



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

**TALKING POINTS FOR DR. FRANCIS M KAI KAI MINISTER OF PLANNING AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SIERRA LEONE**

**APRM-UNDESA Capacity Building Workshop on
Africa's Voluntary National Reviews for the HLPF-2022 and
Domestication of the Agenda 2063**

Abuja, Nigeria 28-29 March 2022

Session One: 2021 VNRs and Lessons Learnt from COVID-19

Minister's response is expected to cover the following:

1. What key lessons can be drawn from the 2021 VNR preparatory processes?
 2. How have countries reflected the localization of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, including through voluntary local reviews (VLRs)?
 3. What innovative approaches/tools have African governments adopted to prepare VNRs considering the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?
 4. Did the pandemic provide an opportunity to improve governments' accountability and ownership as regards the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda, and if so, how?
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Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Let me profoundly thank the UN DESA and the African Union for enabling my participation in this very important workshop on Africa's VNRs for 2022 and issues of domesticating AU Agenda 2063. Let me also express gratitude to the Office of the Presidency of Nigeria for facilitating this event.
2. Since the inception of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in 2015, Sierra Leone has indeed witnessed increased involvement of the general public in development follow-up and reporting processes in the country.
3. We have tremendously benefitted from the VNR processes, following the lessons we have learned from the civil war in the 1990s, and subsequent natural disasters such as the Ebola virus disease and now the COVID-19.
4. We have done three VNR reports to date (2016, 2019 and 2021); whose processes secured us increased cooperation from our people, Development

Partners, the private sector and NGOs/CSOs in delivery of public services, given that our National Development Plan has been strongly aligned to the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.

Given this background, let me specifically say a few words on "what key lessons can be drawn from the 2021 VNR preparatory processes"

5. The 2021 VNR processes, which Sierra Leone was part of, were a difficult undertaking in the middle of a pandemic that did not spare any corner of the world.
6. To us, as an LDC, these processes were an extended test of state **resilience** to be able to mobilise a wide range of development actors to extensively participate in the production of a national report at the peak of the worst global crisis befalling humanity since the end of the second world war.
7. Indeed, this suggests that *sustained application of democratic principles and mutual cooperation in service delivery are crucial resources for achieving sustainable development.* It guarantees the resilience required in the process.
8. The 2021 VNR processes further taught us the need to undertake *optimal investment in digital solutions, and science, technology and innovation in general.* While the internet was still developing in the country, we could manage to present our VNR report to New York virtually without hindrance.

With regard to "How countries have reflected the localisation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063, including through voluntary local reviews (VLRs)"

9. One way we have tried to promote effective localisation of the two agendas within our National Development Plan has been through strengthening District and Community Level Development Coordination.
10. We have established District Development Coordination Committees in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone to regularly follow-up and report on delivery of priority projects and programmes at local level. The effectiveness of these Committees is supported and monitored at the central Government through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government.
11. Furthermore, we successfully piloted development coordination at sub-district level, in more 25 of the 190 chiefdoms in Sierra Leone; covering 4 of the 16 districts of the country. The aim has been to strengthen decentralisation through enhancing people-centred service delivery by

encouraging formulation of village/chiefdom level plans, whose implementation is led by the people, and linked to district and national level plans, and by extension the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

12. Accordingly, we will be doing our first Voluntary Local Review this year in selected districts, although we are not slated for a mainstream review in the upcoming HLPF in New York.

As to "What innovative approaches/tools have African governments adopted to prepare VNRs considering the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?"—from the Sierra Leone perspective

13. Indeed, we encountered serious challenges due to COVID-19 when we opted to do our 3rd VNR in 2021, the pandemic affecting every aspect of service delivery, including financing and process engagement and timing.
14. We struggled to start the VNR process in time largely because of delayed funding (besides the fact that the little that came was inadequate), in the middle of fighting the pandemic in the country—spending on direct response to the outbreak crowding out normal development expenditures.
15. Nonetheless, in terms of primary data collection, ***we utilised the existing structures of CSOs/NGOs*** at district and community levels to organise consultations and group discussions on progress made in the implementation of the SDGs at local level.
16. This minimised cost, reiterating the cooperation between the government and non-state actors in service delivery processes in the country that has been enhanced during VNR processes, especially in the middle of the global crisis witnessed in the ***last two and a half years***.
17. Also, within the public sector, the strong cooperation between the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development coordinating the SDGs/Agenda 2063 and line MDAs helped greatly in saving resources and overcoming the fiscal squeeze caused by the COVID-19.
18. For instance, in a rapid impact assessment done in the justice sector to inform progress on SDG16 in our 2021 VNR, use was heavily made of the ***existing structures of the National Legal Aid Board***, having paralegal officers at community level across the country that were used in the collection of primary data with minimal cost.
19. And as we had to virtually present our VNR report to New York from Freetown, we had prepared audiovisual PowerPoint Presentation with

technical notes to the UN ahead, to cushion any unforeseen technical hitch during our presentation.

20. During the presentation of the Report done by the **Minister** of Planning and Economic Development from Freetown (at night), technical staff were alert with multiple laptop computers connected online to provide backup to the equipment used by the **presenter/the Minister**.

Finally, let me respond as to whether "...the pandemic did provide an opportunity to improve governments' accountability and ownership as regards the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda..."

21. The pandemic did provide a great opportunity to improve accountability. If anything, this is where COVID-19 got us right, in our strategic approach to implementing the SDGs before it broke out in the country.
22. We had prioritised governance and accountability for results in our national development plan prior to the pandemic, drawing from our experience in the past, which COVID-19 came only to strengthen.
23. We have sustained our focus on strengthening public financial management, continuing to implement integrated financial management systems, introducing e-procurement and enhancing online public expenditure management in general; scaling up audit service and parliamentary public accounts oversight and the fight against corruption.
24. We have ensured improved management of contingency liabilities with state MDAs and enterprises, through (among others) the establishment of a Fiscal Risk Management Oversight Department in the Ministry of Finance, currently saving huge resources for the state from contracting bad debts on behalf of the Government.
25. Moreover, our increased cooperation with Development Partners has ensured that the Government takes lead in directing external support to public priorities contained in our national development plan; ensuring that we regularly hold Development Partners' Committee meetings, bringing together Government-donor agencies to a common table to discuss national development issues.
26. To conclude, let me thank the organisers once again for the great opportunity accorded Sierra Leone to share its perspective, while I look forward to further interacting with the audience should there be any questions and comments. **Thank You All**