

VNR Lab 9: Integrating the 2030 Agenda into national development plans and strategies: Emerging lessons learned

This Lab explored the experiences and lessons learned integrating the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into national planning frameworks. Moderated by Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief of the National Strategies and Capacity Building Branch, DSDG/DESA, the Lab featured one speaker from academia and two country representatives, who shared their experience with development of national plans and strategies.

At outset, it was pointed out that the past decade has seen a resurgence in development planning. The large proportion of plans (60 per cent plus) based on communicative rationality is a key feature of the “new national planning”. It was explained that communicative rationality is based on the search for pragmatic improvement, grounded in a broad consensus in a specific context, and often allied with adaptive or “agile” management style. By contrast, linear/ends-means rationality is the traditional form of planning, associated with goals or targets, tools such as results-based management, input-output tables, social cost-benefit analysis, and the overall search for specific end point or “optimal” solution. Other important characteristics of development planning that were identified are: incorporation of a bottom-up approach, analytical rigour and a solid evidence base, and the degree to which the planning process has benefited from stakeholder engagement (social embeddedness). It was underlined that national development is not just a technical exercise, but also has political aspects.

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

- The value of a carefully structured process to prepare the national plan, with an accent on broad-based participation, to arrive at the overall, strategic goals of the plan. It was mentioned that public consultation took place at several stages, during the development phase and with respect to the final draft. It was noted that during the plan preparation process vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities and elderly persons were identified and consulted. The need to conduct rigorous monitoring was underlined.
- The broad, long-term strategies need to be translated into short-term delivery documents whether government action plans or three-year development plans. Similarly, plan priorities require cascading into sectoral plans and strategies.
- The importance of institutional arrangements that ensure SDG integration in the national planning process and provide oversight and strategic guidance was highlighted. The mainstreaming of other commitments, such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the SAMOA Pathway was also noted.
- The question was raised how challenges raised identified during the VNR preparation are fed back into the policy process, such as through roadmaps. It was mentioned that COVID-19 has brought to the fore how countries need to retain the flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances, without losing the focus on long-term goals. The potential to leverage support from international organizations was referred to, as was the usefulness of peer-learning through bilateral exchanges and informal reviews. The need to localize/redefine targets for the local context was referred to, as was the importance of ensuring coherence across short and mid-term sectoral targets in meeting long-term strategic goals. The question was also posed about what could be done to ensure continuity with changes in government.