



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

8 June 2021

Meeting Notes

Participants

Bahamas; Barbados; Jamaica; St. Kitts and Nevis; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago.

ECLAC: Romain Zivy; 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 of the 2030 Agenda 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 the upcoming High-level Political Forum (HLPF) taking place from 6-15 July 2021.

Presentations

Preparing for the 2021 High-level Political Forum (HLPF)

ECLAC shared a presentation (enclosed) with participants which included the following key points:

- The **HLPF 2021** will take place from **6-15 July 2021**, including the **3 days of ministerial meeting of the forum (13-15 July)**, as part of the high-level segment of the Council. The theme of the HLPF is "**Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development**". The 9 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review during the 2021 HLPF are considered to be closely linked to the recovery from COVID-19, namely **SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16 and 17**. About **40 countries will present their VNR in 2021**, out of which **11 countries from the region of Latin America and the Caribbean**, namely **Antigua y Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua**, for the first time, **Bahamas, Dominican Republic and Paraguay**, for the second time and **Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay** for the third time. The **main messages of the 2021 VNRs** are available online [here](#).
- Various sessions at the HLPF will focus on the **impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and on building resilience**. 3 sessions will address the **SDGs in review and their interlinkages**. There will also be sessions for **countries in special situations: SIDS, LDCs, and LLDCs**, to review progress on the **2020 SDG targets** and the contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda of a wide range of actors, including **subnational and local actors**. The session on "**Means of implementation: technology and financing the SDGs**" on 12 July will sound on the intervention of **ECLAC's Executive Secretary**. The programme of the HLPF 2021 can be found [here](#).
- ECLAC's will contribute to the 2021 HLPF in the form of events, reports, conclusions and recommendations, including a **session of the five Chairs of the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development on 14 July**,



where **Costa Rica** will present the **results of the LAC Forum** which took place on 15-18 March 2021, with **comments from ECLAC's Executive Secretary; ECLAC Reports**, such as the Annual Report on Regional Progress: Building forward better: Action to strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Financing for development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond, and the Caribbean Outlook: forging a people-centered approach to sustainable development post COVID-19; as well as intergovernmentally agreed **conclusions and recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of the Forum of ECLAC** events during the HLPF.

ECLAC recommended participants to view a report submitted by ECLAC to the HLPF 2021, which summarizes the key highlights of the Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, entitled "Input on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean", which includes the first-time session dedicated to the specificities of the Associate Member States in the Caribbean during the Forum. Another document to review ahead of the HLPF, is the summary of the Chair of the Government of Costa Rica, which includes a more detailed description of the Forum's proceedings.

ECLAC further shared information about the planned HLPF side event from ECLAC and Costa Rica on Development in Transition, which will take the Caribbean perspective of developing a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index for Caribbean SIDS into account. This Development in Transition Concept responds to the call of the Prime Minister of Barbados and other countries from the region, especially Caribbean SIDS and Middle-Income Countries (MICs). The index is being built by the entire United Nations system, with UN DESA being the lead organizer. The side event is part of the ongoing work on this front, which goes beyond the HLPF and the General Assembly. Along this line, there will be a High-level Meeting convened on 16-17 June 2021 to discuss the gaps and challenges of MICS in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on the economic dimension of sustainable development. More information on this meeting organized by the group of like-minded countries of the MICs can be found [here](#).

Discussion

Suriname stated that they are participating for the first time in the Community of Practice and indicated their plans to present their first VNR in 2022.

ECLAC commented that the preparation of the VNR takes a long time and that it is notable that Suriname is already planning to start the complex, but very rewarding process. ECLAC further asked how the "veteran" countries of the Community of Practice have used the HLPF, including its side events, to showcase the results of the VNR.

Trinidad and Tobago explained that they presented their first VNR in 2020 but participated in the 2019 HLPF in person to prepare their own VNR a year later. Trinidad and Tobago recommended that other countries take every opportunity to sit in the sessions of the HLPF as an observer ahead of a country's own VNR presentation, including a lot of strategic notetaking and paying attention to *who* is presenting the VNR, *what* and *how* they are presenting, looking for key aspects to inform the own VNR process.

ECLAC added that VNR presentations differ from one country to another. As last year, the HLPF will be virtual this year, which has positive aspects, such as saving costs to fly to New York, which enables more participation and inclusiveness, as well as negative ones, such as the lack of networking and real in person experience. While all VNRs are available in the [SDG Gateway](#), the videos of the VNR presentations can be found in the [UN Web TV archive](#). Countries can even watch all sessions after the HLPF itself, which might be helpful taking the packed schedule of the HLPF into account. ECLAC also shared the experience of the Jamaica VNR Lab in 2020 as a technical dialogue, which complemented the VNR presentation by highlighting the statistical component of their VNR. VNR labs can also be conducted during the Regional Forum, not only during the HLPF.



Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanked ECLAC and the Community of Practice for accompanying the country's VNR process in 2020. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was at first lagging behind in its VNR process once the pandemic hit, such as having a monitoring system for the SDGs in place, with various further challenges arising due to the lockdown measures put in place. Based on the guidance from ECLAC, the country made use of virtual platforms to conduct surveys with all stakeholders and receive their feedback and orientation regarding the VNR process. The Community of Practice proved very helpful to exchange experiences between countries and receive valuable advice and lesson learned regarding the VNR process from other countries. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is considering presenting their second VNR in 2022.

ECLAC stressed that there are commonalities between countries in the region despite their individual characteristics, which provides a common space to share experiences and learn from each other. In this sense, countries do not need to reinvent the wheel again, but can base their VNR preparations on the valuable knowledge and broad range of information from the over 200 VNRs presented by 168 countries with very diverse development levels and challenges in five years so far.

Jamaica stated that they have not conducted a VNR since joining the Community of Practice but are planning to do so soon. Nevertheless, the Community of Practice provided a very helpful platform to learn from the individual experiences of other Caribbean countries in the overall implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Jamaica has a small National Development Planning Unit and is currently looking at how to strengthen the local dimension of the 2030 Agenda, as local authorities have felt left out in the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the first VNR process. Jamaica commented that it is very encouraging to hear that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is considering presenting their second VNR in 2022.

ECLAC stressed the importance of learning from the past VNR experience for the second VNR and acknowledged the challenges of multi-island states to engage different actors, including local authorities, in the VNR process. ECLAC stated that it is not an easy job to elaborate a VNR, but there is true value in the process as it presents an opportunity to reflect where a country stands in terms of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. ECLAC agreed with Jamaica that it is very encouraging to see that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is already planning to present their second VNR despite the recent volcano eruption. ECLAC encouraged Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to consider presenting their second VNR as well.

Barbados stated that in 2020 the country had presented a statement by the Prime Minister regarding the achievement of the SDGs, in particular 9 of the 17 SDGs. The country is currently finalizing a Rapid Integrated Assessment (RIA) to critically measure where the country stands in terms of SDG achievement. This work will be conducted by a consultant in collaboration with ECLAC and the UN Resident Coordinator. Barbados further illustrated how the country was impacted by the pandemic and had to reallocate a lot of funds to the response efforts to recover from COVID-19. The country is further conducting a lot of work towards SDG 6, putting measures in place to improve their water resources. The recent volcano eruption in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was even a tremendous experience for Barbados, as the country had to make use of a lot of water to wash off the ashes. Barbados encouraged all countries to present a VNR to improve the quality of life of all people, with the SDGs being our guide for a better life, and thanked ECLAC for the Community of Practice.

ECLAC announced that this will be the last session under the leadership of María Ortiz, who will be stepping down from her post at ECLAC shortly after the HLPF 2021. ECLAC assured that the monthly Community of Practice sessions will continue under the leadership of Abdullahi Abdulkadri from ECLAC's subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean in Port of Spain with support by Mareike Eberz from the Office of the Executive Secretary and Lydia Geny from the Office of the Secretary of the Commission. Due to the HLPF, there will be no session of the Community of Practice in July, but the Community of Practice will continue in August with reflections and lessons learned from the 2021 HLPF as well as the results of an evaluation on this VNR cycle of the Community of Practice, which will be circulated with all members in a couple of weeks. ECLAC further



highlighted that the VNR report itself is important, but the VNR process is even more important, as it presents a unique opportunity to assess where countries stand in terms of SDG achievement, how they can best engage with the various entities and funds of the UN as well as other countries, such as via ECLAC's Community of Practice, and also how they tackle multiple challenges on their path towards sustainable development beyond the VNR, such as a volcano eruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community of Practice has been designed to assist all countries of the region in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and will continue doing so.

Next Steps

- ECLAC will share the presentation along with the minutes of the meeting with the participants.
- ECLAC will share a list of confirmed HLPF side events of ECLAC with all participants.
- An evaluation of the Community of Practice sessions of the 2020/21 VNR cycle will be circulated with all participants in a couple of weeks.
- The next meeting of the Community of Practice for Caribbean countries will take place on **10 August 2021 at 12:00 pm (Chile time)**.