VNRs & Country-led Evaluations – how they work together

According to paragraph 74 (g) of the 2030 Agenda and the reporting guidelines for the VNRs, the VNRs should be “rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations”.

**Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** provide the tools for the follow-up and review framework for Agenda 2030. They are based on monitoring data and answer questions about what and how much has been achieved.

By providing credible evidence **Country-led evaluations (CLEs)** are fundamental for conducting high-quality VNRs. CLEs inform, complement and enrich the VNRs, provide deeper analysis explaining the progress (or lack thereof) on certain SDGs and generate lessons on what needs to change in order to achieve the SDGs. CLEs therefore better serve evidence-based national SD policy and programmes, advocacy and decision-making.

**BOTH** VNRs and CLEs are necessary for the follow up and review of Agenda 2030.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VNRs</th>
<th>Country-led Evaluations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure and report on <strong>national progress</strong> towards achieving the SDGs</td>
<td>Explain the targets and progress and support decisions, by addressing the complexity of the SDGs and their achievement, in relation to national policies and programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track ongoing progress in <strong>programme implementation</strong>, in <strong>outputs</strong> and in <strong>outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Make use of VNR monitoring data but is primarily concerned with how well implementation, outputs and development outcomes were achieved, as well as with determining long-term development impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on <strong>indicators against targets</strong></td>
<td>Examine and help answer “why” targets are achieved (or not achieved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driven by <strong>accountability</strong> to achieve the SDG targets</td>
<td>Driven by <strong>evaluative thinking</strong> and hence balance accountability with learning aspects to inform policy choices and influence programmes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Engage a variety of stakeholders at all levels

“Country-led evaluations answer the **WHY** questions while VNRs answer the **WHAT** and **HOW much** questions”
There are more than one pathway for Member States to conduct Country-led Evaluations of the SDGs. The scope can include all 17 SDGs or a strategic selection of SDGs. They can be primary evaluations or syntheses of evidence from past evaluations of relevant national policies, strategies programmes and projects. Such syntheses may also include evidence from evaluations by other actors within a country’s evidence ecosystem where considered relevant to specific SDGs and to the VNR.

**Pathway 1: Evaluate all SDGs**
- Initial engagement, negotiations & decisions
- Prepare for evaluation of all 17 SDGs
- Conduct the evaluation
- Integrate Evidence to directly feed into VNRs

The Finland evaluation of the SDGs was completed within six months (29 August 2018 and 28 February 2019). In country contexts where national capacities are constrained, consideration of the role of partners would be critical.

**Pathway 2: Evaluate selected SDGs**
- Initial engagement, negotiations & decisions
- Prepare for evaluation of selected SDGs
- Conduct the evaluation
- Integrate Evidence to directly feed into VNRs

A country can evaluate SDGs for which evidence is critical to inform VNRs but also inform national policies and programmes. Nigeria has evaluated SDG 1, 3 & 4, while Costa Rica has evaluated SDG 13.

**Pathway 3: Evaluate some SDGs; and consolidate existing evidence for the others**
- Initial engagement, negotiations, decisions and selection of SDGs
- Prepare for primary evaluation
- Conduct primary evaluation
- Prepare for synthesis evaluation
- Conduct synthesis evaluation
- Integrate Evidence to directly feed into VNRs

Most countries will have sources of evidence that if reviewed and consolidated could inform VNRs in a transparent, participatory and credible way. For example, national governments through their M&E systems and line ministries may have elements of some SDGs evaluated, while other actors including research communities, universities, development partners, or VOPES may have other evaluations of interest.

**Pathway 4: Not conducting an evaluation, only consolidating existing evidence of all SDGs**
- Initial engagement, negotiations & decisions
- Select existing evidence from evaluations
- Conduct synthesis evaluation
- Integrate Evidence to directly feed into VNRs

UNICEF provided support to OSSAP-SDGs Nigeria to complete a synthesis of 40 existing evaluations covering different SDGs. The evidence from multiple evaluations were used to strengthen the Nigeria VNR Report 2020.