



ESCAP Twinning Programme for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Reviews

Fostering cooperation and cross-learning to overcome systemic challenges in achieving the SDGs and preparing voluntary national reviews

Challenge

Voluntary national reviews are a key component of the follow-up and review mechanism of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the preparation of voluntary national reviews, countries presenting their reports for the first time face a number of common challenges, including data collection and stakeholder engagement. North and Central Asian countries preparing their reports for the first time can benefit from twinning with more experienced countries. For 10 of the 17 SDGs, countries in North and Central Asia have insufficient data to provide a clear picture. Compiling data is challenging because many countries are still in the process of fully adapting SDG targets and indicators to national contexts. The SDGs cover a broad range of issues that affect multiple stakeholders, such as line ministries and other governmental agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector. Coordination among these stakeholders is therefore critical. Organizing national multi-stakeholder consultations in a comprehensive, inclusive and meaningful way can be challenging, especially when this mode of governance is not commonly practiced.

Towards a Solution

In 2019, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were seeking practical guidance to prepare their first voluntary national reviews, to be presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020. In response, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) initiated a voluntary national review twinning programme for North and Central Asian countries to share knowledge, experiences and practical recommendations with countries that have similar administrative systems and economic, social and environmental circumstances. In the spirit of South-South cooperation, the objective of the twinning programme is to exchange best practices and methodologies for the preparation and follow-up of a voluntary national review in order to overcome some of the systemic challenges that countries encounter in the process.

In 2020, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have joined forces to exchange experiences and share lessons in preparing their respective voluntary national reviews as part of a twinning exercise. While Armenia and Georgia will be submitting their second reports at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will be submitting their first reports. As a result, two sets of twinning exercises have been piloted: one in Kyrgyzstan with Armenia and another in Uzbekistan with Georgia. These twinning exercises were facilitated by ESCAP in partnership with the Governments and the United Nations Resident Coordinator Offices of the countries concerned.

During these twinning exercises, members of the participating delegations had the opportunity to meet with their counterparts in Parliament; State institutions for statistics, the environment and national economies; non-governmental organizations; and mass media to **establish a direct connection, exchange good practices and share knowledge on preparing the voluntary national reviews**. The countries agreed to exchange the first draft of their reports for peer review by mid-April 2020. They continued to interact through the SDG Helpdesk, which is an online platform for knowledge-sharing, expertise and advice hosted by ESCAP (sdghelpdesk.unescap.org). The



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SDG Helpdesk provided these countries with an online community through which they could also exchange knowledge and information on voluntary national reviews and other issues related to achieving the SDGs.

Although the focus was on countries preparing their first voluntary national reviews, the countries preparing their second reports have also learned from the twinning exercise, which has proven that exchange of knowledge and practices can take place in both directions, promoting South-South peer learning.

The twinning exercise has raised significant interest in the development community within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region, as various United Nations agencies and donors are already planning to support efforts to replicate this exercise. This good practice can be easily replicated, as it requires only modest funding for a number of in-person and virtual

cross-country exchanges. The greatest requirement is that countries have the political will to share their experiences and processes with each other and with stakeholders. This good practice also helps to build capacity through peer learning in a setting in which countries facing similar challenges can find a sympathetic ear and share practical, operational ideas and proposals. Once contact has been formally established during the twinning meetings, informal and formal channels could also be opened for future communication and South-South and triangular cooperation.

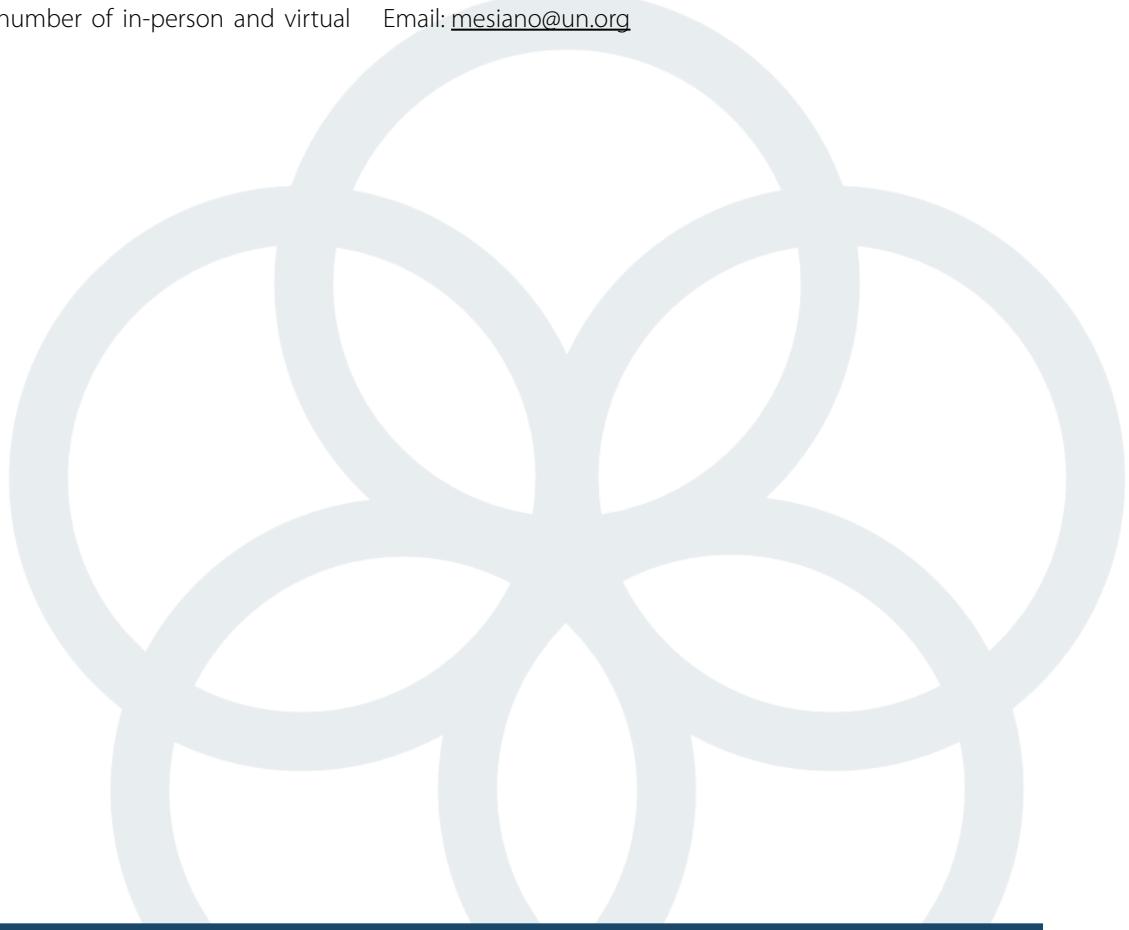
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PROJECT NAME: ESCAP Twinning Programme for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Reviews

COUNTRIES/REGIONS: Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan

NOMINATED BY: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL TARGET(S): 17.9, 17.14, 17.16, 17.17, 17.19

SUPPORTED BY: ESCAP Subregional Office for North and Central Asia, ESCAP Environment and Development Division

IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES: ESCAP; Governments of Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan; United Nations Resident Coordinator Offices in those countries

PROJECT STATUS: Ongoing

PROJECT PERIOD: 2019–2020

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