

**Regional preparatory workshop for
African voluntary national reviews and
voluntary local reviews: strengthening integration
and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063**

26 and 27 February 2021, Brazzaville (online)

Concept note

I. Background

1. As signatories to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union, African member States are required to review, on a regular basis, the frameworks and mechanisms that they have adopted to promote implementation of the two agendas, with a view to fostering inclusive growth and development. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda encourages member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels that are country-led and country-driven. The 2030 Agenda provides that those voluntary reviews should involve multiple stakeholders and be undertaken collaboratively. The process to undertake a review is expected to be rigorous and based on evidence, accurate data, and the inputs of relevant actors. The reviews are then formally submitted by countries during the high-level political forum on sustainable development, which is held on an annual basis.

2. In their preparation of voluntary national reviews, member States should avail themselves of inputs from Government, civil society organizations, the private sector, and other groups whose voices are vital for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, by promoting discussion at the regional level, including at the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, and at the global level during the high-level political forum, the voluntary national review process facilitates the sharing of good practices, success stories and common challenges, and can help draw the attention of stakeholders to resources that can potentially be used to address those challenges. Ultimately, voluntary national reviews provide countries with an opportunity to take stock of progress achieved, identify bottlenecks impeding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and chart a way forward.

3. Forty-five African States had conducted voluntary national reviews as of the 2020 high-level political forum, and 11 African countries are currently engaged in the review process in preparation for the 2021 high-level political forum. These include two countries that are preparing their first reviews,¹ six countries that are preparing their second reviews,² and three countries that are preparing their third reviews.³

¹ Angola and Djibouti.

² Cabo Verde, Chad, Madagascar, Namibia, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

³ Egypt, Niger and Sierra Leone.



4. Complementary to the voluntary national review process, African member States have noted the particular benefits of conducting sustainable development reviews at the district, governorate and municipality levels. Participants at the sixth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, held in 2020, concluded that voluntary local reviews were important tools for meaningful multi-stakeholder engagement and mobilization to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Participants at the sixth session requested member States to integrate voluntary local reviews into their voluntary national reviews and to establish local review mechanisms to improve accountability, transparency and public ownership of the implementation of the two agendas. By engaging with multiple stakeholders on the ground, voluntary local reviews reach a grassroots audience, which, in turn, can inform and move forward the sustainable development process, in line with the two agendas. To that end, ECA has been assisting selected local governments in the preparation of local reviews and is extending the scope of that initiative to help other local stakeholders.

5. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has radically changed the development landscape for the 11 countries preparing to submit voluntary national reviews in 2021. Even prior to the pandemic, African member States faced significant challenges related to the financing of inclusive initiatives to promote sustainable development; COVID-19 has further constrained their development trajectories by causing massive disruptions to public health, economic activity, trade, employment, the movement of people and the mobilization of financial resources by Governments. Those disruptions have undermined progress by all African countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, an issue that will, undoubtedly, be reflected in the voluntary national and local reviews under preparation.

II. Scope of the workshop

6. The objectives of the two-day preparatory and capacity development workshop, to be held on 26 and 27 February 2021 for countries conducting voluntary national reviews in 2021, are to support preparations for the submission of national reviews to the 2021 high-level political forum, and to strengthen member States' capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 and monitor and report on progress in that regard.

7. The 2021 workshop is taking place in the initial year of the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, and in the midst of an unprecedented and destructive pandemic, with ramifications for the development trajectory of African countries. The workshop will therefore consider COVID-19-related challenges impeding the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, together with action that can be taken to get implementation back on track. The workshop will also look at the common themes of the continent's development frameworks and visions. Specifically, the workshop will:

- (a) Provide an opportunity for the countries preparing to submit voluntary national reviews in 2021 to report on the status of their preparations;
- (b) Identify challenges impeding the preparation of voluntary national reviews;
- (c) Reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting development planning and review processes;
- (d) Discuss the format and expected content of voluntary national review reports to be submitted to the 2021 high-level political forum, including relevant deadlines;

- (e) Provide an opportunity to stakeholders who have previously prepared voluntary national reviews to share best practices, discuss common challenges and review potential solutions. Those stakeholders will also be offered an opportunity to discuss how first or second reviews can provide a basis for the formulation of subsequent reviews;
- (f) Share experiences of subnational implementation through the preparation of voluntary local reviews, deepen understanding of linkages between local and national reviews, and discuss how both types of reviews can help accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063;
- (g) Review and endorse the ECA Africa regional guidelines on voluntary local reviews;
- (h) Discuss other global guidelines for voluntary local reviews, including those of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and those developed jointly by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments;
- (i) Underscore the importance of using information obtained through evaluations and audits and rigorous disaggregated data in voluntary national and local review processes;
- (j) Review the tools at participants' disposal to plan and report on progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and subnational levels.

8. The workshop will include plenary sessions featuring presentations and discussions, in addition to interactive and engaging group work on specific topics identified by participants. Several online knowledge products to support voluntary national review preparation will be introduced. Discussions will also be held on voluntary local reviews, including by representatives of local governments that are already engaged in the local review process or that will start preparing local reviews in the near future. Discussions will focus, inter alia, on how local reviews can inform or complement the process to prepare national reviews. The workshop will conclude with a joint session that will facilitate dialogue and experience sharing among former and current voluntary national review countries and with relevant stakeholders from the region. The outputs of the workshop will directly inform the main events and messages of the seventh session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in March 2021.

III. Key questions

9. The workshop will be guided by the following key questions:
- (a) What are the successes, challenges, gaps and lessons learned from the voluntary national and local review preparation processes?
 - (b) What are the key guidelines for reporting at the national and subnational levels?

- (c) What are the main ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the voluntary national and local review preparation processes?
- (d) How can those processes support recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (e) How can subsequent voluntary national reviews build on previous ones?
- (f) How can stakeholder engagement be further strengthened?
- (g) What steps are being taken to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into national and local plans and strategies?
- (h) How are African countries using national and local review processes to facilitate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, and report and follow-up on progress achieved in that regard?
- (i) How can voluntary local reviews enhance collaboration and policy coherence among stakeholders involved in implementing programmes to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals at the national and subnational levels?
- (j) How can voluntary local reviews enhance the collection of data related to the achievement of the Goals?
- (k) What steps can be taken to strengthen synergies between national and local reviews?
- (l) What steps are countries planning to take to accelerate progress in the context of the United Nations decade of action and delivery for sustainable development?
- (m) What further support is needed to complete and follow up on African countries' voluntary national and local reviews?

IV. Expected outcomes

10. Outcomes expected from the workshop include:

- (a) Strengthened capacity of countries conducting voluntary national reviews in 2021 to participate meaningfully in national and local review processes;
- (b) Strengthened commitment of countries, districts and cities to conduct voluntary national and local reviews;
- (c) Enhanced consideration of regional specificities, including Agenda 2063 and human rights and governance imperatives, in national and local review processes;
- (d) Stronger long-term engagement and collaboration among countries within voluntary national review networks;
- (e) Increased understanding of the need to ensure that national and local reviews are based on reliable data;

- (f) Increased understanding of how voluntary local reviews can enhance national reporting and collaboration among national and local institutions;
- (g) Stronger alignment of national development frameworks with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

V. Guidance for participants

11. The workshop will be attended by national and local government representatives, city mayors, and representatives of African regional institutions, civil society organizations, academic institutions, local organizations, the private sector, and United Nations system entities.

12. Participants should be prepared to share information on implementation successes and challenges, gaps in countries' voluntary national and local review processes, stakeholder mapping and engagement, institutional mapping, lessons learned in review processes, and needs for further assistance.

VI. Contacts

13. Enquiries concerning the organization of the preparatory and capacity development workshop should be directed to:

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