

"Building Bridges: Engaging Stakeholders to Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"

VNR Lab on Multi-Stakeholder Engagement Practices for the 2024 United Nations High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

Monday 15 July 2024, 1:15-2:45 PM EDT

UNDESA, through its [Division for Sustainable Development Goals](#) and in partnership with the [Major Groups and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism \(MGoS\)](#) organized the Voluntary National Review (VNR) Lab on "[Building Bridges: Engaging Stakeholders to Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.](#)" The objective was to discuss challenges, share lessons learned and good practices as well as report on innovative tools to strengthen and facilitate meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships and engagement more systematically throughout the Voluntary National Review process and beyond.

Ms. Lotta Tahtinen, Chief, Outreach and Partnerships Branch, DSDG/DESA and Mr. Oli Henman (Co-Chair, MGoS CM) delivered opening remarks. Ms. Cristina González Cebas (Deputy Director General for the 2030 Agenda, Spain), Mr. Jose Pablo Céspedes Rodríguez (Coordinator of the SDG Technical Secretariat, Costa Rica), Ms. Nelya Rakhimova (VNR Task Group, MGoS CM), Ms. Juliet Braslow (Sustainable Development Officer, UN ESCAP), Ms. Florence Syevuo (SDG Kenya Forum), and Ms. Alessandra Nilo (2030 Working Group, Brazil) contributed through panel discussions as well as by interacting with participants. The meeting was facilitated by Naiara Costa, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, DSDG/DESA.

Opening Remarks

Ms. Lotta Tahtinen, Chief, Outreach and Partnership Branch, DSDG, DESA, welcomed participants and emphasized the importance of commitment, planning, and resources for meaningful stakeholder engagement. The annual VNR Synthesis Report prepared by DESA and capacity-building initiatives were mentioned as meaningful tools that support countries preparatory process for the VNRs, including on how to enhance stakeholder participation.

Mr. Oli Henman, Co-Chair, Major Groups and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism (MGoS CM), emphasized that stakeholder engagement is a year-round process, beginning with a national dialogue and ensuring strong engagement from the start. This year, Brazil, Kenya, Spain, and Costa Rica amongst others provided strong examples that were highlighted. He also noted that many countries are presenting their reports for the second or third time, highlighting the importance of integrating these efforts into national development plans.

Panel: Showcasing good practices of meaningful stakeholder engagement in the VNR process

Ms. Cristina González Cebas, Deputy Director General for the 2030 Agenda, Spain, highlighted that this is the third time Spain is presenting its VNR. She emphasized the importance of a participatory approach, noting that actors with different approaches and interests in sustainability were involved in the preparations of Spain's 2024 VNR. Spain developed a process

involving local and regional governments as well as civil society, using national and sub-national instances where ministries, regions, and local authorities were represented. She highlighted the role of the Sustainable Development Council, which includes many civil society institutions and companies, providing independent opinions on the 2030 Agenda. She also mentioned that the VNR was prepared with inputs from other important councils, including the ombudsman. Despite many challenges, such as increasing VNR knowledge and boosting capacity, she emphasized the necessity of localizing the SDGs and involving all stakeholders in the process.

Mr. Jose Pablo Céspedes Rodríguez, Coordinator of the SDG Technical Secretariat, highlighted Costa Rica's adoption of an SDG national framework involving various stakeholders from unions to the private sector. The committee's long-standing plan emphasizes VNR collaboration as a central commitment. Even though there are challenges in ensuring the participation of stakeholders, he stressed the government's role in facilitating participation and pushing forward. The VNR process is crucial for promoting and relaunching national commitments to the 2030 Agenda. He also emphasized defining national targets and ensuring active participation from diverse sectors.

Interactive Discussion

During the VNR Lab, there was an engaging discussion involving representatives from Member States, youth, CSOs, and other stakeholders. Questions were raised about tools and methods used to engage different stakeholders, such as local authorities, youth, marginalized communities, and higher education institutions. Spain and Costa Rica shared their experiences, highlighting the importance of national frameworks, public policies, and training programs to reinforce society's commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

In addition, participants discussed the involvement of children and youth in the VNR process, with Spain noting their participatory processes through the national SD strategy and Costa Rica emphasizing their efforts to include various groups in policy reviews. Both countries stressed the necessity of localized efforts and the government's role in facilitating and maintaining stakeholder engagement despite challenges in capacity. The discussion also covered the practical aspects of stakeholder engagement, such as funding for organizations working with marginalized groups, the role of higher education in data collection and methodology development, and the importance of including stakeholders in the process and product of the VNR. Spain and Costa Rica highlighted their efforts to incorporate feedback and data from various sectors, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the VNR process.

Major groups and other stakeholders contributions to the VNR process

Ms. Nelya Rakhimova, VNR Task Group, MGoS CM, shared the coordination process led by the MGoS CM and its role in engaging independent civil society in the VNR process, which currently is comprised of 21 major groups and stakeholder constituencies, with plans to expand. She emphasized that MGoS engage in regional forums and highlighted the importance of

shadow/spotlight reports produced by self-organized civil society. She noted that their platform collects these from various groups with the aim of building capacity and providing a valuable reference.

Ms. Juliet Braslow, Sustainable Development Officer, UN ESCAP, discussed involving stakeholders from sub-regional and regional levels, with a focus on VNRs. Capacity building and peer learning are facilitated through VNR clinics and a twinning program that pairs countries with similar priorities, featuring themed workshops and study tours. She provided examples from Armenia, Nepal, Azerbaijan, and Palau, showcasing different stakeholder engagement approaches. The VNR process is an excellent opportunity to include often excluded stakeholders, fostering broader engagement.

Ms. Florence Syevuo, SDG Kenya Forum, emphasized building capacity and inclusivity in the VNR process, noting Kenya's VNRs in 2017, 2020, and 2024. The annexes include reports from various stakeholders. A technical committee, umbrella bodies, and a private sector alliance were established to organize stakeholders and ensure broader participation. Despite challenges in implementing recommendations, the process aims to include marginalized groups and emphasize community voices for diversity in the VNR.

Ms. Alessandra Nilo, 2030 Working Group, Brazil, discussed civil society's role in producing a spotlight report for the 2030 Agenda since 2017, using official government data. The process involved over 80 experts from 47 organizations covering all SDGs and targets. This year, Brazil, presenting its second VNR, acknowledged the spotlight report's recommendations, reinstated the national commission for SDGs (CNODS), and registered efforts to align its budget with the SDG framework.

Interactive Discussion – Major groups and other stakeholders

The discussion covered themes of capacity building, implementing VNRs at various levels, sustaining conversations and financing platforms, and data verification for SDG alignment.

Questions on implementing VNRs at national and bilateral levels were discussed, with ESCAP emphasizing the importance of pairing countries based on interests and contexts and ensuring stakeholder buy-in. Sustaining conversations beyond the VNR and financing platforms were addressed, with the SDG Kenya Forum noting their self-funding efforts and collective solutions. Finally, the 2030 Working Group Brazil stressed the need for careful data verification and aligning public funds with SDGs, advocating for streamlined sustainable development funding.

Closing remarks

Ms. Nelya Rakhimova, VNR Task Group, MGoS CM, emphasized the importance of genuinely engaging stakeholders in the VNR process. She noted that while stakeholders are frequently mentioned in reports, engagement often falls short. She also highlighted the need for awareness and capacity building. She stressed that transparency and broad societal understanding are

crucial for effective engagement, and efforts should ensure these practices are implemented, not just reported. **Ms. Naiara Costa, DSDG, UNDESA, Senior Sustainable Development Officer**, thanked all speakers and participants for a rich discussion.

More useful information is available online:

- [VNR Lab: “Building Bridges: Engaging Stakeholders to Advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)
- Spotlight Report on 2030 Agenda (Brazil): [rl-2024-english.pdf \(gtagenda2030.org.br\)](#)
- Civil Society Organization (CSO) Voluntary National Review Report (Kenya): [VNR 2024 - Kenya CSOs Voluntary National Review Report.pdf \(sdgkenyaforum.org\)](#)