



Community of Practice on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for Caribbean countries

9 February 2021

Meeting Notes

Participants

Representatives from: The Bahamas, Belize, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago

ECLAC: Romain Zivy, María Ortiz, Mareike Eberz (Office of the Executive Secretary); Lydia Geny, Luis Flores (Office of the Secretary of the Commission); and Abdullahi Abdulkadri (ECLAC's subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean).

Presentation

The presentations delivered during the session are enclosed as attachments to these notes.

Objective of the meeting

This community of practice is an informal space for exchange and sharing of good practices with regards to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in general and the preparation of VNRs in particular; and aims to provide a space to regularly communicate among peers. The specific goals of this session were to:

- 1) Continue the discussion on SDGs integration into National Development Plan and Instruments, by reviewing the case of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines;
- 2) Provide information on the upcoming Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development (16 to 18 March 2021) and the Regional VNR workshop (15 March 2021) and explore the expectations and topics that the Community of Practice members about these events

Introduction

ECLAC indicated that the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) review is under way and one of the topics of discussion is the importance of the regional dimension and the role of the Regional Fora in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Presentation from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

- 1) **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** presented how they integrated the SDGs in their National Development Plan and Instruments. The presentation (enclosed) included the following key points:
 - **Introduction:** Saint Vincent and the Grenadines explained the multiple challenges the country is currently facing, from the spike in COVID-19 cases, to the disproportionate impact of climate change on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and vulnerabilities to other extreme natural events (such as volcanic eruptions), which need to be taken into account when planning for Sustainable Development. The country presented their first VNR at the HLPF in 2020.



- **Past National Development Planning:** Saint Vincent and the Grenadines indicated that the First National Development Plans, have not matched the needs of the country, especially those formulated before the country's independence in 1979. Only the current 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP 2013-2025), with its five strategic goals at its center, is the first development plan which truly aims to improve the quality of life for all Vincentians, based on wide ranging an inclusive consultations and public participation, including Vincentians living abroad. This led to a greater buy-in and ownership to develop and implement this flagship plan.
- **Shortcomings of past development plans:** previous plans failed to take into account the human, natural and financial capacities of the country. Objectives did not match the national sectoral priorities and the cost of development was underestimated. Critical sectoral interventions were omitted in the planning process. Planners failed to recognize and incorporate policies that encouraged private sector involvement. In the long run, unemployment increased, and tax revenues did not increase significantly.
- **The five strategic goals of the 8th NESDP 2013-2025 included:** 1) Re-engineering Economic Growth. 2) Enabling Increased Human and Social Development. 3) Promoting Good Governance, Citizen Security and increasing the Effectiveness of Public Administration. 4) Improving Physical Infrastructure and Preserving the Environment (taking mitigation measures into account, based on the characteristics of the country as a SIDS and a multi-island State, that is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change) and 5) Building National Pride, Identity and Culture in the day to day live of Vincentians.
- **Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA):** In 2019, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines requested the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to assess the country's readiness to align their National Development Plan and other strategic instruments to the 2030 Agenda. This National Goals Alignment to the SDGs along the five strategic goals was the first step to localize the SDGs in the country. The RIA found a 62% alignment of the country's National Development Plan an other planning instruments to the SDGs. The country has made significant strikes regarding certain areas, such as climate action, by banning single-use plastic (SDGs 13, 14 & 15). There has also been significant progress in providing quality education (SDG 4), and good efforts to reduce poverty (SDG 1).
- **Risks and Challenges to achieving the SDGs,** such as inadequate financing; insufficient ownership of the national development plan; unclear partnerships; lack of a comprehensive coordination and M&E mechanism; insufficient statistical capacity; the impact of COVID-19; exogenous shocks, such as the impact of natural hazards and climate change; and slow pace of the implementation of programs, projects and reforms.
- **Next steps:** Moving forward in the VNR process and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines aims to validate the RIA with key stakeholders; incorporate a medium term strategy in the review process of the NESDP; develop a SDG Road Map for taking stock of the SDGs; establish an institutional mechanism for monitoring the SDGs; and complete an assessment of the SDG data availability.

Discussion

ECLAC recognized Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' efforts to increase public ownership of SDG alignment with the current 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan, as well as valuable lessons learned from the VNR process. In this context, ECLAC stressed that the VNR is not the final outcome, but a milestone in the broader national process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Jamaica asked whether Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had an overarching Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system in place, aligned to the 2030 Agenda to follow the country's National Development Plan, including medium-term milestones.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines explained that although the National Development Plan is considered the overall umbrella document to foster development in the country, it does not include yet a monitoring matrix with specific indicators aligned to the SDGs. Moving forward, the country aims to establish a medium-term monitoring plan and develop indicators to measure the country's achievements and determine areas to accelerate action for the SDGs.

ECLAC commented on the difficulties that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines mentioned in terms of creating ownership of the National Development Plan and the VNR process and inquired whether the country had seen a shift in terms of awareness of the 2030 Agenda after the VNR presentation at the HLPF in 2020.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines explained that there was a shift in terms of awareness of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and the VNR process after their presentation at the HLPF in 2020, especially at the Ministerial level.

ECLAC further asked how Saint Vincent and the Grenadines managed to engage stakeholders in the VNR process despite the multiple challenges outlined in the presentation, such as being a multiple island state hardly hit by the COVID-19 crisis.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines highlighted the challenge the COVID-19 pandemic presented for the preparation and presentation of their first VNR, making face-to-face meetings impossible and forcing the country to rely on online questionnaires to engage stakeholders. However, the first draft of the VNR was shared electronically with stakeholders for their review, which generated dialogue and pinpointed certain areas for improvement.

ECLAC positively noted that this stakeholder engagement is another great component to foster ownership and highlighted its continuous availability to provide support to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines regarding the strengthening of the institutional dimension and providing statistical data capacity support.

Presentation from ECLAC

2) ECLAC presented the **Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development** to participants. The presentation (enclosed) included the following key points:

- The Fourth Meeting of the Regional Forum in 2021 will be held for the first time virtually under the Presidency of the government of Costa Rica and the auspices of ECLAC from 15 to 18 March 2021. The meeting in 2020 under the Presidency of Cuba unfortunately could not take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Caribbean subregion is very present in the Forum, which is not only a space for governments, but also brings together other actors and stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, youth, development banks, UN Resident Coordinators and other UN entities from the Caribbean.
- The Forum provides opportunities for peer learning and exchange of good practices. This year, there will be four Caribbean countries presenting their VNR at the HLPF in 2021, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. ECLAC will organize a regional workshop for the 2021 VNR countries in the framework of the Forum.



- ECLAC also invited the Caribbean countries to join the session to build forward better after the COVID-19 pandemic on 16 March, especially Antigua and Barbuda and Bahamas, the two countries from the English-speaking Caribbean Community of Practice that will present their VNR in 2021.
- Other important components of the programme include the presentation of the annual report “Building forward better: Action to strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” on the regional progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is considered a regional contribution to the HLPF, the presentation of the SDG Gateway, the regional platform for Latin America and the Caribbean on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which can be found here: <https://agenda2030lac.org/en>. The official website of the Forum with more information can be found here: <https://foroalc2030.cepal.org/2021/en>

ECLAC highlighted that the Regional Forum is very visible at the global level, as its chair, the government of Costa Rica, will officially present the results of the Forum and showcase its regionally agreed intergovernmental recommendations in the Ministerial Segment of the HLPF in July 2021. Moreover, ECLAC elaborated on the regional VNR workshop, which will take place on 15 March in a shortened length of half a day due to the virtual format, with interpretation available both in Spanish and English. In this regard, ECLAC asked the Community of Practice members about specific topic to discuss at the regional workshop to tailor the event to their needs and expectations.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines inquired about the number of participants in Member State delegations in the Regional Forum.

ECLAC confirmed that there would be no limit on the number of people who could connect from country delegations to the Regional Forum due to the virtual format this year.

Next Steps

- ECLAC will share the presentations along with the minutes of the meeting with participants.
- The next meeting of the Community of Practice for Caribbean countries will take place on **Friday 16 April 2021 at 12:00 pm (Chile time)**.