



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level

Tuesday 11 July 2023, 3:00 PM -4:15 PM

Secretariat Background Note

SDG localization, anchored on the principle of multilevel governance and multistakeholder collaboration, is recognized as a key approach to collectively propel us toward greater inclusion and sustainability, as has been highlighted most recently by the Secretary-General's Special Edition of the SDG Progress report¹: Local action is a precondition for delivering the promise of the SDGs. According to some estimates, at least 105 of the 169 SDGs targets (62 per cent) will not be reached without proper engagement and coordination with local and regional governments². Moreover, collaboration and co-creation by all relevant local stakeholders can foster the sustainable solutions and accountability needed in each unique community. In recognition of the central role of local governments and actors, already when adopting the 2030 Agenda, Governments pledged to work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities and subregional institutions, among others³.

The importance of action at the local level has been highlighted also in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the Member States, and engagement with local governments has led to better VNRs. According

¹ <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022, A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: synthesis report (OECD urban policy reviews)

³ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development A/RES/70/1, para. 45



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to the VNR Synthesis Report 2022⁴, actions to engage local municipalities and include more diverse sets of stakeholders have led to VNRs that encompass more in-depth reports of the state of national progress, not only from a top-level perspective but also in terms of scalability and feasibility of policy shifts toward more sustainable development practices. Promotion of sub-national engagement has brought countries closer to multilevel governance and aided policy coherence.

Local SDG transformations can be ignited as grass-roots actions or through empowering policies by national governments. Member State policies that have aimed at supporting SDG localization include, among others, capacity building to local elected officials and mayors for incorporating the SDGs in local development policies, communication campaigns, town hall meetings and town square festivals to make the SDGs more known and to solicit feedback on local priorities, and local level SDG councils that connect with the national governance structures for SDG implementation. In many places, the need to ensure that information about the SDGs and planned activities is available in all local languages has been highlighted as a prerequisite for active local engagement. At the same time, many Member States have noted in the VNRs that capacities, especially outside the capital regions, for SDG localization are low and that more resources are needed for these endeavors.

Voluntary Local Reviews

One of the clear signs of increased local level engagement in SDG implementation are the Voluntary Local Reviews. Since 2018, VLRs

⁴ <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/VNR%202022%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf>



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have emerged as an innovative tool by and for cities. The number of VLRs, modelled after the Voluntary National Reviews by national governments, has since skyrocketed from those prepared initially by a few spearheading cities, to over 200 reviews and counting. The practice of carrying out VLRs is being taken up by local governments in all regions of the world, of all sizes and at all levels – including provincial, district, municipal and city governments and rural areas.

The popularity of VLRs reflects the opportunities their preparation affords to both accelerate local action and identify critical gaps. VLRs have the potential to support more integrated policymaking and coordination between national and local governments; to increase engagement with members of our societies who also play critical roles in SDG implementation, including civil society, the private sector and academia; to bring those who are most left behind into processes for local SDG implementation; and to enhance data collection. The process for preparing VLRs and peer learning, which is today increasingly occurring between local governments, both within countries and internationally, can also facilitate the search for new and innovative means of implementation.

Member States are increasingly benefitting from VLRs in their national level reviews. 2020 was the first year when national governments referred to the VLRs within their VNRs, with three countries, Finland, Kenya and Uganda, mentioning the VLRs in their reports. In 2021 and 2022, the number of Member States taking up this practice expanded significantly, to include Argentina, Cabo Verde, Denmark, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Norway, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, Zimbabwe, among others. The ways in which national governments mentioned VLRs varies among reports, with some, for example, including a strong emphasis on



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localization, detailing the structures in place for coordination of SDG implementation between national and local levels of government and/or including VLRs as annexes.



There is also established and growing recognition of the value of Voluntary Local Reviews at international levels. For example, the Ministerial Declarations of the 2021 and 2022 HLPF have reiterated that the VLRs are a useful tool to show progress and foster exchange in local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. At regional level, in 2023, several of the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development convened by the United Nations' Regional Commissions included workshops and side events focused on the practice of VLRs and their links to VNRs.



Proposed questions for discussion

The present session will showcase successful local transformations and discuss what enabled them. It will also address how the lessons learned from VLR processes can best be utilized to accelerate progress towards all 17 SDGs.

- What are examples of transformations being achieved at the local level, to overcome crises and shift towards the full implementation of the SDGs in times of crises? How can these be supported or replicated?
- What is the role of local and regional governments in accelerating SDG progress?
- What are some of the best ways for increasing stakeholder engagement in local SDG implementation? How can local government help to mobilize and facilitate those experiencing



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poverty or marginalization, to engage in the design and implementation of local action?

- What are some of the key messages arising from the Voluntary Local Reviews? How can VLRs be used to catalyze global impacts?
- How can the VLRs contribute to SDG-based national planning and budgeting?