

Voluntary National Reviews: What are countries prioritizing?

*A review of 'main messages'
from volunteer countries
presented for the 2017 Session
of the UN High Level Political
Forum on Sustainable
Development*

July 2017

In Partnership with World Vision International



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Introduction

The [United Nations High-Level Political Forum \(HLPF\)](#) is the global structure responsible for assessing progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries, ensuring that the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) remains relevant and ambitious, and most importantly that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are achieved by 2030. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States have emphasized that the HLPF should draw high-level political attention to gaps or areas where implementation is lagging behind and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up to accelerate progress. Presentation and discussion of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) is a key component of the HLPF’s function. For 2017, **44 countries** have volunteered to present national reviews on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda, twice the number of countries that volunteered in 2016¹.

Volunteer Countries for HLPF 2017

Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Monaco, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Uruguay, Zimbabwe.

In addition to the official reports, VNR countries have also been asked to submit in advance separate documents highlighting the “**main messages**” of their reports.

Together 2030, in partnership with World Vision, commissioned a review of the Main Messages submitted by 20 June 2017 to provide a preliminary literary review of countries’ VNR reports. The

¹ Countries that volunteered for the 2016 HLPF: China, Colombia, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Switzerland, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela.

purpose of this review is to provide information to civil society stakeholders for their engagement in the HLPF in July 2017, and to make recommendations for improving VNR reports in 2018 and beyond.

Approach to the Review

As of 20 June 2017, the [Main Messages](#) from 38 countries were available for review, and 6 countries² had yet to submit. Twelve of the submissions³ were translated to English using Google Translate to facilitate review.

Main Messages Reviewed

Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Monaco, Netherlands, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uruguay, Zimbabwe

All 38 of the Main Messages were reviewed to assess whether they addressed the following key questions:

- 1. Did countries describe the consultation process leading up to the VNR, including engagement of civil society and other stakeholders?*
- 2. Did countries describe the institutional arrangements in place for governance and accountability for implementation at the national level?*
- 3. Did countries report on the participation and contributions of civil society in implementation of the 2030 Agenda?*
- 4. Did countries report on actions taken to implement the 2030 Agenda, balancing social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development?*
- 5. Did countries reference policies or programmes to target support for specific marginalized groups and/or populations, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, minority ethnic groups, young and older persons and others?*
- 6. Did countries identify gaps or challenges in implementation?*

While countries have been provided with a [set of voluntary common reporting guidelines](#) to structure their VNR reports, similar guidance as to the structure and format of the Main Messages

² As of 20 June 2017, the following countries had not yet submitted their Main Messages: Cyprus, Guatemala, Italy, Nepal, Nigeria and Togo.

³ The Main Messages from the following countries were translated to English using Google Translate: Argentina, Belarus, Benin, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Luxembourg, Monaco, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

documents was not identified. For HLPF 2016, countries were asked to submit the executive summaries to their VNR reports in advance, and these were later compiled into [a single document](#). The [“Proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum”](#) describes the summary as follows:

“A one-to-two page synthesis of the process and findings of the review highlighting two or three good practices the country wishes to share, two or three lessons it has learned in trying to accelerate implementation, two or three challenges on which it wishes to hear about other countries’ good practices and two or three areas where it would need support in terms of finance, capacity-building, technology, partnerships etc.”

According to the [report of Expert Group Meeting on Voluntary National Reviews](#) for the HLPF held in New York in December 2016, some Member States reported that they found it challenging to meet the advance deadline for the executive summary, because their full VNR reports were still in the process of being drafted at that time. For 2017, the summaries have been characterized as “main messages,” with a deadline for submission of 19 May. The purpose and benefit of submitting Main Messages in advance of the VNR reports is to communicate [“headline findings”](#) from the VNR to other Member States and stakeholders, “well in advance of the HLPF.”

Due to the wide-ranging interpretations of what an executive summary or Main Messages synthesis should contain, the length, format and substance of the submissions vary significantly. Some cover just one to two pages (for example, **Bangladesh, Brazil, Monaco**) while others are as long as 11 pages (for example, **Indonesia, Jordan**). Some begin with a good deal of background looking back at the country’s progress during the MDG era, while others devote space to describe the country’s role in the post-2015 process and a provide general introduction to the 2030 Agenda. The divergent approaches make it difficult to compare across submissions, particularly without the benefit of the full VNR reports for reference. In future, it would improve accessibility if countries used a common format for their Main Messages as well as their VNR reports.

This analysis attempts to provide a **preliminary overview** of the submissions based on what has been provided by June 20 2017, taking note of key topics that are important to Together 2030 and civil society more broadly, and highlighting areas of potential concern. **The annex to this paper includes a table that provides a quick snapshot of the findings by country.** The full VNR reports are sure to provide more information and greater clarity as to countries’ activities thus far, and may substantially fill in the gaps identified in the Main Messages.

Findings

VNR Consultation Process and Stakeholder Engagement

Paragraph 79 of the [2030 Agenda](#) calls on Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, drawing on contributions from civil society, marginalized groups and others. Furthermore, the voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNRs suggest that countries provide information about the methodology and process for preparation of the review, including how different levels and sectors of government contributed to the review and how stakeholders from civil society, academia and the private sector were involved. In its [written inputs](#)⁴ to the 2017 HLPF, Together 2030 calls for VNR presentations to clearly outline how inclusive the process was at country level leading up to the VNR.

Countries Reporting on the Process of Preparing the VNR Report

Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Thailand, Zimbabwe.

Of the 38 Main Messages reviewed, 18 address the process for preparation of the VNR in some way. Some countries (**Belgium, Botswana, Czech Republic, Honduras, Iran, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Zimbabwe**) mention briefly that stakeholders had been consulted in the VNR process, most referring specifically to civil society engagement as well as consultation with parliamentarians, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Other countries are more vague, referring simply to consultation with “relevant stakeholders.”

A small group of countries (**Benin, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Tajikistan, Thailand**) go into greater detail, describing the phases of the VNR process, the specific stakeholders involved and the mechanisms of engagement. **Indonesia** describes a set of principles for ensuring an inclusive VNR process, including making schedules available to stakeholders, a public campaign, online and offline channels, publication of documents to ensure transparency, and use of accessible language to reduce the information gap.

Thailand reports that it undertook “several rounds of consultations to gather relevant information,” and highlights the benefits of the consultation process, including greater awareness and ownership among stakeholders, and a greater appreciation for local wisdom and community strength among members of the task force that drafted the report. **Thailand** also recognizes the inputs and contributions of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country,

⁴ “Balancing the pillars: Eradicating poverty, protecting the planet and promoting shared prosperity.” Together 2030 Written Inputs to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017. April 2017. <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FINAL-With-protocol-and-orgs-Together-2030-Written-inputs-to-HLPF-2017.pdf>

reporting that some CSOs have also produced their own VNR reports to supplement that of the government.

A few countries reported inclusion of particular groups, such as women and youth associations, farmers and pastoralists (**Ethiopia**); or youth and persons with disabilities (**Kenya**). **Jordan** reports that it undertook a particularly inclusive process, with extensive consultations engaging “organizations focused on human rights, women's rights, and community development; organizations working with youth and volunteers; the private sector; workers' unions; local councils and committees; academia; and science and technology communities.” **Jordan** also reports that “special attention was dedicated to ensuring the inclusion of women, youth, children, and people with disabilities,” as well as refugees. Notably, five countries (**Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Netherlands, Slovenia**) mention including youth in the VNR process, while only one (**Jordan**) reports to have included children.

Based on the [survey undertaken by Together 2030 in early 2017](#)⁵ to collect evidence on stakeholder awareness of, and participation in, national planning and review for the 2030 Agenda, awareness and engagement of the VNR process among civil society at the national level was low. So, it will be important to compare countries’ full reports with the perceptions and experiences of the stakeholders in each country.

Institutional Arrangements, Governance and Accountability

[Together 2030 calls for strengthening of the accountability framework for VNRs](#): “The governance arrangements for national SDG accountability should be detailed by countries volunteering for national reviews and a clear accountability cycle should be presented, including how the outcomes of the HLPF discussions will be brought back to the national level.”

Countries Reporting on Institutional Arrangements

Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Netherlands, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Zimbabwe

With the exception of a few countries (**Monaco, Qatar, Uruguay**), nearly all describe the institutional arrangements that have been established for oversight, implementation,

⁵ “Are National Voluntary Reviews Promoting Awareness and Inclusion?” Perception survey on civil society and stakeholder engagement in voluntary national reviews and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. May 2017. Survey conducted by Together 2030 in partnership with Newcastle University. <http://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FINAL-Report-Together-2030-Percepitions-Survey-2017.docx.pdf>

coordination and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, and many point to engagement and commitment from the highest levels of government. All but two countries (**Monaco, Uruguay**) also report progress on identifying priority goals, targets and indicators, aligning and integrating the SDGs with national development plans, and adapting global indicators to the national context, though much of this work is ongoing and at different stages in the process.

In contrast, relatively few countries share substantial plans for follow-up and review, aside from naming the responsible office. A handful of countries (**Czech Republic, Denmark, Jordan, Kenya, Netherlands, Thailand**) report plans to develop and disseminate national reports of progress on a regular basis, in addition to participating in VNRs at the global level.

Political will, policy implementation and coherence are cited as obstacles for some countries (**Afghanistan, Belize, Benin, El Salvador, Honduras, Tajikistan, Zimbabwe**), for various reasons relevant to the national context. **Belize**, for instance, reports that the agenda has not been fully embraced at all levels and sectors, posing a challenge for effective implementation.

Finally, a number of countries (**Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Jordan, Honduras, Iran, Maldives, Peru, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan**) appear to be still in the planning stages for implementation. **Belgium**, for instance, describes the VNR process as primarily a “stocktaking exercise,” providing a starting point and impetus for further action.

Participation of Civil Society in Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Participation by stakeholders is both a means and an end in the context of the 2030 Agenda. As a means, participation allows the expertise and contributions of all groups to accelerate and enhance the quality of SDG delivery, leading to better policies with greater support and ownership. Participation and inclusion are also included in the goals and targets themselves, and space for accountability and monitoring of commitments is fundamental to effective follow-up and review. Accordingly, [Together 2030 calls on governments](#) to “report on how they are creating clear, open, coherent, transparent and regular spaces for the participation of stakeholders in the planning, implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.”

Countries Reporting on Civil Society Participation in Implementation

Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Monaco, Netherlands, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Zimbabwe.

With just two exceptions (**India, Uruguay**), all countries report having or planning to have some form of civil society participation in the process of SDG implementation. **Bangladesh** explains that the government is still “working out how to enhance multi-stakeholder participation,” and **Iran** reports that it has plans to create a coordination mechanism that will include civil society.

Other countries describe a wide range of platforms and mechanisms for civil society participation, from including stakeholders on government-led national SDG coordination bodies and/or technical committees (**Belize, Benin, Botswana, Chile, Czech Republic, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Thailand, Zimbabwe**), to conducting consultations, dialogues, awareness-raising and capacity-building sessions with civil society (**Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Chile, El Salvador, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Panama, Portugal, Sweden, Thailand**).

Several countries (**Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Thailand**) highlight CSO-led initiatives and contributions, and **Denmark** provides a separate annex detailing the commitments of civil society, business, municipalities, youth and academic institutions. **Czech Republic** reports having developed a “voluntary commitments framework, which will allow civil society, private sector and other actors and individuals to participate in the implementation and encourage partnerships between various sectors of the society.”

Finally, a few countries (**Bangladesh, El Salvador, Honduras**) note that setting up adequate mechanisms for inclusive stakeholder engagement and collaboration has been a challenge, while others (**Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Brazil, Denmark, El Salvador, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Netherlands, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Zimbabwe**) cite the need to increase public awareness and enhance participation as important next steps.


Implementation with a Balance of the Three Dimensions

The theme for HLPF 2017 is "eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world." As noted in [Together 2030's HLPF inputs](#), poverty will only be eradicated if prosperity is equitably shared, social protection is a reality and the planet is protected. The three pillars of sustainable development (social, environmental and economic) are at the core of the 2030 Agenda; accordingly, VNR countries should report on policies and programmes that address and integrate all 17 goals with a balanced view of the three pillars.

While most countries share information on the institutional arrangements for 2030 Agenda implementation as well as civil society engagement, the submissions were weaker overall when it came to reporting on implementation itself. In cases where countries do include some

information about policies and programmes contributing to the SDGs, it appears that many of the activities and achievements were in place before the agenda was adopted, rather than being implemented as part of the SDG response. This is not to diminish the value and importance of these ongoing efforts, but to emphasize that the 2030 Agenda should be a transformative framework to accelerate progress toward sustainable development. Business as usual is not enough to match the ambition of the agenda; however, the Main Messages from some countries still point in this direction.

About a third of the Main Messages provide a balanced view of implementation related to all three pillars of sustainable development: **Belize, Botswana, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Portugal, Qatar, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uruguay and Zimbabwe**. Countries took one of three different approaches to their submissions, with some countries choosing to address the seven goals (1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 plus 17) for in-depth review at HLPF 2017; some countries focusing on the goals and targets that they have identified as national priorities; and slightly fewer choosing to address all 17 goals. A number of countries consider the goals in groups, such as the “5 P’s”⁶ (for example, **Denmark, Portugal**), or their own groupings (for example, **Czech Republic**), and recognize the interlinkages among the goals. A few countries (for example, **Chile, Czech Republic, Japan, Netherlands**) reference the “fourth pillar” under Goal 16, highlighting the importance of effective governance and transparent, accountable and inclusive institutions.



About a third of the Main Messages provide a balanced view of implementation related to all three pillars of sustainable development.

It is important to emphasize that the SDGs are indivisible and interlinked, and that VNRs are expected to present reports on the implementation of all the goals rather than a few, or just the subset under in-depth review in a certain year at the HLPF.

Policies and Programmes for Specific Groups and Populations

The 2030 Agenda specifies that the SDGs must be met for all segments of society, with the aim of reaching the furthest behind first. To achieve the commitment of leaving no one behind, it is critical that the most marginalized, vulnerable and disadvantaged are identified, and that strategies are developed and implemented to provide them with targeted support. This is

⁶ As stated in the Preamble of the [2030 Agenda](#), the “5 P’s” are people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnership.

particularly difficult because it requires taking action on persistent and deeply rooted inequalities and systemic barriers to progress.

Nearly a third of VNR countries (**Belarus, Botswana, Chile, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Zimbabwe**) describe actions targeting particular groups or populations of concern. Others emphasize the need to support vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, without being explicit about who they mean. It was more common to mention groups such as youth, students, women's groups, trade unions, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), as having been engaged in the consultation process.

Nearly a third of VNR countries describe actions targeting particular groups or populations of concern. Others emphasize the need to support vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, without being explicit about who they mean.

Belarus includes gender equality and active youth policy among its priorities. **Botswana** describes its flagship programme under Goal 1 as targeting “those with monthly income of less than P300 (US\$30) per month, destitute persons, people living with disabilities, orphans and vulnerable individuals,” as well as other initiatives to support women, including single mothers, children, small-scale farmers and people living with HIV. **Chile** acknowledges the need for comprehensive protection measures for “women, children, indigenous peoples, immigrants, older persons, people with disabilities and people on the street.” **Ethiopia** reports actions undertaken to support women, youth and girls, and historically marginalized groups, as well as pro-poor policies. **India** describes a number of existing programmes under each of the HLPF goals for in-depth review that support women, including widows; children, including initiatives for the girl child; workers in the informal sector; and people with disabilities. **Indonesia** mentions the need for protections for informal workers, wage laborers and small-scale fisherman, and emphasizes the problem of child marriage as a barrier to achieving the SDGs. **Zimbabwe** also highlights the problem of child marriage, pointing to a recent ruling that outlaws the practice.

As Goal 5 is one of the SDGs to be reviewed in depth this year at the HLPF, a number of countries (**Belize, Botswana, Chile, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Netherlands, Portugal, Qatar, Sweden, Thailand, Zimbabwe**) discuss their ongoing activities or plans for improving gender equality and empowering women. Similarly, a few countries mention mothers and children within the context of targets and indicators for Goal 2 or Goal 3.

Implementation Gaps and Challenges Identified by Countries

The [voluntary common reporting guidelines](#) suggest that countries share the main challenges and difficulties they face in implementing the 2030 Agenda, including in mobilizing the means of implementation. Among the benefits of reporting on obstacles to implementation are to facilitate learning between countries, to identify areas where additional support or guidance may be required, and to highlight opportunities for partnerships. A majority of VNR countries reported at least briefly on challenges, with most detail coming from lower- and middle-income countries.

Countries Reporting on Challenges in Implementation

Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Netherlands, Peru, Tajikistan, Zimbabwe.

The most commonly reported challenges are as follows:

<i>Challenges</i>	<i>VNR Countries</i>
Localization of targets and indicators; data collection, disaggregation, analysis and dissemination	Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Czech Republic, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Malaysia, Maldives, Netherlands, Zimbabwe
Funding for implementation, mobilization of financial resources	Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, El Salvador, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Tajikistan, Zimbabwe
Political will, lack of effective policy coordination and coherence	Afghanistan, Belize, Benin, El Salvador, Honduras, Zimbabwe
Stakeholder participation and engagement	Bangladesh, El Salvador, Honduras

Recommendations and Conclusion

In sum, the set of submissions available for this review provide many reasons to be hopeful as well as some cause for concern. On the positive side:

- Based on the Main Messages reviewed, it appears that many developing and developed countries alike, and representing all regions, are **taking the 2030 Agenda seriously, with high levels of commitment** among political leadership.
- **Significant progress is being made in setting up institutional arrangements and creating an enabling environment for implementation.**
- Some countries seem to be **getting the message that diverse stakeholders must be included** in consultations, implementation, and follow-up and review. The frequency of references to the inclusion of women and young people is heartening.
- Many countries have provided **ample material to inform substantive interchange and sharing** of experiences in the upcoming HLPF discussion.

However, the following conclusions are concerning:



Pace of implementation of the 2030 Agenda remains a concern.

- As we are into the second year of a 15-year agenda, **the pace of implementation remains a concern.** Too many countries, again developed and developing alike, seem to consider their first VNR report as a starting point for implementation. Instead, it is expected that at this point countries would be reporting based on two years of concerted activity. Implementation must proceed with a sense of urgency appropriate to the overwhelming scale of our common global challenges.
- The majority of the Main Messages **lack information on implementation, including efforts to leave no one behind.**
- While a number of countries mention plans for setting up monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and strategies for follow-up and review, **too few present a clear cycle of accountability and how they are engaging stakeholders in the process.**
- Some VNR countries are **neglecting to cover all 17 SDGs** in their national reports addressed to the HLPF. This diminishes the indivisibility and integrality of the goals and goes against the principles for comprehensive follow-up and review agreed in the 2030 Agenda.
- There is also a **gap with regard to plans to bring information back to the national level** and debrief the process and outcomes of the VNRs with stakeholders – a critical element of follow-up and review. Based on the current set of Main Messages, countries have a long way to go in this regard.

The following are recommendations for improving the VNR process and implementation more generally:

- Establish **common guidelines for format and content of Main Messages** as well as VNR reports. Five to six pages is an accessible length for Main Messages that also allows sufficient space to cover key issues.
- Countries should **be more explicit in reporting on the VNR process**, including efforts to engage stakeholders. [Together 2030 calls on governments](#) “to strengthen efforts to publicize their plans and processes for national review, and opportunities for participation, sharing common challenges and identifying best practices in stakeholder engagement.”
- Countries need to **step up the pace**. They should not wait for their first VNR report before getting started on implementation.
- Countries should **report on progress toward all 17 SDGs**, recognizing the indivisibility of the agenda and interlinkages among the goals.
- Main Messages should **include more substance on implementation**, including specific activities, progress and challenges.
- Civil society must keep demanding meaningful participation. It’s positive that many countries mentioned youth and women, but **more stakeholder groups need to be included** and more detail provided regarding efforts to ensure the process is inclusive and engagement is meaningful. Furthermore, it will be important to compare country VNR reports with the perceptions and experiences of civil society stakeholders in country (see [Together 2030 Perception Survey](#), May 2017).
- To **ensure no one is left behind**, the most marginalized and disadvantaged must be identified early on, and reports should explicitly explain what countries are doing to provide them with targeted support.
- The **cycle of accountability must be made clear to stakeholders** and described clearly in reports, including who is consulted and engaged in the review process and how. As [Together 2030 has called for in its HLPF 2017 inputs](#): “An accountability cycle should be continually in place until 2030, providing regular and predictable spaces for interaction, review and participation for civil society and stakeholders, be the result of inclusive national discussions and part of a multi-layered review system.”



VNR countries should report on progress achieved on all SDGs and not only on those under review by the HLPF on that respective year.

Overall, the quality of reporting needs to improve markedly in subsequent years if the HLPF is to become a meaningful space for constructive and robust review, and ultimately if the SDGs are to be achieved by 2030. The hope is that by pointing out the wide variability among the Main Messages and emphasizing high expectations for reporting, Together 2030 has provided a useful

contribution to inform discussions at the 2017 HLPF and a helpful reference to support civil society in calling for accelerated activity and better reporting in future years.

Annex

[Country Assessment: Main Messages – VNR reports \(2017\)](#)

About This Document

This paper was commissioned by Together 2030. It was prepared by Mari Ullmann, working in the capacity of an independent consultant. Naiara Costa, International Secretariat for Together 2030, and Arelys Bellorini, United Nations Representative for World Vision International reviewed the paper and provided inputs. Support for this work was provided by World Vision International.

About Together 2030

Together 2030 (www.together2030.org) is a civil society initiative that promotes national implementation and track progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Initiative, set up in December 2015, aims at generating knowledge and project voices from different civil society and stakeholders around the world on the challenges and opportunities for the 2030 Agenda.

Together 2030 brings together actors to discuss the way to formulate and implement roadmaps at national level and hold governments to account at all levels.

As of July 2017, 515 organizations have joined Together 2030 from around 90 countries. More than 70% of those are based in developing countries and around 30% in developed countries.



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