

VNR Lab 15:
Creating a child-sensitive and child inclusive Voluntary National Review
15 July 2020

Speakers

Expert Presenters (in order of appearance in the programme)

- Miatta, Liberia
- Izora, Uzbekistan
- Ulrik Knudsen, Deputy SG, Organization for Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD)
- Joana Pedro, Social Development Specialist, European Investment Bank
- Andrew Morley, President, World Vision International
- Mark Hereward, Associate Director of Data and Analytics, UNICEF

Member States Panelists (in order of appearance in the programme)

- **Bulgaria:** HE Ms Zornitsa Rusinova, Deputy Minister for Labour and Social Policies
- **Ghana:** HE Dr Felix Addo-Yobo, Director, Development Policy, National Development Planning Commission
- **Indonesia:** HE Mr SH. Nahar, Deputy Minister for Child Protection from Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection
- **México:** HE Mrs Gemma Santana. Office of the Presidency's Director General for the 2030 Agenda
- **Oman:** HH Sayyida Dr Mona F. Al Said, SQU Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation and Chairperson of Children First Association; His Excellency Ambassador Dr Mohamed Al-Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations; Ms. Maitha Ahmed Mohammed Al Issai, Head of Children's Programmes at the Ministry of Social Development

Summary

The VNR Lab was co-organized by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (OSRSG-VAC) and the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), and attracted nearly 200 attendees. The programme was organized in two parts: four expert presentations, and overviews of good practices shared by five Member States.

A geographically diverse panel from Bulgaria, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico and Oman joined the SRS- VAC Dr. Najat Maalla M'jid in an interactive dialogue. The panellists expressed the importance of integrating child rights and voices into their VNR processes and offered examples:

Examples that speak to the centrality of children in the development agenda

- The linkage between child participation in public life and its contribution to increased confidence, skills-building and better life outcomes
- The legal framework to protect children from violence
- Access to education, including virtual learning
- Inter-governmental cooperation mechanism such as the *Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs*

- Integrating the SDGs at local level and empowering children to participate in the implementation
- Comprehensive child protection system for all children as well as the need to integrate children's rights in all the SDGs, in addition to the SDG targets directly related to child protection
- A "culture of child protection," including peer-to-peer support needs to be cultivated.
- Mapping of existing mechanisms that encourage children to express their views in their families, their communities and their schools
- The SDGs are the framework for addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples specific to VNR Process

- VNR process must ensure that children are not "passive bystanders" but are fully integrated into the implementation of the SDGs. Some examples include SDG workshops for children, digital dialogues and a "children's takeover" as part of the annual World Children's Day celebration
- When children are well informed they can be highly effective change agents in their communities and their countries. For example, leveraging existing celebration such as the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to make the case for integrating child rights into VNR process can be an effective approach
- Use of data and strengthening data collection systems are useful in the VNR process, including studies on relevant topics such as multidimensional child poverty.

Dr. M'jid, who moderated the session articulated a recurrent theme of the Lab, that "children must be seen as actors, not only recipients of services." She also stressed that children's well-being must be centrally featured in planning and budget processes and that "children need to be seen and heard" across the 2030 Agenda from SDG 1 through SDG 17.

The Member States' dialogue built on the experts' presentations earlier in the event, which highlighted the following key messages:

- Two child speakers emphasized the importance of engaging children and youth at all levels of decision making processes; there must be equal opportunities available to all young people; inclusive access to quality education is the foundation for empowering children as global citizens to be part of the solution and to advance the SDGs at local, national and global levels
- The need for better data and measurement of child well-being and the importance of investing in children in the earliest stages of life
- The VNRs not only need to talk about *youth* participation but also *child* (a different age group) participation. "It is vital that children are involved in shaping their own future, and that we support them all along the way."
- The importance of making full use of data that we already have while also strengthening national capacities to better collect, analyse and use disaggregated data; to do so a variety of data sources, both traditional and official sources need to be considered.

Comments and questions from attendees:

Attendees shared the following comments using the chat box for the Lab. Many expressed their appreciation to have the opportunity to discuss this important topic, also noting that further collective reflection is needed. These are some notable points made by the attendees:

Related to COVID-19 Pandemic

- SDG 17 is very important in view of COVID-19 for national and international cooperation towards developing a child-sensitive and child-inclusive society.
- There is a need to revisit and modify the action to ensure a child-sensitive and child-inclusive society in view of COVID-19.
- Action is needed to address the digital divide in the context of children's remote learning.
- Beyond nutrition education and security, children are highly vulnerable to sexual abuse, we need to raise the profile of campaign against this dreadful act, (during the COVID-19 pandemic) there is a significant increase in number of child abuse cases in schools, at home and everywhere.
- Enhancing means of SDGs implementation, including data collection, have remained challenging due to scarce financial resources. The pandemic is adding more difficulties. Therefore, strengthening multilateralism, international cooperation, in all its forms, and global partnership are more important than ever.
- Urgent funds are needed to help provide for full, comprehensive and sustainable responses to tackle the current global health pandemic and prepare its aftermath. These included solid and sustained Social policies that provide for increasing access to quality education, addressing child and family welfare, ending poverty, child marriage and child labour, achieving gender equality and eliminating all forms of violence.

Child Sensitive VNRs

- VNRs do not require a standard format, but is it accompanied by an emphasis on the importance of consultations with children/regarding children as citizens who must be equally heard as much as adults are consulted in the development of State plans and budgets?
- Public programs and services can be developed without sufficient reference to local context or data on the issues of children or the communities.
- Without clear understanding of what constitutes good practice, it is challenging to showcase good practices in consultations with children for the development of public programs and services.
- Further reflection is needed on how to make information on governance impacting children and SDGs accessible and understandable to children. As mentioned by child speakers, education or information sharing is a supportive condition for child participation.
- Inclusive and participatory VNR processes can help ensure that children's well-being and protection are at the centre of national development planning, and hence, lead to accelerating progress towards reaching the SDGs.
- Tracking achievements, assessing progress and identifying challenges require the availability of disaggregated data and information by age and place. These are essential for the monitoring of the SDGs, in order to prevent vulnerable groups of children from being left behind as a result of abuse, child marriage, neglect, poverty, lack of education, malnutrition, or disabilities.
- We set out to consult children, had questions to guide discussions with them by end of March - and then came covid-19 lockdowns. We ended up using U-Report and an online platform to reach as many of them as possible. Thereby we failed to consult the most vulnerable since they have no access to the internet. What could we have done differently under the circumstances -

apart from arranging for earlier consultations (which wouldn't have been necessary if there was no pandemic).

- Examples of complimentary data sources for children currently being worked on include harvesting data from news and social media streams to map (however roughly) the increase in violence in the home (particularly interested in violence against children) by reports in social or news media. It isn't necessarily accurate, but conforms to the principle of "good enough" data to see trends / spreads at least roughly

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Partnerships, Ms. Charlotte Petri- Gornitzka delivered closing remarks highlighting the progress that has been made in strengthening child rights and child voices in the VNR process over the last 5 years since the adoption of the SDGs, but that we must continue to build on this progress and listen to children.

The Lab ended with a creative and inspiring message of hope – a performance by the Young at Arts Children's Choir organized by the NGO Sing for Hope.