



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

10 August 2021

Meeting Notes

Participants

Antigua and Barbuda; The Bahamas; Jamaica; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Trinidad and Tobago.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC): Romain Zivy; Mareike Eberz (Office of the Executive Secretary); Lydia Rosa Gény (Office of the Secretary of the Commission); Abdullahi Abdulkadri; Catarina Camarinhas (ECLAC 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 for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in general, and the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (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 key messages and main outcomes of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2021, showcasing the experience of Antigua and Barbuda and The Bahamas presenting their VNRs at this year's HLPF (6-15 July 2021). Moreover, future 2030 Agenda milestones, such as the upcoming SDG Moment during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021, were presented, while participants engaged in an open discussion towards the end of the session.

Presentations

Key messages and main outcomes of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2021 and upcoming 2030 Agenda milestones (*presentation by ECLAC*)

- Forty-two countries presented their VNR at the HLPF 2021, out of which 11 countries were from the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, namely Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua, for the first time; The Bahamas, Dominican Republic and Paraguay, for the second time; and Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay, for the third time. While the VNRs are available in the [SDG Gateway](#), the VNR presentations can be found in the [UN Web TV archive](#).
- In total, the HLPF has heard 247 presentations from 176 countries since 2016. From Latin America and the Caribbean, 28 countries have presented their VNR to the HLPF in New York between 2016 and 2021, including 14 countries that submitted their VNR more than once. Five countries from the Caribbean (Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Suriname) have not yet presented a VNR, and are highly encouraged to do so in the next year. **Countries should indicate their interest to present their VNR at the HLPF 2022 to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) by the end of September 2021.**



- The HLPF 2021 took place in a hybrid format. Only in-person sessions were the opening (13 July) and closing (15 July) of the ministerial segment, which allowed for the adoption of the HLPF Outcome Document at the closing session on 15 July. Views in the discussions leading up to the adoption diverged on climate change, the TRIPS waiver, health care services, financing and debt, biodiversity, and countries in special situations.
- This year, the United Nations Secretary-General updated his Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for preparing VNRs, including a call for 4 key areas: (1) COVID-19 recovery plans and strategies; (2) Continuity and comparability in 2nd and 3rd VNRs; (3) New and emerging challenges; and (4) Possible links to subnational reporting, including voluntary local reviews (VLRs).
- The regional and subregional dimensions in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda gained utmost importance at the HLPF 2021. Regional Commissions were recognized to mobilize action and leveraging regional frameworks on the road to 2030 and beyond, for example via the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development. Key messages from the Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development included:
 - There is a growing possibility that the Goals of the 2030 Agenda will not be achieved, and its comprehensive nature is at risk. Only 1/3 of the SDG targets are on track to be met.
 - Urgent measures need to be taken to support middle-income countries and SIDS; review obsolete concepts of measuring development and financing paradigms that are no longer adjusted to the current needs. The recovery requires expansionary fiscal policies, with strengthened income and international financing.
 - At the current rate of vaccination, the region will not achieve herd immunity in 2021, urgent measures for equitable access to vaccines/ regional cooperation and solidarity are needed.
 - The countries have taken ownership of the 2030 Agenda: 28 of the 33 countries in the region have presented their reports to the HLPF between 2016 and 2021.
 - ECLAC proposal for a big push for sustainability for a transformative recovery.

The ECLAC Annual report on regional progress: building forward better: action to strengthen the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the Fourth meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, among other key documents are available at the official website of the Forum at: <https://foro-alc2030.cepal.org/2021/en>

Outlook HLPF 2022

- The 2022 HLPF will review in-depth the following 5 SDGs: 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land), and 17 (partnerships).
- The incoming ECOSOC President Collen Vixen Kelapile, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations, will introduce a set of reforms to the 2022 session.
- He called on countries presenting VNRs in 2022 to conduct “innovative, evidence-based and inclusive” VNR processes.



- He suggested limiting the number of VNR presentations at the 2022 HLPF in order to ensure enough time for meaningful interaction on each review and maximizing the value of VNRs, while giving priority to first-time presenters.
- The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs remain the global blueprint for every country. SDG 17 remains the most transformative goal of the joint agenda, without it, SDGs will not be attained by 2030.

Upcoming 2030 Agenda milestones

Regional level

Some key upcoming meetings in 2021 include: the Extraordinary meeting of the Committee on South-South Cooperation of ECLAC (19-20 August); 61st meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean of ECLAC (29-30 September); VI Summit of Heads of State and Government of CELAC (18 September); 18th meeting of the Regional Council for Planning of ILPES of ECLAC (19-21 October 2021); 4th meeting of Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean of ECLAC (26-28 October 2021, under the chairship of Antigua and Barbuda); Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction for the Americas and the Caribbean (PR21) (1-4 November); 20th Monitoring Committee of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) of ECLAC (4-5 November, under the chairship of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines); 11th meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC (23-25 November), and the Third session of the Conference on Science, Innovation and Information and Communications Technologies of ECLAC (13-15 December 2021)

Global level

Some key upcoming meetings in 2021 include: the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (14-30 September, NY); SDG Moment (20 September) and the High-level Dialogue on Energy (22-24 September); Global Food Systems Summit (23 September); 15th session of the Conference of UNCTAD (3-8 October, Barbados); UN World Data Forum (3-6 October, Switzerland); 15th meeting of the UN Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP 15) (11-24 October, China); The second United Nations Global Sustainable Transport Conference (14-16 October, China); G-20 Summit (30-31 October, Italy); 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (1-12 November, Scotland); 12th Ministerial Conference of WTO (30 November- 3 December, Switzerland); UN Ocean Conference (dates TBC, Portugal).

The experience of Caribbean countries presenting their VNRs at the HLPF 2021

Antigua and Barbuda

The presentation of the first ever VNR of Antigua and Barbuda was made under the theme of *building forward stronger* and provided important updates on the country's progress towards the achievement of the SDGs. Antigua and Barbuda is very thankful to ECLAC, especially to its subregional headquarters for the Caribbean based in Trinidad and Tobago, for their continuous support during their VNR process. In preparation for the VNR, the International Trade Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Immigration through technical assistance from ECLAC held extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including government, civil society, private sector, youth, academia, faith-based institutions and development partners to collect inputs. The consultations reviewed in depth all 17 SDGs and were structured along the "5 P's" approach-: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships for an integrated approach.

The VNR focused on leaving no one behind, offering an inclusive approach of engaging multiples stakeholders in a virtual format, despite ongoing challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective and innovative



approaches, such as online surveys and phone interviews, were employed to guarantee inclusivity throughout the VNR process and accumulate a wealth of information, giving a voice to each stakeholder group, and generating a balanced self-assessment. In addition, the VNR process will inform the new national development medium-term strategy based on the Methodology for Assessing Procurement Systems (MAPS) exercise.

Both the VNR report and video presented at the HLPF reflect important successes, challenges, as well as lessons learned, which will serve to strengthen policies and partnerships in the country. While increased official development assistance (ODA) is necessary to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and build back better, the collection of statistical data to measure progress towards the SDGs can help mobilize support from external partners.

The presentation was well received by UN membership and Antigua and Barbuda received three questions from the floor, one by the United Kingdom on climate change, one by Saint Lucia on small islands developing States (SIDS), and one by a civil society representative on stakeholder engagement. In conclusion, the overall VNR experience has been very useful and rewarding. The year 2026 was identified as possible year to conduct a second VNR.

The Bahamas

The Bahamas set up a SDG Unit, with the responsibility to implement, monitor and follow-up on the 2030 Agenda on the local, national and ministerial level. At the beginning of the VNR process, three technical committees (1. Social Inclusion, 2. Environmental Sustainability, 3. Economic Prosperity) were created to spearhead the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, while creating synergies and reducing overlaps. The human rights dimension was implemented throughout the entire VNR process and trade-offs between all 17 SDGs were taken into consideration. A stable core group of people helped gather a wealth of information for the VNR report.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic limited the efforts to engage stakeholders, the core groups met on a regular basis and engaged diverse and marginalized stakeholder groups throughout the country. People from all sectors were engaged in the process to ensure full ownership of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, The Bahamas cooperated with various media outlets, such as The Tribune Media Group (newspaper and radio) and ZNS Radio to educate journalists about the 2030 Agenda, get their buy-in regarding the SDGs and issue comprehensive media reports. One concrete example was negotiating airtime to present the SDGs on a weekly basis via an official radio show, which allowed the country to reach out to even the most rural communities, leaving no one behind.

The Bahamas included a SIDS common chapter in their VNR report, focusing on climate change, COVID-19, spatial dispersion, low lying areas, small resource-based and undiversified economy. One concrete example in their VNR report reflecting the multiples challenges of a SIDS is how Hurricane Dorian and the recovery efforts affected the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Caribbean country. While The Bahamas is proud to be a SIDS, the country is hugely subjected to external shocks and hence encouraged Caribbean SIDS to work together to overcome the common challenges they face. Moving forward, The Bahamas has gone through many changes within the SDG Unit but is now well equipped with three staff members.

Discussion

ECLAC thanked Antigua and Barbuda and The Bahamas for their excellent presentations and asked whether The Bahamas had published their VNR report as it cannot be found on the official UN DESA website.

The Bahamas explained that the report is 100% finished but the Cabinet still must sign off on it.



Trinidad and Tobago congratulated the two countries of Antigua and Barbuda and The Bahamas for sharing their experience and asked whether the second-generation VNR reporting guidelines have been integrated into the second VNR of The Bahamas.

The Bahamas could not provide a definite answer to this question as the person attending the session had recently joined the SDG unit, but would be more than happy to find out.

Elizabeth Emanuel explained that Jamaica benefitted from the country's Vision 2030 development plan in shaping their VNR process. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts, Antigua and Barbuda had conducted solid consultations with multiple stakeholders in a virtual space. Consultation results manifested a strong focus on gender-based violence (GBV). VNRs present a brilliant opportunity for countries from the same region to learn from each other by sharing best practices, identify gaps and lessons learned. Key questions to be asked at the beginning of the VNR process encompass: What is sustainable development all about? How is this connected to the SDGs? Where do we stand as a country?

The Bahamas recommended to other countries to make better use of the resources provided by the United Nations system for the VNR process.

ECLAC confirmed its continuous willingness to assist its member States in the implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda in general and support the VNR process in particular. ECLAC further invited countries to join the [Extraordinary meeting of the Committee on South-South Cooperation: opportunities for renewed international development cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), which will be held virtually on 19 and 20 August 2021. At this meeting, ECLAC will present a new concept for measuring development needs of countries in transition as a tool for resource mobilization: [Development in transition: Concept and measurement proposal for renewed cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). In accordance with the concept of development in transition, elaborated by ECLAC together with the European Commission and the Development Centre of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a renewed cooperation should be tailored to the specific needs of countries and seek to address structural development gaps, contributing to the generation of regional and global public goods. In the case of Caribbean countries, ECLAC will focus on the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index amongst other tools.

ECLAC further thanked countries for presenting their VNRs despite the multiple challenges resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, for example regarding the collection of data in times of lockdown measures in place. ECLAC also recommended that countries enhance their collaboration with the private sector within international frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. ECLAC further invited countries to think how ECLAC could support them even further in the VNR process and encouraged countries to formalize their commitment to present their VNR at next year's HLPF.

ECLAC announced that the results of the evaluation survey of the Community of Practice sessions of the 2020/21 VNR cycle will be presented in the next Community of Practice session in October. There will be no session of the Community of Practice in September due to the United Nations General Assembly taking place simultaneously. Last, but not least, ECLAC invited participants to visit the official website of the Community of Practice, where all presentations and meeting notes can be found [here](#).

Next Steps

- ECLAC will share the presentations along with the meeting minutes with all participants.
- The evaluation survey of the Community of Practice sessions of the 2020/21 VNR cycle will be circulated once more with all participants to give everyone a chance to participate (deadline: 31 August 2021).



- The next meeting of the Community of Practice for Caribbean countries will take place on **12 October 2021 at 12:00 pm (Chilean time)**.