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VNR LAB – Against all odds: Meaningful VNRs in fragile and conflict-affected situations

17 July 2024, 9:00-10:00 am

New York, United Nations Headquarters and online

Summary Report *

Countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations face complex challenges that require them to conduct their voluntary national review (VNR) using adapted, home-grown approaches and solutions. Ongoing conflict and humanitarian crises, fragmented institutions, lack of control over parts of the territories, displacement, lack of resources, scarcity of data, and limited opportunities for broad consultation mean that applying the global VNR guidelines may not always be feasible or applicable.

The VNR Lab brought together representatives of Member States to reflect on approaches, solutions and innovations that have aided in conducting the VNR under such situations.

1. Key messages

- Political stability and sustainable peace are prerequisites for development and achieving the SDGs.
- In countries affected by conflict and fragility, the VNR can be an opportunity to identify and build consensus around national priorities, engage with stakeholders, and envision a pathway for moving forward post-conflict. It is also a vehicle to convey critical messages to the global community including donors and development partners and garner their support.
- Tailoring the global SDG framework, including through the adoption of additional SDGs or targets, can help countries affected by conflict and fragility to monitor and address national priorities not adequately tackled in the 2030 Agenda, such as landmines and irregular migration.
- Data gaps are a common challenge facing VNR development but becomes quite magnified in countries in fragile and conflict-affected situations. The VNR can incentivize and help countries affected by conflict and instability to establish data collection and validation mechanisms.

* This document did not undergo formal editing.

- Dynamic modeling can be helpful for countries in conflict to better understand the effects of conflict and provide data- and literature-informed scenario-based forecasts of development futures where exact data may not be available.
- Countries in situations of conflict and fragility can fill critical data gaps, including those relating to peace, using statistics from different sources including government agencies, the private sector, civil society, humanitarian missions and global databases.
- Post-conflict efforts must include investments in developing statistical systems, capacity building of personnel, and utilizing/developing technology tools for data generation and analysis.
- Post-conflict efforts for rebuilding, reconstruction, and reintegration of affected communities depend on the support of donors and the international community, who play a key role in the shift from humanitarian work to sustainable development and achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

2. Interventions by Member States

Yemen: Yemen's first VNR, submitted in 2024, was seen as an opportunity amidst the ongoing war and humanitarian crisis. To conduct the VNR, Yemen adopted a flexible framework and benefited from consultations with stakeholders. Data gaps were a major challenge. To counter this challenge, data was obtained from international sources, government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. Prediction tools and estimations were also utilized to fill data gaps. Projections and modeling were deployed to predict indicators for the medium and long terms based on different scenarios. The VNR helped build consensus among partners on priorities for the future. Sustainable peace was the primary priority highlighted by the VNR for moving forward. Other priorities included mobilization of funds, strengthening institutional capacity, transitioning from humanitarian aid to development, climate change adaptation, and partnerships with the private sector, civil society organization and donors.

Libya: The Sustainable Development Committee at the Ministry of Planning of Libya led the country's efforts towards conducting a second VNR in 2024. The VNR process was consultative and allowed, through the Libyan Forum for Sustainable Development, for the participation of the private sector, civil society, youth groups, women, persons with disability, legislative bodies, academia and experts. The VNR report identified illegal immigration as a primary challenge facing the achievement of the SDGs in Libya. Being a transit country with vast borders, managing, monitoring and reporting on the migration situations was not feasible. The VNR notes the political, economic, social, cultural, health and security consequences of this trend.

South Sudan: Emerging from war and newly independent, South Sudan faces the challenge of underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of data. The latest census was conducted in 2008 and data has not been updated since 2010. As such, conducting data-driven analysis for the VNR was a challenge because of outdated data or lack thereof. To remedy this situation, the government relied on reports of humanitarian missions in the country. Other sources of data were international databases on SDG 16 and conflict countries including South Sudan, such as the Armed Conflict

Location and Event Data, the Rule of Law Index, conflict figures by the UN, and the Human Security Survey. Government agencies, mainly ministries, as well as other stakeholders were brought together to validate the data. Technology helped improve the quality of data and access to data. Moving forward, there is a need to invest in statistical systems, provide training and skill-building, and further utilize technology tools for data generation and analysis.

Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan’s fourth VNR sought to give voice to marginalized communities and promote collective efforts towards development. Azerbaijan seeks a decision-making process that is inclusive of civil society, the business community, youth, and international organizations. Identified priorities included rehabilitation, construction and reintegration of liberated areas into the national development plan. A critical challenge was landmines, with the country having one of the highest concentrations in the world. Landmines were a grave risk to security and endangerment of communities. To demonstrate its commitment to the SDGs, Azerbaijan developed a national-level SDG 18 on “mine action”. Moving forward, Azerbaijan seeks to achieve full demining, safe living condition, social protection, integration of affected populations into society, and integration of land into agricultural systems. International support and the shift from humanitarian aid to development will be key.

3. Programme

Introductory remarks by the Moderator – Ms. Jana El Baba, Sustainable Development Officer, 2030 Agenda and SDG Coordination Cluster, ESCWA

Speakers

- Mr. Mohamad Al-Hawri, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen
- Mr. Taher Belhassan, General Director of the Planning Institute, and Head of the Sustainable Development Committee, Ministry of Planning, Libya
- Mr. Huseyn Huseynov, Head of the Department for Sustainable Development and Social Policy, Ministry of Economy, and Secretary of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan
- Mr. Augustino Ting Mayai, Chairperson, National Bureau of Statistics, South Sudan

Discussion



The VNR Lab was organized on the margins of the 2024 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Economic Commission for African (ECA), and the Economic Commission for Asia Pacific (ESCAP).