

## **Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Follow-up to the Voluntary National Reviews in the North and Central Asia region**

14 December 2020 (virtual modality)

10:00 – 12:00 Almaty / 23:00 – 01:00 NYC

### **Summary Report**

#### **Introduction**

More than 50 government officials, representatives of civil society, the private sector, and labour unions, as well as representatives of the UN system in the region participated in the workshop. The workshop was co-organized by Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA, and the Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP. The workshop proceedings were interpreted into Russian and English.

#### **Opening session**

All countries in the North and Central Asia region have conducted at least one voluntary national review (VNR), with two having already completed a second one. In his opening remarks, Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief of the National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, DSDG/DESA, recalled that the VNRs are a means to foster implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. He underlined that follow-up to the VNRs could address common, persistent problems countries are facing in striving for the SDGs. Among them are lack of high quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by various characteristics relevant in national contexts; shortcomings in the coordination between institutions, horizontally and vertically; lack of experience and institutional mechanisms for meaningful engagement with stakeholders; and the need to mobilize adequate means of implementation. As elsewhere, the COVID-19 pandemic was compounding social and economic challenges in the North and Central Asia region. The pandemic demonstrated more clearly than ever before the importance of staying true to the goals and aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Mr. Sibanda underlined that the workshop was an opportunity to share good practices and lessons learned in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The current situation with the COVID-19 is a clear indicator that countries need to strengthen their actions to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which will help them recover and build back in a sustainable way. Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Officer-in-Charge, ESCAP Sub-Regional Office for North and Central Asia, further stated that the workshop provided a timely opportunity to address gaps and discuss solutions that had been identified in the VNRs in close coordination and multi-stakeholders' partnerships with representatives from governments, civil society, business, academia and

youth. He emphasized that ESCAP stood ready to work with countries to advance their SDG implementation plans, including making available through tools and methodologies such as the [SDG Drivers Framework for North and Central Asia](#). The framework consists of a toolbox of methodologies to map out potential drivers that could accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

### **Summary of discussions**

During the session entitled “Setting the scene: Progress and challenges implementing the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia” participants shared experiences about the status of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia through the lens of the VNRs. Panellists addressed implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including obstacles encountered, lessons learned, and emerging challenges.

Among key points raised during discussion were the following:

- Georgia explained that its first VNR contained initial steps in the implementation the implementation of the Agenda, established priorities and ambitions, and presented the overall approach to the SDGs. The second review showcased economic growth, yet also acknowledged the need to target persistent inequality. It adopted a whole-of-society approach and made use of existing institutional mechanisms.
- Achieving the SDGs would require rapid innovation, the mobilization of cutting-edge expertise, and addressing capacity gaps in the public sector, which could be remedied through public-private partnerships. Great importance was attached to public-private partnerships for Georgia’s socio-economic development. The introduction of universal health care also contributed to ensuring that no one is left behind, aided in this respect by a reinforced primary health-care system.
- The recognition that inequalities of various kinds persisted meant that the government had adopted leaving no one behind as a priority, which was even more important given the impact of COVID-19. Emerging issues included youth, decentralization and disparities between urban and rural areas, and sustainable energy.
- Azerbaijan underlined that data disaggregation remained a key challenge. The focus had been on how to follow-up and use statistics in practical terms and the adoption of best practices in addressing gaps. Stakeholder engagement was identified as another challenge, especially with respect to the private sector, which had been targeted with public awareness measures intended to involve them in the SDGs.

- Uzbekistan stated that among the difficulties encountered was adapting the UN methodology for indicators to the national circumstances, including lack of resources in the responsible ministries and agencies. Additionally, COVID-19 hampered coordination between ministries. The usefulness of peer exchange and learning through twinning with other VNR countries was noted.
- A good practice and lesson learned related to the role of parliament in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the preparation of the VNR. Reference was made to the establishment of a parliamentary commission, which helped foster engagement and consultation in the preparation of the review.
- Going forward, the Uzbekistan planned to better integrate the nationalized SDGs and targets into sectoral and regional development plans and strategies, as well as establish an integrated national financing framework, to mobilize domestic and external public and private resources. Capacity building in the field of statistical data-gathering was ongoing, with a view to further development of UN indicators. Implementing the indicators and related good practices was identified as a topic that could benefit learning more about the experience of other countries.
- Outlining implementation and VNR follow-up in Turkmenistan, a representative of the UN RCO explained that a National SDG monitoring system had been established by Presidential decree, with the Ministry of Finance and Economy in the lead on SDG coordination, monitoring, and reporting. It was underlined that lack of data hampered the assessment of the country's progress towards the SDGs. Other data-related challenges included: lack of baseline data for national SDG indicators; missing methodologies for collection of data for several SDG targets; and limited capacity of ministries collecting administrative data. Activities in the post-VNR phase are focussing on, among other things, establishment of a SDG database; SDG financing, with the introduction of the integrated national financing framework concept, and continued support for national human rights action plans, and developing a national SDG mid-term report, in partnership with ESCAP.

During the question and answer session, it was noted that second and subsequent reviews ought to focus on progress achieved, as well as interlinkages and the three dimensions of sustainable development, with a greater emphasis on solutions. It was also the case that second reviews benefited from a more fleshed-out institutional frameworks, such as multi-stakeholder SD councils. It was also stressed that the review should be regarded as an integral part of the implementation process, not as a stand-alone effort. The review also identified key next steps in the post-VNR phase, in this way seeking to accelerate implementation. Among the next steps mentioned were linking budgeting to SDG targets, as

well as including SDGs in the budget process, and boosting awareness-raising and increasing the role of civil society in monitoring and evaluation.

Participants then discussed two topics in parallel break-out groups: “Data and statistics for the SDGs” and “Effective stakeholder engagement”. It was noted that both are very important in relation to follow-up to the VNRs. In addition to challenges related to indicators, the need to overcome barriers to integrating data from civil society with the official data from governments was raised. In the discussion on stakeholder engagement, a representative of the business sector stated that dialogue and engagement with the private sector needed to be designed to respond to the needs and expectations of this group of stakeholders, for instance focussing on specific products and targets where they could contribute. From the perspective of civil society, the VNR process also entailed a great deal of learning, including coming to grips with the wide range of actors among and issues, necessitating dialogue with a range of organizations.

Among the points highlighted in the final session, entitled “Going forward: Good practices for enhancing implementation of the Agenda”, were the following:

- The role of the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was highlighted.
- The importance of raising awareness of the SDGs in the business community was underlined, and in this regard a good practice that was shared was that of training programmes delivered by a confederation of business enterprises to its members. Activities to upgrade the export capacity of SMEs contributed to decent employment (SDG 8) and youth employment. The private sector could also facilitate access to new technologies, for instance climate-smart agriculture. The importance of creating incentives for private sector involvement was underlined.

At the conclusion of the workshop the intention to hold an in-person workshop was re-affirmed

## Annex 2

### Agenda

#### Implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Follow-up to the Voluntary National Reviews in the North and Central Asia region

14 December 2020, virtual modality

<p>09:30 (Almaty)</p> <p>22:30(NYC)</p>	<p><b>Connection check/logging on to platform</b></p>
<p><b>10:00 – 10:15 (Almaty)</b></p> <p>23:00 – 23:15 (NYC)</p>	<p><b>Welcome and opening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief, National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA</li> <li>- Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov, Officer-in-Charge, ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia</li> <li>- Aims and objectives of the workshop</li> </ul>
<p><b>10:15 – 10:55 (Almaty)</b></p> <p><b>(40 minutes)</b></p> <p>23:15 – 23:55 (NYC)</p>	<p><b>Setting the scene: Progress and challenges implementing the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia</b></p> <p>This session that aims to kick-off the peer learning and contribute to building a common understanding of the status of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in North and Central Asia through the lens of the VNRs.</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief, National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA</p> <p>Panel discussion (5 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ms. Natia Tsikaradze, National Coordinator for SDGs, Administration of Government, Georgia</li> <li>- Mr. Elnur Ibrahimov, Adviser on Socio-Economic Issues, Secretariat of the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan</li> <li>- Mr. Anvarkhon Umarchodjaev, Head, Department on SDGs, Ministry of Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, Uzbekistan</li> <li>- Ms. Elena Panova, UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan</li> </ul>

	<p>Q&amp;A</p> <p><i>Guiding questions</i> (panellists asked to prepare beforehand):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What area of implementation has proved most challenging?</li> <li>2. What is one good practice or lesson learned during the VNR process?</li> <li>3. What are key next steps to support implementation during the post-VNR phase?</li> </ol>	
<p><b>10:55 – 11:00 (Almaty)</b></p> <p><b>23:55 – 24:00 (NYC)</b></p>	<p><b>Briefing and splitting into break-out rooms -</b></p> <p>Objectives of session</p>	
<p><b>11:00 – 11:25 (Almaty)</b></p> <p><b>25 min</b></p> <p>00:00 – 00:25 (NYC)</p>	<p><b><u>Break-out Room A: Data and statistics for the SDGs</u></b></p> <p>Kick-off presentation: Ms. Gemma Van Halderen, Director, Statistics Division, ESCAP</p> <p>Facilitated exchange of experiences</p> <p>- Outcome: 2-3 good practices</p>	<p><b><u>Break-out Room B: Effective stakeholder engagement</u></b></p> <p>Kick-off presentation: Ms. Natalja Wehmer, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP co-moderated by Ms. Dinara Azhigaliyeva, Associate Expert, ESCAP</p> <p>Facilitated exchange of experiences</p> <p>- Outcome: 2-3 good practices</p>
<p><b>11:25 – 11:35</b></p> <p><b>10 min</b></p> <p>00:25 – 00:25 (NYC)</p>	<p><b>Rapid feedback session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moderated session with key highlights from break-out groups</li> </ul>	
<p><b>11:35 – 11:55 (Almaty)</b></p> <p><b>20 min</b></p> <p>00:35 – 00:55</p>	<p><b>Going forward: Good practices for enhancing implementation of the Agenda</b></p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Sustainable Development Officer, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP</p> <p>Panel discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mr. Anton Tsvetov, Deputy Director, Department of Multilateral Economic Cooperation and Special Projects, Ministry of Economic Development, Russian Federation</li> <li>- Mr. Fuad Humbatov, Deputy Secretary-General, National Confederation of Entrepreneurs, Azerbaijan</li> <li>- Ms. Tatiana Tretiakova, Coordinator, National M&amp;E Network, Kyrgyzstan</li> </ul>	

	<p><i>Guiding questions:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are good practices for addressing financing challenges and gaps?</li> <li>2. What are examples of multi-stakeholder partnerships for capacity development activities and supporting implementation?</li> <li>3. What are good practices for strengthening M&amp;E and reporting frameworks?</li> <li>4. How can we make national planning and budgeting systems more effective for implementing the national and 2030 Development Agenda?</li> </ol>
<p><b>11:55 – 12:00 (Almaty)</b>  <b>5 min</b>  00:55 – 01:00 (NYC)</p>	<p><b>Closing</b></p>