

NHRI·EU

ENGAGING WITH
THE VOLUNTARY
NATIONAL REVIEW
OF 2030 AGENDA
PROGRESS TO
PROMOTE HUMAN
RIGHTS

A GUIDE FOR NATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS



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GANHRI

Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions

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NATIONAL REVIEW OF 2030 AGENDA

PROGRESS TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS

A GUIDE FOR NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



1 SUMMARY OF GUIDANCE

Given the high convergence between the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and human rights frameworks, the Voluntary National Review (VNR) offers potential to promote human rights and advance their implementation. The VNR is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review framework, and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) have an important role to play in all steps of the review process, building on their core competencies and mandate.

The role of NHRIs in the VNR processes is recognised in the official United Nations guidance to VNR countries. NHRIs can play advisory, bridging, capacity-building, awareness-raising, accountability and oversight roles, as well as direct roles in monitoring and reporting as outlined in the Mérida Declaration.

This guide includes examples of NHRI involvement in VNR processes from across the globe. The VNR process can be divided up into steps, each of which offers entry points for NHRI engagement. The table below summarises the steps and examples of NHRI contributions, which are further expanded upon in the guide.

VNR STEPS	EXAMPLES OF NHRI CONTRIBUTIONS
Decision	Recommend and encourage the relevant state actors to undertake a VNR; request an overall plan for SDG follow-up and review as well as for stakeholder involvement.
Preparation	Participate (and if not invited, request to participate) in the planning; advice on how to design participatory, inclusive, transparent and accountable processes from a human rights perspective; contribute to the development of national indicators; advice on human rights-based approaches to data collection, human rights impact assessments of policies and budget and how to ensure synergies and coherence with human rights reporting processes.
Consultation process	Participate, share information, analysis, and advice; point to recommendations received from human rights mechanisms linked to the relevant SDGs and targets; develop capacity of and open the door to civil society representatives, human rights defenders and rights-holders for their effective participation.
Drafting & Validation	Contribute written input to the VNR report and/or contribute to or publish own stakeholder report with analysis of progress on selected or all SDGs, drawing on existing monitoring work; review draft and advice on how to improve the quality of the report from a human rights and accountability perspective.
Presentation at the HLPF	Engage with national (and other States' delegations), permanent UN missions and major groups suggesting relevant questions to pose to the VNR panel; participate in the HLPF – for example, co-organising side-events; conduct awareness-raising.
Follow-up	Follow up on gaps or opportunities identified in the VNR process; work with national statistical offices to help address data or indicator gaps; input to SDG action plans or national development plans; support alignment of monitoring frameworks; encourage institutionalised multi-stakeholder review mechanisms; ensure synergy with human rights reporting processes.

Key lessons from the initial years of NHRI involvement include a need to raise awareness with state actors about the role and value addition of NHRIs in relation to the 2030 Agenda to ensure their inclusion in VNR processes. It has been found that a permanent role in 2030 Agenda oversight structures facilitates effective participation by NHRIs, and that effective engagement builds on continuous data collection efforts and linking the human rights work of NHRIs to the 2030 Agenda.

2 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to provide inspiration for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) on how to engage with 2030 Agenda follow-up and review mechanisms and processes, particularly the Voluntary National Review (VNR). The VNR is the cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review framework and the foundation for reviews at regional and global levels.

The guide starts out with a brief outline of the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review mechanisms at the national, regional, and global levels. This is followed by the introductory section “Why Engage?”, which examines the potential of the VNR process from a human rights perspective. The subsequent and main section explores “How to Engage” in practice, based on the roles NHRIs can play at each step of the VNR process at the national and global level. The six sub-sections correspond to the steps in the VNR process and propose concrete actions NHRIs can take at each step. The guide includes specific examples of involvement by NHRIs in VNR processes across the globe, as illustrations of the different roles these institutions can play. The guide concludes with key lessons learned based on NHRI involvement in VNR processes.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW MECHANISMS

The 2030 Agenda outlines the framework for “follow-up and review” of the Agenda at the national, regional and global level (the 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1) § 71-91). The UN Secretary General “Voluntary common reporting guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF” and the UN DESA “Handbook for the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews” provide concrete guidance to VNR countries. The guidelines are regularly updated and can be found at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

NATIONAL LEVEL

The VNRs are the foundation for reviews at regional and global levels. As the name implies, the reviews are voluntary. Between 2016 and 2021, 176 countries submitted 248 VNRs, hence most countries have conducted at least one review.

While the submission of a VNR report and the country presentation at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) creates the occasion for a national SDG review, the value from an NHRI perspective lies in the national process leading up to the report submission. Comprehensive and inclusive reviews offer entry points for promoting human rights and advancing human rights implementation in the country.

SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL

An increasing number of cities and regions are developing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to report on 2030 Agenda implementation at the city or regional level. These local processes can also provide entry points for NHRIs to highlight human rights issues and linkages with the SDGs.

- NHRIs are explicitly mentioned as stakeholders in national reviews in the UN Secretary General Guidelines and the UN DESA Handbook for VNR countries.

REGIONAL LEVEL

The 2030 Agenda encourages peer learning, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets at the regional and sub-regional level. The Regional Sustainable Development Fora organised by the UN regional commissions serve as platforms for information sharing and preparation for the HLPF.

- NHRIs and NHRI networks are increasingly participating in the sustainable development fora at regional level.

GLOBAL LEVEL

The VNR process at national level culminates in a country report that is submitted to and presented at the HLPF under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which is held annually in July in New York. Every year between 40 and 45 countries present a VNR.

Besides the VNR presentations, thematic reviews of selected goals and cross-cutting issues also take place during the HLPF preceded by expert group meetings. All the 17 SDGs are reviewed at the HLPF within a four-year period paving the way for the quadrennial meeting under the General Assembly¹. A pre-negotiated declaration is the official outcome of the annual forum.

- The UN General Assembly Resolution on National Human Rights Institutions (A/RES/74/156 paragraph 13 and 14) encourages all relevant United Nations mechanisms and processes, including the HLPF, to further enhance the participation of NHRIs and to allow for their contributions. While NHRIs do not currently have a formal status, they may participate, for example as part of official delegations and as co-organisers and participants in events.

3 WHY ENGAGE?

OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ADVANCE THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ² (hereafter the “2030 Agenda”) is in many ways a human rights agenda. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “seek to realize the human rights of all” (2030 Agenda Preamble). The pledge to “leave no one behind” mirrors the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination. The SDGs are grounded in human rights, and more than 90% of the SDG targets can be linked to human rights.

For example, rights to an adequate standard of living, food, health, education, water and housing are reflected in SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 11. SDG 5 seeks to ensure gender equality and SDG 10 aims to reduce inequality in and between countries, including by eliminating discriminatory laws and policies, and ensuring the socio-economic and political involvement of all, regardless of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. SDG 8 reflects fundamental labour rights. SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions sets concrete targets for the fulfilment of civil and political rights, including in relation to political participation, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs is an online tool that identifies the linkages between the SDGs and universal human rights, labour standards and key environmental instruments. The Guide allows for tailored results related to the instruments applicable to a specific country, and is therefore an essential tool to:

- understand the links between country-specific human rights obligations and the SDGs;
- develop a human rights-based approach to sustainable development programming, implementation, reporting and monitoring.

Visit the Guide at <http://sdg.humanrights.dk/>

Human rights instruments and mechanisms provide an important framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. International and regional human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, special procedures, the Universal Periodic Review, and treaty bodies, as well as the International Labour Organization’s supervisory bodies, can be leveraged to assess and guide 2030 Agenda implementation. The recommendations coming out of human rights monitoring mechanisms point to actions which, if implemented, would help close implementation gaps in relation to both SDG and human rights fulfilment.

The important role of NHRIs in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in its review, is recognised and outlined in the Mérida Declaration on “The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and also the Kigali Declaration and Plan of Action on Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 (Africa regional) and the Marrakech Declaration on Human Rights Defenders³. Actively contributing to 2030 Agenda implementation and review from a human rights perspective does not involve a diversion from the NHRI mandate. Instead, it offers an opportunity to promote human rights and strengthen their implementation using the avenues that the 2030 Agenda has opened in countries. NHRIs can help advance human rights implementation and increase accountability for the SDGs, building on the core competencies and mandate of NHRIs.

Many countries invest significant resources in sustainable development planning, implementation and monitoring. NHRIs can leverage these resources and the momentum created by the 2030 Agenda to advance human rights implementation. VNRs typically involve a different set of actors from those involved in human rights review – such as ministries of planning, ministries of finance, prime ministers’ offices, national statistical offices and a wider range of civil society organisations and other stakeholders with an interest in sustainable development. Beyond the awareness-raising and promotion potential, the VNR process offers an opportunity to build stronger relationships with and influence duty bearers who have the decision-making power to shape the policies and budgets that have a direct impact on people’s lives.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS COVER A BROAD SPECTRUM OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES

As per the 2030 Agenda, VNRs will “track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development” (para. 74 b). It is specified in the Secretary General Voluntary Guidelines that VNRs are supposed to cover progress on all SDGs. The vast majority of countries report on all goals in their VNRs⁴.

The broad and multidimensional nature of the 2030 Agenda requires countries to undertake a comprehensive review of progress across social, economic and environmental dimensions in order to report on all the SDGs. By nature, a VNR touches upon the broad spectrum of social, economic, cultural, civil and political human rights – as well as labour rights and the right to a healthy environment. Given their broad mandate to monitor the implementation of human rights, NHRIs already cover many human rights issues through their regular monitoring and reporting. The VNR process provides an opportunity for NHRIs to leverage and amplify their existing work linked to the SDGs and the principle of leaving no one behind.

FOCUS ON THOSE FURTHEST LEFT BEHIND

The 2030 Agenda specifies that VNRs “will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind” (para. 74 e). The commitment to “leave no one behind” and to focus on “those furthest behind” aligns well with the focus of many NHRIs on specific rights-holder groups subject to discrimination and marginalisation.

VNRs are also supposed to be based on evidence and disaggregated data, yet many countries lack disaggregated data and many SDG indicators do not adequately specify the need for disaggregation. Hence, qualitative and quantitative information about the situation of “groups left behind” can therefore be valuable and important input to a VNR. Such information can help shine a light on human rights issues, which need to be addressed in line with states’ human rights obligations and SDG commitments.

STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY FOR 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

Among other challenges, the voluntary nature of the VNR, the absence of an effective peer review element, combined with a desire by many governments to present developments in a positive light, and a lack of disaggregated data for many SDG indicators have led to an accountability gap in 2030 Agenda monitoring and reporting.

NHRIs can play an important role to help strengthen accountability for the 2030 Agenda commitments – for example by:

- Pointing to the underpinning human rights obligations and standards;
- Contributing independent review of progress or gaps;
- Contributing information on and advice on how to improve the situation for groups left behind;
- Encouraging States to follow up on and report on recommendations received by human rights mechanisms in the VNR.

This can help strengthen the legitimacy and accountability of the VNR and ensure greater coherence in state reporting to different UN mechanisms.

BUILD ON HUMAN RIGHTS REPORTING

The 2030 Agenda specifies that VNRs will “build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, [and] avoid duplication [...]” (para. 74 f). The UN DESA VNR Handbook specifies that this involves “reports submitted to international bodies, including human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), other international treaties and conventions” (VNR Handbook 2021 edition, p. 10).

The fact that the 2030 Agenda is grounded in human rights instruments means there are significant opportunities to use existing monitoring and reporting as a basis for contributing to the VNR. For example, CEDAW reporting can be used for reporting on SDG 5 and on other SDGs as they pertain to women’s rights. The synergies with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) are significant due to the universal nature of the UPR and the many issues covered. These synergies can be exploited by aligning the reporting processes, when feasible in terms of timing, and drawing directly on state and stakeholder reporting to the UPR process, as well as the recommendations coming out of the UPR and other human rights monitoring mechanisms linked to the SDGs for the VNR purpose.

The **SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer** is an online tool developed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights that shows the connections between the recommendations produced by the international human rights monitoring bodies and the 169 SDG targets. Information can be filtered to specific countries, groups of rights-holders or human rights mechanisms. The tool supports integrated implementation of and reporting on human rights and SDGs. The Data Explorer has analysed and linked more than 150,000 human rights recommendations and observations produced by the UPR, treaty bodies, and special procedures.

Visit the Data Explorer at: <http://sdgdata.humanrights.dk>

A CLEAR ROLE FOR NHRIS

While VNRs are country-led and initiated by governments, they are intended to be “open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders” (2030 Agenda para. 74 d). The UN DESA Handbook emphasises the importance of multi-stakeholder participation throughout the VNR process, including meaningful participation by marginalised groups.

NHRIs are explicitly recognised to be among the participating stakeholders in the VNRs. The UN DESA Handbook and the UN Secretary General (SG) Voluntary Guidelines⁵ suggest that VNR countries report on whether national human rights institutions contributed and how stakeholders, “such as national human rights institutions [...] were continuously involved in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda, including its Goals and targets”. Several UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions⁶ on NHRIs explicitly recognise the role they play in 2030 Agenda follow-up and review and encourage their contributions to the HLPF and related global and regional preparatory processes as well as the Sustainable Development Goals Summit.

What emerges from the first years of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is that even the most closed countries organise consultation processes leading up to the VNR submission. While the openness and quality of these processes vary greatly, as does the extent to which stakeholder input is eventually reflected in the report, there is sometimes greater openness and willingness to engage stakeholders in 2030 Agenda review compared to human rights review. Hence, in some countries and situations, the 2030 Agenda processes and mechanisms provide rare opportunities for advancing human rights fulfilment.



The “existence of independent NHRIs in compliance with the Paris Principles” is a global indicator for the achievement of SDG 16 (target 16.a) on peace, justice and strong institutions. This reaffirms that sustainable development cannot be achieved without a strong and independent NHRI.

Where appropriate, NHRIs can use the VNR process to request the state to present commitments in compliance with the Paris Principles, such as ensuring a broader mandate or adequate funding for NHRIs. VNR processes can thus also be used as advocacy opportunities for NHRIs to build their own strength and growth.

4 HOW TO ENGAGE

4.1 NHRI ROLES IN THE VNR PROCESS

The role of NHRIs in implementing the 2030 Agenda outlined in the Mérida Declaration is directly relevant to 2030 Agenda follow-up and review, and more specially the VNR process. Relevant roles include:

An **advisory role** to national and local governments, rights-holders and other actors, to promote a human rights-based approach to implementation and measurement of the Agenda, which includes assessing the impact of national development plans, laws, policies, programmes, administrative practices and budgets on the realisation of all human rights for everyone.

A **bridging role** in developing and strengthening partnerships for implementation by promoting transparent and inclusive processes for participation and consultation with rights-holders and civil society in the VNR process, including reaching out to ensure meaningful participation of those who are furthest behind. The role also involves bridging 2030 Agenda and human rights review and monitoring mechanisms.

A **capacity-building & awareness-raising role** engaging with duty-bearers, rights-holders and other key actors to raise awareness and build trust and promote dialogue and concerted efforts for a human rights-based approach to the implementation and monitoring of the Agenda, and safeguarding space for engagement of rights-holders, human rights defenders and civil society in the VNR process.

A **direct role in monitoring and reporting** including 1) assisting in the shaping of national SDG indicators and sound data collection systems to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights in the measurement of the Agenda, 2) monitoring progress in the implementation of the Agenda to disclose inequality and discrimination in this regard, including through innovative approaches to data collection and partnerships with rights-holders, vulnerable and marginalised groups for participatory and inclusive monitoring, and by identifying obstacles as well as actions for accelerated progress.

An **oversight/accountability role** in engaging with and holding governments to account for poor or uneven progress in the implementation of the Agenda, including by identifying gaps and barriers and advising on how to overcome them.

In the step-by-step guide below, these different NHRI roles will be unpacked in relation to the VNR process and related entry points.

4.2 VNR ENTRY POINTS

The Voluntary National Review process consists of multiple steps from the initial decision to undertake a VNR, to the consultation and drafting process and finally, to the presentation at the HLPF in New York and the subsequent follow-up. NHRIs

have an important role to play in all these steps, drawing on a mix of roles as outlined in the Mérida Declaration and in compliance with the Paris Principles on the competence and responsibilities of NHRIs.

The table below outlines the key steps in the VNR process and gives examples of types of NHRI contributions.

VNR STEPS	EXAMPLES OF NHRI CONTRIBUTIONS
Decision	Recommend and encourage the relevant state actors to undertake a VNR; request an overall plan for SDG follow-up and review as well as for stakeholder involvement.
Preparation	Participate (and if not invited, request to participate) in the planning; advice on how to design participatory, inclusive, transparent and accountable processes from a human rights perspective; contribute to the development of national indicators; advice on human rights-based approaches to data collection, human rights impact assessments of policies and budget and how to ensure synergies and coherence with human rights reporting processes.
Consultation process	Participate, share information, analysis, and advice; point to recommendations received from the human rights mechanisms linked to the relevant SDGs and targets; develop capacity of and open the door to civil society representatives, human rights defenders, rights-holders for their effective participation.
Drafting & Validation	Contribute written input to the VNR report, and/or contribute to or publish own stakeholder report with analysis of progress on selected or all SDGs, drawing on existing monitoring work; review draft and advice on how to improve the quality of the report from a human rights and accountability perspective.
Presentation at the HLPF	Engage with national (and other States' delegations), permanent UN missions and major groups suggesting relevant questions to pose to the VNR panel; participate in the HLPF – for example, co-organizing side-events; conduct awareness-raising.
Follow-up	Follow up on gaps or opportunities identified in the VNR process; work with national statistical offices to help address data or indicator gaps; input to SDG action plans or national development plans; support alignment of monitoring frameworks; encourage institutionalised multi-stakeholder review mechanisms; ensure synergy with human rights reporting processes.

4.3 STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE AND EXAMPLES

1. INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO UNDERTAKE A REVIEW

The interest in undertaking Voluntary National Reviews among UN Member States has been high, as evidenced by the fact that most states have reported at least once since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. However, in many cases, states are not committing to reporting at regular intervals and do not communicate their long-term or immediate reporting plans to all relevant national stakeholders. This can result in stakeholders, including NHRIs, not being able to engage meaningfully in the review process.

Nevertheless, an increasing number of states are beginning to commit to regular progress reporting, for example, through yearly progress reports to parliaments and quadrennial VNRs to be presented at the HLPF. A fixed reporting schedule allows stakeholders, including NHRIs, to plan their engagement and contribute more substantially and meaningfully.

Proposed actions:

- NHRIs, potentially in coordination with, for example, civil society SDG coalitions, can encourage reviewing and requesting a plan indicating the timing of future VNRs. NHRIs can also propose timing to align with other reporting processes including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) or the design of national development plans. Reference can be made to the 2030 Agenda principles that VNR processes are intended to be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent, as well as support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.

The **Scottish Human Rights Commission** with the SDG Network of Scotland co-signed an [open letter](#) to the Scottish Political Parties, Parliamentary Committees, the Scottish Cabinet, Scotland's Secretary of State and all 32 Local Authorities to secure commitment to delivering the SDGs and to tracking progress. The Commission is continuously advocating for a formal process to engage NHRIs and to strengthen accountability for the SDGs.

2. CONTRIBUTE TO THE PREPARATION OF THE REVIEW

The VNR planning phase offers an opportunity for NHRIs to influence both the process and the VNR report from a human rights perspective. Despite the clear recognition of the role of NHRIs in the official VNR guidance for countries and the 2030 Agenda commitment to building on existing reporting mechanisms, the state actors responsible for the VNR process frequently do not invite NHRIs into planning processes or the review itself. This, in some cases, is due to a lack of awareness of the role and value addition of NHRIs, which can be caused by a weak understanding

of the human rights dimensions of the 2030 Agenda. There may also be weak or no prior relationships between the NHRIs and the actors in charge of VNR processes, as these are typically not the same as those responsible for human rights reporting. In some instances, there might be reluctance to involving human rights actors.

Proposed actions:

- NHRIs can claim a space “at the table” by pro-actively contacting the VNR organisers. Reference can be made to the 2030 Agenda principles for VNRs, as well as the UNSG Guidelines and UN DESA Handbook, which mention NHRIs as a stakeholder in the review process. The fact that the “existence of NHRIs compliant with the Paris Principles” is a global indicator for SDG 16 (target 16.a) on strong institutions may in some cases also be a relevant argument for the role of NHRIs in the 2030 Agenda.
- If invited into the planning process early, NHRIs can advise the government and other stakeholders on how to ensure an inclusive stakeholder engagement process in line with human rights principles, including how to effectively ensure the meaningful participation of civil society, major groups and marginalised groups including women, children and youth, workers, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples.
- NHRIs can advise and offer support on human rights-based approaches to data collection and work with national statistical offices on developing national indicators. This type of advisory and capacity development work would ideally take place well in advance of the VNR to allow time for data collection.
- NHRIs can advise government, private sector and civil society on how to conduct human rights impact assessments of policies, activities and budgets.
- NHRIs can advise on the scope of the review to ensure that it is comprehensive and fully integrates human rights.
- NHRIs can advise on how to ensure synergy with human rights reporting processes, including how recommendations from human rights mechanisms can be linked to the SDGs and addressed in the VNR report.
- Where NHRIs enjoy privileged access to planning and decision-making structures, they can draw on their bridging role to open the door to civil society representatives, rights-holders and human rights defenders to influence the planning process.
- If not invited into the planning process, NHRIs can still provide unsolicited advice and remind the VNR organisers of the commitment to an open and inclusive process.
- Whether or not NHRIs are part of the planning process, they can play an awareness-raising role informing relevant stakeholders and the public about the review and raise awareness about human rights and SDG linkages.

The **Cameroon Human Rights Commission** was not invited to contribute to the preparation of the 2019 VNR. The Commission adopted a pro-active approach and sent a request to the Ministry of Economy and Planning to participate in the elaboration of the VNR. As a result, the Commission was invited to attend a validation workshop with civil society as an observer. The Commission has identified a need for more awareness-raising about the centrality of human rights in the 2030 Agenda, within both the Government and the Commission itself. This would help clarify the potentially important role and contribution of the Commission.

The **Ghana Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice** trained state actors and NGOs on human rights-based approaches to data collection and budget analysis.

3.

PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

2030 Agenda implementation and monitoring calls for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and effort. The UN DESA VNR Handbook encourages the development of stakeholder engagement plans and specifies that “All sectors and levels of government, civil society, private sector, trade unions, members of parliament and national human rights institutions, should be considered” (p. 9).

While some states are taking stakeholder involvement to the next level by institutionalising multi-stakeholder mechanisms for ongoing review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, many others are organising one-off stakeholder consultations during the VNR process. The quality of these consultation processes varies. For example, validation processes which involve sharing or presenting the draft report for a limited group of stakeholders in the capital leave little scope for influence or participation by marginalised groups. Genuine stakeholder engagement processes in which different groups of stakeholders give input to and co-draft the report, for example in technical working groups, create more possibilities for influence.

Proposed actions:

- NHRIs can proactively lobby to get invited to participate in consultation processes.
- Many countries have active civil society coalitions who organise their own parallel consultation processes. NHRIs can participate in such coalitions and processes and/or participate in official consultation processes when invited.
- Fulfilling their capacity development role, NHRIs can offer support to different actors on human rights-based approaches including to data collection.
- NHRIs can advise on how to improve the quality of the consultation processes to ensure genuine and meaningful participation of marginalised groups and help identify those whose voices need to be heard.

- Drawing on the bridging role, NHRIs can help open the door to civil society representatives, rights-holders and human rights defenders and their different perspectives.
- In line with the promotion and awareness-raising mandate, NHRIs can create awareness about the interlinkages between the 2030 Agenda and human rights, point to the specific human rights underpinning the SDGs reviewed, highlight human rights issues and recommendations from human rights mechanisms to be reflected in the VNR report, and help interpret and unpack the principle of leaving no one behind.

The **Kenya National Commission on Human Rights** actively participated in the technical committee in charge of preparing the VNR in 2020. The working groups had strong participation from civil society organised in the Kenya SDG Forum. A priority for the commission going forward is to ensure direct participation of underrepresented groups in the technical committees. The commission will focus on persons with disabilities, including persons with albinism and intersex persons.

The **Scottish Human Rights Commission** joined the civil society SDG Network as a member of the steering committee and has contributed to raising awareness about 2030 Agenda and human rights interlinkages and related tools on the network website. This led to a strong focus on human rights in the alternative VNR report in 2020. The Commission expects to contribute to ongoing sharing of information and training on SDG and human rights linkages for network members.

4.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE VNR REPORT ITSELF OR TO STAKEHOLDER REPORTING

What to contribute

By virtue of their mandate and core functions, NHRIs have access to an important depository of information related to human rights implementation in the country, which can be directly linked to SDG implementation.

Draw on and map existing information against the 2030 Agenda:

Information collected through monitoring, investigation, complaints, inquiries, policy analysis, research, or reports prepared for human rights monitoring mechanisms is, in many cases, relevant for the reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation.

NHRIs can map their existing work and resources against the SDG targets using the DIHR online tool “the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs”. This mapping can help identify what is relevant to feed into the VNR process as a contribution to the official report or to an independent review of progress and gaps in SDG implementation.

The **Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice in Ghana** commissioned an analysis and mapping of information from annual reports, complaints, research, and other documents produced by the Commission linked to the SDGs. The mapping showed that the data can be linked to specific aspects of SDG 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and well-being), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work), 11 (sustainable cities) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

The adequacy of the data to contribute to SDG monitoring from a qualitative and quantitative perspective was assessed as well as the relevance for monitoring specific population groups in the country and the “leave no one behind” commitment of the 2030 Agenda. One of the findings was that while most of the data does not lend itself well to quantitative reporting against SDG indicators and targets, it is useful for qualitative reporting on trends in human rights violations linked to the SDGs. The analysis pointed to a need to ensure further data disaggregation (e.g. by age, education, economic status, district) from a “leave no one behind” perspective to help identify vulnerable population groups.

The Commission provided input to the 2019 VNR report in the form of advisories and general opinions based on its existing areas of work, monitoring and complaints handling. The Commission ensured the inclusion of human rights language and overall references to human rights and the work of the commission in the VNR report itself.

Consider relevance to “leave no one behind” commitment: If not directly linked to an SDG target, the information will often be relevant to the central commitment to “leave no one behind” as groups deprived of their social, economic, civil or political rights are typically the ones being “left behind” in society in one or more respects. Hence, this information can help identify who is being left behind and what can be done about it. This type of analysis can feed directly into a VNR chapter on the leave no one behind commitment or a stakeholder report regarding the same matter.

Do not underestimate the value of qualitative information: Many NHRIs do not have capacity to undertake primary data collection, and at the same time many national statistical offices are reluctant to accept data collected by other actors if this does not live up to statistical standards. This does not have to be a barrier to contributing to a VNR report. NHRIs can contribute with qualitative case studies, policy analysis, survey results, or point to critical areas based on trends in complaints received.

In fact, while VNR reports increasingly include data in the form of statistical annexes (over half in 2020), the reports typically consist of a narrative on progress not necessarily underpinned by data. A contribution by an NHRI related to a specific challenge to SDG fulfilment, for example accessibility of public transportation (SDG target 11.2), when backed up by a survey, a study or an analysis of complaints can be included in a VNR report in the chapter on SDG 11 or in the chapter highlighting specific issues for people left behind. Proposing language or offering advice on how the SDGs are linked to human rights obligations can improve the quality of the report from a human rights perspective.

Point to other available information: Limited resources and capacity to follow the many SDG thematic and related human rights areas is often an issue for NHRIs. Therefore, it should be emphasised that NHRIs do not have to generate all the information and data themselves. It can be valuable to analyse official statistics or draw attention to information from studies and surveys conducted by other actors that the NHRI has found to be valid and reliable. For instance, in Europe the European social survey can be a point of reference for certain issues related to, for example, gender or discrimination (linked to several SDGs and the commitment to leaving no one behind). Importantly, NHRIs can draw on the wealth of recommendations from international human rights monitoring mechanisms linked to the SDGs and recommend that the follow-up is reflected in the VNR.

Look beyond SDG 16: NHRIs can contribute to review across the 2030 Agenda in line with their broad mandate. As SDG 16 has an indicator (16.a.1) on the “Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles” and many NHRIs have traditionally monitored civil and political rights linked to SDG 16 targets and indicators more extensively than social, economic and cultural rights, this has sometimes led to a misconception that the contribution of NHRIs belong under SDG 16.

Depending on the capacity and issues covered by the NHRI in question, an NHRI can potentially contribute relevant information across the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs on the full range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, as well as on groups left behind. Besides the more obvious cases, such as linking CEDAW reporting to SDG 5, a mapping would reveal many other linkages. For example, complaints received from persons with disabilities related to inaccessibility of public transportation would help point to gaps in SDG target 11.2 on access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems and the indicator 11.2.1 on convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.

The **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)** in connection with the UK 2019 VNR, drafted a report outlining the related human rights frameworks for each SDG. The report, for example, highlighted the right to social security (Article 9) and right to an adequate standard of living (Article 11) in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) under SDG 1. In its shadow report, the NIHRC reports on SDGs 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 16 based on its existing monitoring work. Notably, the shadow report represents the first public positioning of the NIHRC on climate change. The Commission also prepared a contribution with explicit links to the SDGs for the consultation on a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill.

The shadow report includes an analysis of official statistics, laws, budget allocations and measures taken by the Government and provides recommendations. The report was submitted to the Government and made public on the Commission's website.

As part of its regular and ongoing work aimed at inquiring into systemic environmental issues, the **Hungarian Ombudsman for Future Generations (HOFG)**, a Deputy Commissioner at the Office of the Commissioner of Fundamental Rights in Hungary, prepared in late 2017 a detailed General Opinion on specific SDGs in line with its mandate and expertise, namely Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15. The HOFG summarised the most relevant recommendations to serve as a guideline for the Government in designing ambitious targets for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As the General Opinion outline suggested national indicators for these goals, the HOFG also engaged with the National Statistical Office to introduce its work.

The HOFG's office became aware of the 2018 VNR process and started to pro-actively engage with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - responsible for preparing the VNR - to include the Opinion linked to five SDGs as these goals were also the specific focal points of the 2018 HLPF. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited the Office to prepare written input to the VNR report. The submission, which includes main recommendations of the General Opinion, eventually featured in the official report in a section on "Partnership and Stakeholder Engagement in Hungary".

The **Indonesia National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM)** was invited by the Ministry of National Development Planning to a meeting on SDG 16 in connection with the 2019 VNR. The Commission was asked to provide quantitative data on individual complaints. Later, at the validation stage, the SDG Secretariat invited the Commission to confirm whether the data provided was correctly represented in the VNR report. As a data provider, the Commission can provide contextualised and substantive information on progress towards SDG 16 but also other SDGs in areas such as education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3), land (multiple SDGs, including SDG 1 and 5), labour (SDG 8) and freedom of religion (SDG 16 and related to the leaving no one behind).

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

The official VNR report: NHRIs can choose to contribute directly to the VNR if invited into the drafting process as part of a technical working group or as a respondent in the hearing or validation processes. For the input to eventually feature in the final VNR report, it requires openness from the state actors to reflect what would often be critical information.

The **Kenya National Commission on Human Rights** was invited to take part in the 2020 VNR process and actively participated in the technical committee in charge of preparing the VNR along with civil society organisations via the Kenya SDG Forum. The Commission took a leading role with regards to SDG 16 and provided data on SDG target 16.1 (violence and death rates), 16.2 (abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children), and 16.3 (rule of law and equal access to justice).

Ultimately, the information provided by the Commission was not included in the 2020 VNR report, partly due to the lack of agreed methodology of data collection with the Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics and partly due to the sensitivity of the information. The VNR report did mention the groups left behind identified by the Commission. Looking ahead, the Commission will seek agreement on data collection methodologies and increase its capacities to be able to contribute on a wider range of SDGs.

The **National Human Rights Council of Côte d'Ivoire** contributed to the drafting of the sectoral report on the implementation of SDG 16.10.2 on public access to information. The Council made a resource person available to the Commission d'Accès à l'Information d'intérêt public et Documents Publics (CAIDP), a public body. The CAIDP report was made available to the VNR 2019 editorial committee, which incorporated the information into the 2019 VNR.

Stakeholder report: If deemed more appropriate or if not invited to provide input to the official report, NHRIs may publish their own stakeholder report on all or selected goals or contribute to a civil society stakeholder report, sometimes referred to as “shadow” or “spotlight reports”. NHRI contributions can be in the form of analysis of progress and gaps, advice on how to overcome gaps, overviews of human rights recommendations linked to the SDGs, or advice on how to fully integrate human rights obligations.

A number of NHRIs have contributed to joint stakeholder reports or published their own. For example, in connection with the 2017 **Argentina** VNR, the **Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación (Ombudsman)** prepared a shadow report in collaboration with civil society to give voice and visibility to civil society organisations. The **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission** produced its own shadow report in parallel with the UK 2019 VNR and published it in June 2019. The **Scottish Human Rights Commission** together with the SDG Network secured commitment from the Government to co-draft an alternative VNR report in 2020.

Stakeholder reports cannot be officially submitted to the UN along with the VNR without state consent, but if consenting, state actors can submit stakeholder reports to the official UN website along with the VNR. There are also global civil society initiatives and [websites](#) dedicated to alternative reporting.

The **Scottish Human Rights Commission** submitted a brief through a "[Paragraph 89](#)" submission option meant for major groups and other relevant stakeholders to "report on their contribution to implementation" and "the achievement of individual Sustainable Development Goals and targets on the ground". This is not advertised by UN DESA as a path to submit NHRI reports but unless instructed otherwise, NHRIs could explore this option to make formal submissions.

The brief focused on some of the key concerns and areas of further action within the Scottish Government's current approach to SDG monitoring and implementation, as well as some reflections on the benefit a formal process for NHRI engagement could bring to the VNR process.

Likewise, the **German Institute for Human Rights** submitted [comments](#) to the German 2016 VNR report, which feature on the official UN DESA [SDG website](#) under documents.

WHEN TO SUBMIT CONTENT

While some NHRIs are engaged in all steps of the VNR process or invited to submit written input, those that are not may want to consider when to e.g. publish a stakeholder report. The decision will depend on the relationship the NHRI has with the relevant state actors and other stakeholders and the potential impact.

Before the review: There could be strategic relevance in preparing and publishing a report at the early stages of a review as a way to influence the scope and focus of the review and create awareness about the human rights and SDG linkages. An NHRI report could draw attention to key human rights issues supported by evidence as well as recommendations linked to the SDGs. The report could include recommendations for the review process itself.

During the review: If the NHRI is invited into the process for example as a member of a technical drafting group or through hearing processes or stakeholder consultations, these could be opportunities for providing concrete input, opinions and recommendations.

After the review process: It may in some cases be relevant to wait for the final official VNR report before providing an independent opinion on the report and pointing to any gaps or issues not covered by the report. Especially if the process is relatively closed and it is unclear if input from stakeholders will be included in the final version.

In connection with the UK 2019 VNR, the **Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission** decided to prepare a shadow report on SDG progress in Northern Ireland. The Commission found the UK engagement process insufficiently accessible and transparent. The roundtables were not widely advertised and limited to locations in England, and there was no opportunity to make written submissions.

Likewise, in connection with the UK 2019 VNR, the **Scottish Human Rights Commission** co-drafted a supplementary VNR report together with other members of the Scottish SDG Network and the Scottish Government. The supplementary report serves to enhance and expand upon the Scottish content presented in the UK VNR. The Commission found that there was limited opportunity to contribute to the official UK report given the time frame and scope of the review process.

The report was drafted through an open process in Google Docs with input from the Government and civil society. The Commission contributed to improving different sections and chapters from a human rights perspective and mainly contributed content related to SDG 16.

Ahead of the collaboration, the stakeholders had agreed to certain ground rules including that civil society would be allowed to publish the data should the Government not wish to make the report public. Although a draft report was published, the Government delayed the publication of the final report a number of times. In response, the SDG Network with the Scottish Human Rights Commission as a member, wrote a letter to the relevant Government Minister to request the publication of the report. The report was eventually published. It offers a more nuanced and honest representation of SDG progress in Scotland, according to the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

The **Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines** was not directly involved in the VNR process in 2019, but issued a statement addressed to the Government and highlighting gaps related to the SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16, supported by information collected through monitoring. The Commission will continue to advocate for a more inclusive and participatory VNR preparation. The Commission also wishes to prepare a full shadow report next time.

5. PARTICIPATE IN THE HLPF

While the greatest potential for influence on 2030 Agenda follow-up and review lies in ongoing national work and in the lead up to a VNR, there is some potential for NHRIs to engage in the annual HLPF.

Proposed actions:

- **Engage with the national delegation:** Request a meeting with the delegation ahead of the HLPF to discuss the presentation and main messages from a human rights and accountability perspective. NHRIs may consider joining the delegation after careful consideration to the real and perceived consequences for their independent status.
- **Engage with other delegations, permanent UN missions and major groups:** although the VNR process does not involve systematic peer review, other states, major groups, and other stakeholders can still pose questions in connection with the review. It should be noted that there is very limited time for questioning (10-15 minutes total) during the VNR session. Questions, however, can be a way to shine a light on important issues not well covered in the report or presentation. NHRIs could therefore share their recommendations with specific states and major groups and propose questions to be asked in the VNR session.
- **Consider potential role in the VNR presentation:** The presentations are mostly done by a panel consisting of government representatives (2-4 people). In some cases, members of civil society, youth representatives and the private sector have been invited to present and have been part of the official delegation. NHRIs could be part of the official delegation and presenting panel if invited and if this does not compromise the real or perceived independent role of the NHRI.
- **Support awareness-raising initiatives:** NHRIs can use the HLPF as an occasion to amplify key messages and spread awareness about the 2030 Agenda and human rights linkages. For example, NHRIs could invite the public to “viewing parties”, livestreaming the VNR presentation on UN Web TV and organise panel debates or similar.
- **Co-organise side events and participate in the HLPF:** While NHRIs do not yet have ECOSOC consultative status, meaning they cannot submit applications for official side events, they can still co-organise official side events with partners

or organise unofficial side events on the margins of the HLPF. For example, the Argentinian NHRI organised a side event to present its shadow report at the HLPF. This can amplify the issues, give visibility to the work of the NHRI and strengthen partnerships.

Participation in the HLPF as well as in the regional sustainable development fora can be a good networking, learning and potentially also an advocacy opportunity. Many events take place or are streamed online, which enables remote participation.

The **Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación** in Argentina sent its complementary report to the relevant government counterparts ahead of the HLPF in 2017. This sparked the Government to invite the Defensoría to join the official delegation to present Argentina's progress at the HLPF.

The **Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines** was not included in the 2019 VNR process but proactively contacted the Government and expressed its interest to contribute. The Commission issued a public statement and participated in the HLPF. The Commission plans to advocate proactively for an inclusive and participatory VNR process in the future and wishes to maintain its engagement at the HLPF to give visibility towards its own assessment of progress towards the SDGs through shadow reports.

6.

FOLLOW UP ON THE VNR AND PARTICIPATE IN ONGOING SDG PROGRESS REVIEW

Use the VNR as a platform for follow-up

For NHRIs that are not already part of 2030 Agenda implementation and review structures, the VNR can be an occasion to establish relationships with actors involved in sustainable development planning and monitoring. As these typically involve a wider range of actors than those involved in human rights review, this opens the door to continued engagement with often influential actors such as ministries of planning, finance, prime minister's offices, national statistical offices, and parliamentary committees in addition to broad civil society coalitions.

The VNR report itself, a joint submission with civil society or an independent NHRI assessment of the VNR process and of SDG progress can provide a basis for following up with the relevant governmental focal point to push for follow up on commitments, improvements to future VNR processes or to fill specific gaps identified. A thorough SDG review will typically reveal gaps in availability of disaggregated data for marginalised groups, which the NHRI can subsequently address in collaboration with the national statistical office.

Move from one-off engagements to ongoing involvement

Drawing on their oversight and accountability role, NHRIs have an important role in informing and monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on an ongoing basis from a human rights perspective - in their own capacity and sometimes as a member of formalised 2030 Agenda structures.

While more states are beginning to communicate their intention to conduct regular reviews, few states have institutionalised multi-stakeholder mechanisms for ongoing SDG review in line with the whole-of-government and whole-of-society vision of the 2030 Agenda. While the VNR can provide a good platform and create a momentum for implementation, this can easily be lost without a mandated follow-up structure on the findings and ensure input into SDG action planning. NHRIs will typically have more opportunities for ongoing engagement and influence if part of 2030 Agenda implementation and follow-up structures or advisory boards and may lobby for and support the process of establishing these.

The **Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR)** is a member of the “2030-Panel”, which is an advisory body established by the Danish Parliament's All-Party Coalition for the Sustainable Development Goals (the 2030-Network). The 2030-Panel supports the political work of the 2030-Network through knowledge sharing, analysis and sparring. DIHR contributed to the 2021 Denmark VNR process through the panel's joint submission, which was included in the official VNR report.

Contribute to aligning monitoring frameworks

Many countries seek to align national development plans and related indicator frameworks with the 2030 Agenda indicator framework to ensure policy coherence and reduce the monitoring and reporting burden. Such alignment can create a good foundation for ongoing and institutionalised review processes as the 2030 Agenda is integrated rather than a separate framework with its own mechanism for review.

NHRIs can play an important role in supporting such alignment processes including from the perspective of ensuring that national indicators and data collection efforts also serve to monitor the respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights. For example, as many of the SDG indicators are outcome focused, NHRI can add value in identifying complementary structural and process indicators to measure the progressive realisation of the rights underpinning the SDGs.

Engagement with national statistical offices on national indicators and human rights-based approaches to data collection would ideally be part of ongoing and regular work as the VNR process itself would rarely allow time for the process of developing indicators and collecting and analysing data. For more details, see the forthcoming GANHRI guide “Indicators and data for human rights and sustainable development: a guide for National Human Rights Institutions”:

The **Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación** in Argentina established a programme on follow-up of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda soon after its adoption. The Office has collaborated with the National Statistical Office to identify gaps in official statistics, formulate human rights indicators and shape the data collection efforts with a particular focus on undocumented persons. The Office also launched investigations leading to thematic studies with specific recommendations for the 17 SDGs.

Ensure ongoing synergies with human rights monitoring and reporting

NHRIs can play a key role in ensuring that human rights monitoring informs sustainable development implementation and reporting. Human rights reporting (e.g. NHRI reports to human rights treaty bodies and to the UPR) can be a source of data on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and national development plans, and the recommendations that arise from human rights reporting can serve to identify ways to overcome implementation gaps.

The **Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR)** submitted input to the SDG National Action Plan in 2021. In a submission to the Ministry of Finance (the lead agency on 2030 Agenda planning and reporting in Denmark), DIHR pointed to specific recommendations from the recent Universal Periodic Review linked to the SDGs (particularly in relation to SDG 1, 3, 4, 5, 10 and 16). DIHR also submitted input specifically related to SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 10 (reduce inequality) and SDG 3 (good health and well-being) to the relevant sectoral ministries. The sectoral submissions drew on DIHR's existing work in these thematic areas and referred to DIHR's own research as well as that of others, including advice from international human rights mechanisms. They contain concrete recommendations linked to the SDGs and specific targets where relevant.

In their engagement with actors and structures responsible for national development and/or 2030 Agenda follow-up and review, NHRIs can point to recent human rights reports and recommendations and encourage that follow-up is reflected in national 2030 Agenda action/development plans. Likewise, in their engagement with governmental human rights focal points (sometimes also referred to as National Mechanisms for Implementation, Reporting and Follow-up), NHRIs can encourage greater synergies with the 2030 Agenda reporting processes and structures if such linkages do not already exist. This can also help ensure greater coherence in state reporting to different UN mechanisms.

The benefits of integrated human rights and 2030 Agenda reporting from a state actor perspective

State mechanisms responsible for human rights reporting⁷ often do not coordinate with those responsible for 2030 Agenda reporting. This is partly due to the fact that they have been developed in parallel, often under different ministries and that the synergies have not yet been identified or explored. However, a recent study of such mechanisms by the Danish Institute for Human Rights showed general willingness to integrate human rights reporting with the 2030 Agenda.

Some of the governmental human rights focal points interviewed pointed out that greater insights into the implementation of the SDGs would assist in the drafting of reports on human rights issues related to the SDGs. In addition, greater integration and coordination would ensure cross-fertilisation and coherence in the reports and ensure a “uniformity of response” to different UN mechanisms, thereby also improving the efficiency of reporting and avoiding duplication or contradiction. It was also pointed out that better integration would likely facilitate increased attention to particular groups, risks and strengthen the mainstreaming of the principle of “leave no one behind” in sustainable development reporting. Furthermore, involving bodies with expertise in human rights issues in 2030 Agenda processes can ensure that indicators and statistics developed by such processes are sufficiently nuanced to capture hidden inequalities, and facilitates measurement of achievements under both the 2030 Agenda and human rights.

If NHRIs link their own recommendations to the SDGs (e.g. in reports to human rights treaty bodies) and encourage international human rights monitoring mechanisms to do the same, it will be easier for governments receiving the recommendations to see and understand the links, which contributes to awareness-raising and may facilitate greater engagement by human rights actors in sustainable development processes.

Since their adoption, the **Danish Institute for Human Rights** has referred to the SDGs in its reporting to international human rights mechanisms including the UPR.⁵⁷ For instance, in its 2018 midterm report, the Institute linked all recommendations issued to Denmark to the SDG framework. The **Scottish Human Rights Commission** also seeks to connect treaty review recommendations to the SDGs, so that the governments can more easily see and understand the connections.

5 KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM NHRI ENGAGEMENT IN VNR PROCESSES

Need for awareness-raising on the role of NHRIs in 2030 Agenda implementation and review

Despite the clear recognition of the role of NHRIs in the official VNR guidance for UN Member States, many state actors are still unclear about the role and value addition of NHRIs in 2030 Agenda follow-up and review processes. Hence, there is a need for NHRIs to claim the space and explain their role with reference to the high convergence of the 2030 Agenda and human rights standards, and for example, the Paris Principles and Mérida Declaration, the official VNR guidance to member states and the 2030 Agenda principles. Connecting human rights recommendations to the SDGs and encouraging human rights monitoring mechanisms to do so can also help demonstrate the links.

Going forward, the **Indonesia National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM)** will seek a common understanding with the Government about its role in the 2030 Agenda implementation and the preparation of future VNRs. Leveraging its monitoring and oversight mandate, the Commission can monitor the implementation of the SDGs, as the government commitment to achieve the SDGs has been incorporated in the national legislation with a 2017 Presidential Decree.

A permanent role in 2030 Agenda coordination structures facilitates effective participation

NHRIs that already have a formal role in national SDG coordination and implementation structures have better insights into and opportunities for influencing the review schedule and process. A formal role in the SDG structures also facilitates NHRI participation in all aspects of SDG implementation and review as well as collaboration with other stakeholders, such as civil society and the national statistical offices.

The **Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice** in Ghana is a member of the SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee. The Committee coordinated the information collection and the drafting process in connection with the 2019 VNR. The Commission was involved in all stages of the planning, implementation and drafting of the VNR report.

The **National Human Rights Council of Côte d'Ivoire** is a member of the Permanent Technical Secretariat under the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development responsible for the follow-up and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Given its institutional role in the SDG implementation structure, the Council was directly involved in the preparation of the country's first VNR in 2019. The Council participated in the kick-off workshop, contributed to the validation of the VNR report as well as in a roundtable on gender-based violence linked to SDG 5.

Integrate the 2030 Agenda in the NHRI work

It is easier for NHRIs to contribute effectively to a VNR process, especially within the often-tight deadlines given by the state actors, if the 2030 Agenda is already a strategic focus. For example, if a mapping of existing work against the 2030 Agenda has been done, and if relationships with key actors such as the national statistical offices and SDG networks are already established. The VNR then becomes an occasion for drawing on and synthesising ongoing efforts to monitor and review progress towards human rights realisation linked to the 2030 Agenda commitments in the country.

The **Defensoría del Pueblo de la Nación (Ombudsman)** in Argentina has been engaged with the 2030 Agenda implementation in Argentina since 2015. The Defensoría's office signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Council for Coordination of Social Policies, which is the public entity in charge of implementation and follow-up on the 2030 Agenda. The parties agreed to exchange information, documentation and to cooperate on technical issues and research related to the follow-up, evaluation and fulfilment of SDGs.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A/70/684 “Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level”
- 2 <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- 3 All three declarations referred can be downloaded here: <https://www.nanhri.org/resource-centre/declarations-2/>
- 4 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/CDP-Reflections-2021-VNRs.pdf>
- 5 2021 edition: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27171SG_Guidelines_2021.final.pdf
- 6 See: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/39/17> and <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/156>
- 7 Sometimes referred to as “Governmental Human Rights Focal Points” (GHRFP) or “National Mechanisms for Reporting, Implementation and Follow Up” (NMRIFs)

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