



## **Community of Practice for Caribbean countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in 2021**

**11 May 2020**

*Meeting Notes*

### **Participants**

**Bahamas; Jamaica; St. Kitts and Navis; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Trinidad and Tobago**

**UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) for Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten:** Srdan Deric, Development Coordination Officer;

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

### **Objective of the meeting**

The community of practice is an informal space for exchange among peers and sharing of good practices with regards to the implementation, follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in general and the preparation of VNRs by governments in particular; and aims to provide a space to regularly communicate with peers.

The specific goal of this session was to address good practices on communication and dissemination of the VNRs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

### **Presentations**

#### **Good practices on VNR communication and dissemination in Latin America and the Caribbean**

ECLAC's presentation (enclosed) included the following key points:

- The time between the finalization of the VNR and its presentation during the HLPF provides a good window of opportunity to give visibility to and to communicate and disseminate the VNR and their key messages.
- There are many reasons to communicate the VNR process, including inviting target audiences to follow the VNR presentation during the HLPF; raising public awareness and commitment on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs; sharing key results of the VNR during and after the HLPF; enhancing transparency with regards to the VNR preparation process and build trust and commitment with stakeholders; strengthening partnerships with existing stakeholders or raise interest of potential partners; and informing and involving a wider range of stakeholders in the VNR process and the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.
- There are many good practices of VNR communication and dissemination in Latin America and the Caribbean, that can be tapped into by future VNR presenters.



## The communication and dissemination strategy of the VNR process in Trinidad and Tobago in 2020

The intervention by the RCO included the following key points:

- Trinidad and Tobago successfully presented its first VNR report at the virtual HLPF in July 2020, focusing on eight of the 17 SDGs, namely Goals 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17. ECLAC provided valuable capacity and financial support to Trinidad and Tobago's VNR process, while other UN agencies and funds also assisted with the facilitation of the stakeholder engagement. The country still managed to conduct fact-to-face meetings with stakeholders before the off-set of the global COVID-19 pandemic.
- Ahead of the VNR presentation, Trinidad and Tobago set to raise awareness about the VNR process and managed to generate more than 45.000 engagements on various social media channels. As a self-reflection, it would have been good to have a more coherent communication strategy in place. After the VNR presentation at the HLPF in New York, the country continued using their social media platforms to build on the initial outreach efforts and managed to keep stakeholders further engaged in the process of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs, beyond the VNR process.
- Trinidad and Tobago also used more traditional media, such as print media, and produced Op-Eds in several newspapers. For the future, the language used in the print media could be adjusted to cater for different audiences. Sometimes the VNR language is quite technical and UN-focused but should cater to a broad audience with different levels of knowledge on the topic. The SDGs affect everybody's life, but the way they are presented sometimes makes their reach seem very far away.
- With the arrival of a dedicated Communications Official in the RCO, the VNR generated momentum at the HLPF was used to amplify the communication and dissemination strategy, which encompassed the production of regular SDG radio programs with the wider UN system, including frequent VNR referencing and broadcasting on popular radio shows; the engagement of influential local personalities to increase awareness on the SDGs; the development of a SDG Media Ambassador (maybe the only one in the region) with a very popular newscaster on the nightly news, who would reference the VNR in her TV programs and social media channels; and a wide dissemination effort with key findings via various platforms, such as Twitter, although it is not a widespread medium in Trinidad and Tobago, yet. Facebook was used with caution because of the open comments feature.
- This VNR was also used as an information document, being disseminated with 21 development partners of the Government, including the Permanent Missions in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago then organized follow-up meetings on various issues addressed in the VNR, such as financing, turning the VNR into a reference point for mobilizing resources.
- The VNR was broken down into "little snippets" and sent to news outlets and film crews, which enabled us to post a human-interest story every day, lending a human face to the SDGs and our VNR process. This resulted in a huge increase of interest in the 2030 Agenda. This effective communication strategy is highly recommended, as the costs are minimal but with great impact.



## Discussion

**ECLAC** highlighted the idea of adapting the UN messages to diverse audiences and inviting a SDG Media Ambassador and commented that the intervention showed clearly that the VNR goes ways beyond its presentation at the HLPF, and have a wider purpose, such as mobilizing resources.

**Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** asked whether there is an overall institution or coordinating body to bring all communications and outreach efforts together and if there were your plans for the next VNR, with a concrete timeline.

**UN RCO** indicated that the Ministry for Planning and Development is the central Ministry to coordinate the actions related to the 2030 Agenda and the VNR process, but that coordination meetings take place with different partners, such as the wider UN system, including ECLAC. It is recommended that messaging on SDGs remains in more informal terms to be effective (positive, feel good messages and inspiring human stories) and skip comprehensive, formalized structures and clearance processes. There is no fixed date as of today for Trinidad and Tobago's second VNR.

**ECLAC** underlined that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs provide space to promote positive, feel-good messages that Governments usually are on board to promote. ECLAC further stressed that VNRs are voluntary as the name implies, and not a traditional accountability document that needs to be approved by a formal legislative process. ECLAC inquired about the use of different platforms to promote conversations around the 2030 Agenda with constituents. It also emphasized the importance to create dedicated SDG websites and platforms, such as the **Regional Knowledge Platform on the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, the SDG Gateway**. The objective of this Platform is to gather all information related to the SDGs, including activities, information resources, statistics, regional data, specific analytical tools, and knowledge products developed and made available by the United Nations in the region. Access to the internet was also stressed, with the need to develop print material and radio programs as a creative strategy to reach more people.

**UN RCO** illustrated the different use of online platform depending on the national context and how they might be used depending of their use/popularity in different countries/groups. In addition, the outreach in a small Caribbean island state might be easier due to the small size and population. In this sense, the country has the opportunity to personalize its communications further. The collaboration with SDG Youth Ambassadors, for example in the context of the UN75 campaign, was also highlighted.

**Jamaica** commented that their country also had very active SDG Youth Ambassadors, which disseminate key messages around the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and the VNR process. Their work is managed by Jamaica's Planning Institute and the agencies that comprise the coordinating entity, the National Agenda Oversight Committee.

**St. Kitts and Navis** announced that they will present their first VNR in 2022 and are in the early stages of their VNR process. Due to the pandemic lockdown measures in place, the country was only able to conduct two in-person meetings so far, to engage various stakeholders and work on the generation of data. The country is also looking at the possibility of collaborating with SDG Youth Ambassadors, taking the recommendation of Trinidad and Tobago into account to carefully select candidates and be clear on their role and activities.

**ECLAC** congratulated St. Kitts and Navis for starting their VNR process early, considering that the process takes a long time. The Community of Practice, and the learned lessons shared with them, as well as the 35 VNRs of Latin America and the Caribbean, with each one telling a different story and based on a different context, will hopefully be of use in the VNR preparations. ECLAC also shared the webpage dedicated to the



Community of Practice, which can be found here: <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/2030-agenda-sustainable-development/eclac-community-practice-voluntary-national-reviews> . The webpage contains all materials from previous sessions of the Community of Practice for participants' reference in one space.

#### **Next Steps**

- ECLAC will share the presentation 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 **8 June 2021 at 12:00 pm (Chile time)**.