What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Comparative analysis of the Voluntary National Reviews presented by countries of Latin America and the Caribbean at the High-Level Political Forum (2016-2019)
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Glossary

**UNGA**  ➢ United Nations General Assembly

**LAC**  ➢ Latin America and the Caribbean

**SusDev**  ➢ Sustainable Development

**ECOSOC**  ➢ United Nations Economic and Social Council

**HLPF**  ➢ United Nations High-Level Political Forum

**Mol**  ➢ Means of Implementation

**SDGs**  ➢ Sustainable Development Goals

**SG**  ➢ United Nations Secretary General

**VNRs**  ➢ Voluntary National Reviews
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Context

21 OF THE 33 COUNTRIES (64%) of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)\(^1\) have submitted at least one National Voluntary Review (VNR) between 2016 and 2019.

SEVEN OF THE 8 COUNTRIES (88%) of the subregion of Central America have submitted at least one VNR.

THE SAME HAS BEEN DONE BY 10 OF THE 12 COUNTRIES OF SOUTH AMERICA (83%) AND 4 OF THE 13 COUNTRIES OF THE CARIBBEAN (31%).

It is necessary to provide support to the Caribbean region so that it does not lag behind the regional average in terms of reporting national progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

1. In this work we used the official statistical grouping of countries established by the United Nations Statistics Commission (Standard M49) that places Mexico within the subregion of Central America. For more information on the M49 Standard see https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/
Main findings

1. The principles of implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under multi-stakeholder work schemes and leaving no one behind are the most mentioned by the VNRs of the LAC countries. On the contrary, the universality of the 2030 Agenda and its human rights base are the least taken into account. The absence of greater integration of these latter principles can weaken the region in two ways:

- Given the prominence of several LAC countries considered world leaders in human rights, especially civil and political.
- Due to the importance of integrating the universal responsibility approach to overcome the challenges that countries point to, such as matters of statistical capacities, environmental protection, or the use of GDP as a measure of development.

2. There is a clear deficit in the region regarding the integration of global agendas: the Paris Agreement is mentioned by 73% of the reports, the Sendai Framework for Action by 54% and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda by 50%. Compliance with the commitments emanating from each of them must be narrowed and their synergies more referred in national examinations. Also, policy coherence should receive greater attention.

3. The inclusion of references to regional treaties is low, which could be showing a lack of interpretation of the agreements reached in LAC in the perspective of sustainable development. The most referenced regional instrument is the Montevideo Consensus.

4. Parliaments are the least included actor in the national implementation and monitoring institutions of the 2030 Agenda, as well as in the processes of Voluntary National Reviews. Their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level is not visible enough. Something similar, but to a lesser extent, occurs with local governments.
Introduction

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) was established by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, that met in Rio de Janeiro, from June 20 to 22, 2012. The 2030 Agenda made this Forum the main space for monitoring and examining its implementation at a global level. The HLPF, a multi-stakeholder forum, meets annually at the ministerial level under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and every four years holds a summit-level meeting under the auspices of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA), at which the Heads of State and Government should review the work structure of the HLPF, to adapt it to the needs that the process demands. The first meeting of the HLPF at the summit level will take place in September 2019, ending the first “four-year SDG review cycle” (2016-2019).

The Forum is a space for countries to submit to the international community the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) that result from their review processes of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the level national. These reports, which each State presents when it considers it pertinent, are the basis of the monitoring and review system established in the 2030 Agenda, articulated on a triple national, regional and global approach:

---

5. Only 14 countries have mentioned in their VNRs financing sources to implement the SDGs at the national level.

6. In terms of data availability, the identification of statistical challenges that must be overcome is general, although with varying intensity given the differences in the starting points of the countries. It would be convenient for VNRs to be more precise in defining the support they require, to attract the attention of potential international cooperation partners. This is one of the possibilities given by the national reporting system that is being wasted.

7. The limited inclusion of the voluntary guidelines for the presentation of Voluntary National Reviews prepared by the Secretary General of the United Nations (SG) hinders the cross-treatment of information available in the VNRs at the regional level or the cross-cutting approach to specific topics.

8. In the case of countries that submitted more than one VNR, a continuity line between the different reports cannot always be identified, which hinders a cyclical consideration and analysis of the information. This generates a fragmented reporting system in static temporary images.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Graphic 1. Review and monitoring scheme of progress towards the achievement of the SDGs established in the 2030 Agenda

Source: Own elaboration
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

In 2016 the Secretary General of the United Nations (SG) developed voluntary guidelines to strengthen the coherence and comparability of the VNRs presented, which were updated in December 2017 and applied to the reports submitted to the 2018 and 2019 HLPF meetings.

As of the analysis carried out by Cepei every year of the VNRs presented by Latin American and Caribbean Countries (LAC) at the HLPF, in the upcoming sections we will move forward in a transversal approach at some of the more than 60 elements that we analyze when studying each national presentation.

The question we seek to answer is what elements, and with what intensity, are they being included by LAC countries when they present to the international community the progress in their national SDG implementation processes?

To find an answer, we divided this work into eight chapters:

1. **General data:** It provides data on the evolution of the reports presentations of the region and a comparative view with other region. It also includes information on each particular session of the HLPF that we consider relevant for a contextualized interpretation of the national reports.

2. **Report Coverage:** It analyzes the 17 SDGs, and the thematic SDGs of each session, and it groups the SDGs analyzed in some other combination.

3. **Incorporation of the SDGs at the national level:** It refers to the processes of incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the national development guidance documents and the establishment of a national institutional framework for their implementation.

4. **Incorporation of the central elements of the 2030 Agenda:** It considers the incorporation of elements of the 2030 Agenda other than the SDGs in national development guidance documents (principles, integrated approach to sustainable development, multi-stakeholder work, interdependence with other international agendas linked to development).

5. **Consideration of other global agendas and the coherence of development policies:** It looks at elements that show an articulation between the 2030 Agenda and other related international agendas and documents, as well as the degree of consideration of the coherence of policies for development.

6. **Means of implementation (MoI):** Inclusion of the different MoI established by the 2030 Agenda.

7. **Data for development:** It references the data availability for the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs at national and related levels (such as the mention of plans to improve statistical capacities).
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Alignment of the VNRs with the voluntary guidelines of the Secretary General of the United Nations: Inclusion in the VNR of the guidelines, including the identification of good practices.

Finally, the conclusions chapter presents a set of results obtained from the analysis carried out.

This text does not seek to create “rankings” of countries based on their VNRs, but to support the continuous improvement of the follow-up processes of the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean. For this reason we have decided, with exceptions that contribute to a better understanding, not to identify elements of each of the reports, but to work without identifying which country they refer to.

The division into LAC subregions that we carry out in this report is as follows:

South America (12 countries): Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana*, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela

Central America (8 countries): Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama

The Caribbean (13 countries): Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago

Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): It integrates the total of countries in South America, Central America and the Caribbean

Finally, and for a better understanding of the content we propose, it is important for the reader to be attentive to the references made throughout our report, which may be to VNRs or countries. In the first case, the study is made up of 26 reports and, in the second, the total number of countries that have submitted reports between 2016 and 2019 are 21, five of which have done so twice (Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay).

We hope that this work will contribute to the debates of the SDGs Summit that will take place in September 2019 in New York, but also to the countries that work in the preparation of their Voluntary National Reviews, as well as to the works prepared within the framework of the Regional Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development.

2. Guyana is located as South America since we follow the United Nations M-49 standard for the location of countries and regions. We must point out, however, that Guyana’s self-perception, reflected in its 2019 VNR, is that of a Caribbean State: “Guyana is (...) the only English-speaking country in South America. It is part of the Caribbean region, due to its strong cultural, historical and political ties with other Anglo-Caribbean countries and the Caribbean Community” (p. 8).
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

General Data

The HLPF has met to follow up on the SDGs four times, always under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The presentations of VNRs by LAC countries during the meetings are reflected in the following table:

Table 1. Presentation of VNRs by LAC countries (2016-2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Subregion</th>
<th>HLPF 2016</th>
<th>HLPF 2017</th>
<th>HLPF 2018</th>
<th>HLPF 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahamas</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total VNRs, specifying second reports (*)</strong></td>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8 (3)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total VNRs presented</strong></td>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total countries that have submitted at least one VNR</strong></td>
<td>LAC</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*): Brazil and El Salvador had committed to submit their reports to the 2019 HLPF, but then gave up doing so.

Source: Own elaboration
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

During these years, a total of 142 countries have submitted VNRs, fourteen have done it twice and only one (Togo) three times. 21 reporting States belong to the LAC region, and five of them have submitted two reports (Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay). Meaning LAC countries represent 15% of those who have reported.

Ten countries in the region plan to present their reports at the 2020 HLPF: Bolivia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago will do so for the first time. For the second time, Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama and Peru. Colombia will present its third VNR.

Graphic 2. Presentation of VNRs at the HLPF by regions (2016-2019)
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Of the 21 reporting countries five are from the Caribbean (out of 14 countries that make up the subregion they represent 36%), seven from Central America (from a total of 8 countries that make up the subregion, they represent 87%) and nine from South America (from a total of 11 countries that make up the subregion, they represent 82%).

At the time of submitting their first or second reviews to the HLPF, most LAC countries have been represented by officials of lower rank than the Minister (14 cases, including 4 Deputy Ministers). On ten occasions they were Ministers, a Vice President (Paraguay, 2018) and a Head of State (Bahamas, 2018).

Report Coverage

Each HLPF meeting since 2017 has been assigned a series of SDGs that should be analyzed with special attention and for which the United Nations system must prepare thematic reviews. In this section, therefore, we do not include in our analysis the VNRs presented in 2016.

3. The SDGs to be analyzed for each HLPF session for the 2017-2019 period were established in the 70/299 resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, dated July 29, 2016.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

The selection of this group of Objectives is carried out to prioritize the evaluation and monitoring of their progress in a given session, so that at the end of each working cycle the 17 SDGs will have been studied in particular once, except for Objective 17 on partnerships, which by its nature is considered a “thematic objective” in all the sessions of the HLPF. This, however, does not mean that the analysis carried out by the countries of their own progress should be restricted in each period to the corresponding thematic SDGs. On the contrary, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda, the VNRs must refer to the 17 SDGs as a whole, and this is reaffirmed by the voluntary guidelines developed by the SG, where “countries are encouraged to review the 17 SDGs”.

The reports submitted by LAC countries between 2017 and 2019 show, however, a high degree of dispersion regarding the SDGs they study:

- They covers the 17 SDGs: 30%
- They cover only the thematic SDGs of the year of presentation: 30%
- They make a different coverage to the total or those prioritized by the HLPF: 39%

The option to carry out a different SDG coverage from the total or the thematic group, to instead report in the VNRs on prioritized SDGs at the national level is the most widespread. As an example, we can highlight the report presented in 2019 by Guatemala, built entirely on the basis of the alignment between its National Development Plan and the 2030 Agenda.

Source: Own elaboration
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Incorporation of the SDGs at the national level

All the VNRs presented by LAC countries, with the exception of Chile in 2019, include references to alignment exercises between the SDGs and national development planning policies or documents, and to the development of processes of national appropriation of the objectives and/ or 2030 Agenda goals. The absence of these two issues in the second Chilean report may well be due to the fact that they were presented in their first report (2017), without any developments in the matter since then.

Regarding institutional developments, the different processes followed in LAC can be grouped in three schemes: 1. Creation of new institutions oriented to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, 2. Establishment of coordination structures between existing organizations and 3. Continuation of the existing institutional framework without introducing modifications.

Table 2. Organization of the institutional framework for national implementation in LAC countries as reported in their VNRs (2016-2018)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New institution</th>
<th>New institutional coordination space</th>
<th>Implementation by pre-existing institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Guatemala (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% OF THE TOTAL</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration

*Percentages on the total of 21 countries that have submitted at least one VNR and identification of the most recent report where the institutional implementation of the 2030 Agenda of each country is mentioned.
Comparative analysis of the VNRs presented by countries of Latin America and the Caribbean at the High-Level Political Forum (2016-2019)

What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

The processes of alignment, appropriation and development of an institutional framework for the national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs remain incomplete if knowledge and awareness of what sustainable development means among citizens is not promoted. For this reason we looked at the consideration of the promotion of awareness-raising actions in the reports. We identified that 100% of the 26 VNRs presented by LAC countries between 2016 and 2018 refer to communication, socialization and awareness activities or actions about sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda, mainly through workshops, whether multi-stakeholder, with specific actors or open to the community.

Graphic 4. Voluntary National Reviews that include references to information and / or awareness campaigns on the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and / or Sustainable Development (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

This graphic shows that 17 reports (65%) refer to information or awareness-raising campaigns; however, 10 include the issue as a challenge to be faced. We highlight the case of Uruguay, which in 2017 presented its communication challenges and in 2018, in its second VNR, included the activities that are being carried out in this field.

A weak side of this process is due to the general lack of consideration of journalists as partners in the national implementation and monitoring of the SDGs (they do not appear in any of the 26 VNRs), and the low degree of information about conducting mass information campaigns.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Incorporation of the central elements of the 2030 Agenda

From the VNRs presented by LAC countries between 2016 and 2019, we identified the following references to principles of the 2030 Agenda, acting as guides to the national SDG implementation and monitoring processes.

As is the case at the global level, the principle of “leaving no one behind” appears as the main narrative discourse of the relations between the 2030 Agenda and the social policies that are adopted at the national level. However, the references tend to follow a perspective of vulnerable groups as passive actors of the policies they should focus on, losing the dimension of their potential contributions and, even more seriously, the need for their inclusion in decision-making processes.

To understand the above, it is necessary to pay attention to the references, included in the VNRs, to the principle of multi-stakeholder implementation, which together with that of “leaving no one behind” make up the most mentioned.

Graphic 5. Number of VNRs that refer to the principles of the 2030 Agenda (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Number of VNRs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave no one behind</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universality of the 2030 Agenda</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Base</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence between SDGs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated approach of SusDev</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-stakeholder implementation</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to the “5Ps”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

When identifying the participation of non-state actors in the institutions responsible for implementing and following up on the 2030 Agenda at the national level, we find the following:

**Graphic 6.** Participation of actors other than the central government in the national implementation and monitoring institutions of the 2030 Agenda, as reported in the VNRs of LAC countries (2016-2019; 21 countries)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th># of countries</th>
<th>% of countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subnational governments</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other actors</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


[2] Colombia mentioned it in its 2016 report, but not in 2018; Chile mentioned it in 2017, but not in 2019; Mexico, on the other hand, did not named it in 2016, but did it in 2018

[3] Mexico did not considered it in 2016, but in 2018; Chile reported it in 2017, but not in 2019

[4] Mexico did not included, them in 2016, but it did in 2018

[5] Guatemala did not mentioned it in 2017, but it did in 2019

**Source:** Own elaboration

*If more than one report has been submitted, we consider the last report, mentioning if there have been changes between one VNR or the other.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

In more than 8 of the 21 countries that have submitted their reports, no actor has been included in the implementation institutionality. The three “traditional” non-state actors (civil society, private sector and academia) are the most considered, while a generic set we call “other actors”, which includes workers, youth, native peoples and ethnic groups, is taken into account only by the institutional implementation framework of 6 countries (29% of the total reporting countries).

Even more unfavorable is the situation of state actors other than the central government. Despite the existing recognition of the importance of the territory as a scenario for the implementation of the SDGs, only 5 LAC countries, which have presented VNRs between 2016 and 2019, indicate their participation in the national institutional implementation framework of the 2030 Agenda.

The situation is still not fully inclusive if we move from institutional arrangements to the national review processes supported by the Voluntary National Reviews. Taking into account the VNRs, and not the countries, we find the following results shown in the graphic below. Again, subnational parliaments and governments are especially set aside:

**Graphic 7. Participation of actors other than the central State in the construction of the VNRs by LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)**

The high inclusion of the multi-stakeholder work principle is evidenced when observing the VNRs’ references to the participation of multiple stakeholders in the implementation and / or monitoring of the SDGs at the national level.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Graphic 8. Participation of actors other than the central government in national implementation and / or follow-up actions of the SDGs as reported in the VNRs of LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subnational governments</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other actors</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration

Consideration of other global agendas and the coherence of development policies

The 2030 Agenda is related to other global agendas. This is strengthened by the principle of interlinkage between its Objectives, which function as a connector of the obligations assumed by the States in matters such as the fight against climate change, the promotion of human rights, disaster prevention or development financing.

Governments stated in the text of the 2030 Agenda (paragraph 40) that the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development “is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. They included in Goal 11.b a mention to the Sendai Framework for Action, and referred to the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) that, shortly thereafter, would be adopted by the Paris Agreement.

This draws attention to the consideration included in LAC VNRs of the coherence of development policies, and about the incorporation into the analysis of international, global or regional treaties, related to the 2030 Agenda.

Regarding policy coherence, its explicit consideration on the VNRs is limited: it appears in 7 of the 26 reports analyzed (27% of cases). Of these seven reports that expressly contemplate it, three have been submitted in 2018, while the remaining four in 2019, which indicates a growing concern for the topic.

If we move from the consideration of policy coherence to the incorporation of references to other treaties supporting the efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda at the national level, we have the following:
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

**Graphic 9.** References to other international documents incorporated in the VNRs of LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

While the consideration of global agreements is high, that of regional instruments is at the other extreme, although again we can detect the growth of its inclusion over time since it was present in only one report in 2017, in three in 2018, and in two in the last session of the HLPF.

![Bar chart showing references to different documents in VNRs](chart)

- **Addis Ababa Action Agenda:** 13 mentions, 50% of VNRs
- **Paris Agreement:** 19 mentions, 73% of VNRs
- **Sendai Framework for Action:** 14 mentions, 54% of VNRs
- **Other global agreements:** 17 mentions, 65% of VNRs
- **Regional agreements:** 6 mentions, 23% of VNRs

**Source:** Own elaboration

Among the mentions of “other global agreements,” a special one is made to the international environmental and human rights law. At the regional level, the most considered agreement is the **Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development 2013**.
Means of implementation (MoI)

Following the classification of MoI made by the 2030 Agenda and SDG 17, only international cooperation has been considered in all VNRs presented by LAC countries. In decreasing order of presence, technology is followed (present in 17 VNRs, 65%), creation / strengthening of human capacities and public external financing (14 VNRs, 54% each), systemic issues (12 VNRs, 46%), and finally international trade (9 VNRs, 35%).

19 countries refer to the financing sources for the national implementation of the SDGs, a larger number than those that include external financing. Uruguay, which had not addressed the issue in its first VNR (2017), did pay attention to it in the second (2018). Chile is the only country that has submitted two reports without having presented the issue at all.

Let us finally point out that, although there is only one case in which there is no presentation of the immediate challenges for the implementation of the SDGs (Chile in 2017, which did address this issue in its 2019 report), in all the VNRs they are exposed in a general manner, which makes it difficult to identify the internal and external support that the countries need to overcome them.

Graphic 10. Means of implementation of the SDGs referenced in the VNRs of LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

Source: Own elaboration
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Data for Development

Except for the reports of Argentina (2017) and Honduras (2017), all others expressly mention the statistical authority responsible for generating, managing and communicating the data for the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs. In the case of Argentina (2017), although the identification is not direct, it is easy to infer from the text of the report. Having that authority does not automatically mean to count with the necessary data to follow up on the Sustainable Development Goals, which is why we look at the inclusion in the VNRs of references on their availability. The result is that 19 of the 21 countries in the region that have informed to the HLPF addressed the issue. Uruguay, which had not mentioned it in its first report (2017), worked it deeply in its second report (2018). Belize and Honduras are the only two countries that have not addressed it.

Graphic 11. References to conducting a study on the availability of data for the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at the national level in the VNRs presented by LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

Source: Own elaboration

The studies on data availability are incomplete if they don’t include the information regarding its results, presented at least in the form of identifying the sufficiency or insufficiency of the data available to carry out the monitoring task and national measurement of progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

**Graphic 12.** References to the sufficiency / insufficiency of data for the follow-up of the 2030 Agenda at the national level in the VNRs presented by LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

We must clarify that one of the two countries that does not addressed the issue is Chile, which in its first presentation in 2017 indicated that the data study was ongoing. Although in its second VNR, evidence on data availability and deficiencies was presented.

The analysis on data availability show common concerns among the countries that have carried them out: on the one hand, they identified that the existing deficiencies are centrally due to lack of human and technical capacities of the national statistical systems, which require financial and professional resources that are not available to governments; showing that in this aspect international cooperation has a fundamental role to play. On the other hand, it becomes clear that the greatest shortcomings, in all cases, are in the area of **environmental statistics**.

In spite of the above, the identification of deficiencies is not accompanied by specific requests for support of potential partners of the statistical cooperation community.

This brings us to a third issue related to data. Considering the previous points, do the VNRs under study, analyze the existence of government programs or plans to improve statistical capacities?
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

**Graphic 13.** Identification of programs / plans to improve national statistical capacities in the VNRs presented by LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

- Yes: 15%
- No: 11%

Source: Own elaboration

Among the 11 VNRs that do not indicate the existence of such plans and programs are those of Colombia and Mexico (2016), and Chile (2017). The three countries included references to the subject in their second reports. If we observe the same reality for the number of LAC countries that have presented VNRs between 2016 and 2019, we find that 13 (62%) out of a total of 21 have reported on the subject.

Finally, given the lack of data, and recalling the importance of including different actors in the tasks of implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, through the creation of synergies according to their capacities, we looked in the reports for mentions about the establishment of data partnerships between governments, civil society, the private sector and academic institutions. The result shows that it is a field where there has not been enough progress, or it has not been reported in the VNRs.

**Graphic 14.** Identification of data partnerships between government, civil society, the private sector and academia in the VNRs presented by LAC countries (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

- Yes: 7%
- No: 19%

Source: Own elaboration

Under a countries approach, and given that Colombia included this issue in its two VNRs (2016 and 2018), the total number of States that have addressed this issue is reduced to six, half of them from the Caribbean region (Belize, Bahamas and Jamaica). This indicates greater attention to the issue in that subregion, which has submitted a smaller number of reports than Latin America.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Alignment of the VNRs with the voluntary guidelines of the Secretary General of the United Nations

As an annex to its report “Critical milestones towards a coherent, efficient, and inclusive follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level” (A / 70/684), of January 15, 2016, the SG presented a set of “Common Voluntary Information Guidelines for National Voluntary Exams in the High-Level Political Forum”. Subsequently, the States requested the SG “to update, taking into account the observations of the countries participating in the High-Level Political Forum, the common guidelines for the submission of voluntary reviews” (A / Res / 70/299, of July 29, 2016), which resulted in the elaboration of a second set of guidelines, presented in December 2017.

When reviewing the alignment of the VNRs of the LAC countries to the voluntary guidelines of the SG, we must therefore exclude the three reports submitted in 2016 (first reports of Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela), given that the processes of voluntary national examination of these were already underway when the guidelines were adopted. Therefore, we will contrast those from 2017 to 2019 with their corresponding sets of guidelines.

The result of this exercise can be seen in the following graphic, where we indicate the reception or not of each of the chapters proposed by the voluntary guidelines in the VNRs:

Graphic 15. Inclusion of the chapters recommended by the SG in its voluntary guidelines in the VNRs of the LAC countries (2017-2018; 19 VNRS)

Opening with presentation of Head of State or Government

Executive Summary

Introduction

Presentation of the methodology used in its construction
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

Ownership chapter

Chapter on incorporating the SDGs into national frameworks

Chapter on integration of the 3 dimensions of SusDev

Chapter on objectives and goals

Chapter on poverty eradication and prosperity promotion (2018) / Leave No One Behind (2017)

Chapter on institutional mechanisms for implementation and monitoring

Chapter on means of implementation

Chapter on future steps

Statistical annex

Conclusions Chapter

Source: Own elaboration

The report includes this chapter

The report does not include this chapter
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

The distribution is uneven, but it seems clear that even if the voluntary guidelines are taken into consideration, they do not prove to be a determining factor for the countries when giving order to the contents of their VNRs.

Although it does not affect any commitment assumed by the States (the follow-up of the guidelines is “voluntary”), this situation makes it more difficult to establish comparisons between reports and quickly locate information in them. In addition, this generates a variety of organizational schemes included in the reports that makes it impossible for a regional or cross-cutting view between them.

As a last topic to be discussed, taking into account that the HLPF prioritizes joint learning and exchanges on successful [and failed] experiences, we underline that the SG’s voluntary guidelines include the recommendation to refer good implementation and monitoring practices of the SDGs. In the VNRs of LAC countries, this is limited: 58% of the reports do not share good practices or successful experiences.

**Graphic 16.** Inclusion of good practices / successful experiences in VNRs presented by LAC countries at the HLPF (2016-2019; 26 VNRs)

Source: Own elaboration
Conclusions

Between 2016 and 2019, 21 of the 33 LAC countries have submitted at least one VNR to the HLPF, but the Caribbean subregion is lagging behind in this effort. This fact marks the need to support the countries of the Caribbean to participate in the global processes of review and monitoring of the SDGs, and shows an opportunity to strengthen international cooperation, opening a niche for South-South Cooperation within the region, in which countries that have already reported can support those who have not yet done so.

A balanced reference of the three dimensions of Sustainable Development is still weak and especially the environmental variable seems to be lagging behind by the economic and social. This may be linked to the fact that in LAC environmental statistics are the least developed. This element requires more attention and ECLAC, a global reference in the statistical area and promoter of a “great environmental impulse” to promote development in the region, appears as an institution well positioned to lead this task. References to the Paris Agreement against Climate Change can be a door to walk in that direction, and to link the SDGs to Voluntary National Reviews, which result from multilateral environmental agreements, widely ratified by LAC countries.

Multi-stakeholder work is taken into account in the VNRs, which include work experiences with different stakeholders and expose their involvement in the national review processes to monitor the implementation of the SDGs. However, its inclusion is lower when it comes to participation in the institutions responsible for promoting the 2030 Agenda in each country. We mention, with special concern, the very limited treatment that VNRs are giving to the work of parliaments, institutions that within a democratic order can strengthen the continuity of the work in favor of sustainable development beyond government changes.

The VNRs also show the need to further explore the possibilities offered by the principle of universality recognized in the 2030 Agenda, which requires paying greater attention to the coherence of national and international policies, an element scarcely present in the VNRs.

On the other hand, but linked to the above, it is striking that a region with the history of LAC barely references in its reports the interdependence between the 2030 Agenda and the Human Rights.

The mentions made in the VNRs to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda are general and only exceptionally the financing for the SDGs appears as a central element. Even in those cases in which the reports identify financing sources, these should be clarified and complemented by new contributions, which requires greater specificity and detail in addressing this highly sensitive issue for the region.

We also emphasize that the voluntary guidelines for VNRs proposed by the SG are not followed by the States of the region on a regular basis. Although they are recommendations that can be follow
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

voluntarily, their inclusion in the reports facilitate comparisons, reciprocal learning and the common interpretation of the information made available to the international community.

In general terms, the way in which the second VNRs are being presented by countries should be rethought. A global reality, which is also seen in the region, is that the structure of the first reports is repeated, portraying “photographs” of moments in the implementation, but losing the process element of a “movie”. The elements that are identified in each report as weaknesses in the national implementation processes of the SDGs, as well as the commitments and future actions that are proposed to overcome them, should be the link between each report and its background to create a continuity.

We are approaching the closure of the first four-year cycle of the HLPF. The lessons learned on these four years of VNRs presentations by LAC countries, are essential for the benefit of transparency, accountability and the promotion of sustainable development. It is, above all, a commitment of governments to the people who inhabit and give life to the world.
What are the countries of the LAC region talking about in their reviews on the implementation of the SDGs?

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