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**Delivering on the Capacity Development
of Civil Society and other Stakeholders
to ensure a successful implementation
of the 2030 Agenda**



An analysis of the 2017 & 2018 VNRs to evaluate what national governments are doing in this area.



Figure 1 VNRs presented in 2017/2018/2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

- ▶ **Capacity development has been used as an encompassing term to describe everything from education to vocational training in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by governments in 2017/2018.**
- ▶ **There is a need for a much clearer definition of capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda, not just to the focus of the 17 goals and targets, but also to the ambitious vision and potentially transformative principles of the Preamble and Declaration of the 2030 Agenda.**
- ▶ **The capacity development of national stakeholders linked to the 2030 Agenda, and in particular of Civil Society, is heterogenous, fragmented, irregular and in many cases does not appear to be taking place based on an analysis by Forus of the VNRs submitted by governments to the HLPF in 2017 and 2018.**
- ▶ **The failure of governments to live up to the clear commitments of Goal 17 of the agenda to provide for the capacity building of civil society and other stakeholders is difficult to comprehend, given that properly designed and planned capacity development could greatly enhance the ability of different stakeholder groups to monitor and contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.**
- ▶ **A systematic and objective identification of the capacity development needs of different stakeholder groups, including civil society, is required as a matter of priority, given that the international community is now four years into the implementation phase of this universal agenda whose ambitious goals and targets must be achieved by 2030.**

Key Recommendations

- ▶ **A clear definition of capacity development should be agreed upon by all UN member states to inform reporting on capacity development in the VNRs**
- ▶ **The capacity development of different stakeholder groups linked the 2030 Agenda should be subject to a global, multi-level coordination system in which civil society and other stakeholders play a key role.**
- ▶ **A Global Fund should be created as part of the operationalization of Goal 17 to promote the capacity building and development of different stakeholder groups,**
- ▶ **Capacity development needs should be determined by each stakeholder group, based on the entire 2030 Agenda including its Principles and Declaration**
- ▶ **National, regional and global-level indicators should be developed which measure the extent to which the capacity development of civil society and other stakeholder groups have been enabled at each level, including an indicator which will measure the financial resources dedicated to capacity development for civil society each year.**
- ▶ **Capacity development efforts should be strengthened at the regional level, involving multiple stakeholders in order to promote greater partnership and linked to regional 2030 Agenda priority areas.**
- ▶ **Official spaces should be created within official regional/ international forums for innovative peer exchange and learning between CSOs and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.**
- ▶ **Joint capacity development of different stakeholder groups should be encouraged at international, regional and national forums to facilitate the exchange of expertise and to promote peer learning.**



Introduction

“Effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through peer learning is essential for renewed action and progress in achieving the ambitious and interlinked SDGs.”¹

LIU Zhenmin (Under-Secretary-General UNDESA)

Voluntary National Reviews

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) has established a process of voluntary national reviews (VNRs), which have become a tool for the review and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Between the years 2016 and 2018, 111 VNRs have been submitted by governments to the HLPF and 48² more will be submitted in 2019. Since its inception, the HLPF peer review system has been used by governments as a means of monitoring their country’s progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and its sustainable development goals, and of learning from the experiences and best practices shared by other governments.

Goal 17 & the capacity development of stakeholders

Capacity Development is fundamental for achieving the goals set by the 2030 Agenda. Goal 17 is therefore essential to the success of the 2030 Agenda and to the achievement of all the sustainable development goals. Goal 17 recognizes the role of Capacity Development³ as an important means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Although civil society is not specifically mentioned in this regard, it is clear that the need for enhanced capacity development for all stakeholder groups involved in the 2030 Agenda monitoring and implementation is recognised.

Point 63 of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda states:

“Processes to develop and facilitate the availability of appropriate knowledge and technologies globally, as well as capacity-building, are also critical. We commit to pursuing policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors, and to reinvigorating the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.”

Target 17.9 of Goal 17 states:

“Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.”

Target 17.18 states:

“By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”

In relation to technology transfer, Point 70 of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda states:

“The United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will promote coordination, coherence and cooperation within the United Nations system on science, technology and innovation-related matters, enhancing synergy and efficiency, in particular to enhance capacity-building initiatives. The task team will draw on existing resources and will work with 10 representatives from civil society, the private sector and the scientific community to prepare the meetings of the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as in the development and operationalization of the online platform, including preparing proposals for the modalities for the forum and the online platform”.

“The multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will provide a venue for facilitating interaction, matchmaking and the establishment of networks between relevant stakeholders and multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to identify and examine technology needs and gaps, including on scientific cooperation, innovation and capacity-building, and also in order to help to facilitate development, transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Point 74 (h) of the Declaration to the 2030 Agenda on Follow Up and Review states:

“They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes, particularly in African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries.”

Considerable reflection is required in relation to how Goal 17’s various commitments on capacity development can best be delivered upon for different stakeholder groups, in

¹ LIU Zhenmin (Under-Secretary-General UNDESA), *Handbook for the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, 2019 Edition* URL: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v4.pdf

² 8 countries submitting for the second time.

³ For the purposes of this paper, the terms “capacity-building” and “capacity development” describe the same process and will be referred to as “capacity development” throughout.

light of their diverse needs, geographical spread, and with a particular focus on the parts of the world where capacities are weak due to a lack of resources and limited, if any, capacity development opportunities.

Analysis of capacity development content of 2017 & 2018 VNRs

For this reason, Forus carried out an analysis of the 2017 & 2018 VNRs in order to determine how capacity development is being implemented by national governments and whom it benefits.

The methodology used for this analysis was to gather all information on capacity development in the 2017 & 2018⁴ VNRs, understand and categorize the different types of capacity development mentioned and the target groups, develop conclusions on the capacity development efforts of governments as reflected by their Voluntary National Reviews and formulate recommendations for the future.

Capacity Development in the Voluntary National Reviews 2017

General findings

- 43 VNRs were submitted in 2017 - of these, 9 do not mention capacity development at all.
- Out of the 34 that do, 11 do so by mentioning the need for capacity development linked to SDG implementation but have no system in place.
- Out of the remaining 23 VNRs, 11 cite capacity development as one of the tools of international cooperation that they use where low income/developing countries are concerned.
- Where capacity development efforts are mentioned in the 2017 VNRs, they were mainly organized from a project-oriented perspective and focused largely on the delivery of concrete project outcomes and activities linked to objectives rather than on capacity development itself.

For example, Japan: "Japan continues to provide technical assistances to build their capacity on tax policy and administration in partnership with international organizations as well as bilateral formats. For example, the government of Japan invites practitioners from tax authorities in developing countries to Japan where we have seminars on improving tax policy and administration. We also dispatch experts of the National Tax Agency of Japan to developing countries as part of JICA's aid programs."

- The targets of the capacity development mentioned in the 2017 VNRs remain vague- for the most part capacity development efforts are cited in relation to international co-operation with LDCs (Least Developed Countries), developing countries and "south countries"⁵.

For example, Monaco: "Between 15% and 20% of Monaco's ODA goes to international organization in order to contribute to the implementation of their programming for the least developed countries (LDCs). This financial support is aimed in particular at strengthening the capacities of LDCs. Capacity development in developing countries is also highlighted for some specific SDGs. On climate action (SDG 13), the report notes that the Government has developed support measures related to adaptation and capacity building for the most vulnerable countries, and in particular Small Island Developing States (SIDS). On partnerships for the goals (SDG 17), the report states that the country support the Pasteur Institute BIRDY program in Madagascar to fight against antibiotic resistance. The programme should be extended to other low-income countries and include training of young scientists in research in those countries".

⁴ The VNRs analyzed in this document are from the following countries: 2017: Afghanistan, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Monaco, Nepal, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Perú, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia, Sweden, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Uruguay, Zimbabwe. 2018: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Australia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Benin, Bhutan, Cabo Verde, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Ireland, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Mali, Malta, Mexico, Namibia, Niger, Paraguay, Poland, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sudan, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, Viet Nam.

⁵ Brazil's VNR presented in 2017: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15806Brazil_English.pdf



- Priority targets for capacity development when specified in the reviews are government officials at national, local and municipal levels for the most part.

For example, Kenya: “ The government has developed National Capacity Building Framework to reposition the public service to improve service levels and ensure a citizen-centric service delivery approach. The Council of Governors (the representative body of all governors in the country) is also involved in capacity building of SDGs at the devolved level in collaboration with the National Government. The planning and budgetary officers at the sub national level have been trained. Emphasis has been given to the Training of Trainers (TOTs) who will train others in their respective institutions.”

- For the countries that note a need for capacity development, it is mainly in the area of SDG implementation capacities primarily in the areas of governance, institutional strengthening, monitoring of public policies, and environmental sustainability.

For example, Jordan: “ Jordan has developed a Roadmap to implement the 2030 Agenda, which focuses on community awareness, prioritization and mapping, capacity development, mainstreaming into national and sub-national planning frameworks, costing, strengthening national statistical systems, and monitoring and evaluation.”

Capacity development of Civil Society

It is noteworthy that out of the 43 VNRs presented in 2017 only 5 mentioned capacity development aimed at Civil Society; one of the main stakeholders of Agenda 2030:

- The Maldives are providing capacity development for journalists in the “mediatisation” of the SDGs.
- The Ethiopian government states that capacity development was offered to “strong women institutions and associations”.
- In Nigeria, capacity development was offered by CSOs for CSOs and other stakeholders on SDG4.
- In India, CSOs, CSO coalitions and the government provided capacity development in SDG awareness raising

- Finally, Portugal provided CSO strengthening capacity development through multi-stakeholder partnerships in partner countries.

Capacity Development in the Voluntary National Reviews 2018

General findings

- Of the 46 VNRs submitted in 2018, 9 do not mention capacity development at all. Of the 37 that do, 5 do so by mentioning the need for capacity development linked to SDG implementation but have no system in place.
- Of the 32 remaining VNRs, 8 cite capacity development exclusively as an international cooperation tool when engaging with low income/developing countries.
- In 2018, capacity development efforts appear to have been mainly organized from a project-oriented perspective. They focused largely on the delivery of concrete outcomes and activities linked to different project objectives rather than on capacity development itself.

For example, Mexico: “The Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Program and the Urban Resilience Guide, designed by SEDATU, contribute to safe and resilient development in vulnerable regions of south-eastern Mexico through capacity building.”







- The targets of these capacity development efforts were largely government officials and public sectors servants, including in the programs provided by high-income countries to developing and low-income countries.

For example, Singapore: “In the area of disaster risk management capacity, Singapore collaborated with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) to conduct two joint specialised training courses for 17 countries. The training courses provided practical support and knowledge for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. We also collaborated with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to enhance the disaster management capabilities of other countries through the Disaster Risk Reduction and Response Course. Since its inception in 2015, more than 50 Governmental officials from 13 countries have been trained”

- For the VNR countries that noted a need for capacity development, it was mainly in the area of SDG implementation relating to the thematic of data collection and analysis, management, funding, environmental sustainability and Disaster Risk Reduction.

For example, Bhutan: “While capacity development efforts in support of the MDGs led to considerable improvements in terms of data quality and availability in Bhutan, challenges remain in terms of coordination. Limited communication and coordination within national statistical systems is a major source of data problems. The lack of coordination among national data producers can result in reporting inconsistent or contradictory information to international statistical agencies. Different sources produce different data because the underlying definitions and operational contexts vary. Using different sources also means that data are updated irregularly, and the reference periods may differ. Therefore, improving coordination between line ministries and NSB (National Statistics Bureau) is a priority. The NSB and UN Country team have recently carried out Data Ecosystem Mapping in Bhutan to identify gaps in data required for the 12th FYP (Five year plans of Bhutan) and for the SDGs. The mapping exercise concluded that Coordination is one of the key issues that constrains the data ecosystem particularly given the decentralized nature of the national statistical system. The mapping exercise also found the need to upgrade human resource capacity at all levels of government, particularly at local government level, and the need for capacity development with more predictable and adequate financial resources. “

- In many cases, capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda only surfaces when the country in question is the recipient of international aid/development. To illustrate this, in the case of Azerbaijan, capacity development was provided by UNDP on SDG implementation at local and international levels, but the government’s capacity development national efforts were focused on responding to statistical and institutional needs.

- Other stakeholders are also making efforts in terms of providing capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda. Civil society organizations working on specific thematic areas seem to be trying to organize capacity development linked to their areas of expertise. To illustrate this, in the case of Nigeria, the Civil Society Action Coalition of Education for All (CSACCEFA) conducted capacity development workshops for 60 national education stakeholders on SDG 4. Participants included CSOs, youths and government officials from the education sector. However, at the national level, Development Partners (i.e. the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of the UN System of Nigeria; the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness, and Capability (SPARC) Programme of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), select members of the MDAs, State Governments, and other stakeholders) of the Nigerian Federal Government are partnering with it to provide technical support and capacity building for implementing government identified priority projects and programmes, without necessarily engaging relevant civil society actors in this process.

Capacity development of Civil Society

Out of the 46 VNRs presented in 2018 only 5 mention capacity development aimed at Civil Society; one of the main stakeholders of Agenda 2030:

- **The government of Cape Verde states** in its VNR that it is providing capacity development for Civil Society in accessing new sources of finance and fundraising.
- **Senegal** is providing capacity development to government officials, state services, local elected officials, the private sector, civil society and technical and financial partners in SDG implementation and monitoring.
- **In Lithuania**, civil society capacity development is focusing on gender, freedom of media and pluralism.
- **Benin** has established a program exclusive to civil society to provide capacity development for engagement in consultative processes called “cadre de concertation des Organisations de la Société Civile” (framework of cooperation of Civil Society organizations).

- **Slovakia** is providing capacity development in partner countries to help these countries develop their own capacity development programs for civil society.

Conclusions

- **The Voluntary National Review process is a mechanism that should allow for accountability and continued progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at local, national regional and global levels.**
 - **Capacity development of all stakeholders and the emergence of multi-stakeholder partnerships is essential for successful outcomes. However, as of 2019, it is notable that the capacity development efforts of governments linked to monitoring and implementing the 2030 Agenda are not equally inclusive of all stakeholder groups. These efforts seem to be largely targeted at government officials and Civil Society Organizations are rarely included.**
 - **Furthermore:**
 - **No clear or widely accepted definition of capacity development informs any of the VNRs.**
 - **The provision of capacity development focusing on the 2030 Agenda/SDGs is heterogeneous and fragmented in many countries regardless of their income levels.**
 - **37.8 % of VNRs do not mention capacity development at all or are limited to merely noting the need for capacity development rather than reporting on progress made.**
 - **Formal education and training are often considered as capacity development in the VNRs even though they may not be directly linked to the 2030 Agenda.**
 - **Governments often highlight capacity development in the context of international cooperation without mentioning capacity development in their domestic contexts. This is despite the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda and the need for VNRs to reflect domestic as well as international progress on implementation.**
 - **All stakeholder groups are not equally represented in the capacity development efforts that take place at the national level, and in many cases civil society is completely absent from these initiatives.**
 - **There is little reference in the VNRs to using the opportunity of joint capacity development of different stakeholders as a strategy for building & strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships, even though this kind of strategy could be very productive.**
 - **There is no reference to capacity development initiatives taking place at the regional level in the VNRs submitted in 2017 & 2018. This is despite the fact that considerable opportunity exists at a regional level, for example during the UN regional sustainable development forums, to organize innovative capacity development forums such as “VNR labs” in which multiple stakeholders including governments could participate and agree on regional priorities.**
 - **There appears to be little coordination between governments and domestic CSOs to ensure that capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda is prioritized. Only 8.9% of VNRs submitted in 2017 & 2018 mention capacity development for civil society.**
 - **In many cases when capacity development is provided to third countries, it involves experts traveling to these countries to provide training instead of training local leaders to do so. This is a short-sighted and not very sustainable approach to capacity development.**
 - **It is difficult to assess what kind of capacity development linked to the 2030 Agenda is taking place in Low income/ Lower-middle income countries as, to date, they have participated less in the VNR process.**
- 2017: 16 VNRs for Low income/Lower-middle income against 26 for upper middle- and high-income countries.**
- 2018: 15 VNRs for Low income/Lower-middle income against 30 for upper middle- and high-income countries in 2018.**
- **There are no specific indicators for assessing the extent of capacity development linked to Agenda 2030 taking place in a given country or region each year, nor is any evidence provided that baselines have been established in advance for the purpose of measuring the impact of capacity development initiatives at any level. All evaluation seems to be done “post hoc”.**
 - **Goals 16 & 17 are most frequently mentioned in relation to capacity development efforts mentioned in the 2017 & 2018 VNRs.**

Recommendations

1

A clear definition of capacity development should be agreed upon by all UN member states and should inform progress reporting on capacity development in the VNRs submitted to the High-Level Political Forum.

2

The capacity development of different stakeholder groups linked the 2030 Agenda should be coordinated, and civil society should be fully included along with other stakeholders in the design of a global, multi-level capacity development coordination system.

3

A Global Fund should be created to promote the capacity building and development of different stakeholder groups, in particular civil society, and to support them in the implementation, monitoring, review and follow-up of Agenda 2030. It is important to when developing this funding system to consider the universality of the agenda and the diversity of needs expressed by civil society from different regions.

4

Capacity development needs should be determined by each stakeholder group, based on the entire 2030 Agenda including its Principles and Declaration as well as the 17 individual goals and their related targets.

5

National, regional and global-level indicators should be developed which measure the extent to which the capacity development of civil society and other stakeholder groups have been enabled at each level, including an indicator linked to Goal 17 (Means of Implementation) which will measure the financial resources dedicated to capacity development for civil society each year.

6

VNRs should report on the capacity development efforts which take place each year at the local and national levels, as well as in international cooperation.

7

Capacity development efforts should be strengthened at the regional level, involving multiple stakeholders and linked to regional 2030 Agenda priority areas.

8

Official spaces should be created within official regional/international forums for innovative peer exchange and learning between CSOs and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

9

Joint capacity development of different stakeholder groups should be encouraged within international, regional and national forums to facilitate the exchange of expertise and to promote peer learning.

[Read here the full research findings on the 2017 & 2018 VNRs :](http://forus-international.org/en/influence/agenda-2030-hlpf)
<http://forus-international.org/en/influence/agenda-2030-hlpf>





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