

Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Lessons learnt from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) – how far can we go?

Friends of Governance for Sustainable
Development in cooperation with UN-DESA
Office of Intergovernmental Support and
Coordination for Sustainable Development and
Division on Sustainable Development Goals

SESSION 3

Review of the role of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs):

**How VNRs can be improved to
be most effective in
accelerating national
implementation of the 2030
Agenda and serving as a
mechanism for sharing
experiences and lessons
learned between countries**

UN Headquarters, New York, 10 September 2018

Three issues

Where we are



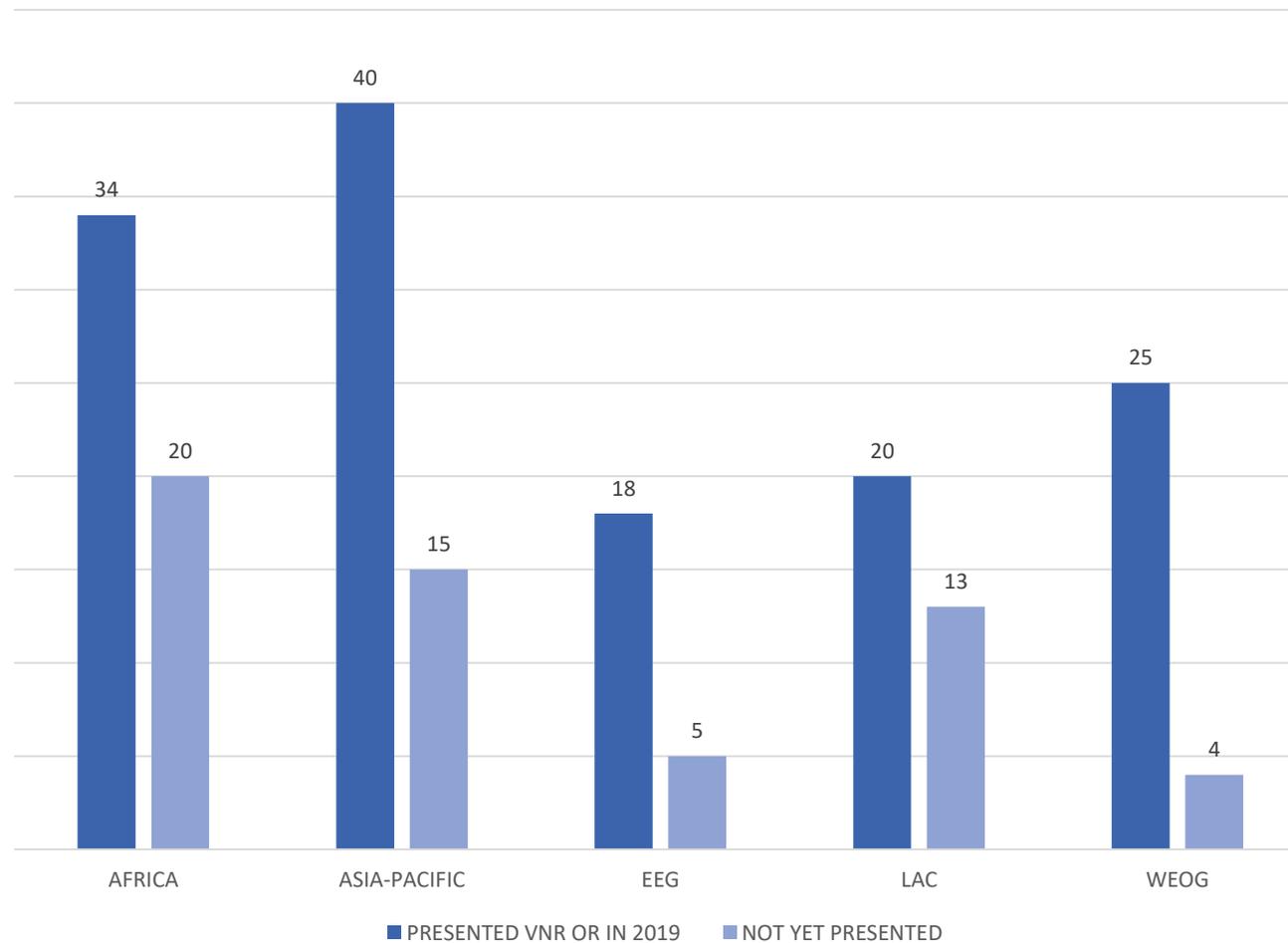
What we have learned so far



What could be improved

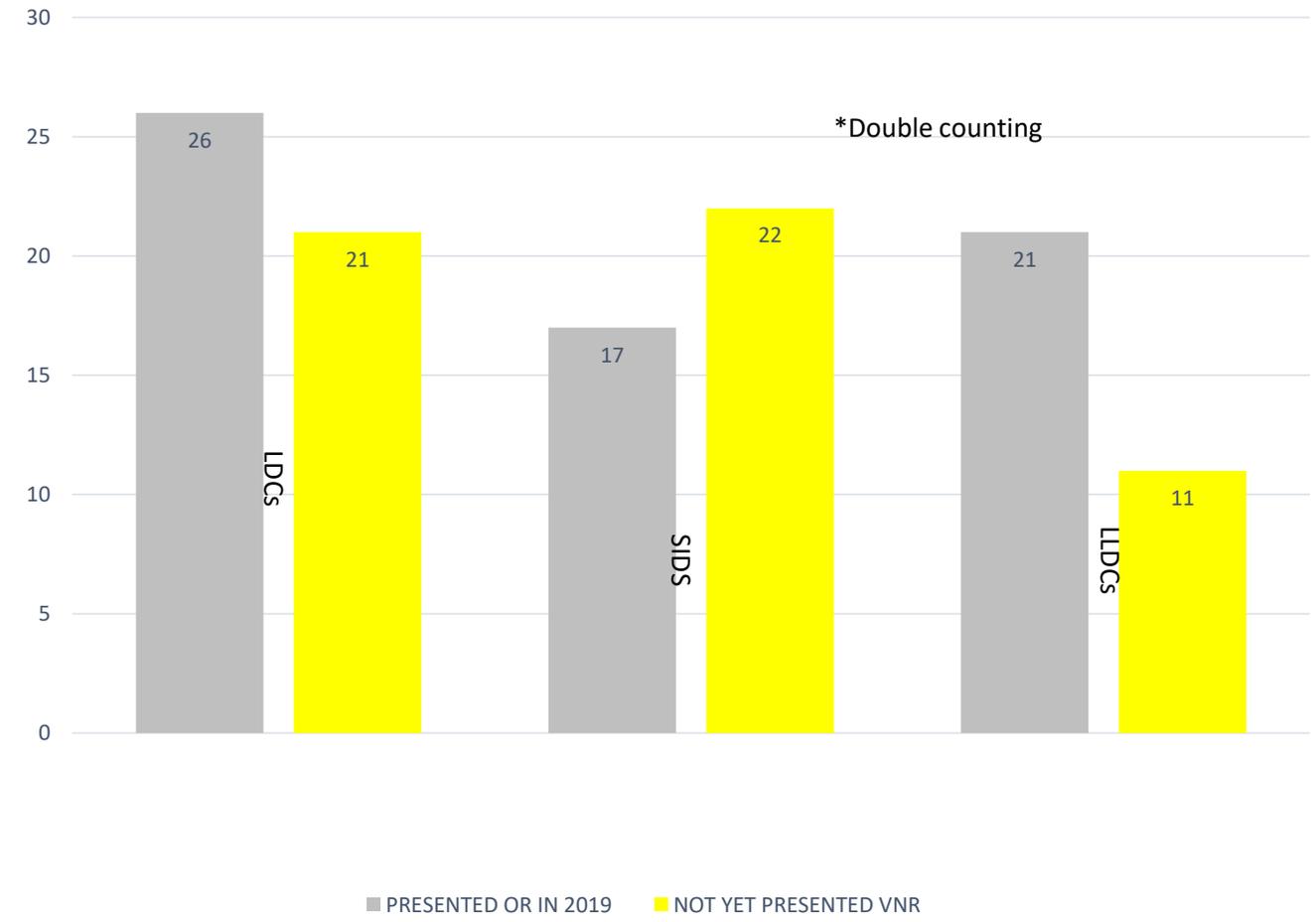
WHERE WE ARE

VNRs BY REGION 2016, 2017, 2018 AND 2019



WHERE WE ARE

COUNTRIES IN SPECIAL SITUATIONS VNRs 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019



WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR

NATIONAL LEVEL

Benefits

- Strengthening political will around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Mobilizing all parts of government (especially parliaments and local government) and stakeholders around 2030 Agenda
- Focusing on priority areas and mapping this with budget requirements and resource mobilization
- Aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and adapting existing institutions and/or creating coordinating bodies to support the VNR process
- Taking stock of what exists and what still needs to be done and identifying next steps
- Strengthening evidence-based decision making through engagement of national statistic offices and relevant stakeholders, including scientific community

Challenges

- Insufficient time to properly organize extensive consultations with all stakeholders in VNR process
- Insufficient time for drafting a report including translation into one of 6 UN languages
- Creating national ownership for 2030 Agenda with whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach
- Accelerating action in priority areas, the localization of the SDGs and the strengthening of the institutional capacities of all key stakeholders engaged in the process, including the monitoring and reporting institutions
- Strengthening the role of evidence-based statistics and policy making to increase transparency and improve the public service and SDG delivery
- Insufficient policy coordination and coherence to maximize impact and avoid duplication
- Lack of capacity especially in local governments
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Lack of institutional engagement of relevant stakeholders including with private sector

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR

GLOBAL LEVEL

Benefits

- Drawing international attention to the national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Sharing of benefits and challenges
- Identifying and sharing best practices and lessons learned
- Identifying priority areas and where more assistance is needed
- Including in the presenters other parts of government (members of parliament, local government representatives) and non-state actors (civil society, private sector) in their presentations
- President of ECOSOC in her summary includes recommendations for VNR countries to use (more at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/205432018_HLPF_Presidents_summary_FINAL.pdf)
- Interacting with countries and various stakeholders outside official meetings (VNR Lab, side events, special events)

Challenges

- Insufficient analysis in the reports and not enough time to have a proper discussion engaging countries and stakeholders on WHY and HOW a certain measure constitutes a good practice and whether/how it could be replicated by other countries (15 minutes for presentation in individual or panel format including showing visuals and 10-15 minutes for Q&A)
- Inadequate response from other countries in commenting and asking relevant questions on the report
- Lack of concrete recommendations for countries to follow-up if they so choose
- Differentiation of countries coming to present the first time and those presenting 2nd or 3rd time
- Lack of institutionalized follow-up

SUPPORT TO VNR PROCESS

Preparatory process

UN DESA in cooperation with UN country teams, regional commissions and regional and subregional organizations as appropriate conducts a preparatory process for VNR countries through

- 3 global workshops
- Regional and subregional workshops in UN regions
- Individual assistance upon request from countries
- Preparation of synthesis report of VNR reports each year
- SG voluntary common reporting guidelines
- Synthesis of main messages from VNR reports
- Handbook on preparation for VNRs updated each year

Benefits

- Familiarization with VNR process, peer learning and capacity building
- Sharing of lessons learned, best practices and experiences from countries who have already presented their VNRs
- Regional and subregional specificities discussed among VNR countries and benefits and challenges connected to them

Challenges

- Insufficient time and resources for more robust capacity building
- Not sufficiently coordinated approach by the UN system
- Lack of comparability among reports due to different approaches and methods used

WHAT could be improved: recommendations bearing in mind voluntary and flexible nature of VNRs

National level

- Strengthening national ownership including through capacity building and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and through preparing the VNRs by national team using international assistance when needed
- Linking the VNRs to reporting to other mechanisms and conventions
- Strengthening monitoring and oversight including through parliaments and supreme audit institutions, the latter have already seen positive action from some governments implementing their recommendations such as better adapting institutions to carry out policy coherence, including subnational stakeholders in the process, strengthening cooperation among all branches of government
- Explaining the impacts strategies and policies put in place have on national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Substantiating statements on progress in implementation by quality data
- Addressing implementation of all 17 SDGs and strengthening monitoring and evaluation
- Strengthening policy coherence and interlinkages among SDGs by showing trade offs and how they are achieved
- Strengthening follow-up through setting up various matching processes after VNR presentation and twinning/policy dialogues between countries that have/seek good policy advice in certain areas
- Providing examples of costing for SDGs and alignment of budgets with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Better engaging UN country teams and UN system in national VNR preparation as well as other relevant regional and subregional UN and other organizations

WHAT could be improved: recommendations bearing in mind voluntary and flexible nature of VNRs

Global level

- Using SG voluntary common reporting guidelines to increase comparability, but also to improve overall quality of reports over time by learning from good practices and reflecting these by updating periodically the guidelines
- Focusing VNR presentation at HLPF on explanation of impact of policies and strategies, lessons learned and peer learning that can be of benefit to all countries
- Strengthening of interactive discussion including through providing more time for Q&A and possibly asking group of countries, relevant parts of the UN system and stakeholders to work together to prepare comments and questions as “friends of VNRs” and even come with some recommendations that countries might consider in the follow-up process
- Better use lead discussants including by using experts to prepare more detailed and comments for VNR countries
- Consider including a session at the HLPF to discuss the main outcomes and findings from previous VNRs
- Strengthen the role of HLPF as a platform for peer learning and exchanging of experiences including through showcasing particular examples of good policies and strategies that had a significant impact on implementation
- Strengthen HLPF to serve as a broker and matchmaker for partnerships in the follow-up after the VNRs through looking at areas where countries need support

Thank you!

Irena Zubcevic, Chief, Policy and Review Branch
Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable
Development
UN-DESA
(zubcevic@un.org)