Human Rights and Voluntary National Reviews

Operational
Common Approach
Guidance Note

The mission of the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** (OHCHR) is to work for the protection of all human rights for all people; to help empower people to realize their rights; and to assist those responsible for upholding such rights in ensuring that they are implemented.

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The **Human Rights Mainstreaming Multi-Donor Trust Fund** (the HRM Fund) supports the UN Development System (UNDS) efforts to respond to the call by Member States for UNDS entities to assist countries in their efforts to respect, and fulfil their human rights obligations and commitments, including as a critical tool to operationalize the 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind (LNOB). Leveraging the opportunities presented by the UNDS repositioning, the Fund enables the empowered, independent UN Resident Coordinators and new generation UN Country Teams to advance the values of the UN Charter and ensure that human rights are at the heart of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through coherence, system-wide policies and coordinated inter-agency action at all levels.

Executive Summary

This guidance aims to support Member States in integrating human rights into the development of **Voluntary National Reviews** (VNRs) on the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** presented at the **High-Level Political Forum**.

Throughout the VNR process – preparation, presentation and follow-up – human rights can strengthen VNRs. This guidance provides an overview of the human rights system and the complementarity and entry points that exist in VNR processes. It explains what existing reports and complementary reporting requirements and data are likely to exist, and how to coordinate between government bodies working on human rights and those working on development. This guidance elaborates on the importance of human rights-based approaches to leaving no one behind, collection and analysis of data, meaningful participation of stakeholders and how to engage human rights actors in VNR preparation and follow-up.

Suggestions on how and where attention to human rights can strengthen VNR processes and the different elements to consider are included. These suggestions are drawn from a review of VNRs submitted by Member States to date and illustrative examples of these points are included, although this is not intended to be exhaustive. This guidance suggests practical ways to integrate human rights into VNR processes step-by-step and culminates in an eight-step checklist for practitioners with related resources and tools.

This guidance is intended as a complementary resource to the regularly updated United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) **Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews** and the UN Secretary-General's **Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines** for Member States that are reporting on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through VNR processes. This guidance has been developed under the **UN Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights** to support placing human rights at the centre of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is grounded in the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the human rights treaties, as well as the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome.[1]

The 2030 Agenda clearly states that human rights are at its centre.

> "We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met."[2]
>
> – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

A closer examination of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda, along with the targets that give them concrete reality, shows that most of the goals and targets in the SDGs correlate with human rights obligations.

For example,

Goal 3
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

⟶ corresponds to the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

Goal 4
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

⟶ corresponds to the human right to education.

Goal 5
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

⟶ is the subject of an entire human rights convention.

Goal 16
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

⟶ encompasses a number of different (mainly civil and political) rights and fundamental freedoms related to accountability, participation and the rule of law, as well as highlighting the importance of human rights institutions.

Human rights, including labour rights, are important even for those goals where the connection may not be so apparent. For example, **Goal 14** discusses life under the sea, which may seem remote from human rights. Yet, looking at the targets listed under that goal will show that the rights and welfare of fishing communities are central to achieving sustainable development in this area. This example illustrates how the connection to human rights can be most tangible at the target level, as well as the indicators that measure them.

Both the sustainable development agenda and the human rights obligations of Member States come with related reporting processes. By systematically connecting these processes, and those who engage in them, governments can be more efficient and analytical in their reporting, including by utilizing the information collected for one to support the other. In turn, this ensures a more coherent and coordinated system of follow-up and implementation in-country.

As the **Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights** and **Our Common Agenda** remind us, human rights are a problem-solving measure that can accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda, including by making sure no one is being left behind. Human rights reporting processes formulate thematic and country-specific recommendations and provide concrete proposals for policy, legislation and implementation. Human rights reporting, with its emphasis on process (as well as structure and outcomes) may also be of assistance in giving VNRs a more analytical character.

The central pledge of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first. This message runs through all the goals and targets - even those that may not seem to have a direct connection to human rights. It is a message that corresponds exactly to the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination and meaningful participation.

Leaving no one behind means that work on all goals and targets should prioritize those who may be most marginalized or at risk in any given context. While comprising more than half the world's population, women and girls are very often the most at risk of being left behind, which is why gender equality has its own goal and runs through the whole agenda. Gender equality, besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieve peaceful societies and sustainable development.

Many other sections of society face particular barriers due to vulnerability, marginalization or exclusion. These groups may include children, persons with disabilities, national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, migrants and migrant workers, refugees, people deprived of liberty, LGBTIQ+ people, and women and girls in each of these groups, among others. **Human rights standards** include protections for these groups and provide methods for evaluating vulnerability and promoting inclusion and empowerment. In practical terms, the tools and tactics that have been developed to protect and promote human rights are essential to realizing the commitment to leave no one behind.

Meaningful participation in setting priorities and implementing sustainable development leads to better outcomes which are informed and formulated by those who are directly affected and with the best local knowledge.

This guidance seeks to support Member States in maximizing these synergies between human rights and SDG reporting processes to increase not only efficiencies but also effectiveness of interrelated efforts. The following sections of this guidance articulate the various entry points for integrating a human rights perspective into VNR processes and highlight why this is important, showcase examples of how this has been done at the country level, and provide a checklist for practitioners with related resources and tools.

92%

of SDG goals and targets correspond to international human rights or labour rights.[3]

Orange the World Campaign in Tanzania.
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VNRs and the human rights system – benefits of complementarity

→ This section explores some of the practical advantages of integrating human rights into the VNR, looking first at complementary reporting obligations between human rights and the 2030 Agenda, then at leaving no one behind, collecting and analysing data, meaningful participation in the VNR, and engaging human rights actors in the process.

About VNRs

VNRs are a Member State led process to systematically review national progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Member States have the opportunity to share their experiences with each other by presenting the VNR to the international community at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and publishing their report online in the HLPF VNR database.

VNRs are not an end in themselves, but rather an assessment and stocktaking exercise to assist in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. VNRs aim to assess the status of implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, achieving just and equitable sustainable development for all will be impossible without also fulfilling human rights.

Improving efficiencies and effectiveness of VNRs through human rights

Integrating human rights considerations in the VNR preparation enhances the VNR's analytical scope, leads to defining the best solutions and helps to prioritize efforts. This does not necessarily entail significant additional work as much of the relevant analysis and information already exists – the key is to find effective ways of channelling this information into VNR processes and using the VNR to, in turn, inform human rights work and reporting.

Sustainable development goals and targets and international human rights and labour standards are deeply entwined. VNRs are not human rights reports but integrating aspects of human rights reporting and engaging human rights actors in the VNR process will not only help improve the content and impact of the reports but will also help align and guide national policymaking for the benefit of the people – with the dual aim of improving implementation of the 2030 Agenda and fulfilling human rights for all.

The international human rights system

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lays the groundwork for the human rights architecture that has developed in the following decades.

Three major international mechanisms make up the United Nations human rights system:

→ The **human rights treaty bodies**, which are independent expert mechanisms whose mandates stem from the international human rights treaties;

→ The **universal periodic review**, a State-led peer review of the countries' human rights record; and

→ The **special procedures**, which are independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council to address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world

States are required to report regularly both to the treaty bodies and to the **Human Rights Council** on their progress in meeting their human rights obligations or commitments. They are also asked to respond to communications from special procedures on individual cases and issues of broad concerns, to respond to the special procedures' calls for inputs, and to accept their requests for country visits, which will result in reports to the Human Rights Council or **General Assembly**.

For states preparing VNRs, identifying these overlaps can be a way of maximizing resources at the national level by sharing and utilizing complementary reporting between the VNR and periodic reports and engagement with human rights mechanisms, regional mechanisms and special procedures. This helps to minimize duplication of efforts and paint the most comprehensive picture of progress achieved.

Human rights are important not only because they are mirrored in the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Applying a human rights lens to the VNR also pays attention to the process whereby goals and targets are reached. Among other things, this means encouraging the meaningful participation of rights-holders or stakeholders who represent them, including those most at risk of being left behind and engaging human rights actors in the realization of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in the development of VNRs.

Guidance and considerations for linking human rights and VNRs

To support Member States in preparing a VNR, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) develops a regularly updated Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (hereafter referred to as the "VNR Handbook") outlining practical steps in the process, and the UN Secretary-General released the Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines.

Build on existing knowledge
The 2030 Agenda specifies that VNRs will "build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, [and] avoid duplication [...]".[4] The VNR Handbook specifies that development of VNRs involves "reports submitted to international bodies, including human rights mechanisms".[5] This refers to Member States reporting to and engaging with, for example, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), special procedures of the Human Rights Council, and UN human rights treaty bodies, as well as regional human rights bodies.

Information sharing for mutual benefit
For those drafting VNRs, access to human rights reports (and supporting data that may not be in the reports themselves) will be of great assistance. This can be a two-way process. Information and data gathered for the VNR may be important for human rights reporting and engagement, as well as the other way. But human rights reporting will likely have a longer history and more data on, for example, particularly marginalized groups.

Human rights reporting obligations may help with data needs across the 2030 Agenda. For example, gender equality is the subject of a stand-alone goal, while children are explicitly addressed in more than 30 SDG targets. Reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child or the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women may already contain information required for the VNR. Alternatively, information gathered in preparation for the VNR could be used in reporting under other human rights and International Labour Organization (ILO) procedures.

Some information gathered and compiled in the process of reporting to human rights mechanisms does not have a self-evident connection to the SDGs but can still help to inform VNRs. For example, people deprived of their liberty are often particularly vulnerable. Monitoring and reporting of these groups will be connected with bodies such as the Committee Against Torture or the Sub-Committee on Prevention of Torture (or corresponding regional bodies), as well as national-level mechanisms, and can offer an important data to include in VNRs.
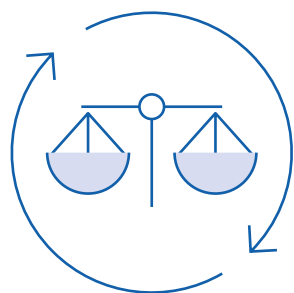
Sustainable development goals and targets and international human rights and labour standards are deeply entwined.

Leverage synergies

Promoting and leveraging synergies between VNR and human rights reporting processes can also contribute to joined-up policymaking, whereby initiatives that are reported in the VNR are the same as those reported to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, or the Committee on the Rights of the Child, or the Committee on Migrant Workers – or whichever other human rights body is relevant. This may be achieved by integrating relevant data and findings from human rights reporting into the VNR – or by using research for the VNR to support future human rights reporting. Either way, the advantage is that the reporting may only need to be done once, or if sequential, it will build on previous analysis, at the same time as ensuring consistency and coherence in policy and implementation. Synergies can also be leveraged among the VNR, treaty body reporting, and other reporting processes in intergovernmental forums, such as the national-level reviews on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that are submitted by countries to the Commission on the Status of Women every five years. This may also encourage productive collaboration between the government bodies responsible for VNRs and human rights, who might not otherwise be working together.

◉ COSTA RICA
The UPR and the Sustainable Development Goals[6]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Costa Rica has made a considerable effort to integrate the recommendations received and accepted from the UPR process into its goals and indicators for SDG implementation. After submitting its third national UPR report in 2019, Costa Rica received 212 recommendations, 194 of which it fully accepted. All 212 were matched against existing targets and indicators for the SDGs.

The UPR report itself is notable for the extent to which it refers to the SDGs. For example, the report discusses the National Policy for De Facto Equality Between Women and Men, which is described as the cornerstone of the country's strategy for implementing Goal 5. Its discussion of the right to education makes explicit reference to Goal 4. The UPR report discusses water and sanitation under the right to an adequate standard of living and again refers to achievements in wastewater management as a result of SDG implementation. The wastewater management programme is part of a national development plan that has integrated the SDGs and given priority to eradicating poverty.[7]

◉ SAMOA
Human rights and VNR reporting

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Samoa has systematically aligned and leveraged various reporting processes to enhance the quality of their national reports and use gathered data and analysis in several processes. For example, the Government of Samoa was able to utilize the organization of the extraordinary 84th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), held in March 2020 in Samoa, to gather relevant content on the situation of children in the country. A consultation with children was organized as part of the CRC session so that the experts could hear directly from the children, with the relevant information feeding into the Samoan second VNR report submitted in 2020, which in turn also informed the country's 2021 UPR report.

National mechanisms for human rights reporting and VNRs

The government body preparing the VNR may not be involved in human rights reporting and may even be unaware of these processes. Some countries have a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up (NMRF) which aims to coordinate the government's reporting to human rights mechanisms and its implementation of recommendations. Where NMRFs exist, these will be important actors in supporting the VNR. Otherwise, it will be important to identify which Ministry or other body is responsible for human rights reporting.

♀ DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
Linking human rights follow-up to SDGs[8]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In its 2019 Universal Periodic Review, the Dominican Republic received various recommendations related to strengthening its follow-up tool for human rights recommendations, aligned to the implementation of the SDGs. In its 2021 VNR report, the Dominican Republic describes how the country has committed to implementing the SDGs with a human rights perspective by establishing mechanisms to link the follow-up tool to the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. This creates greater synergies between the efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the efforts to implement recommendations of human rights mechanisms, recognizing that these are complementary and mutually reinforcing, helping to focus key interventions on the most vulnerable groups to help achieve sustainable development in the country.

♀ MAURITIUS
Aligning its VNR reporting with human rights monitoring[9]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

A good example of such a mechanism is the NMRF of Mauritius. The mechanism, which is directly referred to in the 2019 VNR report of Mauritius, fosters coordination and collaboration across ministries and departments and consults with the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and civil society with a view to reporting to UN and regional human rights mechanisms and following up on the recommendations received from these bodies. In 2022, the mechanism will work on reports under the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, both of which can serve as valuable sources of information for the next VNR report while they may also include information from the Mauritius VNR.

In its 2019 VNR report, Mauritius mentions the alignment of its implementation of the 2030 Agenda with specific human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), specifically in relation to Goal 4, quality education, and Goal 5, gender equality. For example, the report mentions the monitoring committee that was set up to track implementation of recommendations from the CEDAW committee in response to the country's eighth periodic report.

National mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up

An NMRF is a government body that is responsible for coordinating and preparing reports to international human rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies, the UPR and special procedures, as well as coordinating and tracking follow-up of decisions or recommendations of these bodies. Not all countries have such bodies, but they are increasingly seen as an efficient and effective means of ensuring that the government acts as a coherent and coordinated body in its relations with human rights mechanisms.

By extension, the NMRF, where it exists, can be an effective support to the VNR process. NMRFs should have knowledge of those at risk of being left behind. They should know where reports to human rights bodies overlap in content with goals and targets in the 2030 Agenda, as well as knowing where recommendations from human rights bodies overlap with issues to be addressed under the sustainable development agenda.

Leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first

➡️ **This section explains how utilizing human rights tools can be an effective way to aid understanding and reporting on the principle of leaving no one behind.**

Leaving no one behind is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda. The imperative that the most vulnerable or marginalized in society should be empowered and included as contributors to and beneficiaries of sustainable development is an inseparable part of the methodology for implementing the SDGs. An integral part of leaving no one behind is making a priority of those who are furthest behind.

The human rights principle of equality and non-discrimination is key to understanding vulnerability or marginalization and those most at risk of being left behind. Some groups at risk of being left behind, such as women, children, minorities and persons with disabilities, have explicit protections under human rights law, which are echoed in the SDGs and the broader 2030 Agenda.

Risk analysis and intersectionality

Identifying those at risk of being left behind and understanding why this is a dynamic process that entails research into different issues in different contexts and will need to be constantly updated. The COVID-19 pandemic has created some new issues of marginalization and vulnerability. Similarly, populations may be affected by other events, such as the outbreak of armed conflict, which will need to be taken into account in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Hence, identifying those most at risk requires a concrete and on-going analysis of who is at risk in any given context, what are the root causes, and how different factors of vulnerability intersect to create additional barriers to progress and development.

Analysing this 'intersectionality' is a key step in the process of identifying those who are furthest behind and at risk of being left behind. This is also a matter of data – which is discussed in more detail later in this guidance. It will only be possible to locate these groups with precision if data are collected in a sufficiently granular, disaggregated form, and then analysed in a way that identifies intersectional oppression.

Leaving no one behind is relevant for consideration and action for all the SDGs, not only in relation to those goals where equality is explicitly addressed, but also those (such as those related to climate and environment) where the connection is implicit.

Past VNRs have tended to focus on the adoption of targeted social protection measures to reach certain population groups. Much less attention has been placed on addressing the root causes of inequality such as by the repealing or adopting of laws and policies to address discrimination, stigma and negative stereotypes against marginalized groups.[10] The recommendations and outcomes of international human rights mechanisms can provide valuable information to assess root causes of inequalities in the context of VNRs. This guidance discusses the importance of *participation*, including in data gathering. But it is also important to consider those who may have no direct means of participation, such as people who are trafficked, subject to forced labour, or deprived of their liberty. In addition, efforts should be made to overcome the digital divide when technology is being utilized in VNR processes to ensure populations are not further excluded from the process.

What is intersectionality and why does it matter?

The term 'intersectionality' originated in a case of employment discrimination. A company successfully defended itself against a claim of discrimination lodged by Black women who were not hired by the company. The court found that the company did not discriminate on grounds of race, because it employed Black men, nor did it discriminate on grounds of sex, because it employed white women. The case showed how the intersection of race and sex discrimination had a very specific impact on Black women.

The effects of intersectional vulnerability can be seen in many examples. Women, men, girls and boys are likely to experience disability differently. Refugee children will have different experiences from refugee adults, and so on. The point is not to compete to see who is most oppressed, but to understand that human experiences will be different and appropriate responses should be developed with the participation of those affected so that policies are appropriate to the particular context.[11]

Gender equality considerations and opportunities

Gender equality is at the heart of human rights and United Nations values. The VNRs provide Member States with the opportunity to assess progress and gaps in the implementation of the SDGs from a gender perspective. The VNR Handbook encourages countries to integrate a gender perspective across all sections of the report, including the review of every goal, not just of SDG 5.

It is crucial that VNRs reflect how a gender perspective is mainstreamed in the planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national sustainable development strategies and COVID-19 recovery plans. This includes assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes and budgets. Good practices and experiences with strengthening gender equality strategies in recent years, or since the last VNR, in order to address persistent and emerging challenges may be highlighted, as well as the development and use of gender statistics. The reviews also allow governments to highlight how they have been institutionalizing processes to ensure gender-responsive planning and budgeting across line ministries, and how they involve national gender equality mechanisms, which contribute to strengthening coherence and coordination for gender-responsive implementation.

The disproportionate impacts on women and girls from the pandemic – as well as other crises, including from climate change, humanitarian emergencies, and financial shocks – need to be analysed and addressed to accelerate the achievement of gender equality. This will be facilitated if national gender equality mechanisms, women's and girls' organizations, feminist groups, and women's human rights and environmental defenders are included in the preparatory process of the VNRs, as well as ensuring gender balance and civil society actors in the national delegation and VNR presentation at the HLPF.

⚲ MONGOLIA
Identifying those most at risk of being left behind[12]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Local researchers in Mongolia developed a methodology to identify categories of people likely to be at risk of being left behind under each SDG, using previous research reports supplemented by other available information. Researchers then convened focus groups among these six population groups identified as most at risk to verify these findings and include their views in the VNR report.

The groups identified as "most vulnerable groups at risk of not fully benefitting from development" were herders, internal migrants living in larger areas of the city, persons with disabilities, older persons, children, and youth (15-24 years of age). The risks of being left behind were then further categorized in relation to a series of issues, including household income and access to health care and education, but also political participation and access to information about government decision-making. This process indicated which of these groups are being left further behind.

⚙ Resources

Where to find information on human rights and 2030 Agenda:
→ The **Universal Human Rights Index** allows you to search over 170,000 observations and recommendations made by international human rights bodies and linked to the relevant SDG
→ **About the 2030 Agenda and human rights**
→ **Summary Table** on links between SDGs and Human Rights standards
→ **Human Rights Guide to the SDGs including database of linkages**
→ **Database of each country's interactions with the UN human rights system**

→ **Treaty bodies** monitoring compliance with the UN human rights treaties
→ **Reports of the ILO Committee of Experts on countries' compliance with the international labour standards**
→ List of **Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council** dealing with specific issues and countries
→ **UPR reports** and related information for each country
→ **Database** of SDG indicators from a gender perspective
→ National reports on implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to the **Commission on the Status of Women**

Human Rights-Based Approach to Data

➡️ **This section explains the distinctive human rights approach to the collection and analysis of data.**

One of the ways in which human rights can add value to a VNR, and to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda more broadly, is by revealing new sources of data and new ways of interpreting this data.

Human rights relate not only to outcomes, but also to the process by which rights are implemented and the structural factors that may impede or promote the realization of rights.[13] The same considerations apply to the SDGs and their constitutive targets.

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data[14] is encouraged as it promotes the use of new sources of data that may not already have been gathered and analysed by national statistical offices, as well as indicating creative new ways of analysing the data that are collected and stressing the relevance of data disaggregation which is crucial to understanding who is being left behind.

One of the most effective ways of injecting a human rights-based approach into the collection and management of data has been through partnerships between national human rights institutions and national statistical offices.

📍 **KENYA**
Partnership between NHRI and national statistical office[15]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In 2017 the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). Subsequently, the partners, also drawing on the work of international human rights mechanisms, worked together to identify 28 different social groups that were at risk of being left behind and assess how to improve data collection for these groups.

One of the outcomes of this partnership was the inclusion of additional questions on specific population groups in the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census. This meant that for the first time, among others, persons with albinism, intersex people, and persons belonging to specific indigenous communities were counted and part of the national census exercise, thus gathering important data that helped to improve policymaking and implementation.

📍 **SCOTLAND**
Aligning SDG monitoring frameworks and human rights[16]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In 2015, the Scottish Human Rights Commission was developing its monitoring framework for the Scottish National Action Plan on human rights (SNAP). In recognition that the SDG Agenda was firmly rooted in the international human rights framework, the decision was taken to ensure that the SDG agenda was at the heart of SNAP's long-term goals. Importantly, this meant that a deliberate effort was made to ensure that the monitoring frameworks for the SDGs and the human rights targets were fully aligned.

The Commission undertook a data gap analysis to determine where the Scottish government's national indicators matched the SDGs and where gaps existed that would have to be addressed in a revised national performance framework (NPF). According to the Commission, only 30 percent of SDG indicators were well reflected in the NPF.

The Commission sought to improve this by helping to develop indicators that measured not only outcomes, but also structure and process, along the lines of the UN human rights indicator guidance.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DATA IS BASED ON SIX PRINCIPLES

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

This entails the involvement of all groups in decision-making about which data need to be collected and how they are classified. Participation should lead to more relevant and accurate data, often beyond what national statistics offices habitually collect, as well as opening up access to data sources that might not otherwise be available.

DISAGGREGATION

The analysis of disaggregated data is essential to operationalizing the principle of leaving no one behind. 'Disaggregation' is a slightly misleading term because the crucial point is how data are collected – they can only be disaggregated to the level at which they were gathered. The data must be sufficiently granular to allow analysis of the experience of specific population groups. These groups may not correspond exactly to categories customarily used by national statistical offices or other government agencies in their data collection. Data collected in this way can be analysed to give a better understanding of intersectionality, or the overlap of different forms of barriers facing different groups.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION

This principle also ties in to leaving no one behind and the notion that vulnerability is not a fixed category, but contextual.[17] It is also premised on participation since the notion of self-identification rests on individuals and groups being able to determine how they are classified. Importantly, reporting on characteristics of identity should not reflect or perpetuate stereotypes or bias.

TRANSPARENCY

The collection and analysis of data should be done according to publicly known and transparent principles and practices. The VNR itself is a good opportunity to expose these processes.

PRIVACY

More detailed collection of data, reflecting a number of issues that are not normally addressed in data collection, must not be at the expense of the privacy of the data subjects. People should be free not to provide data on characteristics that might be important sources of vulnerability – and hence also fear and lack of trust on the part of the subjects. They should also have confidence that the information they do provide is secure and protected by strict and rigidly enforced data protection regulations.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability here works in two directions. First, it is about the accountability of official bodies for the practice and consequences of their own data collection – for example in ensuring the security and privacy of data, but also in the ethical and transparent collection of data. Secondly, data can be used to ensure accountability. The VNR itself is a 'soft' accountability mechanism in which the government reports on its progress towards realizing the 2030 Agenda.

Meaningful participation

→ **This section discusses the commonalities between the human rights principle of meaningful participation and the multistakeholder collaboration that is central to the VNR process.**

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the importance of *multi-stakeholder engagement*. This corresponds to the human rights principle of the meaningful participation of all those affected by the relevant issue. The rationale for this is that the social and developmental transformation envisaged in the 2030 Agenda – and made concrete in the goals and targets – is most effectively achieved through the active involvement of social groups themselves.

Meaningful participation allows the contribution of views and information from different sections of society, including grassroots and community organizations, private sector, civil society and academia, particularly those directly affected by any given goal or target. This involves more than just consultation, although that will often be the starting point. Participation signifies active involvement in formulating strategies to achieve goals and targets, in formulating additional indicators to measure progress to targets, and in identifying data sources that will help to make such measurement possible. Stakeholders can also help accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Their active participation should be encouraged as implementing partners and not only when developing policies. Participation also entails the involvement of all those affected in monitoring progress towards goals and targets and holding those responsible accountable for such progress – or lack of it.

Exactly who participates will clearly depend to some extent on the topic. A good practice would be for instance for women and girls and persons with disabilities to be consulted in a crosscutting manner – that is for all goals.

Also, systematic involvement of those directly affected by particular goals will lead to new perspectives and potentially new data and new solutions. For example, coastal and fishing communities are likely to be a valuable source of information as well as change-makers on Goal 14. Consulting Workers' Organizations and Employers and Business Membership Organizations, on **Goal 8** will be likely to uncover new perspectives and promote the involvement of these groups in implementation of initiatives linked to decent work.

While children have an obvious and direct interest in Goal 4, quality education, it is preferable to understand them as a group with a crosscutting interest in all the goals in the 2030 Agenda – indeed, arguably more interest than anyone, since they are the future generation.[18]

⊙ CHILE
Consultations with children[19]   COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Chile's National Children's Council embarked on a nationwide consultation with children about the SDGs, in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and Social Development and with the support of UN agencies. The Chilean government reported that the initiative would allow hundreds of thousands of children and young people to learn about the SDGs, discuss their priorities, and propose actions to achieve these.

⊙ GUINEA-BISSAU
Local consultations in Guinea-Bissau[20]   COUNTRY EXAMPLE

As part of their 2022 VNR process, Guinea-Bissau organized regional consultations in all nine regions of the country under the Leave No One Behind theme. The consultations, supported by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office and OHCHR, brought together 302 participants from different sectors of society (marginalized groups, private sector, community organizations, religious leaders, media representatives) as well as the national and local government to discuss key challenges to development, identify which groups are furthest behind, and propose solutions. For each regional consultation, a report was produced, which served as a data source for the elaboration of the VNR report. In addition, a summary presenting the outcomes of the consultations is a standalone annex to the VNR.

The **VNR Handbook** suggests formulating a stakeholder engagement plan at the outset of VNR preparation, which would be an important moment in identifying potential groups for consultation. Initial stakeholder engagement plans could be reviewed and expanded for subsequent VNRs.[21] It is also a good moment to start considering *how* consultation will take place. It will be important to agree on ways to address potential communication gaps – for example by translating consultation materials into minority languages, budgeting for accessibility and interpretation for in-person meetings and providing vouchers for data or airtime if consultation takes place online or via mobile phones.

It makes best sense to secure maximum participation by decentralizing discussion. This could mean holding discussions in local centres, not just in the capital city, giving an opportunity for those who live in other areas and who also may be less able to contribute remotely or to travel to the capital to participate. Additionally, some countries may decide to promote **Voluntary Local Reviews** (VLRs), which are distinct from the VNRs. Regional organizations may also opt to prepare a review of the 2030 Agenda implementation at the regional level. For example, the **European Union** signed up to present a VNR in 2023.

Recent studies indicate that the emphasis on participation and multi-stakeholder dialogue in VNR processes has created important, and sometimes unprecedented, national political traction for civil society engagement. The wide scope of the 2030 Agenda has also created space for broad-based participation and dialogue among a multiplicity of stakeholders. Human rights advocates can capitalize on the SDGs political traction and broader audience to position human rights and the specific guidance of human rights review mechanisms in sustainable development processes.[22]

⚲ JAMAICA
Community consultation to identify most vulnerable by specific goal[23]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

In its 2018 VNR report, Jamaica highlighted how it had used national community discussions to identify the most vulnerable groups. The report maps these vulnerable groups against the different SDGs. Many of the vulnerable groups identified by the communities are facing intersectional barriers that put them particularly at risk. For example, under Goal 4 (quality education), the groups identified are:

→ Children in poverty
→ Children in rural communities
→ Children in need of care and protection
→ Children with disabilities
→ Persons with a low level of education.

Jamaica had previously developed a system of locally generated indicators to measure relations between youth in the community and the police. This was done by group discussions that identified what were considered good police-community relations, then defined these characteristics more closely, developing agreed measurements that were then applied to their own community.

⚲ GHANA
Consultative meetings on SDG implementation[24]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

As part of their 2019 VNR process, Ghana organized consultative meetings in three centres, Cape Coast, Tamale and Kumasi, on three distinct issues related to the 2030 Agenda: youth engagement on the SDGs, leaving no one behind, and synergies across the SDGs. Each meeting included more than 100 participants from civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, traditional authorities, persons with disabilities, political parties, youth groups, and marginalized groups, as well as government. Stakeholders were invited to make submissions before the meetings, which were then collated for discussion.

"At the meetings, participants identified critical barriers, opportunities, emerging issues under each thematic area, and recommended actions to respond to the identified issues. The outputs from the thematic consultations are reflected in the VNR report. Full reports on the thematic reviews will be published separately to inform strategic interventions for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs at all levels."[25]

Engaging human rights actors

➡️ **This section looks at ways of involving people and groups who are active on human rights issues in the VNR process.**

One of the biggest obstacles to integrating human rights into the VNR is that these two different spheres of activity are usually undertaken by different people. Most human rights organizations are not engaged in development issues and development practitioners do not describe their activities in terms of human rights.

Preparing the VNR is a good opportunity to address this issue, building long-term partnerships through short-term collaboration. The best sources for identifying those at risk of being left behind, or in finding new and disaggregated sources of data, will often be human rights practitioners, whether governmental bodies – national human rights institutions, equality bodies or similar national mechanisms – or civil society human rights groups.

Participation of civil society will most often be structured through organizations – trade unions, religious organizations, professional bodies and so on. But maximum outreach can be achieved by also involving community, grassroots and social organizations that may engage citizens who are not socially or politically active and often not systematically consulted.

One way of formalizing the involvement of civil society groups is through a process of 'open drafting' of VNR reports. This approach allows non-governmental participants to review and contribute to the VNR report, either by commenting on what the government has produced or by making their own written contributions.

📍 **INDONESIA**
Role of NHRI[26]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

The Indonesia National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) was invited by the Ministry of National Development Planning to a meeting on SDG 16 in connection with the 2019 VNR. The Commission was asked to provide quantitative data on individual complaints submitted to the institution. Later, at the validation stage, the SDG Secretariat invited the Commission to confirm whether the data provided was correctly represented in the VNR report. As a data provider, the Commission can provide contextualized and substantive information on progress towards SDG 16 but also other SDGs in areas such as education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), land (multiple SDGs, including SDG 1 and 5), labour (SDG 8) and freedom of religion (SDG 16 and related to the leaving no one behind).

📍 **FINLAND**
'Open drafting' of the VNR report[27]

COUNTRY EXAMPLE

Some countries have opened up the process of drafting the VNR report to involve other stakeholders such as civil society groups and the business sector. One of these is Finland. In its 2020 report, civil society actors were invited to present their assessment of progress on each goal, alongside the official assessment of the government. In addition, several different non-governmental stakeholders contributed case studies illustrating the country's progress on various issues, to supplement the main text of the VNR. These included contributions by the media industry on promoting literacy, the marine industry on its contribution to realizing Goal 14, the forestry industry on its work with sustainability, and the regional government of Lapland on sustainable development in that part of the country.

Finland also engaged in a 'peer dialogue' with two other governments – Mozambique and Switzerland – which reviewed the draft and made suggestions for its revision.

⚲ HUNGARY
The Ombudsman for Future Generations[28]

As part of its regular and ongoing work aimed at inquiring into systemic environmental issues, the Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations (HOFG), a Deputy Commissioner at the Office of the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights in Hungary, prepared in late 2017 a detailed General Opinion on specific SDGs in line with its mandate and expertise, namely Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15. The HOFG summarized the most relevant recommendations to serve as a guideline for the Government in designing ambitious targets for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As the General Opinion outline suggested national indicators for these goals, the HOFG also engaged with the National Statistical Office to introduce its work.

The HOFG's office worked to include the Opinion linked to five SDGs in the VNR report, as these goals were also the specific focal points of the 2018 HLPF. It is featured in the VNR report in a section on "Partnership and Stakeholder Engagement in Hungary".

A majority of states have national human rights institutions (NHRIs) – that is, independent state bodies responsible for monitoring adherence to the human rights protected in national and international law.[29] Some are human rights commissions, some are human rights ombuds bodies, and some are hybrid or unique institutions. NHRIs may seek accreditation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).[30] Full compliance with the Paris Principles,[31] the global standards for NHRI independence and effectiveness, is itself an indicator of sustainable development under Goal 16.

Alongside NHRIs there are often specialized independent national mechanisms that deal with particular aspects of human rights (such as equality bodies, children's ombuds bodies, and inspection or monitoring bodies). Such mechanisms will often not be eligible for accreditation with GANHRI, since their specific mandates do not meet the Paris Principles requirement of "a broad human rights mandate"[32], they may still play an important role in relation to aspects of the 2030 Agenda. The latest edition of the VNR Handbook explicitly underlines the potential role of NHRIs and other existing national institutions in VNRs.[33]

Between them, these bodies have a wealth of knowledge about specific populations, which will be important for identifying groups at risk and in assembling relevant data. In addition, the work of NHRIs is usually to monitor the full range of human rights, including economic and social rights. They have developed knowledge and expertise in these areas and have generated their own data, whether from the complaints that they have received or from their own investigations.

NHRIs and the 2030 Agenda

The unique role of NHRIs, in line with their Paris Principles compliant mandates and functions, include:

⟶ Advising the State and its bodies on HRBA to SDG implementation.

⟶ Identifying those left behind, and promoting meaningful participation of rights holders in the SDG process at all levels.

⟶ Advising the State on human rights-based implementation.

⟶ Monitoring implementation, and reporting at national level, and to international bodies.

⟶ Supporting accountability for poor or uneven progress and advising on course correction.

See the Mérida Declaration, 2015.

Many non-governmental human rights actors also have expertise, contacts and data. Unlike NHRIs, non-governmental groups have no obligation to monitor the broad range of human rights, so they may choose to be more specialized in their work. This may be a strength, with groups focusing on women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and so on, acquiring deep knowledge, important data and plentiful contacts. Non-governmental groups have often acquired extensive knowledge and may be the most trusted partners for vulnerable communities.

Establishing partnerships will help to set the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as a priority for human rights bodies.

⚲ NORWAY
Consultation with the indigenous parliament[34]

Representatives of indigenous peoples were able to provide input to the country's first VNR through previously established mechanisms. The Norwegian government and the Sámediggi (the Sami Parliament) dialogue can be highlighted as a key example. Its starting point was the 2005 agreement on procedures for consultation signed by the government and the Sámediggi, strengthening the Sami people's voice in public decisions that could affect them directly. Consequently, the government has established that the Sámediggi must be consulted on any measures to reach the SDGs that may affect them.

⚲ GERMANY
Trade unions in dialogue with government[35]

Trade unions in Germany have access to the data collected by the Federal Statistics Office to monitor implementation of the SDGs. (In its 2017 Sustainable Development Strategy, the German government committed to the implementation of all 17 goals and set out concrete implementation measures, including indicators.)

Trade unions take part in regular forums for discussing the implementation of the sustainability strategy with the government. This provides trade unions with an opportunity to negotiate a greater focus on their own priorities. Trade unions are also part of the official delegation to the High-Level Political Forum.

Children holding SDG icons in Bhutan.
© UNDP Bhutan/ Dechen Wangmo

Eight steps towards developing a VNR that integrates human rights

Preparation of the Voluntary National Review offers an opportunity to show how the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda is based on international human rights obligations. This can benefit both the realization of the SDGs and targets and the protection and promotion of human rights.

The authoritative guidance on this is the **VNR Handbook**, which describes the process of preparing VNRs through four items:

① Preparation and organization
② Stakeholder engagement
③ VNR preparation
④ HLPF presentation

This section breaks down these items further to identify the various entry points for human rights in each part of the process and provides a checklist to guide Member States through eight steps:

① Preparation and planning
② Stakeholder analysis and engagement
③ Data collection
④ Data analysis
⑤ Drafting the report
⑥ Multistakeholder validation
⑦ Presentation at the HLPF
⑧ Follow up after the HLPF

Related tools and resources for practitioners engaged in each step are also indicated.

(Note: Please reference the colour coding to see how the four items from **VNR Handbook** relate to the eight steps in this guidance for integrating human rights into VNRs).

VNR HANDBOOK ITEMS

PREPARATION AND ORGANIZATION | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT | VNR PREPARATION | HLPF PRESENTATION

① Preparation and planning
② Stakeholder analysis and engagement
③ Data collection
④ Data analysis
⑤ Drafting the report
⑥ Multistakeholder validation
⑦ Presentation to the HLPF
⑧ Follow-up after the HLPF

STEPS TO INTEGRATE HUMAN RIGHTS INTO VNRS
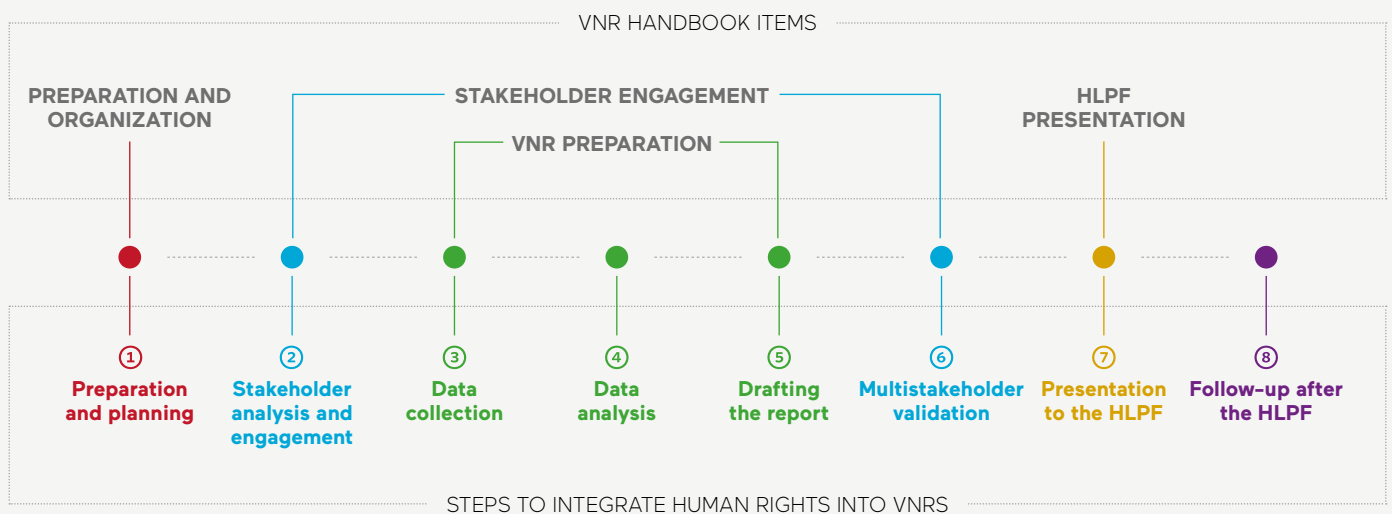
① Preparation and planning

The **VNR Handbook** recommends developing a VNR plan or roadmap at an early stage in the process of developing the review.[36] It will be helpful at the outset to integrate human rights considerations, including a gender perspective, as part of the plan to develop the VNR. This will be the best way of ensuring the full benefits of a human rights–based approach, rather than adding references to human rights at a later stage. It will also be helpful to involve human rights actors, such as the national human rights institution and civil society, at an early stage to identify areas of common interest.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help to ensure the inclusion of relevant human rights considerations in the VNR process and report.

☐ Identify key issues and priorities for discussion to inform the development of the VNR.

☐ Budget sufficient time and resources to complete the VNR. Successful VNRs generally take about a year and have the budget to conduct effective consultation.

☐ When developing the VNR roadmap, consider methods and timelines to engage key institutional partners working on human rights, such as the NHRI, equality bodies and similar.

☐ Make contact with the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-Up, or with the government body responsible for engagement with international and regional human rights bodies and inform them about the process and key entry points for engagement.

☐ Identify synergies with existing human rights frameworks, such as national human rights action plans, sectoral plans on human rights-related issues, anti-discrimination legislation and equality initiatives.

☐ Locate the most recent human rights reports and inputs submitted by the state to international and regional human rights mechanisms, as well as the reports and recommendations issued by these mechanisms. This should include using the **UPR third cycle** tools and consider what data, guidance and analysis could be integrated in the VNR. **Click here** for all international reports and recommendations pertaining to each state. Often regional human rights mechanisms will be equally important, so it will be important to also identify recommendations or judgments from these.

☐ Identify **overlaps** between issues contained in human rights reports, recommendations from human rights bodies, and the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

☐ Where there is supporting data not fully included in human rights reports (including qualitative data) identify the sources and obtain copies.

☐ Identify any key data gaps and prepare a plan of how to address them. Some of these gaps could be addressed using data and analysis generated by the human rights mechanisms.

☐ Engage with the UN country team (UNCT) and seek support from OHCHR through their country or regional presences, as relevant.

☐ Consider whether to align the VNR with the Universal Periodic Review process, to maximize efficiency in both.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN DESA, **Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF)**, 2022.

UN DESA, **Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews**, 2022.

UN DESA, **Tools Supporting Voluntary National Review Processes**, (webpage).

UN Committee for Development Policy, **The 2020 VNRs: points for reflection in preparation for the 2021 reviews**, 2021.

UN OHCHR, **Universal Human Rights Index**, (webpage).

UN OHCHR, UNDP, UNDOC, **Repository of UN good practices on how the UPR supports sustainable development**, 2022.

Danish Institute for Human Rights, **The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals**, (webpage).

Christophe Golay, **#ESCR and #SDGS: Practical manual on the role of United Nations human rights mechanisms in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals that seek to realize economy, social and cultural rights**, Geneva Academy, 2020.

② Stakeholder analysis and engagement

Multi-stakeholder engagement is central to the realization of the 2030 Agenda. Human rights will be most effectively integrated into the VNR by identifying and working with the relevant stakeholders from the earliest possible point in the process.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help you to support stakeholder analysis and engagement.

☐ Identify the main actors working on issues linked to human rights under the full range of topics to be covered in the VNR. At the national level, this is likely to include the full spectrum of human rights organizations, including women's organizations and trade unions. It will also include human rights focal points and departments within government bodies. Locally, some research will be needed to make sure that all relevant stakeholders have been identified and contacted, including those outside the capital, placing a special emphasis on organizations representing groups that might otherwise be left without a voice (those furthest behind and their representative organizations).

☐ Discover who the potential rights-holders are in relation to the issues being reported in the VNR, in order to determine who may be at risk of being left behind. Be creative and lateral in your thinking. Many different groups are affected and you will need to consider issues of intersectionality. To identify groups for each state, you can use the **Universal Human Rights Index** and search by state, affected group and SDG target to identify all recommendations made by human rights mechanisms that touch on this issue. You can then contact representatives from these groups to engage them to participate in the reporting process.

☐ Ensure that stakeholders represent the full range of the most marginalized groups, including a fair representation of gender, age, national or ethnic origin, disability, etc.

☐ Develop a strategy for ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into all participative activities and try to ensure gender balance among those consulted. Consult with national gender equality mechanisms, women's and girls' organizations and women human rights and environmental defenders.

☐ Make contact with the NHRI (and local or regional counterparts) and other similar bodies.

☐ Identify non-governmental and community-based organizations working on human rights issues, whether these are broad or specific to their communities or constituencies.

☐ Make contact with labour, professional and academic bodies with an interest in human rights and development. These are likely to include trade unions, law societies or bar associations, and universities (particularly human rights centres and law clinics).

☐ Ensure that consultation takes place at a local level. Establish a budget for consultation, including travel, communication costs and translation where necessary.

☐ Develop a plan for engagement with these stakeholders, based on the most effective means of communication, during the VNR process and beyond. These will most likely vary depending on the group, from online methods, group meetings, public information campaigns and other methods.

☐ Ensure that participation extends to developing and implementing strategies – not just expressing an opinion.

☐ Contact the UNCT with a view to solicit their support in engaging with multi-stakeholder networks.

③ Data collection

It will be necessary to draw upon the widest range of sources of data for the VNR, including the national statistics office and other datasets, such as those in UNSTATS. International human rights mechanisms may also provide guidance for data collection and analysis and in many cases State Reports submitted to human rights mechanisms will already include some relevant data. If the national statistical authority already has a partnership with the NHRI, human rights considerations relating to data collection should already have been taken into account.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help to ensure the inclusion of relevant human rights considerations in the collection of data.

☐ Identify possible new data sources (in addition to national statistical offices and administrative data) specified by multiple stakeholders; encourage collaboration between the national statistical office and NHRIs, including commissions and ombuds bodies. Also consider the possible contribution of academic institutions, think tanks and civil society human rights bodies, especially where NHRIs do not exist. Put in place a plan for the collection of relevant data, focusing on the identified priorities.

☐ Check prior reporting to and engagement with human rights bodies at both the international and regional level to identify data, quantitative and qualitative, that may be useful to incorporate into the VNR (and vice versa).

☐ Do not feel confined to the existing SDG indicators, which are mainly measures of outcomes in relation to the goals and targets. Also feel free to develop or borrow from human rights indicators that also measure structural obstacles and the process towards realizing targets.

☐ Ensure that data is collected at the most granulated or disaggregated level in order to reflect all necessary characteristics of the population, noting where such data do not already exist and will need to be collected.

☐ Ensure that the categorization of participants is based on their own self-identification, not upon externally imposed categories or stereotypes.

☐ Ensure transparency in the methods used to collect data.

☐ Respect the privacy of all data subjects.

☐ Consider reaching out to the UNCT to explore whether any relevant UN data sources or analysis can be made available for the purposes of informing the VNR.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN DESA Statistics Division, **Data disaggregation for the SDG Indicators**, (webpage).

UN DESA Statistics Division, **Compilation of tools and resources for data disaggregation**, 2019.

UN OHCHR, **Human Rights Indicators**, (webpage).

Asian Development Bank, **Practical Guidebook on Data Disaggregation for the Sustainable Development Goals**, 2021.

Danish Institute for Human Rights, **Indicators and data for human rights and sustainable development**, n/d.

④ Data analysis

Data will be analysed with respect to the same principles of transparency and privacy that are observed in data collection. Human rights practice brings a few specific approaches to data analysis that can be of benefit if employed in analysis of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help you ensure the inclusion of relevant human rights considerations in data analysis.

☐ Analyse data down to the lowest disaggregated characteristics of population groups.

☐ Perform an intersectional analysis of vulnerabilities, using this disaggregated data.

☐ Analyse measures associated with structural constraints and issues of process, as well as outcomes. This involves determining why steps to secure the rights of the most disadvantaged groups have not succeeded and how far these groups have been involved in devising solutions.

☐ Supplement quantitative data with qualitative information from human rights actors that may help to explain the processes at work.

☐ Analyse and report on progress towards implementing human rights recommendations relevant to each SDG and leaving no one behind.

☐ Consider reaching out to the UNCT or specific UN entities in the country to explore how they may be able to contribute to the VNR analysis, under specific SDGs and under the LNOB pledge.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN OHCHR, **Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation**, 2012.

UN OHCHR, **A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data: Leaving no one behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, 2018.

UNICEF, **Using data to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children**, (webpage).

Danish Institute for Human Rights, **Human Rights and Data**, 2017.

⑤ Drafting the report

Maximizing stakeholder participation in drafting the report will ensure that the insights from the earlier parts of the process are reflected in the final written product. It may not be possible to 'write by committee,' but inviting stakeholders to contribute directly will be effective. This can be done through their contributing content on particular issues through-out the report, using the 'open drafting' methodology mentioned in this guidance. It is important to ensure that the report faithfully reflects the earlier steps in the VNR process.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions which can help you organize drafting in a manner that applies human rights-based approach principles, such as participation, transparency and accountability.

☐ Determine whether 'open drafting' would be possible and desirable for part of the report or the entire VNR.

☐ If undertaking 'open drafting', identify key contributors and consider whether any of them can speak authoritatively on the linkages between sustainable development and human rights.

☐ Whether using 'open drafting' or not, make an effort to se-cure human rights expertise in the drafting team (including expertise on gender mainstreaming).

☐ If you are not utilizing the 'open drafting' approach, try to ensure that key human rights considerations identified by reviewing the relevant work of human rights mechanisms or raised by national stakeholders (NHRIs, human rights orga-nizations, organizations representing marginalized groups, etc.) are reflected in the VNR, including in commitments made on the way forward.

☐ If you have gathered informative content on human rights considerations that is too expansive to be included in the VNR report, consider annexing it to the VNR (for instance some VNRs include annexes with further information on leave no one behind (LNOB) consultations, reflecting link-ages between human rights mechanisms and SDGs or SDG targets etc.).

☐ Include statistical annexes to the VNR report as a means of increasing accountability, allowing readers to make their own assessment of the data.

DRAFTING THE REPORT: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN DESA, **Repository of Good Practices in Voluntary National Review (VNR) Reporting** , n/d.

UN Development Group, **Guidelines to support country reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals**, n/d.

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, **The Pledge to "Leave No One Behind": The Internation-al Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, E/C.12/2019.1, 2019.

Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, **Global Alliance: Guide to Report on SDG16 in Voluntary National Reviews**, New York, 2020.

Global Alliance and TAP Network, **Mainstreaming SDG 16: Using the Voluntary National Review to Advance More Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies**, 2020.

UNDP and Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, **Leaving No One Behind: Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals**, 2021.

UN OHCHR, **Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council work on the 2030 Agenda**, (webpage) .

UN OHCHR, **Child Rights Input: United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Develop-ment**, 2021.

UNPRPD and UN Women, **Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind**, 2022.

UNSDG, **Operationalizing Leaving No one Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams**, 2022.

UN Women, **Guidance Note: Preparations for Gen-der-responsive Voluntary National Reviews for UN Women Country and Regional Offices**, 2020.

White and Case, **Review of the 2020 Voluntary National Reports with a focus on Sustainable Development Goal 16**, 2021.

White and Case, **Review of the 2021 Voluntary National Reviews and SDG 16**, 2022.

Alfonso Barragués Fernández, "**Accountability for sex-ual and reproductive health and rights in development practice: building synergies**", Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters Journal, vol. 28, No. 1 (2020).

⑥ Multistakeholder validation

Whatever process is adopted for drafting the report, it will be important to validate the report with the various stakeholders.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help with multistakeholder validation.

☐ Circulate a draft report for comment by stakeholders.

☐ Convene various consultative forums of different sorts (public meetings, online consultations etc.) to feed back the findings of the VNR and to collect public reactions. An important part of this is conveying to those who participated in the earlier consultative steps that their contributions were taken into account.

☐ Ensure that the stakeholders consulted include representatives of groups that are furthest behind, or at particular risk of being left behind, assuming that their contributions have already been sought at earlier stages and this step will be to confirm that they have been accurately reflected in the report.

☐ Encourage other group such as civil society organizations or human rights institutions, to produce their own shadow reports if they wish as this strengthens, not weakens, the impression of diversity in participation. The use of shadow reports has become a common part of human rights reporting, to the extent that expert bodies typically read shadow reports alongside official government reports.

☐ Consider using the convening power of the UN in the country to help ensure the validation process is robust and includes all relevant stakeholders.

⑦ Presentation at the HLPF

Presenting the VNR report at the High-Level Political Forum is primarily the responsibility of the Member State. However, the involvement of other actors in the presentation is a way of signaling the breadth of participation in the report and the range of issues considered.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help you continue to promote meaningful participation, including from human rights actors, in presenting the VNR.

☐ Identify stakeholders that have participated in the development of the VNR. This could include representatives from the national human rights institution, civil society, indigenous or minority groups, the private sector, and other social groups.

☐ Invite key representatives to be part of the official delegation, thereby forming a multi-stakeholder delegation to present the report at the HLPF.

☐ Distribute the VNR presentation, alongside the VNR report, as widely as possible and consider making it available in languages spoken in the country other than the official language.

PRESENTATION AT THE HLPF: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN DESA, **Expert Group Meeting: Enhancing Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) Engagement in National Level Reviews**, 2017.

UNDP-UN DESA, **What is a 'Good Practice'? A framework to analyse the Quality of Stakeholder Engagement in implementation and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda**, 2020.

⑧ Follow-up after the HLPF

The importance of the VNR ultimately lies in its future contribution to realizing the 2030 Agenda. Hence it is important that presentation at the HLPF is not seen as an end point. If the process of producing the VNR has followed at least some of the guidance in this note, then new partnerships will have been formed and new issues identified. The importance of the VNR is not just as a written report, but as an opportunity to develop new priorities and identify new solutions for future implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The integration of human rights into the process is not just for the VNR report, but for the whole implementation strategy until 2030.

Below you will find a list of suggested actions that can help you ensure effective follow-up to the VNR and the continued inclusion of human rights in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

☐ Identify upcoming reports or inputs to or engagement with human rights mechanisms and consider how the VNR, its data and analysis can feed into the relevant State reports, linking the various reporting processes, and easing reporting burdens at the national level.

☐ Commit to engaging human rights actors in follow-up to the VNR and in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national, regional and local levels, particularly when it comes to groups that have been identified as left behind or furthest behind.

☐ Consider whether institutional arrangements bringing together sustainable development and human rights actors need to be created or strengthened going forward (e.g. collaboration between NMRF and SDG implementation body, between the NHRI and NSO, between the SDG implementation body and human rights actors, between national CSO development and human rights platforms etc.).

☐ Consider whether any identified promising practices have significant (positive) human rights implications and engage diverse actors in a conversation about how these practices could be scaled up or applied to other sectors.

☐ Consider when the country might present the next VNR report (some countries for instance choose to submit the report regularly every few years, so they have a set reporting calendar and can start the preparations well in advance), also taking into account human rights reporting obligations at the regional and global level to identify the strategic timeline that allows for maximizing the reporting synergies.

☐ Engage the UNCT in a conversation on follow up to the VNR report, particularly on the commitments made in the report as well as key gaps and challenges identified (including data gaps) to explore how the UN could help address these. The UNCT should also be in a position to help link key points from the VNR with relevant human rights norms and standards as well as relevant recommendations from human rights mechanisms, which can help accelerate implementation.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER THE HLPF: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

UN DESA, **SDG Good Practices: a compilation of success stories and lessons learned in SDG implementation**, 2020.

Endnotes

1   United Nations General Assembly, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1), article 10. Available at **https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda**.

2   Ibid., article 8.

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