

IPPN Knowledge Café Session 9

“UN Common Operational Approach to Human Rights and Voluntary National Reviews”

- Summary -

Title	UN Common Operational Approach to Human Rights and Voluntary National Reviews		
Date, Time	Wednesday, 14 September 2022, 8:00 AM New York 2:00 PM Geneva		
Platform	Virtual Zoom & SparkBlue IPPN Secretariat	Serge Kpto , SDG Integration Team, UNDP	
Moderator	George Abualzulof , Senior Human Rights Adviser, UN Development Coordination Office (DCO)		
Opening Remarks and Presentation	Maria-Soledad Pazo , Senior Human Rights Officer, Universal Periodic Review Branch, OHCHR Sarah Rattray , Global Policy Specialist for Human Rights, Rule of Law, Security and Human Rights for Sustaining Peace, Crisis Bureau, UNDP		
Speakers	Agostinho Moises , Head of the Department for External Policies, Monitoring and Evaluation, from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration, Guinea-Bissau Marialaura Fino , International Labour Standards Specialist, Decent Work Team and Office for the Andean Countries, International Labour Organization (ILO), Peru Inas Margieh , Programme Coordinator, UN Women, Palestine		
Rapporteur	Ezgi Ozturk , Governance CoP Facilitator, UNDP		
Contact	Chelsea Shelton , Human Rights Programme Specialist, UNDP		
Organizers	UNDP, OHCHR, ILO, DCO, UN WOMEN		
Registrants	143	Participants	51

I. Overview

This document summarises key highlights and takeaways from the IPPN Knowledge Café Session 9 on “UN Support to Rights-based Voluntary National Reviews” held virtually on 14 September 2022 from 8AM to 9AM EST.

II. Summary of the Discussion

How can the UN support Member States in integrating human rights into the development of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and what are the benefits of doing so? Co-organized by UNDP, OHCHR, ILO, DCO and UN Women, the 9th session of IPPN Knowledge Cafe aimed to increase understanding of how human rights can strengthen Voluntary National Review processes, promote greater awareness and familiarity with the new guidance: [Human Rights and Voluntary National Reviews Operational Common Approach Guidance Note](#), and identify

practical ways the UN can support Member States in integrating human rights into the development of Voluntary National Reviews. The session reviewed contents of the guidance and then through the first-hand account of national and UN partners, shared concrete examples from Guinea-Bissau, Ecuador, and State of Palestine how they developed rights-based VNRs.

The session kicked off with an interactive poll to take the pulse of the audience through the question **“What percentage of SDG Indicators and targets correspond to countries’ international human rights and labour rights obligations?”**

Audience response:

25% of participants are of the view that 55% of the SDG Indicators and targets correspond to international human rights and labour rights obligations.

57% of the participants are of the view that 92% of the SDG Indicators and targets correspond to international human rights and labour rights obligations.

14% of participants are of the view that 100% of the SDG Indicators and targets correspond to international human rights and labour rights obligations.

4% percent of the participants choose not to answer.

*** Correct answer: 92% of the SDG Indicators and targets correspond to international human rights and labour rights obligations.

In her opening remarks, **Sarah Rattray** (UNDP) outlined the purpose of the guidance as (i) to complement the regularly updated UN DESA Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs and the UN SG’s Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Member States, (ii) further articulate entry points for integrating human rights into VNR processes and (iii) to provide practical guidance for Member States to reap the benefits of the complementarity between VNRs and the work of the global and regional human rights system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda and advance human rights.

Maria Soledad Pazo (OHCHR) unpacked further the methodology to integrate human rights into VNRs through eight steps of the VNR process outlined in the guidance, including preparation and planning, (stakeholder analysis and engagement, data collection/analysis, drafting, and multi stakeholder validation, presentation to the HLPF and follow-up after the HLPF. Country examples featured in the guidance that were highlighted in her intervention included **Costa Rica** for illustrating integration of UPR recommendations into goals and targets for SDG implementation, **Dominican Republic** for linking human rights follow-up to the SDGs, and **Mongolia** for identifying those most at risk of being left behind and including their views in the VNR amongst others.

Following the overview of the guidance note, moderator **George Abualzulof** (DCO) welcomed the key speakers to share their experiences on integrating human rights into VNR processes.

Below are the key takeaways, insights and recommendations emerging from the experiences of Guinea-Bissau, Ecuador and State of Palestine:

Guinea-Bissau - Agostinho Moises, Head of the Department for External Policies, Monitoring and Evaluation, the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Integration:

- The country’s experience carrying out 9 regional consultations in **the context of the preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR)** was a significantly

participatory process that allowed to draw conclusions on the actual state of implementation of the SDGs.

- Their experience demonstrated that **VNR is not only a reporting mechanism but also an opportunity for transparent and participatory engagement of stakeholders** ranging from civil society, private sector, media, women groups, youth and other more vulnerable groups.
- Consultations created a safe space to (i) encourage independent views on the level of implementation of the SDGs and (ii) to **promote a multi-level dialogue between right holders and duty bearers**, between central and regional state entities, and between regional states and local populations.
- Guinea-Bissau has further capitalized on the VNR process to identify challenges, needs, gaps and strengths of different regions in their endeavour to achieve the SDGs and helped **establish context specific, locally informed roadmaps to address the diverse challenges** faced in various regions in line with the Human-rights Based Approach (HRBA) methodology.
- **Integrating human rights in the VNR process enriched and deepened the learning** from this experience and generated specific lessons on the socio-economic situation, rising inequalities, impact of shocks absorbed by women and children, exposed the interconnected nature of the challenges faced by vulnerable groups yielding to multiple forms of discrimination as well as worsening condition of health and education sectors. For more detailed information on the experience in Guinea-Bissau, please see the event page.

Ecuador - Marialaura Fino, International Labour Standards Specialist, Decent Work Team and Office for the Andean Countries, International Labour Organization (ILO), Peru

- The most recent cooperation framework for Ecuador was based on the national development plan, the evaluation of the previous cooperation framework, the country assessment, and **national consultations with stakeholders** - which was critical for successful integration of human rights into VNR process.
- The process focused on addressing most important challenges facing the country as articulated by civil society, employers and workers organizations who actively participated in the planning meetings and consultations.
- International labour standards and the recommendations from the supervisory bodies of the ILO should be taken into account in building the framework for cooperation agreement as labour rights are human rights.

“Labour rights are human rights. Their full integration in the Voluntary National Review can enrich and strengthen the process, including through the participation of relevant key stakeholders, such as workers and employers organizations.”

Palestine, Inas Margieh, Programme Coordinator, UN Women, Palestine

- Palestine’s VNR experience has created a strategic opportunity for **enabling the implementation of national gender equality and empowerment of women (GEWE) commitments**.
- Informed by the lessons-learned of the previous VNR cycle, the vision focused on how to incorporate needs and rights of those furthest left behind including women and girls in the VNR planning process across all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Priority was given to the creation of **a stakeholder engagement space and dialogue** between the Prime Minister’s Office, the Central Bureau of Statistics, CSOs, women

groups and academia. Civil society also prepared their own “shadow report” to the VNR.

- The VNR process **identified data gaps** in relation to the SDG gender indicators and provided analytical space to assess gendered data gaps to support formulation of recommendations for national action in line with international frameworks.
- Adopting a **people-centred approach, field-level dialogues** were organized in remote and marginalized communities on gender and women empowerment priorities across the SDGs.
- Going forward, addressing **gender data gap and analysis** of furthest left behind will be critical to ensure gender-responsive VNRs.
- Innovative ways of working focused on people-centred agenda design and community engagement will be critical.
- There is a need to further expand the vision beyond reporting and leveraging the VNR follow-up to push for the implementation of the national GEWE commitments.

“Identifying the voices of furthest left behind women at the local community level is a central approach to identify their needs and participate in implementation of the 2030 Agenda and leaving no one behind.”

III. Summary of Discussion

Following the inspiring and resourceful presentations, moderator George Abualzulof has opened the floor for questions from the audience and framed the discussion around the following questions:

- What are the **common challenges** to developing rights-based VNRs and what strategies can the UN employ to overcome them?
- What other **opportunities** exist for the UN to support Member States in developing rights-based VNRs?
- What further **resources and/or capacities** are needed for the UN to deliver this support?

Elisabeth da Costa (Senior Human Rights Advisor, RCO (Resident Coordinator’s Office), Guinea-Bissau)

- The VNR is an opportunity for a reality check with all stakeholders, especially representatives of LNOB groups. One challenge – from the perspective of a human rights practitioner – can be to engage with non-traditional human rights actors.
- Awareness of the 2030 Agenda and its potential as an advocacy tool for human rights can be particularly limited among human rights NGOs. Hence why it’s important to start the conversation and the process with all stakeholders in the room and in a timely fashion.
- VNRs should be prioritized on the agenda of the UN Country Teams. The VNR process is an invitation of the UN and other partners to reflect and engage with the government. The VNR provides an excellent opportunity to step up UN system wide efforts on SDGs integration, namely, to identify those SDGs that should be prioritized given their potential catalytic effect on others. VNR is also an important source of information to update the Common Country Analysis.
- The UN is in an advantageous position on the ground to facilitate the broader engagement with other development partners.

Bonnie Berry (Senior Advocacy Officer - Save the Children)

Question: CSOs on the ground have significant resource challenges for consulting the groups that are most left behind in the VNR processes. What is the UN doing or can do to better support the CSOs to ensure they can engage those left behind in the wider consultations?

Is guidance available for providing detailed insights on intersectional approaches and on how to consult children appropriately? Children are recognized as agents of change but also are one of the most at risk of being left behind.

Answer: Sarah Rattray pointed to the Guidance which features a notable example from Samoa where the Government was able to utilize an extraordinary Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) session in Samoa to gather relevant information on the situation of children in the country. A consultation with children was organized to feed into the CRC session with the relevant information feeding into the Samoan VNR in 2020. In Mauritius, the VNR aligns implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the CRC and CEDAW.

Question: For CSOs doing complementary reporting, what happens after they submit reports? Where do the reports go? They are not posted on official website as in the case of CSO reports on UPR. What can we do to ensure the reports are published alongside the government reports which are made accessible to the UN?

Answer (shared following the event due to time constraints): The Human Rights and VNR Guidance and the UN DESA Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs encourage states to work together with civil society in preparation, presentation, and follow-up to the VNR. The VNR is a state-led process and currently only the state-led reports are published in the HLPF VNR [database](#). (Some states have developed VNRs jointly with civil society). Following the presentation of the VNR at the HLPF, there is dedicated time for questions and answers where civil society organisations have the opportunity to participate in the discussion. (Some states have included civil society representatives in their delegation to present the VNR).

When asked about challenges, speakers highlighted the need for the UN to consolidate efforts and to further enhance coordination and integration, as well as the need for allocation of budget and resources to advance integration of human rights in VNR processes.

Moderator, George Abualzulof closed the session by further stressing the role of the UN Development System under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator's office and in coordination with civil society and other partners to deliver a whole of society approach to prepare and implement the VNRs.

IV. Further Resources

- [A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data – Leaving No One Behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [Guidance Note on Preparations for Gender-Responsive Voluntary National Reviews for UN Women Country and Regional Offices](#)
- [How to Use Voluntary National Review Process to Advance Children's Rights](#)
- [The 2018 Voluntary National Review of Palestine](#)