

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, universally adopted by all United Nations Member States, provided a visionary roadmap for nations and stakeholders to strive for equality, social inclusion, and a sustainable, prosperous world while conserving our planet and ensuring that no one is left behind. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the global pact urged Member States to conduct voluntary, regular, and inclusive reviews to assess progress at national (VNR) and sub-national levels (VLR), which were country-led and country-driven. These reviews served as a basis for the regular progress reviews by the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) that convened annually in July in New York.

Given that the Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a process through which countries assess and present national progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda, it was imperative that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) also mirrored the process and developed their own VNRs to assess the extent to which they contributed to the national process. Kenya was among the Member States that presented its third VNR in July 2024. Thus, through the leadership of the SDG Kenya Forum, the CSO process was initiated on January 31, 2024, with stakeholders being enhanced in their capacity to develop a VNR report. A follow-up virtual meeting was also held on February 21, 2024, on the same.

A roadmap was developed that informed the timelines for organizations to present their submissions to the Forum for compilation by March 31, 2024. Therefore, against this background, the SDG Kenya Forum, in collaboration with Open Institute, scheduled a three-day working/writing Workshop to review the progress made by CSOs, as well as provide an opportunity for technical experts to interface with the participants and enrich their submissions. The workshop was a writing workshop where organizations improved on the submissions they had developed as well as shared information, experiences, and best practices on VNR with their peers. The meeting was held from March 25 to 27, 2024, at Maanzoni Lodge, Machakos.

Objectives of the meeting were;

1. To assess the progress made by CSOs in developing submissions for the 2024 CSO VNR.
2. To build the capacity of Civil Society Organizations in the VNR reporting process.
3. To foster partnerships and collaborations among various stakeholders.
4. To facilitate peer-to-peer learning and sharing of ideas, experiences, and best practices in SDG reporting.

Expected Outcomes from the writing workshop were

1. Improved CSO VNR Zero Draft submissions.
2. Enhanced knowledge and skills for effective participation in the VNR process.
3. Strengthened partnerships and collaborations for advancing the SDGs.

In addition to the diverse stakeholders present at the writing workshop, HENNET was invited to participate in the discussions under Goal Group 3, with the lead being the International Center for Reproductive Health-Kenya (ICRH-K). HENNET's involvement stemmed from its prior role as the unbiased convener, bringing together various Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and providing support for the drafting of Goal Group 3.

Prior to the VNR writing workshop, HENNET had actively engaged in bringing CSOs, particularly in areas related to health aligning with the broader objectives of Goal Group 3. This collaborative effort not only strengthened the CSO network but also facilitated a cohesive approach towards achieving sustainable development targets in Kenya.

HENNET Timelines in the VNR writing Process

1. Inception Meeting (January 31st):

- The SDG Kenya Forum initiated the VNR2024 process with an Inception Meeting. During this stage, they laid the groundwork for the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process which was attended by HENNET
- The VNR process facilitated peer learning, allowing CSOs to share experiences and strengthen policies for SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) implementation.
- A key focus was on amplifying grassroots voices in the #CSOVNR process, recognizing that embracing citizen-generated data truly reflected community needs.

Why the VNR?

The VNR served several critical purposes:

1. It assessed progress, evaluating the implementation of SDGs since the last VNR in 2020.
2. It identified implementation challenges related to SDGs and proposed solutions.
3. It generated actionable recommendations to enhance SDGs implementation in the country.

2. Stage 2 (February 6th 2024):

On February 6, participants engaged in a discussion on Citizen-Generated Data (CGD) at The Forum. Their contributions shaped Kenyan CSOs' SDGs Community Dialogues, serving as a valuable source of qualitative data

3. Stage 3 (March 8th):

- On March 8, 2024, HENNET convened a CSO Forum for a sensitization session with the SDG Kenya Forum. The purpose was to understand what was expected of CSOs in the Health Sector regarding reporting on SDGs.
- This session aimed to equip CSOs with the necessary knowledge and guidelines for their active participation in the VNR process.

4. Stage 4 (VNR Writing):

- From March 25th to 27th, the VNR reporting took place at Maanzoni Lodge in Machakos. HENNET actively participated in this crucial stage.
- During this period, HENNET and other CSOs, such as ICRHK and Fred Hollows, focused on reporting specifically on SDG 3. Goal 3 aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-

being for all, at all ages. Health and well-being are essential at every stage of one's life, starting from the beginning.

5. Stage 5 (Validation Workshop) 29th – 30th May 2024

The Validation workshop was a writing workshop where organizations improved on the submissions they had developed when writing the VNR report on March 27th as well as shared information, experiences, and best practices on VNR with their peers. The meeting was held from May 29 to 31, 2024, at Maanzoni Lodge, Machakos.

6. Stage 6 (Kenya Launches her VNR report)

Kenya launched the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) Report on the 3rd of July 2024 at Movenpick Hotel, Westlands, Nairobi.

<https://sdgkenyaforum.org/vnr-2024>

7. Stage 7 – (2024 VNR Report)

- The 2024 VNR Report is scheduled to be tabled in New York during the Annual High-Level Political Meeting in July.
- Kenya has been rated as one of the leading countries in Africa for tracking the implementation of SDGs through the 1st and 2nd VNR Reports of 2017/2020.
- The 3rd VNR will be a significant milestone, further reinforcing Kenya's commitment to sustainable development.

Robert Papa, a VNR expert and consultant, highlighted several critical aspects related to CSOs and SDG implementation:

1. Role of CSOs in SDG Implementation

CSOs play a pivotal role in advancing the SDGs. Their contributions include:

- **Advocacy and Awareness Creation:** CSOs raise awareness about the SDGs and advocate for their integration into policies and programs.
- **Community Engagement:** CSOs actively involve local communities in SDG-related initiatives.
- **Capacity Building:** CSOs enhance the skills and knowledge of stakeholders to drive SDG progress.
- **Data Collection and Monitoring:** CSOs collect relevant data to assess progress and identify gaps.
- **Policy Analysis:** CSOs amplify the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups by analyzing policies and advocating for their inclusion.

2. Importance of CSO Engagement

Engaging CSOs yields several benefits:

- **Strengthening Implementation:** CSOs contribute to effective SDG implementation at the national level.

- **Progress Assessment:** CSOs evaluate the country's progress toward achieving the SDGs.
- **Data-Driven Insights:** CSOs provide evidence-based analyses using relevant data and indicators.
- **Inclusivity and Equity:** CSOs emphasize the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities and vulnerable groups.

3. Purpose of CSO VNR

The CSO VNR serves as a critical tool for:

- **Advocacy:** It advocates for SDG-related issues and holds stakeholders accountable.
- **Accountability:** It ensures transparency and tracks progress.
- **Fostering Dialogue:** It facilitates discussions among stakeholders involved in SDG implementation.
- **Actionable Recommendations:** The CSO VNR offers holistic recommendations for improving SDG outcomes.

4. Integration of SDG Dimensions and Leaving No One Behind

During the workshop, we discussed:

- **Integration of Dimensions:** How the SDGs intersect across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.
- **Leaving No One Behind:** Strategies to include vulnerable groups (such as women, children, and persons with disabilities) in SDG efforts.

5. Sustainability in Kenya's Development

We explored the three pillars of sustainability:

- **Socio-Cultural:** Balancing development with cultural preservation.
- **Economic:** Ensuring economic growth while considering social equity.
- **Natural Resources:** Managing resources sustainably for future generations.

6. Benefits of Action-Oriented VLRs

Action-oriented VLRs offer:

- **Strategic Planning and Policy Coherence:** VLRs serve as diagnostic tools, aiding government decision-making.
- **Multilevel Governance:** They promote dialogue and cooperation across governance levels.
- **International Positioning and Recognition:** Showcasing VLRs in international workshops enhances visibility and collaboration.

7. Markets for SDGs

- Poverty
- Hunger
- Sanitation

- Health
- Energy
- Inequality
- Environment

Kenya has so far developed & presented 2 Voluntary National Reports, in 2017 & 2020 & is expected to present the 3rd review in July 2024, during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York.

The programme of the HLPF 2024 will focus on the theme “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”.

The programme will include the thematic reviews of Sustainable Development Goals 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

The forum will address the special challenges faced by countries in special situations. It will explore the regional and local dimensions on effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions regarding the SDGs.