
PRESS RELEASE

Voluntary Local Reviews are changing the way we think of SDG localization and the approach to the National Reviews

Madrid, Spain, 25 February 2021 - UN-Habitat and UCLG, with the support of the Madrid City Council, brought together representatives from local, regional and national governments, United Nations organizations and other groups to discuss how local governments can connect with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN Member States in 2015.

It is widely agreed that local governments must be fully involved to ensure that the SDGs are achieved. Some local and regional governments have shared their progress in localizing the SDGs by producing 'Voluntary Local Reviews' (VLRs), which complement the information and data on SDG implementation provided by national governments in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

The Expert Group Meeting called "Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Connecting VLRs and VNRs" which was held on February 23 and 24, looked at promoting coherence and cooperation for VLR reporting and strengthening their connection to VNRs.

While Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) help local governments share about their progress, experiences and practices on the SDGs, they also help local communities engage with localization in a transparent and accountable way. The VLRs and the information they provide is changing the approach to the VNRs and the local-national linkages.

Around 40 local governments were present at the meeting (of a total of 216 participants) along with the five UN Regional Commissions (for Western Asia UNESCWA, for Asia and the Pacific UNESCAP, for Africa UNECA, for Latin America and the Caribbean UNECLAC, and for Europe UNECE) to discuss and advance the UN support to the VLR movement worldwide.

During the Meeting, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, Maimunah Mohd Sharif, mentioned that "COVID-19 has highlighted the role of local governments to meet urban challenges, therefore connecting VLRs with the VNRs is a key step". For her part, the General Secretary of UCLG, Emilia Saiz stated that "one of the reasons why progress is not being made faster in achieving the SDGs is due to the lack of its localization, in which the New Urban Agenda is key, VLRs must impact

initiatives and change policies for localization. Finally, Santiago Saura, from Madrid City Council, highlighted that “there is a need to generate mechanisms that integrate the national and the local, to facilitate the monitoring of the achievement of the SDGs” and that “Madrid is developing its SDGs Strategy and VLRs are part of it, we have increased the level of ambition to comply with the SDGs, aligned with national and European objectives”.

The institutions and partners that gathered at the EGM ***Towards a New Generation of VLRs: Connecting VLRs and VNRs*** committed to work together and urge the international community to join their efforts to support VLRs. This would allow more local and regional governments to learn from each other and join the VLR movement, and to have better institutional cooperation between all levels of government –including shared data and information. They also stated that VLRs must be supported as powerful tools to gather local review process and coordinate with national governments.

Finally, they agreed that the UN which can create the link between the local, national, regional and global levels of action (UN-Habitat, the UN Regional Commissions, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs UNDESA, the United Nations Country Team UNCT and the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office UNRCOs), jointly with national governments and local and regional governments networks, will work in a coordinated and efficient manner to further support VLRs, to facilitate coordination with the VNR process. They also called for improved participation and recognition of local government and communities within the UN-led international processes.