

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
22 March 2022

Original: English

**Economic Commission for Africa
Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
Regional preparatory workshop for African
voluntary national reviews and voluntary local
reviews**

Kigali (hybrid), 1 and 2 March 2022

**Report on the preparatory workshop for African
voluntary national reviews and voluntary local
reviews: strengthening integration and reporting on
the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063****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 encouraged 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. These reviews – at both the national and subnational levels – are country-led and country-driven. To support the review process and ensure that it is informed by best practices from across the region and incorporates technical advising provided by partner institutions, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organizes an annual workshop during the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

2. In 2022, a record 21 African countries are pursuing voluntary national reviews, making the 2022 review process particularly important for the region, and resulting in a regional workshop that brings together a particularly large number of current and past voluntary national review countries to share lessons and best practices, and help build a path forward for the completion of voluntary national reviews to be presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be held in New York in July 2022.

3. Complementary to the voluntary national review process, the localization of the sustainable development agenda has been receiving growing attention, as African localities and grass-roots actors have played central roles in coronavirus disease (COVID-19) responses, and in ensuring the implementation of initiatives for a development path that is representative. As with the 2021 voluntary national and local review workshop, the workshop in 2022 brought actors at the national and local levels together to interact and identify areas where review processes can be mutually reinforcing, with a particular focus on the recently completed African voluntary local review guidelines.

4. The two-day preparatory workshop for voluntary national and local reviews was organized by ECA in coordination with the Department of Economic and Social



Affairs and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and was held in Kigali on 1 and 2 March 2022, as a pre-event to the eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The workshop was attended by over 160 participants, more than 60 of whom attended in person and 100 online. As the first such in-person workshop in two years, there was much interactive debate and discussion, which greatly enriched the review plans of countries and localities in the continued process.

II. Day 1: Voluntary national reviews

A. Welcome and opening remarks

5. The workshop was opened with welcoming remarks by the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA, Hanan Morsy, speaking on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ECA, Vera Songwe; the Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations and President of the Economic and Social Council, Colleen Kelapile; the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin; the Deputy Minister of Economic Management of Liberia, Augustus Flomo; and the Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Morocco to United Nations Headquarters, Meriem El Hilali.

6. Ms. Morsy underscored the importance of 2022 for Africa with the most voluntary national reviews being pursued by any region in any year. The voluntary national reviews had encountered different successes and challenges, and the workshop would help to identify and deliver the targeted assistance needed. These reviews would assist in harnessing the goals of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

7. Mr. Kelapile noted that the workshop, in addition to global voluntary national review workshops and support by ECOSOC and the Group of Friends of the Voluntary National Reviews, would assist countries in preparing their voluntary national reviews for presentation in July.

8. Mr. Liu reiterated that stakeholder involvement in the process ensures national ownership, deepens the voluntary national review process, and thus provided a better assessment tool for the effectiveness of policies for the Sustainable Development Goals.

9. Mr. Flomo commented on the history of Liberia and its goals for development and eliminating poverty. The country was committed to the review process and aligning its national development plan with the Sustainable Development Goals. He underscored the importance of civil society organizations, the private sector and other actors, and the need for accountability in the review process to ensure that no one was left behind.

10. Ms. El Hilali recognized the importance of peer learning for countries to innovate and adopt successful means to overcome review constraints, including through the mechanisms offered by the Group of Friends.

B. How to link across multiple reviews – lessons from countries pursuing their second, third and fourth voluntary national reviews

1. Presentations

11. The discussion was moderated by Juliet Wasswa-Mugambwa, Office of the Special Adviser for Africa, who invited speakers to share lessons learned, challenges and opportunities from their countries' first voluntary national reviews and to indicate how those could be linked to the current second review. Presentations on the issue were given by Richard Bofah, Ghana; Nya Ngangue Christelle Stella, Cameroon;

Emmanuel Ametepey, Youth Advocates Ghana; Alfusainey Jabbi, Gambia; and Malineo Seboholi, Lesotho.

12. Mr. Bofah reported that Ghana had established a multilayered implementation architecture for the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 to ensure a whole-of-government approach. The Sustainable Development Goals had been integrated into the country's national development frameworks. Opportunities to be leveraged included a sustained coordination arrangement to implement the two agendas and expansion of the non-government stakeholder base for the purposes of consultations.

13. Ms. Christelle Stella noted that Cameroon had integrated the Goals into its national development planning and monitoring. Among challenges that had arisen in the country's first voluntary national review and should be factored into the second review process, she identified accurate data, funding for implementation of the Goals and linking with youth networks. It was also hoped that all 10 of the country's regions would undertake voluntary local reviews.

14. Mr. Ametepey commented that youth consultations on the review and implementation of the Goals had generally been limited and that youth networks needed to be strengthened and their knowledge leveraged. He stressed that young people should be involved in all sessions of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and should leverage the power of social media to tell their story to the world.

15. Mr. Jabbi confirmed that the Gambia was addressing data gaps identified in its first voluntary national review, including through surveys conducted by the Bureau of Statistics to improve reporting on the Goals. The review process had helped the Gambia to build permanent capacity and accountability in reporting. Lessons learned included the need to enhance coordination with civil society and the private sector, and also to institutionalize data collection, analysis and record-keeping.

16. Ms. Seboholi noted that Lesotho had mainstreamed the Goals into national development planning, but that only 53 per cent of the data on indicators in the 2016 baseline report had been accessible. She reported that the first voluntary national review process had been participatory and inclusive, and also innovative in reaching communities and incorporating needed voices. Thenceforth, the country would be focusing on linking the first and second review processes.

2. Recommendations

17. Following their discussion, workshop participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) Coordination across government ministries at the national level is a key component for success of the review, with ultimate accountability resting with ministerial committees or, in some cases, the office of the President but with implementation decentralized;

(b) A whole-of-society approach encourages contributions from civil society, local government, the media, the private sector, development partners and human rights stakeholders;

(c) Youth networks should be accorded greater standing to liaise with government ministries on development planning;

(d) Integration of the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 in national planning and budgeting processes is vital;

(e) Countries must be selective in respect of data availability, relevance and timeliness, and countries can use combinations of both existing data (administrative data, survey data and others) and new data obtained through rapid assessments.

C. Addressing the unique needs of countries pursuing their first voluntary national reviews

1. Presentations

18. The discussion was moderated by John Sloan, ECA, who invited speakers to discuss their voluntary national review experiences thus far, including the barriers that they had faced, the innovations employed in surmounting those barriers and the kind of advice or support that they sought from the other countries and partners in attendance. Presentations were delivered by Mohamed Sougal, Djibouti; Issa Jandi, Guinea-Bissau; Kasapo Manda, Sustainable Development Goals Youth Representative; Helmut Barreto, Sao Tome and Principe; Joy Masache, Malawi; and Hagos Ahmed, Eritrea.

19. Mr. Sougal described the composition of the voluntary national review steering committee for Djibouti and the focus of the review on contributions from across the Government and civil society. National workshops would be convened to reach those stakeholders. In view of the constraints of time and resources, a lead voluntary national review consultant had been identified from among the country's public officials, with support from the United Nations country team.

20. Mr. Jandi described the multi-stakeholder coordination unit for the voluntary national review of Guinea-Bissau and discussions with partners in support of the review. He confirmed that consultations with key groups and data collection had begun, with a zero draft of the report under preparation. Challenges included mixing data from different sources and funding. The review's main activities comprised the organization of regional consultations and the alignment of the national development plan with the Sustainable Development Goals.

21. Ms. Manda commented on the centrality of young people to the needs and aspirations of the 2030 Agenda. She stressed that innovations to address challenges associated with the Goals should involve young people – for example, through youth development funds, capacity-building and data collection tools. Young people should organize themselves to participate in an alliance at the local and regional levels.

22. Mr. Barreto described the specific challenges faced in addressing the Goals as a small island State. Progress had been made in the areas of education, health and carbon neutrality, although it had been uneven and had faced climate change challenges. Because of those specificities, the voluntary national review would focus more on certain Goals than on others. He reported that Sao Tome and Principe had established a committee to address the issue of alignment with the Goals.

23. Ms. Masache gave advice for first-time voluntary national reviews from her country's perspective (Malawi was engaged in its second voluntary national review); data would be sourced from different stakeholders to overcome data collection issues; stakeholder mapping and mass awareness-raising could ensure that the review was as inclusive as possible; and the review could serve as a tool to allocate resources to specific Goals. The country's national development plan had been launched on the basis of its voluntary national review; she stressed that such follow-up actions on the review were crucial.

24. Mr. Ahmed noted that a task force had been established in Eritrea with two key ministries guiding and involving a stakeholder mapping exercise in respect of non-State entities. Specific measures were being applied to overcome data availability issues.

2. Recommendations

25. Following their discussion, workshop participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) As many State and non-State groups as possible should be involved in the voluntary national review as early as possible;

(b) Young people must be incorporated as partners for the entire review process and with regard to the Sustainable Development Goals, in general;

(c) Data should be sourced from a wide variety of sources to help fill gaps and data collection and assessment bodies should be directly drawn into the voluntary national review process;

(d) There is a standing request for other countries to advise on how they aligned their national development plans with the two agendas.

D. Partnerships for voluntary national reviews – tools and support from the United Nations system and other entities

1. Presentations

26. The discussion was moderated by Sara Hamouda, African Peer Review Mechanism, who noted that the Mechanism was dedicated to promoting good governance and progress towards attaining the Goals and that, in the discussion, participants should specify the role of different organizations in supporting the voluntary national review process. Following those remarks, presentations were given by Hodane Youssouf, Dakar Sub-Office, Regional Office in Africa, Development Coordination Office; Adrian Hassler, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and Luca Roffarello, Regional Coordinator Office for Sao Tome and Principe.

27. Ms. Youssouf described the United Nations reform process undertaken to ensure effective horizontal implementation of the Goals and the roles allocated to the regional coordinators (coordinating the United Nations system at the country level through the regional collaborative platform) and the United Nations country teams (financial and technical support for voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews through the provision of assistance to member States). These measures are undertaken to enhance strategic planning and ensure that no one is left behind.

28. Mr. Hassler underscored that human rights were at the centre of sustainable development and served as a guiding principle for implementation of the Goals. He pointed out that countries could leverage synergies in their reporting on human rights and the Goals, including through voluntary national review processes. OHCHR offered a range of support in those processes, including to national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up.

29. Mr. Roffarello reiterated that the voluntary national review was a nationally owned process and that the regional coordinator offices provided overall coordination of United Nations institutional, technical and financial support. He explained that the United Nations country team engaged in technical work with national partners in support of the review, including on data-related issues, and liaised with United Nations partners to help provide that assistance.

2. Recommendations

30. Following their discussion, workshop participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) The United Nations reform process can help to improve the efficiency of Sustainable Development Goal-related support, coordination and reporting;

(b) Member States can work through the regional coordinator offices and the United Nations country teams to gain the financial and technical support that they need;

(c) The United Nations and regional processes should continue to be better coordinated and the United Nations and the African Union can leverage partnerships to ensure closer joint work;

(d) It is vital to close gaps in how human rights are institutionalized in Sustainable Development Goal processes and in voluntary national review reporting, while ensuring the inclusion of young people, women and marginalized groups in these discussions on human rights and also in providing assistance in data collection.

E. Guidance and best practices in the final stages of preparing the voluntary national reviews for presentation at the high-level political forum on sustainable development

31. Tonya Vaturi, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, provided practical guidance and reviewed best practices for countries approaching the final stages of preparing their voluntary national review reports for presentation at the meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2022.

32. She laid out the timeline of events between March and July leading up to the forum, including dates for the second global voluntary national review workshop (11–13 April 2022), and deadlines for voluntary national review submissions to the Secretariat. It was anticipated that the forum would be held in an in-person format and that the President of the Economic and Social Commission would strive to allot more time for the voluntary national review presentations, if possible.

33. She reviewed the voluntary national review road map and outlined best practices in writing the voluntary national review reports, stressing the aim of reviewing progress towards all 17 of the Goals and encouraging countries to work together in peer reviewing their reports with the support of the Group of Friends of the Voluntary National Reviews. She also provided guidance on how to prepare for the actual presentation of the reviews at the meeting of the high-level political forum, including space for stakeholders and others to participate in the presentation and using focused media to communicate key messages. Lastly, she highlighted the various means of support and resources available through the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to countries submitting their voluntary national reviews.

III. Day 2: voluntary local reviews

A. Welcoming remarks

34. Day 2 of the workshop was opened with welcoming remarks delivered by Edlam Yemeru, ECA. In her address, she stressed that voluntary local reviews had helped localities to identify gaps in the implementation of policies and programmes, enabling more deliberate integration of local reviews in national reviews, identifying priorities and areas of focus for their action plans and budgeting and enhancing coordination between local government and national statistical offices for generating timely and reliable data. She underscored the transformative potential of the voluntary local review process and the importance of harnessing the African voluntary local review guidelines, which had a mandate from member States.

35. Following those remarks, Shipra Suri, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), noted the importance of ensuring that the voluntary local review reports were not an end in themselves but rather a means to stimulate action and change. Leaving no one behind was a fundamental tenet of the voluntary local reviews and they offered good tools to integrate the links with the 2030 Agenda and other relevant global and regional agendas. Concluding her remarks, she underscored the critical importance of the Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines in accelerating the process, as its tools were practical and easily adoptable.

B. Africa’s voluntary local reviews: guidelines and peer engagement

36. Presentations were delivered by Lusungu Kayani-Stearns, ECA; Pascal Byarugaba, Uganda National Sustainable Development Goals Secretariat; Natasha Primo, Cape Town, South Africa; and Oumie Joof, Regional Coordinator Office for the Gambia.

37. Ms. Kayani-Stearns laid out the key features of the Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines and the rationale behind the development of regional guidelines. She explained that regional specificities, including Agenda 2063, coupled with member State requests for common templates and guidelines during the 2020 session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, were key rationales for developing regional guidelines. She underscored that voluntary local reviews should adopt a phased process and mainstream the “leave no one behind” ideal to identify, assess and work in partnership with multiple entities, including marginalized groups. In this regard, the Guidelines represented good additions with simple and easy-to-follow tools and steps, along with best practices from localities that were already conducting voluntary local reviews.

38. Mr. Byarugaba explained that the voluntary local review approaches and guidelines were not yet sufficiently familiar to localities and subnational governments in Uganda. In that regard, he recommended the mapping and engaging of all the stakeholders, such as United Nations agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector and other development entities, to localize the Goals and institutionalize the review process. He further highlighted his country’s experience in conducting voluntary local reviews and underscored the need for technical and financial support to ensure synergy and proper implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 at all levels.

39. Ms. Primo commented that poor data availability was one of the main challenges impeding the development of the Cape Town voluntary local review. Cape Town covered the eight Sustainable Development Goal indicators that were most closely aligned with city strategies as priority indicators in the review. She observed that African guidelines were best placed to bring together the alignment of the two agendas and ensure comparability among similar cities. To ensure the necessary impact of the voluntary local reviews, she recommended the engagement of young people and vulnerable groups, and also the establishment of a community of practice among African cities.

40. Ms. Joof explained that, while The Guidelines provided step-by-step coaching for development of the voluntary local reviews; they were still very extensive and might be slightly too complex. In that regard, peer learning and peer review were very useful for the process. She further highlighted that advocacy and capacity-building in relation to the reviews represented key steps that must be taken.

C. Integrating voluntary local reviews into voluntary national review processes

41. The discussion was opened by Amson Sibanda, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and presentations were made by Oumar Sylla, UN-Habitat; Magloire Aguessy, Benin; and Tamiru Cherinet, Ethiopia.

42. Mr. Sibanda noted that voluntary local reviews engaged citizens in local actions and provided a way to monitor and evaluate progress in implementation of the Goals. Adoption of the voluntary local review process among countries had been very slow, however. Achieving the 2030 Agenda depended heavily on the contributions of local governments. Information from local reviews should be reflected in national reviews and the lessons learned should be used to improve the process. Challenges facing local-national review integration include local capacity

constraints, lack of financial resources, limited policy coherence, coordination and limited awareness of the Goals at the local level.

43. Mr. Sylla highlighted a number of key elements for consideration in prioritizing urbanization in national development planning, including ensuring job-rich growth amid rapid urbanization; boosting the housing sector to stimulate the national economy; aligning the work of local and regional governments with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063; and driving more investment towards the development of climate resilience.

44. Mr. Aguessy explained that Benin had put in place an institutional framework that included a major council, committees, non-governmental organizations and local opinion leaders in order to support local authorities in their efforts to consolidate reports according to their priorities and to enhance implementation of the Goals at the local level. Benin was currently conducting voluntary local reviews in four pilot localities and had developed an electronic platform dedicated to the reviews.

45. Ms. Cherinet noted that Ethiopia had mainstreamed the goals of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 into its national development plan and that progress reports on the national development plan also reflected those goals. Stakeholders at all levels were included in the voluntary national review process, with data coming from the local level and feeding into the reporting at the national level.

D. Voluntary local reviews and COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding

46. Presentations were made by Marie Solange, Cameroon; Moses Quarshie, Ghana; Frank Mampouya, Congo; and Mendi Rais, Morocco.

47. Ms. Solange noted that Yaoundé had developed an economic resilience and recovery plan and that there was a need to ensure alignment of processes under that plan and the voluntary local review with the urban planning strategy of Yaoundé, while also integrating resilience-building into the review. She further noted that Yaoundé was planning to develop and implement a separate report on economic resilience informed by the findings of the review.

48. Mr. Quarshie observed that the voluntary local review in Accra had raised awareness of the need to fill in the gaps in the implementation of the Goals at the local level. The review had helped the local government to respond to issues raised by the community on local development agendas and thereby ensured accountability of government authorities for tackling the issues raised. The voluntary local review had been instrumental in identifying groups rendered particularly vulnerable by COVID-19 and in devising strategies to ensure their quick recovery from the pandemic.

49. Mr. Mampouya noted that the voluntary local review process could assist in building national consensus in the Congo and would help to align policy documents and inform local and national development planning. Challenges had been faced, however, in conducting a voluntary local review in Brazzaville in such areas as data, financial resources and Sustainable Development Goal experts.

50. Mr. Rais pointed out that both the voluntary local review and the voluntary national review were treated as equally important and reinforcing processes in Morocco. He underscored the importance of aligning the two reviews as a key factor in implementing the Goals and recovering from COVID-19. He further outlined the challenges that Morocco had faced in conducting voluntary local reviews, including limited awareness among the country's civil servants.

IV. Town hall meeting on voluntary national and local reviews

A. Presentations

51. The 2022 town hall meeting on voluntary national and local reviews was moderated by Julie Kofoed, United Nations Foundation, who remarked that the Foundation had been involved in the town hall and the Regional Forum for a number of years, as those events brought stakeholders together to learn from one another and share perspectives on the voluntary national and local reviews. Presentations were made by Karima Ben Soltane, ECA; Awa Basse, Senegal; Kofi Kankam, Africa Regional Mechanism for Major Groups and Other Stakeholders; Karlito Nunes, Timor-Leste; and Reynald Maeda, Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform.

52. Ms. Ben Soltane delivered opening remarks, noting that the workshop should lead to the fine-tuning of approaches and strategies for the efficient delivery of the 2030 Agenda. It was vital to learn of the impact of COVID-19 on development priorities and planning. Voluntary local reviews introduced a territorial aspect to the review process, reflecting the reality on the ground. Access to financial resources remained critical to achieving the Goals.

53. Ms. Basse outlined key issues relating to the voluntary national review process in Senegal, where the 2030 Agenda had been aligned to a degree of 97 per cent with the national development plan. The voluntary national review was coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Cooperation and enlisted the involvement of civil society representatives, who drafted a shadow review based on citizens' evaluation of the official review. Each region in Senegal contributed to the voluntary national review.

54. Mr. Kankam reviewed ways in which the major groups and other stakeholders were engaging their constituencies, including through a steering committee with representatives of the five African subregions, to connect and disseminate information. The committee was seeking resources to support national coalitions of such groups and stakeholders in voluntary national review processes and the convening of webinars to strengthen capacities on voluntary national reviews.

55. Mr. Nunes stressed that the principles of accountability, transparency and leaving no one behind were key to the voluntary national review process. Timor-Leste had adopted a whole-of-society approach, involving consultations with stakeholders. It was a priority to enhance domestic resource mobilization and diversification to achieve the Goals.

56. Mr. Maeda elaborated on the lessons from the voluntary national review process in the United Republic of Tanzania, including the coordination of civil society inputs into the process, in which the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform coordinated expertise and resources across its networks to bring inputs to efforts to attain the Goals and the voluntary national review process. This strengthened the ownership of stakeholders in the review and helped ensure the inclusion of young people, older persons, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities.

B. Recommendations

57. Following their discussion, workshop participants agreed on the following recommendations:

(a) Voluntary national and local reviews must be closely linked to ensure coherent and effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals;

- (b) There must be meaningful and inclusive stakeholder engagement to ensure ownership in the voluntary national review process;
- (c) Particular attention must be paid to those most likely to be left behind;
- (d) Early planning of the review process is key to its success.

—————