

High Level Political Forum 2020
UCLG and UN-Habitat Voluntary Local Review Series Launch
Wednesday, 08/07/2020
10.00-11.30 EST

Dear Emilia, Secretary-General of UCLG

Dear colleagues, partners and Friends

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning, afternoon and evening to all of you, wherever you are in the world!

It gives me immense pleasure to join you all today to jointly launch, with you Emilia, the UCLG and UN-Habitat Voluntary Local Review Series and its first Guidance Volume.

First of all, I would like to thank the whole UCLG Team for the tireless work in these complex and uncertain times - you are the real inspiration for all of us and I am counting on your strong partnership.

Our alliance on the localisation of the SDGs goes far back in time, and it is now stronger than ever.

Indeed, since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis which has quickly and deeply affected all of us, UCLG and UN-Habitat have come closer together to support Local and Regional Governments in fighting the pandemic and its social and economic consequences.

We have done this through the Live Learning Experiences that over the past three months have virtually gathered hundreds of Mayors and thousands of participants to share local experiences and innovative solutions.

We are doing it now with the launch of this important Voluntary Local Review Series that aims at initiating a global process on VLRs to provide guidance, definitions and technical support to any local and regional government seeking to engage in the VLR process.

To achieve the SDGs, it is critical to strengthen the mobilisation of local and regional governments and their communities. This is one of our Declared Actions made at the 10th session of the World Urban Forum.

It is vital to ensure that local and regional governments are actively involved in all steps of the process: in the definition, implementation, follow-up, and monitoring of the localisation strategies and priorities.

To achieve this, they must be empowered by localised and disaggregated data, especially through a spatially disaggregated approach, and also be given adequate resources to contribute to the process – Voluntary Local Reviews are a unique opportunity to do so.

Since 2018, when the city of New York and three Japanese municipalities produced their first 'Voluntary Local Reviews' (VLRs), almost 40 cities and regional governments from all continents, and of all sizes, have published their respective VLRs. This also includes two cities from my home country, Malaysia, which are Shah Alam and Seberang Perai.

This process has increased awareness, transparency, institutional accountability, and the very ownership of SDG implementation — making local governments more capable of spurring policy change, cut down silos and become more open to innovation and change.

We know that there is no fixed working definition for Voluntary Local Reviews. However, it is clear that all VLRs have common elements, particularly as regards their primary purpose: assessing and presenting the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda from a local standpoint, and through a locally-developed narrative.

UCLG and UN-Habitat also understand that the purpose of VLRs goes beyond their monitoring and evaluation function:

- VLRs represent an aspirational statement and the commitment of a community to a global endeavour.
- They can facilitate community engagement and participation through a shared vision and inclusive approaches.
- VLRs enhance transparency and trust between citizens and public institutions, therefore, contribute to strengthening the social contract.
- They create opportunities to break internal silos and foster multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral dialogues.
- VLRs are a tool to enhance development planning, to revise and adapt policy decisions, while creating more traction and broader ownership of the goals.

Critical in the VLR process is their integration with the national monitoring and reporting mechanisms, especially with the Voluntary National Review. VLRs have indeed the potential to foster multilevel governance and coordination, thus strengthening the role of local and regional governments in the overall national efforts to achieve the SDGs.

For these reasons, UCLG and UN-Habitat have decided to join forces and to launch the VLRs, Series: a global process to support Local and Regional Governments and Voluntary Local Reviews through the development of a set of resources and guidance.

The overall objective of the VLR Series is to provide cities and local authorities with cutting-edge knowledge and practical guidance on the VLR process, while animating a sharing exercise – and ultimately the global debate – on the local implementation of the SDGs.

The Series is an integral part of the work of the UCLG Community of Practice on VLRs, as well as of the UN-Habitat-led work on VLRs, such as the forthcoming Expert Group Meeting being organised in collaboration with the city of Madrid.

The first Volume of the Guidance on VLRs offers a comparative analysis of the existing VLRs. It builds on the extraordinary work that Local and Regional Governments worldwide have accomplished to advance the localisation of the Global Goals.

Dear friends and partners, once again, thank you again for being here for the launch of this significant VLR Series.

Let's work all together to support local communities and local governments in recovering after the pandemic and in achieving the Global Goals.

Thank you.