9th Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews in the Arab Region

League of Arab States, Cairo, 2-3 October 2023

Information Note [DRAFT]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established principles for a follow-up and review process that is robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, and transparent. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) lie at the heart of this follow-up and review process. Through VNRs, member states report on their progress, highlight matters of priority, and share their experiences including successes, challenges, and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. VNRs can also help mobilize multi-stakeholder partnerships. By 2023, 330 VNRs have been submitted to the HLPF globally including 35 VNRs from 21 Arab countries. Three Arab countries have expressed interest in submitting a VNR in 2024.[1]

Member states reaffirm every year the importance of the VNR process during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) held in New York in July. This year, the Secretary-General of the United Nations issued a special edition of *The Sustainable Development Goals Report*,[2] spurring ambitious action and proposing a rescue plan to put the 2030 Agenda back on track. The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit (SDG Summit), which will be held in September 2023 under the auspices of the General Assembly, will be a cornerstone for strengthening countries' commitment to the 2030 Agenda, and a turning point to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs during the remaining time period until 2030. The Summit calls on all parties concerned with development to share their transformational plans and activities to accelerate the implementation of the Goals.[3]

To support Arab States, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the League of Arab States, has been organizing regional VNR workshops. The workshops provide a space for knowledge exchange and peer learning on VNRs in the Arab region. Since October 2019, eight workshops have been organized. Moreover, ESCWA established the Arab VNR Community of Practice (CoP) as an informal peer-learning mechanism that brings together government officials from Arab countries involved in the preparation of VNRs at a working level.[4] In 2023, ESCWA organized the first twinning activity between two Arab states to facilitate a bilateral exchange of experiences on SDG follow-up and the VNR process.

I.   Objectives and thematic focus

As in previous editions, the 9th regional VNR workshop provides a **platform for dialogue and peer learning** on VNR issues in Arab countries. Since it is the first workshop within the 2024 cycle, it will shed light on

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[1] The updated list of VNR countries is available here: https://hlpf.un.org/countries?f%5B0%5D=year%3A2024
[2] The report is available at this link: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/
[3] For more information on the 2023 SDG Summit, visit: https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023
[4] For more information on ESCWA VNR support, please visit the dedicated page.

experiences of Arab countries that submitted a VNR at the 2023 HLPF and on preparations of countries that plan to conduct a VNR in 2024.

On the occasion of the **2023 SDG Summit**, the workshop will consider post-summit commitments aimed at putting the SDGs back on track until 2030 and implications for the VNRs in the next phase.

The workshop's thematic focus will address the role of **technology** as one of the 2030 Agenda means of implementation and ways of integrating it in the VNR process and report. The workshop's thematic focus reflects a growing international and Arab regional interest in leveraging technology, especially digital technology, to serve sustainable development. The United Nations system has put forward, within the framework of the 2023 SDG Summit, a proposal for international collective along six transitions, one of which is digital public infrastructure.[5] The UN is also preparing for the "Global Digital Compact"[6] as part of the Summit of the Future planned for 2024.

II.   Topics of discussion

a)   **VNRs of 2023 and 2024:** countries that submitted a VNR in 2023 (Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Comoros) will present a summary of the VNR methodology, main challenges, and solutions adopted to address them. Since these countries submitted their second VNR, the dialogue will address mechanisms for linking with the first VNR and the extent to which the VNR can be used in development planning and implementation follow-up. The workshop will provide countries planning for a 2024 VNR (to date, Mauritania, Oman, and the Syrian Arab Republic)[7] with the opportunity to share their plans and proposals for linking with previous VNRs. The workshop will also present the Compendium of VNR Good Practices in Arab Countries, which ESCWA is currently preparing, and will discuss opportunities for bilateral exchange of experiences, or twinning, during the 2024 cycle.

b)   **Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda - post 2023 SDG Summit:** the workshop will present the main outcomes of the 2023 HLPF and SDG Summit as well as commitments made by countries, stakeholders, and the United Nations system. These commitments include the Secretary-General's Rescue Plan, the SDG Summit's Political Declaration, and SDG acceleration initiatives. The workshop will consider the implications of these for VNRs in the next phase.

c)   **2030 Agenda means of implementation - the role of technology and its transformative opportunities:** the workshop will address the role of technology, notably digital and emerging technology, in accelerating the SDGs.[8] Experiences will be shared on (1) the use of technology in the VNR process, whether in consultations or in collecting data and information, (2) the participation of technology stakeholders in the VNR process, (3) reporting of technology-related indicators and utilizing available sources of information, and (4) integrating technology in the

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[5] https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII
[6] https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact
[7] As of 26 July 2023. The updated list of VNR countries is available here:
https://hlpf.un.org/countries?f%5B0%5D=year%3A2024
[8] The 2030 Agenda dedicates a section to the means of implementation which are further detailed in SDG 17 covering financing, technology, capacity building, partnerships and data. Technology-related targets can be found in most SDGs.

VNR report, including its contribution to achieving the SDGs; challenges facing technology transfer, development and financing; and future plans or opportunities in this context.

III.   Organizational and Logistical Details

a) Date and venue
The workshop will be organized **in-person at the League of Arab States in Cairo** on 2-3 October 2023, with possibility for online participation.

b) Participants and registration
The workshop targets government officials in Arab countries involved in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, particularly those engaged in the preparation of VNRs and members of the VNR Community of Practice (CoP). Participants will also include experts from regional, international and United Nations organizations. Representatives from technology authorities or committees are also welcome.

Participation is by invitation only.

c) Working languages
Arabic and English are the working languages of the workshop. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in Arabic, English, and French.

d) Correspondence
Correspondence regarding logistical arrangements of the regional workshop should be addressed to:
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