



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level

*Wednesday, 10 July 2024, 4:45 PM – 6:00 PM*

### Secretariat Background Note

With at least 65 per cent of SDG targets linked to the work and mandates of local and regional governments, local action is indispensable for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The critical role of regional and local authorities was recognized at the time of adoption of the 2030 Agenda and, in the nine years since 2015, recognition of the importance of local action by Member States<sup>1</sup> and by the UN Secretary-General<sup>2</sup> has grown considerably. At the 2023 SDG Summit, Member States assessed challenges to SDG implementation, identified solutions, and recommitted to their efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030 and to revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. They also emphasized their commitment to localize the SDGs and advance integrated planning and implementation at the local level.

#### **Voluntary Local Reviews and the SDG localization movement**

Growing numbers of local governments from all regions have embraced the SDGs as a framework for their own development

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, E/HLS/2022/1, para. 25.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Our Common Agenda, available at: [https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common Agenda Report English.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common%20Agenda%20Report%20English.pdf); and A/78/80-E/2023/64.





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planning and efforts. Since the presentation of the first voluntary local reviews (VLRs) of SDG implementation in 2018 by cities such as New York (USA) and the Town of Shimokawa (Japan), many local governments have conducted a VLR. To date, over 300 VLRs have been published in more than 45 countries, covering over 600 million people. VLRs are being conducted by local and regional governments with diverse characteristics, including those with varying resource endowments and population sizes, from well-resourced metropolitan cities to small towns or rural districts with limited human and financial resources.

The commitment to conduct VLRs represents a bottom-up response to the 2030 Agenda and showcases the contributions of local and regional governments towards the achievement of the SDGs. Their growing popularity reflects the many benefits they can bring, including providing opportunities to strengthen integrated policymaking and coordination between national and local governments, to increase engagement with stakeholders and bring those who are furthest behind into processes for local SDG implementation, and to enhance data collection.

Many local and regional governments have also enthusiastically participated in SDG or VLR-related peer learning and exchanges with others, including through UN-led opportunities, such as the Local2030 Coalition, the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, or events such as UN DESA's annual International Mayors Forum, as well as through alliances forged by mayors themselves, such as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. Such initiatives not only contribute to capacity building amongst local governments, but also foster multilevel governance and facilitate the exchange of information on good practices and on new innovative solutions to address development challenges.



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### Voluntary National Review and Voluntary Local Review Integration

According to the VNR Synthesis Report 2023, “VLRs are becoming an integral component of the VNR,”<sup>3</sup> with a growing number of national governments integrating VLR findings into national reports. In this way, VLRs complement and enrich the national story regarding SDG implementation by ensuring a more detailed and differentiated assessment of progress, gaps and challenges in states, provinces, cities, municipalities, towns, districts, and villages. Moreover, fostering linkages between VNRs and VLRs facilitates the work of national planning institutions in their ongoing efforts to align and embed the 2030 Agenda into national and local development plans, foster linkages and partnerships with other development actors to harmonize local development activities, avoid duplications and promote effectiveness.

### Looking ahead

Global attainment of the Goals remains severely off track. At a time when the world is beset by multiple crises that have complicated progress, transformation at local level is more important than ever. Local action continues to grow; however, much work remains to maximize contributions, including further rolling out the practice of SDG localization and preparation of VLRs, to reach broader groups of local and regional governments, to bring a diverse array of local voices into the review process and connect their efforts with national development planning. A United Nations inter-agency policy brief on SDG localization published in May 2024<sup>4</sup> sets out a series of

<sup>3</sup> [https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023\\_VNR\\_Synthesis\\_Report.pdf](https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023_VNR_Synthesis_Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Accelerating SDG Localization to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNDESA, UN Habitat, UNDP, UCLG, Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, ECA, UNECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA, (May



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overarching recommendations for actions to be taken by national and subnational governments as well as by UN entities to further local SDG transformations. These call, *inter alia*, for improved enabling policy environments and financing for SDG localization; provision of capacity building for policy makers and local and regional government associations; timely generation of disaggregated data and strengthened commitments to inclusive governance.

This session will showcase successful local transformations and transitions to accelerate SDG implementation at local and regional levels, as well as the ways in which they are coordinated with national voluntary national review processes and reporting. It will discuss what enabled these and how any identified challenges have been overcome. Participants will share their views on how local action can be expanded in all regions to accelerate progress towards all 17 SDGs.

### Proposed questions for discussion

- How have SDG localization efforts, including through the preparation of VLRs, led to advances in the implementation of sustainable development? Please share concrete examples from your local, regional or national context.
- What transformations are being achieved at the local level to overcome crises and shift towards the full implementation of the SDGs in times of multiple crises? How can they be supported?
- What guidance can you share, based on your own experience, on best approaches to accelerating implementation of the SDGs through localization? How can local governments and

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2024) <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/inter-agency-policy-brief-accelerating-sdg-localization-deliver-promise-2030-agenda>.



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stakeholders best share their experiences with others that may not yet have initiated this practice?



- What is the role of local and regional governments and their associations in accelerating SDG progress?



- What good practices and innovations can be shared in terms of increasing stakeholder engagement, including from marginalized communities, in local SDG implementation?



- How can the VLRs contribute to SDG-based national planning and budgeting?

