

February 13, 2024

# Communiqué:

## New approach to the voluntary national review process

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) congratulates countries on their active participation in the voluntary national review (VNR) process, and the success of the VNRs as an important innovation for the follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

From 2018 to 2022 the Committee conducted annual analyses of the VNRs presented at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) the previous year. These studies have highlighted strengths and weaknesses of the review processes. Motivated by concerns that we are not on track to achieve the ambition of the 2030 agenda and in response to the Secretary General's call to "rescue the SDGs", the CDP proposes the launch of a new approach to the VNRs – VNR 2.0 – to strengthen their effectiveness as a tool for learning and exchanging lessons of experience in implementation of the SDGs. The key elements of the new VNR process would include:

1. **Analytical and focused on priority issues:** While CDP studies have found progressive strengthening in the analytical content of the latest submissions are still largely descriptive and general in discussing the challenges, strategies, priorities, and lessons learned. To promote mutual learning, the new approach to VNRs should include more analytical depth that reflect on the core priorities for the country, lessons of good practices that accelerated progress, the nature of the challenges, the alternative policy measures that could be considered and the gaps in knowledge where lessons from other countries would be of help.
2. **Attention to transformative ambition:** There is a disconnect between the transformative ambition of the 2030 agenda and the implementation efforts. Most VNRs do not capture the magnitude of effort required to achieve the ambitious targets, neglecting crucial targets and goals that possess significant potential to bring about transformative and sustainable change in the long run. An assessment of the core transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda including the means of implementation should provide a baseline for VNR 2.0.
3. **Strategies for an interconnected and unified agenda:** While a growing number of countries are establishing inter-departmental coordination frameworks for SDG implementation, the strategies for implementation rarely reflect an integrated approach. The goals are discussed for each sector in isolation without much consideration for the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic challenges and solutions. Little attention given to tradeoffs in policy strategies. The new approach to VNRs should be framed in the 2030 Agenda concept of sustainable development that is integrated, universal, with commitments to inclusion and human rights, and respect for planetary limits.

4. **Creating feed-back loops:** While some countries' second and third cycle VNRs refer to the previous reviews, discussion of lessons learned from implementation are still limited. A clear mechanism for creating feed-back loops in learning lessons from implementation experience is essential to accelerate SDG achievement.
5. **Participatory and transparent process:** Learning from experience depends not only on the substantive content of the reviews but also on the entire process, which includes discussions with stakeholders prior to the reviews, and feedback from participants after the HLPF. The perspectives of non-governmental entities, such as civil society, academia, and businesses, hold significant value. The CDP recommends a participatory process at the country level that has transparency, recognizes the role of civil society, creates space for their contribution to identifying priorities and incorporates a national learning process that with feedback loops to policy and planning mechanisms. The Committee also recommends incorporating shadow reports from civil society into the HLPF procedures.

Following these principles would make the VNR process more conducive to stimulating national and international discourse and reflections on what actions, policies and measures are required to bring about the transformative change needed to meet the aspirational vision of the 2030 Agenda. It would help mobilize stakeholders and ultimately make the VNRs more effective vehicles for accelerating progress on the SDG.