



VNR LABS

HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

Enhancing the dialogue between the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)

Monday, 12 July 2021, 8:00-9:00 New York time

Summary

This VNR Lab highlighted the benefits from enhanced connections between the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and showcased practical examples from 2021 VNR countries on such cooperation between different levels of government. Organized jointly by DESA's Division for Sustainable Development Goals and all five United Nations Regional Commissions, the Lab brought together over 120 participants and was opened by Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Officer-in-Charge of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals. Speakers of the session included representatives of the national and local governments from Sweden, Japan and Argentina as well as representatives of the United Nations Regional Commissions.

Key points from the presentations and ensuing discussion included the following:

- National governments are increasingly recognizing the critical role of local governments for SDG achievement. While SDG 11 is a driver for overall SDG implementation, local and regional governments can make a significant impact on all 17 goals.
- VLR processes can enrich the Voluntary National Reviews in several different ways. For example, a VNR can be a great tool for sharing case studies and best practices from the local level with the global community. Aligning the review processes from the start can promote peer learning between different government levels, and local governments can contribute to the data gathering and analysis for the VNR process. Both levels of review processes are also crucial for openness and accountability.
- For the national government, the VNR process can be a moment to engage with frontrunner cities that have already conducted VLRs but also to encourage new communities to start the process. Such concerted efforts can also support localities that don't have the resources to prepare a VLR on their own. VNR-VLR collaboration can ideally ensure continued follow-up that will address the challenges identified in the review processes.
- The importance of defining a shared longer-term vision and a goal at all levels of government was stressed. Such goalsetting can support policy coherence throughout public sector SDG implementation.
- Both VNRs and VLRs are comprehensive efforts that require a strong political commitment early on in the process. While most VLR have been so far conducted at the initiative of the localities, the benefits of strong national level political endorsement of VLR processes and local level SDG efforts cannot be overemphasized.
- Both review processes should contribute to evidence-based policymaking and planning and lead to tangible results. For the VLRs, each locality should consider what main benefits it aims at deriving from the review process.

- Effective coordination mechanisms can build trust between national and local levels and a trusted coordinator can facilitate an open flow of information. Informal engagement and trust building is crucial for ensuring that everyone can contribute to the review effort. Robust institutions for VNRs and VLRs can also serve as institutions for implementation efforts.
- Advisory councils and working groups with multi-stakeholder participation were also mentioned as a concrete example of useful coordination mechanisms. Local level coordination mechanisms can include representatives active at the national level and vice versa.
- The importance of champion cities cannot be overemphasized. These frontrunner VLR cities can provide positive examples for peer learning and encourage others to conduct VLR processes. At the same time, it will be important to ensure that the VLRs do not become marketing exercises of well-off capitals and large cities.
- VLRs can serve as an effective awareness raising tool. Once communities are aware of the SDGs and their meaning for their own lives, they can effectively serve as implementation partners. The VLR process can also serve as a tool for forging new partnerships with private sector, think tanks and academia as well other local and national governments.
- The Regional Commissions are uniquely positioned to address regional specificities and can leverage their regional platforms for peer learning between local governments and also between different levels of government in the review processes. Many Regional Commission work in tandem with other actors such as city networks and NGOs and have great convening power in bringing together different entities for VNR-VLR support.
- Regional Forums for sustainable development can serve as an effective venue for knowledge sharing and dialogue between the VNRs and VLRs and for getting the buy-in of governments for these processes. Several Regional Commissions have prepared or are preparing region-specific guidance materials for the VLRs, and many provide technical support to individual local governments.