HLPF 2017 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY 18 JULY 2017

On Tuesday, five sessions on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) took place – three in the morning and two in the afternoon – during the Ministerial Segment of the 2017 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). In total, 16 countries presented VNRs: Belgium, Benin, Peru, Guatemala, Italy, Zimbabwe, the Czech Republic, Jordan, Thailand, Argentina, Belarus, Portugal, Uruguay, Nigeria, Panama, and Sweden. In parallel, the General Debate took place in the afternoon.

**VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 5**

This session was chaired by Frederick Musiwa Makamure Shava, Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the UN, and President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Presenting the VNR for Belgium, Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister, said the SDGs have led to the formulation of an umbrella national development strategy in his country, including a common reporting mechanism. He highlighted four lessons from the process, including the need to: incorporate SDG targets into internal and external policy frameworks; identify areas for further action, such as water and air quality; follow up on, and review, implementation; and invest in awareness raising.

Presenting the VNR for Benin, Abdoulaye Bio Tchané, Minister of State for Development and Planning, said his country has identified 49 of the 169 SDG targets as national priorities, and emphasized the importance of an enabling environment. He highlighted areas of progress, including: drafting of a government action plan; a global survey on food security; and the creation of a “smart” city that allows education, research, and entrepreneurship to flourish.

Presenting the VNR for Peru, Javier Abugattás Fatule, President of the Board of Directors of the National Center for Strategic Planning, noted his country’s geographical, topographical, and cultural diversity, and stressed the importance of accounting for this diversity at the local level in implementing the SDGs. He said that while Peru is incorporating the 2030 Agenda into its national policies and plans, it is also projecting a holistic vision to go beyond 2030.

Lead discussant Gilbert Houngbo, International Fund for Agricultural Development, noted challenges in measuring progress against indicators where data is lacking, and underlined the need for resources to build statistical capacity.

Responding to Houngbo on sustaining momentum, De Croo described Belgium’s current level of progress as only the “starting point.” On LUXEMBOURG’s question on the role of parliament, he said assessments related to SDGs will be integrated with existing processes to avoid silos. On a question on vulnerable groups from INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, De Croo highlighted the “She Decides” initiative that promotes gender empowerment. On a question raised by CHILDREN AND YOUTH on inequalities reinforced by unpaid internships, De Croo called the negative impact of unpaid internships on the SDGs “a bit of an exaggeration.”

Responding to LUXEMBOURG and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, Tchané called for a focus on women’s education and health. Fatule said his country intends to fulfill the potential of all citizens.

**VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 6**

This session was chaired by ECOSOC President Shava.

Presenting the VNR for Guatemala, Miguel Ángel Moir Sandoval, Minister of Planning, described his country’s efforts to create a participatory process, raise awareness, and identify priority SDGs. He highlighted the following national challenges: poverty, with 59.3% of the population living in poverty and 23% living in extreme poverty; food insecurity, with 16% of the population suffering malnutrition; gender-related challenges, including violence against women; and the exclusion of indigenous communities.

Presenting the VNR for Zimbabwe, Obert Mpofu, Minister of Micro-Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, and Grasiano Nyaguse, from the same ministry, described efforts to: identify national priorities (poverty reduction, food and nutrition, gender, health, and public administration and governance); integrate the SDGs into national strategies; enhance multi-stakeholder participation at all levels; establish an institutional structure, including the identification of focal points in key ministries and oversight by Parliament; identify targets and indicators, with 2015 as the base year; agree a development assistance framework with the UN; align budgetary processes; and enhance domestic revenue to implement the SDGs.
Presenting Italy’s VNR, Gian Luca Galletti, Minister of Environment, Land and Sea Protection, highlighted a forthcoming action plan containing quantified objectives for 2030 and said regions and local governments will also define sustainable development strategies. Luca Maustrupier, Directorate General for Development Cooperation, said Italy’s development cooperation goes beyond “traditional areas,” to also support better data, resource mobilization, and private sector involvement. Enrico Giovannini, Founder, Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) highlighted ASviS’ efforts to bring together over 170 civil society organizations to: report on the state of the SDGs in Italy; make proposals; and organize SDGs’ outreach.

Underscoring “we don’t need resources, we need honesty,” lead discussant Andrés Mideros, National Secretary of Planning and Development, Ecuador, called for addressing tax evasion at bilateral and multilateral levels. He stressed the importance of participatory processes and mechanisms for follow-up of SDGs, and the importance of data.

Lead discussant Jessica Espey, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, provided five recommendations for VNRs: identifying the national stakeholders that have been consulted; setting out how local and regional governments will be engaged; quantifying objectives and thresholds for success; introducing national targets for data investments; and earlier publication, to allow for comments and engagement.

In response to questions from Espey and THAILAND: Sandoval stressed the importance of establishing a statistical baseline to measure progress on the SDGs; Galletti said civil society participation will provide guarantees to the 2030 Agenda process; and Mpofu described a special maize programme as a policy intervention to enhance production and reduce maize imports.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 7

This session was chaired by Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the UN, and ECOSOC Vice President.

Presenting the VNR for the Czech Republic, Richard Brabec, First Deputy Prime Minister, said the VNR process involved stakeholders for ensuring factual accuracy and wider acceptance. He outlined progress on the 2030 Agenda, including low levels of unemployment, and the lowest number of people threatened by poverty and social exclusion in the EU. Among challenges, he listed climate change, structural barriers to the shift to a low-carbon economy, and the need to increase official development assistance.

In response to questions from NGOs, LUXEMBOURG, and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Brabec highlighted: an action plan to reduce harm from alcohol consumption; creation of new water reservoirs to help resist climate shocks; the Government Council for Sustainable Development; and increases in minimum wage and financial contributions to individuals willing to relocate for employment.

Presenting the VNR for Jordan, Imad Fakhoury, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, said his country is under “economic siege” due to regional instability. He highlighted: the SDG Roadmap adopted by all stakeholders; integration of the SDGs and targets into the country’s three-year executive development plan; and project pilots in two regions to inform sub-national planning.

On a question on data disaggregation and child marriage from CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Fakhoury said a new strategy for the national statistical system was being elaborated with UN support. Salma Nims, Jordanian National Commission for Women, highlighted efforts to change social attitudes and enact legislation.

Presenting the VNR for Thailand, Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Thapani Sirivadhanabhakdi, Thai Beverage Public Company; and youth delegate Potcharapol Prommat, highlighted: the importance of localizing the SDGs; integration of the country’s Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the SDGs into national development strategies and budgets; progress on SDG 4 (good health and well-being); partnerships with the private sector; and the importance of good education for all.

HLPF ALLIANCE THAILAND asked the delegation about on-the-ground challenges; ensuring meaningful participation; and mainstreaming gender. Ladawan Kumpa, National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand, highlighted a workshop that had brought together provincial governors and local authorities as well as civil society. Responding to KENYA and BANGLADESH on key challenges and next steps, Pramudwinai noted: increased engagement with municipalities; knowledge dissemination; improving statistical capacity; and continued inclusive consultation.

Presenting the VNR for Argentina, Gabriela Agosto, National Council of Coordination of Social Policies; with Mabel Bianco, Foundation of Women’s Study and Investigation; and Andrea Avila, Randstad, outlined two stages of work that preceded monitoring of the SDGs: internal prioritization of SDGs; and inter-institutional efforts to select Goals and indicators. They highlighted the commitment of 10 provinces and the city of Buenos Aires to implement the SDGs, and said their country hopes to have specific data on implementation in 14 of the 23 provinces by 2018.

Responding to questions from PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES and CHILDREN AND YOUTH, Agosto highlighted the establishment of an observatory to identify structural factors for violence against women and girls, and stressed her country’s commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

GENERAL DEBATE

During this parallel session, statements were made by 39 heads of state, ministers, and other representatives of Member States.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 8

This session was chaired by Jürgen Schulz, Permanent Representative of Germany to the UN, and ECOSOC Vice President.

Presenting the VNR for Belarus, Marianna Shchetkina, Council of the Republic of the National Assembly, highlighted several institutional and policy mechanisms, including: a national sustainable development strategy; a programme of socio-economic development; and sector- and region-based programmes. She noted progress in addressing poverty, food security, decent jobs, and women’s empowerment.

Responding to questions from the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AZERBAIJAN, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, KYRGYZSTAN, and CHINA, Shchetkina highlighted: social protection as a priority; the
challenge of ensuring remuneration keeps pace with productivity; and an energy conservation programme. CHILDREN AND YOUTH said they were not included in SDG implementation and follow-up processes.

Presenting Portugal’s VNR, Teresa Ribeiro, Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, highlighted: intra-governmental guidelines for the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2016; the crucial role of Portugal’s National Statistical Institute, and Agency for Development and Cohesion; a public consultation process led by civil society; and support for adapting the UN development system to follow up on, and improve effectiveness of, the 2030 Agenda. Mário Parra da Silva, UN Global Compact Network Portugal, introduced Alliance SDGs Portugal, a multi-stakeholder platform that seeks to bring the SDGs and targets “into the real world.”

Responding to the stakeholder group on AGEING on non-discrimination, Ribeiro emphasized: the role of statistics; the need for strong political action to ensure the constitution is upheld; and the preparation of a programme on “active ageing.”

Presenting the VNR for Uruguay, Álvaro García, Minister of Budget and Planning, highlighted: the special emphasis on growth and equity; good access to health services; low levels of corruption; and strong social protection systems in his country. He described efforts to: address child poverty; increase market share in agricultural products by further improving phytosanitary measures; reduce suicide rates in the 20-25 age group; pass a bill to reduce gender-based violence; close the infrastructure gap; and increase spending in science, technology, and innovation.

Responding to questions from ARGENTINA, WOMEN, and PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, García highlighted: the key role of regional economic integration associations in implementing the 2030 Agenda; the participation of civil society organizations through broad social dialogue and specific workshops; and collaboration with civil society to gather disaggregated data.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 9

Presenting the VNR for Sweden, Ardalan Shekarabi, Minister for Public Administration; Carola Lemne, Confederation of Swedish Enterprise; Karin Stjernfeldt Jammeh, Mayor of Malmö; and Björn Fonden, Swedish Youth Delegate to the UN, highlighted: progress on 49 indicators, including on education, health, and infrastructure; peace and democracy as preconditions for progress; municipal-level efforts to implement the SDGs; the private sector as the bearer of solutions; and the need for young people to be given resources and space in decision-making.

Presenting the VNR for Nigeria, Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire, Presidential Senior Special Advisor on the SDGs; Priscilla Achakpa, Civil Society Strategy Group; and Mories Atoki, Private Sector Advisory Group, said that their country’s progress on SDGs has been held back by: the economic crisis triggered by the decline in oil prices; the humanitarian crisis in the Northeast; and continued militancy in the Nigerian delta. They highlighted progress towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including ongoing work on an SDGs needs assessment; and efforts to establish a baseline for tracking performance across national and sub-national government levels.

Presenting the VNR for Panama, María Luisa Navarro, Vice Minister of Multilateral Affairs and Cooperation, highlighted a sustained reduction in poverty levels, and in rates of malnutrition and hunger, but said that persistent inequality calls for targeted interventions in priority areas. She identified next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including: closing institutional gaps in human rights-based policies; bolstering a multi-dimensional approach; and strengthening the national statistics system and non-governmental and private sector participation.

Lead discussant László Borbély, State Counsellor, Romania, posed questions to: Nigeria, on the global indicator framework; Panama, on challenges in promoting synergies in SDG implementation, at both the policy and financing levels; and Sweden, on recommendations for mapping and implementing the SDGs.

Reflecting on success factors across VNRs, lead discussant Claire Melamed, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, highlighted the importance of: robust institutional frameworks at the highest governmental levels as well as local levels; broad social policies, which support a range of people, together with narrow social policies that target individuals; effective economic policies that reduce inequality; and knowledge and data.

On a question from CHILDREN AND YOUTH on engagement with civil society, Navarro said her government has worked to promote dialogue and synergies with non-governmental stakeholders including academia. In response to CHILDREN AND YOUTH and NIGERIA, Orelope-Adefulire said her country has adopted a bottom-up approach to foster local ownership.

On questions from CHILDREN AND YOUTH, MEXICO and NGOs, Shekarabi noted: investments in cooperation with local governments; efforts to incorporate children’s rights into Swedish legislation; and partnerships with civil society.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Describing the VNR process, one delegate said countries were effectively posting “selfies” on the HLPF wall. Are these flattering self-portraits, or #nofilter? Countries have presented successes as well as challenges this year. Some countries have even opened themselves up to the “dislike” button by inviting stakeholders to review their VNRs. These are early days, still focused on developing baselines, strategies, and policies – perhaps too early to talk of results, and of successes and failures. As the VNR process matures, said one participant, case studies on how implementation is working (or not), might enable learning from both success and failures. The voluntary guidelines for the VNRs will be updated in due course. It will be useful, said the participant, if the sharing of case studies, particularly from the local level where implementation takes place and impact is first evident, is encouraged.

At UN Headquarters, meanwhile, a fire alarm during the VNR sessions on Tuesday resulted in an evacuation. A seasoned participant, via Twitter, wondered if it was set off by the hot air generated by the SDGs discussion.

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The Earth Negotiations Bulletin summary and analysis of the 2017 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development will be available on Saturday, 22 July 2017, online at: http://enb.iisd.org/hlpf/2017/
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