

Communiqué on Voluntary Local Reviews

The institutions and partners gathered at the Expert Group Meeting *Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Connecting VLRs and VNRs held on February 23 and 24 2021* recognize that:

- 1.1. **The community of local governments and stakeholders that gathers around the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) has been growing at an encouraging pace.** When it was published, in July 2020, the first volume of the UCLG-UN-Habitat Guidelines analyzed just 37 VLRs available, while the second volume already lists 63 full-fledged documents. At least nine more VLRs are ready to be launched through 2021 – this is rapid progress, in the span of just a few months.
- 1.2. **Local reviews provide first-hand information on how local and regional governments are leading the way in the implementation of the SDGs.** VLRs tell the stories of how local institutions have re-designed themselves and aligned their policy making to the vision and directions of the 2030 Agenda. They describe how residents and territories have mobilized for policy initiatives, community-building, and advocacy that aims to bring the Goals to every doorstep, every institution, every company. The VLRs mine and work with data that is only available at the local level, this generating a wealth of information and nuanced analysis that can help national governments and the international community make their 2030 commitments a reality.
- 1.3. **VLRs are being published across all continents. The local governments driving them represent, sponsor and support the initiatives of about 190 million people.** International organizations such as UN-Habitat, UNDESA, the European Commission, and the UN Regional Commissions and global local and regional governments networks, such as United Cities and Local Governments, are supporting urban and rural communities, territories and institutions to take up this challenge and join the movement.
- 1.4. **Local reviews are changing the local-national dynamic through VNR-VLR linkages.** The VLR movement and the proactiveness of the frontrunner cities have increased the demand for institutional intermediation between the local and national level. Several countries have established inter-institutional and cross-level mechanisms (committees and high-level commissions, as well as more informal and bottom-up venues) that work as new high-legitimacy spaces for different levels of government to work together, exchange data, practices and techniques on the way to the implementation of the SDGs.

- 1.5. **The emergence of VLRs and the information they provide is changing the approach to the national review.** National governments are committing to utilize this information and analysis. Many governments are mentioning or including these data and insights in their national reviews. This articulation can happen in different ways, and with different degrees of closeness: VLRs could be attached to VNRs, or mentioned in focus boxes, or in some cases the information from VLRs could directly feed into the development of the VNR itself. Significant cooperation also is also being seen at data and indicators' level, with national statistical offices collaborating with cities to extract and define city data.
- 1.6. **Local reviews have changed the way we think of SDG localization.** While VLRs help local governments share their experiences and practices with the outside world, they also have an important internal impact. Because of the VLR, local communities engage with localization in a much more transparent and accountable way. Localization starts pervading the most important functions of local authorities: basic services, healthcare, education, social inclusion and climate-change policies. The VLR process has also demanded more cross-departmental collaboration and "delivering as one" at the local level.
- 1.7. **There is deep knowledge in the numbers.** VLRs show huge advancements in the local generation and treatment of data. VLRs have increased awareness of the importance of data analysis and pushed for indicator adaptation and the sourcing of relevant, locally owned data on all dimensions of SDG localization.
- 1.8. **VLRs offer new means of participation.** VLRs have helped with mobilization and enhanced political engagement of citizens in governance processes - many cities experimented with community workshops and platforms, local polls, local council certifications, and many other ways to increase the co-ownership of both the SDG agenda and the local review effort.

However, much work still needs to be done to give local and regional governments and local stakeholders the resources they need and acknowledge the role they play in the SDG review process. The institutions and partners gathered at the Expert Group Meeting *Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Connecting VLRs and VNRs* commit to work together and urge the international community to join their effort to support VLRs as follows:

- 2.1. **More bridges, more dialogue.** VLRs are thriving in several cities, but in isolation. It is important that these examples are widely shared and the global community is invested in building bridges horizontally, so that more local and regional governments can learn from each other and join the VLR movement. This should be accompanied by and building stairs vertically, so that more dialogue between the grassroots communities, local governments and the national government can establish a virtuous decision-making cycle.

- 2.2. **A truly enabling and constructive reporting ecosystem** is one in which all sources – local and national – come together, with SDG implementation as the common goal of this process. We need to clearly identify where the VLRs and local data can add most value to the VNRs, making local authorities and stakeholders co-owners of the national reports.
- 2.3. **Support to data and indicators.** Adapted indicators, common statistical resources, mutual training and learning are essential so that cross-level obstacles are overcome, and data is used to tailor sustainable policies to the needs, potential and commitment of local communities. The Global Urban Monitoring Framework will be the cornerstone of this process.
- 2.4. **Local-national connections.** Better institutional cooperation between all levels of government, shared data and information, a robust enabling environment, are key to advance SDG implementation. The imperative is to create an ecosystem in which local governments are peers in decision-making, strategic planning with national governments, transforming communities and territories in a fully co-owned, multi-level and multi-stakeholder process.
- 2.5. **National local government associations.** In many contexts, the intermediary space between national and local governments is being filled by national local government associations. Their ability to provide information and tools to a large audience of municipalities, provinces or regions makes for an efficient mechanism of collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, and builds useful linkages with the national government. National associations should be supported to advance Voluntary sub-national and local reviews (VSR and VLR) as powerful tools at the national level, and coordinate with national governments on behalf of the community of local governments.
- 2.6. **Global movement of local and regional governments.** The global movement of local and regional governments has been actively advocating for the urgent need of improved multilevel governance mechanisms for collaboration to achieve the SDGs. The efforts of the global and regional movement of local and regional governments must be hence acknowledged, supported and showcased in order to boost the localization of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda and involved in the international processes for the development a vision on the future of cities and territories.
- 2.7. **UN support.** The UN is the institution able to create the link between the local, national, regional and global levels of action. UN-Habitat, the UN Regional Commissions, UNDESA and the UNCT and UNRCOs, along with national governments and local and regional governments networks, will work in coordinated and efficient manner to further support VLRs and VSRs, facilitate coordination with the VNR process and to improve participation and recognition of local government and communities within the UN-led international processes.