



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

HANDBOOK

FOR THE PREPARATION OF

**VOLUNTARY
NATIONAL
REVIEWS**

The 2019 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 country preparation and presentation of voluntary national reviews (VNRs). It should be read in conjunction with the Secretary-General's proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews 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 basic, practical information on the steps that countries may take when preparing voluntary national reviews. It is designed to provide elementary building blocks for a country in the preparation of its reviews. 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.

Prepared and updated by: DESA, October 2018

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 eleven 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 2019. 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 over three 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 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the Chinese characters '刘' (Liu) and '振民' (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.

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 and targets.

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,

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.

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, in 2019 the HLPF will meet twice, in July under the auspices of ECOSOC, when the VNRs will be presented, and in September under the auspices of the General Assembly. Countries conducting their first VNR will present them during the three-day ministerial segment of the HLPF, while 10 countries presenting subsequent VNRs will present them on 15 July in a panel format. For the 2019 HLPF, the ministerial segment will be held from 16 to 18 July, at UNHQ in New York.⁴

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 Inga Rhonda King, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations in New York. She will chair the 2019 VNRs, with the help of four Vice-Chairs of the Council.

² [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 74.

³ [GA resolution 70/299](#).

⁴ By letter dated 12 September, the President indicated that the list of 41 countries presenting on 16-18 July for the first time are: Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Eritrea, Eswatini, Fiji, Ghana, Guyana, Iceland, Iraq, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Serbia, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, and Vanuatu. Ten countries conducting their second reviews, which have skipped a year since their last VNR, will present on 15 July 2019 during the last afternoon of the first week of the HLPF. These countries are: Azerbaijan, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Indonesia, Philippines, Sierra Leone and Turkey.

One hundred and eleven VNRs have been conducted (22 in 2016, 43 in 2017, and 46 in 2018) by 102 countries, with 8 countries having conducted more than one VNR. Their VNRs, and the Main Messages, are available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>. Fifty-one countries will present their VNRs in 2019.

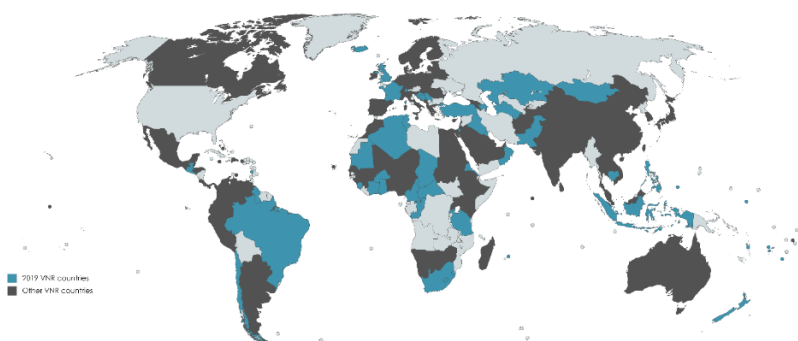


Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of VNR countries 2016-2019

The HLPF also carries out thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs, including on cross-cutting issues.⁵ To facilitate an in-depth review of progress, the HLPF annually discusses a set of SDGs and their

Guidance for the reviews

The main guidance for the VNRs are the UN Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, contained in annex 2. The guidelines provide a framework for certain common elements within reviews, while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances. The guidelines serve to promote consistency between reviews and comparability over time. However, it is up to countries to decide how to carry out their reviews, in accordance with their national contexts and circumstances.

⁵ [GA resolution 70/1](#), para. 85.

interlinkages, subject to the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals.⁶ The 2019 HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC will carry out an in-depth review of SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16, as well as 17, which is reviewed annually.

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 2018, the President informed countries that the list of VNRs for 2019 had been closed, with a total of 51 countries presenting at the HLPF.⁷ Those that did not make it onto the list for 2019 were encouraged to come forward for the 2020 or 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](#).

⁶ [GA resolution 70/299](#), para. 4.

⁷ See note 4.

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 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

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.

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/road map 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, 17 May 2019 and the VNR report, 14 June 2019, both covered in greater detail in section F below.
- **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.

- **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.** The SG guidelines encourage countries to report on the progress in relation to all 17 SDGs. Where priority goals have been identified, countries could cover those in greater depth. Consider where the country is in the national planning cycle and whether the national strategy or plan has been updated or aligned with the SDGs. Consider the candid inclusion of successes, challenges and lessons learned in order to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- **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 line ministries are of special importance, but there may 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.
- **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.⁸

- **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 international treaties, and other reports such as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) relating to the Paris Agreement;
 - 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.

⁸ The global indicator framework was adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017. See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

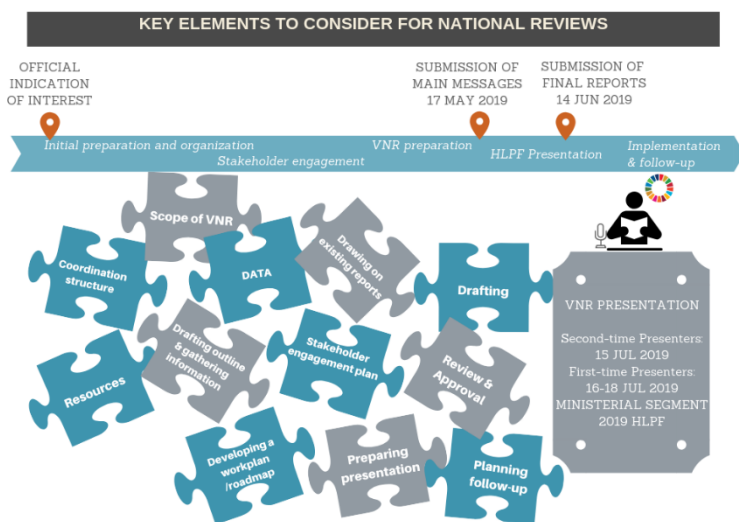


Figure 3: Elements for organisation and preparation of review

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.⁹ There exists a number of other web-based resources designed to assist and support countries in SDG implementation.¹⁰
- ✓ 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 2018 VNRs, but countries can also use any of the VNRs as a benchmark for their own preparations.

⁹ Available at: <https://undg.org/document/guidelines-to-support-country-reporting-on-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

¹⁰ See for instance:

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

- ✓ 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.

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 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, 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.

Country examples

The **Sri Lanka** VNR process was a collaborative and inclusive process that included multi-stakeholder engagement – Government, private sector, academia, development partners and CSOs including Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIOs). As the first step, a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) was developed with two major objectives: i) to consult all stakeholders involved in the SDG process in the country to get inputs for the preparation of the VNR as well as to raise awareness; ii) to setup the platform for continuous stakeholder engagement in the post – 2018 VNR period. The SEP was developed in line with the Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). In order to achieve the first objective, several multi-stakeholder consultative workshops were conducted. In addition, an online platform has been developed to engage all stakeholders in the SDG implementation – a process that goes beyond the VNR 2018.

From: The VNR of Sri Lanka, 2018

Poland noted that in June 2017 the Partnership for the Implementation of the SDGs in Poland was initiated. The aim of the Partnership is to integrate representatives of various circles in cooperation for effective achievement of sustainable development objectives. Under the Partnership, the signatories sign a jointly agreed declaration of intent: Apart from signing the declaration, the signatories of the Partnership make an individual commitment, in which they confirm the implementation of specific actions aimed at achieving selected SDGs, adequate to their activities. Acceding to the Partnership and making a commitment takes place within the framework of cyclical conference events. So far, more than 70 organizations representing a wide range of stakeholders have entered into partnerships, with a total of more than 130 commitments.

From: the VNR of Poland, 2018

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 countries¹¹ 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>

D. Key building blocks for preparing the review

The following headings are generally presented according to the sections of the Secretary-General’s guidelines, referred to above.¹² 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.

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

¹¹ 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>

¹² 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. The guidelines are attached hereto as annex 2.

concrete, tangible steps it has taken to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is met.

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. 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 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. 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. Countries could provide information on the process for preparation of the national review, for example, how different levels and sectors of Government and other multi-stakeholders contributed to the review.

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?
- 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?

Country examples

Togo has been striving to build a strong partnership with its citizens towards achieving the 17 SDGs through the mobilization, since 2011, of more than 27,000 national and international volunteers for development projects. In the interests of the principle of inclusion, Togo launched an innovative volunteering programme in 2016 that enabled it to reach out to a vast target group that had been previously excluded from most youth programmes. This programme, called Civic Commitment Volunteerism (VEC), is open to youths out-of-school and half-schooled. As a result, out of 8,127 interested young Togolese nationals, with a high proportion of young women among, 5,446 (i.e. 67%) benefited from this initiative.

From: the VNR of Togo, 2018

Malta reported providing small grants for awareness raising campaigns specifically on Agenda 2030 which resulted in a youth workshop programme, with a successful international meeting for young adults, followed by a national conference; a general awareness campaign on Agenda 2030 in the form of a series of clips disseminated on TV and Facebook to explain the SDGs in an easily identifiable and understandable manner; and a final conference, which disseminated the results of the project.

From: the VNR of Malta, 2018

In **Spain**, the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces of Spain has played a strategic role in the development of the concept and the tools for localization, as well as the positioning of the vision and the interests of local authorities. Thus, in Andalusia, the government of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia has committed to progress with the goals of the 2030 Agenda by preparing two specific strategic plans: the Andalusian Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 (EADS 2030) and the Andalusian Strategy for Fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

From: the VNR of Spain, 2018

Ireland has underlined in the context of its international cooperation that it supports the strengthening of parliamentary oversight, accountability and domestic resource mobilization in developing countries. They continue to have a partnership with the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions [INTOSAI], to support independent audit institutions in developing countries, thereby facilitating improved tracking and reporting of expenditures to parliament.

From: the VNR of Ireland, 2018

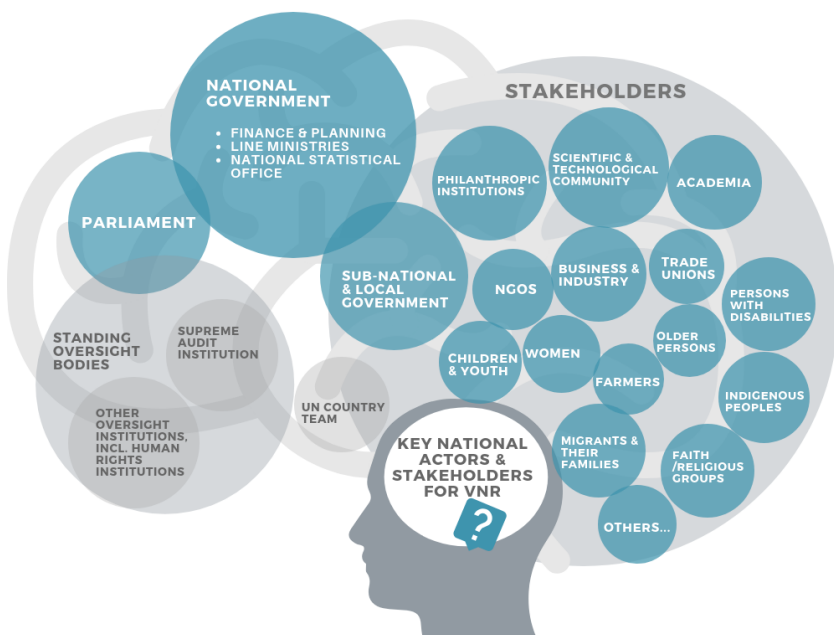


Figure 4: Indicative map of key national actors and stakeholders (DESA)

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. 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;
- 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	

Single target addressed in multiple policies

One plan covering multiple targets

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.

Some questions that could be considered include the following:

- Has the country conducted a gap analysis of the SDGs and its national frameworks?
- 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 has been done to integrate the SDGs into legislation, policies, plans and programmes?
- What are solutions and good practices to ensure policy coherence?
- 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

The following is a list of steps taken in the mapping process in **Latvia**:

- 1. Link each of 169 targets to performance indicators defined in Latvia 2030, the National Development Plan 2020, and other Latvian policy documents and plans.
- 2. Evaluate whether the respective SDG target is currently relevant for Latvia.
- 3. Categorize the relevant targets according to whether they are reflected in domestic policy, development cooperation or other external dimensions (global trade, financial flows, etc.) or a combination of them.
- 4. Identify the line ministry or other government institution responsible for the target, identify co-responsible ministries/institutions.
- 5. For comparison purposes, map the international indicators for each of the 169 targets, including official UN, Eurostat, Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) and OECD pilot project indicators.
- 6. Ministries/institutions provide information on whether the SDG targets will be relevant to Latvia in the future.
- 7. Prepare conclusions, organize a conference with discussions on the SDG framework in Latvian policy.
- 8. Include the conclusions in this Review.

From: the VNR of Latvia, 2018

In **Jamaica**, a local governance mechanism for sustainable development planning forms a key part of the successful implementation of Vision 2030 Jamaica and the SDGs. Local Sustainable Development Plans (LSDPs) provide an important mechanism for localizing the SDGs. Five of the fourteen Municipal Corporations have developed LSDPs and preparation of the remaining LSDPs will commence by 2019. While not all parishes have a developed LSDPs, it should be noted that local development planning is evident at the parish and community levels. Challenges, however, remain in

areas of coordination and institutionalization of processes, and alignment of national and local level planning. These processes at the local level reflect existing and new partnerships which provide platforms to enhance the implementation process and work towards achievement of the SDGs. Through a partnership with the European Commission (EC), the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) is supporting the localization and implementation of the LSDPs under the project “Strengthening local government’s role as a partner in development”.

From: the VNR of Jamaica, 2018



From: The VNR of The Bahamas, 2018

Tip:

- ✓ 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 focussed 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. 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?
- How does the government map responsibilities of ministries against each of the SDGs, or even SDG targets?

- 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.¹³

A basic template can be used to explore interlinkages between SDG targets, such as this one below, taken from the VNR report of **Albania**, 2018.

¹³ 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

SDG Target	SDG Focus	SDG Potential Inter-linkages	Policy Priorities in NSDI II	Policy Priorities in Other Strategies	Reference to NPEI and EUANC*	Institutional Framework Responsible for Priority
1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day	Socio-economic	Goal 2 Food 2.1 Goal 4 Education 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6 Goal 8 Decent work and economic growth 8.1 Goal 10 Inequality 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.7	Pillar 3: Investing in people and social cohesion 11.1: Expanded, better quality educational opportunities 11.3: Expanding employment opportunities 11.5: Consolidating social protection 11.6: Building a more inclusive society	National Social Protection Strategy 2015–2020, Strategic objective A (A1–A5) National Strategy for Employment and Skills 2014–2020, Strategic priorities A, B & C Pensions Policy Document, 2014, Social pension category Draft Gender Equality Strategy 2016–2020, Strategic goal 1.4 National Plan on Youth, 2014–2020, Strategic objective 2	Chapter 17: Economic and monetary policy Chapter 19: Social policy and employment	IPMG* Employment and Social sector; Ministry of Health and Social Protection

*. NPEI, National Plan for European Integration 2014–2020; EUANC, EU accession negotiation chapter; IPMG, Integrated Policy Management Group

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

The Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre (MBRSC) is integral to the strategic initiatives of the **United Arab Emirates** government to inspire scientific innovation, technological advancement and sustainable development in the UAE. It has launched ambitious space science

programmes to position the space sector at the forefront of the UAE's development agenda.

Several streams of MBRSC's work programme align with the SDGs, including:

- SDG 4, with the earmarking of scholarships for undergraduate students, has an internship programme and is working to integrate space studies within the national curriculum at all levels of education;
- SDG 5, where MBRSC is committed to improving the gender ratio in its staff which is presently 60:40, male to female;
- SDG 6, with the use of images to monitor the levels of reservoirs to track access to clean water and the generation of water area maps for seawater, lakes and pools and studied the water surface area of dams over time to monitor the change in surface water;
- SDG 7, where the MBRSC has built the region's first self-cooling eco-home that is completely independent of the power grid;
- SDG 9, in which the MBRSC has worked on classification maps of urban areas, roads, vegetation, water and undeveloped areas, which help in infrastructure mapping and for monitoring the growth of such areas;
- SDG 13, with the use of space-based technologies for disaster management and emergency response, that have been used to monitor deforestation, pollution levels, ice caps and desertification and enable preventative actions; and developing a nanosatellite to study aerosol optical depth, aerosol effective radius, and studying concentrations of greenhouse gases.;
- SDG 14: -the use of images to monitor levels of red tides and fish stock. It is also working on studies about the effects of desalination plants on fish and coral reefs in certain areas.;
- SDG 15: the use of images and data to monitor deforestation, land changes and the impact of natural disasters worldwide.

From: the VNR of the United Arab Emirates, 2018

Armenia states that water is a vital factor for many aspects of economy and human life, and, thus, SDG 6 is inter-linked with many other SDGs such as agricultural production, a major source of human livelihood (SDG 2), energy production (SDG 7), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12), life on earth (SDG 15), and life below water (SDG 14). Thus, an integrated approach is necessary to achieve effective synergies and avoid conflict between SDGs and various stakeholders such as agriculture, industry, cities, human consumption, aquaculture. In this context multi-stakeholder participatory approach and partnerships is a must.

From: the VNR of Armenia, 2018

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. 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. 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

Taking into account that poverty has a mainly urban and female profile, the **Cabo Verdean** Government adopted policy measures centered on an intervention focusing strategy for poor or vulnerable families, with special attention to the areas and municipalities with higher social vulnerability. The Government created an income access program comprising the Social Inclusion Income and the Social Pension. The Social Inclusion Income (SII) is a direct monetary transfer to people and is aimed for individuals and households with children under 15 years living in extreme poverty, belonging to the active population but not engaged in an income-generating economic activity. The Social Pension is intended for people aged 60 or more years with annual income below the threshold of poverty, devoid of any social security plans, national or foreign. The social pension covers approximately 21,771 people across the country.

From: the VNR of Cabo Verde, 2018

For the Government of **Canada**, the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without collective action that recognizes and includes the diverse voices and participation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis. There is significant alignment between the SDGs and the work of reconciliation— centered on closing socio-

economic gaps between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous Canadians, advancing self-determination and improving relationships with Indigenous peoples. Canada is taking important steps in the work of reconciliation through historic investments. Canada is building on programs for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to deliver clean water, housing, child and family services, training and health care, as well as establishing new funding relationships with First Nations intended to secure a better quality of life for Indigenous peoples by moving toward predictable and sustained funding for First Nations communities. Most recently the 2018 federal budget announced \$5 billion over five years to support Indigenous communities and peoples by taking further steps to improve the quality of life for Indigenous peoples and to support the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights.

From: the VNR of Canada, 2018

2016 Vulnerability Baseline Assessment, **Bhutan**

1. The elderly in need of support
2. Orphans
3. People with disabilities
4. Out of school children
5. Unemployed youth
6. Children in conflict with the law
7. People who beg
8. Victims of domestic violence
9. Those working in vulnerable places like Drayang (dance halls)
10. Single parents and their children
11. People affected by HIV/AIDS
12. Individuals engaging in risky sexual behaviour
13. People using drugs and alcohol
14. Vulnerable urban dwellers, particularly living in slums in and near urban centres.

From: the VNR of Bhutan, 2018

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).

Institutional structure for sustainable development in the **State of Palestine**



From: The VNR of the State of Palestine, 2018

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.

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.
- 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?

Country examples

In **Lebanon**, the Council of Ministers established a national committee to oversee and guide the roll-out of the SDGs in Lebanon. The committee is chaired by the prime minister and includes more than 50 state officials at Director-General level to ensure work continues regardless of political developments. The committee also includes civil society and the private sector representatives to ensure an open, inclusive and participatory approach and has four thematic groupings organized around 5PS (People; Planet; Prosperity; Peace, justice and strong institutions) and the fifth 'P' for Partnership was considered a cross-cutting issue in implementing and achieving the SDGs. The Office of the Prime Minister is the committee's secretariat.

From: The VNR of Lebanon, 2018

Structural issues

Countries could reflect on the cross-cutting/transversal 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.

Goals and targets

Countries could provide information on the progress and status of all the SDGs. Each year, a few SDGs are under review (in 2019 they are 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16 with SDG 17, which is reviewed every year). However, countries are encouraged to provide information on all the goals in their VNRs and reflect on critical difficulties encountered in reaching them. More in-depth analysis of a few selected SDGs and targets and their related gaps and challenges seen as national priority might also be reflected in the VNRs. These may be chosen 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.

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;
- interlinkages 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?
- 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?

Qatar ensures the provision of water for all its population. The percentage of population that benefited from safe drinking water services reached 100%, where seawater desalination constitutes 60% of total available water. Sustainably-managed sanitation services are also provided for all and the percentage of safely treated wastewater reached 100% as well. The total loss of desalinated water was reduced to 10% in 2016 (of which 4.7% was due to real loss and less than 6% was due to administrative loss), compared to 30% in 2011. The Rationalization Law No. 26 of 2008 was amended by Law No. 20/2015 to raise users' awareness on the optimal use of water. In addition, defective meters have been replaced with smart meters. Modern techniques to rationalize the use of water have been installed in some schools and mosques and are being installed for other uses. Wastewater treatment plants have been expanded and the study of the establishment of an industrial wastewater treatment plant has been completed. Qatar's water policy has also been prepared and approved, which includes an integrated management of water

resources to be implemented in 2018, while Qatar Water Strategy is underway and will be completed by mid-2018.

SDG 6, From: the VNR of Qatar, 2018

Singapore is exploring ways to increase the amount of space available for the deployment of solar PV panels. While most solar PV panels are deployed on land or rooftops, water bodies with significant surface areas present great potential for harnessing solar energy, especially in land-scarce Singapore. A one MWp floating solar PV system test-bed was launched at Tengeh Reservoir, in the western part of Singapore, in October 2016. Comprising rows of floating solar panels atop a hectare of water, the test-bed feeds energy to the national power grid. It has thus far performed better than rooftop solar panels because of cooler temperatures in the surrounding environment. This initiative was a joint collaboration between Economic Development Board, the Solar Energy Institute of Singapore under the National University of Singapore, and PUB, Singapore's National Water Agency.

SDG 7, From: the VNR of Singapore, 2018

The Labor Fund (Tamkeen) has provided considerable support to small and medium enterprises which represent about 99% of Bahraini companies and 70% of **Bahrain's** workforce.... Over the past few years, Tamkeen has managed to qualify and train 13,000 Bahrainis in different disciplines. The percentage of start-up projects that have been supported by Tamkeen has reached 60%, and 5,000 Bahrainis have been employed through their Business Development Program. The fund has also contributed to supporting nearly 130,000 citizens within the Professional Certification and Training Program, as well as supporting around 45,000 companies and institutions, injecting more than \$2 billion into the national economy. The Fund also focuses on empowering Bahraini women, assisting 131 female entrepreneurs with BD 2.7 million (about US \$7.2 million) in funds. The support provided to women in the business sector comprises 40% of the total funding granted by the Fund since its inception.

SDG 8, From: the VNR of Bahrain, 2018

Means of implementation

The review process needs to consider how means of implementation are mobilised, what difficulties are being encountered, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda. 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?
- 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

Vietnam reported on the results of the Ha Long-Cat Ba Alliance Initiative, launched in 2014 to build the partnership between State agencies, businesses and communities to promote conservation activities and protect Ha Long Bay and Cat Ba archipelago. To date, the alliance has cooperated with nearly 20 cruise companies, local and international businesses as well as NGOs. It has mobilized more than USD 210,000 from private businesses for awareness raising and community development in Hai Phong city and Quang Ninh province. It set up three large-scale clean-up programmes of coastline with more than 300 volunteers, collecting nearly four tonnes of waste along 4km of coastline of islands in Ha Long Bay. With more than 60 per-cent of collected waste polystyrene, the alliance has engaged Ha Long People's Committee to issue a decision on banning this material in Ha Long Bay and worked with Hai Phong People's Committee on alternatives to polystyrene. The alliance has also trained more than 70 tour guides on environmental and biodiversity values of the site and advocated tourism infrastructure projects not to threaten the outstanding universal values of the expanded site.

From: the VNR of Viet Nam, 2018

Australia's Emerging Markets Impact Investment Fund will help small and medium-sized enterprises that are actively improving the lives of the poor in South and South East Asia. In the Pacific, Australia's Pacific Readiness for Investing in Social Enterprise program helped secure a \$600,000 investment by an Australian impact investment fund in 2017 to support a Vanuatu coffee producer plant 200 hectares of coffee trees after their plantation was devastated by a major tropical cyclone.

From: the VNR of Australia, 2018

Colombia noted that the financial sector has played a catalytic role in mobilizing resources towards the SDGs. The bank Bancóldex defined the issuance of green and social bonds as an instrument for financing the SDGs in the country. In 2017 the issuance of green bonds was made, for approximately USD \$ 70 million, whose demand exceeded

by 2.5 times the offered value. Likewise, the demand for the social bond issued by Bancóldex in May 2018, for more than USD \$ 130 million exceeded 4.17 times the offered value. In both cases, the excess demand for issuance of social and green bond, despite its novelty in the Colombian financial market, reflects the high interest of the private sector in financing investments with a high impact on the conservation of the environment and the social progress of the country.

From: the VNR of the Colombia, 2018

Next steps

This section of the guidelines is an opportunity for the country to state what steps are being taken or are planned to further enhance implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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 steps are planned to integrate the SDGs into government activities, e.g. the budgeting process and policies and programmes of line ministries?
- Are there plans for regular review of progress at the national level on the implementation of the Agenda?

Annexes

Countries may include an annex with data, using the global SDG indicators to be proposed by the Statistical Commission, as well as priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate. Countries may also consider including additional annexes covering, for instance, best practices and/or policies and strategies that have advanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda, or comments and inputs from stakeholders.

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?

Conclusion

The conclusion of the VNR could address some of the following issues/questions:

- A summary of the analysis, findings and 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?

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.¹⁴

¹⁴ See note 8.

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.

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

To enhance public awareness and interest as well as to support the accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level, the **Hungarian** Central Statistical Office has created a very informative and interactive website where information on key global indicators can be found regarding to all SDGs. The site is based on a newly generated database documented with short descriptions and analyses, where all indicators are illustrated by graphs or diagrams in order to make the progress of the accomplishment of SDGs easily comprehensible for the general public.

From: the VNR of Hungary, 2018

In November 2015 in **Mexico**, the Governing Board of the National Institute for Statistic and Geography (INEGI) Governing Board modified an agreement establishing the Specialised Technical Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals (CTEODS) as the body responsible for generating and following up on the data and indicators needed to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. The CTEODS is chaired by the Office of the President and brings together 29 federal entities. This committee has worked to monitor global indicators for Mexico in accordance with its statistical capacity. This process required the characterization of indicators and the organization of 15 interinstitutional working groups for the technical analysis of each. To facilitate online access to these indicators, the CTEODS –in collaboration with the Office of the President of the Republic’s National Digital Strategy Department– designed the open data platform www.agenda2030.mx. The process of defining national goals and indicators is currently in the review and reflection stage, which forms part of the preparation of the National Strategy for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

From: the VNR of Mexico, 2018

Paraguay highlighted an innovative mechanism to link the follow up of international human rights recommendations to the SDGs – the SIMORE Plus platform. Among the technical cooperation -under the

South-South modality- currently offered by **Paraguay** to other countries, the "SIMORE Paraguay" Technical Cooperation Program stands out, aimed at providing assistance for the installation and start-up of an online tracking system for international human rights recommendations and compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), based on the Paraguayan experience of SIMORE [el Sistema de Monitoreo de Recomendaciones]. SIMORE is considered an easy experience to replicate in countries that do not have their own system to follow up on the recommendations received, or that seek to strengthen the system they have. It is a friendly, simple, and low-cost system. As a mechanism to support the monitoring of human rights recommendations and the link of them with the SDGs the SIMORE Plus platform represents a successful experience and good accountability and transparency practice, as well as working through partnerships on behalf of the Paraguayan State, available to be shared with other interested countries.

From: the VNR of Paraguay, 2018

F. Preparatory workshops and submission of VNRs¹⁵

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

¹⁵ Dates in this section are for the 2019 HLPF.

The preparatory process for the 2019 VNRs includes the following:

First global workshop: Based on peer learning and exchange between countries conducting VNRs in 2019 and countries that carried out VNRs in 2016, 2017, and 2018 and designed to cover key components of the preparatory process.

Second global workshop: Will facilitate a sharing of experiences among the 2019 VNR countries, including on lessons learned and challenges encountered. 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 write sections of the report and make VNR presentations at the HLPF.

Third global workshop: 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 2019 HLPF, it is expected that four regional VNR workshops will be held on the margins of the regional fora for sustainable development convened by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Dates, and in some cases venues, are still to be determined. The regional workshops discuss the specificities of each region and provide for an additional exchange of experiences and lessons learned among the VNR countries.

Review – deadlines for submission to 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 by 17 May 2019. 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.

The word count of the Main Messages may not exceed 700 words. Main Messages are translated into English by the Secretariat if they are submitted in any other UN language and are issued as an official document of the UN. The Main Messages are posted online.¹⁶

The final reviews should be submitted in electronic format to DESA by 14 June 2019 (a month before the HLPF).¹⁷ 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.

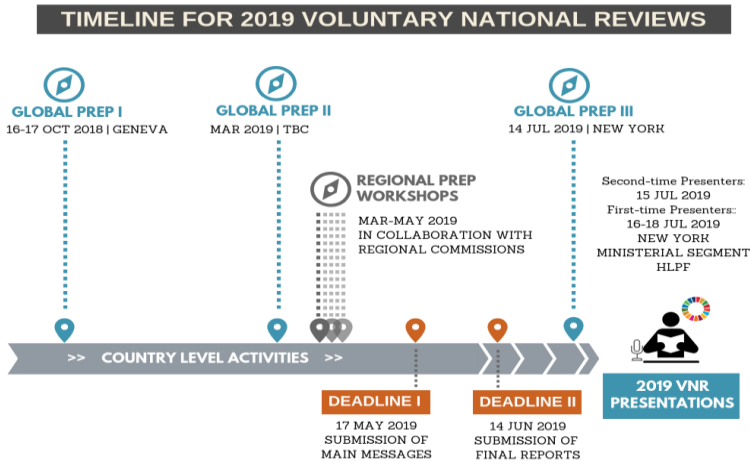


Figure 6: Timeline for 2019 Voluntary National Reviews (DESA)

¹⁶ Main Messages from the 2018 VNRs are available here:

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/HLPF/2018/5&Lang=E

¹⁷ Only reviews that conform to UN resolutions can be posted on the UN website.

G. Presentation of the VNR at the HLPF

Preparations related to the presentation at the HLPF are an important part of the process.

Questionnaire

To gather relevant information, DESA sends a questionnaire to countries a few months before the HLPF. This 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. Once all countries in the session have presented, questions are posed to the presenting countries. 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 for countries presenting for the first time (16-18 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 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.¹⁸

Presentation at the HLPF

Each country will have 15 minutes for its presentation, with a similar amount of time for questions from other countries and stakeholders.¹⁹ The 15 minute time allocation includes the use of audio-visual material, including videos.

The presentation at the HLPF could highlight the key messages from the review and touch on critical issues in implementation. 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. Countries could consider making contact with other VNR presenting countries with a view to facilitating an exchange of lessons learned and good practices during and after the VNR presentation.

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

- submit any audio-visual material by the deadlines communicated by DESA;
- finalise details of the composition of the delegation;
- 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.

¹⁸ As indicated in the letter from the President of ECOSOC of 12 September, 10 countries presenting on 15 July (see note 4 above) will be accommodated in two 90-minute panels of five. This will give each country 10 minutes to present followed by cumulative Q&A for all five of 40 minutes.

¹⁹ See note 17.

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 UNCT and 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.

Second or third reviews will increasingly begin to predominate at future HLPFs: at the 2019 HLPF, 10 countries are slated to carry out their second VNR. Against this backdrop, what could be the

distinguishing features of a second or third review? 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 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 issues.

Annex 1: VNR preparation checklist

Item	Actions
1. Initial preparation and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send letter to President of ECOSOC to communicate 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. <input type="checkbox"/> Develop work plan/road map with deliverables aligned to HLPF deadlines (e.g. submission of Main Messages and VNR Report). <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. <input type="checkbox"/> Assign information- and data-gathering tasks, including drawing on existing national documents and previous VNR reports.
2. Stakeholder Engagement	<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 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 engagement in the VNR process, making use of government communication services, social media, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Make sure targeted efforts are made to reach groups that are marginalised and at risk of being left behind.

3. VNR Preparation	<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 17 May. <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 14 June 2019.
4. HLPF Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fill out questionnaire and return to DESA by April/ May (deadline will be indicated) for information on HLPF presentation. <input type="checkbox"/> Inform DESA of preferred presentation format (panel / individual), presenter, and composition of delegation. <input type="checkbox"/> Produce videos or other visual materials for the VNR presentations. <input type="checkbox"/> Select key messages for VNR presentation, with time limit scheduled for that year in mind.

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 (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 productive when they involve an inclusive and thorough review process, when they produce tangible lessons and solutions, and when they are followed by 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 2015.¹ They have been updated in December 2017 to reflect lessons learned during the two years that have followed.² They provide a framework for certain common elements within reports while allowing for flexibility so countries can adapt to their own circumstances.³

¹ 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.

² See para 8 of resolution 70/299 of 29 July 2016.

³ 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 to reviews at the national level. The UNDG guidelines provide case studies and tools for use in preparing

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 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.

a national SDG report, and can serve to complement the present Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines. See <https://undg.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/Guidelines-to-Support-Country-Reporting-on-SDGs-1.pdf>

- 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 HLPF

Countries are encouraged to structure the report along the following lines, which will promote consistency and comparability. Doing so will also help inform the process of review and generate reflections on implementation.

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 Development including through its national development plans, strategies, or other relevant documents.

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

- the review process
- the status of SDG progress
- how the Government has responded to the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs and to the principle of leaving no-one behind
- two or three examples of each of the following: good practices, lessons learned and challenges encountered on which it wishes to hear about other countries.
- two or three areas where it would need support in terms of finance, capacity-building, technology, partnerships, etc.

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, national review cycle, and whether and how existing national reports have been used. It could outline how the policy architecture reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development and what policy tools have enabled this integration, as well as links to other international agreements such as Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, etc.

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; whether parliaments were

engaged; whether national evaluation/oversight institutions contributed; what mechanisms have been used to engage stakeholders from civil society, academia 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 level and who was engaged in the discussions.

5. Policy and enabling environment.

(a) Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The review could outline efforts made towards all stakeholders, such as national and local governments, legislative bodies, the public, civil society and the private sector, to inform them of and involve them in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, including goals and targets. The review could address how different groups, particularly women and young people, have been engaged and how direct citizen engagement has been facilitated.

(b) Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks. The review could outline critical initiatives that the country has undertaken to adapt the Sustainable Development Goals and targets to its national circumstances, and to advance their implementation including examining policy coherence and interlinkages. It may describe national efforts made to integrate the Goals into the country's legislation, policies, plans and programmes, including the sustainable development strategy, if there is one. The countries are encouraged to be specific in identifying the main challenges and difficulties experienced in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole. 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 the role of different actors. Countries could consider referring to major efforts undertaken by local authorities and non-State actors to implement the Goals, the role of science-policy interfaces, and partnerships.

(c) Integration of the three dimensions. The review might discuss how the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration. 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. In this regard, the review could detail how 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. 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 are considered, as well as on the institution(s)/mechanism(s) in charge of coordination and integration for the 2030 Agenda. The review could consider highlighting efforts to mobilize institutions around the Sustainable Development Goals, improve their functioning, and promote change to achieve policy coherence 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. It would be useful to highlight how the country is reviewing progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, including possible plans for the conduct of national reviews that take into account the presentation of the voluntary national review at the HLPF, where applicable. This

includes 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, including the possible external consequences of domestic policies. Countries can highlight the transformative policies, tools, institutional changes they have used to address these issues or barriers.

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, when appropriate, 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 and in an international 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 and areas requiring advice and support. 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. If countries are doing their second and subsequent voluntary national reviews it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous review.

7. Means of implementation. Based on the above challenges and trends highlighted, the review may discuss how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and

what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, including in terms of financing, capacity development and data needs, technology, and partnerships. The review could indicate how financial systems and resource allocations are being aligned to support the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Coverage of domestic resource mobilization could include the contribution of the private sector. Countries are also encouraged to cover technology, identify concrete capacity development and data needs, and the contribution of multi-stakeholder partnerships.

8. 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. It could also indicate how it is planned to keep the Goals under review at the national and sub-national levels, including dissemination of reviews and their findings.

9. Conclusion. The section may present a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications. It may discuss new or emerging issues identified by the review. Lastly, the country may indicate what lessons it has learned from the review process and how it will apply them in the future implementation and what support it would need in the future for preparing such reviews.

10. Annexes. Countries may 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 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. They could also include comments from stakeholders on the report in an annex.

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:

- Using videos, infographics and data visualization to communicate complex messages such as linkages and priorities in a very short period of time;
- Providing space for stakeholders such as civil society and the private sector to share their views on SDG progress.
- Working informally with other presenting countries in advance to compare review processes and findings.

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.

