

Report of the Sub-Regional Stakeholder Capacity Development Workshop

Dakar, Senegal, 23 of March 2018

Introduction

DESA/DSD organized a one-day sub-regional stakeholder capacity development workshop to inform relevant stakeholders from West and Central Africa on the advancement of the national and global follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda, including the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and its Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). The objective of the workshop was to provide guidance to Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) wanting to contribute to their country's 2018 VNRs process, including the VNR presentations at the 2018 HLPF.

Opening session and HLPF presentation

At the opening session, representatives from UN DESA, UNDP, the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), and the government of Senegal spoke. The inclusive and participatory spirit of the 2030 Agenda was highlighted, as well as the importance of capacity building for civil society to play their role in SDG implementation, follow-up and review. A precondition for 2030 Agenda implementation was the whole-of-society approach. The importance of localization of the Agenda was also emphasized.

Following the opening session, a presentation was given by UN DESA on the HLPF and the VNR process, including how MGoS can engage during the HLPF. At the global level, stakeholders have self-organized an HLPF stakeholder Coordination Mechanism to help coordinate their own strategies and engagement in the forum's work. It's an open-ended mechanism structure (anyone can join) to ensure broad, open, transparent and inclusive participation of MGoS in the HLPF. To register simply fill out the registration form at http://bit.ly/MGoS_mailinglist.

Dialogue between VNR countries and stakeholders from West and Central Africa

During the dialogue between government officials and stakeholders from Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Togo, participants discussed how stakeholders can contribute and be involved in the VNR preparations, integration of SDGs into national plans and strategies, as well as SDG implementation.

Government representatives from Senegal and Guinea presented on their VNR process and the participatory approach taken. In both countries, a consultative committee had been established with participants from MGoS, which would have the opportunity to comment on and discuss the VNR report. Several participants were interested to know more about this participatory approach.

Stakeholders from different countries presented on how civil society was working on the SDGs, organizing themselves into networks or using existing ones since the post 2015 negotiations. In Benin for example, an NGO network had been created for the 2030 Agenda consultations, organized into different sub-groups. They had organized a workshop to see what civil society did already, using questionnaires, and conveyed this to the government. This year they are working on a shadow report. Several participants mentioned the challenge of including the private sector and wondered how to best do this.

Participants also noted the challenge of reaching out to everyone, in particular to the communities in rural areas. It was suggested to translate the SDGs into local language and use local radio to diffuse the message. The importance of leaving no one behind was also mentioned. The representative of Togo mentioned that they had made an analysis of stakeholders to ensure no one was left behind while a civil society representative of Niger mentioned how they were working across the west African countries on an alternative report by person with disabilities.

The issue of alternative reports was discussed. Civil society representatives from several of the VNR countries mentioned that they were writing alternative reports. Government representatives noted that constructive comments from civil society can reinforce the VNR process and some would include the alternative report into the national one. The government representative of Senegal emphasized that the VNR report is a national report and not a state report. He also stressed the responsibility of civil society to provide an organized response and participation in the national consultative process. One civil society representative underlined the importance of coordination for the alternative report, if all groups do one alternative report it would not be effective.

Group discussions

The afternoon was dedicated only to MGoS. Participants exchanged best practices and lessons learned on how to engage in the VNR process as well as how to contribute to national SDG implementation.

Participants discussed what were the best ways to engage CSOs in the VNR process and lessons learned from current experiences of multi-stakeholder engagement. Participants noted that a mechanism which enables consultation with local communities was critical to ensure ownership and localization of the agenda. Furthermore, there was a need to review existing mechanisms for multi-stakeholder participation to ensure that there are no gaps. It was also important not to translate but to communicate in the national language. Information concerning the status of implementation of the SDGs exists at the local level; thus, the preparation of the VNR report should benefit from the participation of everyone. Participants also highlighted the importance of capacity building of stakeholders on the voluntary review process.

On the question of communication and outreach, participants emphasized the importance of informing all stakeholders about the SDGs. It was advised to have a bottom up approach to socialize the SDGs. Participants also discussed the format of information and the need to make it more accessible to persons with disabilities. For example, apps and programs that made text into audio. Moreover, for the socialization of the SDGs the questions should be asked in ways that relate to the daily realities of different social strata using images to make them real at the local level and to all groups.

On the topic of alternative/shadow reports, several participants noted that civil society in their country were writing an alternative report (Niger, Mali, Benin, Senegal). There was a rich discussion on whether and how to write one. Some participants noted that if thorough consultations had happened at all levels with all actors than there was no need of an alternative report, but if that was not the case then there was a need of an alternative report. Some participants noted that civil society had the responsibility to prepare the alternative report and to engage with all stakeholders. The issue of capacity building for vulnerable groups, to be able to participate in the reporting process, was emphasized. Another issue that was discussed at length is whether the SDGs should be included in the education system, if so for what age level of education. In this regard, some participants stressed that children should also be enabled to express their needs.