



# Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

## A practical guidance tool for 2<sup>nd</sup> VNRs

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*This tool was put together by UN ESCAP in response to requests from countries in the Asia and Pacific region for guidance on producing 2<sup>nd</sup> VNRs. Countries that already produced a 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR were contacted for their reflections and feedback. This include Bangladesh, India, Georgia, Nepal, the Philippines and Samoa. It also involved feedback from Timor-Leste who completed their 1<sup>st</sup> VNR in 2019.*

# 1. How to use this tool for 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> VNRs

## 1.1 Purpose of the tool

The purpose of this tool is to provide practical advice and concrete tips to countries on how to develop a 2<sup>nd</sup> (or 3<sup>rd</sup>) generation Voluntary National Review (VNR). The objective of this tool is to help countries to connect their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR to ensure that there is continuity between the reports and that their 2<sup>nd</sup> takes stock of progress made since the previous review.

### Revisiting a Voluntary National Review

The VNR is a process by which countries take stock and assess progress and shortcomings - in implementation of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## 1.2 How this tool aligns with the global handbook and common reporting guidelines

This tool aims to complement the forthcoming 2021 VNR handbook and the common reporting guidelines developed by UN DESA. It includes practical checklists, diagrams and best practices to help countries reflect on the process that led to the preparation of their first VNR and identify key areas for improvement. Many countries encounter similar challenges when developing their VNR. This tool provides practical suggestions to help countries overcome some of these challenges, building on the experience countries have acquired.

## 1.3 Audience for this tool

The primary audience for this tool is governments that are about to start the planning process for their 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR. The tool can also be used by civil society actors and other non-government actors to help them understand the expectations for 2<sup>nd</sup> VNRs and how they can engage with the VNR process.

# 2. Purpose of a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation VNR

It is important to understand what a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation VNR aims to achieve and how it is different from a 1<sup>st</sup> VNR. Outlined below are three useful checklists to utilise when planning the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR.

## Checklist 1: How is a 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR different to a 1<sup>st</sup> VNR?

How is a 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR different to a 1 <sup>st</sup> VNR?	
✓	A 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR should use the 1 <sup>st</sup> VNR as a starting point and directly links the two reports
✓	The 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR reports on implementation and progress on the SDGs since the first report and can consider the first VNR as a baseline
✓	The 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR should provide in-depth analysis of the causes of implementation challenges and identify steps to address findings from the previous report.
✓	The 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR should, ideally, involve more stakeholders in its preparatory process through consultations and continuous feedback

## Checklist 2: What does a 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR aim to achieve?

What does a 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR aim to achieve?	
✓	To build, and respond to, the next steps and challenges, outlined in the 1 <sup>st</sup> VNR.
✓	To identify the most significant changes since the first VNR and analyse the causes of key implementation challenges faced.
✓	To identify what has worked well and what hasn't since the 1 <sup>st</sup> VNR.
✓	To track progress, setbacks and successes since the 1 <sup>st</sup> VNR

**Checklist 3: What should a 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR try to avoid?**

What should a 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR try to avoid?	
✓	It should not be a stand-alone report – it should be connected to, and build on, the analysis of the first VNR.
✓	It should not repeat what has already been presented in the previous VNR.
✓	It should try to avoid summarising strategies in place and describing challenges. It should focus on examining the causes and providing specific next steps for implementation.

**Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Generation VNRs.**

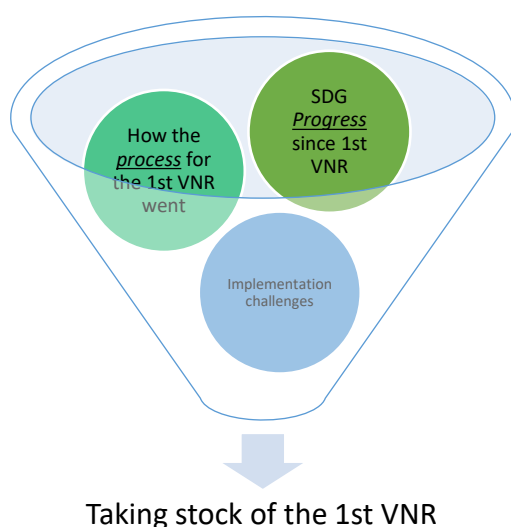
A VLR is a process through which sub-national governments undertake a voluntary review of their progress towards delivering the 2030 Agenda. Although VLRs are yet to become an official part of the review architecture of the 2030 Agenda, they hold the potential to complement VNRs. Many countries are keen to deepen engagement with sub-national governments in the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR process. VLRs can therefore complement 2<sup>nd</sup> VNRs. If the VLR process is well integrated with 2<sup>nd</sup> VNRs, it can provide a more nuanced assessment of SDG progress by acknowledging territorial imbalances between different regions and municipalities. One of the greatest challenges facing all levels of government in monitoring SDG progress is to find reliable data at an appropriate scale. VLRs can therefore also increase coordination between levels of government in gathering and sharing data.

### 3. Taking stock of the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR: Assessing progress and impact since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR

One of the first key steps in developing the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation VNR (identified above in section 2) is to take stock of the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR. This involves:

- ❖ reflecting on the *process* for developing the review
- ❖ reflecting on the *progress* on the SDGs since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR
- ❖ assessing SDG *implementation* and identifying the drivers of implementation challenges.

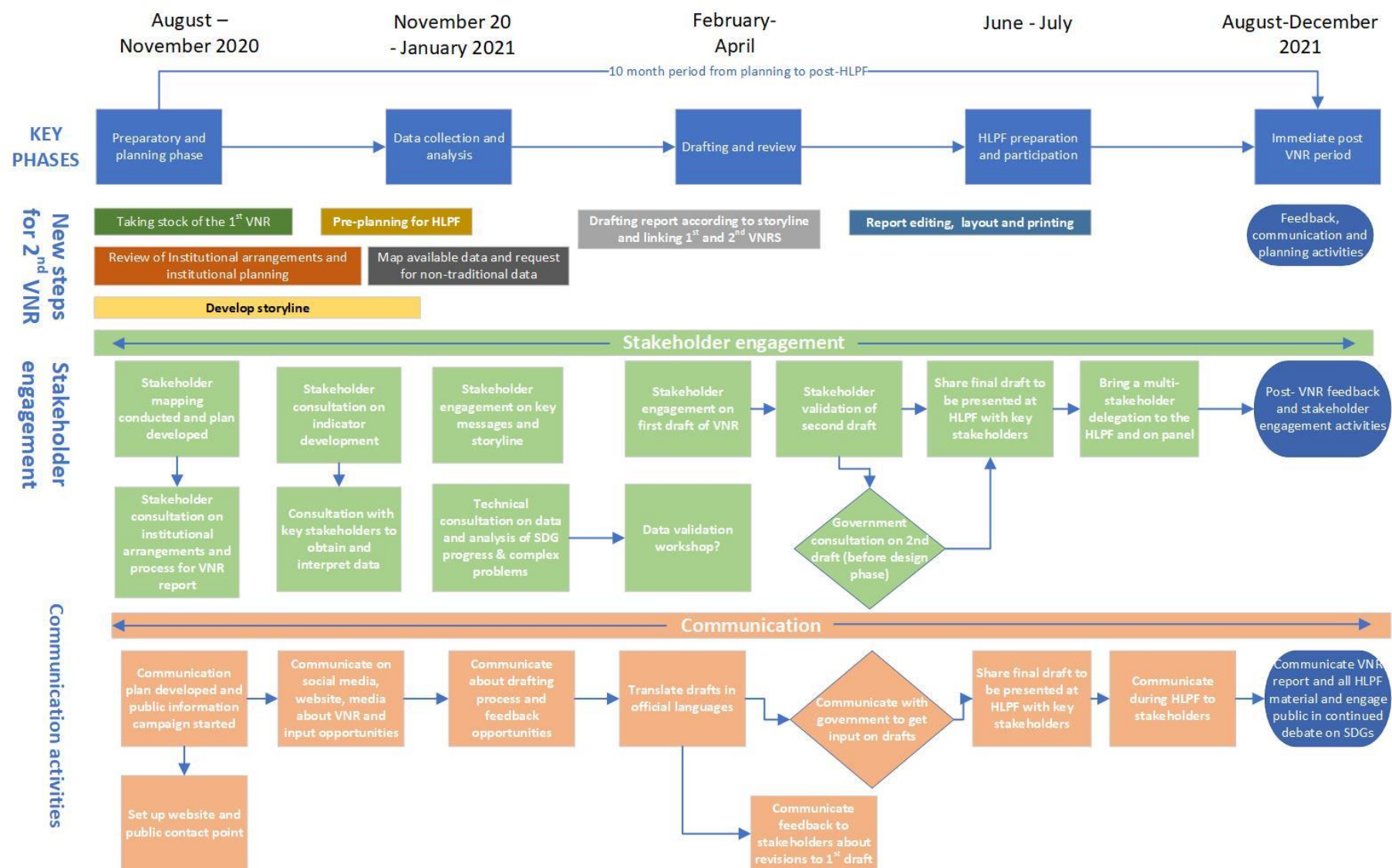
**Figure 1: Taking stock of the 1st VNR**



### 3.1 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR Process: What would you do differently this time around?

Developing, and following up, on a 1<sup>st</sup> VNR is a significant undertaking, requiring a lot of time and effort from a variety of stakeholders. As it was new, many countries did not know what to expect for their 1<sup>st</sup> VNR and were uncertain about how long it would take. There was also little data available on the SDGs and many countries had not yet produced integrated SDG indicators. The second time around, countries are familiar with the process, and can grasp the challenges in terms of time and coordination. However, as many countries identified key challenges when producing their 1<sup>st</sup> VNR, it is important to reflect on what worked well, and what you would do differently this time around. Checklist 4 provides space to reflect on the VNR *process* and what to do differently this time.

Figure 2: Suggested 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR Planning Tool to consider (based on feedback from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR countries)



**Checklist 4: 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR Process analytical tool**

	Worked well	Next time for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> VNR...
<b>Structure and organisation of VNR process</b>		
Decision-making processes and government approval/sign off and buy in for the recommendations and findings of the VNR		
Coordination process and VNR team		
Alignment with national political and policy review processes (including alignment of national SDG Framework and national M&E framework)		
<b>Planning and budgeting</b>		
Budgeting for VNR process & HLPF		
Time management, logistics and planning		
<b>Data collection, management and analysis</b>		
Data collection and management processes with National Statistics Office and Ministries		
Process of collecting non-traditional and administrative data		
Analysing the data, statistical annex and presenting statistics in the VNR		
<b>Stakeholder engagement and communication</b>		
Organising stakeholder engagement activities throughout VNR process		
Was there positive feedback that the process was collaborative and inclusive?		
Utilising and integrating feedback and from stakeholders on 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> drafts of the VNR		
Translation and communicating drafts of VNR in local languages		
Communicating with the public and stakeholders about VNR and consultation		
Use of website and/or data platforms/portals		
<b>Drafting and finalising report</b>		
Targeting specific SDGs or reporting on all		
Use of storyline/narrative in drafting report		
How well is the narrative of the report aligned to national policy strategies?		
Editing, design and layout of report		
<b>Preparing for, and presenting, at the HLPF and side events</b>		
Logistics for developing multi-stakeholder delegation		
Preparing audio-visual and presentations for HLPF speakers		
Attending side-events and organising bilateral interventions		
<b>Follow up to the VNR (post-VNR period)</b>		
Were specific VNR follow up activities planned and budgeted for?		
Was the VNR report and feedback from the HLPF widely shared with stakeholders?		



### 3.2 Assessing setbacks and progress since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR

Taking stock of progress made on the SDGs since the first VNR is one of the primary objectives of the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR. This involves providing a comprehensive analysis of progress made and the challenges to implementation.

#### Analysis of progress made since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR: comprehensive reporting against SDGs

Unlike the first VNR which, usually, provides a baseline for the country's progress on the SDGs, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation VNR aims to provide a more comprehensive assessment of progress and seeks to analyse the efforts undertaken to address findings of the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR. This involves both comprehensive analysis of progress made in achieving the SDGs for all and analysis of the drivers behind the change since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR (Box 1).

#### Comprehensive analysis of data

Outlined below are some useful things to include in the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR when conducting a comprehensive analysis of SDGs.

**Using disaggregated data in your graphs and analysis in your VNR.** Try to use disaggregated statistics from all official data sources: MICS, DHS, Labour force, Census Living standards, and administrative data etc. Non-traditional data sources, such as geospatial data, should also be considered and your National Statistics Offices is well placed to advise on data sources and disaggregation opportunities.

#### Analysis of the drivers of change since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR

It is important to consider the factors that have driven the change since the 1<sup>st</sup> VNR. It is important to analyse the following issues and include the analysis in the 2<sup>nd</sup> VNR.

- ❖ Try to report on **why progress may have been slow** or **why there have been setbacks** on certain issues and what future interventions will look like
- ❖ What were the **blockages** affecting implementation?
- ❖ Try to **attribute improvements** to policy responses/interventions or other factors or outline **why** successes came about

#### Use maps and graphs to show the results of the analysis in your VNR.

Integrate statistical and geospatial data to geolocate, disaggregate and improve the relevance and timeliness of the information in your VNR, especially for cities, municipalities, urban and rural areas, water bodies, coastal areas and the like.

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