



H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, President of ECOSOC, and Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN

**Opening Statement for VNR-VLR Workshop
Ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

27 February 2023

Niamey, Niger

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome everyone, in person and online, to the 2023 Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews and Voluntary Local Reviews, in preparation for the ninth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.

I thank the Economic Commission for Africa for organizing this one-day event, and the Government of Niger for hosting this year's Forum.

All countries in the Africa region have been actively involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. This is evident in the efforts put into the preparation of the Voluntary National Reviews presented at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July.

Every year, the collection of VNR reports provide detailed information and data on how countries are measuring progress towards the 17 SDGs and their targets.



They identify collective challenges, engage stakeholders, undertake initiatives to bridge development gaps, and provide recommendations for solutions through partnerships and multilateral cooperation.

They provide a detailed picture of how recent global shocks have impacted some of the least developed countries in the region, as well as landlocked developing countries, small island developing States, middle-income countries, and countries in conflict or post-conflict situations.

All African countries have experienced negative impacts, as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to exacerbate poverty, unemployment, unsustainable debt, widening inequalities, and inflation.

Although making progress towards the SDGs has become more difficult, African countries have also reported on positive outcomes in their VNR, as a result of increased mobilization of social and economic safety nets and other measures to meet these crises and ensure that no one is left behind.

Africa's VNRs demonstrate a strong commitment to a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that ensures progress in the years ahead, especially in the areas of education, health, gender equality and women's empowerment, youth engagement, capacity building and partnerships.

African countries are also strengthening national institutions and working with stakeholders to implement inclusive solutions to achieve the 2030 Agenda in tandem with the African Union's Agenda 2063, at national as well as at local levels.

The VNRs commonly report on national efforts to integrate the SDGs within national development plans, and highlight the potential to strengthen progress, with many detailing comprehensive plans for the way forward, for a recovery from the pandemic that is sustainable and resilient, and accelerates transformative actions to build back better, greener and bluer.



The use of national surveys and digital assessments has been effective for numerous countries. Innovative platforms and digitization of collection databases developed during the pandemic have helped to scale-up technological literacy and usage, not only for the VNR but also for services such as alternative educational formats and other social support programmes.

VNRs provide examples of innovative initiatives and partnerships that support data systems and enhance sustainable financing. Building on such data is important for identifying areas of potential growth, and where assistance is needed.

VNRs have also reported on increased stakeholder engagement, reflecting new and innovative ways to domesticate the SDGs in local communities. While awareness of the SDGs is steadily increasing, the VNRs also underscore that much more needs to be done to raise awareness and understanding at all levels.

Finally, the promotion of sub-national engagement and review has brought many countries closer to multi-level governance, and aided policy coherence. Voluntary Local Reviews have provided input to national and regional frameworks. They have enriched the discussions around VNRs.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

In July this year, the HLPF will continue to focus on effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs, and explore actionable policy guidance for their full implementation at all levels.

The HLPF will also conduct an in-depth review of progress towards SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy; SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the Goals.

In the process of conducting a VNR, I encourage countries to report on progress towards all 17 SDGs, according to national priority, and remind those engaged to not constrain the scope of the review to only those Goals in focus in any given year.



Later this year, we will also be preparing for the “SDG Summit” in September.

Accordingly, today’s workshop will also provide an opportunity to discuss your priorities and preparations for the SDG Summit, and I invite you all to share your vision for reaching the SDGs by 2030. Your Presidents and Prime Ministers will be invited to share it at the SDG Summit, along with transformative action they intend to take.

I wish you all an exciting and productive day ahead.