HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

#HLPF #SDGs #GlobalGoals

Transformation from the Ground Up: Acting at local level

Thursday 17 July, 16:30-18:00

Conference Room 4

Secretariat Background Note

As the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, global fragilities are intensifying. Persistent and widening inequalities, protracted conflicts and the escalating climate crisis are severely undermining progress toward the shared global aspirations embodied in the SDGs.

In this context, the need for whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches has become more urgent than ever. Local and regional governments play a central role in this effort. With over 65 percent of SDG targets directly linked to their mandates and responsibilities, local action is essential for realizing the 2030 Agenda.

Recognition of the vital role of local and regional actors continues to grow. This is reflected in successive political declarations of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and in the Political Declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit, in which Member States committed to further localizing the SDGs and advancing integrated planning and implementation at the local level.[1] In adopting the 2024 Pact for the Future, Member States further requested that the Secretary-General present a new report to the General Assembly in 2025, providing recommendations on how engagement with local and regional authorities could advance the 2030 Agenda, particularly the localization of the SDGs.[2]

National Governments are also demonstrating increased commitment to multilevel approaches to achieving the SDGs. This is evident in the growing inclusion of local and regional governments in national SDG reporting

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[1] A/RES/78/1, para. 38(s).
[2] Pact for the Future, para. 83 (e).

processes, their participation in national delegations to the HLPF, and the organization of side events focused on SDG localization and related themes. It is notable that 2024 marked the first year in which over half of the VNRs presented at the HLPF included "medium to high" levels of local and regional government involvement.3

At the same time, local and regional governments are stepping up their efforts to implement the SDGs. Across all regions, they are making bold commitments, such as net-zero emissions targets, and joining international organizations, networks and initiatives such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy. Their concerns and voices are also increasingly included in relevant global intergovernmental processes.

A key expression of their commitment to the SDGs is the growing global movement of **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)**. Local and regional governments of all sizes and from all regions are using VLRs to assess and report on their SDG progress. With an estimated 400 VLRs and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) published to date, the VLR process has facilitated the integration of the SDGs into local and regional policymaking, and has been instrumental in helping local and regional governments monitor progress while demonstrating success stories in sustainable development across all areas of planning, including strategy and design; budgeting and procurement; data, monitoring and evaluation; and coordination and stakeholder engagement.

VLRs are increasingly being incorporated into **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**, enriching national reporting with localized insights and enabling more nuanced assessments of progress, gaps and challenges. This integration enhances national planning institutions' ability to align the 2030 Agenda across governance levels. It also fosters greater coordination with development partners, reduces duplication, and promotes more effective and harmonized local development efforts.

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3 UCLG, Towards the Localization of the SDGs (2024) p. 23. Available at: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uploaded/HLPF2024.pdf.

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Since 2024, UN entities and key partners have published a series of inter-agency policy briefs on SDG Localization.4 The briefs share recommended actions for national Governments, subnational governments and UN entitites to support sustainable urban development by enhancing coordination between national and local governments and encouraging integration of the SDGs in local development planning. Adequate funding for implementation of sustainable development at all levels is essential, as is investment in capacity building to equip local governments with needed expertise and tools.

This session will showcase successful local and regional approaches to accelerating sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the SDGs. It will explore the enabling conditions behind these successes and examine how local action can be scaled across regions to drive progress on all 17 Goals.

Proposed questions for discussion

- How have SDG localization efforts, including the preparation of VLRs and VSRs, led to advances in the implementation of sustainable development? What are some examples from local, regional or national contexts in relation to: a) increasing stakeholder engagement in local SDG implementation; b) strengthening local data systems that contribute to evidence-based action; and c) integrating the SDGs into local and national planning?

- How can national and subnational authorities better access and leverage financing, including by diversifying income and finance resources, to scale local efforts and accelerate progress towards the SDGs? What positive concrete examples can be shared?

- 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?

- How can successful action at local level be scaled up and incorporated into systematic or comprehensive national approaches to SDG localization?

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4 Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews#publications.