



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

16 April 2021

*Meeting Notes*

### Participants

**Guyana; Jamaica; Trinidad and Tobago**

**ECLAC:** María Ortiz (Office of the Executive Secretary); Lydia Geny (Office of the Secretary of the Commission); Abdullahi Abdulkadri and Artie Dubrie (ECLAC's subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean).

### Objective of the meeting

This community of practice is an informal space for regular exchange among peers and sharing of good practices with regards to the follow-up and implementation of the 2030 Agenda in general and the preparation of VNRs in particular.

The specific goals of this session were to:

- Present the key messages of the Fourth Meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development (15-18 March 2021), and the regional workshop on VNRs (15 March 2021).
- Discuss how regional frameworks, consensus and agreements can inform and strengthen the VNR process of Caribbean countries.

### Presentation of the results of the Regional VNR workshop and the Forum

#### Regional VNRs workshop

ECLAC presented the main reflections of the Regional workshop for Latin American and Caribbean countries presenting their voluntary national reviews in 2021, organized in collaboration with UNDESA, in the framework of the fourth meeting of the Forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.

It included:

- The 2030 Agenda is more relevant than ever. It is the blueprint to recover from the multidimensional crisis and to create a renewed strategy to strengthen resilience and build forward better. The pandemic didn't stop the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda; by July 2021, 85% of the region's countries would have presented their VNR to the HLPF at least once.
- There are multiple reasons and opportunities to present a VNR: accountability to society, developing partnerships with multiple stakeholders, or creating better cooperation and accelerating actions to implement the 2030 Agenda. The VNR is more than a report or a presentation; it is an inclusive, transparent and participatory process, at a national and local level, which in turn facilitates the integration of the SDGs into national and local development plans and budgets.
- The statistical capacity, data and empirical evidence on SDG progress remains a challenge. A concrete issue faced during the VNR process is establishing a baseline for disaggregated data collection. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the data collection process was interrupted, and budgetary reallocations were made to address other urgent priorities.



- It is recommended to dedicate enough time to the development of the VNR, integrate a systematic, multi-sectoral approach to address the SDGs, while not losing the long-term vision of sustainable development. Synergies must be generated with other global and regional frameworks, such as the Samoa Pathway, national reports on human rights, the Paris Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
- It is useful to establish clear participation mechanisms and budgets to engage civil society in the development of public policies and normative frameworks, accompanied by an effective communication plan at the national level, using online surveys and other channels, to enable collaboration between various stakeholders.
- The VNR can open opportunities to request cooperation from international donors, mobilize partnerships and open communication channels at the national, regional and global levels. Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) allow for local follow-up and national and sub-national coordination.

#### **Results of the Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development (15-18 March 2021)**

- The Forum in figures: 9,600 participants; 31 side events; 100% virtual; 1 ECLAC report: *Building forward better: Action to strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*; 94 intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations, which will be presented by the presidency of the Forum (Costa Rica) at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July 2021.
- LAC is the most affected region by the pandemic, with structural gaps more visible: inequality, informality, low productivity, and limited fiscal space. The Forum reaffirmed its commitment to the 2030 Agenda as the blueprint during and after the pandemic, and to multilateralism, as the main option for a better recovery.
- To address the crisis, a strong call was made for equitable access to vaccines; increased liquidity and innovative financing mechanisms, such as ECLAC's Debt for Climate Adaptation Swap Initiative in the Caribbean; an adjustment to graduation criteria that reflect the multiple dimensions of sustainable development; urgent action to facilitate a response to the current crisis caused by the pandemic in Caribbean SIDS; technology transfer to middle income countries (MICs); a vulnerability index and disaster reduction strategies; meaningful engagement opportunities for youth and women, among other topics.
- Despite the challenges resulting from the difficult context, such as presenting their progress towards the SDGs in a virtual format, the pandemic did not hinder the region's extraordinary commitment with the 2030 Agenda. As one of the highlights of the forum, the Regional Knowledge Management Platform, the [SDG Gateway](#), was presented, which promotes the joined work between member States, the United Nations System, including the Resident Coordinators, and other stakeholders.

**Trinidad and Tobago** asked whether the recommendations for VLRs are expected to be led by the United Nations or Governments.

**ECLAC** explained that the VLRs are not an official review process for the 2030 Agenda, but a complementary process to the official VNRs at the HLPF. VLRs are usually initiated by local authorities as a means to showcase the local action towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their communities, often in collaboration with partners and other stakeholders. As there are no specific guidelines on how to perform the VLRs in the region, the ten VLR reports that have been conducted so far, namely in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay, greatly vary in scope and content. ECLAC also pointed the importance of reporting at other levels, such as leveraging regional and global frameworks to inform and strengthen the VNRs of Caribbean countries.

#### **Presentation on “Leveraging Existing Global and Regional Frameworks for the VNR Process”**



ECLAC presented some reflections on how global and regional intergovernmental frameworks can contribute and strengthen the voluntary review process at the national level:

- Member States routinely produce reports for other international and regional inter governmentally agreed frameworks and agreements, which are developed based on consultations with relevant stakeholders; contain useful data and information; and produce using tested reporting mechanisms. These existing frameworks can inform and strengthen the VNR process and report. The following frameworks do not constitute an exhaustive list, but provide some global and regional examples that could prove useful for the VNR:
  - **Global Frameworks**, such as the SAMOA Pathway, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).
  - **Gender Equality** is a cross-cutting issue in different global and regional frameworks, such as the Beijing Platform for Action (global) and the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 (regional in Latin America and the Caribbean).
  - **Regional Frameworks**: the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement), which came into force on 22 April 2021, the Santiago Commitment ; the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development.
  - **Regional Meetings** that support the VNR: Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, and the Statistical Conference of the Americas, Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, among others.
- In developing the VNR, use valuable information contained in already existing reports, such as information on background/context, to provide baselines, as sources of data or proxies and to develop a contact list for stakeholder consultations.

**ECLAC** indicated that a specific session for the Caribbean subregion takes place in each of its subsidiary bodies meetings to discuss the specific challenges of SIDS and can also provide valuable information for the VNR process. Also, the Samoa Pathway is considered to be a global blueprint for all SIDS worldwide, with annual reports welcomed. The midterm review of the Istanbul Programme of Action provides clear indications that the Samoa Pathway and the 2030 Agenda are not competitive, but complementary. Also, the multidimensional vulnerabilities of SIDS, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and natural disasters should be considered when preparing a VNR.

**Trinidad and Tobago** supported the idea to start the VNR process as early as possible.

**ECLAC** added that countries can already send the official letter to DESA to indicate their interest to present their VNR at the HLPF in 2022, which would provide countries with more time to prepare their VNR report.

**Guyana** asked whether there are any specific suggestions for countries that have already presented their VNR at least once at the HLPF.

**ECLAC** recommended to present again and develop a long-term strategy to regularly present in a two-to-three years cycle, or to report on concrete progress since the previous report, specifying how gaps were bridged and challenges solved.



### Next Steps

- ECLAC will share the presentations along with the minutes of the meeting with the participants.
- The next meeting of the Community of Practice for Caribbean countries will take place on **Tuesday 11 May 2021 at 12:00 pm (Chile time)**.