Meeting 6th progressing Report Launch Event

- Wednesday 23th February 2022 14:00 - 15:30 GMT -

Link to the video recording : www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrXneLEwKPU

Welcoming and opening Remarks

- The aim of the report is to look back at the VNRs presented, to indicate the state of SDGs implementation at national level, to showcase good practices, peer learning and accountability at global level.
- 6th time this report has been produced, to improve SDG implementation at national level
- There are Improvements in the connection between regional and national levels regarding SDG implementation
  - Other trends are going in the wrong direction, especially the decrease of engagement of non-state actors regarding SDG implementation. Some key gaps, especially IT, are unacceptable.
  - The pace to achieve the SDGs is not fast enough, This is not a fatality. We have seen progress in some areas, but there is a need to accelerate the SDG implementation. The UN HLPF should be a forum to showcase and identify "champions" of SDG implementation.

Cooperation Canada opening remarks

- Cooperation Canada has been responsible for the annual publication of this report for 5 years. It is the last time the report will be edited by Cooperation Canada. After that, A4SD will produce this report starting next year.
- The report grew to include many new partners, additional analysis and good practices. We recently added a policy brief on key concerns for CSOs and international institutions (including a Policy Brief of Civic Space and another on COVID 19 & LNOB in 2022).
- Cooperation Canada works closely with UN DESA. We also participate as experts in the HLPF pre-discussions.
- This report recognises the value of a multistakeholder approach, recognizing the important inputs of all stakeholders to SDG implementation.

Progressing National SDG implementation findings in 2021-2022 report

- The Progressing Report report is divided into 4 chapters. each one related to a key issue

10 key messages from this report:

1. In terms of a whole-of-society approach, fewer countries reported on the inclusion of nonstate actors in governance arrangements for implementation than in previous years. Although more countries referred to formal processes for stakeholder engagement, there has been backsliding in reporting on non-state actors' engagement in the VNR process, consultations to define national priorities, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on stakeholder engagement

2. The VNR reports continue to be silent on shrinking civic space globally and ongoing attacks on human rights defenders

3. Fewer countries reported conducting baseline and gap assessments, selecting national priorities, integrating the SDGs into national policies, and selecting national targets and indicators to inform SDGs implementation. Repeat reporters should still provide information on these matters and comply with the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines.

4. There have been improvements in 2021 VNR reports' attention to the transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda (i.e. human rights, universality, leaving no one behind, planetary boundaries, intergenerational responsibility). However, backsliding was observed in relation to SDGs reporting.

5. Reporting on linkages between the 2030 Agenda and relevant international agreements showed mixed results, with most countries pointing to climate-related commitments but having a limited focus on agreements for delivery of effective international assistance. More VNR reports revealed an analysis of both domestic and foreign policies on the realization of the SDGs globally, even if fewer countries focused on policy coherence for sustainable development as a guiding framework for 2030 Agenda implementation.

6. There has been a positive trend in reporting on leaving no one behind, with increases around the identification of left-behind groups, the incorporation of the LNOB principle in national policies and plans, and the impacts of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable. However, challenges remain in terms of data availability, and level of detail and quality of information provided around LNOB

7. More countries reported on non-state actors' contributions towards 2030 Agenda implementation, with a continuous positive trend in terms of recognizing civil society's role.

8. Countries continue to consistently provide information on most aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation. However, backslides have been observed on awareness-raising activities and budgeting.

9. A downward trend is emerging in terms of countries providing information on data availability, and fewer countries reported on the use of unofficial data to complement information for VNR reports than in previous years. Similarly, fewer countries reported on national, regional, and global follow-up and review processes.

10. There have been declines in terms of reporting on most components of the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines compared with previous years. However, on the areas for which countries did report, most included all the information required

First Roundtable discussion : SDG implementation :

- **UNDCO**
  - is supporting 131 resident coordinators in UN offices across the globe. VNR has become a very important instrument process for us. The UN is ready and willing to work with civil society regarding SDG implementation issues. The reform has started in that regard, bringing the UN agencies to work as a single development actor. We have development plans (5 years plans). In the process of those plans, we see several opportunities for CSO engagement, even for CSO to bring a critical voice. The UN has maybe not communicated enough around this process.
  - 1st session is the "common country analysis" (related to the UN Cooperation Framework) → an internal UN analysis on the issues of Agenda 2030 and SDG national implementation. This is an important moment for CSO to have access to this information to understand the government's commitments to the UN.
- **Dominican Republic government**
  - The Dominican Republic has already submitted 2 ENVs, one in 2018 and one last year. The fundamental axes of the national development strategy include civil society, academia, private actors or the government. The ENV has a participatory strategy with all these different actors. Six consultations with these different actors were organized to prepare the ENV. The 2021 report had 9 priority SDGs in that edition of the HLPF (Dominican Republic added water, means of implementation, integration of SDGs into national planning).
- **DG INTPA, European Commission**
  - The EU is committed to SDG implementation, internally and externally. They have been developing key initiatives such as the Green New Deal after Covid. Europe has a key commitment to SDG implementation. Another step was the revision of our rules, with a better regulation framework. On the external side since 2017 there is a new European commitment related to external assistance based on SDG implementation. Unfortunately, Covid 19 has slowed down the implementation of the2030 Agenda . We have really integrated SDG in our tools, to report on SDG or for example a new financial instrument based on SDGs. We also created an electronic toolnow available to stakeholders. We mobilized more funds for cooperation, we achieved an increase in ODA.
  - It is still under discussion, but the EU wants to create a "European VNR". This is new and still needs work, but hopefully this will be presented to UN HLPF in 2023

- **Can you talk about the work of the UNDCO on the 2030 Agenda?**
  - **UNDCO** → the process of UN reform is ongoing since 2018, with a new development coordinator. There are 5 core staff members responsible for issues of policy analysis, partnerships, financial support or data. Delivery of the 2030 Agenda and SDG commitments are the first priority of the UN at national level. There is a new cooperation framework between the UN and governments.Covid response and UN call for vaccine availability is a good example of UN and governments working together. It is important for CSOs to monitor the work of the UN and countries. CSOs can push for the implementation of new commitments at national levels. CSO should step in to establish new SDG priorities and should be more involved in SDG related commitments.

- **Can you speak on the experience in the country about the VNR process?**
  - **Dominican Republic government** → We have presented a VNR twice now. 24 institutional representatives + 4 civil society organizations took part in the VNR preparation process. We invited more CSO actors in the Working Groups preparing the VNR. The inputs of CSOs were really useful, allowing the process to have multi-stakeholder points of view. CSOs have their own interests. Horizontal participation of all the stakeholders is essential.

- **Can you speak about how the EU is implementing the SDGs in its approach to policy making and how it promotes SDGs in international partnerships?**
  - **DG INTPA**→ climate is a key message from the EU. At the end of November the European Commission adopted a Better Regulation Toolbox, (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/br_toolbox-nov_2021_en_0.pdf). In order to include SDGs in all laws and rules from the EU, it is quite new (revision of the better recognition framework). We launched one big initiative during the AU-EU (African Union - European Union) Summit to enhance vaccine and medicine capacity in Africa. We will support UN DESA to have a webinar in Botswana about SDG implementation. BOCONGO (NGO/CSO platform in Botswana and Forus member) asked to be more involved with this process.

II/ Second Roundtable discussion : Civic space, LNOB and Covid-19

- **Forus has developed a Policy Brief on Civic Space**

- ○ Key findings on civic space linked to the 2021 VNRs are that **(i)** the involvement of non-state actors, including civil society, in SDG implementation is essential for successful implementation Many CSOs report significant barriers and closing civic space **(ii)** the 2021 VNRs, similar to previous years, have remained silent on issues of shrinking civil space (only Norway's VNR mentions it). Civic space in 62% of the countries presenting VNRs in 2021 was restricted or closed **(iii)** CSO Parallel or Shadow Reports provide good examples and information about how civil space has been closing in specific countries. These CSOI Parallel reports give a wider perspective but have no official status or role within the UN HLPF; review process.
  - ○ The Policy Brief makes **6 key recommendation**s aimed at the international community :
    - ■ Agree the annual review of SDG 16 by the UN HLPF
    - ■ Establish a new Global Civic Space Observatory
    - ■ Develop a new SDG 17 indicator to measure multi stakeholder engagement in SDG implementation
    - ■ Provide flexible funding to support the operation of CSOs in contexts of closed or closing civic space
    - ■ Include assessment of civic space in investor risk- assessment approaches
    - ■ Adopt new structural and process-oriented civic space indicators linked to monitoring of SDG 16 Target 16.10

- T**he Policy Brief makes 3 key recommendations aimed at national governments:**
  - Create national legal, regulatory and policy frameworks for multi-stakeholder engagement
  - Report on civic space issues in VNRs submitted to UN HLPF
  - Engage in peer exchange with other governments to share good practice on civic space issues

- ● **ActionAid (Policy Brief on LNOB and Covid-19)**
  - ○ The last VNR report in 2022 was during Coid. Lots of discussion on how the government is including civil society in those processes. Data is a big problem for us, as it is mainly government created data. Vaccine issues are an important topic also. We have seen more gender violence over the past year.

- ● **DG INTPA - European Commission**

- We see CSOs as independent development actors. We have 3 priorities:
  - strengthen the Enabling Environment for civil society
  - support participation of civil society in decision making
  - support CSOs in their ability to influence and as parties in development cooperation
- Those priorities are recommended by the OECD DAC or in its new framework.
- The EU Commission has its own development program. It is predictable and long-term (7 years). For 2021 to 2027 there is a development cooperation program between the EU and the other continents (75 percent of the funds are allocated at country level) (25 percent of this funding is secured for thematic issues).CSO thematic programs represent 1.5 billions €.
- The aims of the program:are to go as local as possible, focus on women and youth and the 3 objectives mentioned before. At the glocal level, we will support umbrella organizations. We are trying to set up an engagement system for monitoring CSO action on civic space.
- The EU has created roadmaps for engagement for CSO at national level.
- How can we follow up on our funding? We are working on indicators to better monitor programs

Moderator: What is the most important thing we need to do now to address challenges linked to SDG implementation?

- **Forus**:
  - the most important thing for civil society to do is to highlight an Enabling Environment as a key area in development programs. CSO would need more EU fundings to achieve that. We need to think outside the box and work with other stakeholders (academics, private sectors,foundation.s etc)
  - We need to find common cause with other actors working on similar issues, in order to form partnerships (eg Philanthropy).
  - Lots of valuable work is being carried out by civil society to develop positive narratives in order to contribute to more positive public attitudes towards CSOs and therefore more enabling operating environments for CSOs.

- **ActionAid:**
  - We need to create our own accountability mechanisms (maybe a local review of SDGs). Finally we need to focus on developing civil society data to make the government accountable, with our own data.

- **DG INTPA - European Commission**
  - We are thinking about the issue of service delivery. We are looking to support civil society. It is important for advocacy and CSOs to fight for their space and democratic principles.

Closing Remarks

- **A4SD**
  - Wonderful to be gathered together to speak about SDGs. We note the reduction of civic space and the difficulties for CSOs worldwide.
  - From A4SD we have support from the Swiss government. Please, get in touch with us. There are opportunities for CSOs to participate in the Major Group and Other Stakeholder process to participate and prepare for the HLPF.