

Opening Remarks	EGM Towards a New Generation of Voluntary Local Reviews: Connecting VLRs and VNRs	Tuesday, 24/02/21 14.30CET / 16.30NBO
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Dear Councillor Saura,

Dear Emilia,

Dear partners, experts and friends,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening to all of you wherever you are in this world, and welcome to the Expert Group Meeting on a New Generation of Voluntary Local Reviews!

It is with great pleasure that I open this very important meeting today. I see many experts and participants connected for two days of important and cutting-edge discussions ahead of us.

UN-Habitat would like to acknowledge the close support of UCLG and Madrid City Council for making this meeting possible. Let me thank you dear colleagues for your partnership - this is just one of the many steps we will walk together in the coming months.

As we are all painfully aware, the COVID-19 Pandemic is still with us. But we have good reasons to remain hopeful. Vaccines are available, and they work! Our economies are slowly recovering, and many countries and cities are putting in place unprecedented green and inclusive plans to guide the recovery.

These last 12 months have clearly shown us that the recovery from the pandemic and the transformation our world needs to go through must be anchored at the local level – designed, and tailored to suit the needs of our territories and communities.

To do so, structural coordination among national, regional and local governments is of paramount importance. We need development strategies and policies that are aligned and effective, and that respond to the needs of communities while contributing to the overall country recovery process.

We consider connecting Voluntary Local and National Reviews a critical step in this direction.

Dear experts and participants,

The global community that has embraced Voluntary Local Reviews, has been growing at an encouraging pace.

The first volume of the UCLG-UN-Habitat Guidelines for VLRs, launched at the High-Level Political Forum last year, analyzed 37 VLRs available. The second volume currently being developed is already listing 63 full-fledged documents, and at least 9 more VLRs are ready to be launched through 2021.

At UN-Habitat, we look at VLRs beyond their primary monitoring and reporting task – we see them as powerful tools to trigger and advance the localization of the SDGs.

When the preparation of these VLRs is based on participatory processes involving communities, they become an important tool to guide strategic planning and direct investments, enhance transparency, connect citizens to decision-making processes and strengthen the social contract.

Thanks to VLRs, we are seeing unprecedented investments in city data environments to monitor development at local level. VLRs can collect non-traditional and qualitative data that can complement information from national statistical offices, and thus provide a detailed as well as nuanced picture of the local reality.

VLRs facilitate collaboration across administrative departments, helping to mainstream sustainable development and the SDGs in the everyday activities of local administrations.

Having said that, to fully harness the potential of VLRs, we need to foster their connection with the national reporting system and specifically with the Voluntary National Reviews process.

This will in turn substantially strengthen the VNRs that member states submit to the High-Level Political Forum each year, by tapping into the wealth of information that local governments and communities are producing.

A few decisive steps are needed to make this happen:

ONE. We need mechanisms for structural dialogue that brings together grassroots communities, local governments and national institutions.

TWO. 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.

THREE. We need a strong commitment towards better institutional cooperation between all levels of government, shared data and information, in order to advance the implementation of SDG, and New Urban Agenda, and boost the recovery process.

FOUR. We need partnerships and co-creation. Connecting VLRs and VNRs implies an important coordination effort among the many stakeholders involved in SDG monitoring and reporting. The United Nations, in partnership with the associations of local associations of local governments, is best-placed to facilitate this multilevel governance effort.

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, VNRs and the localization of the SDGs.

The second volume of the Guidelines for VLRs adopts an innovative approach and looks exactly at the connection between VLRs and VNRs, proposing recommendations to both local and national governments on how to strengthen their coordination. Many months of research and exchanges with key actors have brought us to this point today. The results of this EGM will indeed directly feed into the finalisation of the Guidelines towards a formal launch in April.

We have devised a fully-fledged methodology to accompany local and regional governments to develop their VLRs. We have supported cities in Latin America, including Rio de Janeiro and Niteroi; we are also currently working with the cities of Moscow and Florence; and the Greater Amman Municipality is the latest entrant to this club, the first one to develop a VLR in the Arab region.

Our work on VLRs is part of a larger support strategy, to guide local and national governments in all phases of SDG implementation, which includes the development of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework and the SDG Cities Flagship Programme.

Dear colleagues,

We have tried to make these two days as interesting and useful as possible. You will hear from national and local governments from the same country about how they are working to coordinate their action on SDG localization and monitoring. Local governments that are developing their VLRs will shed light on their experiences and processes. The UN Regional Commissions will also discuss how can the UN support VLRs and boost their connection with Voluntary National Reviews.

Let me take a moment to thank the UN-Habitat team behind the organization of this EGM for their work and for convening such a large community of experts here today. From our Spain Country Office, Carmen, Gonzalo and the rest of the team; from headquarters, Eduardo, Shipra and Martino, have worked tirelessly to make this EGM happen.

I cannot conclude my intervention without highlighting the strong and fruitful collaboration between UN-Habitat and the Madrid City Council which has grown from strength to strength, over the past several years. We have worked together in the organization of Expert group Meetings, such as the one for defining the UN-System wide Urban Monitoring Framework last July, or more recently, the EGM on the Urban Safety Monitoring Tool, that took place last October.

This collaboration has been fundamental to create global knowledge and momentum on the monitoring of the SDGs at local level, which I'm sure will also inspire further developments in the city of Madrid itself - we will be happy to support and accompany that process as well.

Dear experts and participants,

Let me close by wishing you two fruitful days of discussion.

Please count on UN-Habitat's leadership, expertise and partnership to support your work and advance SDG localization, globally.

Thank you.

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