 Agenda. He noted that the virtual format of the HLPF this year is an opportunity to harness technology for sustainable development. Furthermore, he stated that the Group of Friends of VNRs will be supporting this year's VNR presentations by matching presenting countries with countries that wish to ask questions during the Q&A segment following the presentation. A form will be emailed to all delegations requesting input by **1 July 2020** on who will ask, and answer questions related to VNR presentations. High-level officials can submit questions, and each will be allotted 1.5 minutes. All Member States can select countries to which they would like to ask questions. It was als noted that Group of Friends of VNRs will work closely with presenters and the HLPF Secretariat to ensure that the VNRs this year are successful and show progress through new ways of working electronically.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs, observed that the key messages received by VNR countries show that many countries are concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic will disrupt advances made toward sustainable development and hinder implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He noted that many key messages described negative impacts of the virus on their VNR development and highlighted the need for greater use of online tools in the process. He said that it is a great accomplishment to include all 47 presenting countries in this virtual session, and that all presenters show great commitment and effort to implementing the SDGs and to developing their VNRs under difficult circumstances. Such lessons learned and challenges are important as countries continue to build back better after the pandemic. He noted that in order to have a more sustainable recovery, there is a need for a more resilient and sustainable economy. He expressed hope that this workshop would be useful for all participants. He stressed that the Secretariat stand ready to make each presentation a success and help to ensure that all counties can learn from each other's experiences. The first fully virtual HLPF is special, and UN DESA will provide a full team to support the VNRs.

Objectives of the workshop and moderation

Marion Barthelemy, Director, OISC, DESA outlined the objectives of the workshop, encouraging participants to share lessons about the VNR process so that it can be improved in the future. The discussions would focus on the HLPF programme, the new aspects of a fully virtual meeting, and guidance on how presentations will be conducted. As session on how to register SDG acceleration actions as new initiatives as next steps would also be included.

Session 1: Country Experiences in VNR preparation

In this session, countries shared experiences on their VNR preparations. Four countries gave presentation and all participating countries were able to send input via the sli.do app, in response to the following request for information:

- one action that they took to make their VNR useful to them and transformative
- one challenge they have encountered in conducting their VNR
- one measure they took complete their VNR in light of COVID-19
- one good practice to implement the SDGs (strategy/policy/action) that was identified by the VNR
- one area where they would need further support or advice on implementing the SDGs
- one piece of advice for improving the VNR process in the future

H. E. Amb. Juan Sandoval Mendiolea discussed the observations of the Group of Friends of VNRs, noting that most VNR countries cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the greatest challenge this year to conducting and preparing their VNRs. Actions that many countries took to make their VNR useful included whole-of-society approaches, broad collection of data, and alignment with other data objectives. Areas where countries would need further support or advice on implementing the SDGs included in the critical areas of data collection and analysis, measuring COVID-19 impacts, inclusion of stakeholders, sharing knowledge, alignment of the SDGs with national development plans, and support to national statistical institutions.

One country noted that a good practice to implement the SDGs identified by their VNR was that close cooperation between government, civil society and the private sector was instrumental in implementing the SDGs, by showing ownership and recognizing the need for all to be on board.

One measure they took complete their VNR in light of COVID-19 was to start the process early, in April 2019, so that the preparatory process was finalized in mid-February, just before the pandemic required emergency measures. This resulted in the pandemic not really affecting the process of the VNR. They did write a chapter on the COVID-19 response to reflect more

up to date measures taken by government.

To improve the VNR process in the future, they advised that a formal mechanism be put in place for VNR preparations, to coordinate ministries that have different responsibilities for different SDGs, noting that they are beginning to do this now, for next time.

A second country stated that one good practice to implement the SDGs was the implementation of a new initiative called Programme for Accelerated Community Development (PACD) to provide a critical response to inclusive development for greater equity and social justice in line with the aspirations of the National Development Plan and the SDGs. The programme provides a platform for a multi-sectoral approach towards addressing poverty and inequality to address the disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of access to basic social services such as water, electricity and road infrastructure.

One measure they took to complete their VNR in light of COVID-19 was to consult virtually with the National Youth Council on the content of the VNR in consideration of youth matters, and to obtain their validation of the final draft of the VNR. In collaboration with UNICEF, the platform was also used to assess youth understanding of the SDGs and the VNR process in particular. Community radio stations were also used, for greater outreach.

To improve the VNR process in the future, they noted the need for institutionalization of data and information needed for SDG monitoring that define roles and responsibilities for collection, analysis, storage and retrieval, creating a repository and a one-stop shop with enhanced data capacity development at institutional and technical levels, and to ensure availability of financial resources as part of a national system of consistent collection and retrieval of SDG-related data to facilitate reporting.

Another country advised that government should take an active role, and include stakeholders and the private sector as part of the VNR process, stressing that collaboration with stakeholders is important for policy harmonization and to address the SDGs together. They said that resource mobilization beyond the public sector is key, to identify other financial resources.

One measure this country took complete their VNR in light of COVID-19 was to conduct outreach meetings on Zoom with various stakeholders, to consider of those with disabilities, to reach rural areas, and to continue interventions for girl children.

They agreed that the VNR process should begin early and engage more stakeholders, noting that time is always a challenge even without a pandemic. They advised establishing a dedicated office that coordinates other offices, to ensure balance among the SDGs. Data is still a challenge and needs more frequent surveys, which will require support from partners to ensure information is connected as part of the process, and not as an afterthought when data is needed.

A fourth country noted that the COVID-19 state of emergency was still in place, and that the VNR preparation had been severely affected. Coordination between key public authorities in 2002 resulted in a forum for national dialogue among public and private stakeholder groups, to generate national debate and long-term vision for country development. In their 2017 VNR they explained how the OECD wellbeing framework and the SDGs were being implemented, and in 2019 there was consensus for the national sustainable development plan, which was formulated with collaboration between local and national experiences, including 196 provinces and civil society. The "commitment to life" and the priority of protection of life emerged from the COVID-19 crisis, led by indigenous groups, the ministry of culture and ministry of health, for the improvement of life for all peoples.

To improve the VNR process in the future, they noted the need for a national development plan along with emergency action at all levels, coordination committees to keep people at the center, and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, to create a forward-looking approach to bring in diversity and take into account adaptation to climate change, ensure coherence with the national vision, and to launch a new model that prioritizes the protection of life.

Discussion

During the discussion one country agreed that countries must align and link SDGs to national development plans and adopt whole-of-society approaches for robust implementation of the SDGs, and to ensure national resources for funding SDG implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in virtual consultations and all segments used zoom platforms. National statistics institutions must strengthen data collection for VNRs.

Another country underscored that the VNR is only the beginning of the process, which can catalyze ownership and inspiration for better lives and livelihoods. A national consultative partnership, which allows ownership among all involved, is key. Although the pandemic has impeded the VNR process, they noted that the UN system has been helpful at this critical time, with support from the country team and ESCAP. They supported coherence in a whole-of-society approach that includes all in country and not just government, especially those who are marginalized, to strengthen efforts in SDG implementation. They acknowledged that data and statistics are crucial and capacity constraints in government systems and funding is a key challenge; when COVID-19 struck, resources were moved to fight the pandemic, and this affected how they approached the VNR.

A Resident Coordinator of one of the VNR countries highlighted the use of global consultation process among custodian organizations of SDG indicators, and metadata files allowing selection of proxy indicators, and thanked the UN system for this support.

A representative of the Group of Friends reiterated the importance of data and the need to have inclusive processes for VNRs, with learning that takes place in whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches, noting the challenge of policy coordination on one hand, and fitting into the "narrow window" of the VNR on the other. He provided additional instruction on the matchmaking process for the presentations and Q&A sessions, with follow-up to ensure interaction in the sessions. He encouraged participants to reach out to Regional Commissions and to other partners, as a good opportunity to highlight something in a one or two-minute reply outside of the VNR presentation itself. He recalled that the VNR is a State-led process, and that the HLPF is a learning space where we can facilitate a peer-learning process.

Session 2: Overview of the HLPF programme and discussions

In this session, Irena Zubcevic, Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development, UN DESA, provided an overview of the HLPF programme, outlined expectations from the presentations and discussions of the VNRs at the HLPF.

For the content of the presentation at the HLPF, participants were encouraged to use infographics, visualization of data, and videos to communicate complex messages about implementation, such as the preparatory process, links, priorities, innovation, progress and challenges. The presentation could underline areas where more work is needed and where assistance is requested. The content should be conducive to peer learning, e.g. the impact of strategies, good practices and lessons learned. It should provide space for representatives of civil society, youth, the private sector and other stakeholders who could share their views on the process of SDG implementation. Second and third-time presentations should highlight the progress from the first VNR.

The timetable for presentations at the HLPF was shared, with a reminder that the 26 first-time presenters would be allotted 15 min each for presentations, and another 15 minutes for Q&A, while second- and third-time presenters would be given 10 minutes each for presentations with 10 minutes for Q&A. Presentation is at the highest level, with two Prime ministers presenting this year from two VNR countries, along with ministers from all other VNR countries. The order of presentations must accommodate level of the presenter, but this year the virtual meeting requires that time zone differences would also be taken into account.

Most VNR countries have opted for a live video stream for their presentations, to ensure interaction among the VNR country and all participants in real time, while other have chosen the option to have their presentations be pre-recorded to avoid technical difficulties. Pre-recorded presentations must be ready earlier in order to elicit questions from other countries so that the VNR country can also record their answers to the questions in advance, in writing, which will be posted on the country webpage in the VNR database.

Lotta Tahtinen, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UN DESA, explained how SDG accelerated actions or initiatives that governments might undertake in line with the decade of action and delivery for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda could be registered and showcased during VNR presentations. She encouraged all countries to register new actions for implementation through a dedicated online form for this purpose.

She explained that the actions are new initiatives that showcase new policies or programs related to SDG implementation set up in countries, as well as efforts to scale-up existing policies or programs, to build back better in the COVID-19 recovery. She provided a link to the database showing 152 actions received by government and stakeholders, including distribution across the SDGs, where actions could target one or multiple SDGs, noting that most submissions so far came from Europe, with fewer from Africa, Asia-Pacific and South Asia. She highlighted 28 actions in 14 of the 2020 VNR countries. She presented a flyer that could be shared in all languages to encourage actions to be registered. She announced that the HLPF would have a dedicated session on acceleration actions through the media zone.

Question and Answer session:

Will VNR presentations accessible in advance?
Reports will be but presentations will not.

How will civil society in be included?
This is up to individual countries, but each is encouraged to include someone from civil society in their VNR presentation. For the presentations that will be live-streamed, following the VNR presentations the questions will be asked in real time. Presentations will also be pre-recorded in case of technical difficulties.

If there is not enough time to either receive questions or prepare responses in pre-recorded presentations, what happens to the country's Q&A session? Is there still a Q&A session if questions will be answered via the country VNR page?
Questions should be sent in writing, and if they are received in time for the pre-recorded session, then they can be answered in pre-recorded presentations. There is an option of pre-recorded presentations and live Q&A.

Additional answers:

- Pre-recorded presentations must adhere to time limits, or the Secretariat will send the presentations back for editing.
- Presentations do not have to address this year's global theme of the decade of action. Countries can use or shape the presentations as they like according to national priorities.
- Responders to questions must be at same level as the presenter of the VNR.
- Panel presentations will show VNRs in sequence, with 2-3 presenters on screen, then Q&A session for all in the panel.
- The deadline for pre-recoded presentations is **26 June 2020**.
- The composition of delegations is up to each country.

A third-time presenting country, noting the difficulty of VNRs this year due to COVID-19, said that they had sent their VNR and main messages already, and were planning to do a pre-recoded presentation to avoid technical challenges, present the pre-recorded message and then engage with stakeholders to have feedback on questions and prepare Q&A session. They had engaged more than 400 non-governmental actors, with a focus on SDG 6 this year to achieve it by next year, and to build back better, with private sector support to face challenges in the current COVID-19 crisis.

Session 3: Overview of Arrangements for VNR presentations at the HLPF

For the third session of the webinar, Ziad Mahmassani, Political Affairs Officer in the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, explained the technical arrangements for VNR countries.

He reiterated the importance that countries keep the time allocated for each presentation and to avoid overlapping on others' as time. He also noted that the time limits would need to adhere especially due to virtual nature of the meeting and the need to make technical adjustments.

On interpretation, the Secretariat is currently working on providing interpretation services and is testing several platforms. Once the Secretariat finds a compatible platform, it will be tested on an intergovernmental body, and if successful, will be offered on a limited scale. Indeed, all events will be running on reduced interpretation capacity and interpretation for parallel meetings will not be possible.

Webex is currently being considered <u>although</u> it could change in the weeks to come depending on whether the interpretation services are better managed on a different platform. The Secretariat will provide technical notes and conduct testing session with the presenters on the chosen platform. These testing sessions are essential to ensure the smooth performance of the meetings. Presenters will be asked to join a specific testing session and will be asked to use the same equipment (camera, microphone, computer, laptop, etc.) during their VNR presentation at the HLPF.

This year, presenting countries have four options:

- A live presentation and Q&A on the chosen platform
- A pre-recorded presentation including the Q&A part (provided that the questions from other parties arrived on time)
- If the questions didn't arrive on time or the country may opt submit the pre-recorded presentation with the Q&A. The Q&A will then either (1) be done live on the chosen platform or (2) sent to Secretariat in writing and published on the VNR country's HLPF webpage.

Countries who are considering a live presentation are strongly advised to send a **pre-recorded version** of their presentation as a **backup** in case there are any technical difficulties on the day of the presentation.

Presenters are encouraged to use audio-visual material. The files should be provided in advance for the technical team to verify the exploitation of the file and have the time to send it back if there is any glitch in the file. Files should be sent under .**AVE, .WMV** or **.MOV**

Group of Friends of VNRs

VNR countries are invited to reach out to the Permanent Mission of Mexico (Chair of the Group of Friends of VNRs) to help facilitate the Q&A portion of the VNR. Mr. Rodolfo Reta mentioned that VNR countries will be sent a Google Form with questions specifically addressed at presenting countries and others tailored for those wishing to ask a question during the Q&A. They request the VNR countries sent their response before **1st July**.

Q&A from chat box

Will interpreters also translate pre-recorded videos?
This is still work in progress. The Secretariat will inform Member States as soon as possible. Either way, presenting countries who will be sending pre-recorded videos are advised to add English captions to non-English videos.

Can the presenters use another camera than the one used by WebEx?
Yes, they can as long as it is connected to their computer. However, presenters will be asked to **use the same equipment as they did during the trial session**.

How can I register on the platform?
Registration varies from one platform to another. The method of registration will depend on the work of the Secretariat on interpretation, whether it confirms the use of WebEx or another one. Confirmation will be carried out as soon as possible and registration codes will be distributed accordingly.

Who should be part of the presenting delegation?
This decision is up to each country's government. The VNR presentation can have as many presenters as the VNR country wishes as long as it stays within the time allotted (10mins (2nd/3rd time presenters) or 15 min (1st time presenters).

Do Member States have to hand in a full list of the members of their delegation?
Yes, they do. Be mindful that the list of participants is different from the registration form which will give access to the platform. The number of members is not limited if they are following the session (webcast). However, it is limited for those wishing to enter the platform. The exact number will be known soon and shared with VNR countries.

How many people can one delegation bring onto the platform?
During their presentation session, a special arrangement will allow VNR countries a **larger participation capacity** (an additional 10 to 12 more people – to be confirmed). This includes collaborating stakeholders. Non-presenting countries will be attending the meetings on the webcast, thus there is no limit on participation for non-presenting attendees.

Can other members of the delegation respond during the Q&A session?
Yes, they can. Depending on the questions asked, other members allowed on the platform can elaborate on a given answer.

How can the Permanent Representative attend the HLPF session if he/she is part of the panel answering questions to the national VNR?
The PR can be registered onto the platform as part of the panel only if he/she is there to present or answer a question. The choice of panellists belongs to each government; however we encourage countries to send high-level presenters and other stakeholders such as representatives of civil society.

Do members of the same delegation need to be together in one room?
No, presenters of the VNR country do not need to be at the same place.

What are the other channels that will be broadcasting the sessions?
In addition to the **virtual platform**, the meeting will be broadcast on **UN Web TV**. This is usually also fed into Facebook and YouTube channels but needs to be confirmed. The main access to the webcast is through UN Web TV.

Are there connection requirements?
Any decent internet connection should be good enough for the presentation. Those sending a pre-recorded video need to worry less as the video will be downloaded by the Secretariat. As for the live presentations are concerned, because they are streamed, they will need a quality bandwidth.

Session 4: Scenarios and guidelines related to the DESA focal points for the VNRs

Finally, in the last session, Joop Theunissen, Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development, UN DESA, gave participants more details on the deadlines to come and the work VNR countries will go through with their focal point. VNR countries and their respective focal points will be put in contact this week. Please note that DGACM will also allocate a focal point for each presenting country.

Each country presenting its VNR will have a focal point to go over the presentation scenarios and to arrange all the technical requirements in the lead-up and during the presentation and the information will be shared with DGACM. The role of the focal point is to work with VNR countries to collect transcripts and files of the presentations, answer any questions and concerns and keep continuous back and forth between the UN system and the VNR country to ensure a smooth presentation.

As far as the timetable goes, second timers will be going first (10 and 13 July). Days and time slots have been decided jointly with the VNR countries. The order of passage follows alphabetical order, but priority may be given to countries with a greater time zone difference to New York City's.

VNR countries must share the finalized scenarios and transcripts of the VNR presentation by **1st July**.

VNRc countries should also share the PowerPoint presentations and audio-visual material by **19th June**. VNR countries will have to send the pre-recorded video presentation before **26th**

June. The deadline may seem early, but this has proven efficient over the years as the teams need time to go over all the material and to make sure everything is up to standard. It is in the countries' interest to send pre-recorded videos and other audio-visual material as early as possible as the back and forth and readjusting the material may take time.

VNR countries will also have to complete the "Instructions and requests on technical arrangements" document with the help of your focal point to make sure DESA has all the information it needs.

All videos must be presented in horizontal format. Countries should ensure ample light in the room and no other distracting noises in the video. They were also advised to allow 3 seconds before the presenter starts speaking and another 3 seconds after the presenter finishes peaking. Furthermore, they can record the video full HD format (1080p) and sound in best quality possible (48kHz or 44.1kHz) exported as WAV or AIFF. The video file should sent in any of the following formats: .**AVE, .WMV** or **.MOV**

Q&A from chat box

Can we make subsequent changes to the PowerPoint even if we have already sent it out to our focal points?
Yes, of course.

Can the PowerPoint be presented in a different language from the language of the presentation?
Yes, it can.

Is the deadline for a backup pre-recorded video also 26th June?
Yes, it is.

How many presenters can we have?
You can have as many presenters as you want. We encourage VNR countries to give the floor to other stakeholders such as representatives of civil society to show the diversity of the debate. From a participant's point of view, it is also more dynamic to have more than 1 person presenting.

Polling Results from Sli.do

One action that your country took to make your VNR useful and transformative (11)

- Wide range consultations
- Engagement of stakeholders from various sectors and thematic areas
- Engagement of all actors

- stakeholder engagement
- NGO engagement
- Aligning SDG indicators with EU performance indicators -- helping align key national, regional and international agendas
- Wide engagement of the whole of society
- We worked hard to get as much Data as possible based on the National Agenda Indicators (even in this COVID 19 area) and share the VNR for comments and approval with the Governance Body of the National SDG Agenda. (In this way, we promoted engagement)
- share with national governmental counterparts
- survey
- Implement the commitment to the Protection of Life, a firm decision to keep our population increasingly safe from damage and from the loss of assets