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BIODIVERSITY GUIDANCE FOR VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Draft Guidance for Reporting Progress on Biodiversity to the High-level Political Forum

Note by the Executive Secretary

1.	At its thirteenth meeting, the Conference of the Parties urged Parties to mainstream biodiversity in the implementation of all relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (decision XIII/3, para. 14). In paragraph 104 of the same decision, the Executive Secretary was requested to support Parties in their efforts to utilize an integrated approach towards achieving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

2.	As part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States of the United Nations are encouraged to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels, which are country-led and country-driven. These Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are presented annually at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development.

3.	The 2018 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council from 9 July to 18 July 2018, addressed SDG 15 on terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. It also addressed other SDGs of relevance to biodiversity: Goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy, Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities, Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production, and Goal 17 on partnerships. 46 countries presented VNRs at the 2018 HLPF.

4.	Notification 2018/005 of 18 January 2018 alerted Parties with respect to the focus of the 2018 HLPF, and urged them to highlight the specific role of biodiversity and ecosystems for sustainable development in their interventions during the High-level Political Forum, including in the voluntary national reviews that will be presented during the forum.

5.	As part of its efforts to support Parties in utilizing integrated approaches, the Secretariat, with financial support provided by the European Union, initiated the preparation of guidance for the integration of biodiversity considerations in voluntary national reviews, providing good practice examples taken from Voluntary National Reviews prepared for the 2017 HLPF and references to relevant outputs and products prepared under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

6.	The draft Biodiversity Guidance for Voluntary National Reviews was circulated in draft form to the second meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation as document CBD/SBI/2/INF/32. This initial draft document was updated, using information and examples available from the VNRs presented at the 2018 High-level Political Forum, for the information of the Conference of the Parties at its fourteenth meeting.

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[*] CBD/COP/14/1.

Biodiversity Guidance for Voluntary National Reviews

*Updated Draft Guidance for Reporting Progress on Biodiversity to the
High-level Political Forum through VNRs*

INTRODUCTION

As part of follow-up and review for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member states of the United Nations are encouraged to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (paragraph 79). These Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are presented annually in New York under the auspices of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF).

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) issued a 2019 update to its 'Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs', incorporating and building on the UN Secretary General's 2018 Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for the VNRs at the HLPF (see Annex II of the Handbook). Among its contents, the updated Handbook provides a reminder as to the "integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals" and also recommends that VNRs "draw on existing reports" and "use existing national platforms and processes that could contribute to the VNR writing and analysis process."

The present document provides Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) with supplementary guidance for reporting on progress in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in their VNRs and for articulating the important cross-cutting role that biodiversity plays in supporting each of the SDGs. This biodiversity-specific guidance document is organized according to the eight sections outlined in the United Nations Secretary General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for VNRs at the HLPF. Importantly, the guidance contained herein encourages Parties to the Convention to draw on existing reporting outputs (national, regional, and international) in the preparation of the VNRs, including emphasis on the commonalities in reporting between VNRs and the Sixth National Reports due under the CBD in December 2018.

The extent and type of biodiversity coverage in the VNRs presented at the 2017 and 2018 HLPFs was examined to help inform the updated biodiversity guidance contained herein. The financial support of the European Union in preparing this guidance is gratefully acknowledged.

BACKGROUND

Forty-three countries presented VNRs to the HLPF in 2017. Biodiversity was covered to varying degrees in all but one report and was mentioned more than 20 times in the reports prepared by Belgium, Portugal, Cyprus, Chile, Uruguay, Malaysia and Thailand. The upper quartile of reports with respect to the inclusion of biodiversity, mentioned biodiversity related terms 24 times per 100 pages. The lower quartile of reports mentioned biodiversity just 5 times per 100 pages. While biodiversity was most often referenced in relation to SDGs 2, 14 and 15, several countries discussed it in the context of other SDGs, including Belgium (SDGs 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 15 and 16), Portugal (SDGs 2, 4, 12, 13, 14 and 15), and Cyprus (SDGs 2, 12, 13, 14 and 15).

In its Synthesis Report of the 2017 VNR reports, UNDESA observed that countries which reported on SDG 15 stressed that ecosystems are of key importance to health and quality of life and highlighted the interconnectedness of water with healthy terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. Thailand for example, noted its efforts to conserve and restore deteriorated upstream forests and prevent soil erosion in an effort to promote water management. UNDESA also observed, based on the collection of 2017 VNR reports, that a key accelerator for biodiversity loss was destruction of habitats.

In 2018, forty-six countries presented VNRs to the HLPF. Biodiversity coverage increased from 2017 to 2018 with the upper quartile of reports mentioning biodiversity 31 times per 100 pages (up from 24 times

per 100 pages in 2017), and the lower quartile of reports mentioning biodiversity 11 times per 100 pages (up from 5 times per 100 pages in 2017). The majority of this coverage occurred in relation to SDG 15 'Life on Land', as evidenced by the top ten reports, in which 72% of the mentions of biodiversity occurred in relation to SDG 15. That said, there was indeed coverage of biodiversity across several SDGs in the 2018 reports, including for example from: Singapore where biodiversity was mentioned in the context of SDGs 11, 13, 14, 15 and 16; Viet Nam (across SDGs 6, 14 and 15), Andorra (across SDGs 7, 12, 13 and 15), Uruguay (across SDGs 6, 11, 12, and 15), Ireland (across SDGs 2, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), Canada (across SDGs 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15), Senegal (across SDGs 2, 6, 11, 13, 14, 15), and Spain (across SDGs 2, 14 and 15).

1. OPENING STATEMENT

In the opening statement of a VNR, the Secretary General's 2018 Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines asks member states to "highlight the current status of SDG progress and how the Government is responding to the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda for Development including through its national development plans, strategies, or other relevant documents."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Opening Statement' of a VNR

In the context of a VNR's 'Opening Statement', Parties to the Convention and other member States could articulate how biodiversity and healthy ecosystems provide a foundation for achieving the SDGs in their country.

For example, the CBD's 'Policy Brief on Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda' describes the cross-cutting role of biodiversity as follows:

"Biodiversity and ecosystem services contribute directly to human well-being and development priorities. Nearly half of the world's population is directly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. Today, some 2.6 billion people draw their livelihoods either partially or fully from agriculture, 1.6 billion from forests, and 250 million from fisheries. Many of the most vulnerable people depend directly on biodiversity to fulfil their daily subsistence needs. Biodiversity is also at the centre of many economic activities, including those related to agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism. The importance of biodiversity and ecosystems is reflected in many of the SDGs and targets. Therefore, consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems will be essential as countries embark on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, and in the implementation of key national priorities for sustainable development."

This section of a VNR is also a good opportunity to list any national strategy or action plan that has been created for helping to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and thereby, contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Useful Resources:
- Technical Note: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CBD and Partners
- Policy Brief: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CBD and Partners
- Note by the Executive Secretary on Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice.
- Background Note: Expert Meeting on SDG 15, UNDESA
- CBD Website: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- COP-13 decisions containing requests related to NBSAPs, CBD

- [NBSAPs: Natural Catalysts for Accelerating Action on SDGs (UNDP and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016)](#)

Good Practice Examples

Italy's 2017 VNR
[Italy's 2017 VNR](#) highlights the fundamental importance of biodiversity to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In its foreword, which is equivalent to the "Opening Statement", the report states*: "Following the 2030 Agenda, the [National Sustainable Development Strategy] shapes a new vision towards a circular, low-emission economy, resilient to climate impacts and to other global changes endangering local communities, prioritising the fight against biodiversity loss, alteration of the fundamental bio-geochemical cycles (carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus) and land-use change."*

Moreover, Italy's 2017 VNR included a section pertaining to "planet preservation" (p.38) which is also a useful example of the type of statement that could be included in a VNR opening statement. Their report highlighted the following points:
- *"It is crucial to adequately consider the link between the health of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, social well-being and economic perspectives within territorial development and infrastructure policies."*
- *"In this sense, the ability to account Natural Capital is decisive to promote long-lasting growth by focusing on environmental quality. This objective is at the basis of the first report on the State of Natural Capital, coordinated by a Natural Capital Committee, composed by representatives of institutions and research experts."*
- *"In 2010, Italy adopted a National Strategy for Biodiversity, building on a participatory and shared process involving institutional, social and economic actors concerned with Natural Capital accountability and mainstreaming."*

Qatar's 2018 VNR
In the opening statement of Qatar's 2018 VNR, Dr. Saleh M. Al-Nabit, Minister of Development Planning and Statistics stated:

"This review shows the progress achieved by our country in implementing the sustainable development goals of ensuring the availability of water and sanitation for all, ensuring that all have access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy; making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns; protecting, restoring, and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; combating desertification and halting land degradation; halting biodiversity loss; strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development."

2. HIGHLIGHTS

The Secretary General's VNR Guidelines recommend including a 'Highlights' section in a VNR and to describe "how the Government has responded to the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs and to the principle of leaving no-one behind", among other aspects.

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Highlights' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'Highlights' section of a VNR, member states could emphasize the importance of achieving the SDGs in a manner that considers the interaction among all SDGs and minimizes trade-offs. Member states could also describe the cross-cutting role

of biodiversity in achieving the SDGs in their country, and the role biodiversity plays in 'leaving no one behind'.

For example, the CBD's Technical Note on 'Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda' makes the following statement:

"Biodiversity and ecosystems feature prominently across many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated targets. They contribute directly to human well-being and development priorities. Biodiversity is at the centre of many economic activities, particularly those related to crop and livestock agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. Globally, nearly half of the human population is directly dependent on natural resources for its livelihood, and many of the most vulnerable people depend directly on biodiversity to fulfil their daily subsistence needs."

Useful Resources on Biodiversity's Role in Achieving the SDGs:
- CBD Website, Biodiversity for Development
- Technical Note: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNCBD and Partners
- Policy Brief: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNCBD and Partners
- Note by the Executive Secretary on Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice.
- The 2030 Agenda and Ecosystems: A discussion paper on the links between the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Swedish Biodiversity Centre.

Useful Resources on Biodiversity's Role in 'Leaving No One Behind':
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. UN Human Rights Council, 34th Session
- COP XII/5. Biodiversity for poverty eradication and sustainable development, CBD
- Biodiversity, Development and Poverty Alleviation. Recognizing the Role of Biodiversity for Human Well-being, CBD
- CBD Website, Gender and Biodiversity
- UNDP Blog: Valuing biodiversity and achieving national SDG targets, UNDP
- Shared UN System Framework for Action on Leaving No One Behind, UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination

Good Practice Examples

Chile's 2017 VNR
Chile's 2017 VNR highlights near the beginning of its report (in its 'Declaration' section) how the country is responding to the 2030 Agenda and the role biodiversity plays in that response. Chile's 2017 VNR states:

"The environmental policy establishes conditions and incentives to advance towards sustainability, guaranteeing the quality of life, environmental equity and protection of ecosystems. The environmental dimension of development is promoted through a green growth strategy through the National Climate Change Action Plan, the National Sustainable Consumption and Production Program, the Recycling Law, new atmospheric decontamination plans and the implementation of green taxes. In addition, the

environment is protected by expanding protected areas, advancing in a National Biodiversity Strategy and the legislative proposal of the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Service."

Viet Nam's 2018 VNR
In the executive summary of its 2018 VNR, Viet Nam highlighted the following two points:

- *SDG 14: "To date, numerous policies related to SDG 14 have been improved and finalized, such as the Law on Environmental Protection, Law on Vietnamese Sea, Law on Natural Resources and Environment of Sea and Islands, Law on Fisheries, Strategy for Fisheries Development, Strategy for Sustainable Exploitation and Use of Natural Resources and Protection of Marine Environment, and National Strategy on Bio-diversity until 2020 and Vision to 2030.*
- *SDG 15: "Numerous policies related to SDG 15 have been issued, including the Law on Forest Protection and Development, Law on Bio-diversity, Law on Forestry and related strategies. The formulation of master plans is considered an important tool to conserve bio-diversity, with 18 provinces having formulated and approved provincial master plans for bio-diversity conservation.*

3. INTRODUCTION

The UN's VNR Guidelines suggest that Member States should include in their introduction section a mention of the international agreements it is party to in the context of how the county's policy architecture reflects the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Introduction' of a VNR

In the context of the 'Introduction' section of a VNR, member states could include a statement mentioning if they are a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity and/or other biodiversity-related multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and describe how these MEAs are part of its policy architecture for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Useful Resources:
- CBD Website, Text of the Convention
- CBD Website, List of Parties to the Convention

Good Practice Examples

While examples of the mention of specific conventions or MEAs in this section of a VNR were not observed in 2017 and 2018, there are instances were biodiversity was mentioned in the introduction. For instance:

Ireland's 2018 VNR
In its 2018 VNR, Ireland stated the following:

"Performance against other SDGs, though in many areas positive, is more mixed, and specific challenges exist in relation to housing, levels of obesity, achieving sustainable consumption and production, biodiversity and habitat destruction, mitigating and adapting to climate change, addressing entrenched inequalities and mainstreaming a gender perspective into policy."

Bhutan's 2018 VNR
In the introduction section to its 2018 VNR, Bhutan stated the following:

"Bhutan has prioritized three goals in the medium term namely Goal 1: Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, underscoring the continued importance RGoB places on poverty reduction and the shift beyond income poverty towards addressing issues of social protection and vulnerable groups, Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, upholding Bhutan's commitment to the global community to remain carbon neutral at all times and Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss."

4. METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS FOR PREPARATION OF THE REVIEW

In this section of a VNR, member states are asked to describe "how different levels and sectors of Government contributed to the review", "whether and how the whole-of-Government approach was used" and "what mechanisms have been used to engage stakeholders", among other aspects.

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Methodology' Section of a VNR

In this section, member states could describe their institutional arrangements and mechanisms for ensuring that different issues and priorities are considered together in an integrated national approach to implementation. Examples of how the importance of biodiversity is considered through such mechanisms could be provided. This is also the section where member states could highlight the contribution to the review of stakeholders who have first-hand perspective of ecosystems and the services they provide, such as representatives from watershed associations, conservation districts, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Useful Resources:
- COP XII/8. Stakeholder engagement, CBD
- COP XII/9. Engagement with subnational and local governments, CBD
- COP XII/10. Business engagement, CBD
- UNCBD Website on Traditional Knowledge
- CBD Traditional Knowledge Information Portal
- CBD WG8j Recommendations
- COP XIII/18. Article 8(j) and related provisions, CBD
- COP XIII/19. Article 8(j) and related Articles: other matters related to the programme of work, CBD

Good Practice Examples

In review of the 2017 and 2018 VNRs, no examples were found that reflected biodiversity in the methodology section of a VNR. In all cases this section was high level and did not get into sector specific aspects. There is however, one example from a different VNR section that did reflect the type of discussion that could be included in the methodology section of a VNR. This example was from Singapore's 2018 VNR.

Singapore's 2018 VNR
In Singapore's 2018 VNR, and in the context of discussing progress toward SDG 14, the reported noted the following:

"Involving the Community as Stakeholders: "Successful nature conservation initiatives are intrinsically linked to cultivating mindsets and behaviours that value nature appreciation. Thus, community outreach and stewardship programmes are vital in encouraging nature conservation efforts with members of the public and other stakeholders. Building on the pool of volunteers nurtured through community engagement projects like the Comprehensive Marine Biodiversity Survey, the MCAP keeps these volunteers engaged in nature appreciation and conservation through talks and workshops, SCUBA diving, citizen science activities and nature ambassador opportunities."

5. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The policy and enabling environment section of a VNR comprises multiple sub-sections and therefore, several opportunities exist to articulate how biodiversity and healthy ecosystems serve as the foundation for sustainable development.

Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals

This subsection of a VNR calls for examples of how the 2030 Agenda and SDGs are being mainstreamed into policy and planning by governments (national and sub-national), civil society and the private sector. It also asks "how different groups, particularly women and young people, have been engaged and how direct citizen engagement has been facilitated."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Creating Ownership' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'Creating Ownership' section of a VNR, member states could describe efforts toward mainstreaming biodiversity into planning and policy in national and sub-national governments, civil society and the private sector.

In particular, Parties to Convention on Biological Diversity have increasingly focused on the need to "mainstream" biodiversity in the sectors and cross-sectoral policies that have the greatest relevance to biodiversity, from dependencies to potential adverse impacts. At its twelfth meeting, the Parties adopted a decision on biodiversity for poverty eradication and development, along with the Chennai Guidance related to actions to integrate biodiversity considerations into policy and planning by governments, and actions by civil society and the private sector, as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

At its thirteenth meeting, the Parties adopted a decision on the mainstreaming of biodiversity with a particular focus on the agriculture, forestry, fisheries and tourism sectors (decision XIII/3). In the same decision, the Parties decided that at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 14), they would consider the mainstreaming of biodiversity in the sectors of energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing, as well as health.

Useful Resources:
- [CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/4](), Biodiversity and Climate Change
- [CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/3](), 16 December 2016. Strategic actions to enhance the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the achievement

of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including with respect to mainstreaming and the integration of biodiversity within and across sectors, CBD
- CBD_SBSTTA_XXI/4. Mainstreaming of biodiversity in the sectors of energy and mining, infrastructure, manufacturing and processing, and health, CBD
- UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/XII/5, Chennai Guidance for the Integration of Biodiversity and Poverty Eradication.

Member states could also include brief examples of any efforts within their country with regard to traditional knowledge, engaging community stakeholders, including using citizen science or local crowdsourcing to monitor biodiversity and ecosystem health in the context of SDGs 14 and 15.

Useful Resources:
- See Part 4 of this document.

Good Practice Examples

While no specific biodiversity-related examples were observed in the 'Creating Ownership' section among the 2017 and 2018 VNRs, Canada's 2018 report did presented information in its SDG progress section that exemplifies the type of information that would be appropriate for conveying a sense of ownership of the SDGs in the context of biodiversity.

Canada's 2018 VNR
"Mainstreaming biodiversity Canada has a long history of supporting the mainstreaming of biodiversity into productive sectors. This includes efforts to incorporate biodiversity considerations into the agricultural, fisheries, forestry and tourism sectors. Canada is working to improve policy coherence by integrating actions for conserving biodiversity with other environmental and socio-economic objectives. For instance, Canada has established a pan-Canadian working group to address issues of climate change and biodiversity loss in a coordinated way, and to promote the integration of biodiversity considerations into climate change decisions."

Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks

This subsection of a VNR asks member states to "outline critical initiatives that the country has undertaken to adapt the SDGs and targets to its national circumstances." The Secretary General's VNR Guidelines also suggest that "countries could consider referring to major efforts undertaken by local authorities and non-State actors to implement the Goals, the role of science-policy interfaces, and partnerships."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'National Frameworks' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'National Frameworks' section of a VNR, Parties to the CBD could make reference to their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and how it is integrated with its broader national development plan. NBSAPs are to be a policy instrument per Decision X/2 and XIII/1.

Useful Resources:
- CBD Website: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- COP-13 requests related to NBSAPs, UNCBD
- NBSAPs: Natural Catalysts for Accelerating Action on SDGs (UNDP, 2016)
- UNCBD Website: Subnational Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (SBSAPs)
- UNCBD Website: Regional Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (RBSAPs)

Good Practice Examples

Thailand's 2017 VNR

Thailand's 2017 VNR makes reference to its national biodiversity plan in the context of discussing progress toward SDG 2. For example, the report states:

"Furthermore, the Royal Thai Government attaches importance to possessing the biodiversity of seeds used in agriculture, domesticated animals, and relevant species of plants and animals. This has led to the formulation of the Master Plan on Integration of the Management of Biodiversity 2015 – 2021 consisting of four strategies: (1) inclusive biodiversity management, (2) conservation and restoration of biodiversity, (3) protect national interests on biodiversity, increase and share benefits from biodiversity in accordance with Green Economy concept and (4) develop knowledge and database on biodiversity of international standards."

Ireland's 2018 VNR

In its section on 'National Policy and Institutional Architecture', Ireland's 2018 VNR provides relevant policy background and refers to its biodiversity plan.

"A key commitment under the SDG National Implementation Plan involves mainstreaming the SDGs across national policies, so that when relevant sectoral policies are developed or reviewed, Ireland's commitments under the SDGs will be taken into account. While this will be an incremental process, national polices which already refer to the SDGs include the National Strategy for Women and Girls, the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility, the National Planning Framework and the [upcoming] Clean Air Strategy."

Integration of the three dimensions

The UN's VNR Guidelines recommend that Member States "discuss how the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are being integrated and how sustainable development policies are being designed and implemented to reflect such integration."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Integration' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'Integration' section of a VNR, member states could elaborate how policy tools for upstream planning, such as strategic environmental assessment (SEA), were used and how this helped advance the SDGs, including the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Useful Resources:
- COP 8 Decision VIII/28. Impact assessment: Voluntary guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive impact assessment, CBD
- Brochure with the voluntary guidelines on biodiversity-inclusive impact assessment, Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment.

Good Practice Examples

Switzerland's 2018 VNR

"Prospective evaluation instruments, such as regulatory impact assessments, sustainability assessments, environmental assessments, energy impact assessments and health impact assessments, are available for analysing the impact of the government's proposed policies and actions."

Viet Nam's 2018 VNR

Viet Nam's 2018 VNR contains a section on "Linkages in SDGs Implementation."

"Conservation of biodiversity as per SDG 15 will help protect people's health, promote food production and reduce poverty. Therefore, SDG 15 is closely related to others, especially SDGs 1, 2, 3, 13 and 14."

Leaving no one behind

An underlying principle for the 2030 Agenda is to 'leave no one behind' as articulated in paragraphs 3, 4, 18, 23, 48, 72 and 74 of the Agenda. Accordingly, the Secretary General's VNR Guidelines suggest that member states "assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" and describe "how vulnerable groups have been identified, including through improved data collection and disaggregation" and additionally, "what policies and programmes are being implemented to address their needs and support their empowerment."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Leave No One Behind' Section of a VNR

From the perspective of the 'leave no one behind' principle, the importance of biodiversity as a basic human right could be elaborated in a VNR by drawing on aspects of the following quote from the UN Human Rights Council:

"The full enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food and water, depends on the services provided by ecosystems. The provision of ecosystem services depends on the health and sustainability of ecosystems, which in turn depend on biodiversity. The full enjoyment of human rights thus depends on biodiversity, and the degradation and loss of biodiversity undermine the ability of human beings to enjoy their human rights." (source: [UN Human Rights Council](#), 34th Session)

Biodiversity's contribution to the Agenda's 'leave no one behind' principle can be further elaborated by member states in providing country-specific examples of any or all of the following aspects identified by the UN Human Rights Council:

- *The loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services has disproportionate effects on people who are vulnerable for other reasons, including gender, age, disability, poverty or minority status.*
- *The degradation and loss of biodiversity often result from and reinforce existing patterns of discrimination.* Although everyone depends on ecosystem services, some people depend on them more closely than others. For indigenous peoples, forest-dwellers, fisherfolk and others who rely directly on the products of forests, rivers, lakes and oceans for their food, fuel and medicine, environmental harm can and often does have disastrous consequences.
- *Many religions call on all human beings to be stewards of the riches of the natural world. However, the loss of particular places is felt predominantly by those who associate their sacred rituals and sites with those locations.* Food and shelter may be replaced, but the destruction of a sacred grove may cause irreparable harm.
- *The loss of biodiversity-dependent ecosystem services is likely to accentuate inequality and marginalization of the most vulnerable sectors of society, by decreasing their access to basic materials for a healthy life and by reducing their freedom of choice and action.* Economic development that does not consider effects on these ecosystem services may decrease the quality of life of these vulnerable populations, even if other segments of society benefit.

Useful Resources:
- See Part 2 of this document.

Good Practice Example

Romania's 2018 VNR

Romania's 2018 VNR includes on 'Leaving No One Behind' and features its national efforts in the arenas of health, education and culture. In describing its education strategy, the Romania report illustrates the broad scope, including biological and landscape diversity.

"At the macro-regional level, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development offers a valuable opportunity for countries to learn from each other and to share newly produced resources and materials within and beyond the ECE region. The UNECE Strategy for ESD's main aim is to encourage countries to integrate ESD into all forms of their education systems and covers all levels from primary to tertiary, including vocational and adult learning. ESD means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning, such as poverty alleviation, citizenship, peace, ethics, responsibility in local and global contexts, democracy and governance, justice, security, human rights, health, gender equity, cultural diversity, rural and urban development, economy, production and consumption patterns, corporate responsibility, environmental protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity."

Institutional mechanisms

Under this subsection of a VNR, member states are asked how it has adapted its institutional framework in light of the 2030 Agenda (i.e., to promote horizontal and vertical policy coherence and coordination).

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Institutional Mechanisms' Section of a VNR

The 'Institutions' section of a VNR provides an opportunity for member states and Parties to the CBD to describe government coordination mechanisms, mechanisms for stakeholder inputs and engagement, multi-stakeholder knowledge platforms, and independent governmental audit or evaluation institutions. This can include for example, how any horizontal coordinating bodies created in relation to the preparation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and its implementation are integrated with any new inter-agency coordinating bodies for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

Useful Resources:
- Compendium of National Institutional Arrangements for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNDESA
- CBD Website: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- CBD/SBI/2/4/Add.1, Institutional Mechanisms and Effective Measures to Enhance Implementation at the National Level

Structural issues

In this subsection of a VNR, the UN's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines note that member states are "encouraged to report on relevant structural issues or barriers they have faced, including the possible external consequences of domestic policies" and to "highlight the transformative policies, tools, institutional changes they have used to address these issues or barriers."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Structural Issues' Section of a VNR

In the context of a VNR's "Structural Issues' section, Parties to the CBD are encouraged to highlight the barriers/obstacles that they have experienced in the implementation of the

Convention. In doing so, Parties can draw on insights from the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), the mandate of which is "to identify strategic actions to enhance implementation, which may include, as appropriate, actions related to mainstreaming; the development and implementation of coherent and effective measures and supporting institutional frameworks, as well as actions related to synergies with other biodiversity-related conventions, partnerships with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations; and the enhancement of the role of relevant actors…"

Useful Resources:
- CBD/SBI/2/4/Add.1, Institutional Mechanisms and Effective Measures to Enhance Implementation at the National Level

Furthermore, discussions taking place in the context of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted at COP15 will include consideration of systems thinking, transition management, and/or other tools for transformational change, including: disrupters and innovation, accelerators and multipliers; corporate policies, markets, and finance; transforming implementation through technology, data and accountability; and public awareness efforts related to the urgency of transformational change in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Useful Resources:
- Bogis-Bossey Dialogue for Biodiversity, CBD
- Scenarios for the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity, CBD
- Policy Innovations for Transformative Change: Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Research Institute for Social Change)

6. PROGRESS ON GOALS AND TARGETS

This section is a core part of a VNR, and as such the Secretary General's Guidelines encouraged member states to "provide brief information on progress and the status of all SDGs" and to "describe critical difficulties encountered in reaching them and how they could be addressed."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'SDG Progress' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'Progress on Goals and Targets' section of a VNR, biodiversity and healthy ecosystems support each SDG in a unique way (see Part 1 and 2 of this document), and together these links give a systems view for how biodiversity provides a cross-cutting foundation for the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, in discussing the progress of each SDG and their targets in this section of a VNR, member states are encouraged to consider and reflect on the role that biodiversity and healthy ecosystems play in reaching targets, including mention of the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets (see CBD Technical Note), and how any difficulties encountered could be mitigated or how any successes achieved could be further leveraged for transformational change.

In addition to examining progress based on the SDG indicators as put forth by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), Parties to the CBD are encouraged to draw on insights and data from their *Sixth National Report* which is due under the Convention by 31 December 2018. Similarly, Parties can also draw on their VNR reports for the preparation of their Sixth National Report.

Furthermore, member States are encouraged to draw on insights from the regional assessments of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and also take into account preparations for the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* and other indicators shared through the *Biodiversity Indicators Partnership*.

Useful Resources:
- CBD Website, Biodiversity for Development
- Technical Note: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CBD and Partners
- Policy Brief: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CBD and Partners
- Note by the Executive Secretary on Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice.
- The 2030 Agenda and Ecosystems: A discussion paper on the links between the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Swedish Biodiversity Centre.
- Sixth National Report Information Portal, CBD
- CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/28, Indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets
- Biodiversity Indictors Partnership
- CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/29, Global Biodiversity Outlook and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
- The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

Good Practice Examples

Romania's 2018 VNR

Romania's 2018 VNR includes a comprehensive report on progress for SDG 15, including extensive coverage of biodiversity in the following areas:

- Actual state of biodiversity
- Management of the protected areas
- Ecosystems Diversity
- Species Diversity
- Genetic Diversity
- Human Influence on the ecological systems
- Economy and biodiversity
- Threats for biodiversity
- Overall assessment of conservation status of habitats and species
- Improving/deteriorating trends of habitats and species with an unfavourable conservation status
- Overall assessment of conservation status of habitats and species by biogeographical and marine
- Region
- Overall assessment of conservation status by habitat category and species group
- Frequency of main pressures and threats
- Forest ecosystems
- Partnership with other associations

Ireland's 2018 VNR
In describing progress for SDG 15, Ireland's 2018 VNR includes a detailed overview of its National Biodiversity Action Plan and how this plan supports many facets of Ireland's SDG progress.

*"As a Party to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, Ireland has made a commitment to prepare Action Plans towards the achievement of the Convention's targets: namely to secure the conservation of biological diversity; sustainable use of its components; and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources. Ireland's **third National Biodiversity Action Plan [NBAP], 2017-2021 [SDG 15.9]** sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland's Vision for Biodiversity that "biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally"."*

"The NBAP contains 119 actions under a framework of seven strategic objectives. These encompass mainstreaming biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors; strengthening the knowledge base for the conservation; increasing awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services; conserving and restoring biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside; conserving and restoring ecosystem services in the marine environment; expanding and improving management of protected areas and species; and strengthening international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services."

"Many of the targeted actions in the NBAP also contribute towards Ireland's obligations under EU environmental directives and other relevant national policies including the National Peatlands Strategy and the Climate Change Adaptation Framework."

"The NBAP highlights the 2030 Agenda which recognises that sustainable management of natural resources is relevant to achieving all the SDGs, and therefore the crucial role of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the well-being of both people and our planet. The actions under each objective within the NBAP will contribute towards achieving many of the SDGs. These links between the NBAP objectives and the SDGs are listed after each objective within Appendix 1 of the NBAP."

"One of the actions within the NBAP aims to "Build on the National Biodiversity Indicators to develop state, pressures, and response indicators to allow assessment of Ireland's national and international biodiversity commitments by 2020, including this the third NBAP, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the SDGs". These indicators are hosted on the National Biodiversity Data Centre website http://indicators.biodiversityireland.ie/. The indicators are currently being tagged where linkages to the SDGs have been identified."

7. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The UN's VNR Guidelines encourage Member States to "discuss how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, including in terms of financing, capacity development and data needs, technology, and partnerships."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Means of Implementation' section

In the context of the 'Means of Implementation' section of a VNR, member states could elaborate on experience with various financing sources and mechanisms for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well with associated capacity building

and technical support activities, such as through the Biodiversity Finance (BIOFIN) Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme.

Furthermore, Parties to the CBD could also elaborate on progress towards the *Resource Mobilization* targets as adopted by the Conference at its thirteenth meeting, under Aichi Target 20 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 (decision XIII/20).

Useful Resources:
- CBD Website, Financial Mechanism and Resources
- CBD Website, National financing: Africa
- CBD Website, National financing: Asia-Pacific
- CBD Website, National financing: Latin American and Caribbean
- CBD Website, National and international financing: Eastern European
- CBD Website, National and international financing: Western European and Others
- UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/XII/3, Resource Mobilization.
- CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/20, Resource Mobilization

Good Practice Example – Malaysia's 2017 VNR

The Malaysian 2017 VNR report is a good case example elaborating on the array of financing sources and mechanisms for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. The report states:

"Malaysia will need funding and technical assistance to develop national indicators and baselines to assess the progress of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Channelling resources to develop data for national indicators will be critical for evidence-based decisions and future plans. Technical assistance in developing proxy indicators may be needed in capacity building and "info-structure" development (e.g., using big data and open data for data collection). Innovative resource mobilisation is an area that requires technical and legal knowledge and funding. For example, in the environment sector, Malaysia is exploring alternative sources of financing through initiatives such as the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). These pilot projects are instrumental to support mobilisation of additional resources."

Ireland's 2018 VNR
While being included in its section on SDG progress, Ireland's 2018 VNR provides a good example of the type of information that could be included in the 'Means of Implementation' section of a VNR.

"A national Biodiversity Expenditure Review [2010-2015] will be published in 2018 which examines expenditure from relevant sectors including, Agriculture, Forestry, Marine, Heritage and eNGOs. This review also presents innovative financial mechanisms that could be utilised to mobilise additional resources for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Research will build on this review to undertake a Financial Needs Assessment to determine the resources required to conserve and restore biodiversity."

Bhutan's 2018 VNR
In its 2018 VNR, Bhutan provides a good description of financing sources and instruments.

"Bhutan's five-year plan financing thus far have been sourced mainly through ODA and domestic resources. With prudent fiscal management, the Royal Government is able to finance up to 64 per cent of its development expenditure through domestic revenue. Domestic resource mobilization is given the highest priority as manifested through the 11th FYP's objective of self-reliance. Self-reliance is interpreted

as 'the ability to meet all our national development needs as articulated through five year plans by 2020'. Some of the efforts put in place to mobilize resources from domestic sources are broadening the tax base including green tax and sales tax on vehicles and fuels, rationalization of recurrent expenditure, enhancing efficiency of state owned enterprises and fostering public private partnerships. Other financial instruments such as bonds and capital market are also explored to supplement financing of SDGs.

Bhutan is also implementing the Bhutan for Life program, an innovative green financing mechanism to augment its resource requirements for conservation."

8. NEXT STEPS

This penultimate section of the VNR asks Member States to "outline what steps are planned to enhance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda" and also to "indicate how it is planned to keep the Goals under review at the national and sub-national levels, including dissemination of reviews and their findings."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Next Steps' Section of a VNR

In the context of the 'Next Steps' section of a VNR, Parties to the CBD could comment on how implementation of their National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and achievement of related targets align with and contribute to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Additionally, Parties to the CBD are also encouraged to draw on information from their Sixth National Report, as it becomes available (see Part 10 of this document), and likewise, information collected as part of the VNR could also be used in the sixth National Report.

Useful Resources:
- CBD Website: National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs)
- Sixth National Report Information Portal, CBD

Good Practice Example

Bhutan's 2018 VNR
In its 'The Way Forward' section, Bhutan's 2018 VNR stated the following in relation to the cross-cutting nature of biodiversity:

"Because of the centrality of land to other dimensions of development, Bhutan's challenge in achieving SDG 15 will also significantly impede, the achievement of other SDGs – mainly SDG 6, SDG 8, SDG 9 and SDG 11."

9. CONCLUSION

The Secretary General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines describes the 'Conclusion' section as an opportunity to "present a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications" as well as to "discuss new or and emerging issues identified by the review."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Conclusions' Section of a VNR

In the context of the "Conclusion" section of a VNR, and in relation to emerging issues, Parties to the CBD could discuss relevant linkages to the post-2020 strategic framework.

The fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 2020 is expected to update the Convention's strategic plan. This would be done in the context of the 2050 Vision of the current Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 as well the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant international processes, and in the light of an assessment of progress in achieving the goals and Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the current plan as well as of future scenarios of change.

Useful Resources:
- UNCBD Post 2020 Website
- Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020
- CBD/SBSTTA/21/2, Scenarios for the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity

Good Practice Example

Ireland's 2018 VNR
In its 'Conclusion' section, Ireland's 2018 VNR makes the following statement:

"It should be noted in this regard that Ireland's Biodiversity Action Plan is potentially the most detailed Irish example of engagement with the SDGs in a sectoral policy and this is a positive indicator of future progress."

10. ANNEXES

The annex of a VNR is an important part of the report and the UN's guidance states that it "may include an annex with data, using the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and adding priority indicators identified at the regional and national levels where appropriate."

Biodiversity Guidance for the 'Annex' of a VNR

In the context of the data "Annexes" of a VNR, in addition to reporting on the SDG indicator list developed by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), Parties to the CBD are encouraged to draw on indicators used in their Sixth National Report. Relating to the Sixth National Report, Parties to the Convention "*Encourages* Parties to submit their sixth national report by 31 December 2018, taking into account preparations for the fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook*, and *encourages* Parties to submit elements of their sixth national report as soon as they are ready, as appropriate, through the voluntary online reporting tool."
(para. 3, CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/27)

Furthermore, member States are encouraged to draw on data from the regional assessments of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and also take into account preparations for the *fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook* and other indicators shared through the *Biodiversity Indicators Partnership*.

Useful Resources:
- Sixth National Report Information Portal, CBD
- Reporting Guidelines for the Sixth National Report, CBD
- Resource Manual for the Sixth National Report, CBD
- Technical Note: Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CBD and Partners

- The 2030 Agenda and Ecosystems: A discussion paper on the links between the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Swedish Biodiversity Centre.
- Global Biodiversity Outlook 4, CBD
- CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/29, Global Biodiversity Outlook and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
- CBD/COP/DEC/XIII/28, Indicators for the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets
- Biodiversity Indictors Partnership
- The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)
- SDG Indicators, Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs)

Good Practice Example – Cyprus 2017 VNR

The Cyprus 2017 VNR contains annexes with data using the SDG indicators. The annexes display data related to each SDG, and a range of indicators where data was available. Noteworthy is that most of the SDG indicators of the Cyprus 2017 VNR are biodiversity-related. (Please refer to pages 63 through 69 of this VNR).

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