SDG 17

PRIORITIZING THE CAPACITY BUILDING OF CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EFFECTIVE SDG IMPLEMENTATION

An analysis of the 2020 VNRs to assess government action on SDG 17.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Americas**: Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Honduras, Panama, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago.
- **Europe**: North Macedonia, Moldova, Ukraine, Estonia, Bulgaria, Austria, Finland, Slovenia, Russia.
- **Africa**: Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, Syria, Uganda, Morocco, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Comoros, Burundi, Benin, Niger, Gambia, Zambia.
- **Asia**: Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Georgia, Nepal, India.
- **Pacific**: Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands.

Countries presenting their VNRs in 2020

47

KEY FINDINGS

1

Capacity building not mentioned by one fifth of reporting governments in 2020 VNRs

- Of the **47 VNRs** presented to the HLPF by governments in 2020, **8 VNRs** did not mention capacity building (eg one fifth of reporting governments)[1]. This is despite the fact that SDG 17 underlines the importance of capacity building as a **key means of implementation of the SDG agenda**, and that this SDG is reviewed by the UN HLPF each year.
- However this figure does represent an improvement on the **2019 VNR figures** which indicated that **one third of governments presenting their VNRs** did not mention capacity building.

2

No clear definition of capacity building/ development informs the 2020 VNRs

- As noted in previous years, capacity building is used as an all-encompassing term to describe **everything from education to vocational training** in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by governments between the years **2017 – 2020**.

3

Key capacity building gaps in SDG implementation were identified by the 2020 VNRs

- Of the 39 VNRs which did mention capacity building, 25 highlighted **specific gaps linked to SDG implementation**.
- These gaps are related to areas such as **digitalisation, education, gender equality, LNOB, data collection, etc**.
- Although a majority of VNRs **highlighted the key role of CSOs in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**[2] , there was an obvious gap between the importance attributed to their work and the actual efforts made to strengthen them and their capacities. In fact, there was no evidence in the VNRs submitted in 2020 that any of the Governments **are adopting systematic and continuous approaches to the capacity building of civil society** linked to the SDGs.
- The role and input of CSOs to particular VNR processes is recognised by the 2020 VNRs. However their **contribution to longer-term SDG monitoring and implementation tends to be overlooked**. This undoubtedly contributes to the subsequent failure of governments to make provision for the effective capacity building of civil society going forward.

4

Little reference in 2020 VNRs to government support for domestic capacity building

- While some countries, especially in the Global South, have not put in place the means to provide for the capacity building of CSOs and other stakeholders, they do identify it as a **major area of challenge and insist on global cooperation in this regard** [3].
- The elaboration of a VNR appears in some instances to be the first occasion where domestic CSOs have been included by governments in a multi stakeholder consultation process[4]. The VNR process therefore can be **considered as a first step toward CSOs capacity building and greater inclusion in the policy influencing processes**.

5

Different roles of low, middle and high-income countries linked to capacity building

- An analysis of the 2020 VNRs indicates that lower-income countries appear to be the **targets or beneficiaries of capacity building** in a wider context of international cooperation. Middle-income countries appear to function both as funders/supporters of capacity building and also as beneficiaries/ targets. High-income countries tend to be providers of capacity building for overseas partners.
- A clear **lack of reciprocity** appears to characterise the approach to international capacity building cooperation, which is mostly considered as a **unilateral process** initiated by high income countries.
- To compensate for this, there may be scope to **promote SDG capacity building in the context of both South-South cooperation and Triangular cooperation frameworks**. Some Global South countries are both donors and recipients and may partner effectively given their similar backgrounds and experiences.

6

Covid 19 reporting was identified as a major challenge to the implementation of the Agenda 2030

- The COVID-19 global pandemic was **a major focus of the 2020 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2020**. The pandemic not only resulted in the HLPF being organised as a virtual event but it also featured as a main topic in many of the HLPF debates.
- Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, 39 (or 83%) included Covid-19 reporting. In most cases, an entire chapter was dedicated to this topic, as Covid-19 was identified by 35 of the presenting governments **as a major challenge to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**.
- While the 2020 VNR reports highlighted the impacts of the pandemic on the principle of "leaving no one behind" and mentioned efforts to tackle COVID-19 by means of specific SDGs (eg SDG 1,2,3,4,5 & 10) only 25 VNRs (53%) provided information about **how COVID-19 affected stakeholders engaged in VNR processes**. In some cases, the reports highlighted the positive reactions of different stakeholder groups to COVID-19, and in particular commented positively on increased engagement by civil society organisations.[5]
- While the role played by civil society at a national level during the global pandemic was repeatedly mentioned in the 2020 VNRs, in most cases they did not specify how Covid-19 had impacted on their national priorities, and **whether or not it had impacted on the capacity building of key stakeholders such as civil society** or how the state itself was intervening to promote capacity building measures aimed at civil society.
- The 2020 VNRs indicated that the implementation of the SDGs at a national level was being jeopardized as most governments were **prioritizing short-term solutions to the economic crisis** which didn't take the 2030 Agenda into account.
- The Covid-19 global pandemic led to the cancellation or postponement of many major regional or international events. At the national or local level, **SDG-related events were cancelled or organised digitally**, including capacity building workshops involving state and civil society representatives, making multi-stakeholder engagement more difficult.[6]

7

Digitalization identified as a major challenge/priority

- Ten countries presenting their VNRs in 2020 did not mention the role of technology in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. On the other hand, 20 VNRs mentioned **digitalization & internet access as a priority in their national planning**.[7] However, few VNRs gave any examples of national measures being put in place linked to digitalization
- Some countries, such as Gambia or Finland, identified the process of digitalization as a challenge to be addressed , especially with regard to **providing marginalized populations and groups with access to digital services.**
- Low-income countries which have identified digitalization as a priority for achieving the SDGs, were not able to put in place planned projects linked to this domain. They referred to **the considerable gap between countries of the Global North and Global South in relation to digitalization** and called for cooperation in order not to be "left behind" in the data revolution, since they claimed that the data and technology they are still using are "out of date".[8]
- Inevitably, Covid-19 had an **accelerating impact on the process of digitalization**. Many civil society actors, state institutions and others, had to quickly adapt to working digitally. However, this situation revealed the significant disparities between the Global North and Global South, and between privileged and marginalized sectors of society. Capacity building has been identified as crucial to closing those gaps, and many programs aimed at increasing digital capacities were created. Nevertheless, it would appear that digital[9] adaptation efforts mainly targeted institutional structures and not civil society.

8

Women's leadership

- Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, only 27 contain **gender disaggregated data**. The other VNRs rarely made reference to this or provided unclear data.
- Measures promoting the "empowerment" of women were regularly mentioned in the 2020 VNRs but **details about those measures or programs were rarely provided.**
- Measures reported in the fight against gender-based inequalities included laws to protect women, sex education programs, the inclusion of women in government decision-making by the use of quotas, access to microcredits, etc. However, **capacity building programs are rarely mentioned in this regard**, and when they are, they only refer to financial education to access credits or training politician women.[10] In other words, these capacity building programs do not appear to be linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Clear definitions of capacity building should be agreed by all UN Member States for VNRs

- Clear definitions of capacity building should be agreed upon by all UN member states. These definitions should **enable reporting on progress related to capacity building in the VNRs** submitted by governments each year to the High-Level Political Forum.
- The 2030 Agenda assigns a key role to civil society in SDG monitoring and implementation activities at all levels, as part of a renewed "Global Partnership" (SDG 17). The VNRs should therefore report on progress made with the capacity building of civil society and other stakeholders and **avoid focusing exclusively on the capacity building of institutional actors** as is largely the case at present.

2

Domestically oriented & multi-level capacity building for CSOs & other stakeholders should be ensured

- A greater focus should be placed on domestically focused capacity building (i.e. directed at national level stakeholders) in addition to capacity building in partner countries as part of international cooperation frameworks.
- **Capacity building should be encouraged at multiple levels**, including the regional and local levels, involving multiple stakeholders in order to promote greater partnership and links to regional 2030 Agenda priority areas.
- Official spaces should be created within official regional/international SDG forums for **innovative peer exchange, learning, and capacity building involving CSOs and other stakeholders** involved in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.
- The engagement of domestic civil society & other stakeholders in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 should be supported by UN MS, in order to enable CSOs to **participate effectively in institutionalized dialogue and consultations, engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships and contribute to formal multi-stakeholder governance arrangements.**
- UN MS should recognise the importance of digitalisation in ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in SDG implementation, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, governments should provide access for CSOs & other stakeholders to digital technology and capacity building to promote the digital literacy skills of CSOs and other stakeholders.

3

CSOs & other stakeholders should systematically determine their own 2030 Agenda capacity building needs

- The capacity building needs of each stakeholder group, including civil society, **should be identified and determined by themselves.**
- Ongoing capacity building programmes for CSOs linked to the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda **should be developed and strengthened.**
- Data collection and analysis should form a **key component of CSO capacity building**. as citizen-based information is key to monitoring the SDGs.

4

Digital access & digital capacity building programmes should be provided for CSOs in light of the COVID 19 pandemic and to support the more effective monitoring & implementation of the 2030 Agenda

- Many of the 2020 VNRs mention that **the COVID pandemic** has affected national implementation of the SDGs but do not describe the precise impacts.
- It is important that the UN MS report on the **actions that have been taken to address the pandemic** at a national level and to reduce its negative impacts on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- As the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a **massive shift towards the digitalization of work** in most countries, measures to support the digital capacity building of civil society and other stakeholders must be addressed.

5

Innovative approaches must be adopted to source funding for the capacity - building of CSOs & other stakeholders

- It will be necessary to **examine national and subnational budgets** to ensure that resources are allocated for the capacity building of civil society and other stakeholders, linked to SDG monitoring and implementation. This may present challenges for governments as the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on national finances in many countries. Innovative sources of funding for SDG capacity building for different stakeholder groups should be considered, including a global fund linked to the operationalisation of SDG 17.

6

Women's leadership should be included in SDG-related capacity building frameworks

- Five years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the fight against **gender inequality** is still off-track. The Covid-19 pandemic has only increased gender disparities, jeopardizing the small progress made in the last 5 years. For instance, more women are on the Covid-19 frontline or work in sectors hit hard by the crisis. Moreover, there has been a severe escalation of violence against women.
- In order to build back from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that governments, civil society and other stakeholders **guarantee women's full, equal and meaningful participation in national recovery programmes.**
- Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, only 27 (57%) contain **gender disaggregated data.** The scarcity of such important data in VNRs submitted to the UN HLPF urgently needs to be addressed.
- The development of women's leadership should be a **central objective of SDG-related capacity building frameworks,** not only for those interested in politics but also female representatives of civil and marginalized women. These frameworks must include all kinds of capacity building, including digital training, to enable them to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

INTRODUCTION

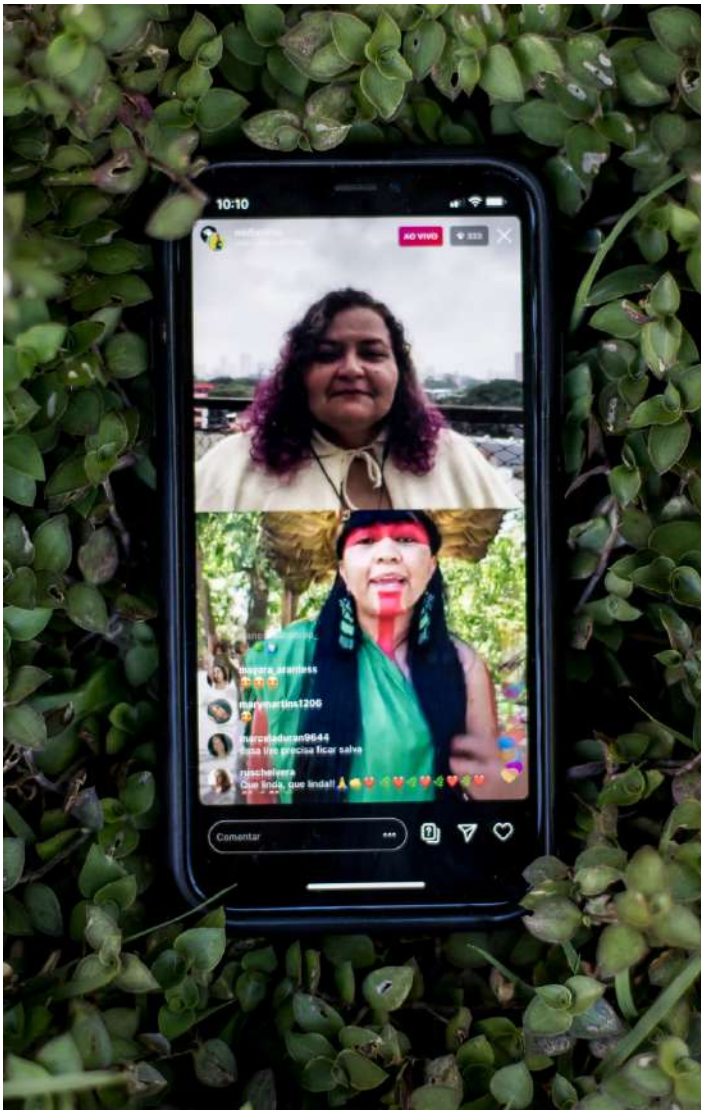
Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 calls for strengthening the means of implementation of the Agenda 2030. Achieving the ambitions of Agenda 2030 will require mobilising political will and deepening partnerships between government, the private sector and civil society. It will also require increasing international cooperation and improving coherence between policies and initiatives both domestically and internationally. SDG 17 addresses these needs and calls for actions to increase capacity for implementing the SDGs at all levels. As such, meeting the targets and ambitions of SDG 17 is absolutely essential to successfully advance the entire SDG agenda.

This report reviews and assesses the progress being made by UN Member States in achieving the capacity- building targets of SDG 17. It does so by analysing the relevant content of the VNRs (Voluntary National Reviews) presented by governments to the UN HLPF last year, in July 2020.

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 2020, 205 VNRs have been submitted by 168 governments to the HLPF and 45 more will be submitted in 2021.

In 2020, 47 VNRs were submitted, with 26 countries presenting their VNR for the first time. Since its inception, the HLPF peer review system has been used by governments as a means of monitoring & reporting on 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.



SDG 17 & the capacity building of stakeholders

Capacity building is fundamental for achieving the goals set by the 2030 Agenda. SDG 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 Building as an important means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Although civil society is not specifically mentioned in this regard, the need for enhanced capacity building for all stakeholder groups involved in the 2030 Agenda monitoring and implementation is explicitly recognised.

17.8

Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology.

17.9

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.

17.18

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.

17.19

By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries.

Differentiating capacity building from capacity development[11]

Capacity development commonly refers to the process of creating and building capacities and to their (subsequent) use, management and retention. It builds on and recognises existing capacity assets.

Capacity building commonly refers to a process that supports only the initial stages of building or creating capacities and is based on an assumption that there are no existing capacities to build from. It is therefore less comprehensive than capacity development. The OECD/DAC writes that *capacity building "suggests a process starting with a plain surface and involving the step-by-step erection of a new structure, based on a preconceived design. Experience suggests that capacity is not successfully enhanced in this way."* Capacity building can be relevant to crisis or immediate post-conflict situations where existing capacity has largely been lost due to capacity destruction or capacity flight.[12]

The role Civil Society Organizations in the monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda assigns a key role to civil society in monitoring and supporting implementation at all levels, as part of a renewed "Global Partnership".

Civil society fulfils a watchdog role, ensuring respect for democratic values, universal human rights and the transparency of the process. Civil society plays a critically important role as an active advocate and "transmitter" of new ideas and values at many different levels. Ensuring greater capacity building for CSOs means that they can play an important role in SDG-related policy and decision-making working with governments, international institutions and other relevant actors to achieve the ambitious goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

> One third of the way into our SDG journey, the world is not on track to achieve the global Goals by 2030. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been uneven and more focused attention was needed in most areas. The pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation towards many of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress.
>
> *- Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs* [13]

The Covid-19 pandemic has jeopardized the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, whose implementation has slowed since the onset of the pandemic. For instance, the 2020 reporting countries expressed "concern that the pandemic will adversely impact progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including the SDGs and disrupt their development efforts in the short term".[14] Moreover, the pandemic has disrupted the collection of data necessary to monitor progress on the SDGs, as governments are focusing their efforts on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and to the economic consequences that followed.[15] Current trends suggest that governments are prioritizing short-term solutions to the economic crisis, solutions which do not necessarily take into account the SDGs.[16]

Last year, many key international SDG-related meetings, where key decisions were being made, had to be cancelled or postponed. Other important international meetings were organised digitally. While digital meetings have many advantages, they also present challenges including the difficulties for civil society of trying to influence governments virtually, in the absence of a physical presence. Moreover, virtual meetings often offer a very passive form of participation to many participants, including CSOs.

Given these developments it is clear that capacity building linked to digitalization has never been so urgent. In fact, some governments have taken advantage of digitalization to exclude civil society representatives and other stakeholders from monitoring and decision-making processes. For some actors the digital space has become a space of exclusion, particularly for those lacking the digital means to conduct their work online.

An analysis of the capacity building content of 2020 VNRs

Forus has carried out an analysis of the 2020 VNRs submitted by UN MS to the HLPF in order to determine how capacity building is being implemented by national governments and exactly whom it benefits. This analysis draws on the raw consolidated data and findings of the fifth edition of the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report (2020), led by Cooperation Canada.

The methodology on which this analysis is based included gathering all data & information on capacity building from the 2020 VNRs, understanding and categorizing the different types of capacity building mentioned and the target groups, analysing and developing conclusions on the capacity building efforts of governments as reflected by their VNRs and formulating recommendations for the future.

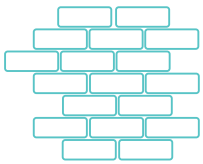
CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 2020

General findings

Of the 47 VNRs presented to the UN HLPF by governments in 2020, 8 did not mention capacity building. This represents an improvement on the 2019 figures which indicated that one third of governments presenting their VNRs did not mention capacity building.

As noted in previous years, capacity building is used as an all-encompassing term to describe everything from education to vocational training in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by governments between the years 2017 – 2020.

Of the 39 VNRs which did mention capacity building, 25 highlighted specific gaps linked to SDG implementation. These gaps are related to areas such as digitalization, education, gender equality, LNOB, data collection, etc.



Although a majority of VNRs highlight the key role of CSOs for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, no evidence was provided in the VNRs submitted in 2020 that any of the Governments are adopting systematic and continuous approaches to the capacity building of Civil Society linked to the SDGs.

Case Study Box: Kenya's VNR, pp.84-85
Kenyan CSOs contribute directly to the implementation of the SDGs.

Kenyan CSOs contribute directly to the implementation of the SDGs. They provide direct services to vulnerable populations, support skills development through capacity building and training, and provide microfinance services for economic empowerment. CSOs also carry out policy advocacy and awareness creation to support implementation of the SDGs. One such example is the Reality of Aid Africa Network (RoA Africa) which researches and presents comprehensive reports on effectiveness of aid in Africa. [...] In 2018, it assessed the level of preparedness for the Busan Agenda among Youth and Child Rights CSOs for Kenya and three other African countries. Using regional and international platforms, such as the Second - High Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation, RoA Africa continues to champion a human rights-based, social and environmental justice approach towards South-South cooperation as well as the realisation of SDGs.

- Some countries, especially in the Global South, who have not put in place the means for capacity building, do however identify it as a major challenge and insist on global cooperation in this regard. The elaboration of a VNR appears in some instances to be the first occasion for particular countries to include CSOs in a multi-stakeholder consultative process.

Case Study Box : North Macedonia VNR 2020, page 46
Empowering marginalized groups in North Macedonia through capacity building.

"Face to Face" is a program run by the CSO Public Association for Research, Communications, and Development in North Macedonia. The program's mission is two-fold: contributing to socio-economic empowerment for marginalized groups (youth from the street, homeless people, persons with disabilities, and people in social risk), and educating the public on topics related to the SDGs. Since 2012, the program publishes the "Face to Face" bimonthly street magazine, an open platform for collaboration, co-creation, multi-stakeholder partnerships, progress, and knowledge activation among social stakeholders as communities, civil society, public institutions, and the business sector. Since the 2030 Agenda adoption, each magazine issue focuses on one SDG and, in early 2019, the publication was rebranded to "Magazine on Sustainable Development."

Different roles of low, middle and high-income countries linked to capacity building

- Lower-income countries appear to be targets or beneficiaries of capacity building in the context of international cooperation. Middle-income countries appear to function both as funders/supporters of capacity building and also as beneficiaries/ targets. High-income countries tend to be providers of capacity building for overseas partners.
- A clear lack of reciprocity appears to characterise the approach to international capacity building cooperation, which is mostly considered as a unilateral process initiated by high income countries.
- To compensate for this, there may be scope to promote SDG capacity building linked to South-South cooperation and Triangular cooperation frameworks. Some Global South countries are both donors and recipients and may partner effectively as they have similar backgrounds and experiences.

Covid 19 reporting identified as a major challenge to the implementation of the Agenda 2030

- Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, 39 (or 83%) include Covid-19 reporting. In most cases, a whole chapter is dedicated to this topic, as Covid-19 has been identified by 35 of the presenting governments as a major challenge to the implementation of the Agenda 2030.
- While the 2020 VNR reports highlight the impacts of the pandemic linked to the principle of “leaving no one behind” and mention efforts to address COVID-19 through the lens of specific SDGs, such as SDG 1,2,3,4,5 & 10, only 25 VNRs (53%) provide information on how COVID-19 affected the engagement of stakeholders in VNR processes. In some cases, the reports highlight positive stakeholder reactions to COVID-19, resulting in more engagement on the part of civil society.

Case Study Box : Panama 2020 VNR, pp. 28-31 Panama launches health response programs following Covid.

Faced with Covid-19, Panama launched four large health response programs: 1. Individual Notification of Obtained Negative Cases (NICO); 2. Automatic Health Operational Response (ROSA); 3. Updated Protection of Cases under Observation (PACO); 4. Relief Attention and Response System (SARA) The Panama Savings Fund assets were used, as an urgent measure, to mitigate and make the fiscal deficit more flexible. Other regulations and actions focused on job preservation, access to economic resources for the most affected sectors, basic product consumption rationalization, the supply of agricultural products, food, and health articles. Measures were taken to strengthen the health system and to support the virtualization of education.

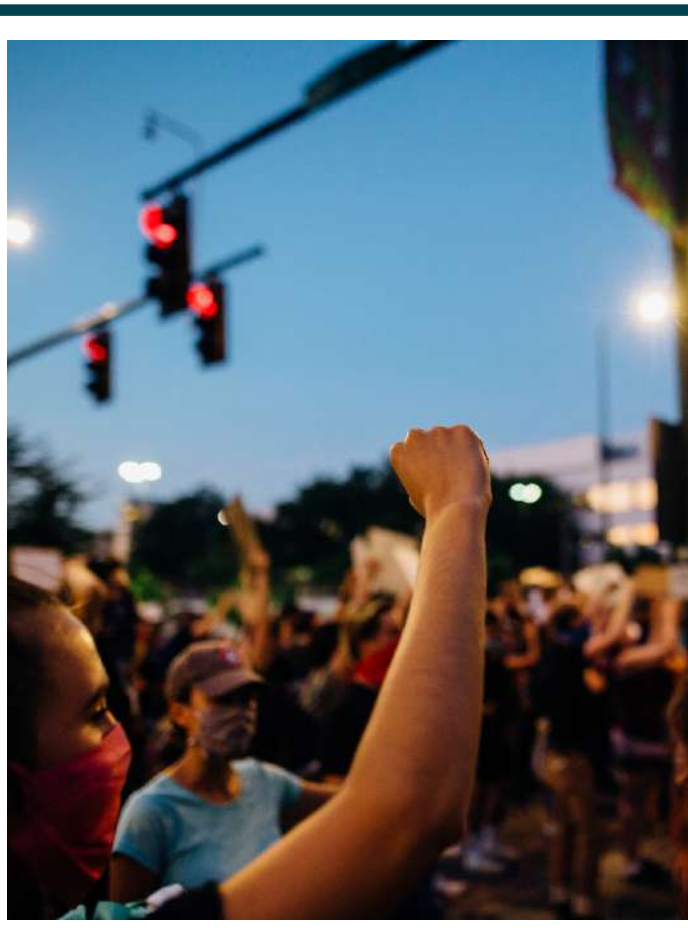
- While the role played by the civil society is mentioned, in most cases the 2020 VNRs do not provide specific information on how Covid-19 has impacted their national priorities, how it has affected the capacity building of key stakeholders such as the civil society and how the state is intervening to provide capacity building measures aimed at civil society.
- Due to Covid-19, the implementation of SDGs is being jeopardized as most governments are currently prioritizing short-term solutions to the economic crisis; solutions which don't take into account the 2030 Agenda.

Case Study box: India 2020 VNR report, p. 138 India creates a regional information exchange program.

India has utilized its strengths in the digital and information technology space to develop a 'South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) COVID-19 Information Exchange Platform (COINEX) for use by all SAARC countries. India has activated its e-ITEC network to deliver medical expertise content for training of healthcare personnel to countries in the neighbourhood.

Digitalization identified as a challenge/priority

- Ten countries presenting their VNRs in 2020 did not mention technological means for the implementation of the Agenda. On the other hand, 20 VNRs mentioned digital & internet access as a priority in their planning. However, few gave examples of the measures being put in place in this domain.
- Some countries, such as Gambia or Finland, identified digitalization as a challenge and a major gap to overcome, especially in relation to the inclusion of marginalized population groups to these services.
- Low-income countries which identified digitalization as a priority to achieve the SDGs, were not able to put in place their planned projects linked to this domain. They identify digitalization as a significant gap that has opened with countries of the Global North, calling for cooperation "to not be left behind" in the data revolution and report that they still use data and technology that is"out of date".
- Inevitably, Covid-19 had an accelerating effect in digitalization, as many civil society actors, state institutions, etc, had to quickly adapt to a digital working culture. However, this situation has also revealed the big disparities between the Global North and Global South, and between the levels of digital access & digital capacities of privileged and marginalized sectors of society. Capacity building has been crucial to close those gaps and many programs aimed at increasing digital capacities were created. Nevertheless, it has been observed that digital adaptation efforts mainly targeted institutional structures and did not include civil society.



Case Study Box: Austria VNR report 2020 Austria aims to Leave No One Behind in the digital transformation.

The 'fit4internet' initiative, launched in Austria in 2018, aimed to implement the principle of 'leaving no one behind' related to the digital transformation, thereby helping to fight poverty, promote education and reduce inequalities.

Women's leadership

- Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, only 27 contain gender disaggregated data to leave no one behind. The other VNRs rarely made any reference to this issue or provided unclear data.
- Measures promoting the "empowerment" of women are often mentioned but details about these measures are programs are rarely specified.

Case Study Box : Democratic Republic of Congo VNR 2020, p.33 The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) promotes gender equality.

The government of the DRC reported in its 2020 VNR that realising gender equality is a priority for it. Reforms of the legal framework relating to women's rights have been carried out, leading in particular to the revision of the Family Code. However, efforts still need to be made, particularly to eliminate certain cultural burdens likely to reverse progress p.xi; The Law on the implementation of women's rights and parity adopted in 2015 recommends the establishment of specific programmes to encourage parity between girls and boys in schooling; The proportion of women in the Parliament increased from 9.7% in 2014 to 14.3% in 2019, with the election of a woman as President of the National Assembly. p.xvi; The government launched the construction of multifunctional women's centres to facilitate the empowerment of rural women. This framework contributes, in particular, to strengthening the administrative, technical and financial capacities of rural women to participate in the development of their households.

- Measures to fight against gender-based inequalities include laws to protect women, sex education programs, the inclusion of women in government decision-making through the use of quotas, access to microcredits, etc. However, capacities building programs are rarely mentioned and when they are, they often only refer to financial education to access credits or training women politicians. In other words, those programs are not directly linked to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Case Study Box : Moldova 2020 VNR, p. 56

Moldova promotes balanced gender participation in decision-making processes.

The 'Women in Politics' programme implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women ensured a higher participation rate for women from disadvantaged groups in Moldova. Women running in local and parliamentary elections participated in political empowerment training. Within the programmes, 39 Roma women and 43 women with disabilities were encouraged to run for election. As a result: six women with disabilities and seven Roma women were elected to local councils. At the Women's Leadership Academy (Women 4 Leadership), 120 women were trained, of whom 86 were registered in the electoral process. Within the 'Balanced participation in the decision-making process' project (Gender-Centre, Women's Political Club 50/50 with the support of UN Women Moldova/ Sweden), 640 out of 1,676 participants in the electoral preparation stood for election and 288 were elected (50 mayors and 238 councillors).

FORUS PROJECTS FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 2030

Forus is a global network of 68 national CSO platforms and 7 regional coalitions which promotes and supports civil society actors worldwide. In particular, Forus supports its members by sub-granting contributions to them, which are an indirect financial contribution intended to help to achieve an objective of Forus' overall grant contracts.

These sub-grants cover:

- The capacity development of communities via local grassroots CSOs,
- Supporting peer learning & sharing of good practices,
- Advocacy activities towards relevant national and regional authorities, linked to the Agenda 2030 and Forus' work on an enabling environment for CSOs,
- Research & action research in countries to identify conflict-sensitive environments, adaptation strategies and climate-sensitive conflict prevention strategies; among others.

Forus members all over the globe are engaged in the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Forus has supported many of its members' efforts in this area using its sub-grant scheme. The programs that have been financed using the grant scheme include the strengthening of strategic sectors of civil society, building alliances for monitoring and coordinating Agenda 2030 advocacy actions, information programs about the SDGs, the creation of ownership of the 2030 Agenda amongst civil society and the creation and strengthening of multi-stakeholder frameworks; etc.

Forus supports the capacity building of its Senegalese National Platform linked to the 2018 VNRs (December 2017 - June 2018).

The Conseil des ONG d'Appui au Développement (CONGAD) applied to Forus for funding for a capacity building project to support the participation of CSOs in the Senegalese National Voluntary Review on the state of implementation of the SDGs in Senegal scheduled for 2018.

Priority area for capacity development: Advocacy and Partnerships

In the framework of Senegal's presentation of a VNR on the HLPF 2018, CONGAD's goal was to ensure that CSOs could effectively participate in this process, have the necessary support to monitor it and that they were able to structure their contribution in a shadow report. This was implemented through:

- the organization of a national workshop for sharing, building ownership and understanding of CSOs' national SDG indicators;
- the organization of decentralized consultations;
- the organization of a validation workshop of the national civil society report on the Senegalese VNR;
- the finalization and submission of the contribution report of the CSOs to the Senegalese public authorities.

Forus structural support to support its members' digitalization in a changing Covid context

Additionally, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Forus launched a "structural support" process as an additional activity to respond to member requests. It provided small amounts of resources to support its members, with the goal of increasing their adaptability to work in a changing Covid context. These resources were mainly invested in IT equipment and digital support for civil society (for example, purchase of computers or softwares to support remote working, internet's cost coverage, etc) and/or contracting of a specific service for the platform (external consultants, etc). Over 30 members required and received this support. The structural support was available for non-OECD members and a lot of additional management work showing Forus' ability to adapt & support its members.

Forus Ivory Coast platform receives support to increase the digital capacities of its members.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many Forus' members had to quickly adapt to working digitally. Forus Ivory Coast platform, CSCI (Convention de la Société Civile Ivoirienne), requested Forus' structural support, to buy video-conference equipment. The aim was to ensure the effective digital participation of board members in attending board meetings and to reduce traveling costs to provinces.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The terms **"capacity building" and "capacity development"** in the 2020 VNRs submitted by governments to the HLPF are poorly defined and are used to describe activities ranging from formal education to women's empowerment to economic and productive activities. There is still no clear or widely accepted definition of capacity development/building for use in the VNRs..

2. **83 % of the 2020 VNRs mention capacity building**. However, most do not report on the progress made in this area, or compare it to previous years.

3. The capacity building of all stakeholders and the emergence of multi-stakeholder partnerships is essential for **successful outcomes on SDG implementation**. Support by governments for the capacity building of CSOs and other stakeholder groups in domestic contexts is not reflected in the VNRs submitted in 2020. Most VNRs mainly highlight the support given with regard to capacity building aimed at government institutions and public servants.

4. Despite highlighting the key role of CSOs in the implementation of the SDG, civil society is mostly **completely absent from capacity building efforts** at the national level.

5. High-income countries often highlight capacity building in the context of international cooperation frameworks without mentioning **capacity building in their domestic contexts**.

6. There is no reference to capacity building **initiatives taking place at the regional level** in the VNRs submitted in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

7. There are **no specific SDG indicators** for assessing the extent of capacity building 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 building initiatives at any level.

8 **The Covid-19 pandemic** has been identified by most reports as a major challenge to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. However, while the VNRs mention the measures put in place to contain the pandemic and its economic effect, they do not mention the actions taken to address the effects of the pandemic through the proactive implementation of the 2030 Agenda at national level.

9 **Digital capacity building initiatives** to ensure the participation of civil society and other stakeholders in the monitoring of the implementation of the agenda have not been put in place.

10 While most reports mention the necessity to **achieve gender equality**, little progress has been made in the area. Capacity building for the implementation of the Agenda, for instance in relation to digitalization and data collection, does not specifically target women.

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 **Systematic & continuous capacity building programmes** for civil society and other stakeholder groups linked to the 2030 Agenda should be developed and strengthened. Data collection and analysis as well as digitalization should be some of the key areas to be targeted by CSOs capacity building.

3 For high-income countries: VNRs should focus more on the **domestic implementation** of capacity development.

4 Capacity building should be integrated internationally into peer-learning processes, particularly linked to **South South and Triangular forms of cooperation** and not only as a North-South scheme of cooperation.

5 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 and partnerships.

6 The capacity development of CSOs should be financed from **a new Global Fund** linked to Goal 17 and its provisions on Multi-Stakeholder participation. This fund should provide financing for the capacity development of civil society and other stakeholder groups in High, Medium and Low-Income countries.

7 Capacity development needs should be determined by each stakeholder group, in order to **identify specific SDG** - related needs and challenges.

8 VNRs should report on actions that have been taken to **address the Covid-19 crisis** at national level and to reduce its negative impact in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

9 As the Covid-19 pandemic has **accelerated the digitalization of the working culture** of most countries, measures to support increasing the digital access & capacities of civil society and other stakeholders should be addressed.

10 It is also necessary to **examine national and subnational budgets** to ensure that resources are allocated for the capacity building of civil society and other stakeholders. As the Covid-19 pandemic has financially affected many CSOs and other non-profit organizations, additional sources of innovative finance for SDG-related capacity building should be identified.

11 **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 indicators which measure the financial resources dedicated to capacity development for civil society each year.

12 In order to **build back from the COVID-19 pandemic**, it is crucial that governments, civil society and other stakeholders guarantee women's full, equal and meaningful participation in overall recovery efforts and in the monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

13 **Women should be included** in capacity building frameworks which enable them to participate in multi-stakeholder engagement frameworks to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

FOOTNOTES

Footnotes

1. The figures used in this report are based on raw data that formed part of the findings of the fifth edition of the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report (2020), led by Cooperation Canada and in which Forus is a Steering Group member.

2. Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, only 10 had a Civil Society Report, 16 mention the presence of CSOs in lead councils/committees, and 13 in technical working groups but without decision making capacity.

3. Capacity-building is important for sourcing and managing ODA. Kenya has embraced devolved systems of governance, which gives the sub-national governments a mandate to directly source ODA from development partners. This will necessitate capacity building for effectiveness. Therefore, development cooperation should consider sustainable capacity building components as part of the assistance they provide to Governments. (see Kenya VNR 2020, p. 85)

4. The Kenyan government's VNR reports that the development co-operation landscape is changing and there is no longer a bipartisan agenda between governments and development partners only, but the development agenda dialogue is becoming more inclusive and multi-stakeholder in nature (...)
This needs to be done through more integrated, accountable and transparent approaches to development through inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues. (Kenya 2020 VNR, p. 85)

5. The NGO Affairs Bureau in collaboration with Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh (a platform which includes more than a hundred organisations from across the country working on SDGs) held a conference entitled "The role of NGOs in the implementation of SDGs in Bangladesh" on May 18, 2017. This was followed by the formulation of an 'NGO's SDG Action Plan'. The Plan set out to map all the activities and contributions of NGOs related to the SDGs irrespective of their source of funds". (Bangladesh VNR 2020, p. 162)

6. The Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy developed an inclusive process of meetings with various stakeholders, thematic workshops and regional consultations. SLOGA was the one facilitating the workshops, aimed to reflect upon the SDG indicators. The workshops provided a forum for exchange among various actors with participants identifying the need for a more structured and regular dialogue on sustainable development. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Slovenia (March 2020), only half of the regional workshops have been implemented (Slovenia VNR 2020).

7. The Kyrgyz Republic's VNR recognizes digitalization and development of information and communication technologies as "key factors and catalysts for accelerating and promoting sustainable development and the timely achievement of all the SDGs," and notes that a "full-scale application of digital technology advancements is a key element of current policies and is stressed throughout all the national priorities." (The Kyrgyz Republic VNR, p. 78)

8. However, as a country, due to resource constraints Uganda still relies on data that are out of date, with too many people missing from the numbers collected. We need more timely and relevant data to achieve the SDGs, and to make the best use of the various forms of data around us. In order not to be left behind in the data revolution, we need to build a strong culture of data consumption and production, working with all relevant partners across the world. (Uganda VNR 2020, p. 83)

9. The Gambian VNR report indicated the progress made in the area of access to ICT, including mobile Internet access. The Government is leveraging improvements in ICT to enhance access to services, including e-Government. Through the use of technology, Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) has strengthened and improved revenue mobilization. (Gambia VNR 2020, p. 55)

10. For example, in Moldova 2020 VNR it is quoted that: 'Women in Politics' programme implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women ensured a higher participation rate for women from disadvantaged groups. Women running in local and parliamentary elections participated in political empowerment training. Within the programmes, 39 Roma women and 43 women with disabilities were encouraged to run for election. As a result: six women with disabilities and seven Roma women were elected to local councils.

11. Forus uses the term "capacity development" in its institutional communications. However, Forus recognizes the use of the term "capacity building", which we will prioritize in the present report as it is the term used in Goal 17 targets.

12. Frequently Asked Questions: The UNDP Approach to Supporting Capacity Development, Capacity Development Group Bureau for Development Policy United Nations Development Programme, June 2009.

13. Liu Zhenmin, "Finding transformative pathways in turbulent times", In: United Nations, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, UN DESA, p. 3.

14. UN DESA, 2020 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report.

15. Ibid.

16. OECD, Building a coherent response to a sustainable post-Covid-19 recovery, 23 November 2020.

17. Please, see the consolidated data of the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report 2020, led by Cooperation Canada here.

18. Fifth edition of the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report (2020), produced by Cooperation Canada.

19. Of the 47 VNRs presented in 2020, only 10 had a Civil Society Report.Of the 47 VNRs submitted in 2020, 16 mention the presence of CSOs in lead councils/committees, and 13 in technical working groups but without decision making capacity.

20. See the Reality of Aid Africa website here: https://www.roaafrica.org/

21. Learn more about the North Macedonian "Face to Face" program here.

22. Please, see the consolidated data of the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report 2020, led by Cooperation Canada here.

23. See Panama 2020 VNR here (in Spanish).

24. See SAARC page here: https://www.saarc-sec.org/

25. See SAARC-COINEX page here: https://saarc-coinex.org/saarc/mainhomepage

26. Uganda VNR report indicates that "due to resource constraints Uganda still relies on data that are out of date, with too many people missing from the numbers collected. We need more timely and relevant data to achieve the SDGs, and to make the best use of the various forms of data around us. In order not to be left behind in the data revolution, we need to build a strong culture of data consumption and production, working with all relevant partners across the world". (Uganda 2020 VNR, p. 83)

27. See "fit4internet" page here: https://www.fit4internet.at/

28. See DRC 2020 VNR report here (in French).

29. Learn more about Moldova's Women 4 Leadership Academy here.

30. Forus, Developing the capacities of civil society for a successful implementation of the 2030 agenda, 2 August 2018.

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Forus, previously known as the International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP/FIP), is a member-led network of 68 National NGO Platforms and 7 Regional Coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environmental issues.

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