Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)
A practical guidance tool for 2nd VNRs

Contents

1. How to use this tool for 2nd or 3rd VNRs ................................................................. 3
2. Purpose of a 2nd generation VNR .................................................................................. 3
3. Taking stock of the 1st VNR: Assessing progress and impact since the 1st VNR .......... 4
4. Following up recommendations and next steps from the 1st VNR .................................. 11
5. Refreshing SDG institutional mechanisms .................................................................... 12
6. Comprehensive stakeholder engagement and communication in the 2nd VNR .......... 17
7. Social distancing and online engagement in the 2nd VNR process .............................. 27
8. Tracking the trajectory from the 1st VNR: innovative data collection and analysis .... 30
9. Telling your story: Drafting the 2nd VNR using a storyline ........................................... 34
10. Presenting at the HLPF: seizing opportunities the second time around .................... 37
11. Next steps... how to kick start the 2nd VNR ................................................................. 39

Key references ......................................................................................................................... 41

List of boxes
Box 1: How to improve reporting using a hypothetical example ........................................ 8
Box 2: Examining causes of implementation challenges ...................................................... 10
Box 3: Tips for reporting improvements or setbacks since the 1st VNR ............................ 10
Box 4: Potential roles/responsibilities needed in VNR Coordination team ..................... 16
Box 5: Purpose of stakeholder engagement activities in 1st VNR .................................... 20
Box 6: Best practice box: Timor-Leste ............................................................................. 21
Box 7: Types of engagement and ways to engage............................................................... 23
Box 8: Best practice box: India Standing Sub-Groups ....................................................... 23
Box 9: Helpful hint boxes .................................................................................................. 26
Box 10: Best practice box: Georgia and online consultations ............................................ 29
Box 11: Thinking about the audience for the 2nd VNR .................................................... 35
Box 12: Best practice box: The Philippines ..................................................................... 39
List of checklists

Checklist 1: How is a 2nd VNR different to a 1st VNR? ................................................................. 3
Checklist 2: What does a 2nd VNR aim to achieve? ........................................................................... 3
Checklist 3: What should a 2nd VNR try to avoid? ............................................................................... 4
Checklist 4: 2nd VNR Process analytical tool ...................................................................................... 7
Checklist 5: Level of inclusion in the 1st VNR ....................................................................................... 19
Checklist 6: How were stakeholders engaged in the 1st VNR? ............................................................ 22
Checklist 7: Questions to consider from the 1st VNR ........................................................................... 28
Checklist 8: Questions to consider from the 2nd VNR ......................................................................... 29
Checklist 9: Evaluating improvements in data collection since the 1st VNR ........................................... 31
Checklist 10: What communication methods will be used in the 2nd VNR? ....................................... 33
Checklist 11: Reflecting on the HLPF for a 2nd VNR ............................................................................. 37

List of figures

Figure 1: Taking stock of the 1st VNR ................................................................................................... 4
Figure 2: Suggested 2nd VNR Planning Tool to consider ....................................................................... 6
Figure 3: Common causes of implementation challenges ....................................................................... 10
Figure 4: Assessing recommendations and next steps from the 1st VNR .............................................. 11
Figure 5: Best practice box: The Philippines ....................................................................................... 12
Figure 6: VNR Institutional arrangements ............................................................................................. 12
Figure 7: The 4 C’s for reviewing institutional mechanisms .................................................................... 13
Figure 8: Best practice box: Samoa ........................................................................................................ 15
Figure 9: Different roles in the VNR process .......................................................................................... 16
Figure 10: Problem solving key challenges in stakeholder engagement .............................................. 18
Figure 11: Stakeholder engagement integrated into the 2nd VNR process ........................................... 22
Figure 12: Summary of tips for stakeholder engagement ...................................................................... 25
Figure 13: Example of data gap analysis .............................................................................................. 31
Figure 14: Developing a storyline for the VNR ...................................................................................... 35
Figure 15: How to develop a storyline ................................................................................................... 36
Figure 16: Participation at the HLPF ...................................................................................................... 37
Figure 17: 2nd VNR Planning Steps...what to do right now!.................................................................... 40

This tool was put together by UN ESCAP in response to requests from countries in the Asia and Pacific
region for guidance on producing 2nd VNRs. Countries that already produced a 2nd VNR were contacted
for their reflections and feedback. This included Bangladesh, India, Georgia, Nepal, the Philippines and
Samoa. It also involved feedback from Timor-Leste who completed their 1st VNR in 2019.
1. How to use this tool for 2nd or 3rd VNRs

1.1 Purpose of the tool

The purpose of this tool is to provide practical advice and concrete tips to countries on how to develop a 2nd (or 3rd) generation Voluntary National Review (VNR). The objective of this tool is to help countries to connect their 1st and 2nd VNR to ensure that there is continuity between the reports and that their 2nd takes stock of progress made since the previous review.

1.2 How this tool aligns with the global handbook and common reporting guidelines

This tool aims to complement the forthcoming 2021 VNR handbook and the common reporting guidelines developed by UN DESA. It includes practical checklists, diagrams and best practices to help countries reflect on the process that led to the preparation of their first VNR and identify key areas for improvement. Many countries encounter similar challenges when developing their VNR. This tool provides practical suggestions to help countries overcome some of these challenges, building on the experience countries have acquired.

1.3 Audience for this tool

The primary audience for this tool is governments that are about to start the planning process for their 2nd VNR. The tool can also be used by civil society actors and other non-government actors to help them understand the expectations for 2nd VNRs and how they can engage with the VNR process.

2. Purpose of a 2nd generation VNR

It is important to understand what a 2nd generation VNR aims to achieve and how it is different from a 1st VNR.Outlined below are three useful checklists to utilise when planning the 2nd VNR.

**Checklist 1: How is a 2nd VNR different to a 1st VNR?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is a 2nd VNR different to a 1st VNR?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ A 2nd VNR should use the 1st VNR as a starting point and directly links the two reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The 2nd VNR reports on implementation and progress on the SDGs since the first report and can consider the first VNR as a baseline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The 2nd VNR should provide in-depth analysis of the causes of implementation challenges and identify steps to address findings from the previous report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ The 2nd VNR should, ideally, involve more stakeholders in its preparatory process through consultations and continuous feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Checklist 2: What does a 2nd VNR aim to achieve?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does a 2nd VNR aim to achieve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ To build, and respond to, the next steps and challenges, outlined in the 1st VNR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ To identify the most significant changes since the first VNR and analyse the causes of key implementation challenges faced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ To identify what has worked well and what hasn’t since the 1st VNR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ To track progress, setbacks and successes since the 1st VNR.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Checklist 3: What should a 2nd VNR try to avoid?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What should a 2nd VNR try to avoid?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ It should not be a stand-alone report – it should be connected to, and build on, the analysis of the first VNR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ It should not repeat what has already been presented in the previous VNR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ It should try to avoid summarising strategies in place and describing challenges. It should focus on examining the causes and providing specific next steps for implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and 2nd Generation VNRs.

A VLR is a process through which sub-national governments undertake a voluntary review of their progress towards delivering the 2030 Agenda. Although VLRs are yet to become an official part of the review architecture of the 2030 Agenda, they hold the potential to complement VNRs. Many countries are keen to deepen engagement with sub-national governments in the 2nd VNR process. VLR’s can therefore complement 2nd VNRs. If the VLR process is well integrated with 2nd VNRs, it can provide a more nuanced assessment of SDG progress by acknowledging territorial imbalances between different regions and municipalities. One of the greatest challenges facing all levels of government in monitoring SDG progress is to find reliable data at an appropriate scale. VLRs can therefore also increase coordination between levels of government in gathering and sharing data.

3. Taking stock of the 1st VNR: Assessing progress and impact since the 1st VNR

One of the first key steps in developing the 2nd generation VNR (identified above in section 2) is to take stock of the 1st VNR. This involves:

❖ reflecting on the process for developing the review
❖ reflecting on the progress on the SDGs since the 1st VNR
❖ assessing SDG implementation and identifying the drives of implementation challenges.

Figure 1: Taking stock of the 1st VNR
3.1 2nd VNR Process: What would you do differently this time around?

Developing, and following up, on a 1st VNR is a significant undertaking, requiring a lot of time and effort from a variety of stakeholders. As it was new, many countries did not know what to expect for their 1st VNR and were uncertain about how long it would take. There was also little data available on the SDGs and many countries had not yet produced integrated SDG indicators. The second time around, countries are familiar with the process, and can grasp the challenges in terms of time and coordination. However, as many countries identified key challenges when producing their 1st VNR, it is important to reflect on what worked well, and what you would do differently this time around. Checklist 4 provides space to reflect on the VNR process and what to do differently this time.
Figure 2: Suggested 2nd VNR Planning Tool to consider (based on feedback from 1st and 2nd VNR countries)

**KEY PHASES**

- **Preparatory and planning phase**
- **Data collection and analysis**
- **Drafting and review**
- **Preparation and participation**
- **Immediate post VNR period**

**10-month period from planning to post-HLPF**

**New steps for 2nd VNR**

- **Taking stock of the 1st VNR**
- **Review of institutional arrangements and institutional planning**
- **Develop storyline**
- **Pre-planning for HLPF**
- **Map available data and request for non-traditional data**

**Stakeholder engagement**

- **Stakeholder mapping conducted and plan developed**
- **Stakeholder consultation on indicator development**
- **Stakeholder engagement on key messages and storyline**
- **Stakeholder engagement on first draft of VNR**
- **Stakeholder validation of second draft**
- **Share final draft to be presented at HLPF with key stakeholders**
- **Bring a multi-stakeholder delegation to the HLPF and on panel**
- **Post-VNR feedback and stakeholder engagement activities**

**Communication**

- **Communication plan developed and public information campaign started**
- **Set up website and public contact point**
- **Communicate on social media, website, media about VNR and Input opportunities**
- **Communicate about drafting process and feedback opportunities**
- **Translate drafts in official languages**
- **Communicate with government to get input on drafts**
- **Communicate feedback to stakeholders about revisions to 1st draft**

**Report editing, layout and printing**

Feedback, communication and planning activities
# Checklist 4: 2nd VNR Process analytical tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Worked well</th>
<th>Next time for the 2nd VNR...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure and organisation of VNR process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making processes and government approval/sign off and buy in for the recommendations and findings of the VNR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination process and VNR team</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alignment with national political and policy review processes (including alignment of national SDG Framework and national M&amp;E framework)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning and budgeting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting for VNR process &amp; HLPF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management, logistics and planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection, management and analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection and management processes with National Statistics Office and Ministries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of collecting non-traditional and administrative data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing the data, statistical annex and presenting statistics in the VNR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder engagement and communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organising stakeholder engagement activities throughout VNR process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was there positive feedback that the process was collaborative and inclusive?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilising and integrating feedback and from stakeholders on 1st, 2nd or 3rd drafts of the VNR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation and communicating drafts of VNR in local languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating with the public and stakeholders about VNR and consultation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of website and/or data platforms/portals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Drafting and finalising report</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting specific SDGs or reporting on all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of storyline/narrative in drafting report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is the narrative of the report aligned to national policy strategies?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing, design and layout of report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for, and presenting, at the HLPF and side events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Logistics for developing multi-stakeholder delegation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing audio-visual and presentations for HLPF speakers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending side-events and organising bilateral interventions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow up to the VNR (post-VNR period)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were specific VNR follow up activities planned and budgeted for?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the VNR report and feedback from the HLPF widely shared with stakeholders?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 3.2 Assessing setbacks and progress since the 1st VNR

Taking stock of progress made on the SDGs since the first VNR is one of the primary objectives of the 2nd VNR. This involves providing a comprehensive analysis of progress made and the challenges to implementation.

**Analysis of progress made since the 1st VNR: comprehensive reporting against SDGs**

Unlike the first VNR which, usually, provides a baseline for the country’s progress on the SDGs, the 2nd generation VNR aims to provide a more comprehensive assessment of progress and seeks to analyse the efforts undertaken to address findings of the 1st VNR. This involves both comprehensive analysis of progress made in achieving the SDGs for all and analysis of the drivers behind the change since the 1st VNR (Box 1).

**Comprehensive analysis of data**

Outlined below are some useful things to include in the 2nd VNR when conducting a comprehensive analysis of SDGs.

Use **disaggregated data** in your graphs and analysis of your VNR. Try to use disaggregated statistics from all official data sources: MICS, DHS, Labour force, Census Living standards, and administrative data etc. Non-traditional data sources, such as geospatial data, should also be considered and your National Statistics Offices is well placed to advise on data sources and disaggregation opportunities.

**Analysis of the drivers of change since the 1st VNR**

It is important to consider the factors that have driven the change since the 1st VNR. It is important to analyse the following issues and include the analysis in the 2nd VNR.

- Try to report on why progress may have been slow or why there have been setbacks on certain issues and what future interventions will look like
- What were the blockages affecting implementation?
- Try to attribute improvements to policy responses/interventions or other factors or outline why successes came about

Use maps and graphs to show the results of the analysis in your VNR.

Integrate statistical and geospatial data to geolocate, disaggregate and improve the relevance and timeliness of the information in your VNR, especially for cities, municipalities, urban and rural areas, water bodies, coastal areas and the like.

Box 1 provides a hypothetical example of how to comprehensively report against progress. It shows what comprehensive reporting looks like, with a hypothetical example.

**Box 1: How to improve reporting using a hypothetical example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st VNR: Outlining the baseline and <strong>describing change</strong> that has taken place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG 2 / Indicator: 2.2.1: The percentage of children under 5 years old suffering from stunting has started to decrease from X to X, however it remains very high. In order to address this, an important <strong>next step</strong> will be to scale up programme X and increase resources allocated to this programme.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2nd VNR: **Analysing** drivers of change and reasons for setbacks or successes |
SDG 2 / Indicator: 2.2.1: Looking at data from **3 DHS survey rounds**, we can now see a downward **trajectory** in the percentage of children under 5 years old suffering from stunting. We continue to see a decrease in the number of stunted children under 5.

Although, there is still a moderate level of stunted children, the country has made **significant progress**. The progress can be **attributed to key programme interventions** including: X, Y, and Z.

However, it is important to note that **key vulnerable groups still remain at risk** of stunting. Children living in rural areas and children with disabilities are more likely to be stunted, with X% of children with disabilities suffering from stunting.

**Qualitative research from NGO X** also highlights that mothers in rural areas face challenges in X and Y which contributes to high stunting levels in rural areas.

**In our first VNR, we did not have access to disaggregated data** on stunting. Now that we can access disaggregated data, in additional to qualitative data, we can improve our efforts to track the most vulnerable and ensure that no one is left behind.

**In order to further accelerate progress, and ensure that we do not backtrack**, it is vital to continue investing resources in programmes X, Y, and Z and ensure greater attention, within these programmes, is given to marginalised groups, especially children with disabilities and living in rural areas.

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**Assessing SDG Implementation since the 1st VNR**

What happened after you presented the 1st VNR? Were the next steps actioned immediately and kick-start efforts to implement the priority actions outlined in the VNR? What challenges were faced after the 1st VNR in implementing the commitments? 2nd generation VNRs should report on the impact of their previous VNRs on SDG implementation and follow up the next steps outlined in their first VNR. This section will help report on the *causes* of SDG Implementation challenges.

- It is important to conduct in-depth analysis of the *causes of SDG implementation challenges*
- What were the *factors behind successful implementation* of the SDGs? What do you think enabled the country to make progress on specific SDGs?

**SDG Implementation Challenges – what were the causes of these challenges?**

Many countries highlighted in their 1st and 2nd VNRs that they face common challenges in implementing the SDGs. Although the challenges facing each country will depend on their context, there are several clear types of challenges that countries encounter (see Figure 4). This list is not exhaustive but is a summary of the type of challenges countries face.
Identifying the drivers of some of implementation challenges the country faces is an important step in producing the 2nd VNR. Linked to this, it is important to consider how to report on these challenges and link them to progress made on the SDGs since the 1st VNR. Box 2 is a useful tool to evaluate progress on each SDG and to link successes or setbacks to tackling or facing implementation challenges (Box 3).

**Box 2: Examining causes of implementation challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG</th>
<th>1st VNR</th>
<th>2nd VNR (see Box 3)</th>
<th>Causes of implementation challenges / Factors behind successful implementation (see Figure 3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG 1</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td><em>Improving</em> due to... but not fast enough progress since 1st VNR</td>
<td>e.g. Due to lack of disaggregated data on vulnerable groups to make evidence-based decisions and track the impact of social protection programme on vulnerable districts/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 4</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td><em>Suffering Setbacks</em> due to....</td>
<td>e.g. Capacity gaps at national and sub-national level within Ministry of Education and teacher-training centres to fully cost and implement national strategy on inclusive education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 8</td>
<td>Improving</td>
<td><em>Accelerating</em> due to....</td>
<td>e.g. Due to strong policy coherence between job creation programmes, youth vocational education programmes, and private sector strengthening initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 3: Tips for reporting improvements or setbacks since the 1st VNR**

**On track/accelerating:** Significant chance of meeting the Goal and its targets and progress has improved rapidly since the 1st VNR to achieve significant gains.

**Improving:** Good gains made since the last VNR and the situation for excluded groups and those at risk of being left behind is also improving since the 1st VNR.
4. Following up recommendations and next steps from the 1st VNR

A key starting point for connecting the 1st and 2nd VNRs is to review the recommendations and next steps from the 1st VNR. Assessing which next steps have been implemented and which recommendations have been addressed is vital in evaluating progress on SDG implementation. However, in their 1st VNRs, many reporting countries outlined next steps or recommendations, but few reports defined specific follow-up actions. This can make it hard in the 2nd VNR to clearly track which next steps were implemented. In order to provide continuity between reports, it is therefore important to try to provide a specific update as possible on the ways forward, conclusions, next steps and recommendations from the 1st in the second report.

**Figure 4: Assessing recommendations and next steps from the 1st VNR**

- Ways forward/Conclusions/Recommendations from the 1st VNR
  - Addressed?
  - Revised?
  - Not taken forward
- Outline implications for 2nd VNR
- Report on progress in the 2nd VNR
- Next steps from the 1st VNR
  - Implemented
  - Still in progress?
  - Not taken forward
- Outline the implications for 2nd VNR
- Report on progress in the 2nd VNR

**Common next steps included in 1st VNRs:**
- To strengthen statistical systems and SDG monitoring and data collection efforts
- To establish and improve routine SDG reporting
- To improve partnerships and cross-sector collaboration
- To broaden and institutionalise stakeholder engagement in the SDG monitoring process

To assess whether next steps and recommendations/ways forward from the 1st VNR have been actioned or implemented it is useful to use figure 4 to state what changed and why.

**Ways to report on next steps**
- You could include a **roadmap** that defines key follow up activities and next steps between reporting OR/
- You could include a **chapter in the VNR report** that captures lessons learnt, challenges and next steps since from one VNR reporting process to the next

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1 UN DESA, 2019, 2019 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report, New York: UN DESA, p. 89
Figure 5: Best practice box: The Philippines

**Best practice box: Following up on recommendations from the 1st VNR**
**The Philippines 2nd VNR**

**What:** One of the first things The Philippines did when starting the 2nd VNR was to check the main recommendations from the 1st VNR. They assessed how far they had gone in implementing the recommendations.

**Why:** The Philippines wanted to assess if they needed to dig deeper this time around and adopt a more ‘granular analysis’ approach to data analysis.

**How:** Several next steps from the first VNR related to data disaggregation and leaving no one behind. They also received feedback that the 1st VNR was not granular in its collection of disaggregated data in relation to people with disabilities. So, in preparation for our 2nd VNR in 2019 they updated our data collection to ensure they collected disaggregated data.

**Challenges:** Although the Philippines collected significantly more disaggregated data on people with disabilities, in the final 2nd VNR report they mainly included global macro data for the Philippines. In future, they would like to include more including graphs and tables in the report that show clearly the more detailed disaggregated data and progress for people with disabilities.

5. Refreshing SDG institutional mechanisms

Prior to developing their 1st VNR, many countries established a permanent SDG Committee, task force, working group or secretariat, within a specific ministry or government body, to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. In the 2019 VNRs, 50 percent of countries indicated that they had set up national SDG or sustainable development councils, commissions, steering committees, task forces or working groups. Some countries also established a temporary group/team/taskforce to specifically develop and coordinate the VNR and others utilised the permanent mechanism established for SDG implementation to lead on the VNR.

**Figure 6: VNR Institutional arrangements**

During the 1st VNR many of these institutions and processes were in the ‘setting up’ phase and still finding their feet. Many countries were still figuring out who were the key institutions to work with, and which ministries should take the lead. Now that you will be producing a 2nd generation VNR, it is

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2 UN DESA, 2019, 2019 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report, New York: UN DESA
a good opportunity to conduct a self-assessment of the SDG Institutional arrangements and approach to the VNRs, and review and potentially refresh both mechanisms if possible. Regardless of the institutional arrangement(s) it is important to assess the 4 C’s: Coordination, Communication, Consultation and Compilation.

**Figure 7: The 4 C’s for reviewing institutional mechanisms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Compilation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you set up an SDG permanent mechanism before or after the 1st VNR?</td>
<td>Which Ministry or Government institution is overseeing or leading the process for the 2nd VNR? Is it the same as for the 1st VNR? Are the individuals in charge of drafting the report different this time around? If so, are they familiar with the VNR process for the 1st VNR?</td>
<td>How did this SDG permanent institution of the 1st VNR coordinate and consult with group/individuals responsible for drafting the VNR? Does it still have an active role in the post-VNR period?</td>
<td>Does the SDG permanent mechanism have a mandate to review SDG progress and is it connected to planning and review processes for national development plans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you develop a national set of indicators for monitoring SDGs which is directly linked with national development plan and agreed up on by all stakeholders?</td>
<td>Does this institution have a dedicated budget and allocated human resources?</td>
<td>Did the coordination mechanism for the 1st VNR have the right stakeholders, and if not, who would you recommend including for the 2nd VNR?</td>
<td>Is there adequate inter-sector cooperation and coordination within the group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the 2nd VNR being produced under a new Government and if so, how much does the new Government want to follow the same process of the old Government? Do they want to use the 2nd VNR for political messages about how much better they are doing now they are in Government?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 Reviewing the permanent Institutional mechanism for SDG monitoring/implementation for the 1st VNR (already in place)

Preparing for the 2nd VNR involves conducting a self-assessment and requesting concrete feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the SDG institutional arrangements. This can help to assess whether they support SDG implementation. Linked to this, it is useful to assess the impact and quality of stakeholder engagement mechanisms developed for the 1st VNR.

**Questions to consider from the 4 C’s:**

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**Coordination**

- Did you set up an SDG permanent mechanism before or after the 1st VNR?
- Which Ministry or Government institution is overseeing or leading the process for the 2nd VNR? Is it the same as for the 1st VNR? Are the individuals in charge of drafting the report different this time around? If so, are they familiar with the VNR process for the 1st VNR?
- How did this SDG permanent institution of the 1st VNR coordinate and consult with group/individuals responsible for drafting the VNR? Does it still have an active role in the post-VNR period?
- Does the SDG permanent mechanism have a mandate to review SDG progress and is it connected to planning and review processes for national development plans?
- Did the coordination mechanism for the 1st VNR have the right stakeholders, and if not, who would you recommend including for the 2nd VNR?
- Did you develop a national set of indicators for monitoring SDGs which is directly linked with national development plan and agreed up on by all stakeholders?
- Does this institution have a dedicated budget and allocated human resources?
- Is there adequate inter-sector cooperation and coordination within the group?
- Is the 2nd VNR being produced under a new Government and if so, how much does the new Government want to follow the same process of the old Government? Do they want to use the 2nd VNR for political messages about how much better they are doing now they are in Government?
5.2 Reviewing the Temporary VNR taskforce/working group established for the 1st VNR

For the 1st VNR, institutional processes/groups specifically for developing and reviewing the VNR may have established. Will these processes or groups be re-established, or will a new group be created? Or will the VNR role of the permanent SDG monitoring institution be strengthened?

**Best practice box**

**Bangladesh: Involving Sector Ministries directly in the 2nd VNR process**

**What:** Each Ministry/Division was allocated a role for each SDG: lead, co-lead or associate. The sector ministries were then responsible for collecting data, holding consultations and developing SDG progress reports on their specific goal to feed into the VNR. They were given a template and format and asked to outline best practices, innovative ideas, partnerships and progress on leaving no one behind.

**Why:** We wanted to give responsibilities to each Ministry to ensure they knew how they could contribute to the VNRs. We did not just want the VNR to be written by the Prime Minister’s Office but wanted data and analysis from each sector ministry and for them to work closely with civil society and the private sector. It was also important for Ministries to engage at Divisional level as well.

**Challenges:** Ministries still require a lot of support and it was crucial to manage time well to ensure all SDG progress reports could be reviewed and incorporated into the VNR. Unless you start early, there is not going to be sufficient time to engage with sub-districts across the country.

**Questions to consider from the 4 C’s for Temporary VNR teams**

**Consultation**

- Did you share the stakeholder engagement plan with key stakeholders for their feedback?
- Was the stakeholder engagement plan, budgeted for, and implemented?
- Was stakeholder engagement a distinct phase in the VNR process or was it integrated throughout?
Was there a lead person for stakeholder engagement in the VNR process?

Coordination

- How effectively did the VNR team engage with the permanent SDG monitoring and implementation mechanism? What could you do to improve coordination and planning this time around between the VNR drafting time and the SDG institution?
- Did you coordinate effectively with NGOs, sector ministries, political advisors?
- Did you have a separate VNR drafting team? Will it be the same team or people as for the 1st VNR? Or will the permanent SDG institution lead and coordinate the VNR?
- How did the writing staff, stakeholder engagement, data collection and political coordination staff work together?
- Did you have adequate human resources to coordinate the VNR and clear roles and responsibilities?

Compilation

- How effectively did the VNR team compile, collate, analyse and share data for the VNR? Did you have a data lead within the VNR team and how effective was the engagement with the General Statistics Office in drafting the report and the statistical annex?
- Were there data focal points in ministries? How effectively did the focal points collect and share data? How did the VNR team access official data and administrative data from Ministries?
- Did you seek out and compile big data (such as satellite imagery, social media data) etc in consultation with the National Statistics Office?

Communication

- How effectively did you communicate with stakeholders and the public (using newsletters, website, social media, public meetings, media, leaflets, email updates, and 1:1 briefings) to communicate about the VNR process, opportunities to engage and the wider Agenda 2030?
- How effectively did you communicate to government ministries on the VNR process and encourage their participation?
- How effective was communication between the VNR team and the SDG permanent institution about the VNR process?

Planning the 2nd VNR Coordination team

Based on countries’ experience from the 1st VNR, managing time and coordinating the different parts of the VNR process is difficult. Feedback from countries that presented their 1st and 2nd VNRs has highlighted the need to the responsibilities for key processes and activities in the VNR process are very clear. Some of these may require new staff which will needed to be budgeted for.

Figure 8: Best practice box: Samoa

**Best practice box**

**Samoa: Inserting the VNR into national processes**

**What:** The 2020 VNR (the country’s 2nd VNR) was strategically aligned to the review of the national development strategy and used existing consultation and data processes. The SDG taskforce inserted the VNR directly into national process and utilised already planned annual sector review reports. Samoa linked the VNR to several international reports (e.g. CEDAW, Beijing +20, WTO), given the universality of the 2030 Agenda.

**Why:** By linking the VNR to reviews of the national development strategy, it was easier for the public to relate to the process. It would have been very overwhelming and time-consuming for Samoa to conduct separate processes for all the international reports, the VNR and the national development strategy.
How: 2020 was chosen as the year to present the VNR as it was aligned with the review process for the national development strategy. The 2nd VNR built completely on the processes established in 1st VNR. The SDG taskforce utilised national data processes that were established for the national development strategy and improved over time.

Challenges/Advice: Linking to sector-wide reports and national processes also means that a standalone budget is not needed for the SDG taskforce. Utilising sector leads in the SDG taskforce and linking to reviews of each sector, means that a lot of the data collection and analysis for the VNR is already completed.

Figure 9: Different roles in the VNR process

Box 4: Potential roles/responsibilities needed in VNR Coordination team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>Writing the report, reviewing feedback and responding to feedback, engaging with stakeholders and SDG working groups to respond to feedback, supporting presentations of VNR to cabinet and SDG working groups, liaison with translators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection, compilation and communication</td>
<td>Responsible for chasing up data from ministries and National Statistics Office (NSO), collating data, compiling data, sharing data with SDG working group, supporting data validation workshops, compiling statistical annex, developing graphs. Ideally this person should be from the NSO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Setting up and updating website, contacting and updating working group/SDG commission, public awareness, communicating about stakeholder engagement opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>Organising and facilitating stakeholder engagement events, initiatives, meetings, setting up and moderating online consultations, summarising feedback from consultations, liaison with VNR writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political liaison and coordination</td>
<td>Setting up meetings with government officials, eminent persons, political leaders, gathering political insight, holding informal briefings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistics and administration</td>
<td>Organising logistics of stakeholder events, printing, translating, interpretation, travel to regions, administration of stakeholder events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design, layout, and copyedit of report</td>
<td>Designing graphs, designing reporting, pictures, layout, copyediting/proofreading, report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio visual</td>
<td>Development of audio-visual material for HLPF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Comprehensive stakeholder engagement and communication in the 2nd VNR

Stakeholder engagement is one crucial area that countries are seeking to strengthen in their 2nd VNR. Many countries reported challenges in relation to stakeholder engagement. You will have learnt a lot from the 1st VNR. Most importantly, you will have learnt which are the key institutions, inside and outside government, to engage with. You may have also learnt about what type of outreach strategy is needed to engage meaningfully with marginalised groups. The 2nd VNR is an opportunity to overcome these challenges and put these lessons into practice to develop more timely and meaningful engagement with stakeholders.

6.1 Problem-solving key challenges to stakeholder engagement in VNR process

Interviews with countries that conducted 1st and 2nd VNRs and synthesis of VNR reports\(^3\) reveal that many countries encountered similar challenges when engaging stakeholders in the VNR process. Outlined below are some of the common challenges that were highlighted in the interviews as well as some of the tricky issues that countries need to navigate during stakeholder engagement.

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6.2 Reflecting on stakeholder engagement in the 1st VNR

How do you feel the stakeholder engagement part of 1st VNR process went the first time around? Do you think stakeholders found the process inclusive? Here are some questions to consider when assessing the stakeholder engagement process.

❖ What feedback did you receive from stakeholders on the VNR process? Was it inclusive?
Did stakeholders feel engaged and that their feedback was incorporated in the report?
Did you have good relations with key stakeholders during the 1st VNR?
Did you build trust between civil society and government? Or was some trust lost with some stakeholders?

Assessing inclusiveness

The 2nd VNR is an opportunity to broaden and deepen stakeholder engagement to ensure that a diverse group of people, especially for those who are vulnerable or marginalised, can participate. Assessing how inclusive the engagement with stakeholders was during the 1st VNR is a good place to start. UN ESCAP developed the following tool to help countries assess the level of inclusion in stakeholder engagement, which can be applied to the VNR process.

Checklist 5: Level of inclusion in the 1st VNR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion in the 1st VNR</th>
<th>Questions to consider for the 2nd VNR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder mapping &amp; analysis</td>
<td>Did you map and analyse the context and needs of different stakeholders and use the findings to shape the choice of methods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of perspectives</td>
<td>Did you provide equitable opportunities for sharing and considering diverse perspectives, including assenting and dissenting views, “grassroots” and scientific perspectives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing barriers to participation</td>
<td>Did you identify and take steps to address the factors that prevent participation (e.g. language, literacy, accessibility, gender, technology, socio-cultural prejudice, age etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion of vulnerable &amp; marginalised groups</td>
<td>Did you identify vulnerable and marginalised groups and enable their participation in the VNR process via appropriate methods?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness from cultural perspectives</td>
<td>Did the engagement process and methods demonstrate cultural sensitivity and awareness of tradition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of safe spaces</td>
<td>Did the methods, facilitation and the governance of the VNR team ensure safe space for the participation of all stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN ESCAP and IAP, Creating a seat at the table: A Stakeholder Engagement Planning and Assessment Tool for the 2030 Agenda, SDG Helpdesk

Who did you engage with during the 1st VNR? How can you engage with new groups?

Stakeholder mapping

A stakeholder map is not a ‘shopping list’ of all the key actors in a country, but a specific mapping of the influence and interest of key institutions and individuals in the VNR process. It is important to revisit the stakeholder list of the 1st VNR to assess how interested they were in the 1st VNR and what influence they had. Who is missing off this list? Consider issuing an ‘open call’ to consultation meetings and working groups to engage with broader groups.

Some of the ‘unusual suspects’ that often are not engaged in VNR processes

- Local government associations
- Trade unions/Labour Unions
- Parliament and parliamentary/legislative committees
- Private sector companies, women’s business cooperatives, representatives and networks
- Farmers & agricultural producers
- Youth volunteers
- Scientists and Academics
- Health institutes
- Professional Associations (Lawyers, Nurses)
- Sub-national NGOs
- LGBTI groups
- Regional NGOs who work on transboundary issues
6.3 Reflecting on the purpose of stakeholder engagement in the 1st VNR

All stakeholder engagement processes/activities are not the same. They have different purposes, scopes of responsibility and reach. The levels of engagement that are expected from the stakeholders involved\(^4\). It is important to choose the appropriate level of stakeholder engagement for the specific stage of the implementation and review processes. Box 6 is a useful tool to reflect on the purpose of stakeholder engagement during the 1st VNR. Different aspects and stages of stakeholder engagement may have had different purposes. When you collaborate more with stakeholders, the rewards you reap are big. It is likely that the more you involve, collaborate and empower stakeholders, the greater trust you will build and the more energy, commitment and partnerships for the SDGs will be created.

Box 5: Purpose of stakeholder engagement activities in 1st VNR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; VNR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>To provide regular information to assist stakeholders to understand the 2030 agenda, the VNR and SDG implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult</td>
<td>To obtain feedback from stakeholders, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how stakeholder input influenced the outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve</td>
<td>To work directly with stakeholders throughout the VNR process to ensure that their concerns and needs are consistently understood and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^4\) UN DESA and UNITAR (2020), Stakeholder engagement and the 2030 Agenda: A practical guide, United Nations, p. 58
considered, and that their expertise is used effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>To partner with stakeholders on decision-making regarding the VNR and ensure that stakeholders are equipped to contribute to developing and guiding process. Stakeholder recommendations are sought and incorporated and joint decision making to the maximum extent possible.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Civil society are part of an SDG Commission or working group, and help make joint decisions and develop joint recommendations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 6: Best practice box: Timor-Leste**

**Best practice box: Getting advice from Civil Society on how to be inclusive**

**Timor-Leste: Civil society advisory group**

**What:** The purpose of the group is to advise the VNR secretariat on how to effectively engage excluded groups in the consultation. The group also helped facilitate consultations. The advisory group is made up of representatives from the NGO Platform and youth, women and conflict prevention NGOs. This group is in addition to civil society representatives that sit on the SDG working group which oversees the VNR.

**When:** A civil society advisory group was set up from beginning of the VNR process, just after the stakeholder consultation plan was developed.

**Why:** It was going to be hard to involve marginalised groups in a meaningful way with limited time and preparation. Therefore, it was possible to involve certain NGOs that have strong expertise on inclusive and participatory approaches to advise the VNR secretariat. This would make a massive difference to ensuring Timor-Leste genuinely consulted the most vulnerable groups.

**Next time for the 2nd VNR:** It could be possible to involve the civil society advisory group even earlier by getting their feedback on the stakeholder engagement plan.

**6.4 Integrating Stakeholder engagement in the five main phases in the 2nd VNR process**

Stakeholder engagement is not an event or activity but an ongoing process — underpinned by clear communication. For the first VNR, many countries viewed stakeholder engagement as a distinct phase in the VNR process. However, in order to ensure that stakeholders engage in all stages of the VNR, it is useful to think of stakeholder engagement as a process. Stakeholder engagement and communication are an integral part of each phase, rather than a distinct phase (see figure 10).

Producing a 2nd generation VNR is an excellent opportunity to build on processes, mechanisms and initiatives established during the first VNR to create a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan. The key challenge is to balance both the political and technical consultation process and manage potential consultation fatigue.
A stakeholder engagement plan should outline how will you engage different stakeholders in different stages of the 2nd VNR and on different topics and processes. Checklist 6 outlines the four different questions to consider.

**Checklist 6: How were stakeholders engaged in the 1st VNR?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>Phase 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing mechanisms planning the process for VNR</td>
<td>Sharing information on VNR and stakeholder engagement plan</td>
<td>Defining parameters and focus of the report and storyline</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Reviewing data and analysing progress &amp; policy responses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who did you engage?
In what process?
When / how frequently?
Through what means?
Engaging on what topics?
There are many ways you can engage stakeholders, depending on the type and purpose of the engagement. Box 8 provides some suggestions for different ways to engage.

**Box 7: Types of engagement and ways to engage**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of engagement</th>
<th>Ways to engage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback on drafts and recommendations</td>
<td>Online or offline Feedback forms Validation workshops on near final drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback on consultation plan and VNR process</td>
<td>Share consultation plan and provide feedback form with different options 1:1 meetings/small focused with key stakeholders Evaluation meeting on 1st VNR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public consultation on country’s progress</td>
<td>Town hall meetings/consultations for feedback on specific issues Online surveys Radio talk show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical feedback on specific issues:</td>
<td>Technical working groups One to one meeting Focused consultations with stakeholders (e.g. people with disabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New policy responses and interventions</td>
<td>Idea incubators Public debates Radio talk shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data validation</td>
<td>Online platforms Validation workshops 1:1: consultations with scientists, or key stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>CSOs/Think Tanks provide data and survey input Dashboards Thematic workshops with technical experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public information</td>
<td>Radio Media campaigns Social media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Box 8: Best practice box: India Standing Sub-Groups**

**Best practice box: Enhancing stakeholder partnerships post 1st VNR**

**India standing committees and sub-groups**

**When:** After their 1st VNR

**What:** Setting up Standing Committees and CSO sub-groups for facilitating partnerships and reporting on SDGs between civil society, government and other stakeholders. This helped improve coordination and cooperation among Government Departments, CSOs and UN Agencies for the 2nd VNR.

**Why:** It was not enough to just involve civil society in the standing committees, it was necessary to hold dedicated consultations with vulnerable groups. Special sub-groups for the VNR were set-up. However, it was also realised that it was necessary to create an ongoing structure that would permit regular consultations with these groups.

**How:** Lead CSOs created sub-groups and organised consultations with vulnerable groups. Subsequently these have become standing sub-groups have been set up for continued engagement with all.

**Challenges:** It is still necessary to further institutionalise stakeholder engagement by ensuring these permanent standing sub-groups engage fully in the SDG process and future VNRs on an ongoing basis. This standing sub-groups have the potential to act a powerful platform for facilitating genuine collaboration and collecting inputs and feedback for the VNR.
6.5 Problem-solving strategies and tips for 2nd VNRs

Interviews with countries that conducted 1st and 2nd VNRs and synthesis of VNR reports reveal that many countries encountered similar challenges when engaging stakeholders in the VNR process. Outlined below are some of the common challenges that were highlighted in the interviews as well as some of the tricky issues that countries need to navigate during stakeholder engagement. Expectations will be higher in terms of inclusive stakeholder engagement the second time around.

Set up VNR/SDG website and communicate early
✓ Set up a website from the beginning about the VNR process and key dates. Include the list of the advisory group or SDG working group. Include the focus SDGs and structure of the report.
✓ Include a contact person in the VNR team for the public to get in touch with
✓ Conduct a mapping of stakeholders in government and outside government – analysing their interest and influence in the VNR process
✓ Share the stakeholder engagement plan and let the public know how to get involved

Establish a clear stakeholder engagement plan
✓ In order for stakeholder engagement to be meaningful, the input and feedback needs to be utilised effectively. This means that receiving and responding to feedback needs to be carefully planned for in the reviewing schedule.
✓ Clearly set out the proposed topics and opportunities for consultations and get input from stakeholders on these topics from the outset
✓ Be clear about the clear opportunities for engagement throughout the VNR development process and set out a clear timeline which is communicated and shared.

Structure the draft process clearly
✓ It is vital that the editing and drafting process is structured in a way that allows additional reviews and translation.
✓ A decision on the translation of drafts and final reports (how many drafts to be translated) needs to be taken at the beginning of the planning process.
✓ Translation and interpretation need to be budgeted for and the time delay factored into the timeline (see diagram).

Establish clear feedback mechanisms
✓ Developing clear processes where feedback is requested (providing and validating data, reviewing drafts, commenting on messages, feedback on stakeholder engagement plan).
✓ Developing clear feedback mechanisms (feedback forms, surveys, online forms, validation workshops, meetings, feedback forms)
✓ Developing clear topics where feedback is requested (e.g. progress on SDG 2, tackling exclusion of marginalised groups)
✓ Key formal stakeholder engagement opportunities need to be carefully scheduled in the VNR timeline – so can they fit into the drafting review process – and input can be utilised in re-drafts of the report.

**Plan ahead of time to manage large amounts of feedback**

- Organising large-scale consultations can generate lots of input, which not all can be used directly in the report. However, it can be used in wider initiatives around SDG monitoring.
- So, the objective of each stakeholder engagement needs to be clear. Stakeholders also need to understand how their feedback will be utilised.
- Ensure that validation workshops on second or final drafts of VNR are scheduled early enough so there is adequate time to incorporate feedback.
- With many submissions and consultations, it can be difficult to have time and space to incorporate and respond to feedback. Try to build on existing consultations and reviews—insert the VNR into existing meetings.
- Budget and schedule post-VNR follow-up meetings and activities so stakeholders are aware of opportunities to engage beyond the VNR and understand how their feedback will feed into wider SDG processes.

**Keeping the process going after the VNR**

- Publicise the outcomes of the VNR and inform the public about next steps.
- It is important to demonstrate that opportunities for dialogue with government on SDG implementation exist after the VNR is presented at the HLPF. Keeping communication lines open and organising and budgeting for dialogues and initiatives in immediate post-VNR period is a vital way to ensure stakeholder engagement is maintained between VNRs.
- Several countries decided to plan 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) VNRs in advance and allocated a specific budget for VNRs in their government multi-annual plans.
- Budget and schedule regular post-VNR follow-up meetings and activities so stakeholders are aware of opportunities to engage beyond the VNR and understand how their feedback will feed into wider SDG process.

**Figure 12: Summary of tips for stakeholder engagement**

- Ensure a dedicated person is responsible for stakeholder engagement.
- Consult stakeholders from the outset on the VNR process and institutional arrangement, stakeholder engagement plan and defining the key messages.
- Organise targeted consultations with specific groups, i.e. young mothers, people with disabilities in addition to helping them participate in multi-stakeholder events.
- Ensure feedback from consultations is planned for and is included in timeline of VNR preparation.
- Allocate a budget and allocate time for translation of key consultation documents and drafts of VNR.
Managing expectations and responding to NGOs who feel they were not consulted enough

Quite often civil society organisations or other stakeholders may express concern that they were not consulted sufficiently or that their voices were not being reflected in report. Due to the scale of the VNR and broadening of stakeholder engagement process, it may not be always be possible to meet the expectations of certain groups. Due to time and budget constraints there may need to be limits and boundaries to the consultation process. This means that an engagement and communication plan must be carefully developed and shared – and revised following receiving feedback. While expectations may need to be managed, it is also important to develop specific feedback opportunities, respond to feedback and be clear about specific dialogue opportunities with government and clear roles to engage in SDG monitoring and activities beyond the VNR.

What do we do if we have conflicting views with stakeholders? How to use and reflect contributions in the VNR and support shadow VNR reports.

While it is desirable to try to accommodate or acknowledge different views in the VNR, on occasion, it may not be always be possible to capture all views or agree on specific recommendations or next steps. It is therefore important to adopt a long-term stakeholder engagement plan and emphasise that the VNR and Agenda 2030 is not a process and not just a report. Scheduling consultation initiatives after the VNR is concluded is a good way to highlight that opportunities still exist for dialogue and debate on SDG implementation post-VNR. Civil society organisations may also wish to develop a ‘shadow’ VNR report outlining their views on SDG implementation. It may therefore be useful to include some case study boxes with excerpts of the shadow report or ensure that the report is shared with relevant sector ministries. It could also be possible to insert boxes, that highlight conflicting views on key issues, or include an annex of recommendations from civil society organisations.

How to engage with weak civil society networks/coalitions and individual CSOs that feel that Civil Society coalitions do not adequately represent their interests.

As a strong and dynamic civil society may still be emerging in some countries, it may also be possible that some Civil Society coalitions or networks are not always full representative of all groups, or do not have the capacity to share all consultations documents and information in a timely manner. This can lead to some organisations expressing that they were not adequately consulted. It may be appropriate to work closely with the Civil Society Coalition as well as key NGOs representing thematic areas in the development of the engagement and communication plan. This will ensure that the CSO coalition is fully aware of the government expectations in relation to civil society consultation and communication, but also that key sector NGOs are also engaged from the outset. It will also be important to work closely with sector working groups and organise thematic consultations directly with NGOs, keeping a register of CSOs that attend to ensure that their details can be included in feedback communications. It will also be important to organise direct consultation initiatives, such as online surveys, and advertise them widely on social media.

How to moderate online discussions and ensure reliable and genuine input?

It is important to manage and moderate comments, discussions and forums for online engagement to ensure that they are respectful and do not become a tool for slander or abuse. While they can be a productive use for critical democratic debate and feedback, it is important that they do not become overrun with negativity and that there is an appropriate tone. It might be useful to set up moderation guidelines and a code of conduct for participation that applies to online engagement for the VNR process. These guidelines could help moderators distinguish between comments that many people disagree with, and comments that could breach ethical and legal code of conduct.
7. Social distancing and online engagement in the 2nd VNR process

Online engagement is increasingly used as a stakeholder consultation platform in the VNR process. The Covid 19 pandemic led to an increased use of online consultation and drafting tools in the VNR process in 2020 and adoption of social distancing measures. It is likely that these measures will continue for the foreseeable future. This means that virtual and online measures will be used in future VNR process in areas where previously countries would have used face-to-face engagement. Online engagement can be a very cost-effective and time efficient way to engage groups that are geographically dispersed. It can be also be a useful tool to elicit feedback and input in ways that are more structured than face to face engagement (e.g. using for surveys and feedback forms).

Online engagement can therefore help tackle several the challenges encountered in the VNR process but only if there is carefully planning and adequate resourcing. Although more people globally now have access to a smart phone, it is important to recognise that online engagement can still pose a challenge for countries or communities where internet usage is low or cost prohibitive. This can prevent countries can starting online consultations and communication and can exclude certain groups in society from engagement.

**Issues to consider**

- How to increase online engagement where there is low internet usage
- How to manage and moderate lots of online feedback
- How to prepare for negative online feedback
- How to decide which online tools and platforms to use for different topics and purposes
- How to decide which resources do you need?

**Tips for getting online with poor internet access/usage**

- Providing regional and local training to communities in how to use their mobile phone to access online surveys, get information and join online forums
- Try to make websites and discussion forums accessible and hold specific training events for people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups
- Try to loan tablets, computers and mobile phones to community centres for groups to use so that they can participate in online forms and surveys. Set up online stations at socially distanced consultation events.
- Start first with radio segments and encouraging communities to visit community centres and regional centres to watch live streaming of events
- Provide access to charging points for mobile phone and tablets
- Provide centres where communities and groups can access tablets or computers to use online forums, surveys and live streaming of events

**How to manage and moderate lots of online feedback**

- Appoint a specific person to moderate all online forums and comment sections
- Develop a clear code of conduct that includes guidelines for open and safe feedback
- Develop a short briefing (that is translated into local languages) that synthesises the key messages from the feedback and include snippets or quotations of some of the input
- Post this briefing online and share
UN ESCAP 2nd Generation Guidance VNR tool

How to prepare for negative online feedback

 ✓ Anticipate and plan for receiving some critical or negative feedback if you post a draft online using social media. Discuss with colleagues in advance that feedback, even if critical, shows there is a good level of interest in the VNR process.

 ✓ Prepare guidance for the VNR team that includes examples of how to respond to constructive, political and harmful types of feedback.

 ✓ Partner with a youth or civil society organisation to manage the online outreach and social media. This can draw on their IT expertise and their facilitation expertise, and help avoid putting the government in an adversarial position.

How to decide which online tools and platforms to use for different topics /different objectives

Written submissions: Where you request technical feedback and data and where it is simpler and more efficient to get feedback written down and submitted online

Surveys: Where you want to assess different priorities and preferences and get feedback from large numbers of people on different options and ideas.

Discussions boards and forums: Where you want to encourage rapid debate and get feedback on different perspectives without having to get everything together in the same room.

Social media (Facebook, Twitter): To engage large groups, particularly young people, to engage in debate, share information and communicate about the VNR and Agenda 2030.

Live streaming and dedicated virtual meetings: To promote social distancing and provide wide coverage of an event that can be recorded and watched by different groups at different times.

How to decide which resources do you need?

Financial resources to pay for a moderator and purchase tablets and phones to loan community centres for training.

Technical expertise in establishing websites, communication, and using live streaming and online surveys.

Checklist 7: Questions to consider from the 1st VNR

Questions to consider from the 1st VNR

 ✓ Did you establish and regularly update a SDGs or VNR website for the 1st VNR? Did you use social media to engage?

 ✓ How did you manage to synthesise and utilise the large amount of input from online tools?

 ✓ Which groups or stakeholders mainly used the online tools? Did some groups not utilise these tools? Why was that?

 ✓ Which types of engagement did you use online tools for?

 ✓ If you did not use online tools for engagement, what was the reason? Time, cost, expertise or low internet usage in the community?
Checklist 8: Questions to consider from the 2nd VNR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to consider for the 2nd VNR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ What type of social distancing do you think may be required to conduct safe consultations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ What type of feedback and engagement is online engagement best suited for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Could you consider live streaming many face-to-face meetings?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ What training and software could be provided to marginalised groups or communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ What language will the online tools be in? Is there adequate time and budget to translate and synthesise online input?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social media tools for online debate, communication and engagement
❖ Social media tools: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, what’s app groups
❖ Podcasts and Apps

Online consultation tools
❖ Document collaboration and editing
❖ Online Surveys/polls
❖ Discussion boards and chat
❖ Document, video, audio libraries
❖ Event promotion and registrations
❖ Geo-tagging (Pin drop) of activities
❖ Analytics of who is contributing when and how often
❖ Individual and group chat
❖ Online data dashboard

Specific Tools for social distancing
❖ Live streaming and You Tube
❖ Virtual meetings like zoom
❖ Online submissions and use of feedback forms and surveys

Box 10: Best practice box: Georgia and online consultations

Best practice box: Social distancing and VNR stakeholder engagement during Covid 19

Georgia: Social distancing and VNR consultations

Online tools: Discussion boards, website, online voting and live streaming

What Georgia did differently due to social distancing requirements: Due to Covid 19 and social distancing requirements Georgia moved a lot of consultations online. They shared the VNR draft online on the SDG website and asked for the written submissions and feedback. Georgia received over 200 feedback submissions from the online feedback and from representatives of thematic working groups. It also shared drafts of the VNR report electronically with the four thematic working groups. The SDGs Interagency Council reviewed and approved the final draft of the report electronically.

Use of online voting: Georgia applied a new online voting procedure for making decisions in the SDG Council. This enabled the SDG Council to continue making decisions and avoid delays, even when they could not meet in person due to social distancing requirements. This made sure that everyone could safely participate and created an inclusive decision-making environment.

Tips to consider
It is important to think about a variety of social distancing methods for holding consultations. This could include online platforms (special websites, governmental websites, emails, online workshops, social networks, etc. However, it is crucial to think about how you will ensure that marginalised groups can meaningfully engage in the process. It is equally important to think how you will do online decision-making and whether resolution adoption procedures might be useful.
8. Tracking the trajectory from the 1st VNR: innovative data collection and analysis

The collection and analysis of high-quality disaggregated data is crucial to assess progress and track the country’s trajectory between the 1st and 2nd VNRs and towards the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, reliable data is vital for determining evidence-based interventions needed to address key blockages hindering implementation since the 1st VNR. However, lack of data and the absence of disaggregated data were two key challenges countries encountered during the 1st VNR. Since completing their 1st VNR, many countries implemented a series of measures to increase data availability and quality and to strengthen national statistical systems. Countries’ recognise that collecting better and more disaggregated data is directly connected to achieving the SDGs and ensuring no one is left behind.

8.1 Developing a national SDG indicator framework

Indicator frameworks are crucial for a successful follow-up and review of the SDGs, especially for VNR processes. An important step in the preparatory phase of the VNR process is to develop a comprehensive indicator framework, in consultation with all stakeholders. The indicator plan should be guided by official SDG indicators, and aligned with policy priorities outlined in the national development plan. It is best that this process is led by national statistics offices in close collaboration with the SDG coordination body/VNR working groups. The indicator framework can strengthen understanding of the level of demand for data among stakeholders. It can help identify disaggregation requirements and create ownership for data among stakeholders. In cases where a country has already developed an SDG indicator framework, this exercise should focus on reviewing indicators to improve alignment with policy priorities, integrate indicators into national plans, and to identify disaggregation needs.

8.2 Evaluating improvements in data collection since the first VNR

Assessing any improvements in data collection and mapping the availability of official data are important steps in the process. This will help you assess what data you have and identify alternative sources of data you may want to investigate to close the most important gaps. It will help identify opportunities to implement more advanced and innovative forms of data compilation such as integrating statistical and geospatial data. Figure 12 provides an example of data gap analysis.

Data Gap Analysis

Data gap analysis, led by the National Statistics Office (NSO), involves mapping indicators against national statistical collections and data sources. It can help identify:

- Indicators already produced
- Indicators for which data could be easily available/collection (expand existing datasets, collection instruments)
- Indicators which are likely to be very difficult or expensive to produce (new datasets/collections)

Data gap analysis can categorise data availability into 4 categories: currently available, easily feasible, feasible with a strong effort, not feasible even with a strong effort. UN ESCAP have produced an ‘end-to-end framework’ for supporting the role of National Statistics Offices in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Data gap analysis is a key part of the agenda-setting
stage of this framework. Data gap analysis can help support the development of a national indicator framework and strengthen alignment to national M&E and development strategies, which underpin the 2nd VNR process.

To access this ‘end-to-end framework’ on SDG implementation and the role of NSOs, visit here: [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session_1_Overview_end-to-end_framework_Cameron_WS_National_SDG_10-13Sep2019.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session_1_Overview_end-to-end_framework_Cameron_WS_National_SDG_10-13Sep2019.pdf)

**Figure 13: Example of data gap analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LN</th>
<th>Groups of the SDG indicators</th>
<th>Number of indicators</th>
<th>% of applicable indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>All unique SDG indicators</td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Applicable</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Currently available</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Easily feasible</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Feasible with a strong effort</strong></td>
<td>89</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Not feasible even with a strong effort</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Current statistical capacity (sum of currently available and easily feasible indicators)</strong></td>
<td>79</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: An end-to-end framework for national SDG implementation - focus on the role of NSOs Regional Workshop on National SDG Reporting Mechanisms: An End-to-End Framework Bangkok, Thailand, 10-13 September 2019*

**Checklist 9: Evaluating improvements in data collection since the 1st VNR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Since the 1st VNR</th>
<th>2nd Generation VNR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you have more data?</strong> Is data available for an increased % of SDG indicators?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More frequent data?</strong> Improved frequency of data collection from large government surveys – i.e. 3 survey rounds (e.g. DHS) in regular time intervals (every 4 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>More disaggregated data?</strong> Is there more disaggregated data on disability (for e.g.) in DHS and Census but also in labour force or household income and expenditure surveys? Can alternative data sources, such as geospatial data or mobile phone data, assist with disaggregation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you have greater geographical coverage</strong> with enhanced mapping of vulnerable groups? Can alternative data sources integrated with traditional data sources improve geographical coverage and mapping of vulnerable groups?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you have more data on SDG progress collected at sub-national level?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greater use of qualitative or non-government data</strong> on SDGs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greater use of sector-specific data?</strong> More data to build up a picture, (i.e. agricultural census, education or crime surveys)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greater use of administrative data?</strong> improvements in collection and sharing of administrative data from sector ministries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.3 Getting the data: the role of data coordination and problem-solving
Increasing the amount of data is only half the challenge. An important lesson from 1st VNRs is the challenge of obtaining, collating, and sharing the data. The national statistics office is often the central agency for producing official statistics and coordinates data production and collection across the national statistical system. However, line ministries also play an important role in collecting, organising and sharing data. Improving data coordination by involving the national statistical office into the VNR team from the outset is crucial in encouraging sector ministries, government bodies and other institutions to share data for the VNR and other national and international reporting needs.

### Key data planning tips when starting the 2nd VNR

| ✓ | Ensure representation of the National statistical office in the VNR team to lead coordination, analysis and presentation of data. Make sure there is a dedicated person in the VNR team for coordinating and presenting the data for the report. |
| ✓ | Discuss with the National Statistics office about lessons learnt from the 1st VNR and use the reflection tool together (Checklist 9) to evaluate data improvements. |
| ✓ | Engage with, and support, sector ministries from the beginning to collect administrative data. |
| ✓ | Conduct a data mapping/data gap analysis to assess the level, type, quality and coverage of data. |
| ✓ | Develop a plan to address challenges in data collection and coordination from the 1st VNR and address data gaps. |
| ✓ | Develop a plan to obtain new forms of innovative data, qualitative data and non-traditional data by reaching out to stakeholders for data and to help with problem solving. |
| ✓ | Do you want to develop a national indicator matrix, using a mix of local, global and proxy indicators? Many countries adapt the global indicator framework to their national contexts. |

### Problem-solving data gaps

| ✓ | If there are gaps in official data, consider using alternative forms of data such as administrative data from sector ministries, scientific data from science-related ministries and various forms of 'big' data such as geospatial data from national mapping agencies, mobile phone and/or sales data from the private sector, and data from NGOs. |
| ✓ | Try to reach an agreement with the National Statistical Office and technical experts about the definition of 'valid' or accurate data and the correct wording of caveats or explainer boxes. Discuss how non-traditional forms of data, such as big data’ might be considered official data. |
| ✓ | If there is disagreement about whether to use CSO-generated data in the report, due a reliance on official data, consider using case study boxes featuring CSO data. It might also be useful to consider holding data validation workshops to discuss data gaps, encourage debate and the corroboration of data. |
| ✓ | Try to get data from sub-national level, and talk to local government about what locally collected data they have. |

### 8.4 Using and analysing the disaggregated data that you have collected

While many countries have improved the collection of disaggregated data since the 1st VNR or adopted methods to disaggregate existing data, the key challenge is to fully utilise and analyse the

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6 It might be useful to use the ‘end-to-end framework, produced by UNESCAP which outlines the role of data gap analysis in the Follow Up and Review process of Agenda 2030.
data. However, this can pose new challenges about how to effectively analyse the data and raises issues in relation to human resource capacity.

### Tips for analysis of data

- Try to produce data from government surveys data by income, gender, age, migratory status, disability, social groupings and geographic location. Often the data is there, but it needs to be pulled out and analysed.

- It is important to disaggregate data from all government surveys (labour force, crime, household income and expenditure etc.)

- Consult with the stakeholders about which disaggregated data to analyse in order to reflect national priorities and to ensure data is collected on marginalised groups.

- Try to collect and analyse data from a variety of sources (including censuses, sample household surveys and administrative data). This can also be informed by the use of big data sources such as geospatial information.

- Make sure to produce graphs and tables that display the disaggregated data in the report and is included in the statistical annex.

### 8.5 Improving collection and use of innovative and non-traditional data

More than 50 percent of the 2019 VNR countries included references to, or used, non-traditional data sources in their reports. This could include data from international organisations (such as the World Bank), CSOs/Think Tanks, and the private sector. Identification of non-traditional or new data sources can be useful in filling data gaps, but also in providing new and fresh data on emerging issues that government surveys can’t collect. Using technology to collect innovative forms of data can improve data collection, analysis and accessibility. There is potential for non-traditional data to be used as part of official statistics. Engaging early on with stakeholders to determine who can access and analyse this data is an important part of data mapping.

#### New innovative forms of data

- Small area estimation
- Geospatial and satellite data
- Analysis of social media (Facebook, twitter), google and uber
- Mobile phone coverage to assess mobility

### 8.6 Communicating the data – innovative ways to present the data

It is important to consider from the start of the planning stage how you wish to analyse, communicate and present data in the VNR and more generally to the public. This affects budgeting, time-management and effective use of human resources. Checking and communicating the data (including providing references and footnotes) is time-consuming, but crucial for accuracy, trust, transparency, credibility, and integrity. Communicating data through clear data visualizations, such as charts, graphs, infographics, and tables makes it easier to understand progress and show trajectories. It also makes the report more appealing and easier to get across the storyline.

#### Checklist 10: What communication methods will be used in the 2nd VNR?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication methods</th>
<th>What will be used in the 2nd VNR?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statistical annex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting platforms/dashboards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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7 Partners for Review, 2019, Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the 2019 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development – a Comparative Analysis, GIZ, p. 35
Statistical annex
Statistical annexes are an important way to highlight data availability, gaps, and relevant insights useful for tracking SDG indicators. Approximately 30 percent of the 2019 VNR reports included a statistical annex, which is slightly less than the previous reporting year\(^8\). Statistical annexes can use the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and add priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate.

SDG dashboards/trackers/reporting platforms
Several countries during their 2\(^{nd}\) VNR have launched online SDG reporting platforms to make disaggregated data easily accessible and to communicate results and progress. These dashboards improve communication, data operability and help streamline data collection and dissemination. UNESCAP has also produced a dashboard to track national SDG progress\(^9\).

9. Telling your story: Drafting the 2\(^{nd}\) VNR using a storyline
The most powerful way to get key messages across in the 2\(^{nd}\) VNR is to develop a storyline which ties together the report. A storyline is the overarching message of the report, which runs through the different sections of the report. The storyline ties together the report and helps ensure that readers of the report come away with a clear understanding of the country’s priorities and how the country seeks to address key challenges. It is important to let the 2\(^{nd}\) VNR ‘tell a story’ about the national priorities and what the country has accomplished given the context.

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\(^8\) Partners for Review, p. 36
\(^9\) [https://data.unescap.org/data-analysis/sdg-progress](https://data.unescap.org/data-analysis/sdg-progress)
9.1 Tips for developing a storyline

- Developing the storyline should be one of the first steps of the 2nd VNR process
- Even if you are running ahead of schedule, spending time on the storyline from the beginning will help finalise the report
- Holding a consultation early on with stakeholders on key messages and the overarching storyline on SDG progress will help stakeholders to re-engage with what the SDGs are about. It will also help steer the direction of data collection and further analysis to understand the ‘story’.
- It will be important to think about audience(s) for the report and how to focus down on specific SDGs to help tell your country’s story (see box)

The 700-word key messages which you are required to produce, are opportunity to outline the storyline. As they are sent to UN DESA before the final VNR report, they are an opportunity to get clarity on the country’s storyline before the report is drafted.

The key messages for the 2nd VNR are an opportunity to tell the world how successful your actions from the 1st VNR have (or have not) been. It is an opportunity to communicate the country’s story about what the country has accomplished given the country’s context, to outline setbacks or problems the country has faced and what support and resources the country would like to help address key challenges.

While the key messages should emerge from the evidence and data collected on the SDGs, it is important that there is some consensus on the key messages and the overarching storyline of the report early on to ensure buy-in and a smooth sign-off of the final report. The overarching messages will help shape the story of report and the narrative of any potential audio-visual material such as a video.

Box 11: Thinking about the audience for the 2nd VNR

What was the primary audience(s) for the first VNR? How did this affect the focus and analysis of the report? Was it the UN and member states? Was it the national political audience?

Have you modified the audience(s) for the 2nd VNR? What changes will this bring about?

The primary audience(s) for the report might affect the following:

* Storyline
* Translation of the report into local languages
* Focus/in-depth SDGs
* Linking VNR into national reviews and planning processes
9.2 How a storyline shapes section of the 2nd VNR report

Selecting focus SDGs

- The storyline will also affect the choice of specific SDGs to focus on in-depth in the 2nd VNR report and the proposed objectives of the 2nd VNR. It will affect whether you choose to narrow the choice of SDGs and indicators to report on to align more directly with your national plan, priorities and context.

Policy & enabling environment:

- The storyline ideally should reflect how the country has adapted to the changing context since the 1st VNR and how your national development plan and sequencing of priorities is geared towards, or aligns with, implementing the SDGs.

Update from 1st VNR

- The storyline should summarise or sum up how the country has changed since the 1st VNR. The storyline is an opportunity to pull together the setbacks and successes of the country since its 1st VNR.

Progress on the Goals since the 1st VNR

- The storyline reflects the overarching story on your country’s progress on the Goals and whether the country is on track and accelerating, improving or slowing down since the 1st VNR.

Leaving no one behind:

- The storyline should reflect how progress on the Goals since the 1st VNR, given your country’s context, has improved the situation for those most left behind. The storyline will how the government focuses interventions to address those at risk, and how the government will address key setbacks especially for the most vulnerable. It can draw on newly disaggregated data and innovations in producing disaggregated data, since the 1st VNR.

Means of implementation

- The storyline will highlight the key setbacks and success that have hindered or aided the implementation of the SDGs since the 1st VNR.
10. Presenting at the HLPF: seizing opportunities the second time around

For many countries, presenting their 1st VNR at the HLPF was an exciting, but also stressful experience. The spotlight placed on your country as a presenting VNR country, and the enormous preparation needed to prepare the VNR presentation and co-host side events, can make the HLPF a very busy event. Even countries that attended the HLPF virtually in 2020, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, found it to be time-consuming having to prepare video presentations of Ministers and coordinate schedules across time zones. Virtual participation in future HLPFs is a possibility. This will result in consultation and preparation processes ahead of the HLPF increasing in importance, due to the need to ensure that stakeholders voices are heard throughout the HLPF even if not all actors attend in person.

10.1 Reflecting on the HLPF for the 1st VNR

There are five main aspects that shape a country’s participation at the HLPF (see Figure 14). The key to successful participation at the forum is successfully anticipating and preparing for all aspects. Many events and activities are established at the last minute, so it can seem difficult to prepare in advance. However, it is important to plan for these different aspects, and deliberately outline your objectives for the HLPF and what your country would like to achieve for the 2nd time around.

Figure 16: Participation at the HLPF

Checklist 11: Reflecting on the HLPF for a 2nd VNR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First VNR</th>
<th>2nd VNR...I would prepare differently next time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VNR presentation and audio visual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalising presentations and inputs from multi-stakeholder delegation</td>
<td>e.g. Prepare presentation and speaking notes in advance of attending HLPF in order to get wide input from delegation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for official questions during VNR presentation</td>
<td>e.g. Try to reach out to ‘friends of VNR’ early to receive some questions in advance. Develop key messages sheet for all speakers to help them stay on message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for media interviews</td>
<td>e.g. Get media training and practice in front of media in virtual setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finalising audio-visual video</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Decide key messages and tone of the video first before choosing images and drafting text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing timeslot</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Try to practice with the full panel to get accurate speaking points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engaging citizens in your home country in the VNR presentation</strong></td>
<td>e.g. If possible, try to establish a timeslot which enables citizens in your country to be able to attend virtually (i.e. a timeslot that is not in the middle of the night)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ministerial Interventions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Ministerial speeches</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Decide backups (e.g. NY PR) if Minister not available or timeslot is not conducive. Decide if speech will be live or pre-recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Ministerial interventions at other events</strong></td>
<td>Try to write speeches in advance to free up time during the HLPF for other last-minute interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Side events</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-hosting / speaking at side events</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Plan side-event in advance. Try not to over commit Ministers or ensure other senior staff are available to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participating in and speaking at VNR Labs</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Carefully schedule attendance at more VNR labs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attending high level lunches, launches and drinks events</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Try not to over commit Ministers or ensure other senior staff are available to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilateral political meetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scheduling bilateral meetings with UN staff and Ministers</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Develop a list of key UN staff and Member States you wish to engage with before the HLPF and start contacting them in advance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managing protocol</strong></td>
<td>Ensure there is a dedicated person in charge of Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal networking and meetings</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meetings with UN staff and regional offices</strong></td>
<td>e.g. Consider virtual networking and preparing list of key contacts in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meetings with delegations and HLPF attendees</strong></td>
<td>Make sure adequate time is allowed in the schedule to attend formal meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting members of multi-stakeholder delegation (e.g. CSOs, youth etc) to network and attend events</strong></td>
<td>Discuss with the delegation about their objectives for the HLPF and who they would like to meet in advance. Help them plan and prepare for meetings and designate a key person to support CSO, private sector and youth representatives, for e.g.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 12: Best practice box: The Philippines

Best practice box: keeping the process going after the VNR
The Philippines ‘Stakeholder Chambers’

When: After their 1st VNR
What: Setting up a Sub-committee on SDGs with a dedicated Stakeholder Chamber
Why: To respond to demands that arose during the 1st VNR for more space to engage on the SDGs. The government wanted to ensure there was a platform for regular dialogue with civil society after the 1st VNR.
How: The Sub-Committee on SDGs serves as a regular and institutionalised space for engagement with all stakeholders (private sector, civil society, academia, media, trade and labour unions). The sub-committee provides space for greater dialogue on the national implementation on the SDGs to help provide input for the reviews of the national development plan (PDP). It holds stakeholder chambers to identify how non-government and private sector initiatives can fill current development gaps.
Challenges: Despite a budget being allocated for this stakeholder chamber, due to increased financial pressures due to Covid 19, this money was temporarily reallocated to other areas. This postponed the operationalization of the Stakeholder Chambers for next year.

11. Next steps…. how to kick start the 2nd VNR

One of the most vital lessons from countries that produced their first VNRs was the importance of time management and planning and getting started on the right track. This section provides useful tips and tools to kick start the VNR planning process for a 2nd VNR and guidance to ensure that stakeholder engagement is integrated through the entire VNR process.

Starting Early
Starting very early (for e.g., in August the year before the HLPF) is the number one recommendation from countries that have produced their 2nd VNR. However, what does ‘starting early’ mean in practice? What key processes should be brought forward and how can you manage processes that seem to consume a lot of time?

Time management tips from 1st VNRs: Improving areas which consume a lot of time

Setting up a VNR Team/Reorganising institutional arrangements: Start the process of setting up a team early on, and engaging stakeholders in the process of evaluating institutional arrangements for the 1st VNR early on, so institutions/processes can be set up and ready to go for the VNR process.

Planning process: Start the planning process for the VNR as early as possible, ideally August/September the year before your present your VNR. Build in flexibility and time for unexpected events and delays. (MORE BELOW)

Stakeholder engagement: Develop a stakeholder engagement and communication plan to set the boundaries of engagement and carefully plan and budget the process. Stakeholder engagement is best viewed as a process that is integrated throughout the VNR process, rather than a standalone phase in itself.
**Data collection:** Build good relations and communication channels with the National Statistics Office (NSO) and data officials in ministries from the very beginning to speed up data collection. Have representatives of the NSOs join the VNR task team. Decide early on if you are going to produce a statistical annex or dashboard.

**Editing and design:** Allocate adequate time and budget for finalising the report, final edits, layout and design. Ideally dedicate a specific person to lead on design of the report but be clear when the drafting process is complete, so time is not wasted redesigning the report after last-minute edits.

**HLPF:** Decide on the delegation, logistics and travel arrangements early on to reduce time spent on this in May-June, when it is important to finalise the VNR report and engage in strategic planning for HPLF

**Post-VNR:** Plan and budget for events and initiatives for the immediate post-VNR period (August-December) from the beginning.

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**Interview impressions: Samoa, VNRs: 2016 & 2020**

“My advice is to start as early as possible. You need a VNR plan that is flexible as things will not always go according to plan. If you are running late, one of the most important things to focus on is getting your ‘storyline’ right. It is useful to think about what you want to say and what you want to showcase since your 1st VNR. If you focus on getting that right, it will really help your VNR.”

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Figure 15 outlines two key blocks of early steps that can help countries plan where to start, especially in the context of producing a 2nd VNR.

**Figure 17: 2nd VNR Planning Steps...what to do right now!**

**First step: August-November 2020**

- Take stock of the 1st VNR process and report - lessons and challenges
- Review and refresh institutional arrangements and establish VNR Team
- Develop stakeholder engagement and communication plan
- Establish VNR budget, capacity requirements and planning
Second step: September-December 2020

- Start communication, outreach and stakeholder engagement
- Review national SDG indicator framework, map available data, request non-traditional data, and develop data timeline
- Start tracking your trajectory and reviewing progress
- Develop storyline for the report

Key references

Julia Joëlle Müller, 2020, The Role of Second Generation VNRs – in Asia and the Pacific, UN ESCAP


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