



**Community of Practice for Caribbean countries  
presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in 2022**

**9 November 2021**

*Meeting Notes*

**Participants**

**Antigua and Barbuda; Belize; Jamaica; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Trinidad and Tobago.**

**The 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 (ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean).

**The United Nations System / Office of Resident Coordinators (ORC):** Cosbert Woods; Auren Manners; Olaf J. De Groot; Feona Sandy.

**Civil Society:** Javier Surasky, Programme Officer Governance and Financing for Sustainable Development, Centro de Pensamiento Estratégico Internacional (CEPEI); Aneska Brone-Caines.

**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 discuss the meaningful engagement of stakeholders, such as civil society, the private sector, academia and local authorities, in the VNR process. This session featured a presentation by Trinidad and Tobago and an intervention by Javier Surasky from CEPEI. In addition, ECLAC presented past and future milestones of the 2030 Agenda at the regional and global levels.

**Presentations**

**Past milestones related to the 2030 Agenda at global and regional levels**

*Presentation by ECLAC*

**18th meeting of the Regional Council for Planning of ILPES of ECLAC (19-21 October 2021)**

The meeting was convened by ECLAC and the Government of Panama from 19 to 21 October 2021 and was joined by ministers, deputy ministers and planning directors from 26 countries in the region, including 9 from the Caribbean. The authorities recognized the importance of public policy consistency for strengthening the processes and instruments of planning for development and public management for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. ECLAC presented the position document: "[Resilient institutions for a transformative post-pandemic recovery in Latin America and the Caribbean: Inputs for discussion](#)". Countries further stressed the need to bolster national planning systems with renewed capacities for planning the post-pandemic recovery with a long-term view.



#### **4th session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (26-28 October 2021)**

The event was convened by ECLAC, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from 26 to 28 October 2021. It is the first time that a Caribbean country serves as Chair of this subsidiary body of ECLAC. In the event, countries reaffirmed the importance of putting people and their rights at the center of development, safeguarding the region's progress on social development and preventing setbacks amid the crisis unleashed by the pandemic. ECLAC presented the position document: "Disasters and inequality in a protracted crisis: Towards universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean". In addition in the resolution adopted by member countries recognized "the importance of coordinating social protection systems with disaster risk management policies to strengthen the capacity for mitigation, prevention, response and adaptation and to create synergies that will improve the efficiency and resilience of institutions and the population." Countries further stressed that multilateralism and cooperation are the critical means for making headway on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

#### **VII Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) for the Americas and the Caribbean (PR21) (1-4 November 2021)**

The event took place from 1 to 4 of November 2021 under the theme 'Building Resilient Economies in the Americas and the Caribbean,' to raise awareness of the increasing economic and human cost of disasters, including challenges by small island developing States (SIDS). The meeting was chaired by the Government of Jamaica, the first Caribbean country to host this regional platform, and co-organized by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). 30 countries from the Americas and the Caribbean pledged to step up action to prevent and better manage disasters and achieve the goals of the Sendai Framework on DRR. For the first time, this regional platform was preceded by a special youth forum on DRR and countries agreed that such forums would become a regular feature of future platforms. A declaration issued by the youth forum was approved at ministerial level. The event concluded by approving new steps to strengthen a regional action plan.

#### **Seminar on non-communicable diseases in the Caribbean of ECLAC (4 November 2021)**

Prior to the 20th Meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) of ECLAC, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC and the Minister of Finance, Economic Planning and Information Technology of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, led a seminar on the high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the Caribbean subregion on 4 November 2021. NCDs, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer, exacerbate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and hinder the subregion's progress towards the 2030 Agenda, due to their multiple health, economic and social consequences. In this context, the region should strengthen production, distribution and access to medicines and vaccines as presented in ECLAC's Plan for self-sufficiency in health matters as requested by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

#### **20th Meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) of ECLAC (5 November 2021)**

The Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee of ECLAC is the subsidiary body of ECLAC dedicated to promote and strengthen economic and social cooperation and integration among the countries of the Caribbean and to foster cooperation and integration between these countries and those of the wider Latin American region. During the 20th meeting of the Monitoring Committee of the CDCC, led under the chairship of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and counted for the first time with the participation of the Government of Costa Rica, in its capacity as Chair of ECLAC, Caribbean member countries, subregional and international authorities and experts debated about the multidimensional challenges that Caribbean member countries



continue to face and that define their vulnerability. They also discussed innovative solutions on financial, technological and institutional matters for accelerating the recovery and strengthening economic resilience. Participants reviewed a preliminary working document presented by ECLAC entitled “Reckoning with COVID-19: pursuing a people-centered recovery and more resilient future for the Caribbean” and addressed strategies to support the recovery through regional solidarity and integration, and how to safeguard the health of the Caribbean. They also reviewed a report on implementation of the 2020 programme of work for the Caribbean and agreed that the 29th session of CDCC will take place in Suriname, prior to ECLAC’s 39th session to be held in 2022. In that occasion, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC reiterated the full commitment of ECLAC to the ‘Caribbean First’ strategy in order to better serve the countries of the subregion

### **Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement in the VNR Process**

*Presentation by Javier Surasky, CEPEI*

The presentation focused on 3 questions regarding stakeholders' engagement in the VNRs building process:

#### **1. Why is it necessary and efficient to engage stakeholders in the VNR building?**

Stakeholders’ engagement promotes ownership and awareness-raising on government efforts to implement the SDGs. Stakeholders’ engagement enlarges the availability of helpful resources, such as financing, technical expertise, analytical assets, and data. Stakeholders’ engagement leads to more cohesive reports. Different stakeholders bring to the discussion their interest issues, promoting a more integrated approach to sustainable development.

#### **2. Who are the stakeholders?**

Stakeholders are not the same in every country at every moment. To rightly identify them is part of the VNR process. Creating a balance between them, their work areas, and their geographical representation is part of the VNR process challenge. Stakeholders include civil society, the private sector, academia, and local governments, among other groups. It can further include, for example, worker unions, university-students’ bodies, and professional associations. Unions are vital in evaluating the SDG 8 on economic growth and decent jobs. When companies are part of the VNR process, and unions are not, it creates a notorious disbalance. University-students’ bodies could have a lot to say to evaluate the SDG 4 on quality education. In many cases, parliaments, the judiciary, and other governmental institutions such as human rights bodies and supreme audit institutions play significant roles in the SDGs implementation. They would have been heading awareness-raising projects, establishing programmes to align their work with the 2030 Agenda, and creating internal operative processes to ensure that the 2030 Agenda principles are considered in their decisions, among a wide range of possible activities. The stakeholder identification exercise is closely linked to a national vulnerabilities and gaps analysis. Which groups are being left behind in your country? Are they organized in some way? If they have any representation, it should be part of the process. Instead of "giving voice" to the vulnerable groups, let them talk because they have their own voice and exciting perspectives on how the SDGs' implementation affects their lives and what to do to improve them. To include the UN system at the national and regional levels, representatives, and other international cooperation partners at the VNR dialogues could enrich the results and provide an "external" point of view on the country's efforts. To invite stakeholders is the first step, but it is far from including them. Inclusive participation means meaningful participation. Strengthening stakeholder capacities to participate in the VNR building process would be necessary, primarily when referring to vulnerable groups' representation.



### 3. How to engage stakeholders in a meaningful way?

#### Best practices of meaningful stakeholder engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean

**Costa Rica's** Judiciary Branch signed the "National Pact for the SDGs" in 2016. To institutionalize its commitment, it created an SDGs promotion governance scheme led by the President of the Supreme Court of Justice. As a result, the Supreme Court adopted a Declaration of Institutional Interest of the SDGs, encouraging judicial bodies to promote SDGs compliance into their annual budgets, and aligned the Supreme Court of Justice decisions with the SDGs. Besides, the judiciary annually publishes a Voluntary Accountability Report on progress in implementing the SDGs.

In **Jamaica**, local authorities participated in building the National Development Plan "Vision 2030 Jamaica" and its implementation strategy, the "Medium-Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework (2018-2021)." Local governments also joined the European Union-funded project named "Strengthening local government's role as a partner in development" to help local authorities build leadership, institutional and operational capacities to implement the SDGs. Besides, the number of VNRs transcribing the inputs provided by civil society or opening a space for their representatives to write a short text to be included as part of the VNR is increasing.

There are many possible ways to promote meaningful stakeholders' engagement in the VNR building process. Stakeholders should have broad access to information. Awareness-raising campaigns on sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda, and the SDGs are also necessary for the meaningful inclusion of every stakeholder. Stakeholders' financial and human capabilities will require support if they are called to play a meaningful role in the VNR exercises. A clear government policy decision on opening the process to stakeholders should be made and transmitted. However, each national context is different and has its specificities. As a result, partners identification and engagement are always a national-specific challenge. Once a State assumes the decision of presenting a VNR, its government may need to ensure that institutional channels for dialogue with multi-stakeholder are created and active; address power inequalities between and within non-governmental partners to guarantee everyone's voice is heard; and identify which vulnerable groups are "invisible" because of a lack of data and bring them into the process.

#### Country experience by Trinidad and Tobago on engaging stakeholders in their VNR

##### *Presentation by Trinidad and Tobago*

Trinidad and Tobago presented their experience in stakeholder engagement for their VNR process during 2020. The presentation included the following key points:

- Trinidad and Tobago successfully presented its first VNR report at the virtual 2020 HLPF, after the unexpected off-set of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated already existing challenges and led to minor setbacks in the country's VNR process. Nevertheless, the country completed its VNR with many lessons learned, focusing on eight of the 17 SDGs, namely Goals 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.
- The entry point to the VNR process, including stakeholder engagement, was the UN DESA Handbook. Based on this document, Trinidad and Tobago developed a project schedule, with an entire section dedicated to stakeholder engagement, including the development of a stakeholder database, as well as a communication and social media strategy. Three consultants in total were hired to conduct the stakeholder engagement plan, namely one dedicated person for Trinidad, one dedicated person for Tobago, and a third for generating stakeholder data. The stakeholder engagement plan was strongly interlinked with the overall 2030 Agenda communication strategy, including the design of branding material for the VNR process.



- Trinidad and Tobago conducted various consultations with diverse stakeholders, which were divided into internal consultations (led by different ministries and governmental departments) and external stakeholder engagement (with support from the UN Resident Coordinator, ECLAC, UNDP), which helped to disseminate stakeholder information, use the platform dedicated to the VNR process, and procured the lead consultant of the VNR report.
- As a result, Trinidad and Tobago ensured 45.000 media interactions, 49 face-to-face interviews and 4 focus group sessions under the stakeholder engagement plan. As response to the pandemic, the country also quickly developed an online survey, to which 1008 responses were received. The survey responses demonstrated some lack of knowledge on the SDGs and highlighting the need to raise general public awareness on the SDGs. Unfortunately, public consultations as well as those planned with trade unions had to be cancelled due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures put in place.
- Both the VNR report and the actual presentation at the HLPF 2020 included the participation of various stakeholders, ranging from different government representatives (Office of the Prime Minister, Education, Health, Labour, and the Tobago House of Assembly), the private sector (Green Alternatives in Action, Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago, and sectoral association), civil society (Buccoo Reef Trust, Autism Tobago, CANARI, Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute and United Way). CANARI was part of the official delegation presenting the VNR report at the HLPF, focusing on their SDG 13 (Climate Action) shadow report, which showed civil society's contribution to this goal in Trinidad and Tobago.
- The country faced several challenges in the VNR process, including guaranteeing a dedicated VNR budget in times of competing priorities, which was secured with the support of the UNCT. Another challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic, regarding conducting stakeholder consultations, which was solved via an online survey for public stakeholder engagement. Another challenge is the development of post VNR activities, which continues to be an area for improvement.

## Discussion

**Jamaica** asked whether Trinidad and Tobago targeted their stakeholder consultation at the general public or specific stakeholder groups.

**Trinidad and Tobago** answered that the four focus groups targeted ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as civil society, with a specific focus on the 8 SDGs they reported on in their VNR process.

**Belize** asked about how much time Trinidad and Tobago had allocated for the stakeholder engagement process.

**Trinidad and Tobago** explained that the VNR process started in mid-2019, with the stakeholder consultation being conducted for three months between November 2019 and February 2020.

**ECLAC** thanked both speakers and confirmed the importance of “meaningful” stakeholder engagement, which is much more than just checking the box. ECLAC recommended countries to start the stakeholder engagement process as early as possible.



## Upcoming 2030 Agenda milestones

*Presentation by ECLAC*

### Regional level

Some key upcoming meetings in 2021 include: 51st Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly (10-11 November 2021); Preparatory meeting for the 5th Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing and the Rights of Older Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean (18 November 2021); 11th meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC (23-25 November 2021); XX General Assembly of the Forum of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Housing and Urban Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI) (22-23 November 2021, Colombia); 36th session of the Committee of the Whole of ECLAC (3 December 2021); 3rd session of the Conference on Science, Innovation and Information and Communications Technologies (13-15 December 2021); 62nd meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in LAC (26-27 January 2022); 1st Conference of the Parties to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) (20-22 April 2022); and 5th meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development (7-10 March 2022, Costa Rica).

### Global level

Some key upcoming meetings in 2021 include: 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) (31 October-12 November, Scotland); 12th Ministerial Conference of WTO (30 November-3 December, Switzerland); Sustainable Energy for All Forum (11 January 2022, Rwanda); ECOSOC Partnership Forum (2 February 2022, NY); ECOSOC Youth Forum (19-20 April 2022, NY); ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development (25-28 April 2022, NY); UN Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum) (5-6 May 2022, NY); UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) 2nd part (25 April-8 May 2022, China); ECOSOC Operational activities for development segment (17-19 May 2022, NY); 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 15) (9-21 May 2022, Côte d'Ivoire); UN Ocean Conference (27 June-1 July 2022, Portugal); and the 10th session of the HLPF (5-15 July 2022, New York).

### **Next Steps**

- ECLAC will share the meeting's presentations and notes with all participants.
- ECLAC invites all participants to visit the official website of the Community of Practice, where all presentations and meeting notes can be found at: <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/2030-agenda-sustainable-development/eclac-community-practice-voluntary-national-reviews>
- The next meeting of the Community of Practice for Caribbean countries will take place on **14 December 2021 at 11:00 a.m. (Trinidad and Tobago time)**.