

VNR DESIGN FOR POST-VNR IMPLEMENTATION AND SUBSEQUENT REPORTING

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WHAT IS IT?

During the VNR, countries take stock of progress and shortcomings in SDG implementation (goals and targets), assess synergies achieved between different SDGs, and consider potential and actual trade-offs.

After the VNR, follow-up and implementation are critical. Governments and all stakeholders need to act upon the lessons learnt, good practices and policy recommendations identified during the review.

The VNR process needs to be designed in a way that facilitates:

- Systematic identification of lessons learnt,
- Good practices, and
- Policy recommendations.

Institutionalizing reporting structures helps ensure smooth coordination of the review process, meaningful engagement of non-state actors, sustains the momentum created by the VNR and supports post-VNR implementation on SDG 16 and the other Goals.

While aspects of SDG 16 may be politically sensitive, countries should assess their progress and explore existing challenges and possible solutions during each VNR.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

IF DESIGNED AND CONDUCTED EFFECTIVELY, A VNR CAN BE AN ENGINE FOR ACTION AND TRANSFORMATION.

This process is cyclical and dynamic. Countries are constantly implementing, assessing, and readjusting their policies to achieve the SDGs.

Identifying avenues for implementation, follow-up, and accountability as part of the review process is key to maximizing the VNR's utility.

VNRs should both review previous implementation and aim to arrive at policy conclusions and next steps to move the post-VNR implementation forward.

Achieving these objectives requires:

- Time and resources (e.g., for stakeholder consultation, policy evaluations, background research), and
- Effective horizontal and vertical coordination and meaningful engagement of non-state actors, so that multiple perspectives are considered in developing recommendations and next steps.

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

INCREASING CHANCES FOR SUSTAINED IMPLEMENTATION

Broad and inclusive reporting structures increase the likelihood of sustained post-VNR implementation because:

- Actors (state and non-state) have more ownership this way, and
- Joint implementation by multiple stakeholders and across sectors is more likely.

SDG action on the ground also increases when **subnational actors** are involved early on in the VNR process.



One country decided to put a focus on a particularly pressing local sustainable development issue and to review it in a systematic and integrated manner. It conducted a systems analysis of **drivers, bottlenecks, and impacts**, developed short- and long-term actions to tackle this issue, and dedicated one chapter in its VNR to showcase the results.

REPORTING BACK, ROUNDTABLES, BUDGET ALLOCATIONS, DATA AND AUDITS.

When designing the VNR process, immediate next steps need to be identified, such as reporting back to parliament or the media, and/or organizing roundtables to discuss VNR recommendations. Issues related to budget allocation and data should be addressed during and subsequent to the VNR. Audits or peer reviews should also be considered as drivers of post-VNR implementation.

MORE AND MORE COUNTRIES REPORT THAT THEIR MECHANISMS WERE IMPROVED AFTER THE VNR.

- A number of countries have started reviewing the SDGs in years when they do not conduct a VNR and, in some instances, report their results to parliament.
- Others hold annual stakeholder forums to discuss implementation progress.

Case Study: Lessons Learned from Repeated VNRs, Colombia

Colombia has so far presented three VNRs: one in 2016, one in 2018 and one in 2021. The most important step after the 2016 VNR was for the government to initiate a multi-stakeholder process to develop the national SDG implementation strategy. This took more than one year of workshops to raise awareness and build capacity and of consultations and technical discussions with line ministries, local and regional governments and non-state actors.

A key motivation for Colombia to present a second VNR after only two years was to share its experience of the strategy process. Besides documenting central government action and achievements, the government also highlighted the contributions of other actors. While not all of these are labeled as SDG initiatives, they significantly contribute to sustainable development. This meant approaching stakeholders in a different way, stipulating new types of cooperation with and among them, and appreciating all contributions.

With civil society, a mapping exercise with umbrella organizations provided an overview of who is doing what in the country. Public surveys, open for anyone to register projects, complemented the process and helped identify relevant initiatives. A series of regional workshops involved documenting what CSOs are doing and how. With the private sector, a pilot project to design indicators based on the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards – developed with the support of the UNDP country office and the GRI, regional partners and sectoral associations – helped measure businesses' contributions to the SDGs.

As a result, the 2018 VNR contains five stories about different stakeholders' contributions to the SDGs. An important element in working with all those stakeholders was the web portal that Colombia developed with support from the Swedish Government and that became a key communication tool in the process. In the 2021 VNR Colombia introduced a robust methodology that was used to measure the contribution of the private sector to the achievement of the SDGs. Through the SDG Corporate Tracker platform, implementing partners have contributed more than 311 companies with information reports for 2018 and 2019.

The participatory strategy development and the 2018 and 2021 VNRs broadened public awareness, engaged civil society and the private sector in meaningful ways and strengthened local processes. These processes also helped carry the vision and spirit of the 2030 Agenda through the transition after the 2018 presidential elections. The broad commitment fostered continuity and the SDGs provided a transcending element for the 2018–2022 National Development Plan.

DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING THE VNR DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has affected the holding of VNRs and post-VNR implementation efforts.

Restrictions have created obstacles to broad and inclusive consultations within government at all levels and with non-state actors.

- Virtual consultations and online surveys are very useful tools in this context, but depend on digital infrastructure and technology, which is not equally available everywhere.

Data collection has also become much more difficult, which is of particular concern for SDG 16 because of the already large data gaps under normal circumstances.

MAINTAINING ACCOUNTABILITY

In some countries, the pandemic is being used as grounds for governments to enact emergency measures and extend their control.

- For instance, where access-to-information laws can help empower citizens and hold duty bearers accountable in times of crisis, restrictions on access to official information and delays in responding to public requests for information [have been recorded in some countries](#).

In these cases, it is even more important that citizens and institutions such as the parliament and media organizations hold them accountable and demand that civic space be restored during recovery.