This Global Launch Event for the new resource, *Mainstreaming SDG16: Using the Voluntary National Review to advance more Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies,* convened virtually on Monday, December 14, 2020. Hosted by the Transparency, Accountability, & Participation (TAP) Network and the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the webinar officially launched the new resource and guided participants through its content. It also featured insights and reflections from experts and practitioners on the reporting and follow-up of SDG 16 at all levels.

This virtual event is the first in a series of webinars dedicated to the issues raised in the resource. Three webinar events will be held in early 2021, covering (i) practical approaches to engage in the VNR process under challenging contexts; (ii) localizing the VNR process and engaging with SDG16 at the subnational level; (iii) examining the VNRs within the context of the "leave no one behind" principle.

Priya Sood, Coordinator of the Global Alliance welcomed participants and introduced the panelists. **Ambassador Juan Sandoval Mendiolea, Chair of the Group of Friends of the VNRs and Deputy Permanent Representative of Mexico to the UN**, provided opening remarks that centered on the importance of both the VNR process as a critical review mechanism needed to identify gaps, improve policies, and mobilize multi-stakeholder efforts. Ambassador Sandoval Mendiolea also emphasized the foundational element of SDG16, maintaining that "strengthening SDG16 strengthens the capacity to realize all the SDGs."

The moderator then gave the floor to **Mr. Jose Troya, UNDP Resident Representative in Costa Rica**. Mr. Troya provided the audience with reflections of the relevance of the VNR process, particularly as they relate to SDG 16, within the context of Costa Rica, having reported their VNRs twice at HLPF 2017 and, most recently, HLPF 2020. Mr. Troya welcomed the launch of the resource as an essential policy guide showcasing opportunities to maximize collaboration and partnerships in advancing SDG16 in the VNR process. Finally, Mr. Troya underscored Costa Rica's commitment to SDG16 reflected in its hosting of the fourth iteration of the 16+ Forum Annual Showcase in San Jose in April of 2021.

Following these reflections from practitioners, **Mr. John Romano, coordinator of the TAP Network**, gave a brief introduction to the resource, its relevance, and its importance for civil society. The resource provides policy guidance and case studies on advancing SDG16 at the national and sub-national levels by effectively leveraging the VNR and post-VNR processes. It is designed to be of use for a broad range of actors and institutions at all levels to support consequential reporting on SDG16 while addressing the question: how can we ensure that the VNR is maximized for SDG 16 impact, including improved subsequent reporting?

Mr. Romano introduced **Margaret Williams, international consultant and lead resource author**, who gave a presentation on the content and key messages. Serving as a policy guide, the resource helps stakeholders understand varying approaches to mainstreaming SDG16 into national and subnational agendas by leveraging the follow-up process from a given country's VNR. Beyond a reporting mechanism, the VNRs present both an opportunity and platform for holding actors accountable to their commitments, broad stakeholder mobilization, and policy coherence. Ultimately, the resource is intended for any stakeholder engaged in the VNR or SDG-related processes, looking to leverage the VNRs as a tool to enhance the implementation of SDG16 and the 2030 Agenda.

Ms. Williams described the three overarching parts of the resource, namely: (I) Mainstreaming and accelerating SDG16 implementation through the VNRs; (II) Approaches to preparing for the next VNR and improving future reporting; (III) Additional opportunities for member states and other stakeholders to engage in SDG16. The first part, outlines different "approaches" to mainstreaming SDG16, including through localization, civil society engagement, supreme audit institutions, parliamentary institutions, public awareness, and many others. Each of the chapters include (a) practical guidance: defining the actor/institution/mechanism, why is it important, and how it can be used; (b) key resources; (c) cases studies of examples of how the approach has been utilized by various stakeholders.

The webinar also included discussant interventions from key stakeholders in civil society and the human rights arena. First, **Marie Eve Bedard, representing the UN's Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR**), provided a human rights-based perspective on the VNRs and the 2030 Agenda. Ms. Bedard's intervention reinforces the resource's chapter on HRBAs and partnerships in the VNR processes. She reminded the audience that all the SDGs are fundamentally rooted in human rights. Leveraging complementary human rights frameworks and mechanisms during the implementation and follow-up of SDG 16 is key to advancing accountability and the foundation to realize the commitments of the 2030 Agenda.

Country Coordinator of the SDGs Kenya Forum and TAP Steering Committee member, Florence Syevuo offered a perspective from civil society on the dynamics of SDG 16 and the VNR process. Ms. Syevuo underscored the importance of broadening stakeholder inclusion and meaningful civil society engagement in the VNR process at the national and local levels. Meaningful civil society engagement facilitates opportunities for collaboration and partnership and can be leveraged or initiated through the VNR process. Civil society inclusion, a key principle of SDG 16, facilitates ownership, meaningful insight, more effective implementation, and accountability. It also serves as the foundation on which the 2030 Agenda rests in "leaving no one behind." The SDGs Kenya Forum provides an example in civil societies' pivotal role in data reporting and contributing to the VNR and post-VNR process. The Forum is responsible for mobilizing and collecting civil society input in the VNR process and supporting the "whole-of-society" approach. It also organizes national and subnational data collection from civil society to track Kenya's progress on the SDGs.

The subsequent interactive Q/A portion of the webinar discussed and analyzed the following key concepts including:

- **The importance of "breaking silos":** the VNR offers important and often still under-utilized opportunities for increased inter-ministerial cooperation and policy coherence. This is true for SDG 16, as well as all other SDGs and beyond those most immediately thought of (Planning, Justice, Finance, Foreign Affairs, etc.). The same goes for national institutions, commissions, offices, etc.
- **The need to streamline plans, processes, and programming at all levels**: far from a standalone exercise, speakers highlighted the importance of linking the VNR to ongoing and existent national and local development plans and priorities- through better coordination in general, as well as through VLRs and VSRs.
- **Broadening and deepening community engagement:** Whether between sectors (civil society working with SAIs or Parliaments) or communities (the "development" community vs. the "anti-corruption" community, there are opportunities for greater collaboration and partnership, as leveraged or initiated through the larger VNR (design, presentation, follow-up and implementation, subsequent reporting).
- **Maximizing data collection:** Whether as generated by civil society, different national institutions, the private sector, or others, there is an enormous amount of data that could be used to strengthen the VNR and better reflect SDG 16 in practice at national and local levels.

The full recording, information on future events in the webinar series, and forthcoming interactive, online resources can be found on the SDG16 Hub. Fill out the form to stay informed with updates and news regarding the resource.