

Concept Note

Session Title: Data to Unlock the Relevance and Accuracy of Voluntary National Reviews

Event: The African voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews: Strengthening integration and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at the 10th Africa Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (Hybrid session)

Registration Link: https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_W7rwISoDRDizgMYudLhKCQ

Date and Time: 22 April 2024, 11:30hrs – 13:00 hrs.

Venue: Conference Room 3, UNCC, Addis Ababa - Ethiopia

Background

Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) serve as part of regular comprehensive follow-up and review mechanism for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the high-level political forum (HLPF) meeting under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) every year in July. In preparing the VNRs, member States are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of their progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven. The VNRs facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The following 15 African countries expressed interest to undertake VNRs of their implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the 2024 HLPF:

Chad, Congo (Republic of the), Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

The power of data to unlock the data dividend for the SDGs is one among the 12 high impact initiatives providing a platform to take the SDGs to scale. It has been stated that “data is the fuel that powers progress across all the SDGs”. By 2030, the Power of Data High Impact Initiative aims to launch 50 national data partnerships to boost government decision making, accelerate digital transformation agendas, and open up new economic and developmental opportunities.¹ As one of the success metrics, it is anticipated that the percentage of available SDG data will increase. For instance, during the 2023 SDG Summit, the UN Secretary General called for countries’ urgent action to reap the data dividend by 1) working towards securing data for at least 90% of the SDG targets in each country by 2027; 2) increasing domestic financing for data and statistics by 50% from the current levels by 2030; 3) embracing new data sources and innovative approaches and adopting data governance and protection policies; 4) Increasing the share of Official Development Assistance for data to at least 0.7% by 2030; and 5) fully implementing the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data.

In pursuit of sustainable development, there is no better way to high success stories and challenges except with accurate and relevant data. Data is key to unlocking the envisaged progress and revolutionized decision-making. Considering that data underpins many of the vital transitions and means of implementation instrumental in achieving the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; it is paramount that countries preparing their VNR Reports, recognize the transformative power of data in shaping these reports.

The session on “Data to unlock relevance and accuracy of Voluntary National Reviews” aims to highlight the compelling reasons for countries to include data at the national and sub-national levels in their VNR

¹ [Power of Data Brochure 1.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

Reports. It will emphasize the importance of data-driven decision-making and showcase the benefits that the VNRs bring to sustainable development efforts.

Objectives

The session aims to:

- 1) emphasize the significance of data in enhancing the quality and relevance of VNR Reports by showcasing the benefits of data-driven decision-making for sustainable development.
- 2) share best practices and innovative approaches for data collection, analysis, and utilization in VNR Reports.
- 3) identify challenges in and opportunities for incorporating data in VNR Reports and discuss strategies to overcome them.
- 4) foster collaboration and knowledge exchange among countries and session participants in utilizing data effectively for VNR Reports.

Rationale

Including robust high-quality data in VNR Reports provide a solid foundation for evidence-based decision-making as it enables policymakers gain insights into the progress, challenges, and gaps in sustainable development efforts. Identification of priority areas, tracking progress, design of effective policies and interventions that address country-specific needs can only be enabled by reliable and credible data incorporated and highlighted in these reports. In addition, the use of high-quality data facilitates the demonstration of transparency allowing for a comprehensive reflection of countries' development journeys over time; fosters accountability and encourages countries to stay committed to their sustainable development goals.

The unprecedented raise in the demand for granular, disaggregated, and inclusive data in various dimensions (including gender, age, location, and socio-economic status among others) has led to the raise of Voluntary Local Reviews in some countries. Disaggregated data is critical as it empowers and guides targeted interventions as vulnerable groups, disparities, and inequalities are brought to the fore. To achieve the promise of leaving no one and no place behind, policies and investments should be tailored to address the specific needs of marginalized communities. Furthermore, deeper analysis of country data decomposed by several subpopulations allows for assessment of the effectiveness of existing policies, identification of gaps, and realignment of country priorities, policies, and strategies with the SDGs and the Agenda 2063 – the Africa we want: ultimately facilitating policy coherence towards optimum resource utilization and maximization of the impact of interventions.

With the shrinking resource envelopes from partners, data-driven and evidence-based VNR Reports maybe one of the most compelling ways to attract investment and support from various stakeholders. Accurate and comprehensive data provide a compelling case to mobilize domestic and international resources. Investors, development partners, and the private sector are more likely to engage in partnerships and collaborations when they have access to reliable data that demonstrate the potential for sustainable development impact.

Session Format

The session will follow an interactive format, combining experts' insights and opinions, and country use-cases of data in VNRs, in an engaging panel discussion. A moderated panel discussion facilitated and led by the Director of the African Centre of Statistics of ECA will encourage knowledge exchange and dialogue among policymakers, data practitioners, and country experts. The discussion will explore strategies to

enhance data collection, analysis, and utilization in VNR Reports, with a focus on addressing challenges and sharing successful approaches.

The panel will comprise of five experts including representatives from: UNRCO/UNCTs of a VNR country, and Takwimu Young African Statistician representative who will provide insights on the importance of data in VNR Reports, highlighting country trends, best practices, and innovative approaches. In addition, a country that has linked its VNR and VLR will be part of the panel discussions.

There will be an interactive Q&A segment allowing participants to engage with the panellists, seek clarification, and share their experiences and perspectives.

Expected Outcomes:

- 1) Increased understanding of the importance and benefits of including high quality data in VNR Reports.
- 2) Enhanced knowledge of best practices and innovative approaches for data collection, analysis, and utilization in VNRs.
- 3) Identification of challenges and strategies to overcome them in incorporating data in VNR Reports.
- 4) Renewed commitment to integrating data-driven decision-making into national sustainable development strategies.

Proposed Questions to Panelists

- 1) In the context of voluntary national reviews, how crucial is the availability of accurate and reliable data? What are some of the challenges your country has faced in collecting and utilizing data for these reviews?
- 2) The relevance of voluntary national reviews lies in their ability to inform policy decisions and drive progress. How can we ensure that the data utilized in these reviews is relevant, up-to-date, and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063?
- 3) Many countries face capacity constraints when it comes to data collection and analysis. What strategies or initiatives has your country adopted to enhance data capacity and promote data-driven decision-making processes?
- 4) The accuracy of data used in voluntary national reviews is essential for credibility and accountability. How does your country ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data used in these reviews? Are there any mechanisms in place to validate the data?
- 5) Data disaggregation is crucial to identify inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. How does your country approach data disaggregation to capture the nuances and disparities within your population?
- 6) The multiple crises the world is facing have significantly impacted development efforts and data collection processes. How has your country adapted its data collection methods and addressed the challenges posed by the crises in the context of voluntary national reviews?
- 7) Data accessibility and transparency play a vital role in fostering accountability and enabling stakeholders to track progress. How does your country ensure that the data used in voluntary national reviews is accessible to all stakeholders, including civil society and marginalized communities?

- 8) Involving multiple stakeholders in the data collection and review process can enhance the relevance and accuracy of voluntary national reviews. How does your country engage with various stakeholders, including academia, civil society organizations, and the private sector, to leverage their expertise and ensure inclusivity?
- 9) Technology and innovation have the potential to transform data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. Could you share any examples of innovative approaches or technologies that your country has utilized to enhance the relevance and accuracy of voluntary national reviews?
- 10) What are some key lessons learned from your country's experience in conducting voluntary national reviews, particularly in terms of data utilization and ensuring relevance and accuracy?
- 11) What is one innovation or useful strategy that you have used to address data gaps in the VNR process this year?
- 12) What is one needed intervention or area of assistance to address persisting data gaps?

Agenda/ Programme of Work