

22nd session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written statement by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Agenda item 4: Peer exchange with voluntary national review countries and voluntary local review cities on experiences and promising practices in implementing Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 17

Less than a decade remains to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and governments need to accelerate sustainable solutions to surpass the current complex and interconnected global challenges – ranging from poverty and climate change to inequality and closing the finance gap. Now more than ever, Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), are crucial tools through which all governments, including regional and local governments, report on the state of the SDGs in their territories to achieve a sustainable future. UN-Habitat provides partners worldwide with direct technical support to develop VLRs. It also leads the development of cutting-edge research and guidance on VLRs and provides opportunities for peer learning, capacity building and international engagement.

As emerged from the final statement of the 2021 High-Level Political Forum, “*The localization of the SDGs requires multilevel governance, shared leadership, and multi-stakeholder coordination, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies, and actions. Improved coordination mechanisms based on the principles of subsidiarity and the respect of local autonomy, as well as civil society participation, are critical to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and promote local innovation.*”

Thus, despite the global nature of the SDGs, their effective achievement relies on local-level action. SDG localization is defined as the process of transforming the SDGs into reality at local level, while maintaining coherence with the national frameworks and the local communities’ priorities. The majority of the SDGs’ targets cannot be reached without proper engagement and coordination with Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) through multilevel governance mechanisms (MLG). MLG acknowledges that no single level of government is likely to have the capacity to address the requirements for the implementation of the SDGs. Indeed, a coordinated action between all stakeholders, including the civil society and local communities, is needed to transform policies and national strategies into concrete implementation of the target sets by the SDGs (whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach).

Multilevel governance can be defined as the paradigm shift from a vertically hierarchical nation-state model to a governmental and public management approach that strives for broad consultative processes and mechanisms for vertical and horizontal coordination among and between a diverse range of actors and levels of government, which are politically independent but otherwise interdependent. Three dimensions characterize effective MLG: **vertical integration, horizontal integration, and stakeholder engagement**. If embedded into the 2030 Agenda context, effective MLG would result in a series of key recommendations and good practices. Indeed, effective MLG allows, *inter alia*, to i) integrate LRGs into national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes on the 2030 Agenda; ii) ensure alignment and consistency of policies, priorities, incentives and

objectives across levels to avoid duplication of efforts, and connecting VLRs to the VNRs processes; iii) overcoming institutional fragmentation in SDG reviews (vertical integration); iv) enhancing horizontal cooperation at different levels of governance, and building capacity in public administration to adequately address the principles and integrated nature of the SDGs (horizontal integration); v) enable effective participation of all societal actors in every phase, including monitoring and evaluation, while facilitating the use of reviews and monitoring reports for the analysis and accountability on the progress of sustainable development strategies, as well as influencing decision-making processes on new priority-setting (stakeholder engagement).

VLRs consist of reports published by local authorities to assess and present how the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda is developing from a local standpoint. However, VLRs are more than just a monitoring and reporting tool. Specifically, they represent a perfect entry point for long-term evidence-based strategies and data-driven policy making, which results in new norms anchored to the specific needs of communities, including the most vulnerable groups.

Presently, 207 VLRs have been published in 44 different countries, involving 168 local and regional governments, showing that LRGs are increasingly complementing the VNRs process and directly contributing to the implementation of Goals 16 and 17. Nevertheless, only 28 per cent of the 70 countries that reported to the High-Level Political Forum between 2016 and 2021 have engaged LRGs in national coordination mechanisms. For the remaining countries, such an engagement is either weak (21 per cent), or non-existent (44 per cent), along with an additional 6 per cent with either no elected LRGs or no available information (United Cities and Local Governments Report of 2022). Given the ability of VLRs to influence countries' overall capacities to deliver on the SDGs, there is a need to boost the commitment of local governments in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the SDGs using VLRs.

Considering the above, it is apparent that VNRs and VLRs are inherently complementary. Connecting VNRs and VLRs can address data collection gaps and help local authorities to have an overview of the 17 Goals and their targets. As a result, local authorities can have a better understanding of which goals they are already implementing within their jurisdiction and of the action to implement the remaining ones by efficiently defining targeted strategies and policies, all while optimally allocating resources.

The global report (**UN-Habitat, Multilevel Governance for SDG Localization, 2022**) contains case studies in five countries which provide an overview of trends and practices of MLG for SDG localization. The in-depth analysis of effective MLG processes and mechanisms in Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines highlighted qualifying elements and good practices from each country as well as ongoing challenges regarding LRGs' involvement in the VNRs. Some of the main challenges include i) gaps and overlaps in coordination between the different levels of government in the use of indicators, making it very difficult to analyze localized SDG progress; ii) limited financial resources for local governments to implement SDGs with their targets often set at a national level without considering local capacity; iii) absence of a systemic involvement of LRGs in SDGs planning, implementation and monitoring process at the national level, and a iv) predominant top-bottom approach in defining binding framework and guidance to achieve the 2030 Agenda increasing the risk of LRGs perceiving the SDGs as externally imposed burdens without adequate resources.

Action-oriented recommendations to improve local monitoring and reporting process through VLR and its connection with VNR include:

- a) Pursuing consistency with indicator frameworks developed at national, supranational and global levels, while ensuring the feasibility of the application of frameworks on lower levels considering the availability of territorially disaggregated data and statistics.
- b) Enhancing the capacity of collection and elaboration of data at a local level, *inter alia*, by encouraging cooperation with the national statistical offices.
- c) Fostering connections between VNR and VLR processes to overcome institutional fragmentation in SDGs reviews.
- d) Connecting the VLR process to long-term strategic plans based on territorial partnerships and cross-sectoral coordination for sustainable development.
- e) Defining systems to share and compare baseline data, trends and performance across government sectors.
- f) Enabling overview and accountability through participatory mechanisms that involve citizens and other non-governmental actors in the monitoring and evaluation of the progress of strategies while also allowing them to influence decision-making processes to set new priorities, policies and budgets.
- g) Including collective action of the whole of society as part of the SDG localization process as well as the monitoring framework.

By promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice for all and the establishment of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, SDG 16 acts as an organizing and cross-cutting goal to ensure sustainable development. Similarly, SDG 17 transversally connects all the goals by setting the principle of global partnership to strengthen the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The following images highlight the efforts of three cities in implementing SDGs 16 and 17 according to the most recent VLRs.

ARGENTINA – BUENOS AIRES 2021 VLR	
SDG 16	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>16.3 – Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.</p> <p>16.5 – Significantly reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms.</p> <p>16.6 – Create effective and transparent accountable institutions at all levels.</p> <p>16.7 – Ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making responsive to needs at all levels.</p> <p>16.10 – Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national laws and international agreements.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated data: The city makes available more than four hundred public data in an open format to promote innovation and open government, as well as to encourage citizens to use this data to add social and economic value. - Open Budget: Allows users to interactively visualize the government's budget and monitor allocations of public resources. - Information sharing: Provides geo-referenced information on the public works carried out by the city government in each neighborhood and details the start and end date of the work, its cost and additional information. - Open Dialogue: Open initiative for the collaborative and horizontal development of public policies. - Collaborative Proposal Management: Platform for citizens to submit requests.

SDG 17	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>17.9 – Increase international support for effective and targeted capacity-building activities in developing countries to support national implementation plans for all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation.</p> <p>17.16 – Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, particularly developing countries.</p> <p>17.17 – Encourage and promote effective partnerships in the public, public-private, and civil society spheres, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships. resource-raising strategies of partnerships.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City networking: Exchanges with key stakeholders in the international system such as cities, international organizations and institutions. As an example, within the framework of the Strategic Sector Cooperation initiative of the Government of Denmark, the cities of Copenhagen and Buenos Aires agreed to carry out a joint work plan on energy efficiency in public buildings and water resource management with a focus on floods. The City of Buenos Aires also participates in networks of cities and philanthropic organizations. Together with C40, it is developing an integrated information management software for Urban Green Infrastructure (IVU Platform). - Cities for Climate Alliance: Formed in 2021 by the City of Buenos Aires and 16 other Argentine cities to promote the exchange of local policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation and sustainable development. - Strategic Planning Council: Created by Article 19 of the City's Constitution, it is a multisectoral and consultative body that periodically proposes consensual strategic plans that serve as a basis for the development of public policies. An example is the Buenos Aires 2035 Participatory Strategic Plan, which identifies priorities and establishes action plans, as well as specific goals and indicators for their follow-up, arising from the dialogue, exchange and open participation of civil society organizations of the City of Buenos Aires.
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ITALY – FLORENCE 2021 VLR	
SDG 16	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>16.1 – Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Territorial network agreement "Free your land" for promoting education for active citizenship and legality. - Pact for Justice signed with a partnership of institutional stakeholders, including the Court of Florence, which found direct translation within the Metropolitan Strategic Plan through the Simple Justice strategy. - Implementation of projects aimed at facilitating citizens' access to services of a judicial nature and strengthening the use of mediation, including through the establishment of outreach desks run by officials' municipal officials.
SDG 17	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>17.17 – Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presence of a highly active and widespread association and a civic commitment favorable to the promotion of sustainable development both in the metropolitan area and in the context of international Cooperation. - Growing involvement of resident foreign communities in the area, thanks to the role played by diaspora associations in co-development initiatives. - Active and central role played by many municipal governments in decentralized cooperation initiatives.

GHANA – ACCRA 2020 VLR	
SDG 16	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>16.1 – Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.</p> <p>Indicator 16.1.3 – Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Violence Act 2007 No. 732: Provides a comprehensive framework preventing and protecting against domestic violence while criminalizing various forms of physical and sexual violence, economic and psychological abuse and intimidation. To implement the Domestic Violence Act, the city of Accra organized capacity training for staff and sensitization programmes for citizens at the sub-metro level while providing shelter and social support for victims.
SDG 17	<p>Relevant targets:</p> <p>17.1 – Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection.</p> <p>Indicator 17.1.1L – Funding Sources as percentage of total revenue</p> <p>Indicator 17.1.2L – Proportion of AMA total expenditure funded by I.G.F.</p> <p>Good practices and highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The suggested measures to improve local revenue generation and progress with the implementation of SDGs include i) provision of integrated revenue management software, ii) strengthening the revenue task force and capacity building of revenue collectors, and iii) streamlining the procedures in revenue collection by introducing technology for efficient and effective revenue mobilization. - The Metropolitan Assembly is implementing several measures to improve revenue mobilization, including the development of a Revenue Improvement Action Plan to guide the expansion of the revenue base and the submission of lists of all the revenue collectors under the Government of Ghana of Internally Generated Funds (IGF) to the Ministry of Finance.

Implementing the recommendations above and linking VNRs and VLRs through MLG and public participation practices may represent the needed booster to achieve not only Goals 16 and 17, but all the Sustainable Developments Goals by 2030.