



Communique on further improving the voluntary national review process

The Committee for Development Policy congratulates countries on their active participation in the voluntary national review (VNR) process so far. The VNRs are an important innovation for follow up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They are a major advancement for strengthening accountability of countries to their citizens for international commitments and for sharing of experiences and lessons learned. Based on the Committee's analysis since 2017 and with a view to further improve the effectiveness of the VNR process for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Committee would like to underscore three important limitations of the process and make five recommendations to address these:

i - The analysis of 2017 and 2018 VNRs found **few adequate strategies for implementing the Leave No One Behind objective**. While most countries acknowledge the principle of leaving no one behind, VNRs often remain vague on how to implement it in practice. Moreover, limited reflection is given in the VNRs to the risks that groups may be 'pushed behind' by misguided development policies. Most countries relate LNOB to social protection only, potentially indicating that it is not yet reflected in strategies in other critical areas such as macroeconomic, technology and productive sector policy strategies. This highlights the need for broader and more robust strategies to ensure the LNOB principle – inclusive development cannot be achieved by social policy alone.

ii - **The focus of Agenda 2030 on those furthest behind is not often evident** in the references to strategies associated in the VNRs with LNOB. Among developed countries, the idea of 'furthest behind' is mostly referred to other countries (typically to least developed countries) rather than to groups within their own country. Among groups recognized to be at risk of being left behind, minorities such as indigenous people and racial, ethnical and religious groups, continue to receive less attention than women or established groups such as children and youth, and persons with disabilities. Honest reflection on trade-offs and groups that could be "pushed behind" is needed.

iii - **The selectivity in reporting and orphan goal: SDG 10**. Comparing the attention given to the 17 SDGs in the VNRs using machine learning shows that SDG 17 finds most attention, which might reflect not only the breadth of SDG 17, but also that countries see global partnerships as central to the 2030 Agenda. Concerningly, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities finds the lowest attention. While there are many references to inequality, this is not adequately reflected in the reporting on SDG10 in the VNRs.

Therefore, the Committee would suggest the following recommendations for the VNR process:

i - Guidance to countries should highlight the need for VNRs to become more evidence- and data-based, and more analytical. A focus should be on lessons learned, solutions as well as challenges and trade-offs. VNRs should address the macroeconomic context and fiscal constraints more thoroughly, including in relation to leaving no one behind. The reporting could be strengthened by incentivizing countries to provide more information on their capacity needs.

ii - HLPF sessions (whether in panels and other formats) should then build more directly on the variety of analyses of VNRs that has been done in the preparatory process, including the one by the CDP, and focus on solution-oriented discussions based on the lessons, needs and gaps identified in the VNRs.

iii - In addition, there should be feedback loops after the VNR is completed, both at the country level and at the HLPF. One way to ensure meaningful follow-up is to offer a mechanism at the HLPF that allows for match-making for support based on needs identified in the VNRs.

iv - In order for VNRs to be truly “national”, the process of VNR preparations should be inclusive and entail broad dialogue and consultations at home. It should engage UN agencies where applicable, stakeholders and practitioners on the ground. The CDP calls for all VNRs to cover the contributions of non-state actors, and for broadening the space for civil society and regional dialogues. Also, improving the visibility and use of stakeholder reports prepared for the HLPF is encouraged.

v - The visibility and impact of VNRs could be strengthened by discussing commonalities among VNRs from the same region including transboundary regional and subregional issues during the regional forums on sustainable development that are convened annually by the United Nations regional commissions. This would require starting the VNR preparatory process earlier. Strengthening the regional preparatory process can improve the inclusive nature of the VNRs and the peer learning element.