

Report of the Workshop for the 2017 Voluntary National Reviews at the High-Level Political Forum, held on 2-3 March 2017, Incheon, Republic of Korea

Welcome and opening

The workshop was opened by Mr. Jong-Soo Yoon, Director of the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development, who welcomed the participants to Incheon. He stated that the Office was pleased to host the workshop and wished the participants fruitful discussions. Ms. Irena Zubcevic, Chief of the SIDS, Oceans, and Climate Branch of the Division for Sustainable Development, DESA, also made brief welcoming remarks. In his opening remarks, the President of ECOSOC, H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations, welcomed all the countries present, noting that they represented the diversity of the United Nations. While each country faced its particular national circumstances, all were united in their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, which has universality as its cornerstone. He noted that the VNRs are useful not only as a review mechanism, but also as a source of information and solutions for all countries meeting at the high-level political forum, as well as stakeholders, in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. In closing, he invited the “class of 2017” to continue to explore new ways to make the reviews more effective in advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Following the President’s statement, a member of the Secretariat outlined the aims of the workshop and shared key messages from the Synthesis Report of Voluntary National Reviews 2016, as well as points from the pre-workshop questionnaire. In this regard, it was noted that countries had made progress with respect to strategies and plans, including undertaking stock-taking, mapping and gap analyses, and identifying priorities. In their questionnaire responses, countries had also reported progress with respect to institutional coordination. As regards challenges, countries had reported, among other things, securing adequate stakeholder engagement, overlapping responsibilities among government departments, including other branches of government, especially legislative, and obtaining data and updating indicators or creating new ones.

Representatives of three United Nations regional commissions (ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP) made brief interventions on the subject of the forthcoming regional forums on sustainable development, which will provide regional contributions to the HLPF 2017 and will be preceded by informal, regional VNR workshops. The final programme for the workshop is included in the annex.

Status of preparations

During the first panel, four countries provided brief overviews of progress and challenges encountered in their national preparatory processes. The representative of Bangladesh reported that major activities have been undertaken with respect to mapping government ministries/departments by SDG targets, preparation by the Bureau of Statistics of a data gap analysis, and capacity development on the 2030 Agenda for officials of major public sector agencies. As regards institutional arrangements, SDG monitoring and implementation committee has been formed with 15 key implementing ministries, and a senior level position of Principal Coordinator (SDGs) has been created in the Prime Minister’s office. Integration was identified as a key challenge with four parts: policy integration, structural and institutional reform, financial planning, and the promoting human capacity development and research. On the part of Honduras, its representative stated that progress has been made with stakeholder involvement, coordination of the VNR preparatory process, and the establishment of mechanisms for review of implementation. Six Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) had been involved so far, and efforts are underway to strengthen their engagement and participation. The President of Honduras has assigned the coordination of the preparatory process to the Government Secretary for General Coordination (SCGG in Spanish), which will prepare the draft VNR for review by a technical commission; the high-level commission will approve the final VNR. Among the challenges encountered were the lack of disaggregated data, lack of capacity of many local MGoS engaged in the 2030 Agenda, and fact that meaningful engagement and participation of

the MGoS is expensive and time consuming. The representative of Ethiopia outlined several areas of progress, beginning with the integration of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda into the second national Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II), which has been endorsed by the Council of Ministers and the House of Representatives. The VNR is being conducted sector-wide at the national, regional/states and city levels, with the involvement of stakeholders through their representatives. He stated that the National Planning Commission (NPC) was coordinating and leading the preparation of the VNR. Among the challenges he mentioned were the time constraints relating to the preparatory process and the need to allocate additional funds to support the processes contributing to the preparation of the VNRs. The representative of Denmark stated that the VNR preparation benefited from a high level of commitment from the government, including in this case the Minister of Finance that will be leading the preparation process together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was strong stakeholder engagement in the implementation of the Agenda, including bottom-up initiatives from different parts of the Danish society. She reported that while awareness of the Agenda in society was quite high, there was a need to reach wider parts of society, including at government level where understanding of SDGs should be increased across the board. With respect to the Denmark's report, it would most likely be in the region of 20 pages, striving to integrate Danish civil society, businesses, and other interest groups' viewpoints.

During the ensuing question and answer session, the panellists addressed questions about the involvement of the private sector, methodologies for indicators, how to engage parliaments, coordination, and public consultation. On the question of how to engage the private sector, the need to identify business opportunities was underlined, as was the importance of reaching out to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Given the distinctive roles of government and parliament, one approach that was suggested was to initiate informal dialogues with relevant parliamentary committees. Some countries had adopted a centralized approach, with VNR preparation coordinated by, for instance a national planning body (Ethiopia, Bangladesh), while others share the task between two government ministries, for instance foreign affairs (for the external dimension) and the ministry of environment (Italy) or finance (Denmark). Different approaches for public consultation were also discussed, including on-line and off line processes.

During the second panel, five countries provided brief overviews of progress and challenges encountered in their national preparatory processes. The representative of Nepal stated that the SDGs have been integrated into the 14th national development plan, as well as into the long-term vision, Envisioning Nepal 2030. Coordination of the VNR process was spearheaded by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister, supported by a technical committee chaired by the vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission. Other activities being undertaken include a baseline report, gap analysis (covering resources, programmes and policies, an implementation action plan, and the establishment of a drafting team for the VNR report). Key challenges for Nepal were identified as the difficulty of localizing the Agenda, given weak/absent local government, resource constraints, coordination within government and, importantly, with (and between) donors and United Nations system agencies. The representative of Costa Rica explained that the three branches of government, as well as various stakeholders, had committed themselves to a national pact for the SDGs. She also stated that a SDG decree had underlined the government's commitment at the highest level, as well as establishing clear coordination mechanisms, which included a high-level council, supported by a technical secretariat. The main challenges related to data, in particular the lack of disaggregated data at the population and regional levels.

The representative of Botswana provided a snapshot of developments in relation to the 2030 Agenda, stating that a SDG National Steering Committee was in place and functioning. A SDG secretariat is based in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, which is also responsible for preparation of national development plans. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is proceeding through four thematic working groups covering: economy and employment, social upliftment, sustainable environment, and governance, safety and security. As regards the VNR, she stated that National Steering Committee had approved a road-map for VNR preparation, which had been prepared by a technical team. Among the challenges that she identified were lack of appreciation at

the outset of the extent of work involved, the tight time limits, and the scarcity of financial resources, which were anticipated to potentially have an effect on the quality and timeliness of the VNR. At the same time, she also highlighted a number of opportunities, including the creation of an opportunity for stakeholder engagement and possibility of building partnerships with development partners for the exchange of ideas, technical expertise and funding.

The representative of Belgium stated that the process of preparation was proceeding according to plan, for instance with the phase of information and data-gathering completed by the end of January. He noted that it was proving challenging to integrate contributions drawn from three “pipelines” – namely, first, coverage of the internal dimension, drawing on government entities; second, the external dimension that would cover actions outside Belgium; third, statistics from the statistical community, which would be reflected in a statistical annex. As an example of a practical challenge he noted that government entities provided information in different formats – in some cases spreadsheets, in others “best practice” reports – thus posing challenge for the organizing information into a cohesive narrative report. With respect to national-level indicators, he noted the importance of having the selected indicators – 34 in the case of Belgium – cover all 17 SDGs, while at the same time extent consistent with the national circumstances.

The representative of Argentina stated that the integration of the Agenda into the national development priorities was undertaken in accordance with national and local realities. This process implied the alignment of the 17 SDGs and its targets with each of the principles of the “Zero Poverty” national policy. As a result, 96 priority targets and 127 indicators were identified. In addition, an effort was underway to systematize data for indicators. The national implementation of the 2030 Agenda was being facilitated through agreements with province governments and local governments. The National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies would be providing training and technical assistance to teams at the sub-national and local levels. In order to promote action by municipal and city governments, a guidebook is being prepared on how to incorporate SDGs at the local level. He emphasized that implementing the Agenda would require going beyond the State to involve all stakeholders.

During the ensuing question and answer session, the panellists addressed questions about whether and how the SDGs were feeding into the annual budget cycle and outreach efforts to specific stakeholders, such as indigenous peoples and local communities. Responding to a question about the composition of Botswana’s National Steering Committee, the representative explained that this multi-sectoral body had representatives from the United Nations, government, civil society, and the private sector. The Secretary General’s Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines were referred to as a basis for their VNR preparations; some countries, while welcoming the Guidelines, also expressed the need to adjust the format based on each country’s circumstances and reporting approach.

Moderated discussions

The first of two moderated discussions shared experiences and lessons learned with respect to two topics: (a) creating awareness and stakeholder engagement, and (b) data collection, monitoring and follow-up at the national level. The following were among the points raised:

- Participants provided examples of outreach efforts, including branding on consumer products, public art works, training modules prepared by local think tanks, promoting research on the SDGs, getting football players and other public figures to spread the message, and creating programmes in schools to promote the SDGs. One participant gave the example of a national day to promote sustainable consumption and production (SCP). It was mentioned that more effort was needed to reach a broader audience, including through more effective use of social media.
- As regards stakeholder involvement, a participant gave the example of the Alliance for Sustainable Development, which brought together stakeholders from academia, trade unions, environmental organizations, etc. Another participant noted the

importance of building trust over time between government and civil society, with one promising avenue being the involvement of CSOs in the development planning process. The usefulness of having a community within the legislative branch that focuses on SDGs was highlighted, for instance by establishing a special committee on the SDGs, in order to promote a legislative agenda related to the SDGs.

- It was mentioned that data collection and use of data have been identified as a challenge over period of time, which underlined a pressing need for statistical capacity development. Participants also discussed the issue of baselines, with several stating that 2015 had been selected as the baseline year for measurement. There was also a discussion of the indicators, both global and national.

During the second moderated discussion participants shared experiences and lessons learned with respect to: (a) coordination mechanisms, main messages and priorities, and format and content of the report. The following were among the points raised:

- The importance of having public servants adopt the agenda was noted, with one participant stating that in his country roundtables had been established for 16 SDGs. Another participant also highlighted the importance of ownership of the agenda by public servants, which would also facilitate information flow between ministries. It was noted that real action on the Agenda would require changes in the pre-existing frameworks, especially with respect to human rights, gender equality, and the inclusion of indigenous peoples.

DAY 2

On the second day of the workshop participants worked in two groups to discuss three topics. The groups were newly constituted for each topic. Rapporteurs reported the main points of the group discussion back to the plenary.

Topic 1: Involving different levels of government and stakeholders

The following were some of the points emerging from the discussions on the above topic:

- The challenge of involving parliamentarians was discussed, with participants sharing a number of approaches. Some countries planned to submit their report or a summary of the VNR process to a particular parliamentary committee; in one country the VNR team had engaged in “sensitization” meetings with parliamentarians; and in another, while there was a willingness to engage, it was judged that the risk of politicization was too high.
- At the vertical level, countries mentioned the appointment of focal points in various government departments and agencies. Examples were also given of a multi-stakeholder steering committee (Botswana) and an inter-ministerial committee that drew on inputs from county (sub-national) governments (Kenya), and a national council on sustainable development that brought together the relevant ministries (Iran).
- Some mentioned the issue of the central government not sufficiently involving local governments. While it depended on the particular constitutional system, it was mentioned that in some countries states or provinces had more direct relationship with local government.
- As regards stakeholders, a question was whether engagement ought in the first place to be focused on the VNR preparation, or whether it should be guided by an orientation towards long-term implementation of the Agenda. An approach to engage the public through on line and off line consultation processes was discussed. The importance of reaching out to the youth was also highlighted by a number of participants. In this regard, reference was made to the letter from the President of the General Assembly, in which he called on Member States to incorporate the Agenda and the SDGs into school curricula; Peru mentioned that this was underway, as was the case in Azerbaijan (with the assistance of UNICEF), where expansion to universities was planned for 2018. Various initiatives to involve youth were mentioned, for

instance Luxembourg planned to hold a competition, with the first prize being a trip to New York for the HLPF.

- Participants also discussed means of garnering greater media interest in the Agenda and the SDGs. One participant mentioned that while the mainstream media in her country was apathetic, a prominent business paper had picked up the issue, addressing the implications for trade and the environment. Other ideas that were shared were the holding of events, with the participation of a political figure, allying with the SDG Action Campaign, and regularly issuing press releases.
- Several participants stated that they intended to include stakeholder representatives in their delegations to the HLPF, while a few stated that they were considering giving stakeholders time to speak as part of their national VNR presentations.

Topic 2: SDGs in national plans and strategies

The following were some of the points emerging from the discussions on the above topic:

- It was noted that each country had its own mechanisms for monitoring, review and follow-up; where necessary modifications ought to be made in order to ensure that the SDGs were implemented. Some countries have also established or are in the process to establish a dedicated SDG Secretariat to facilitate implementation in a coherent and coordinated manner.
- The view was expressed that the highest levels of government should be involved in driving SDG implementation, as well as in oversight of monitoring and follow-up. The direct involvement of the prime minister or president, for instance in chairing the body overseeing SDG implementation, was given as an example of a good practice. At the same time, the view was expressed that high-level attention ought to be matched with a bottom-up approach. An inclusive and participatory approach which is open to multistakeholders involvement, including CSO, the private sector, and academic circle, is deemed crucial for an effective SDG implementation strategy.
- Effective alignment of national development strategies with global goals, targets and indicators is key. In some countries national roadmaps, plans and strategies had been updated to integrate the SDGs. This concerned short-term action plans, medium-term strategies, and the long-term visions. The Agenda and the SDGs were also being integrated into sectoral plans. The importance of identifying gaps and challenges was highlighted, as well as ensuring that the international review process promotes international partnership to address the gaps and challenges, based on the relevant countries' actual needs and priorities.
- It was noted that in some cases full implementation of the Agenda would require legislative changes, and in this context one participant referred to Goal 5, on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It was pointed out that, in considering various planning instruments and frameworks, the influence of politics ought not to be forgotten, as it was political considerations that ultimately determined the level of ambition of targets, as well as the means to achieve them. Related to this, there was a discussion in one of the groups about political cycles, and how it is necessary to ensure consistent progress towards achieving SDGs regardless of changing political cycles. To foster continuity, some participants underlined the important role of public service in devising national development plans to go beyond political cycles, while one participant stated that in her country an attempt had been made to consult with the political opposition in the process of development of the national plan.
- The importance of aligning budgets with the SDGs was discussed, with one country (Mexico) outlining a methodology in this regard.
- The importance for the SDGs of a conducive international environment was emphasized, including the role of international cooperation and partnerships.

Topic 3: Preparation of report and presentation at the HLPF

The following were some of the points emerging from the discussions on the above topic:

- The view was expressed that there was a need for predictability about the presentation slots, in order to secure the participation of ministers. Many participants had indicated in the small group discussions that preliminary indications were that presentations would be at the ministerial level, in some cases with two ministers sharing a country's time slot.
- In addition to the two basic presentation formats in 2016 – presentations by a “panel” of three to four countries, followed by Q&A, and consecutive presentations, each followed by a Q&A – the possibility of a third, “thematic” format was discussed. In part, such an option would entail a group of countries addressing common theme(s), in place of each country making its own national presentation. It was suggested that such themes could be extracted from the VNR reports. Speaking in favour of a panel format, one participant stated that this created a setting for ministers – from countries from different regions and with differing levels of development - to listen to each other and engage with one another.
- It was stated that it was useful to have a discussion about possible formats for the presentation at an early stage. The importance of flexibility in determining the format and organization of presentations was underlined.
- The usefulness of the Secretary-General's voluntary guidelines was generally affirmed, as they promoted consistency and could be adapted to fit national circumstances. A number of countries stated that they intended to include statistical annexes with their reports, as foreseen in the guidelines.
- Reference was made to the Main Messages, which are due to be submitted by 19 May. One participant asked about the purpose and benefit of this document. Another participant stated that her government intended to set out some of the challenging issues to be covered in the full report, for instance addressing cross-cutting issues. It was also noted that the main messages were a means of communicating headline findings from the VNR process to other Member State and stakeholders, well in advance of the HLPF.
- There was a general commitment to prepare the VNR through a participatory and inclusive process, with multi-stakeholders engagement.

Way forward and closing

In his closing Mr. Jong-Soo Yoon, Director, UNOSD, thanked the participants for their active engagement and wished them well on their homeward journeys. In her closing remarks, Ms. Irena Zubcevic underlined that the Secretariat was available to assist countries in the period leading up to the HLPF. She also reminded participants that regional VNR workshops would be taking place, organized in conjunction with UN regional commissions. She encouraged VNR countries to register voluntary commitments in advance of the HLPF. The President of ECOSOC, H.E. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, delivered a closing statement. He encouraged countries to adopt an inclusive approach in the preparation of the VNRs, as well as at the HLPF, and he invited them to consider including stakeholders, whether from parliament, civil society or the businesses sector. Reflecting on the meeting, he stated that it reinforced and demonstrated the universality of the agenda. The participants represented a wide diversity of countries, developed and developing, and government systems, yet all were united in their will to implement the 2030 agenda for the benefit of their people. He called on all the participants to continue the good work and to carry the baton forward to the regional workshops and, in July, to the HLPF.

Feedback from the workshop evaluations:

Several evaluations stated that:

- (a) Use smaller groups, to allow greater degree of more focussed discussion. These smaller groups are forums where participants can share their experience in a more interactive manner.

(b) Sharpen the focus on the VNR reporting process, rather than on SDG implementation more generally. Stick closely to the VNRs, voluntary guidelines, and HLPF presentation.

Other points made:

- Group discussions were seen as a bit lengthy and report backs too long. Greater effort needed to avoid repetition.
- Group selection could benefit from putting together countries with comparable situations (e.g., economic development level). (Facing comparable challenges) (e.g., stakeholder engagement, tackling difficult SDGs, etc.)
- Workshop clearly achieved the objective of sharing information on VNR progresses and challenges. However, no mention of availability of UN-system (technical, financial, technological) support to SDGs implementation and follow up and review exercises.

PROGRAMME

Workshop for the 2017 Voluntary National Reviews at the High-Level Political Forum 2-3 March 2017, Holiday Inn, Incheon, Republic of Korea

Thursday, 2 March 2017

8:30 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 9:10	Welcome by the Division for Sustainable Development, UN-DESA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr. Jong-Soo Yoon, Director UN Office for Sustainable Development - Ms. Irena Zubcevic, Chief, SIDS, Oceans and Climate Branch
9:10 – 9:20	Opening remarks H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of the UN Economic and Social Council
9:20 – 9:45	Aims and objectives of the workshop Chair: H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava Mr. Friedrich Soltau, Sustainable Development Officer, DSD/DESA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Key messages from Synthesis Report, points from the pre-workshop questionnaire, and Secretary-General’s voluntary guidelines
9:45 – 10:45	Introductions (tour de table) Chair: H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short introductions
10:45 – 11:00	Coffee/Tea
11:00 – 12:00	Status of preparations Mini-presentation A: Main area(s) of progress and challenge(s) encountered: Bangladesh, Honduras, Ethiopia, Denmark (5 minutes each) Q&A Moderator Mr. Huseyn Huseynov, Head of Secretariat, National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan
12:00 – 13:00	Status of preparations (cont.) Mini-presentation B: Main area(s) of progress and challenge(s) encountered: Nepal, Belgium, Botswana, Costa Rica, Argentina (5 minutes each) Q&A Moderator: Ms. Maninder Kaur Dwivedi, Adviser, NITI Aayog, Government of India
13:00 – 14:30	Lunch (2nd Floor)
14:30 – 15:30	Moderated discussion: topics as identified in questionnaires

Moderator: Mr. Jeroen Verheul, Ambassador at Large for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, The Netherlands

Sharing experiences and lessons learned about:

- Creating awareness and stakeholder engagement
- Data collection, monitoring and follow-up at the national level

15:30 – 15:45 **Coffee/Tea**

15:45 – 17:15 **Moderated discussion: topics as identified in questionnaires**

Moderator: Mr. Vinicius Trindade, Division for Sustainable Development Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Brazil

Sharing experiences and lessons learned about:

- Coordination mechanisms
- Main messages and priorities
- Format and content of the report

18:00 – 19:00 **Dinner Reception (2nd Floor)**

Friday, 3 March 2017

Work in small break-out groups

9:00 – 9:10 – **Arrangement into two break-out groups**

- Participants work in two groups for each topic

9:10 – 10:30 – **Small group discussions**

Topic 1: *Involving different levels of government and stakeholders* (two groups)

- How are different levels of government involved in the VNR preparation? What kinds of coordination mechanisms are being used?

Rapporteur Group A: Mr. Glauco Seoane, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Peru to the United Nations

Rapporteur Group B: Mr. Ikanremi Bolaji, Minister Plenipotentiary, Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations

10:30 – 10:45 **Coffee/Tea**

10:45 – 11:30 **Reporting back and discussion in plenary**

Moderator: Mr. Jimmy Skenderovic, Adviser, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Luxembourg

Q&A

11:30 – 13:00 - **Small group discussions**

Topic 2: *SDGs in national plans and strategies* (two groups)

ANNEX 1

- How are the SDGs being integrated into national plans and strategies? What kind of monitoring and follow-up mechanisms are in place?

Rapporteur Group A: Mr. Abdul Halim Abdul Aziz, Deputy Director of Distribution Section, Economic Planning Unit, Malaysia

Rapporteur Group B: Ms. Gloria Cid, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Chile to the United Nations

13:00 – 14:00 **Lunch**

14:00 – 14:45 - **Reporting back and discussion in plenary**

Moderator: Mr. Hari Prabowo, Deputy Director for Sustainable Development and Climate Change Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia

Q&A

14:45 – 16:00 **Small group discussions**

Topic 3: *Preparation of report and presentation at HLPF (two groups)*

- What are the key steps in the writing, review and approval process of the national report? Role of the Secretary-General's common voluntary reporting guidelines? What is the level of the presenters at the HLPF?

Rapporteur Group A: Ms. Thanavon Pamaranon, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Thailand to the United Nations

Rapporteur Group B: Ms. Andreja Slomsek, Agenda 2030 National Coordinator, Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia

16:00 – 16:15 **Coffee/Tea**

16:15 – 17:00 - **Reporting back and discussion in plenary**

Moderator: Ms. Sarah Muui, Deputy Head, SDGs Secretariat, Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Kenya

Q&A

Way forward and closing

17:00 – 17:30 **Summary of main points**

Mr. Friedrich Soltau, Sustainable Development Officer, DSD/DESA

Closing remarks

- Mr. Jong-Soo Yoon, Director UN Office for Sustainable Development
- Ms. Irena Zubcevic, Chief, SIDS, Oceans and climate branch
- H.E. Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of the UN Economic and Social Council