VNR LABS
HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

VNR Lab 2: Making progress visible - SDG data visualization platforms

Wednesday 10 July 2019, 8:00 – 9:00 am, S-1522

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs represent an unprecedented leap forward in the fight against poverty and inequalities, as well as in the struggle for environmental sustainability. The SDGs embody a universal, inclusive and transformative vision of development, which calls upon all Member States to ensure a life of dignity for all.

The 2030 Agenda encourages member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven. Since the adoption of the Agenda, Voluntary National Reviews, better known as VNR reports, have become the basis for annual reviews by the HLPF in July. The VNR reports have facilitated the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned. The reports have helped to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Only four years since the adoption of the Agenda, VNR reporting has become a key element in reviewing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level. At the end of the July 2019 HLPF, it is expected that no fewer than 142 countries have conducted voluntary national reviews, some more than once, for a total of 158 VNR reports. As of June 2019, thirty additional countries have already announced their intention to submit a VNR report to the July 2020 HLPF.

All VNR reports are recorded in the online VNR Database, together with related materials of interest to policy makers, such as the annual Handbook for the preparation of the VNRs, in all official languages, reports of preparatory workshops, and Q and As on the process.

Thus, over time, as the number of VNR reports is growing towards the year 2030 a growing knowledge base of national experiences on the 2030 Agenda is developing. There is thus a need for policymakers to be able to dig deeper in the growing knowledge base as they develop their first, second or perhaps even third VNR report in the period leading up to 2030.

To this end, the online VNR database has a basic search function, allowing the user to search by keywords and by year of the presentation. However, the arrival of new search technologies, including through artificial intelligence and computer learning by computer, offers a new opportunity to develop smarter search tools.

To this end, UNDP and DESA have collaborated in the development of SDG Reports, a new online platform with dual functions. The platform is available at sdgreports.org. First, it aims to using natural language processing, or machine learning, to get a more natural search environment for the user to find sections of the VNRs that are relevant to the various SDGs. Additionally, the tool will enable comparisons between reports from the same country over time. The tool also aims to help in the analysis of the interconnectedness of specific SDGs through visualization of their frequencies in these

documents. It also aims to allow comparisons between countries and regions. The tool will be introduced at the formal HLPF session on measuring progress on Monday 15 July at 3 pm.

Secondly, the tool aims to visualize and score or rank the SDGs mentioned in each of the VNRs and the SDGRs, and showing linkages made in the VNR reports between different SDGs. For example, a reference in a VNR report such as this: *"investment in education for girls will contribute to better health and gender equality outcomes"* would eventually be generated by search queries on either SDGs 3, 4 and 5.

In addition to measuring progress on the basis of *VNR reporting*, there has also been much work done on the collection of SDG outcomes on the basis of SDG *data reporting*. A major example is the SDG Indicators Global Database.

The platform provides access to data compiled through the United Nations systems of organizations. It features downloadable data series on each of the SDGs at the target and indicator level, allows searches for indicators, and creates data tables with data series, geographic areas, and specific years. The platform is not a visualization tool.

As data collection becomes more widespread and sophisticated, more options become available for searching and reporting progress. Apart from visualization and machine learning search tools, geospatial data also offer ways for evidence-based analysis. The new Open SDG Data Hub provides a platform to further explore these SDG data sources.

Objective of the event

The event will bring together delegations from member States attending the HLPF who are engaged in the VNR reporting process and in developing their own national statistical capacity to track SDG progress, as well as practitioners from DESA, UNDP and other UN agencies involved in data collection and knowledge building. In line with the informal nature of the VNR Labs and Chatham House rules that form the basis for VNR labs, this event will take form of informal discussions to maximize learning from participants' own experiences. No registration is required; attendees are expected to have a valid UN or HLPF pass.

List of speakers

- ***Mr Paul Cronjaeger,*** Programme Analyst, SDG Integration Team, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP
- ***Mr Luis Gonzalez Morales***, Chief, Web Development and Data Visualization Section, Statistics Division, DESA
- ***Mr Joop Theunissen***, Deputy Chief, Intergovernmental Policy and Review Branch, Office for Intergovernmental Support and Coordination, DESA

More information

Additional information about this VNR Lab can be made available by writing to ruth.checknoff@un.org or theunissen@un.org

Links used in this note

- VNR Database - sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/
- VNR Visualization and Search Platform - sdgreports.org
- SDG Indicators Database - unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/
- Open SDG Data Hub - unstats-undesa.opendata.arcgis.com/