

**Report of the Workshop for the 2018 Voluntary National Reviews at the high-level political forum
20-21 March, Dakar, Senegal**

Welcome

In his opening remarks, His Excellency Jerry Matjila, Vice-President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, stated that Agenda 2030 marked a bold and transformative step to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path, while leaving no one behind. In implementing the Agenda, countries were integrating their policies, coordinating among ministries and institutions, aligning budgets, mobilizing resources, and engaging stakeholders, state and non-state. He emphasized that while the VNRs are an important, they are not an end in themselves, but a means to accelerate implementation.

In a recorded video message, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Liu Zhenmin thanked the Government of Senegal for hosting the workshop. He stated that 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 Sustainable Development Goals. The voluntary national reviews are at the heart of this process. They had become a critical component of the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. He underlined that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) was committed to supporting the VNRs.

Ms. Ruby Sandhu-Rojon, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel stated that the Agenda underscores that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. She added that the 2030 Agenda underlines the imperative of leaving no one behind, which comes to be described as one of the backbone principles of the Agenda. When no one is left behind, then indeed the development delivers benefits for all. At issue was addressing the root causes of conflict and instability. She emphasized that this could not be done without addressing two key points. First, emphasizing on the critical role of women in peace and development. Second, stakeholder engagement and involvement is a strong feature of the 2030 Agenda – at its very genesis and in its implementation.

His Excellency Birima Mangara, Minister Delegate for the Budget, Ministry of Finance and Planning of Senegal welcomed the participants on behalf of the host Government. He underlined that eradicating poverty, ending inequalities, ensuring prosperity and protecting the planet depend on the effective and inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He explained that the Plan for an Emerging Senegal (PSE), is the new policy framework that targets to put Senegal on the road to becoming an emerging economy by 2035. PSE has adopted a collaborative framework under the leadership of the President to integrate and implement the 2030 Agenda in tandem with the principles of the Agenda 2063. Mr. Mangara stated that Senegal is working on creating and attracting the necessary investments towards this objective. Challenges include data disaggregation and monitoring of policies. An ad hoc committee has been established to prepare for the VNR. It is a technical committee formed by representatives of line ministries.

Opening panel: Importance of VNRs for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

Mr. Mayacine Camara, Director in the Ministry of Finance and Planning and VNR coordinator, stressed that Emerging Senegal” plan is a benchmark of Senegal’s national efforts in implementing the 2030 Agenda. He pointed out that Senegal was among the pilot countries of internalizing SDGs. He said the government is developing policy papers in this regard which, if fully implemented, will help the country realize 75% of the SDGs. He highlighted the technical and financial difficulties in data collection at disaggregated level, and the challenge to finance systematic data collection for proper monitoring.

Ms. Priya Gajraj, United Nations Resident Coordinator, stated that integration of SDGs into national development plans and the acceleration of their implementation necessitates the empowerment of women and youth. It also requires taking a LNOB approach to implementation. In so doing, all financing tools must be considered and data gaps and disaggregation needs must be addressed. She underlined that national ownership and leadership are key to advancing SDG implementation as are partnership and respect for country specificities.

Ms. Fatima Denton, Director, African Climate Policy Centre (Special Initiatives Division), Economic Commission for Africa, stated that the VNRs are the start of a process to understand what the challenges are and incubators of new ideas and solutions to common challenges faced by Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. They test our readiness and spark a long-term process of progress and development. They open the space for inclusive processes to LNOB which necessitate a focus on the frontline actors on the ground who must confront the challenges heads-on and respond to them using their comparative advantages. She underlined that although VNRs are national, sharing experience and lessons learned at the regional level is crucial in identifying and solving development challenges that might require regional solutions.

Ms. Irena Zubcevic, Chief, Oceans and Climate Branch, Division for Sustainable Development, DESA, stated that interlinkages, tradeoffs and synergies among different SDG targets and indicators are central to effective SDG implementation. She underlined that VNRs are not about a national governmental process only. Local and state governments including parliaments are integral actors of VNRs and SDG implementation. VNRs are useful platforms for mobilizing political will. Once a country has presented at the HLPF, it must continue with the same resolve in SDG implementation.

After the formal opening, the workshop proceeded with short panels on three topics.

Status of preparations – institutions and policy coherence

It was underlined that VNRs are not an end in themselves but a means to maintaining momentum towards inclusive SDG implementation. Colombia, a second time VNR presenter, will be holding elections in July when 2018 HLPF convenes. The representative of Colombia stressed that institutions and policy coherence not only horizontal and vertical but also overtime is critical to long-term approaches to SDG implementation that extend beyond given administrations, as well as policy coherence (horizontal and vertical), are important for SDG implementation.

It was observed that establishing separate SDG implementation institutions or ministries may not be necessary. In the case of Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Commission, equivalent of a Ministry of Planning in some countries, serves as the central agency for SDG implementation. The representative of Bhutan explained that the GNH Commission comprises representatives from all ministries under the

leadership of the Prime Minister. It has its own secretariat, in addition to the secretariat of the Finance Ministry. Bhutan's holistic philosophy of national happiness in effect since the 1970s is aligned with the principles of the SDGs and promotes policy coherence and facilitates alignment of actions and budget with SDGs. Policy screening tools and mapping played a role in this regard. For instance, policy screening used a number of variables to assess public policies in terms of their effectiveness in addressing the SDGs via a scoring system. The mapping exercise is significant in terms of determining who oversees which SDG targets and linkages, and who the lead and supporting agencies are in implementation and monitoring. This mapping and assignment is flexible, so that different agencies and institutions can join if issues fall within their scope of responsibilities. Line ministries' ownership of SDG implementation however remains a challenge together with the costing and identification of funding for the SDGs. Statistics is another critical challenge.

With respect to the institutional dimension, the GHC established a VNR taskforce composed of ministries and agencies in charge of the SDGs under review in HLPF2018. It also includes representatives of the national statistical office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It does not include civil society or private sector, but the taskforce has undertaken consultations with these stakeholders.

The representative of Senegal reflected on some of the challenges vis-à-vis SDG implementation in the initial stages of implementation. Ownership on the part of government agencies had proved to be a challenge. At present, financing was a major issue. Domestic resource mobilization accompanied by foreign direct investment and official development assistance were significant financing sources. A third challenge concerned data. In this regard, there is a need for building national statistical capacity.

The representative of Bahamas stated that her country's whole-of-government approach to VNR preparations started with the establishment in 2014 of a steering committee, headed by the Prime Minister. The committee was constituted by government and the opposition as well as civil society. A diagnostic phase based on data was followed by gap analysis to understand the national and local issues regarding economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. First, focus was on priorities and most achievable SDGs. With time, a holistic approach on all SDGs was found to be most propitious. Next to each SDG target, strategies of implementation were outlined. Ministries' ownership, accountability and mobilization of institutions and leadership at the highest level were stressed as was the empowerment of the bureaucracy to ensure a sustainable implementation process beyond political cycles. Awareness-raising and communication campaigns were carried out.

In Bahamas, it had been decided that while consultants could contribute expertise in selected areas, the members of the government VNR team would hold the pen. The representative stated that the ongoing process of data strengthening in the process of SDG implementation has adopted a center-of-government approach. It involves, not just the strengthening of the national statistical system, but the effective use of data throughout the government as a whole.

Benin, which had presented its first VNR last year, launched the process for the 2018 VNR with a high-level meeting convened by the Ministry of Planning and Development that included the participation of all stakeholders. Having summarized the work carried out for the 2017 review, the representative of Benin went on to discuss the challenges encountered, which centered on costs and financing. Attracting the support of all and especially private sector investment is the key. He stated that Benin is currently working on a coalition of private sector actors. Other challenges included knowledge and ownership of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs by all public institutions and government officials. Public

service mobilization is important. Finally, the capacity of national statistical institutions and structures in charge of coordination, monitoring and evaluation needed to be strengthened. Turning to preparation of the 2018 VNR, he outlined related activities, including mapping the interventions of technical and financial partners and civil society on the SDGs, as well as the the costing of the priority targets. In the context of localization of the SDGs, a monitoring report on municipal actions for SDGs will be prepared, which will focus on local initiatives and good practices, based on the contributions of all local actors, including civil society.

Status of preparations – national prioritization and mainstreaming SDGs in development plans and budgets

Opening the session, the Chair stated that Mexico has a National Strategy for Agenda 2030, and a national federal planning law for the next 20 years to ensure that it survives subsequent administrations. He noted that all major political parties have Agenda 2030 as part of their political platform. The National Statistical Institute is supporting SDG monitoring and all ministries are involved in SDG. Through a dissemination campaign Mexico is bringing all sectors of the society as participants in the implementation of the Agenda. Key challenges are: making a state versus a government commitment to the Agenda; and socializing the agenda so that all parts of society are responsible for its implementation.

The representative of Jamaica stated that her country's national development plan, Vision 2030, which was adopted in 2009 and provides strategic roadmap, is 90% aligned with the SDGs. Moreover, institutional mechanisms have been put in place, from the Cabinet level down, including the Planning Institute of Jamaica, which facilitates the localization of the SDGs through the medium-term framework (which is reviewed every three years). The national statistical institute is ensuring that the framework for monitoring and evaluation is in place. This core group of institutions in charge of the SDGs implementation reports to the national oversight committee, consisting of the ministers involved, and headed by the auditor general, who is ex officio. In turn, the national oversight committee reports to the Cabinet. The core group's role is that of coordinator, promoting inclusive participation, advocacy, as well as risk assessment and adaptability of SDGs. Jamaica has also undertaken a regional approach in SDG implementation (Caribbean Action 2030 Forum). With respect to means of implementation, she mentioned the impact of external shocks (for example, hurricanes), fiscal constraints (Jamaica is on a IMF fiscal austerity programme), and the importance of strengthening data systems to produce high quality statistics, including its associated costs.

The representative of the Lao PDR stated that a number of initiatives had been taken, including the establishment of a national committee. A supportive institutional framework was in place, in the form of the national secretariat in the department of planning and investment. Individual ministries had nominated their focal points. Line ministries and agencies have been given responsibilities to lead the implementation of certain SDGs. As regards the VNR report, the first draft will be shared with line ministries and other stakeholders. Areas that have been prioritized are poverty eradication, good governance, promotion of health and gender, and sustainable management of natural resources. Among the challenges encountered is that while individual ministries are comfortable having their own work programme, it was proving more challenging to come up with a comprehensive review that all line ministries subscribe to, as well as ensuring responsibility for cross-cutting areas. Availability of quality of data also remained a challenge; while the national statistical office was by law the authoritative source of data, individual line ministries collected and maintained their own data and statistics.

The representative of Guinea stated that his country prepared in 2012 a prospective vision for 2012-2040. It was not difficult to integrate the AAAA, the 2063 Agenda and the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in the vision as all of these documents were finalized in 2016. Implementation for the 2030 vision is on five-year basis. The national program for social and economic development for 2016-2020, which focuses on the SDGs and the 2063 Agenda will be coordinated by the Ministry of Planning. It envisions an investment of \$20 billion for its implementation. The annual report for the implementation of the programme will be the basis for the VNR, which will be supported by a technical secretariat. Among the challenges encountered were: financial and fiscal constraints, limited technical and managerial capacities of human resources, and logistical challenges to reach all population groups in the country.

During the Q&A, points that were raised included the incorporation of the SDGs in the national development plan and budget and relevant sectoral plans and budgets; the development of SDG plans for regions within countries; the effort and resources associated with collecting disaggregated data; and the difficulty of building resilience into implementation processes. Colombia stated that while a ministry has been assigned for each target, supporting institutions that needed to work together have also been identified. With regards to funding, in addition to the regular budget controlled by the ministry of finance, it was noted that there is also an investment budget that is coordinated by the ministry of planning, which can influence how budget is allocated and ensure alignment with the SDGs. However, the alignment of the regular budget has proved more difficult to track. Mexico explained that his country had identified many state entities responsible for implementing the SDGs, e.g. the ministry of social development had taken the lead for SDG 1, but other agencies also contributed to this goal. Asked about the role and composition of its secretariat in preparing the VNR report, Guinea's representative replied that the permanent secretariat consisted of 15 members, including representatives of the private sector and civil society, which will focus on the preparation of future programmes.

Status of preparations – creating ownership: awareness-raising, outreach and communication

During this session, member states discussed efforts made to inform stakeholders about the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda as well as how different stakeholders had been engaged in the VNR preparations.

The representative of Senegal outlined the involvement of stakeholders in the VNR process. Their ad hoc committee for the SDGs, charged with coordinating the VNR report, included civil society representatives. Moreover, once a draft report was ready, stakeholders at local level would also be invited to review it and provide inputs. He highlighted the importance of leaving no one behind and mentioned that a leaving no one behind (LNOB) report was being prepared, which would be included as an attachment to the VNR report. Civil society had been tasked with preparing the LNOB report.

The representative of Egypt mentioned that they had been taking steps to enhance communication in the country. The SDG strategy vision 2030 has been developed in a participatory approach and the working groups that had been created to monitor the implementation of the strategy included civil society and parliamentarians. Furthermore, Egypt had recently launched a media campaign about the sustainable development concept in general and the SDGs in particular.

The representative of Uruguay noted that it was their second time to present a VNR report, and had, after the first VNR report, developed a communications strategy to reach out to all citizens. Uruguay had also created a website to inform all citizens about the SDG process.

During the Q&A participants mentioned the importance of ownership of the entire country and some noted that the 2030 Agenda was not only a government policy but a state policy, i.e. going beyond electoral cycles and including all actors. Some participants noted the challenge of reaching out to the rural areas. Senegal answered that they were using local radio stations to do this.

Guidance for VNRs: Updated voluntary guidelines and Handbook

This session began with a briefing by DESA on the updates to the [Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines](#) for the VNRs. The inclusion in the guidelines of a separate section on LNOB was highlighted. Approaches to the goals, such as outlining the status, trends, and new/emerging issues were mentioned, drawing on the [Synthesis of the 2017 VNRs](#). Among the possible areas where VNRs could be strengthened related to a greater emphasis on explanation and analysis, as opposed to listing of policies. It was noted that the HLPF carries out thematic review of progress on the SDGs, with sets of goals subject to in-depth review in a particular year, in accordance with resolution 70/299. While countries could opt in their VNRs to cover the same set of goals subject to in-depth review in the HLPF, there was no requirement or expectation that this would be the case. In fact, it was explained that the voluntary guidelines encouraged countries to cover all SDGs in their VNRs. It was noted that DESA had prepared a Handbook for the preparation of VNRs, which was intended as a very practical starting point for those involved in VNR preparation.

In the Q&A, it was noted that the stocktaking practice is very important for countries to set the context of the implementation progress of SDGs for the preparation of VNRs. It was also underlined that the involvement and inclusion of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) can be a resource-intensive task. Analysis and planning for stakeholders' engagement is crucial when starting VNR preparation.

Break out groups: In-depth exchange among participants on selected topics

Participants then selected one of four small-groups for more in-depth discussion on the four topics below. Two sets of small-group discussions were held, with the same topic, so that each participant could participate in the discussions on two topics.

1. *Addressing the principle of "Leaving no one behind"*

The participants explored the understanding of LNOB principle. A starting point to address the LNOB principle is to determine what are the dimensions of poverty and exclusion within each country beyond income e.g. age, geographical location, gender, etc. It was widely associated with equitable resource allocation, with a focus on inequalities. One country stated that the principle implied bringing the excluded populations into decision-making across all phases of policy-making--formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Among the points raised in the discussion were:

- Mapping vulnerable groups of all kinds both at the national and local level is a critical step. There is then a need to identify how to address the causes of exclusion at the policy level. Some countries found it useful to explore the LNOB question by focusing on a specific group or region or on a combination of the two - e.g. women in rural areas, indigenous people living in remote areas – to identify their specific challenges and identify possible solutions to reach them.

- A starting point should be to analyze how existing policies and legislation contribute to address or exacerbate the exclusion of specific groups. Institutional and administrative reform and public policy are needed to reach the furthest behind.
- Social protection and social inclusion and consultation frameworks and processes were stressed. Role of local collectivities and civil society were underlined. Social inclusion policies are paramount. Access to financing including microfinance are instrumental.
- Policy and programme formulation concerning vulnerable groups should not only be evidence-based but also informed by a clear understanding of the conditions, perceptions and needs of those group. Communication and consultations with vulnerable groups is essential to understand how they perceive themselves within the system they live in to be able to address their real needs.
- One country explained that policies should be informed by a human rights perspective. Equal rights for everybody is not only about income, but also about living with dignity, get the same level of respect, having the same access.
- Natural catastrophes, extreme weather events and environmental hazards and the linkage to LNOB should be underscored. Financing and research and development are also important in this regard.
- VNR reports should start from stocktaking and then take more time to describe and reflect in the policy section how to address the problem.

2. *Statistical annex and data use*

Monitoring the SDGs require a large amount of data. Many of indicators are in areas where data has never been collected before, and at a highly disaggregated level. The 2030 Agenda requires that data are collected by national statistical systems, and this presents various challenges to countries monitoring the SDGs, particularly in resource constrained environments. Discussions revealed some of the best practices:

- Countries developed national SDG indicators based on their existing data collection systems or used indicators that are already being used to monitor various national development strategies (which are aligned with the SDGs). This ensured that while guided by the global indicator set, the national SDG indicators reflected national priorities, with existing systems.
- Once the national indicator set was developed, countries conducted an analysis to check where data gaps remain and where investments need to be made to collect additional data. This provided a systematic plan of action that formed the basis for strengthening statistical activity. Senegal, for example, conducted a thorough assessment on data gaps for each of the indicators and created a plan, with specific costs, to address the gaps. Uruguay adopted a similar approach.
- It is important for national statistical offices (NSOs) to play a strong coordinating role. This was important because data came from various agencies in different format and having a coordinating body that ensured consistency was important. NSOs as data focal points also ensured that data were accurate, comparable and reliable. NSOs brought all data stakeholders together, and they also seemed to advocate for the role of data and statistics in the wider policy discussions.
- Countries highlighted some of their experiences of sharing knowledge on data and statistics to learn from each other. This seemed to have benefitted everyone involved.

- Presenting data for VNR could include approaches to present data to really strengthen the messages in the report, for example using graphs/charts/dashboards. Countries discussed including additional data in the statistical annex as a reference and presenting only pertinent information in the narrative of the report.

3. Stakeholder engagement – practical tools

During the discussions in small groups, countries shared experiences on how they had engaged with stakeholders in the VNR process so far, showing different levels of institutionalization.

- Some were building on mechanisms established for previous processes such as drafting the national development plan, some had strong civil society engagement from the start of the post-2015 negotiations, while others were starting to reach out to stakeholders for the VNR process, for instance establishing consultative committees. One country was not planning to engage stakeholders while another noted that the capacity of civil society organizations was quite low and needed capacity building on the SDGs.
- The challenge of engaging the private sector was mentioned by a couple of countries. Another challenge discussed among participants was how to involve communities and reach the rural areas or other islands. One country mentioned that its civil society was on the ground and had a direct connection with communities, thus the government relied on them to provide information. Jamaica also had a communication strategy for the VNR. Countries agreed that a communication strategy was crucial.
- During the discussion countries also discussed having a civil society member as part of their official delegations.

4. Means of implementation

The group discussions focused on four themes related to the SDG 17: (i) Financing of development, (ii) Technology, (iii) SDG integration and capacity development, and (iv) Partnership building including the bringing in of the private sector. Some points raised during the discussion include the following:

- Integrating the SDGs into national development plans is key to successful implementation in order to achieve policy coherence and to evaluate tradeoffs.
- Monitoring and Evaluation tools and Modelling are important. Examples are Rapid Integration Assessment (RIA), which allows gap identification and SDG integration in national and sub-national development plans; and the Development Financing Assessment. The view was expressed that modelling tools are still in their infancy. There is a need for more knowledge-sharing on modelling. Different tools can create different results. There must be consistency in the usage and the tools chosen must be appropriate for the specific needs and objectives of any given country.
- Some instruments allow for evaluation and integration simultaneously. Others are more targeted. New and specific tools about SDG integration might be useful. These tools and instruments are often in English. Organisation of Francophonie and the University of Quebec as well as UNITAR have useful tools in French. More tools in French should be created.
- There are emerging and new sources of financing, including South-South cooperation, which should be explored. Internal mobilization of resources is as important as external financing. Political will is as important as resource mobilization.

- Strategies for adopting and upgrading technology must be devised and knowledge about them must be spread. It was noted that the United Nations had recently launched the Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries.
- There is a need to create an enabling environment for investment and growth. The limited fiscal space in some countries, as well as lack of access to markets, including as a result of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) was also raised. The need for local value-addition and beneficiation was discussed, as was the potential of regional markets for promoting trade. One country noted that while there was potential for trade through integration into the 600-million-person ASEAN market, local small and medium enterprises (SMEs) were not yet well-positioned to compete with neighbouring countries.
- There was more potential for partnerships to contribute to implementation.

Presentation at the HLPF

During this session, participants discussed practical arrangements for the VNR presentation at the HLPF after receiving a presentation by the secretariat on the topic. Several countries commented on the short time available for presentations. The vice-president of ECOSOC emphasized that the 15 minutes should be seen as a taste of what is going on. It was therefore important to package the main messages well. The VNR process is a longer one, which does not end with the VNR presentation. On the question from Sri Lanka to have guidelines for the VNR presentations in order to provide more uniformity, the secretariat responded that it is up to each country to choose the best way for presenting. One could look at previous presentations to see what had worked so far. Guinea mentioned that they were planning to organize a side event for a more detailed presentation of their messages.

Participants were informed that the application for side events was open and that there were [new guidelines](#) on the HLPF webpage.

Open discussion on lessons learnt and identified best practices from the breakout groups, including format and structure of the VNR report

During the discussions countries touched on issues arising from the small-group discussions, including which goals could be covered in the VNRs, as well as stakeholder engagement in the process.

Closing

In his closing remarks, the H.E. Jerry Matjila, Vice-President of ECOSOC, observed that the discussions at the workshop had been highly interactive and informative, and he commended the participating countries for sharing their experiences so openly. He underlined a number of points from the discussions, including that integrating SDGs into national development plans is critical to driving successful implementation; the importance of stakeholder engagement, and how implementation of leaving no one behind can help to guide more inclusive and equitable development. Ms. Irena Zubcevic, DSD/DESA, congratulated the participants on their active engagement at the workshop and thanked the Government of Senegal for its hospitality.