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CONCEPT NOTE

REGIONAL PREPARATORY WORKSHOP FOR AFRICA VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW COUNTRIES: Strengthening Integrated and Voluntary National Review and Reporting of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063

24 February 2020

Elephant Hills Hotel, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

I. Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven.” At the global level, the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) serve as a basis for the regular reviews of progress undertaken by the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). They facilitate experiential sharing and exchange of good practices, successes, challenges and lessons learned in accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The ultimate goal of the VNRs is to accelerate implementation and strengthen policy coherence, coordination and institutions of Governments, as well as to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From 2016 to 2019, 35 African countries conducted VNRs, four of them more than once. This year, 16 countries from the region, seven of them for at least the second time, are conducting VNRs to be presented at the HLPF in July 2020 at UN Headquarters in New York.

There is a growing recognition that VNRs need to be improved in order to meet or strengthen focus on some important goals. First, in Africa, Member States have called for integrated implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the African Union Agenda 2063, entailing stronger alignment of national development frameworks with these Agendas. This ties in with the call for a Decade of Action to accelerate progress to achieve the SDGs.

Secondly, in line with the 2030 Agenda, through the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD), Member States have underlined the need to strengthen and deepen engagement and the role of subnational governments and actors in VNRs and ensure localization of the Agendas at the subnational level. To this end, five localities in Africa (the cities of Accra, Harare, Victoria Falls and Yaoundé, and Ngora District in Uganda) have embarked on voluntary local reviews (VLRs).

Thirdly, Member States and stakeholders alike have recognized the importance of adopting evaluative thinking and ensuring evidence-based VNRs that are meaningful and contribute to reflection, learning and improvement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Use of evidence is crucial as it provides knowledge of what is working or not, for whom and under what circumstances. While there has historically been a focus on how to measure progress on the SDGs using indicators, evaluation must be

used to go beyond measurement, to consider whether progress is equitable, relevant and sustainable. In turn, such evidence can help demonstrate public sector accountability and accelerate change by focusing attention on enhancing learning and innovation.

The Regional Preparatory Workshop therefore presents an opportunity to prepare countries to conduct their VNRs with the above goals in close view.

The workshop will build on the Global Workshop for countries presenting their VNRs at the 2020 HLPF, which was organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) on 19 and 20 November 2019 in Oslo, Norway.

While targeting the 16 African countries undertaking a VNR in 2020, the Regional Preparatory Workshop will also be open to other Member States and stakeholders. The workshop therefore presents an opportunity not only to prepare the 2020 VNR countries, but also to strengthen follow-up to previously conducted VNRs and inspire countries to conduct a VNR if they have not yet done so.

II. Scope

The objective of the Regional Preparatory Workshop for Africa Voluntary National Review Countries is to enhance preparations for the 2020 VNRs and strengthen capacity of Member States to undertake integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

Furthermore, the workshop will contribute to efforts to achieve priorities set out in the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs by 2030. Measures are expected on three levels to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs: global action (for greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions), local action (embedding the needed transitions in the frameworks of local institutions), and people action (different constituencies—among them youth, civil society and academia—generating movements to ensure the required transformations).

Specifically, the workshop will:

- (i) Provide an opportunity for the 2020 participating countries to report on the status of VNR preparations and identify areas that need to be strengthened;
- (ii) Promote peer learning and exchange of good practices, experiences and lessons learned in conducting a VNR with regional specificities in focus;
- (iii) Discuss the format and expectations for presentation of VNR reports at the HLPF in July 2020;
- (iv) Share experiences of sub-national implementation through preparation of VLRs and increase understanding of their linkages with the VNRs vis-à-vis their contributions to improving implementation of the two Agendas;
- (v) Highlight the importance of the use of evidence from evaluations and rigorous disaggregated data in VNR and VLR processes; and
- (vi) Familiarize participants with existing tools for planning and reporting on the two Agendas.

The workshop will include plenary sessions featuring presentations and discussions, alternating with interactive and engaging group work, as well as smaller group discussions on specific topics chosen by participants. Several online knowledge products to support VNR preparation will be introduced. The workshop will conclude with a joint session that includes the participants from the Major Groups and other Stakeholders Workshop, to facilitate dialogue and experience sharing among both former and current VNR countries along with relevant stakeholders from the region.

III. Key Questions

Guiding questions for discussions in the workshop:

- (i) What are the good practices, successes, challenges, gaps, and lessons learned from the VNR preparation processes?
- (ii) What are the guidelines for reporting? What are the expectations from volunteering countries?
- (iii) Who are the stakeholders involved in the VNR and integration analysis?
- (iv) What online knowledge products can support VNR preparation?
- (v) What further support do the VNR countries need for the finalization and follow-up to reports?
- (vi) How is the integration of the SDGs into national plans and strategies being defined?
- (vii) How are African countries promoting integrated implementation and follow-up on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063?
- (viii) What are the challenges, lessons learned and good practices in conducting effective VLRs?
- (ix) How can VLRs strengthen VNRs through localization, national ownership and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063?
- (x) Who are the key stakeholders in the VLR and what role do they play in the process, including follow-up of the outcomes?
- (xi) What are ways and opportunities to improve VLRs, promote a more inclusive and participatory process, and speed up implementation?
- (xii) What are the tools available to countries to plan and report on the two Agendas?

IV. Expected Outcomes

- (i) Strengthened capacity of 2020 VNR countries to participate meaningfully in the VNR and VLR processes;
- (ii) Increased appreciation and commitment of more countries to offer themselves to undertake effective VNRs and VLRs;
- (iii) Enhanced consideration of regional specificities including Agenda 2063 and human rights and governance imperatives in the VNR reporting;
- (iv) Continuous engagement and mutual support and shared progress among the participating countries in the peer-learning exercise within the VNR networks;
- (v) Increased understanding of the importance of strengthening use of evidence in VNRs and VLRs; and
- (vi) Stronger alignment of national development frameworks with the two Agendas.

V. Guidance for Participants

Participants will include representatives of Governments of the Member States, African regional institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector and UN system entities.

Participants should come prepared for the VNR workshop with information on good practices, successes, challenges, and gaps in VNR reporting; highlights of stakeholder mapping and engagement, institutional mapping and lessons learned; and priority needs where further assistance is required.

VI. Contacts

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