Earth Negotiations Bulletin

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HLPF 2020 Highlights:
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On Monday, fourteen countries presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) to the HLPF for the second time: Nepal, Georgia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Niger, Panama, Benin, Costa Rica, Peru, and Argentina.

Voluntary National Reviews

Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco and Vice-President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), chaired the presentation of VNRs in the morning. He noted that this year, in addition to the usual elements, the VNRs would also focus on ways to strengthen policies and governance, and to mobilize partnerships for holistic implementation of the SDGs in pursuit of a better recovery. The afternoon session on VNRs was chaired by Juan Sandoval, Permanent Representative of Mexico and ECOSOC Vice-President.

Presenting the second VNR for **Nepal**, Puspa Raj Kadel, National Planning Commission, reported progress in poverty reduction, education, health and water, and providing electricity access; but noted an annual investment of USD 19 billion is still required to achieve the SDGs. He said COVID-19 is adversely affecting economic growth, resulting in a surge of returning migrant workers and a corresponding decline in remittances, and increasing the likelihood of people falling back below the poverty line.

In response to questions from AUSTRIA, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, NORWAY, and KYRGYZSTAN, Kadel highlighted: guidelines for sub-national governments; capacity building programmes at the sub-national level; plans to expand the country's social protection system coverage to 75% by 2030; and mechanisms to include marginalized people.

Presenting the second VNR for **Georgia**, Lasha Darsalia, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, reported progress in: human capital development and social welfare; economic growth; and democratic governance. Among issues requiring closer attention, he listed: leaving no one behind; investing in young people; decentralized development; and greener energy production and consumption. He said Georgia will aim to: generate better quality data; address pollution and contamination; localize SDGs at the municipal level; and link SDG targets to budgeting.

In response to questions from LITHUANIA, INDONESIA, and SINGAPORE, Darsalia highlighted the integration of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda into the national policy process, and the establishment of working groups to plan and monitor the SDGs.

Presenting the second VNR for **Nigeria**, Adejoke Orelope-Adefulire, Senior Special Assistant to the President on the SDGs, said priority SDGs have been integrated into the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan for 2017-2020. She noted efforts to build a more inclusive economy and identified the need to invest more in education. Among challenges, she listed: high unemployment rates; maternal mortality; out-of-school children; and regional inequalities.

Responding to questions from the GAMBIA and FINLAND, Orelope-Adefulire said: Nigeria's evidence-based review is based on credible data from statistical authorities; and efforts are underway with sub-national governments to get children back to school.

Presenting the second VNR for **Kenya**, Ukur Yatani Kanacho, Cabinet Secretary for National Treasury and Planning, highlighted the country's "Big 4 Agenda" prioritizing food and nutrition security, healthcare, manufacturing, and affordable housing. He noted advancements in renewable energy installed per capita, infrastructure, and domestic resource mobilization.

Responding to questions from BANGLADESH, the UK, and Kenyan CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS, Kanacho said the national SDG awareness-raising strategy engages civil society organizations, focus groups, and social media; and the National Bureau of Statistics has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Commission for Human Rights to ensure a human rights-based approach to data collection.

Presenting the second VNR for **Uganda**, Mary Karooro Okurut, Cabinet Minister in Charge of General Duties, highlighted improved access to electricity, reduced unemployment, and increased manufacturing capabilities. She attributed the progress to social protection programmes, rural electrification projects, and a sound economic growth rate. Immaculate Akello, a representative of Uganda's Youth Coalition for the SDGs, highlighted achievements in "go back to school" interventions, and efforts to raise SDG awareness in remote areas.

Responding to questions from DENMARK and NORWAY, Okurut described initiatives to improve livelihood prospects for youth, including a Youth Venture Capital Fund, small grants, and a youth skill-building programme. She said the government has successfully controlled the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on the economy.

Presenting the second VNR for **Bangladesh**, Muhammad Abdul Mannan, Planning Minister, listed initiatives undertaken since the first VNR, including: an SDGs Action Plan; a national data coordination committee; approval of 40 priority indicators for localizing SDGs; a framework of collaboration with government and various UN organizations; and inclusion of the SDGs into school curricula. He said poverty reduction efforts were on track until the pandemic hit, and highlighted, as immediate responses, a national cash transfer programme and support to 19 economic sectors, including health.

Responding to questions from INDIA and MOROCCO, Zuena Aziz, Prime Minister's Office, and Shamsul Alam, Planning Commission, highlighted: locally-developed and scaled-up solutions, including 14,000 community clinics to reduce child mortality; and government efforts to develop primary and secondary education.

Presenting the second VNR for **India**, Rajiv Kumar, NITI Aayog, reported progress, including: lifting 271 million people from multidimensional poverty; the provision of health insurance for 500 million people; and in access to housing, sanitation, clean fuels, and banking. He said India's COVID-19 stimulus package of USD

276 billion amounts to 10% of the country's GDP, and highlighted international initiatives led by India, including the International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, and India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

Responding to questions from ECUADOR, BANGLADESH, OTHER STAKEHOLDERS MAJOR GROUP, and WADA NA TODO ABHIYAN, Kumar noted India's progress in ensuring renewable energy access to the poor, including through off-grid solar photovoltaic programmes, and in financial inclusion of women, including a reduction of the gender gap in bank account ownership. He shared ongoing work to strengthen cooperative federalism to ensure SDG achievement by all states, and explained how the government is institutionalizing partnerships with civil society organizations into VNR and SDG planning processes.

Presenting the second VNR for **Morocco**, Nezha El Ouafi, Minister Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates, noted achievements including in improving living standards, housing, health, education, renewable energy, and ending rural isolation. She said factors contributing to this forward momentum included: strengthening the institutional framework for implementation; adopting a diversified strategy to mobilize financial resources; undertaking a series of national, regional and thematic consultations; and fostering effective cooperation with the UN Development Programme.

Responding to questions from DJIBOUTI, INDIA, MEXICO, and NIGERIA, El Ouafi highlighted: factors leading to Morocco's successful COVID-19 response; the role of civil society in the VNR process; initiatives undertaken on climate change and food security; and South-South cooperation with African countries on adaptation to climate change in the agriculture sector.

Presenting the second VNR for **Niger**, Ahmat Jidoud, Minister of Budget, noted progress in reducing infant mortality, combating desertification, and addressing climate change. He said key lessons learned were on the importance of: ensuring inclusive development; communicating and disseminating information; ensuring sustainable use of resources; and maintaining strong economic growth. He noted challenges, including in empowerment of women and girls, strengthening human capital, mobilizing resources, and harmonizing data collection.

Responding to questions, Jidoud described measures undertaken to ensure meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the VNR process; strategies adopted to promote awareness of the SDGs among all relevant stakeholders; and specific initiatives taken to reduce inequality and discrimination against marginalized groups.

The second VNR for **Panama** highlighted a national focus on: creating inclusion; fighting poverty and inequality; investing in education and health; and addressing social equality among vulnerable communities. While recognizing the urgency of international cooperation, national intersectoral public health actions in response to the pandemic were highlighted.

Responding to ARGENTINA and COSTA RICA, María Inés Castillo López, Minister of Social Development, described efforts to build a multi-dimensional poverty index for children and adolescents, which will be updated every two years as a measure of progress on children's rights; and the Colmena Plan to reduce social equality where it is most severe, using local governance mechanisms and multisectoral approaches, and involving multiple stakeholders.

Presenting the second VNR for **Benin**, Abdoulaye Bio Tchané, Minister of Planning and Development, noted: the localization of SDG targets, achieved by asking local governments to prioritize 10 out of 49 national priority targets; the identification of nine SDGs as entry points in a national push to "leave no one behind" by eradicating poverty and improving human capital; the identification of bottlenecks in SDG implementation; the development of a 10-year framework of actions for accelerating SDG implementation, in response to the 2019 HLPF Ministerial Declaration; and investments in data and statistics.

Responding to questions from SWITZERLAND, MEXICO, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, Benin said sectoral roundtables are being organized to broaden the number of partners available for financing; and a dedicated ministry on digitalization has been established to spur the digital economy.

Presenting the second VNR for **Costa Rica**, Rodolfo Solano-Quirós and Adriana Bolaños-Argueta, Minister and Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs respectively, noted efforts to translate the 2030 Agenda into a national vision that all stakeholders contribute to, and share accountability for. Bolaños-Argueta highlighted achievements, including: alignment of local planning with the 2030 Agenda by 44% of local governments; growing statistical capacity to track 136 indicators; and development of an SDG-related accountability system for businesses.

Responding to questions from the UK, NORWAY, and BHUTAN, a delegate from Costa Rica highlighted: her government's comprehensive decarbonization plan, with an ecosystem focus; efforts to tackle inequality through robust employment options; and a multi-dimensional planning approach that reflects Costa Rica's achievements in social policy.

Presenting the second VNR of **Peru**, Javier Abugattás, National Centre for Strategic Planning, reported deeper integration of SDGs in long-term development plans; and said key priorities include the protection of life and risk management, including through improved decision-making processes, coordination, and research. He also highlighted government measures to support indigenous peoples in the Peruvian Amazonia in the fight against COVID-19.

In response to questions from ECUADOR, SPAIN, and INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, a delegate from Peru highlighted its convening space for civil society, government representatives, and political parties; progress since its 2017 VNR in turning its roadmap into a national vision and a development plan; and budgetary challenges faced due to COVID-19, while acknowledging the weaknesses in social services and stressing the utmost priority to be given to life, families, and local communities in the recovery process.

Presenting the second VNR of **Argentina**, Victoria Tolosa Paz, National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies, said the current government prioritizes the fight against hunger and multidimensional poverty, which goes beyond income and includes access to drinking water and public health. She highlighted: measures to "flatten the curve" of COVID-19 and strengthen the public health system; resource transfers to the most vulnerable groups; and support to companies to preserve jobs.

In response to questions from MEXICO, SPAIN, PARAGUAY, and EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA, a delegate from Argentina drew attention to: measures to promote education via television and the Internet; the priority given by the government to gender equality; and efforts to ensure no one is left behind.

In the Cyber-Corridors

As a day full of VNRs played out in the foreground, delegates continued their parlays on this year's ministerial declaration behind the scenes. While it has become "standard practice" for the negotiations on the declaration to get drawn out on "a few predictable issues" each year, their resolution seems to be a surprise every time. The sticky issue this year, somewhat predictably, is rumored to be wording on climate change, with the controversy centering on references to strengthen global cooperation on climate change and accelerate action. As a result, the HLPF declaration to be adopted at the end of this week has not yet been agreed, while the declaration to commemorate the UN's 75th anniversary in September has been signed off. "Why don't they use the same formulation as in the September declaration, where the same script has already played out," wondered one weary delegate involved in the HLPF declaration. However, other Member States are not happy with only calling for emissions reductions "in line with applicable state commitments," as agreed in the 75th anniversary declaration, without calling for increased ambition, and for all countries to act. It remains to be seen if wordplay can once again resolve this stand-off.