



CASE STUDY

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW:

Samoa

Background Information

Samoa volunteered to present its national review (VNR) at the 2016 High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

Samoa's ability to develop while meeting the challenge of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is constrained by its small size, scarce resources, dispersion and isolation from markets, and capacity limitations. On top of this, Samoa has to deal with tsunamis and flooding, and live with vulnerability to climate change in a country where roughly 70% of the population lives near the coast.

Quotes

"As Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum, Samoa is committed to ensuring that the Roadmap is owned and delivered by everyone, and that we work as one region to achieve these goals where there is benefit in doing so."

-Peseta Noumea Simi, Samoa's CEO for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Chair of the Pacific SDGs Taskforce

Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

Samoa's VNR addressed progress on all the SDGs. The experience of producing their first VNR helped uncover the need of several things to enable the process and make it successful. These include: (1) tracking progress and making information available to the public, (2) building significant capacity around data disaggregation and statistical analysis, (3) identifying and addressing data gaps, (4) bolstering institutional capacity, (5) broad stakeholder engagement to ensure greater ownership and involvement, (6) addressing root causes of inequalities and poor development, (7) translating the goals into localized targets, and (8) coordination of donors' support.

Preparing the VNR led to significant awareness of the SDGs among the Samoan people. Samoa has assessed its existing national sustainable development strategies for alignment with the SDGs and it has setup a National SDG Task Force with representatives from three Ministries: Finance and Planning, Natural Resources and the Environment, and Community and Social Development. Samoa was one of the first countries to have its parliament review SDG-related reports, which ensures visibility for the program as the nation works to integrate the goals with its development plan.



Alongside its national SDG efforts, Samoa is also helping other countries push toward their goals as it leads the Pacific SDGs Taskforce. Samoa views the VNR process as a great peer learning opportunity.

Samoa's VNR also shared several important learnings from the challenges of implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Monitoring was a challenge for island nations as many of the MDG indicators did not directly fit the Pacific context. They therefore recommend an open, inclusive consultation process in working to integrate the goals with these nations. This would also facilitate collaboration between them. Tracking progress nationally and regionally, were both seen as valuable pursuits. But maintaining these efforts for annual reporting at the national level was viewed as a significant drain on resources, so the less demanding regional reports helped maintain momentum without being overburdensome. The increased complexity of the SDGs makes finding the appropriate balance between these efforts even more important. The Samoan VNR also included the recommendation of pursuing thematic areas annually with full reporting to be completed every five years.

Samoa's VNR included further suggestions gleaned from their MDG efforts. Those included (1) the need to foster wide understanding and build commitment to the goals early on, (2) keeping language simple and avoiding technical jargon wherever possible, (3) the need for budget support to enable proper planning, and (4) taking account of the various aspects of growth (inclusivity, vulnerable groups in society, social protection, etc.) when formulating plans. The VNR recommended this might also require something other than conventional "growth" focused development in favor of a model that centers on human needs and targets justice. It addressed the limited amount of direct funding provided for Pacific countries when some of them are already burdened with trying to escape the Least Developed Country list, and the need to further tailor capacity building initiatives.

Benefits & Lessons Learned

In working to integrate the SDGs with internal planning efforts, Samoa's leaders found developing synergy with both national and international strategies and processes to be key. This point is not VNR specific, but it helps stress the interlinkages among SDGs. None of it exists in a vacuum. Relatedly, they also stated the possibility of challenges coming from resource constraints and limited capacity to implement the resources they have.

The complex nature of the SDGs necessitates multiple levels of effort and reporting, as well as agreements and commitments that might elude straightforward solutions. Country level goals and targets are based on individual circumstances, but the requirements of thorough, purposeful reporting require baseline data availability and significant analytical competence. So, such integration may be especially challenging for small island countries which may lack the necessary resources and capacity for the effort at the outset. Samoa stressed the importance of meaningful engagement with the country's parliament for SDG implementation. It also called out the critical importance of oversight, and other related legislative functions (like budgeting) that they provide.

Samoa's first Voluntary National Review (VNR) process unveiled many valuable findings. Those included:

- Completing the exercise helped improve the nation's ability to monitor progress;
- Mapping the goals and planning their implementation uncovered capability gaps, while also building capacity around data gathering and statistical analysis;
- To have a realistic chance of success, the goals need to be contextualized;
- Close collaboration is necessary for consistency of understanding and harmonization of efforts.
- Political will and strong leadership are essential factors;
- For island nations, regional coordination is critical. In Samoa's case, developing national and regional plans strengthened ties between participant groups both within the country and beyond.



Opportunities & Next Steps

Samoa's leaders are leading collaboration with their neighboring countries via the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (Samoa Pathway). Through this platform, the island nations reaffirmed their commitment to sustainable development, and they used it to underscore the need for greater integration in the implementation approach for small island developing states, while calling for support from the international community and relevant stakeholders.

On October 31, 2017, the Government of Samoa co-hosted a National Workshop on Voluntary National Reviews with UNESCAP. As Samoa was one of the first countries to complete a VNR, the workshop gave neighboring countries a chance to learn directly from the group that completed the report. It was also an occasion for other countries to share their progress in readying themselves to undertake a VNR, and for participants in general to discuss opportunities for collaboration. During the VNR workshop, UN Resident Coordinator Lizbeth Cullity commended Samoa for its courage in being the first Small Island Developing State to present its VNR.

One month later, in November 2017, the Government of Samoa co-hosted an event in Apia for country representatives from Pacific Islands. The event featured discussions on how they might collectively deliver the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development (PRSD), a plan that was endorsed at the 48th Pacific Islands Forum meeting that was held in Apia in September. Samoa also hosted a High-Level Regional SDGs Taskforce meeting following the PRSD event.

Peseta Noumea Simi, Samoa's CEO for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Chair of the Pacific SDGs Taskforce, discussed the importance of working collaboratively with peers throughout the region to share and learn from each other, and that the experience of developing the PRSD was a good example of effective stakeholder collaboration. She noted that "the PRSD reflects the Pacific region's collective approach to achieving all of our sustainable development goals and ambitions," and that, "It is our Pacific approach to ensuring that we leave nobody behind." Those efforts will feed into the Pacific region's key themes and priorities that they will adopt at 2018's High Level Political Forum on the SDGs. The group discussed the composition of the 2018 version of the Pacific Sustainable Development Report, and the links between that effort and both the Annual Asia-Pacific SDGs Report and the UN Secretary General's SDGs Reports.

The PRSD shall be guiding Samoa, as well as other Pacific islands, in achieving the SDGs; furthermore, the Roadmap, running from 2016 to 2030, shall ensure that implementation, monitoring and reporting endeavors are integrated at the national, regional and global levels.

Sources & Verification

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