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VNR LABS
HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

2021 High Level Political Forum - VNR Lab

HOW DO INCLUSIVE VNRs HELP ACCELERATE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA? EXPERIENCES FROM THE REGIONS

FRIDAY, 9 JULY, 8:00 - 9:00 am

SUMMARY OF KEY MESSAGES

The Regional Commissions and the Regional Commissions Office in New York organized a Voluntary National Review Lab (VNR Lab) for the third consecutive year to exchange lessons emanated from the VNR processes in the regions. The theme chosen was “How do inclusive VNRs help accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda? Experience from regions”.

The discussion focused on the importance of inclusive VNR processes to ensure broad ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development plans and the realization of the principle of leaving no one behind. Participants, who included representatives of VNR countries (first, second and third timers) including governments, private sector and civil society, shared experiences from the regions on how inclusiveness helped deliver better results and could contribute to keep the momentum beyond the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). Regional perspectives on innovative approaches to respond to restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic were also discussed.

How to ensure that VNR processes are inclusive and national SDG plans are broadly owned? Innovative approaches emerging in the regions.

- A VNR country developed a **comprehensive repository of stakeholders** (private sector, civil society, faith-based institutions, communities, academia, development partners, and the general public). Representatives were grouped into **5 categories mirroring the 5 “Ps”**: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnerships and virtual engagements were organized feeding into the VNR report.
- A representative of civil society recommended **targeted outreach and engagement with the youth and grassroots actors** as these are valuable assets to support advocacy and disseminate information and data.
- Representatives of VNR countries including civil society referred to the importance of **whole of society approaches** and the importance of considering the VNR as a country report, rather than a government report, and of embedding the sense of ownership and partnership in each SDG.
- One representative of civil society noted the importance of ensuring **continuous engagement throughout the VNR process and beyond**, from early awareness-raising and planning, to policymaking, implementation and monitoring of commitments.

- In contexts of shrinking space for civil society, **shadow reports** emerged as critical tools to capture civil society and other stakeholder voices that merited enhanced integration in the HLPF.
- The engagement of **local authorities** was recognized by several participants as an increasingly effective tool to enhance ownership and impact of SDG plans.
- A representative of civil society highlighted the experience of including non-governmental organizations and the private sector as full members of the National SDGs Committee tasked with the preparation of the VNR report which allowed for enhanced ownership and accountability.
- The creation of **online engagement platforms** to allow all stakeholders to submit contributions to the VNR report and, more generally, on SDG implementation was highlighted as an inclusive practice in countries with easy access to internet.
- The potential of **media engagement** was also highlighted. The nomination of media anchors as SDGs Ambassadors proved to be an effective way of reaching remote populations in one of the VNR countries.

What is the impact and benefits of inclusive VNRs?

- All government representatives of VNR countries reaffirmed that inclusive processes had contributed to the **realization of the principle of leaving no one behind** and the generation of a **wealth of information and data** that would prove useful in **informing medium- and long-term development strategies**.
- Further, representatives of VNR countries also noted that consultative platforms established for the preparation of the report were subsequently used to devise national communication and advocacy strategies on the SDGs. The consultative platforms paved the way for **partnerships between government agencies and civil society organizations**.
- All speakers representing VNR countries including civil society noted that inclusive participation in the VNR process was important to increase knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, to **empower citizens** and instill the notion that **everybody is part of the solution**.
- Civil society representatives also noted that direct participation in the VNR processes had contributed to a better **alignment of efforts** and **cross-fertilization of experiences**, including the possibility for civil society representatives to participate in capacity building opportunities awarded to VNR drafting teams.

The VNR Lab concluded with the reaffirmation of the positive impact of inclusiveness in the VNR process, not only to understand where the gaps and challenges are, but also to maintain and even increase the level of ambition of governments and societies to ensure broader impact of SDGs and recovery plans. The VNR Lab also concluded by noting the importance of regional cooperation including exchanges of good practices. All participants shared the sense of urgency and the need to inject dynamism to the Decade of Action by ensuring inclusive and broad participation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels going forward.

For programme and further background see: <http://www.regionalcommissions.org/2021vnr/>