Telling your story and main messages: Drafting a VNR using a storyline

The most powerful way to get the main messages across in a VNR is to develop a storyline that ties together the report. A storyline is the overarching message of the report, which runs through the different sections. It ties together the report and helps ensure that readers come away with a clear understanding of the country’s priorities and how the country addresses its main challenges. It is important to let the report ‘tell a story’ about the national priorities and what the country has accomplished given its context and communicating this clearly with the rest of the world.

Developing a storyline

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING A STORYLINE

First step
Developing the storyline should be one of the first steps of the VNR process. Spending time on the storyline from the beginning will help finalise the report in a consistent manner.

Stakeholder consultations
Holding a consultation early on with stakeholders on the main messages and the overarching storyline on SDG progress will help stakeholders to re-engage with what the SDGs are about. It will also help steer the direction of data collection and further analysis to understand the ‘story’.

Think about audience
It will be important to think about audience(s) for the report and how to focus down on specific SDGs to help tell your country’s story (see box).
MAIN MESSAGES

The main messages (700 words max) which are due in May are an opportunity to outline the VNR storyline. As they are sent to UN DESA before the final VNR report, these main messages provide clarity on the country’s storyline before the report is finalised.

The main messages are also an opportunity to tell the world how successful your actions from previous VNRs have (or have not) been. They serve to communicate the country’s story about what has been accomplished given the country’s context, to outline setbacks or problems the country has faced, and highlight what support and resources the country needs to address main challenges.

While the main messages should emerge from the evidence and data collected on the SDGs, it is important that there is some consensus on the main messages and the overarching storyline of the report early on to ensure buy-in and a smooth sign-off of the final report.

These main messages will help shape the story of the VNR report and the narrative of any potential audio-visual material such as a video content.

Thinking about the audience for the VNR

What was the primary audience(s) for the previous VNR? How did this affect the focus and analysis of the report? Was it the UN and member states? Was it the national political audience?

Have you modified the audience(s) for the current VNR? What changes will this bring about?

The primary audience(s) for the report might affect the following:

- Storyline
- Translation of the report into local languages
- Focus/in-depth SDGs
- Linking VNR into national reviews and planning processes
Example of a storyline

HOW A STORYLINE SHAPES SECTIONS OF THE VNR REPORT

Selecting focus SDGs
The storyline will affect the choice of specific SDGs to focus on in-depth in the VNR report and the proposed objectives of the VNR. It will also affect whether you choose to narrow the choice of reported on SDGs and indicators to align more directly with your national plan, priorities and context.

Policy & enabling environment
The storyline ideally should reflect how the country has adapted to changing contexts and how your national development plan and sequencing of priorities is geared towards, or aligns with, implementing the SDGs.

Update from previous VNR
The storyline should summarise how the country has changed since the previous VNR if applicable. The storyline is an opportunity to pull together the setbacks and successes of the country since its last VNR.

Progress on the Goals
The storyline reflects the overarching story of your country’s progress on the Goals and whether the country is on track, accelerating, improving and/or slowing down, especially since previous VNRs.

Leaving no one behind
The storyline should reflect how progress on the Goals, especially since previous VNRs, has improved the situation for those most left behind. The storyline will share how the government focuses interventions to address those at risk and how it will address main setbacks especially for the most vulnerable. It can draw on newly disaggregated data and innovations in producing disaggregated data.

Means of implementation
The storyline will highlight the main setbacks and success that have hindered or aided the implementation of the SDGs since the last VNR.
VNR Milestones
(exact dates to be defined by UN DESA shortly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Main Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EARLY MAY</td>
<td>Submission of main messages (700 words)</td>
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<tr>
<td>END MAY</td>
<td>Submission of questionnaire to UN DESA (listing HLPF presenters &amp; use of video)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MID JUNE</td>
<td>Submission of VNR report</td>
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<tr>
<td>MID-LATE JUNE</td>
<td>Submission of audio-visual (video) for HLPF</td>
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<tr>
<td>MID JULY</td>
<td>High-Level Political Forum</td>
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There are generally four main phases in the VNR development process (5th phase being post-VNR period which we encourage countries to consider planning earlier). Stakeholder engagement & communication can be integrated into all phases (rather than considered as stand-alone activities).

**PHASES OF THE VNR PROCESS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Main Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUG-OCT</td>
<td>Preparatory &amp; planning phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCT-DEC</td>
<td>Data collection &amp; analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAN-APRIL</td>
<td>Drafting &amp; review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAY</td>
<td>Submit main messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td>VNR report finalisation/approval, HLPF preparation &amp; presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JULY-SEPT</td>
<td>Post-VNR period</td>
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**MAIN ACTIVITIES**

Listed below are some suggested main activities for the first and second phase. Also see the stakeholder engagement planning tool on integrating stakeholder engagement into all VNR phases (below).

**First phase: Preparatory & planning**
- Taking stock of the last VNR process and report lessons and challenges
- Reviewing and refreshing institutional arrangements and establishing VNR team
- Developing stakeholder engagement and communication plan
- Establishing VNR budget, capacity requirements and planning

**Second phase: Data collection & analysis**
- Review national SDG indicator framework, data gap analysis & progress assessment, request non-traditional data and develop data timeline
- Start reviewing and analysing data & findings on SDG progress/trajecotry since last VNR
- Start communication, outreach, and stakeholder engagement activities
- Develop storyline for the report and main messages
PART THREE: Integrating Stakeholder Engagement into all Phases of the VNR Process

10 month period from planning to post-HLPF

AUG-OCT
- Preparatory and planning phase
  - Taking stock of the last VNR
  - Review of institutional arrangements and institutional planning
  - Develop storyline
  - Stakeholder mapping conducted and plan developed
  - Stakeholder consultation on institutional arrangements and process for VNR report

OCT-DEC
- Data collection and analysis
  - Pre-planning for HLPF
  - Consultation with key stakeholders to obtain and interpret data
  - Technical consultation on data and analysis of SDG progress & complex problems

JAN-MAY
- Drafting and review
  - Drafting report according to storyline and linking previous VNRs
  - Stakeholder engagement on first VNR draft
  - Stakeholder validation of second draft
  - Stakeholder consultation on institutional arrangements and process for VNR report
  - Communication plan developed and public information campaign started

JUNE-JULY
- HLPF presentation and participation
  - Report editing, layout and printing
  - Data validation workshop
  - Government consultation on second draft (before design phase)
  - Stakeholder validation of second draft
  - Stakeholder consultation on institutional arrangements and process for VNR report

AUG-DEC
- Immediate post-VNR period
  - Feedback, communication and planning activities
  - Post-VNR feedback and stakeholder engagement activities
  - Stakeholder consultation on institutional arrangements and process for VNR report
  - Communicate feedback to stakeholders about VNR input opportunities

COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES
- Translate drafts in official languages
- Communicate with government to get input on drafts
- Communicate feedback to stakeholders about revisions to first draft
- Communicate VNR report and all HLPF material and engage public in continued debate on SDGs