

Opening Remarks	Regional preparatory workshop for African VNRs and VLRs: strengthening integration and reporting on the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063	Friday, 26/02/21
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- *Your Excellency Ambassador Collen V. Kelapile, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the UN and Vice-President, Economic and Social Council*
- *Madam Vera Songwe, Executive Secretary, ECA*
- *Madam Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*
- *Mr. Jean-Pierre Elong Mbassi, Secretary-General, United Cities and Local Governments of Africa*
- *Madam Beatrice Pacunega Manano, Chief of Economic Affairs, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa*
- *Dear colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,*

Greetings from Nairobi! Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to all of you, wherever you are in this world!

Thank you for your kind invitation to participate in the opening of this very important workshop.

I am glad to see that many UN entities and partner institutions are gathered in this virtual space today to discuss the reporting on Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063, and the connection between Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary National Reviews.

This is a key priority area for UN-Habitat, which is to facilitate closer integration to localise the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. We stand ready to assist all Member States as SDG Cities is our flagship programme.

Dear colleagues,

We know that the African continent – particularly sub-Saharan Africa - is the planet's fastest urbanising regions. More than half of the African population is expected to live in cities by 2030. The emerging secondary and intermediary cities carry huge potential. If urbanisation is integrated and well-planned, it can prosper all human settlements. We need to triple our efforts to ensure that urbanisation in Africa goes beyond being merely a catalyst for economic development. We have to ensure it works for everyone and that it forms the basis for national economic development, the kind of development that helps to reduce urban poverty and inequality. Let us not forget that we have with us mayors and local government representatives, who are frontline actors for addressing climate change, the key to sustainable development in Africa.

UN-Habitat, with its Headquarters in Kenya, continues to work closely with both national and local governments in Africa, to support inclusive and sustainable urbanisation in the continent. Our collaboration with the African Union, UNECA and UCLG Africa has been catalytic in developing a new vision for urbanization in Africa, one that accelerates the recovery from the pandemic and that fosters local economic development and regional integration.

I would like to especially commend the efforts of the African Union in making sure urbanisation is a top priority of the African agenda, and look forward to seeing urbanisation featured in one on the forthcoming Heads of State summits. It is important to state clearly that urbanisation is not only about cities or agglomeration economics. It is how cities as engines of growth is part of a wider network to bring about a better quality of life in the entire spectrum of human settlements. Sustainable urbanisation means healthy towns and villages.

Allow me also to congratulate UNECA, the African Union and the colleagues UN-Habitat for developing the harmonised framework for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which was released last week. This framework will be an important vehicle to guide member states on achieving sustainable urbanisation; providing a sound basis to boost VNR and VLR reporting in Africa.

Dear colleagues and friends,

The VLR global movement is here to stay. African cities, also thanks to the exceptional work of UNECA, are charting a forward path in line with their peers. I would like to share my enthusiasm for the draft of the General Assembly resolution that includes a reference to VLRs and that encourages the UN Regional Commissions to use the Regional Forums as a platform to connect VLRs and VNRs.

In this regard, my colleagues and I welcome and are proud to support the initiative of UNECA to develop Regional Guidelines for VLRs in Africa. These guidelines will be fundamental to support cities in developing their reviews through a common regional approach, and to support Member States in gathering information for their reviews at the local level.

We have just come out of two days of very successful discussions at the Expert Group Meeting that UN-Habitat, together with UCLG and Madrid, organised on the *new generation of VLRs and their connection with VNRs*.

We learned from both national and local governments that despite many inspiring efforts. We also know that a lot more needs to be done to ensure VLRs and VNRs are aligned and well-connected. We need to do more multilevel coordination if we are to successfully localise the SDGs and New Urban Agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to do MORE! We need to accelerate these efforts. We have only ten years – the Decade of Action is already underway!

ONE. We need more bridges and more dialogue connecting grassroots communities, local governments and national institutions to establish virtuous decision-making cycles.

TWO. We need a truly enabling and constructive reporting ecosystem identifying where the VLRs and local data can add most value to the VNRs, and making local governments and stakeholders co-owners of the national reports.

THREE. We need to support some level of harmonisation of data and indicators, which are essential elements to not only assess progress of, but also for tailoring policies to the needs, potential and commitment of local communities.

FOUR. We need to strengthen the capacities of local governments and fully recognise their role as first crisis responders, development promoters and resilience builders.

FIVE. The UN and all international organisations need to work together to coordinate their effort and to provide coherent and effective support to all governments at all levels.

I am proud to say that at UN-Habitat we are working on a range of innovative tools and cutting-edge knowledge to support VLRs and VNRs. This was our commitment made together with local government partners at WUF10. In Africa, we will double our efforts to collaborate with the colleagues of UNECA to advance the localization of the SDGs, New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2063 across the continent.

Dear colleagues, partners and participants,

Let me conclude by saying that the work on VLRs will be critical also for the review process of the New Urban Agenda that will be culminating at the High-Level Meeting called by the President of the General Assembly in April 2022.

This is a unique opportunity for us to strengthen the multilevel connection between national and local action for development and advance sustainable urbanisation worldwide.

You are all invited to join us in that important process.

Allow me once again to express my gratitude to the organisers of the workshop: UNDESA; the office of the Special Adviser for Africa, the African Union and especially the colleagues of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, that have been working tirelessly to make this workshop happen.

Thank you again and wish you all a very fruitful discussion.

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