

LOCAL AND REGIONAL  
GOVERNMENTS' REPORT  
TO THE 2020 HLPF  
4<sup>th</sup> REPORT

# TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

How to accelerate transformative actions  
in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak



Facilitated by:



#HLPF2020  
#Listen2Cities

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Diputació  
Barcelona

This document was produced with the financial support of the Barcelona Provincial Council. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UCLG and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Barcelona Provincial Council.



Sweden  
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This document has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the author.

Graphic design and lay-out: ggrafic.com  
Photo Cover: Jeremy Stenuit, Lisa Therese, Jens Johnsson and Abigail Keenan by Unsplash; Pixabay; Lifeofpix and Shutterstock.  
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# Abbreviations

## A

**ACOBOL:** *Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia* (Association of Bolivian Women Local Councillors)

**ADDCN:** Association of District Development Committee of Nepal

**AEBR:** Association of European Border Regions

**AER:** Assembly of European Regions

**AFLRA:** Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

**AGP:** Association of Volga Region Cities

**AIMF:** *Association Internationale des Maires Francophones* (International Association of Francophone Mayors)

**AL-LAs:** *Alianza Euro-Latinoamericana de Cooperación entre Ciudades* (Euro-Latin American Alliance for Cooperation between Cities)

**AMB:** *Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia* (Association of Municipalities of Bolivia)

**AME:** *Asociación de Municipalidades Ecuatorianas* (Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities)

**AMHON:** *Asociación de Municipios de Honduras* (Association of Honduran Municipalities)

**AMM:** Association of Municipalities of Mali

**AMN:** Association of Municipalities of Niger

**AMPCC:** *Association marocaine des présidents des conseils municipaux* (Moroccan Association of Presidents of Municipal Councils)

**AMPE:** *Asociación de Municipalidades del Perú* (Association of Peruvian Municipalities)

**AMUPA:** *Asociación de Municipios de Panamá* (Association of Panamanian Municipalities)

**ANAI:** *Asociación Nacional de Alcaldías e Intendencias* (National Association of Mayor Offices, Costa Rica)

**ANAMM:** *Associação Nacional dos Municípios de Moçambique* (National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique)

**ANCB:** *Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin* (National Association of Municipalities of Benin)

**ANGR:** *Asamblea Nacional de Gobiernos Regionales* (National Assembly of Regional Governments, Peru)

**ANMCB:** Association of Cape Verde Municipalities

**APEKSI:** Association of Indonesian Municipalities

**APLA:** Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

**ARCM:** All-Russian Congress of Municipalities

**ARM:** *Association des Régions du Maroc* (Association of Moroccan Regions)

**ASEAN:** Association of Southeast Asian Nations

**ASPAC:** Asia-Pacific

**ATA:** African Territorial Agency

**AUC:** Association of Ukrainian Cities

## C

**C40:** C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

**CAF:** County Assemblies Forum

**CALM:** Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova

**CAMCAYCA:** *Confederación de Asociaciones de Municipios de Centroamérica y el Caribe* (Confederation of Associations of Municipalities of Central America and the Caribbean)

**CEMR:** Council of European Municipalities and Regions

**CIS:** Commonwealth of Independent States

**CLGF:** Commonwealth Local Government Forum

**CONAGOPARE:** *Consejo Nacional de Gobiernos Parroquiales Rurales del Ecuador* (National Council of Rural Parish Governments in Ecuador)

**CONGOPE:** *Consortio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador* (Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador)

**COVID-19:** coronavirus disease, originated by SARS-CoV-2 virus

**CoG:** Council of Governors, Kenya

**CNM:** *Confederação Nacional de Municípios* (National Confederation of Municipalities, Brazil)

**COP:** United Nations Climate Change Conference

**CPMR:** Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions

## D

**DFI:** development finance institution

**DMP:** disaster management plan

**DRR:** disaster risk reduction

## E

**EIB:** European Investment Bank

**EU:** European Union

**EUR:** euro

## F

**FAM:** *Federación Argentina de Municipios* (Argentinian Federation of Municipalities)

**FCM:** Federation of Canadian Municipalities

**FCM:** *Federación Colombiana de Municipios* (Federation of Colombian Municipalities)

**FDI:** foreign direct investment

**FEDOMU:** *Federación Dominicana de Municipios* (Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic)

**FEMP:** *Federación Española de Municipalidades y Provincias* (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces)

**FLACMA:** *Federación Latinoamericana de Ciudades, Municipios y Asociaciones de Gobiernos Locales* (Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Latin America)

**FMDV:** *Fonds Mondial pour le Développement des Villes* (Global Fund for Cities Development)

**FNVT:** *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes* (National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities)

## G

**GALGA:** Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities

**GCoM:** Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

**GDP:** gross domestic product

**GG:** general government

**GHG:** greenhouse gas

**GIZ:** *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (German Agency for International Cooperation)

**GTF:** Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

## H

**ha:** hectares

**HLPF:** High-Level Political Forum

## I

**ICLEI:** ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

**ICT:** information and communications technology

**IISD:** International Institute for Sustainable Development

**ILO:** International Labour Organization

**IMIF:** International Municipal Investment Fund

**IPCC:** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

**IT:** information technology

**K**

**KS:** *Kommunesektorens organisasjon* (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities)

**L**

**LATAM:** Latin American and the Caribbean

**LCP:** League of Cities of the Philippines

**LGA:** local government association

**LGAZ:** Local Government Association of Zambia

**LGBTQIA+:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and other gender and sexual identities

**LGNZ:** Local Government New Zealand

**LE:** Live Learning Experience

**LMP:** League of Municipalities of the Philippines

**LRG:** local and regional government

**LSE:** London School of Economics

**M**

**MALGA:** Malawi Local Government Association

**MC2CM:** Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project

**MEWA:** Middle East and West Asia

**MuAN:** Municipal Association of Nepal

**N**

**NALAG:** National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia

**NALAG:** National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana

**NALAS:** Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe

**NAP:** national adaptation plan

**NARMiN:** National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal

**NDC:** Nationally Determined Contribution

**NFN:** NGO Federation Nepal

**NGO:** non-governmental organisation

**NMCAL:** National Municipal Councils Association of Libya

**NUA:** New Urban Agenda

**NUP:** national urban policy

**O**

**ODA:** official development assistance

**OECD:** Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

**P**

**PPPP:** public-private-people partnership

**R**

**REFELA:** *Réseau des Femmes Elues Locales d'Afrique* (Network for Locally Elected Women of Africa)

**RIA:** rapid integrated assessment

**RIS3:** EU Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization

**S**

**SALGA:** South African Local Government Association

**SDG:** Sustainable Development Goal

**SDSN:** Sustainable Development Solutions Network

**SME:** small and medium-sized enterprise

**SNG:** subnational government

**SOS:** Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia

**Städtebund:** Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

**T**

**TDC:** territorially determined contributions

**TTALGA:** Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities

**U**

**UAAU:** Urban Authorities Association of Uganda

**UAE:** United Arab Emirates

**UCCI:** *Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas* (Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities)

**UCLG:** United Cities and Local Governments

**UCLG Africa:** UCLG's regional section in Africa

**UCLG-ASPAC:** UCLG's regional section in Asia-Pacific region

**ULGA:** Uganda Local Governments Association

**UMT:** Union of Municipalities of Turkey

**UN:** United Nations

**UN ESCWA:** United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

**UNCDF:** UN Capital Development Fund

**UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme

**UNDRR:** United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction

**UNESCAP:** United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

**UNGL:** *Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales* (Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica)

**UN-Habitat:** United Nations Human Settlements Programme

**UN IAEG-SDGs:** United Nations Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators

**UN SG:** United Nations Secretary-General

**US:** United States

**USD:** US dollar

**V**

**VLR:** Voluntary Local Review

**VNG:** *Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten* (Association of Dutch Municipalities)

**VNR:** Voluntary National Review

**VSR:** Voluntary Subnational Review

**VVSG:** *Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten* (Association of Flemish Cities and Towns)

**W**

**WASH:** water, sanitation and hygiene

**WHO:** World Health Organization

**Z**

**ZELS:** Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

**ZMOS:** Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia

# Joint statement to the 2020 High-Level Political Forum of the organized constituency of local and regional governments gathered in the Global Taskforce

In these trying times, with the world facing an unprecedented crisis, we need to put our resolve in creating a window of opportunity to bend the curve of the current unsustainable trajectory. Our world will never be the same. It is our shared responsibility to ensure a better future for the generations to come.

The current context has exacerbated our weaknesses. We can no longer ignore the persistence of inequalities, discrimination, and exclusion in our cities and territories. We must fight to eradicate poverty and transform our consumption and production patterns while protecting our common goods for the current and future generations. The fight against the virus has largely become a fight against poverty and structural inequality.

The transformative framework of the universal development agendas remains essential for a more sustainable future. The pandemic is demonstrating that all development agendas need to be addressed as one and will need to be underpinned by emboldened local action, co-led by local and regional governments and the communities they serve and in close collaboration with national governments.

## Local and regional governments and the universal access to essential public services

Achieving the SDGs is directly linked to the capacity of local and regional governments to ensure populations' access to basic service provision that underpin quality of life, such as adequate housing, water, sanitation, education, food systems, mobility and health.

The living conditions of our citizens are more than ever a matter of life or death, particularly as self-quarantine and lockdowns stood up as central elements of the global response to the pandemic and have been critical to safeguard sanitary measures.

As digitalization, online service delivery, remote work and health issues reshape the morphology of our cities and towns, a new territorial model will need to emerge with invigorated roles for smaller and intermediary cities.

**Strong, solidarity-driven local and regional governments will need to guarantee the quality of public services, the ecosystems of which are integral for the achievement of the global goals in the urban era.**

As countries and international entities discuss financial packages and funds to recover economies, **we call to ensure and reinforce public service provision at all levels as a means to build back better.** The sacrifices of our communities cannot go unnoticed.

## Localization and proximity at the core of acceleration

Rooting the 2030 Agenda implementation in local and regional priorities, what is known as **localization**, will allow the co-creation of a new framework of governance that is meaningful and practical in the day-to-day lives of citizens.

Localization requires multi-level and multi-stakeholder coordination, financial support and capacity building for local and regional governments to effectively participate.

The limitation to expanded and global supply chains is paving the way to a new wave of local economic development. Local and regional governments have turned to consider models of proximity that can guarantee the provision of food and essential products by means of local production.

With the support of national governments, investors and communities, local and regional governments are fostering circular economies and new patterns of production and consumption by consolidating urban-rural linkages and territorial approaches.

**We stand for bottom-up and inclusive processes to apply the 2030 Agenda as a roadmap to overcome the present crisis and its subsequent effects, while accelerating the achievement of the SDGs in the Decade of Action.**

## A green and democratic recovery

Our efforts to tackle this crisis must be built on democratic values and lead the way to a green recovery, which reinforces the trust in local and regional institutions and governments, enabling the creation of new jobs and the required sustainable infrastructure.

**We must not yield to solutions that compromise years of efforts to address the climate emergency and protect the biodiversity and natural resources of our world.**

**We call on international systems and national governments to promote legal and regulatory reforms necessary to enhance municipal and regional governments' resources and capacity to act and carry out the goals, especially during periods of distress.**

## Revamped multilateralism that targets local and territorial needs

As the UN celebrates the 75th anniversary of the General Assembly, our constituency has taken upon itself the challenge of triggering the conversation on the future of the world among our citizens.

The global solutions we need to tackle the universal challenges we face can only be achieved with a more inclusive and resourceful multilateralism in which communities have a say, and only if all stakeholders take collective responsibility to make it happen.

## Our hopes for the 2020 HLPF

Our constituency is convinced that the universal development agendas global goals remain a valid framework towards our sustainable future. This is why we have continued our work to ensure implementation of the SDGs around the world even in the midst of the pandemic.

This is also the reason why we look forward to the exchanges during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). We celebrate the mention in the HLPF Ministerial Declaration on involving and empowering local and regional governments to nourish local and territorial ownership of the SDGs. **We hope for further acknowledgement of local and regional governments and their national associations as key drivers of the SDGs.**

The local/territorial-global movement for localization has been growing over the years. The Global Taskforce annual report to the HLPF, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, shows that local and regional governments' involvement in VNR processes has increased to 55% in 2020, up from 42% in the 2016-2019 period. Additionally, our report points to an increase in the elaboration of Voluntary Local and Regional Reviews, with a number of countries facilitating this process and including its results in national reviews, while **recognizing the relevance of local and regional government networks as facilitators.**

**We would envisage the HLPF as the space to discuss innovative governance mechanisms between local, regional and national governments.** We call for an inclusive HLPF that promotes and institutionalizes the dialogue with local and regional governments and stakeholders.

**We welcome the inclusion of a session on *Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation*** to address measures to empower and support cities, local and regional authorities, territories and communities, on issues related to climate adaptation, biodiversity, sustainable urban development, infrastructure, culture, urban-rural linkages, and people-centered services, among others.

**We celebrate the third edition of the Local and Regional Governments Forum co-organized by our constituency.** We exult the Forum as a critical opportunity for dialogue among local and regional governments, Member States, and the UN system in the localization, and follow-up of this agenda.

**We call on all relevant actors to combine efforts and use this moment to transform our societies in the ways we promised through our global agreements, for a world that guarantees fundamental rights for all, equity, and sustainability, based on a renewed local and territorial democracy.**

**We call on national governments to acknowledge the importance and support the elaboration of Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews** as opportunities to revise policy decisions and to generate additional traction for the goals. VLRs, beyond local and territorial borders and monitoring mechanisms, are levers for transformation, and embody the aspirations of local and regional governments and their sense of ownership, as institutions.

**We reiterate the commitment of our organized constituency towards the localization of all the global development agendas, and we call upon national governments and the international system to not leave the transformative potential of the SDGs behind.**

**The time for transformation is now.** Our governance models for the future need to reflect and empower the views of our communities. The aspirations for the future we want must not be placed in a secondary spot when we face difficult times. On the contrary, the 17 SDGs need to inspire our actions and be implemented at the levels in which citizens can truly own them.

We are ready to undertake our share of responsibility and accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. We are ready to unite efforts with Member States and the international community to build back with ambition, in line with our common vision for 2030 and beyond.●

# Highlights

## Background

**The fourth report of the local and regional governments (LRGs) to the HLPF: *Towards the Localization of the SDGs (2020)* has been produced at a difficult time, when the world is suffering the effects of a global pandemic. The impact of this crisis on the social and economic fabric of our communities is, however, still difficult to measure. Within this context, the words “solidarity” and “cooperation” take on an even more relevant meaning. This was the message of the UN Secretary-General in his report to the HLPF and it reflects the feelings of our constituency, based on the experiences of numerous cities and territories.**

The transformative framework of the universal development agendas remains essential for a more sustainable future. Local and regional governments from all over the world are reinstating their strong commitment to achieve the transformation that their societies call for after the pandemic through the potential of the SDGs and the universal development agendas.

In this context, the report analyses the evolution of the process of SDG localization in cities and territories throughout the world, particularly focusing on the 47 countries

reporting this year. In doing this, it builds upon the information presented in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and on the views expressed by LRGs through their own reports (more than 40 Voluntary Local Reviews from cities and regions and six reports from LGAs which provide a wider, subnational view of the localization process in the countries reporting this year). It also collects together the answers to the GTF survey, with the visions of LRGs from 75 countries. This report will be presented during the Local and Regional Governments’ Day at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum.

2020 marks the beginning of the Decade of Action for accelerating sustainable solutions to reach the SDGs by 2030. LRGs were already leading the expansion and extension of the SDG localization movement when COVID-19 placed them on the frontline of a crisis. Since its emergence, they have had to guarantee the safety of their communities and the continuity of essential public services, and to move quickly to support the most vulnerable members of their populations. While facing several shortages and threats, LRGs are carrying out transformative actions to ensure that no one and no territory is left behind.

## Good practices

### **COVID-19 has placed LRGs on the frontline of a crisis in which they must care for their communities, ensure the provision of basic services, and reinforce local solidarity networks to protect the most vulnerable**

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting our communities, cities and territories under unprecedented strain, highlighting many of the faults of our current system, and having a direct impact on the possibility of achieving the SDGs. In the midst of this pandemic, LRGs have based their responses on placing people and human rights at the core of their actions, with a particular focus on protecting those communities that are furthest behind. They have concentrated their efforts on: providing urgent solutions regarding adequate housing, particularly for the homeless; preventing evictions due to mortgage and rental defaults; ensuring the continuity of basic services; guaranteeing access to food; and securing livelihoods for the most vulnerable—among them, migrants, women, and people who live and work in informality, even when informality reduces the possibility of self-quarantining. The responses to inequality have proven to be, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as much a question of ethics as measures to ensure security and curbing the worst effects of the pandemic. Innovative LRGs have developed pre-emptive responses and fostered the sharing of information through digital tools to strengthen accountability, looked to enforce social distancing, ensured the disinfection of public spaces, promoted soft urban mobility alternatives, redesigned urban spaces, encouraged short food circuits, and fostered the development of the sharing and social economy and of community networks based on solidarity. Many LRGs are currently taking advantage of these experiences to move towards establishing longer-term decisions in the reconstruction phase and to foster alternative paths.

Multi-level coordination and collaboration with other spheres of government and local stakeholders have proved a quintessential part of this strategy, as has the engagement in, and promotion of, more accountable strategies for emergency governance. With often limited resources, and in spite of countervailing forces, LRGs are striving to take appropriate action to protect their local communities. This includes engaging in collective learning and exchanging knowledge and processes

between different cities based on the principle of solidarity. LRGs have emboldened local action and thereby helped to create more resilient communities. This has been done in conjunction with the communities that they serve and in close collaboration with both national governments and international partners. Working in this way can create new paths to development in the aftermath of COVID-19, and greater resilience in preparation for future crises.

### **Localization and proximity at the heart of the accelerating response: LRGs' voices speak louder**

LRG participation in the reporting process is making progress. In 2020, for the first time in five years, LRGs were asked to participate in VNR preparation in more than half (55%) of the countries submitting annual reports. The efforts made by LRGs to develop their own Voluntary Local Reviews (there have been more than 40 VLRs since 2017) are being increasingly recognized. In six pilot countries (Costa Rica, Ecuador, Benin, Mozambique, Kenya, and Nepal), LGAs have developed Voluntary Subnational Reviews on the current state of SDG localization. In four of these countries, these reports have been acknowledged in the resulting VNRs, thus strengthening the role of localization in national reporting.

The localization movement has been gaining ground in all of the regions, albeit with different scopes and at different paces. National governments are increasingly acknowledging the need for clear strategies to localize the SDGs and devoting a section of their VNRs to localization (as in Argentina, Bangladesh and India). More and more, LGAs and LRGs are mainstreaming the SDGs into their policies and plans. Hundreds of cities have embedded the SDGs in their local strategies and medium-term planning objectives and strengthened partnerships with local stakeholders.

LRGs and LGAs from countries that have already reported to the HLPF in previous years show great dynamism and a diversity of action. Localization is stronger when backed by a clear national localization strategy and where empowered local governments have the necessary powers and resources to act and innovate. Their participation in fora such as the HLPF and the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development organized by the UN Regional Commissions should provide a very suitable opportunity for exchanging experiences and accelerating action to help reach the established goals by 2030.

## Lessons learned

### From the pandemic to a world of solidarity: accelerating transformative actions in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis

The pandemic could offer a window of opportunity to curb the currently unsustainable development trend of our society. If adequately empowered, LRGs can accelerate their actions and contribute to a reconstruction that caters to the needs of citizens. For example, more than 10,000 LRGs from 135 different countries, with 864 million inhabitants, are committed to taking measurable action to help move to low-carbon societies. Frontrunner LRGs in all regions have put forward a wide range of initiatives to address the many dimensions of urban and territorial sustainable development. Such initiatives include: aligning urban and local plans with the SDGs; improving access to basic and social services; supporting local alternative economic models (the green and circular economies, sharing and social economies, the inclusion of the informal sector in the urban fabric); boosting local food supply systems; making resilience an integral part of urban planning; fostering gender equality and respecting human rights in order to protect women, the young, minorities and immigrants; preventing discrimination; promoting cultural diversity, creativity, and civic participation; and increasing accountability in order to co-create cities and strengthen urban-rural linkages.

However, the scope and pace of LRG action alone are insufficient to curb the current trend. Without well-defined policy interventions and an adequate mobilisation of resources, the impact of urban growth in terms of the degradation of the environment and social inequalities will be greater over the next decade than anything previously seen in human history. Sustainable action by LRGs needs to be both accelerated and scaled up in order to unleash the full potential of sustainable urban development, exploit the links with rural areas and thereby contribute to achieving the SDGs in 2030. Responding effectively to the crisis will permit the change of mentality which is required for building back better and implementing longer-term policies that can trigger meaningful structural change.

### The pressing need to invest in essential public services and infrastructure and to empower LRGs in order to ensure more inclusive policies to deliver the recovery

Well-planned cities and territorial development are critical for achieving the SDGs. However, the current reality of many cities, regions and their respective local governments means that, particularly in developing economies, progress is constrained by inadequate governance frameworks, limited capacities and resources that are not fit for the purpose of transforming unsustainable development patterns.

The COVID-19 crisis has clearly shown that the provision of public services, which is mostly in the hands of LRGs, remains largely underfunded. As countries and international entities discuss financial packages and funds to help economic recovery, there remains a pressing need to reinforce essential public services and to ensure that funding reaches territories and communities most in need through recovery packages and funding policies that prioritize investing in basic services.

Developing a more inclusive ecosystem through an enabling institutional environment with an adequate legal framework and multilevel and collaborative governance is now more urgent than ever if we are to ensure the capacity of all stakeholders to act in favour of the SDGs. Increased access to diverse sources of financing will be instrumental if LRGs are to play a greater role in the reconstruction while promoting sustainable development solutions.

In all the different regions, there is a critical mismatch between the increase in transferred responsibilities and the revenues allocated to LRGs. Given the current challenges, it is urgent to increase access to diverse sources of financing and pathways to access long-term finance and thus fulfil the commitment towards the Global Goals.

The effective financial empowerment of LRGs for the achievement of the SDGs is the commitment corresponding to paragraph 34 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted by UN Member States. It is necessary to generate an adequate stream of finance to empower LRGs and to boost innovation and investment in sustainable public services (health, education, water and sanitation, care services, etc.) and infrastructure (housing, mobility, internet, etc.). This is essential to incentivise the alignment of national and local plans with the SDGs.

## Lessons learned

### Effective whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are key to strengthen cooperation and overcome the current crisis

A whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach lies at the core of the SDG agenda. It is necessary to achieve more accountable and effective governance and more inclusive societies, based on strengthening existing partnerships and building new ones. However, the involvement of LRGs in most national coordination mechanisms is still unsatisfactory: regular consultation has only been acknowledged in 31% of the countries that have reported since 2016. National strategies, actions and policies related to SDG implementation should be progressively imbued with a more local perspective that acknowledges the diversity and richness of each territory and its people and that better suits their needs and aspirations. Local visions and experiences cannot be relegated to a very specific section but, on the contrary, should be mainstreamed throughout the strategies and reporting. Seeking policy coherence across different levels of government should ensure that all actions help us to work towards the same sustainable scenario.

Similarly, progress in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs in cities and territories and in producing disaggregated indicators is still very limited. Effective planning and policy making efforts are often constrained by the lack of adequate data. Some progress has, nevertheless, been observed at the national level in a number of countries. Looking beyond the many VLRs and other local initiatives, many LRG associations have been investing in better ways to strengthen their monitoring systems (e.g. in Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden, among other countries).

In order to succeed in the endeavour of creating efficient local monitoring systems, there is a clear need to ensure that local and national statistics systems are provided with adequate human, technical and financial resources. At the same time, the efforts made need to include better collaboration between LRGs and national statistics offices, and also a search for alternative systems (e.g. the use of district scorecards in Uganda, and the “know your city” approach in slum areas). Without these, national reporting processes will lack a clear local perspective and will tend to ignore the real needs and aspirations of local people, and particularly of the most vulnerable, with the aim to leave no one behind.

## Recommendations

### Empower LRGs to secure the provision of essential services and trigger structural change by accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

This is a necessary condition to make sure that the COVID-19 crisis, or any future emergency, does not jeopardize the quest to achieve the SDGs. On the contrary, LRGs must respond to it through holistic, long-term strategies that are in line with the Decade of Action. The current moment provides a historic opportunity to trigger structural change. LRGs have been at the forefront of the global response to the pandemic. They have safeguarded their populations by ensuring the provision of basic services and by providing care, solidarity and human rights. If properly empowered, innovative policy responses led by LRGs could be consolidated into the long-term strategies that are needed to fulfil the SDGs and build up the preparedness required to confront crises yet to come.

## Recommendations

### **Support and promote the effective implementation and localization of the SDGs, supported by empowered and well-resourced local and regional governments**

LRGs are undertaking efforts to achieve the SDGs through implementing local plans and innovative actions that pertain to the different aspects of the 2030 Agenda. These may involve addressing sustainable urban development, climate change, social inclusion, the social economy, culture, etc. These efforts must receive effective support in order to accelerate and upscale them. The existence of robust national SDG localization strategies, institutional environments conducive to LRG action, adequate technical and financing support, the required political will, and engaged local communities are all key to fostering localization processes. Exploiting and strengthening synergies between local and national plans will be essential for achieving the SDGs. For this reason, the effective financial empowerment of LRGs, which is a commitment recorded in paragraph 34 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, must be made a reality. LRGs must be able to harness the fruits of localization efforts and bolster their transformative potential.

### **Strengthen LRG voices in voluntary national reporting processes and in national coordination mechanisms to achieve a qualitative leap in SDG implementation**

Progress has been made in terms of acknowledging the need to include LRGs in national reporting processes and, to a lesser extent, in national coordination mechanisms (in 31% of the countries reporting between 2016-2020). However, the pace at which this process has advanced has been insufficient and needs to be accelerated. The participation of LRGs in the reporting process and coordination mechanisms is necessary to properly incorporate and reflect localization strategies. Inclusive coordination mechanisms have a tremendous potential to strengthen policy coherence, enhance links between national and local plans, and strengthen multilevel governance. This is key to developing national strategies, reflecting all voices, and incorporating the principle of leaving no one and no territory behind.

### **Acknowledge, support and promote bottom-up monitoring and localized indicators fed with disaggregated data**

An increasing number of countries and LRGs are devoting efforts to developing bottom-up reviews of the state of their SDG implementation. VLRs (and increasingly subnational reviews too) go beyond monitoring and reporting tools, and have become levers for bringing about transformation, and powerful processes that ground local strategies for sustainable development on disaggregated and localized data. They help to bring the SDGs closer to local realities and communities as subnational reporting can engage with them in a more direct way than national reporting can. VLRs can become learning and training instruments for public officials. These subnational processes must be acknowledged, supported and encouraged in order to increase joint ownership of the universal development agendas at all levels, and also increase the availability of localized data for SDG monitoring.

### **Strengthen global cooperation through a renewed and reinforced multilateral system**

The current crisis has reaffirmed the fact that local and territorial issues cannot be solved only at these levels. Global cooperation is critical for global transformation through the achievement of the SDGs. Global and national institutions, working according to the principle of subsidiarity, have a key role to play in providing the support and tools which LRGs need to address the challenges that face their territories. Global fora, such as the HLPF, and regional fora for sustainable development organized by the UN regional commissions should be strengthened to become spaces for real multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogue. A vital step in this direction would involve strengthening the voice of LRGs at these fora. As global challenges become more complex, interconnected and pressing, reinforcing global cooperation and solidarity through the revitalization of a multilateral system that speaks to local communities and the civil society becomes an increasingly urgent necessity. LRGs have demonstrated that they have a key role to play to secure the link between our communities and global institutions.

# 1. Introduction

**The fourth edition of the *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report comes at a moment of critical uncertainty worldwide.**

Over the past months, the world has been faced with an unprecedented crisis triggered by the expansion of the COVID-19 virus. This has caused, and is continuing to cause—even as these lines are being written—tremendous human suffering throughout the world. As in previous editions, yet grounded in the increasing gravity of the current situation, this year's report brings the subnational perspective to the global monitoring and reporting efforts on the progress (or lack thereof) that has so far been made in the implementation of the Global Agendas.

In this critical year for humanity, local and regional governments (LRGs) worldwide have

been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. They have played a central role in ensuring the protection of their populations through securing the provision of basic services and responding to critical needs (such as providing food and social services) in spite of the tremendous challenges being faced. This year's edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* consequently emphasises the direct contribution of LRGs to the implementation of the Global Agendas through the efforts that they have made to safeguard their communities. Associated actions have included: supporting the most vulnerable to prevent their plight from being exacerbated and protecting their already fragile livelihoods; ensuring access to health, water and sanitation; defending the right to housing; and calling for an immediate halt to evictions everywhere, regardless of their causes.

The present report builds on that of previous editions in providing an insightful reflection on the role played by LRGs in localizing the Global Agendas (see Box 1.1 for our definition of "localization"). It provides a comprehensive analysis of global reporting on the current level of implementation of the Global Agendas, underlines the important roles played by LRGs in national reporting processes, and provides an overview of the main trends observed at the global and regional scales over the past four years.

**The 47 countries that are reporting to this year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) are highly diverse in terms of their institutional frameworks, as are the capacities of their respective LRGs to contribute to the implementation of the Global Agendas** and, more specifically, the achievement of the SDGs. Table 1.1 (below) provides a quick overview of the diversity of subnational governance structures presented by the countries reporting

## Box 1.1

### Localization

The 2030 Agenda emphasises the need for an inclusive and localized approach to the SDGs. Localization is described as "the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets". More specifically, it takes into account subnational contexts for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress.

Source: GTF, UCLG (2019), "Towards the Localization of the SDGs"; GTF, UNDP, UN-Habitat (2016), "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Sub-national Level"; UN Development Group (2014), "Localizing the Post-2015 Agenda" (outcome of the global UN dialogue process developed from June 2014 to October 2014).

Table 1.1

## Local self-governments in the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2020\*

|                                  | TYPE OF STATE | REGIONAL-STATE LEVEL | INTERMEDIATE LEVEL | MUNICIPAL LEVEL | TOTAL LRGs |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Argentina                        | F             | 24                   | 0                  | 2,327           | 2,301      |
| Armenia                          | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 502             | 502        |
| Austria                          | F             | 9                    | 0                  | 2,098           | 2,107      |
| Bangladesh                       | U             | 64                   | 489                | 4,888           | 5,441      |
| Benin                            | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 77              | 77         |
| Bulgaria                         | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 265             | 265        |
| Burundi                          | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 119             | 119        |
| Comoros <sup>i</sup>             | F             | 0                    | 0                  | 54              | 54         |
| Costa Rica                       | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 81              | 81         |
| Democratic Republic of Congo     | U             | 26                   | 0                  | 0               | 26         |
| Ecuador                          | U             | 24                   | 0                  | 221             | 245        |
| Estonia                          | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 79              | 79         |
| Finland                          | U             | 1                    | 0                  | 311             | 312        |
| Gambia <sup>ii</sup>             | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 1622            | 1622       |
| Georgia                          | U             | 2                    | 0                  | 72              | 74         |
| Honduras                         | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 298             | 298        |
| India                            | F             | 36                   | 0                  | 267,554         | 267,590    |
| Kenya                            | U             | 0                    | 47                 | 0               | 47         |
| Kyrgyz Republic                  | U             | 2                    | 12                 | 470             | 484        |
| Libya <sup>iii</sup>             | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 99              | 99         |
| Malawi                           | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 35              | 35         |
| Morocco                          | U             | 12                   | 75                 | 1,503           | 1590       |
| Mozambique                       | U             | 11                   | 0                  | 53              | 64         |
| Nepal                            | F             | 7                    | 0                  | 753             | 760        |
| Niger                            | U             | 7                    | 0                  | 265             | 273        |
| Nigeria                          | F             | 37                   | 0                  | 774             | 811        |
| North Macedonia                  | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 81              | 81         |
| Panama                           | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 81              | 81         |
| Papua New Guinea                 | F             | 21                   | 89                 | 296             | 406        |
| Peru                             | U             | 26                   | 196                | 1,874           | 2,096      |
| Republic of Moldova              | U             | 35                   | 0                  | 925             | 960        |
| Russian Federation <sup>iv</sup> | F             | 83                   | 2,351              | 19,976          | 22,410     |
| Slovenia                         | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 212             | 212        |
| Solomon Islands                  | U             | 9                    | 0                  | 1               | 10         |
| Trinidad and Tobago              | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 15              | 15         |
| Uganda <sup>v</sup>              | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 169             | 169        |
| Ukraine                          | U             | 27                   | 676                | 11,030          | 11,733     |
| Uzbekistan <sup>vi</sup>         | U             | 14                   | 201                | 0               | 215        |
| Zambia                           | U             | 0                    | 0                  | 103             | 103        |

\* Out of the 47 countries reporting this year, there are eight which do not have elected LRGs. In Barbados, there is no elected government. Local governance is delivered through 30 appointed constituency councils. In Brunei, there is no elected local government. In Liberia, the President of the Republic appoints both the local government supervisory body and the mayors. It is worth noting that local authorities are associated in the Association Nationale des Maires et Autorités Locales du Libéria. In Micronesia, there are four deconcentrated states: Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. The President nominates the heads of the National Departments and submits to the Congress for approval. Government of the Federated States of Micronesia official website, accessible here: <https://gov.fm/index.php>. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, there is no elected local government and since 1973 the six parishes are administrative units run by appointed officials. In Samoa, there is no elected local government as such. Local government is based on traditional structures. The key legislation for village government comprises the Village Fono Act 1990/37.2b and the Internal Affairs Act 1995.3. In Seychelles, The Local Government Act 2015/38.2b enables the creation of elected district councils to enable citizens. However, the Act has not yet come into effect and local government officers remain appointed to the existing 25 district councils. Nonetheless, the Association of the Districts of Victoria is present in the country. Lastly, the Syrian Arab Republic is divided for administrative purposes into 14 governorates or provinces. These are headed by a governor appointed by the President and assisted by a provincial council whose members are elected every 4 years. The 14 governorates are divided into 65 Districts and 281 subdistricts which are administered by officials appointed by the governor.

**Sources:** information obtained from local government associations, particularly from CEMR database for European countries; OECD/UCLG (2019) 2019 Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Country Profiles; UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance (2018), Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa; UCLG ASPAC and Cities Alliance (2018), City Enabling Environment Rating: Assessment of the Countries in Asia and the Pacific; UCLG, OECD and AFD (2016), Subnational Government around the World; CLGF Country profiles <http://www.clgf.org.uk/resource-centre/clgf-publications/country-profiles/>; OECD (2018) Subnational Government in OECD Countries; UNPAN, Public Administration Country Profile [http://www.unpan.org/country\\_profiles/](http://www.unpan.org/country_profiles/); European Committee of Regions, Division

of Powers section <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/default.aspx>, National Statistical Offices and National Government and Local Government's Portals from different countries; local press and online media

### Notes

U: unitary country; F: federal country

- i Comoros is divided into three islands: Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan. The island of Mayotte voted against independence and is still under French rule. The three islands that make up Comoros are subdivided into 16 prefectures, 54 communes and 318 villages according to the 2011 Decree No. 11-148/PR on the territorial organization of the Union of the Comoros.
- ii Three types of local government units may be distinguished: 1,500 area councils, 114 municipalities and eight city councils.
- iii Since 2007, Libya has been divided into 22 administrative governorates and since the introduction of Law 59 in 2012, there are 99 districts with local councils.
- iv Russia has an asymmetric, multi-tiered administrative structure. The regions include 21 republics, 46 provinces (*oblasts*), one autonomous oblast, nine "territories" (*Kra*), four autonomous areas (autonomy *okrugs*), and two cities with federal status (Moscow and St. Petersburg) which have various degrees of autonomy.
- v Including 127 districts, the City of Kampala and 41 municipalities but not including lower level local councils (LC3, LC2 and LC1), such as division, town, parish, and village.
- vi The subnational government structure follows a dual system of elected local councils and appointed local state governments organized in a three-tiered territorial structure. In 2018, there are 12 regions in addition to two territorial units with special status: the capital city of Tashkent and the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. The regions and the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan are subdivided into 170 districts and 31 cities of regional and republican significance. The mahallas (local assemblies) are the lowest level of administrative and territorial jurisdiction.

this year. Looking beyond the sheer number of subnational governments present in each country, **the variety of decentralizing reforms and different regulatory contexts in which subnational governments operate in these 47 countries varies widely. This has consequently given rise to a plethora of policy environments which may (or may not) facilitate local action to different degrees.** It is particularly worth noting how conducive national frameworks may, or may not, be for local action. It could, for example, be beneficial to monitor the impact that the governance of the COVID-19 crisis may have had on such frameworks. At the time of writing, it can already be observed how the magnitude of the crisis could lead to a dynamic of greater centralization in some countries and decentralization in others.

According to an analysis made by UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance of the enabling environments in the African countries reporting this year, only two of these countries (**Uganda and Morocco**) could be said to have very favourable national frameworks for conducting local action. Two other countries (**Kenya and Zambia**) have environments which are generally conducive for the action of LRGs, but which still require certain improvements. Within the remaining countries, five (**Burundi, Gambia, Malawi, Niger and Nigeria**) require significant reform efforts to move towards creating an environment that is favourable to cities and local authorities, while five others (**Comoros, Congo, Liberia, Mozambique and Seychelles**) have national frameworks that are unfavourable to local action.<sup>1</sup> LRGs in these ten countries face incomplete decentralization processes and are not being endowed with the competences that they require to effectively advance with localization processes in their respective territories. It is worth noting that significant progress towards decentralization has been made in **Benin** since 2003 and that local governments are elected throughout the whole country. Many competences have been devolved

*de iure* and are currently shared between the central and local government levels; however, *de facto*, they are still in the process of being transferred to local governments.<sup>2</sup>

A similar analysis carried out by UCLG ASPAC, Cities Alliance and UNDP related to the eight countries reporting from the Asia-Pacific region revealed that the national environments for local and regional government action are equally diverse, to say the least. The constitutions of **India** and **Nepal**, two federal countries, acknowledge local government and their national environments endow LRGs with the necessary authority to promote localization processes within their territories. In Nepal, this process is very incipient and still being operationalised; it stems from the adoption of the 2015 Constitution. In India, the decentralization process stops at the regional state level, without reaching in a majority of federated state lower levels of government (cities and villages). **Bangladesh** does not, initially, offer a very favourable environment for local and regional government action. Even so, there is explicit mention of local government in its national constitution. Moreover, as in Bangladesh has no national framework or points of reference regarding the qualifications required of local government staff or of the types of programmes required to build up competences in this area. In **Brunei**, there are no elected local government bodies.

There is also heterogeneity amongst the four Pacific island states reporting this year. For example, in **Papua New Guinea**, the Decentralization law (adopted in 1995) was abandoned. In 2014, the new District Development Authority Act increased the authority of the districts, but this has only made progress in a few of them. More recently, provinces have been granted more autonomy, but the necessary instruments have not been provided to date. In the **Solomon Islands**, local government is similarly enshrined in the constitution and its role is complemented with appropriate legislative

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**This year's edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report emphasises the direct contribution of LRGs to the implementation of the Global Agendas through the efforts that they have made to face the COVID-19 pandemic and protect their communities.**

## The 47 countries that are reporting to this year's High-Level Political Forum are highly diverse in terms of their institutional frameworks, as are the capacities of their respective LRGs to contribute to the implementation of the Global Agendas.

provisions. The country has an administrative framework which is relatively conducive for local and regional action, although it could benefit from a national urban policy (NUP) to promote a greater degree of policy coherence. It would also benefit from regulations to establish clearer responsibilities for local government staff and to increase their functions. In the two remaining Pacific island states: **Micronesia** and **Samoa**, traditional chiefdoms are, to a certain extent, recognized as local governance structures. However, in the former, there are no elected local government bodies, but rather four states administered by governors appointed by the national President.

In the case of countries reporting from the Eurasian region this year, the respective national governments have devolved limited functions to LRGs. All countries are governed under dual systems which combine relatively deconcentrated administrations, usually operating at the regional and district levels, with local government bodies at the lower levels. However, the level of autonomy enjoyed by such local government units varies from state to state, with some, in recent years, having even exhibited varying trends either towards decentralization or centralization. **Armenia** and **Georgia** (at the municipal or district level) benefit from relatively autonomous local self-government. In Armenia, for example, although the right to local government is enshrined in the national constitution, and complementary legislation establishes that local government is responsible for local matters, there is no clear definition of the competences of these local authorities or their delegated powers, and most services continue

to be managed by central government. There are two levels of subnational governments: regional administrations (*marzers*) and municipal self-governments. In Georgia, since 2005, there are local self-governments only at district and city level and mayors have been universally elected since 2014 when the new Code of Local Self-Government was adopted. This code was further amended in 2017, thus reforming state administration and reducing the number of self-governed cities from 12 to five, including the capital city of Tbilisi.

In **Uzbekistan**, there is also a dual system composed of appointed local state administrations and elected local governments. The latter are granted less autonomy, as they are formed by a council elected for five-year terms and headed by a *hokim* (governor), who is appointed by the upper tier of government. Since 2017, a decentralization process has been underway that seeks to increase the efficiency of local self-governing bodies; at the same time, the national President has called for the introduction of direct elections for regional and district *hokimlar* (governors).

In **Ukraine**, at the regional and district levels, both state administrators and local governments can be found. At the municipal level, councils and their heads are elected in their corresponding jurisdictions. In 2014, the Minsk Protocol placed great emphasis on the need for decentralization and for a national framework for reform and local self-government aimed at triggering fiscal, political and administrative decentralization. However, the constitutional reform that required to implement this framework has not yet been undertaken. As a result, *de facto*, local governments continue to have limited only capacity to advance localization processes. On a similar note, in the **Kyrgyz Republic**, all of the self-governing bodies in the 484 subnational governments have representative councils that are elected every four years, while the chief executives of the 40 districts and seven administrative regions are directly appointed by the national Prime Minister. Since 2002, a series of reforms have been directed at increasing decentralization. These culminated, in 2018, in the adoption of a programme for developing local self-government between 2018 and 2023. However, since 2014, public finance has become increasingly centralized, with LRGs becoming highly, and increasingly, dependent on the central government's fiscal policy. The **Russian Federation**, for its part, has a complex and asymmetric multi-tiered administrative structure. This consists of 21 republics, 46 provinces, one



Local and Regional  
Governments' Day,  
16 July 2019  
(Photo: UCLG,  
Joel Sheakoski  
<http://tiny.cc/85na9y>)

autonomous *oblast*, nine “territories”, four autonomous areas (*okrug* autonomies), and two cities with federal status (Moscow and St. Petersburg), which have various degrees of autonomy. However, overall decision-making power remains essentially centralized, with the LRGs being generally seen as implementers of national strategies.

Elected local government exists in all the countries reporting in Europe. However, these countries could be divided into two groups, based on the maturity of their respective decentralization processes. In **Austria**, a federal country, and in **Finland**, decentralization processes date back to the early 20th century and the principle of self-government is enshrined in both their constitutions. LRGs in both countries include elected municipalities, while their national enabling environments are generally conducive for LRG localization initiatives. **Estonia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, North Macedonia** and **Moldova** all drafted their constitutions in the early 1990s, with these all containing provisions for decentralization. In all of these states, decentralizing reforms are currently advancing and decentralization is regarded as a critical dimension of reform within their respective current national development strategies. Even so, an evaluation of Bulgaria’s 2006-2015 decentralization reform strategy

showed that only 39% of the envisioned measures had actually been implemented. One of the main reasons for this was the impact of the 2008 crisis, which is likely to have been of less magnitude than the one that the current COVID-19 will trigger.

Of the ten countries reporting from Latin America and the Caribbean, **Barbados** and **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** are the only states with no elected LRGs. In the remaining eight countries, LRGs enjoy varying degrees of autonomy and competences, with all of the different self-governing bodies are elected, albeit through different mechanisms. In all of these eight countries, with the exceptions of **Trinidad and Tobago** and **Belize**, LRGs are acknowledged in the country’s national constitution.

**Argentina** is a highly decentralized country, with provincial and local government bodies having a long history of devolution and recentralization, although decentralization varies significantly from province to province. In **Ecuador** and **Peru** decentralization processes are quite advanced. The 2008 constitution in Ecuador established a four-tiered, decentralized system, however only the provincial, municipal and parochial levels are operational. The constitution also states that decentralized autonomous governments should enjoy political, administrative and financial autonomy and that

their local authorities must be elected every five years. The National Competences System, created after the constitutional reform, facilitated the development of the 2012-2015 National Decentralization Plan and was followed by the 2017-2021 Strategy for the Implementation of Decentralization

In **Peru**, the country's 2002 Constitution opened the door to a decentralisation process which is still ongoing and progress is sluggish. Four different levels of government have since been established: at the national, regional, provincial and district levels. The latter three correspond to the two levels of subnational government (regions and municipalities) and are represented by councils elected once every four years.

**Costa Rica** is also a country in which local government organizations enjoy a relatively significant degree of autonomy, although their capacities are rather constrained by the limited amount of resources (2.2% of the national budget, in 2019). In **Honduras**, there have been a series of consecutive reforms which started in 1990 and have been strengthened since 2005. The Law on Decentralization, which was adopted in 2016, provides municipalities with greater autonomy. However, *de facto*, local governments still lack the necessary competences to effectively carry out their responsibilities and to steer through effective localization processes. In **Panama**, the first decentralization law was introduced in 2009, yet it was halted by the next government to come into office. Decentralizing reforms were then resumed with the Decentralization Law of 2015, which sought to build up municipal competences by increasing municipal fiscal autonomy.

The councillors and mayors of **Trinidad's** 14 municipalities are elected, while 12 members of **Tobago's** House of Assembly are elected and the other four are appointed.

This year, **Libya** and the **Syrian Arab Republic** are reporting from the UN ESCWA region. The difficult realities facing both countries, whose respective civil wars have already been ongoing for approximately nine years, make it difficult to assess the extent to which local and regional government bodies exist and are functional in these states. According to their regulatory frameworks, which were established prior to the outbreak of their respective civil wars, there were 99 districts in Libya which had local councils, while the territorial organization of the Syrian Arab Republic was based on 14 deconcentrated governorates, which were further divided into 65 districts and 281 sub-districts, whose heads were appointed by the governor, who was, himself, appointed by the national President.

Beyond this brief overview of the enabling environments of the countries reporting this year, the present edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* analyses the initiatives advanced by LRGs in the reporting countries and also in others that are not reporting this year. As stated beforehand, **this report will devote particular attention to the efforts made by LRGs to combat the COVID-19 crisis and to protect their populations and ensure the provision of basic services. These functions are necessary in order to guarantee many human rights and to achieve the targets of the Global Agendas.**

The report follows a structure based on the UN *Handbook for preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*. Section 2 introduces the methodology deployed for the report's elaboration. Section 3 provides an analysis of the institutional frameworks used for SDG localization, examining LRG engagement in national reporting and monitoring the processes and initiatives advanced by LRGs and their respective associations to localize the SDGs worldwide. Section 4 explores the six entry points identified by the UN as levers to help accelerate the implementation of the Global Agendas, focusing on the key importance of bolstering local and regional-level action to achieve the SDGs. Section 5 analyses the means of implementation available to LRGs and is followed by the conclusions to the report and the proposed ways to move forward (Section 6).●

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**Beyond this brief overview of the enabling environments of the countries reporting this year, the present edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* analyses the initiatives advanced by LRGs in the reporting countries and in other countries.**

## 2. Methodology and report preparation process

**Building on the work undertaken during the first assessment cycle of SDG achievement (performed by the United Nations between 2015 and 2019), this year's edition of the local and regional government report to the HLPF responds to an urgent call to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. In response to the political declaration adopted following the 2019 edition of the HLPF, LRGs have restated their firm commitment to fulfil the 2030 Agenda and the need to accelerate implementation processes as we enter the Decade of Action.<sup>1</sup>**

As in previous years, the report is grounded on first-hand experiences shared by LRGs from around the world. The GTF has consulted its networks and their members through the "Survey

on the role of LRGs and their associations in the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda". In total, 204 responses were collected from all over the world (see Box 2.1). This report also builds on the outcomes of two actions that have been promoted over the past year in order to propel localization efforts worldwide. On the one hand, it builds on the reporting efforts of LRGs based on a thorough comparative analysis of all the VLRs that have been published, to date, in the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews*.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, this year's report also builds on the pilot project for the promotion of subnational reporting on SDGs in direct partnership with the national LGAs of the selected countries. This effort contributes to the elaboration of country-wide reports on SDG implementation at the

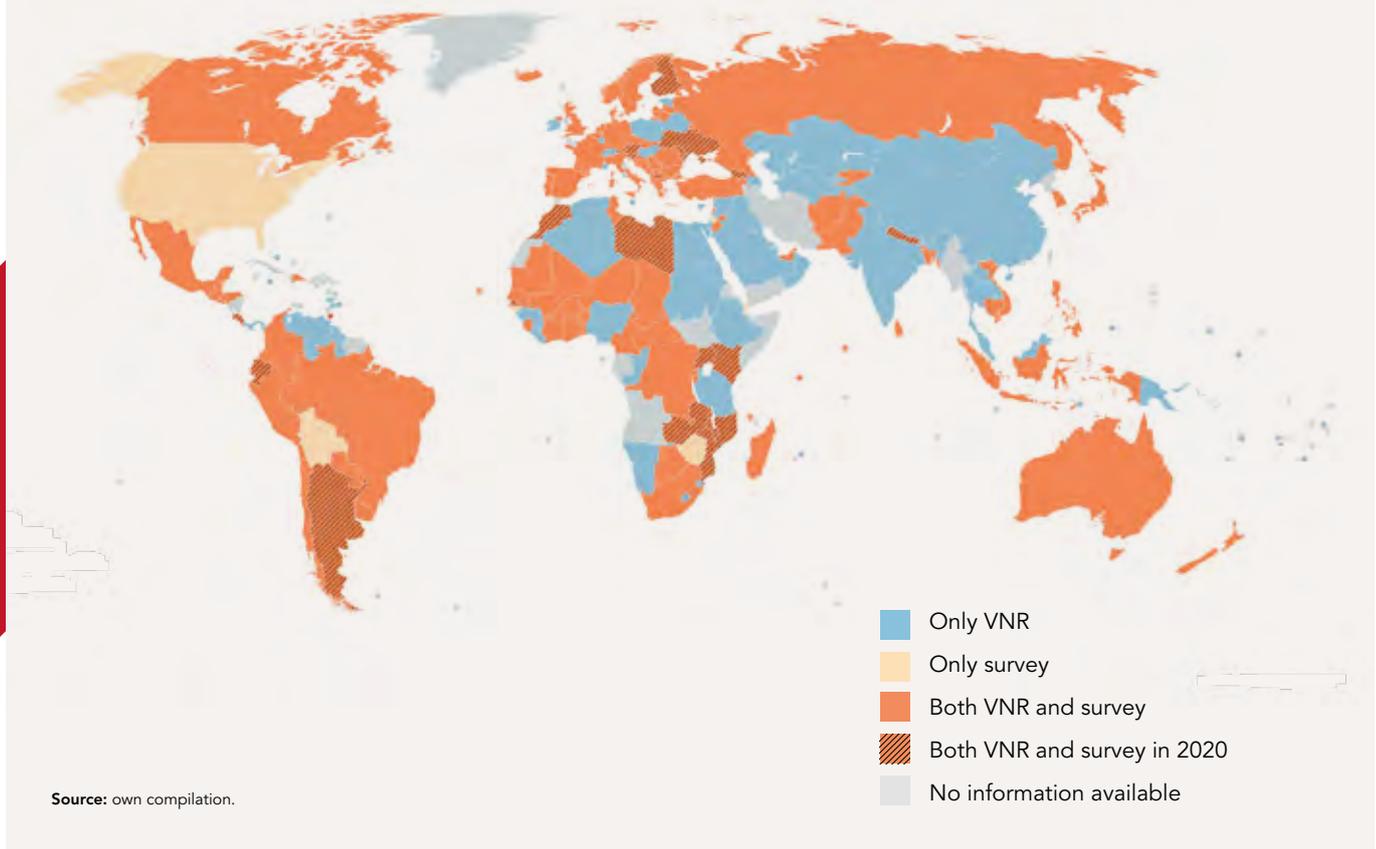
### Box 2.1

#### Surveys collected by the GTF in 2020

A total of 204 surveys were collected by the GTF in 2020 (from 180 in 2019): 76 from national local government associations (23 from reporting countries) and 104 surveys from local and regional governments (9 from reporting countries not covered by answers from LGAs) and 24 from partners. The majority of the answers came from Europe (82 surveys) followed by Latin America (35 surveys), Africa (23 surveys) and Asia-Pacific (22 surveys). An important majority of LGAs of Europe participated in the survey (31), followed by LGAs from Africa (18), Latin America (10) and Asia-Pacific (8). Beyond LGAs, the large majority of LRGs that participated in the survey come from Europe (51), followed by Latin America (25) and Asia-Pacific (13). The majority of partner institutions (think tanks, NGOs and academia) are from Latin America. In Europe, a majority of LRGs are from Spain, France, Belgium, Italy, Netherlands and Finland. A majority are cities (29), followed by departments or provincial councils (11) and regions (6). From Latin America almost all countries are represented, and the majority of answers came from cities. In Asia-Pacific, the majority of the answers are from Indonesia and the Philippines, with a dominance of provincial governments and cities. From the Commonwealth of Independent States, all the participants in the survey are cities. From Middle East and West Asia, responses came from 5 LGAs from three countries of the region, one provincial association, 2 municipalities and 2 other local governments. From North America, two national local governments from Canada and US responded to the survey.

Figure 2.1

## Countries that submitted their VNR to the HLPF and countries whose LRGs answered the GTF Survey (2016–2020)



subnational level in six pilot countries that have been selected from the 47 countries reporting to this year's HLPF.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, and as was the case in previous editions, this year's edition of the local and regional government report to the HLPF also analyses 39 of the 47 VNRs published (until 28 June) and, perhaps most notably, the engagement of the LRGs in their respective elaboration of the VNRs and national SDG implementation mechanisms. The aim is to compare and contrast different national and subnational sources and to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of multilevel government arrangements in the different territories. In sum, the present edition of the GTF's *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report puts forward a comprehensive analysis that seeks to prepare the ground for a debate about the challenges currently facing LRGs. It seeks to shed light on the opportunities that they can exploit as they advance

in their localization processes to accelerate the implementation of the Global Goals.

Last but not least, given the gravity of the global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity to build up collective knowledge to help with recovery, this fourth edition of the GTF's report to the HLPF will also build upon the work undertaken by GTF members and their partner organizations in the monitoring of local and regional responses to the crisis worldwide. Throughout the crisis, GTF members are making it a priority to support LRGs. These efforts have included the compilation of resources and organization of webinars and learning sessions, so as to contribute to collective knowledge building by allowing for LRGs to exchange experiences on the basis of solidarity. Moreover, member organizations have also advanced other initiatives such as the establishment of work taskforces for recovery or full-fledged monitoring initiatives.<sup>4</sup> ●

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a white lace jacket over a black top, is speaking and gesturing with her hands. She is in a meeting or conference setting with other people in the background. A blue diagonal graphic element is on the left side of the page.

### 3. Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

This Section focuses on the ways LRGs have been involved in SDG localization. Firstly, it analyses the participation of LRGs in the preparation of their countries' VNRs and thus in the generation of ownership of the achievement of the 2030 Agenda (Subsection 3.1). Secondly (Subsection 3.2), it focuses on the incorporation of the SDGs and their localization into national institutional frameworks and strategies as well as on national coordination and follow-up mechanisms relating to SDG implementation. It also examines the role of LRGs in these localization strategies and coordination mechanisms. Finally, Subsection 3.3 demonstrates how LRGs are active drivers behind the principle of leaving no one and no territory behind. They contribute to this with policies, programmes and various other initiatives that promote the dissemination of the SDGs, their targets and the underlying principles of the 2030 Agenda.

## 3.1 Creating ownership: participation of local and regional governments in the preparation of the VNRs

**Between 2016 and 2020, 205 VNRs will have been submitted by 168 countries. In 2020, 47 countries have committed to present their VNR: 26 are doing it for the first time, 20 for the second time and one country (Benin) for the third time.<sup>1</sup>** As highlighted by Table 3.1, LRG participation in the reporting process

has evolved. Compared to previous years, the participation of LRGs in the preparation of VNRs for 2020 has made significant progress: in 55% of the countries, LRGs have been asked to make contributions or have been included in the consultation process (although in some cases the consultation has been rather limited).

Table 3.1

### LRG participation in the preparation of the VNRs 2016–2020, by year (1)

|   | 2016 |      | 2017 |      | 2018 |      | 2019 |      | 2020 |      | TOTAL |      |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| <b>Total countries reporting (per year)</b> | 22   | 100% | 43   | 100% | 46   | 100% | 47   | 100% | 47   | 100% | 205   | 100% |
| <b>Mid/high consultation of LRGs</b>        | 10   | 45%  | 17   | 40%  | 21   | 46%  | 18   | 38%  | 26   | 55%  | 92    | 45%  |
| <b>Weak consultation of LRGs</b>            | 6    | 27%  | 10   | 23%  | 7    | 15%  | 11   | 23%  | 5    | 11%  | 39    | 19%  |
| <b>No consultation of LRGs</b>              | 6    | 27%  | 14   | 33%  | 13   | 28%  | 10   | 21%  | 5    | 11%  | 48    | 23%  |
| <b>No elected LRGs (2)</b>                  |      |      | 2    | 5%   | 4    | 9%   | 5    | 11%  | 8    | 17%  | 19    | 9%   |
| <b>No information available (3)</b>         |      |      |      |      | 1    | 2%   | 3    | 6%   | 3    | 6%   | 7     | 3%   |

**Source:** VNRs and surveys answered by LRGs. In total, 168 countries reported between 2016 and 2020.

1. This table includes revised data for previous years based on information available up to 28 June 2020. Explanation of the categories: 1) Mid/high consultation of LRGs: either through their representative LGAs or through a representative delegation of elected officers, LRGs were invited to participate in the consultation at the national and regional levels (conferences, surveys, meetings); 2) Weak consultation of LRGs: only isolated representatives, but no LGAs or representative delegates participated in the meetings, or the LGAs were only invited to an informative meeting; 3) No consultation of LRGs: there was no invitation or involvement in the consultation process, even though the LGAs were informed of the need to prepare VNRs.

2. No local self-government ("No elected LRGs") in the countries reporting in 2020: Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Liberia, Micronesia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Seychelles, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

3. The VNRs that were not published before 28 June 2020 are: Austria, Libya, Micronesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago. Of these, LGAs from Austria, Nepal, Slovenia and Trinidad and Tobago responded to the 2020 GTF survey providing concrete information about their involvement in the process.

Figure 3.1

## LRG participation in the preparation of the VNRs 2016-2020

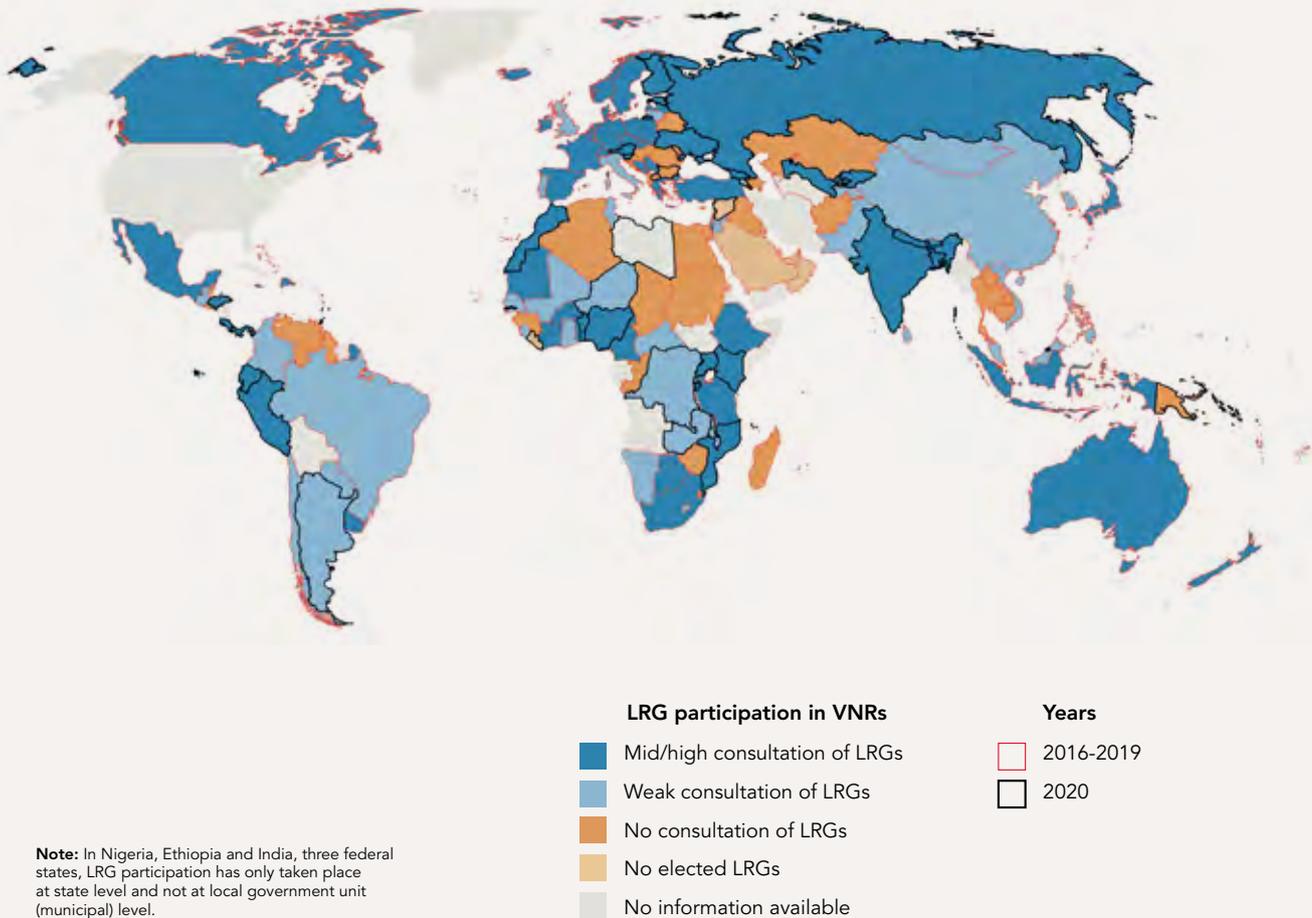


Figure 3.1 shows LRG involvement in the VNR process in different countries since 2016. For 2020, in the first group (countries where LRGs were consulted), LRGs and their associations have participated at different stages of the VNR process: this has ranged from being part of, or contributing to, the reporting unit appointed by the national government (**Burundi, Comoros, Kenya, Russia, and Trinidad and Tobago**), to presenting their own separate contribution to the report (**Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Finland, Mozambique, and Nepal**); attending meetings, conferences or workshops to debate the content and structure of the report (**Austria, Bangladesh, the Gambia, Georgia, Honduras, Morocco, Slovenia, Uganda, and Uzbekistan**); or, at a lesser level, simply

answering a survey or questionnaire (**Estonia, Panama, and Peru**) or providing certain specific information (**Kyrgyzstan**). In the cases of **India and Nigeria**, two federal countries, consultations were realized at state level. In **Liberia**, although there are no elected local authorities, the nominated mayors were consulted.

The second group included replies from some countries that were classed as “weak consultations”. Their LRGs were called to participate in occasional informative workshops, but with limited room to contribute to the actual report (**Moldova and North Macedonia**), or they simply downloaded the draft version and submitted comments (**Armenia**). In **Malawi**, it was the Ministry of Local Governments

and Rural Development that represented the LRGs in the consultation. In **Samoa**, different communities participated through their respective representatives, as there are no elected local government bodies. In the case of **Argentina**, the results were mixed, as explained below.

For a third group of countries, which are grouped together under the label of “no consultation” in Table 3.1, above (**Bulgaria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Ukraine, and Zambia**), it was not possible to determine whether or not LRGs actually participated in the VNR process. In the group of countries with no local elected governments, with the exceptions of Liberia and Samoa, it was difficult to obtain information about the participation of local administrations in the process (**Brunei-Darussalam and Seychelles**). Finally, no information had been provided by **Barbados, Libya, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Solomon Islands** at the time of finalizing this report (28 June 2020).

As many of the VNRs have pointed out, this year’s review processes have been subject to obstacles and restrictions associated with the lockdowns imposed to combat the global pandemic. As a result, it was not possible to organize many of the face-to-face meetings and field sessions that were supposed to take place to include the views of local stakeholders of most national territories. Many national governments (e.g. **Bangladesh** and **Costa Rica**) have, however, made important efforts to arrange online sessions to ensure that no one and no territory was left behind. Innovation and digital technologies have been key to this endeavour.

### Countries where LRGs have contributed to the VNR drafting process or presented their own reports

As mentioned above, in the first group, there were 11 countries in which LRGs contributed to the drafting process or presented their own reports (see Box 3.1). In **Burundi**, local elected representatives form part of the Multi-sectoral Technical Committee in charge of drafting the VNR, along with several ministries, UN agencies, CSOs and NGOs. In addition, four regional workshops were organized throughout the national territory and these involved the participation of the province governors (or their representatives), territorial offices for planning, and representatives from the different municipalities. In **Comoros**, the National Council, which is one of the two task forces in charge of drafting the VNR, counts on the participation of the LRGs. One of the

representatives is the President of the Association of Mayors, and three other members are representatives of the islands. However, the second most populated city: Bambao Ya Mboini Iconi, reported that it has only received feedback about the VNR process but has not had the opportunity to get actively involved. In **Finland**, the first VNR, in 2016, already acknowledged the role of LRGs in the implementation of the SDGs. For the 2020 VNR, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) took part in the process by writing the part about SDG implementation and monitoring in municipalities. Likewise, the regional government of Åland was granted space in the report for its own contribution.

The reports presented by the LGAs of four countries were integrated into their respective country’s VNR. In **Benin**, the ANCB was invited to contribute to the VNR and to revise a preliminary version. Around 50 work sessions were organized over a period of four months, involving 400 stakeholders from different backgrounds. The VNR of Benin deserves particular attention. In order to localize the SDGs, Benin undertook a “spatialization” of the goals and targets through its 77 municipalities and developed a costing analysis including local priorities. In **Costa Rica**, the UNGL highlights progress in the consultation process compared to 2017. In 2020, the national government extended the survey to include individual LRGs and allowed the UNGL to submit its own report, supported by a survey of 50 municipalities. This, however, clashed with the functioning of

#### Box 3.1

### Country-wide pilot projects to support Voluntary Subnational Reviews on the localization of the SDGs

In 2020, six pilot countries presented Voluntary Subnational Reviews: Costa Rica, Benin, Ecuador, Kenya, Nepal and Mozambique. With the support of UCLG, this initiative aims to highlight and facilitate the participation of LRGs, and their associations, in the development of their country’s VNR. It also contributes to the overall strengthening of the localization dimensions in the VNRs. It seeks to empower LRGs to create their own reports, collecting evidence of SDG localization and advancing concrete proposals to boost local action.

Sources: pilot countries’ reports

the national coordination mechanisms, which (as explained in Subsection 3.2) has slowed down in recent years. In **Ecuador**, CONGOPE has increased its role in the VNR process compared to 2018. This year, the association presented its own report for the VNR based on a survey of provincial governments. On the other hand, the Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities (AME) reported not having participated in this year's VNR. In **Kenya**, the two associations: the CoG and the CAF, have played a major role in the process, in coordination with the national government. They form part of the National Interagency Technical Committee, which represents county governments in the VNR process. This Committee organized a series of workshops to gather information from different stakeholders, carried out consultations with the umbrella organizations to collect their reports, and shared the final report with its partner institutions. The CoG and the CAF submitted their own separate report (including feedback from 23 counties).

In **Mozambique**, provincial and regional seminars were organized which allowed, amongst other things, representatives of local public administrations, members of provincial assemblies, and members of local councils to share their views, processes and best practices. ANAMM produced its own report and participated in thematic groups for the drafting of the VNR. Nonetheless, the VNR underlines the need to strengthen local participation mechanisms in order to ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda during the years to come. In **Nepal**, the three national LGAs (NARMiN, MuAN and ADDCN) also launched a survey and collected their own input for the VNR. They participated in multi-stakeholder meetings with the national authorities before the lockdown for the pandemic. Furthermore, field-level interactions were planned in order to share the localization of SDGs through official interviews and focus group discussions; however, this participation had to be reduced to online meetings. In **Russia**, specific working groups (one per SDG) were created for the preparation of the country's first VNR. The All-Russian Congress of Municipalities (ARCM) and the Association of Volga Region Cities (AGP), with the support of UCLG-Eurasia, took part in a national working group on SDG 11 and made proposals for the working groups on SDGs 5, 9, 13 and 17. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, the local association reports having been part of the reporting unit.

### Countries where LRGs have participated through conferences, workshops and surveys or questionnaires

In many countries, online format consultations have been the most widespread mechanism used by national VNR drafting teams to engage with stakeholders. For example, in **Austria**, the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns reports having participated in interactive meetings to debate the report. In **the Gambia**, the process entailed VNR consultations with stakeholders and focus group discussions at the regional level, which included local authorities. The country's national association (GALGA) acknowledged its participation as "adequate" inasmuch as the process was carried out through an equal and open platform which allowed the participation of all stakeholders. In **Georgia**, since 2019, the Mayors and Deputy Mayors of the country's municipalities have been members of the national SDG Council, which is responsible for drafting the VNR and adopting it. However, the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) states, in the survey, that its participation has only been in a consultative capacity. In **Honduras**, the association AMHON, which forms part of the National Commission for the SDGs, took part in the VNR debates (a specific subsection on SDG localization is included), but the regional workshops, where a broader level of LRG participation had been foreseen, did not take place in the end, due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The **Indian** state governments were consulted in two rounds of talks and asked for inputs regarding progress updates and knowledge sharing. In February 2020, NITI Aayog (the agency in charge of the SDGs in the country) organized an SDG Conclave for all eight states in the North-East Region of the country. **Liberia** (where LRGs are not directly elected) has conducted a participatory process. The County Development Steering Committees, which are chaired by each county's superintendent, were responsible for providing leadership during subnational-scale consultations. SDG teams were deployed in all 15 counties to raise awareness of the SDGs through radio talk shows on national and community radio stations and other promotional events in major cities and rural parts of the country. As in other countries, multi-stakeholder sessions were interrupted due to the COVID-19 crisis. In **Nigeria**, the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs had foreseen eight state-level consultations, which had to be reduced to five due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A similar situation

**LRGs are slowly getting a seat at the VNR consultation table from which to present a first-hand approach to the realities of local government. The main innovation this year has been LRGs making their own contributions in several countries; this should be encouraged and expanded.**

occurred in **Bangladesh**. During February and March, the country's local government bodies and other stakeholders took part in a series of local general consultations and in the "goal-wise consultation" for SDG 6. However, only in two divisions (Rangpur and Chattogram) were the Divisional Commissioners' Offices able to organize workshops (with around 250 local stakeholders) to report on SDG implementation.

In **Slovenia**, both LGAs show a high level of satisfaction. The association of urban municipalities (ZMOS) took part in a very participative introductory meeting along with other stakeholders. It then planned to submit a written contribution on SDG 11 and was asked to participate in a final round of comments before publication. The association of municipalities and towns (SOS) values the constant exchange of experiences and knowledge with the national government and the relative consideration of its contributions by the drafting team. The process has slowed down due to the COVID-19 crisis and a change in government. In **Uzbekistan**, 28 consultations have been held, involving 1,348 representatives from both the public and private sectors, in different regions of the country (but the level of involvement of local authorities has not been specified). In **Uganda**, the National SDG Taskforce only had the opportunity to meet a selected group of local government leaders as part of the SDG localization process (there is a sectoral working group involving LRGs) before the lockdown was imposed.

In some other cases, LRGs have had only slight involvement in the process. Estonian, Panamanian

and Peruvian LRGs have, for example, participated by answering an online questionnaire. In **Estonia**, as members of the multi-stakeholder Estonian Commission for Sustainable Development, LRGs have provided information to the review both directly and through a questionnaire. **Panama** has organized a highly participative VNR process, with over 280 institutions being involved. However, local voices were only represented by AMUPA and, due to the COVID-19 crisis, the consultation was carried out through a survey. In **Peru**, the VNR acknowledges LRGs as being at the core of policy development and SDG localization, but the LGAs ANGR and AMPE only participated in the VNR through a survey. Interestingly, however, the 2020 VNR submitted by Peru broadly focuses on action taken to fight COVID-19, underlining responses at the provincial and regional levels. Finally, in **Kyrgyzstan**, Naryn City reports having provided the national government with material that was included in the final version of the national report, but there was not much information about the quality of the consultation process.

It is worth noting that in **Samoa**, in the absence of locally elected local government bodies, community representatives (a growing number of whom were female) participated in a VNR process that was broadly debated with the different stakeholders.

### **Countries with little LRG involvement in the VNR process**

In **Armenia**, LRGs only had the opportunity to download a draft version of the VNR and submit comments, but there was then no follow-up procedure. In **Moldova**, according to the information shared by its national association (CALM), interest in the SDGs has been limited at the local level. The 2030 Agenda is considered a "donor-driven exercise" and the national LGA was only invited to the presentation of the launch of the VNR process. This information is at odds with that contained in the VNR, which states that LRGs participated in the VNR Joint Steering Committee and were consulted during the multi-stakeholder process. In **North Macedonia**, according to the VNR, the participation of LRGs has been limited to a preparatory workshop for experts from central and local government about the RIA methodology. The Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS) reports not having been consulted during the VNR process.

In **Argentina**, the reported results of LRG participation in the VNR process are mixed. The new government, which took office last December,

## However, the number of countries in which the consultation process is still either weak or nonexistent remains disappointingly high.

is currently revising the institutional mechanisms that must follow up the SDG process: the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies. In the survey, the Federation of Argentinian Municipalities (FAM) stated that it had not been consulted during the drafting and adoption of the VNR. The VNR stresses, nevertheless, that the aim of the new government is to “look more deeply into the construction of alliances and expand multi-stakeholder and multi-level lines of action aimed at advancing synergies” and working to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

In **Malawi**, despite the announcement by the national government in the VNR that it “relies upon a healthy working relationship with Local Councils to deliver the SDGs”, MALGA reports that the government rarely consults key stakeholders with regard to SDG implementation. It is, in fact, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development that represents LRGs in the national process. In **Ukraine**, the Association of Ukrainian Cities pointed out, in its answer to the GTF survey, that it had not been consulted. The association LGAZ, in **Zambia**, expressed a similar view: in spite of the recognition of the role of LRGs in the National Decentralisation Policy, the association was not involved in the reporting process.

As mentioned above, in some cases (**Brunei, Bulgaria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, and Seychelles**) the lack of specific information about the participation of LRGs and local administrations in the drafting of the VNRs prevented us from drawing many meaningful conclusions. Local authorities tend not to be mentioned in their VNRs. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, in spite of the implementation of an SDG localization process in 11 out of 26 provinces, LRGs were not specifically mentioned as having taken part in the sessions held in order to draft the VNR.

Despite the difficult conditions created by the COVID-19 crisis, compared to previous years, the analysis of 2020 reporting process shows a positive trend: LRGs are slowly getting a seat

at the VNR consultation table from which to present a first-hand approach to the realities of local government. The main innovation this year has been LRGs making their own contributions in several countries; this should be encouraged and expanded. At the same time, LRGs should be attentive and make sure that their messages are not relegated to a very specific section instead of being mainstreamed throughout the VNR.

As many of the VNRs point out, as a result of the lockdowns imposed because of the global pandemic, in many countries, most of the face-to-face meetings and field sessions that should have taken place to capture the views of local stakeholders were not possible. The modality mostly frequently used to listen to LRGs was that of online meetings at which, along with other stakeholders, the space set aside to debate the approaches of the VNRs and for contributing their views was more limited.

The number of countries in which the consultation process is still either weak or nonexistent remains disappointingly high. More often than not, contributions from LRGs remain weak, sector-specific, belated, disregarded or even absent. Even if an increasing number of VNRs mention localized strategies, very few present data disaggregated by territory or explain how to extend the means of implementation to reach the territories that are most in need. This is an enormous challenge that all countries need to face up to, and particularly regarding the need to respond to the new situation created by COVID-19. It is essential to strengthen local capacities, create more resilient communities, and promote the reactivation of local economies.

National governments need to acknowledge the role of subnational governments as key partners and create an enabling institutional environment for the localization of the SDGs. Likewise, LRGs must be empowered and not regarded as mere implementers of top-down decisions. Giving a key role to LRGs throughout the process of preparing a holistic, whole-of-government and whole-of-society report could provide a suitable starting point for their wider recognition and help them to move closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda. ●

## 3.2 National SDG coordination mechanisms, implementation strategies and LRG participation



Buenos Aires, Argentina (Photo: Paxabay.com)

**The VNRs presented at this year's HLPF show that the majority of countries continue to undertake important efforts to integrate the SDGs into their development strategies and to ensure their implementation through a variety of coordination mechanisms. Following trends already spotted in previous years, an analysis of the 47 VNRs presented to the 2020 HLPF shows that most countries have institutionalized their commitment to the SDGs and established coordination mechanisms to ensure their implementation at the highest level of government.<sup>2</sup>**

These are at times directly coordinated by the Head of State of the national government; for example, in **Armenia**, by the Prime Minister, or in **Burundi**, by the 2nd Vice-President of the Government. Alternatively, they may be led by specific ministries, as occurs with the State Chancellery, with the support of the National Bureau of Statistics, in the Republic of **Moldova**, or by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy, as in **Costa Rica**. It appears, however, that the most frequent mechanisms involve specific departments or agencies, or cross-sectoral or inter-ministerial mechanisms that reside at the centre of government. Some examples

include **Argentina's** National Coordination Council for Social Policies; **Bangladesh's** Inter-ministerial SDG Implementation and Review Committee; **Benin's** Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs, which is supervised by the Ministry of Planning and Development; and **Russia's** Inter-Agency Working Group.

Furthermore, countries are seeking to ensure the participation of multiple stakeholders in order to enshrine the whole-of-society approach and the principle of leaving no one behind in their SDG implementation strategies. In five reporting countries, the national coordination mechanisms have been complemented by non-governmental multi-stakeholder participation. In such cases, dedicated committees have been set up, mostly with just an advisory role, which include representatives from the private sector, NGOs, religious groups, academia, etc. This is the case with: **Bangladesh's** SDG Working Team; **Brunei's** Special Committee for Implementation; **Niger's** Coordination Committee; and **Panama's** Civil Society Commission for the Support and Review of the SDGs; and **Uganda's** National SDG Taskforce.

The commitment of member states to achieving the SDGs has directly translated into almost all the reporting countries producing "national visions" or long-term development strategies that consider the SDGs as a point of reference or that have mainstreamed the SDGs, as for example has occurred with **Bangladesh's** Vision 2041, **Kenya's** Vision 2030, **Panama 2030** or **Emerging Comoros 2030**, to name but a few. Some other countries have adapted pre-existing strategies to incorporate the SDGs. Many other reporting countries have also developed, or revised, their long-term national development plans that embody their national visions in order to integrate the SDGs. These are the cases of the **Kyrgyz Republic's** National Development Strategy for 2018-2040, **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2013-2025**, and the **Solomon Islands National Development Strategy for 2016-2035**, among others.<sup>3</sup> **Morocco** has integrated the

SDGs into its pre-existing National Strategy for Sustainable Development for 2030. In the case of **Estonia**, whose long-term development strategy: Sustainable Estonia 21 was first approved in 2005, the list of its sustainable development indicators was updated in 2017 to bring it into line with the SDGs (and also in accordance with vision Estonia 2035). Other countries, such as **Moldova**, which is currently finalizing its **Moldova 2030 Vision**, are still in the midst of the revision process.

Many reporting countries have also aligned their mid-term development plans with the SDGs. Such cases include: **Ecuador** (National Development Plan *Toda una Vida* 2017-2021), **Malawi** (Growth and Development Strategy 2017-2022), and **the Gambia** (National Development Plan 2018-2021).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, some countries are now aligning their visions and development plans with regional development agendas. This is the case of the majority of African countries, which are also aligned with the African Agenda 2063; many small island countries, which are following the Small Islands Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (or SAMOA Pathway); and **Finland** and **Slovenia**, which are aligned with the European Green Deal.

Not all of these countries started their alignment processes at the same time. Several reporting countries started them in 2015-2016, following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda (e.g. **Bangladesh, Georgia, Honduras, Mozambique, Ukraine** and **Samoa**). Other countries have only just started their alignment processes within the last few years, or are currently in the process of doing so. The **Democratic Republic of Congo** started it in 2018, while **Bulgaria** is to adopt the Bulgaria 2030 National Development Programme in alignment with the SDGs by the end of 2020. Confronted by important political changes, **Argentina** has reaffirmed its commitment and revised its priorities, bringing to the forefront the need to respond to the current critical situation by developing a National Plan Against Hunger.

Several reporting countries have benefited from support received from different supranational

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**An analysis of the 47 VNRs presented to the 2020 HLPF shows that most countries have institutionalized their commitment to the SDGs and established coordination mechanisms to ensure their implementation at the highest level of government.**

organizations that has helped them with their alignment endeavours. Such help, like the use of the RIA methodology, has especially come from UN agencies, as in countries like **Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**, **Morocco** and the **Democratic Republic of Congo**.

Another important question to stress is that, according to an analysis of the 2020 VNRs, the importance that countries are giving to establishing national localization strategies is evolving, as is the space that they are devoting to such localization strategies in their VNRs. In this year's VNRs, for example, several countries have made strong references, and even dedicated a specific section, to their localization processes. This has been the case of **Argentina**, **Bangladesh** and **India**. Other countries, like **Honduras**, use the term of "territorialization" in this context.

In **Argentina**, in the chapter dedicated to the national localization strategy, the emphasis has been put on the provincial level. A roadmap has been developed for the implementation of the SDGs at this level. This started in every province with the signing of a cooperation agreement between the National Council for Social Policy Coordination and the highest provincial authority.<sup>5</sup> In the case of **Bangladesh**, the VNR section devoted to the SDG localization process focuses on localization at the district and *upazila* (subdistrict) levels. It specifies that the government has adopted 40 indicators to localize the SDGs: 39 of them are considered crucial at the local level and for reinforcing the impact on other targets, while the other "+1" indicator focuses on the principle of "leaving no one behind". The localization strategy includes providing support to the subnational level to align its *upazila* and district action plans with the SDGs.

Similarly, the Government of **India** has devoted a whole section to acknowledging the important role that states can play in localizing the SDGs. They are called upon to play a pivotal role in promoting the SDGs. Almost all states and union territories have prepared or adopted SDG vision documents. **Honduras**, for its part, has devoted a specific chapter to implementing the 2030 Agenda at the territorial level, which it calls "territorialisation". One of its priorities is the "territorialisation of the 2030 Agenda" in order to foster the alignment of subnational planning with the SDGs.<sup>6</sup>

Other countries, like **Benin**, **Ecuador**, **Kenya** and **Mozambique**, have also made substantial references to the state of their localization strategies, in spite of not having dedicated a specific chapter to them in their respective VNRs. **Benin**, for example, in 2017 established a Coordination Framework of Government-Municipalities within

## The importance that countries are giving to establishing national localization strategies is evolving, as is the space that they are devoting to such localization strategies in their VNRs.

the Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs in order to monitor and follow up on the country's localization strategy. It did this with the direct involvement of the national LGA. In 2019, the government then launched a "spatialization" analysis to support the prioritization of at least 10 targets in each of the country's 77 municipalities and also launched the National Action Plan, which includes priority projects at the local level (see Subsection 3.3, below). **Ecuador's** National Territorial Strategy promotes plans for territorial development and planning linked to the 2030 Agenda. The Technical Secretary for Planning—*Planifica Ecuador*—has led the updating of local plans (see Subsection 3.3, below). In **Kenya**, the VNR highlights the fact that the national government has decided that those county governments that meet their annual targets (especially regarding SDG 5) will have greater fiscal capacity to finance projects that fall within the realm of the SDGs than those with periodic fluctuations and/or that fail to meet more than 50% of their SDG targets.

The analysis also shows that other some countries, including **Comoros**, **the Gambia**, **Niger**, **Nigeria** and **Uganda**, are currently promoting territorial alignment processes without explicitly calling them "localization processes". Several other countries which do not have advanced localization strategies similarly stress the need to promote decentralizing reforms. This is the case in **Georgia**, **Liberia**, **Malawi**, and **Ukraine**. In **Morocco**, the government is encouraging the deepening of "regionalisation" in order to reduce inequalities between territories. In **Peru**, in order to relaunch the decentralization process, mid-term national development strategy (*Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo Nacional*) has integrated the SDGs and included integrated territorial development plans as key components for the implementation of the national strategy by the three different levels of government (national, regional and local).

### Analysis of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

Table 3.2, below, summarizes the degree of involvement of LRGs in national coordination mechanisms in the period 2016-2020. The table contrasts the analysis of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms in 2020 with the cumulative analysis for the years 2016-2019. Globally speaking, in 2020, LRGs participate in national coordination mechanisms in 26% of the reporting countries: in 12 of the 47 that reported this year. This participation ranges from being directly consulted on a periodical basis or partaking in advisory councils, to fully participating

in consultations or even at decision-making levels. In the Table, all of these modalities are qualified as “medium-high level” participation.

In 40% of the reporting countries: 19 of 47, LRGs participate only “weakly” in coordination mechanisms. Their participation is limited to them being informed or invited to occasional meetings without a follow-up process, or their indirect participation in mechanisms through other bodies. Sometimes, certain specific local authorities are simply co-opted, which is also interpreted as an example of “weak” LRG participation within the country as a whole. Lastly, in 9% of the reporting countries: four cases, there is no LRG involvement in the national coordination mechanisms.

Table 3.2

## Participation of LRGs in the national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs in 2016-2019 and in 2020<sup>7</sup>

| 2020    | Total Countries      | Mid/high participation |     | Weak participation |     | No participation |     | No elected LRGs / No information |      |
|---------|----------------------|------------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|----------------------------------|------|
| Region  | Countries per region | No. countries          | %   | No. countries      | %   | No. countries    | %   | No. countries                    | %    |
| World   | 47                   | 12                     | 26% | 19                 | 40% | 4                | 9%  | 12                               | 26%  |
| Africa  | 16                   | 4                      | 25% | 9                  | 56% | 0                | 0%  | 3                                | 19%  |
| ASPAC   | 8                    | 3                      | 38% | 0                  | 0%  | 1                | 13% | 4                                | 50%  |
| Eurasia | 6                    | 1                      | 17% | 1                  | 17% | 2                | 33% | 2                                | 33%  |
| Europe  | 7                    | 2                      | 29% | 4                  | 57% | 1                | 14% | 0                                | 0%   |
| LATAM   | 6                    | 2                      | 33% | 4                  | 67% | 0                | 0%  | 0                                | 0%   |
| MEWA    | 1                    | 0                      | 0%  | 0                  | 0%  | 0                | 0%  | 1                                | 100% |
| NORAM   | 3                    | 0                      | 0   | 1                  | 33% | 0                | 0%  | 2                                | 67%  |

| 2016-19 | Total Countries      | Mid/high participation |     | Weak participation |     | No participation |     | No elected LRGs / No information |     |
|---------|----------------------|------------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|------------------|-----|----------------------------------|-----|
| Region  | Countries per region | No. countries          | %   | No. countries      | %   | No. countries    | %   | No. countries                    | %   |
| World   | 143                  | 47                     | 33% | 23                 | 16% | 62               | 43% | 11                               | 8%  |
| Africa  | 36                   | 11                     | 31% | 7                  | 19% | 18               | 50% |                                  | 0%  |
| ASPAC   | 28                   | 7                      | 25% | 3                  | 11% | 15               | 54% | 3                                | 11% |
| Eurasia | 7                    | 1                      | 14% | 1                  | 14% | 4                | 57% | 1                                | 14% |
| Europe  | 40                   | 20                     | 50% | 6                  | 15% | 13               | 33% | 1                                | 3%  |
| LATAM   | 17                   | 6                      | 35% | 6                  | 35% | 5                | 29% | 0                                | 0%  |
| MEWA    | 12                   | 1                      | 8%  | 0                  | 0%  | 5                | 42% | 6                                | 50% |
| NORAM   | 3                    | 1                      | 33% | 0                  | 0%  | 2                | 67% | 0                                | 0%  |

These global figures for 2020 contrast with those obtained from the cumulative analysis for the period 2016-2019, in which LRGs could be said to have participated in these mechanisms in 34% of cases, having “weakly participated” in 15% of them and not participated in 43%. As can be concluded from the figures, there has therefore been a slight decrease in the share of countries in which LRGs have participated in these mechanisms. Even so, there has been a sharp increase in the proportion of countries in which LRGs have at least “weakly” participated in such mechanisms. An even sharper decrease can be observed in the proportion of countries in which there has been no LRG participation, with a fall to 6% of the countries reporting in 2020 from 43% of those that reported between 2016 and 2019.

A regional analysis of trends reveals that, in terms of the proportion of the total number of reporting countries by region, the highest proportion of countries in which LRGs can be said to have had a high or medium level of participation in coordination mechanisms was found in ASPAC, followed by Latin America, Europe, Africa, Eurasia and, lastly, MEWA and NORAM.

Even so, the high percentage of “medium-high” levels of participation amongst ASPAC countries (38% of those reporting in this region) needs some clarification. First of all, it should be taken into account that this is not necessarily representative of the overall regional tendency: of the eight ASPAC countries reporting this year, four do not have elected LRGs or there is no available information regarding LRG participation.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the level of participation in **India**, one of the three countries that are in this group, is only limited to the state level, with local government unit participation being weak or inexistent. In India, below the state level, the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee ensures coordination and monitoring related to sustainable development in partnership with its central, state and local governments, but not all of them are operational. In **Bangladesh**, coordination is ensured by the inter-ministerial SDGs Implementation and Review Committee, which is headed by a Principal Coordinator (SDG Affairs) within the Prime Minister’s Office, while the General Economics Division of the Bangladesh Planning Commission acts as a secretariat. In this country, there is a multi-stakeholder SDG Working Team with three committees for SDG localization at the divisional, district and subdistrict levels in which local government bodies are represented.<sup>9</sup> The National Conference on the

SDG Implementation Review meets once every 2 or 3 years. Following the first Conference, which was held in 2018, the next review was due to start from the *upazila* level, followed by the district and divisional levels. Eventually, the national-level conference will be held in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, and will incorporate representatives from government, NGOs, CSOs, the private sector, development partners, and all relevant stakeholders. In **Nepal**, the three associations of local governments: ADDCN, MuAn and NARMIN are all members of the SDG National Steering Committee, of the SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee, and of the SDG Thematic Committees.

In the Latin American region, 33% of the countries reporting this year have at least some LRG involvement in their national coordination mechanisms. In **Costa Rica**, for instance, coordination is ensured by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy, which has created a Technical Secretariat for the SDGs. In 2016, a National Pact for the SDGs was signed that included all levels of government, the private sector and civil society. Based on this agreement, the High-Level Council for the SDGs was created, which is chaired by the country’s President. LRGs participate in the consultative committee and in working groups of the High-Level Council through their respective LGAs (UNGL and ANAI). However, in recent years, the involvement of the LGAs in the National High-Level Council has lost momentum. The UNGL has subsequently asked for the reactivation of this mechanism. In **Honduras**, coordination is assumed by the General Government Coordination Secretariat and the National Agenda 2030 Commission for the SDGs, in which LRGs are represented through their national association (AMHON).

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**In 2020, LRGs participate in national coordination mechanisms in 12 countries of the 47 that reported this year.**

In the remaining 67% of countries reporting from Latin America: **Argentina, Ecuador, Panama** and **Peru**, LRG participation is more indirect or non-existent. In **Argentina**, for instance, the Council for the Coordination of Social Policies, which is in charge of the coordination of the 2030 Agenda, is linked to the Presidency and ensures that support is provided to the Inter-institutional National Commission for the Implementation and Follow-up of the SDGs. No direct LRG participation was reported in the country's national mechanisms, yet provincial governments are invited to participate by the Council's President. In **Peru**, a national mechanism for policy dialogue: the Forum for a National Agreement involves representatives of national and local governments, political parties, civil society, the private sector, trade

unions, and religious groups. The Forum played an important role in the definition of Vision 2050, which was adopted in 2019, in which the SDGs were mainstreamed. More recently, it has also been involved in defining a common strategy against COVID-19. There are regional, provincial and district-level coordination councils, but these are not effective across the whole territory and not all the different parties are well represented.

In Europe, there is medium-high LRG participation in the national coordination mechanisms of two (29%) of the seven reporting countries. These are Estonia and Finland. In **Estonia**, the Inter-ministerial Working Group on Sustainable Development, led by the Government Office Strategy Unit, and the Sustainable Development Commission are the mechanisms in charge of coordinating SDG implementation; Estonia's LRGs are members of the latter. The case of **Finland** is significant for the importance that the VNR explicitly attaches to LRGs. Coordination is ensured by the National Commission on Sustainable Development, which is chaired by the Prime Minister. It is supported by an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Secretariat, a Development Policy Committee in the Finnish Parliament, and an Interdisciplinary Sustainable Development Expert Panel. Representatives from the country's regions, cities and municipal administrations sit on the National Commission. In four (57%) of the European countries reporting this year: **Austria, Bulgaria, Moldova** and **Slovenia**, LRG participation in the national coordination mechanisms is considered "weak" by the LGAs, with only *ad hoc* consultations and irregular meetings. In one country (14%): **North Macedonia**, there is no LRG participation in national mechanisms.

LRGs have a "medium-high" level of participation in the national mechanisms of four (25%) of the 16 countries reporting this year from the African region: **Benin, the Gambia, Kenya** and **Mozambique**. In **Benin**, as mentioned above, LRGs are fully integrated into one of the mechanisms of the Directorate-General for the Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs: the Coordination Framework between national government and the municipalities. However, in the report drafted this year by the ANCB, as part of its contribution to the VNR process, the LGA alerted that, despite the coordination mechanisms, the national government had undertaken a number of initiatives that "erode, rather than strengthen" local governments and demanded respect for the laws governing decentralization. **The Gambia** has set up the

Helsinki, Finland (Photo: Aleksanterinkatu-unsplash)



National Technical Steering Committee for technical and implementation purposes. This includes representatives from local authorities and is chaired by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. In this country, LGAs have been provided with support to formulate regional development plans. **Kenya's** Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee includes representatives from the associations CoG and CAF, CSOs, the private sector, the media and academia. The government has helped to establish an SDG Unit within the CoG that monitors SDGs at the local level, ensuring the active involvement of LRGs and their respective associations. In **Mozambique**, the national government has established mechanisms to engage with the different levels of government on questions related to planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with a sustainable development perspective. These include the SDG National Reference Group; this was created in 2017 and is the key national coordination mechanism. District, administrative post, and locality advisory councils have also been created, together with development observatories, at the central and provincial levels. The provincial and district governments, along with the national association ANAMM, also play a key role in the SDG National Reference Group.

In the remaining nine (59%) countries reporting this year, LRGs have been "weakly" involved in national mechanisms. These are the cases of **Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda** and **Zambia**. It should be underlined that in the African region all the reporting countries have some degree of LRG involvement in their respective national coordination mechanisms; however, this involvement is weak. For example, in some countries, such as Uganda, it is the Ministry of Local Governments, rather than a direct representative of the LRGs, which represents local authorities in the national coordination mechanism.

In the six countries from the Eurasia region, LRGs have attained a medium-high level of participation in national mechanisms only in one country. In **Georgia**, LRGs are represented in the relevant working groups of the Sustainable Development Goals Inter-Agency Council and are expected to contribute to what is called the "evaluation loop". This provides policy advice and helps to adapt the SDG implementation strategy to the local and regional levels. Participation is, however, "weak" in the **Kyrgyz Republic**. In 2015, a governmental decree assigned the cities of Bishkek and Osh the role of attending the Coordination Committee

on Adaptation, Implementation and Monitoring of the SDGs. No further LRG participation has since been reported. In the **Russian Federation**, LRGs are not involved in the national coordination mechanism, but they were invited to contribute to the VNR process. In **Armenia**, LRGs have not been involved in consultative processes. In the remaining cases (**Ukraine** and **Uzbekistan**), the information available on LRG participation has not allowed us to confirm any degree of regular participation.

Of the three countries reporting from NORAM, only **Trinidad and Tobago** has elected LRGs. They have only reported a "weak" level of participation in coordination mechanisms, which has mainly been based on ad-hoc consultations with the national LGA.<sup>10</sup> There are no elected LRGs in the **Syrian Arab Republic**, which was the only country reporting from the MEWA region.

This brief analysis of VNRs corroborates the impression that, overall, the participating countries have maintained their commitment to SDG implementation, which they have continued to institutionalise by adopting a range of national strategies and developing coordination mechanisms. Slowly but increasingly, these strategies are now acknowledging the need to incorporate a strong localization component too. Similarly, this analysis highlights that LRGs have participated in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation in 12 of this year's reporting countries. In fact, LRGs have, at least "weakly", participated in coordination mechanisms in 19 countries this year.

Achieving the SDGs requires establishing robust collaboration between all levels of government; this, in turn, needs an appropriate level of LRG integration within national coordination mechanisms. This analysis shows that there is a global trend towards increased LRG participation. Nevertheless, the pace at which such progress is being made must be accelerated if the SDGs are to be achieved. For this reason, it is of fundamental importance to adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. Improving policy coherence and strengthening the dialogue between different levels of government are crucial if we are to reach the level of intergovernmental cooperation that is needed to achieve the SDGs. Establishing national coordination mechanisms that fully incorporate LRGs would provide a powerful tool with which to achieve this.●

### 3.3

## Leaving no one behind

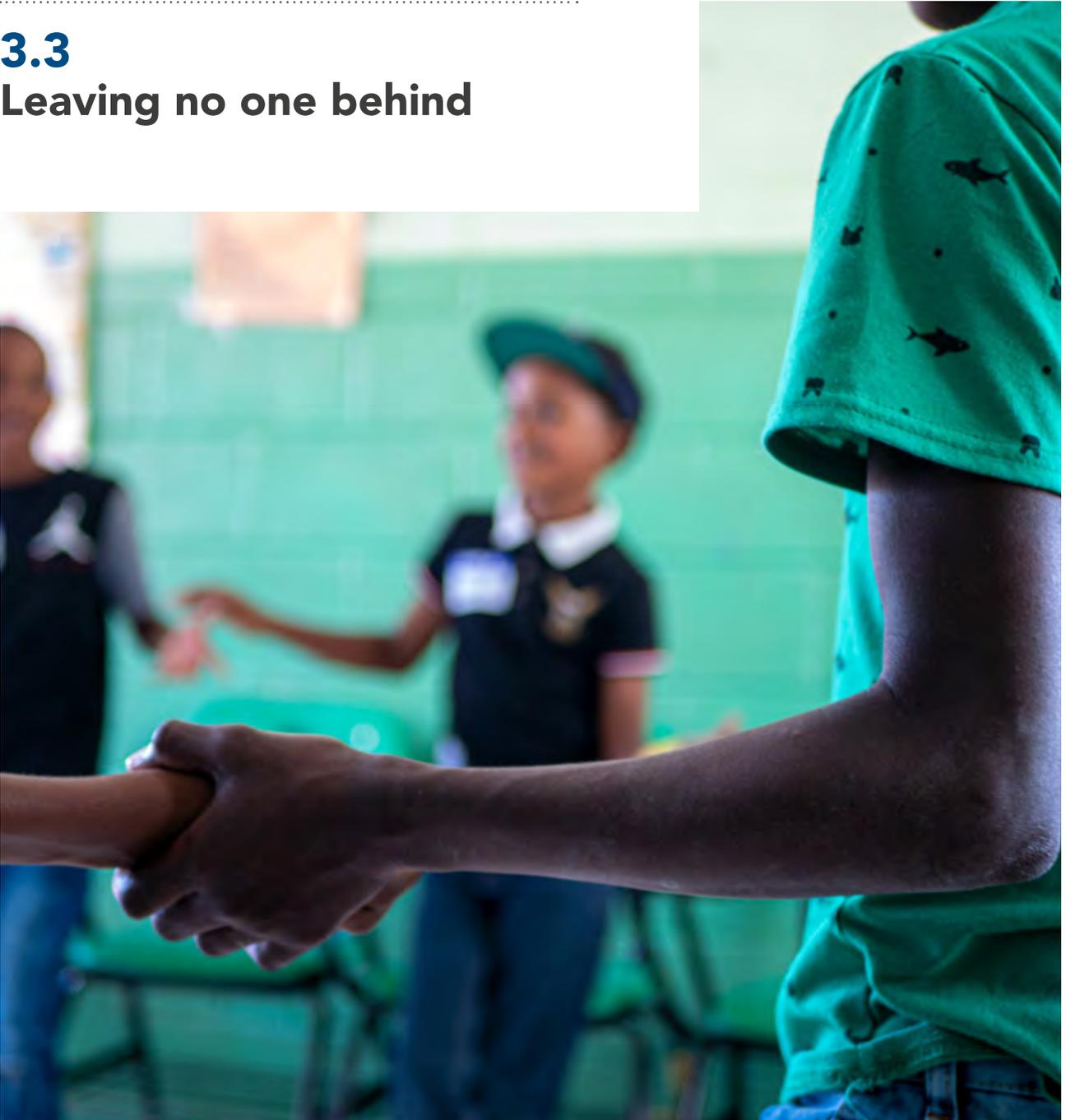


Photo: ty-lagalo-unsplash

#### **The actions of local and regional governments to localize the SDGs in the countries reporting in 2020**

The previous Subsection analysed the involvement of LRGs in the national reporting process and in the coordination mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This Subsection analyses the strategies and actions put into place by LRGs and their associations in the reporting countries.

Thirty-nine of the 47 countries that are presenting their VNRs this year have locally elected authorities and in almost all these countries there are one or more national associations of local and regional governments (58 LGAs in total, see Table 3.3). A solid sample of 28 national LGAs answered the GTF survey, expressing the views of the national representatives of LRGs in 25 reporting countries. However, the sample of individual LRGs (20) only provides a limited insight at the local level.<sup>11</sup>

Table 3.3

## National local and regional government associations in reporting countries (2020)

(In bold, LGAs that answered the GTF survey and in italics, countries where LRGs answered)

| COUNTRY                             | NATIONAL LGAs   | COUNTRY                    | NATIONAL LGAs   |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Argentina</b>                    | <b>Federación Argentina de Municipios (FAM), Mercociudades</b>  | <b>Libya</b>               | Association of Mayors of Libya, <b>National Municipal Councils Association</b>  |
| <b>Armenia</b>                      | Union of Communities of Armenia   | <b>Malawi</b>              | <b>Malawi Local Government Association (MALGA)</b>  |
| <b>Austria</b>                      | <b>Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, Austrian Association of Municipalities</b>   | <b>Morocco</b>             | <i>Association Marocaine des Présidents des Conseils Communaux (AMPCC), Association des Régions du Maroc</i>  |
| <b>Bangladesh</b>                   | Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum (BUPF), Upazila Parishad Foundation of Bangladesh (UPFB) and the Municipal Association of Bangladesh (MAB)  | <b>Mozambique</b>          | <b>National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique (ANAMM)</b>   |
| <b>Benin</b>                        | <b>Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin (ANCB)</b>   | <b>Nepal</b>               | <b>Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal (ADDCN), Municipality Association of Nepal (MuAN), National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMiN)</b> |
| <b>Bulgaria</b>                     | National Association of the Municipalities in Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB)  | <b>Niger</b>               | Association des Municipalités du Niger (AMN)  |
| <b>Burundi</b>                      | Association Burundaise des Elus Locaux (ABELO)  | <b>Nigeria</b>             | Association of Local Governments of Nigeria (ALGON)   |
| <b>Comoros</b>                      | <i>Association nationale des maires comoriens (ANMC)</i>  | <b>North Macedonia</b>     | <b>Association of Units of Local Self-Governments of Republic of North Macedonia; Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS)</b>                   |
| <b>Costa Rica</b>                   | <b>Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales (UNGL), Asociación Nacional de Alcaldías e Intendencias (ANAI)</b>   | <b>Panama</b>              | Asociación de Municipios de Panamá (AMUPA)  |
| <b>Democratic Republic of Congo</b> | Association Nationale des Villes et Communes de la RDC (AVC/RDC)  | <b>Papua New Guinea</b>    | Papua New Guinea Urban Local Level Government Association (PNGULLGA)  |
| <b>Ecuador</b>                      | <b>Asociación de Municipios del Ecuador (AME), Consorcio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador (CONGOPE), Consejo Nacional de Gobiernos Parroquiales Rurales del Ecuador (CONAGOPARE)</b> | <b>Peru</b>                | <i>Asociación de Municipios del Perú (AMPE), Red de Municipalidades Urbanas y Rurales del Perú (REMURPE), Federación de Municipios Libres del Perú (FEMULPE)</i>                  |
| <b>Estonia</b>                      | Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities   | <b>Republic of Moldova</b> | <b>Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova</b>   |
| <b>Finland</b>                      | <i>Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA)</i>  | <b>Russian Federation</b>  | <i>Russian Congress of Municipalities, the Russian Council of Local Self-Government, Union of Russian Cities, Union of Small Cities</i>   |
| <b>Gambia</b>                       | <b>Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities (GALGA)</b>   | <b>Slovenia</b>            | <b>Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia (SOS), Association of Urban Municipalities of Slovenia (ZMOS)</b>  |
| <b>Georgia</b>                      | <b>National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)</b>   | <b>Solomon Islands</b>     | No association  |
| <b>Honduras</b>                     | Asociación de Municipios de Honduras (AMHON)  | <b>Trinidad and Tobago</b> | <b>Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities (TTALGA)</b>   |
| <b>India</b>                        | <i>No national association. LGAs are organized at the state level.</i>  | <b>Uganda</b>              | <b>Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA)</b>   |
| <b>Kenya</b>                        | <b>Council of Governors (CoG), County Assembly Forum (CAF)</b>  | <b>Ukraine</b>             | <b>Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), All-Ukrainian Association of Local Self-Government Councils; Association of Small Towns of Ukraine</b>                                  |
| <b>Kyrgyz Republic</b>              | <i>Association of Villages, Association of Towns of Kyrgyzstan</i>  | <b>Uzbekistan</b>          | No national association   |
| <b>Liberia</b>                      | National Association of Mayors and Local Authorities of Liberia (LIBMALGA)  | <b>Zambia</b>              | <b>Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ)</b>  |

Following the analysis of the surveys, 82% of the LGAs from the reporting countries were shown to have a high level of acquaintance with the 2030 Agenda: **Argentina, Benin, Ecuador** (CONGOPE), **Georgia, Kenya** (CoG and CAF), **Morocco, Mozambique, Slovenia** (ZMOS), **Trinidad and Tobago** and Zambia. Only two associations reported a low level of awareness of the SDGs amongst their technical and political staff (**North Macedonia** and **Uganda**). Among LRGs, the level of awareness was lower (only 45% considered that their staff have a good level of awareness of the SDGs). In general, the effectiveness of the institutional mechanisms used to coordinate work on the 2030 Agenda is ensured by a coordinating officer or at management level in the LGAs (40%), or this function has been delegated to specific structures (35% to planning departments, project units, training agencies, etc.). The CoG in Kenya has created an SDG unit with focus points in each of its counties. The UNGL in Costa Rica has modified its status to support the implementation of the SDGs. On the other hand, the LGA of Moldova has outlined that no specific work on SDGs is being carried out (“still limit interest on the SDGs among their members”).

The majority of responses point to specific commitments, strategies or action plans adopted by LRGs and LGAs to implement the SDGs (80% among LGAs; 71% among LRGs). More than 50% of LGAs and LRGs have conducted awareness-raising activities (communication initiatives, conferences and campaigns) and 22% have carried out training activities. In Georgia, for example, the LGA launched a package for local government bodies. However, the minority answered that they still have not taken any policy initiatives or other actions (the LGAs of Moldova and North Macedonia, and three cities in Kyrgyz Republic, Russia and Ukraine). Some LGAs have initiated actions, although no specific policies and strategies have yet been adopted (Libya, Malawi, Ukraine, and Slovenia—ZMOS). The LRGs and LGAs from countries that have already reported to the HLPF in previous years show great dynamism and a diversity of action (Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya and Finland, and LRGs like Azuay, in Ecuador; Buenos Aires, in Argentina; the region of Åland, in Finland; and counties in Kenya). A large majority of LGAs (81%) are engaged in partnerships with civic organizations, the private sector, academia and international institutions that support the SDGs. They tend to participate in multi-stakeholder initiatives (such as the SDG Forum, in Kenya; “Let’s change the World”, in Slovenia; and the “Tondeka Mabega Leave No-one Behind” campaign, in Uganda).

As in previous years, monitoring and reporting is quite problematical. However, some progress has been observed: 35% of LGAs and 47% of LRGs answered positively regarding the experiences of local and regional governments working with monitoring and reporting. Different examples of local efforts have been proposed, such as: creating a district monitoring framework, in Malawi, and developing self-monitoring and reporting strategies in several municipalities in Finland (Kemi, Turku, Espoo, Lahti, Pirkkala, and Mariehamn). In Ecuador, AME underlines the municipal informative system that contributes information to the national office of statistics, based on local data. With the support of the OECD, Cordoba (Argentina) has developed an online platform with localized indicators. Various different cities, such as Helsinki (Finland) and the District of Nwoya (Uganda), have developed VLRs; others are planning to develop a VLR in the coming months (e.g. Lima, in Peru). A large majority have expressed their interest in developing localized indicators.

### Voluntary Subnational Review

As mentioned in previous Sections, six countries prepared subnational governments reports that provide interesting insights into the progress made from the local perspective and its impact on the governance process relating to the SDGs: **Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Mozambique, and Nepal**. Some of these reports were included, or referenced, in their countries’ respective national VNRs (Benin, Costa Rica, Kenya and Ecuador). While Costa Rica and Ecuador are considered high-to-middle income countries and Kenya a low-to-middle income country, Benin, Mozambique and Nepal are some of the least development countries. The five countries present different levels of progress in the decentralization process. In the first four, LRGs are well-acknowledged and are playing a significant role in the localization of the SDGs, while in the other two, Mozambique and Nepal, with incipient decentralization reforms, they have a more limited role, although some of their LRG contributions should be highlighted. The following Boxes summarise the six corresponding Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs).



<sup>12</sup>  
BENIN

## Voluntary Subnational Reviews

Although, as mentioned above in the introduction, the “enabling institutional environment” for LRGs in Benin is not fully satisfactory, important progress has been made to support the localisation of the SDGs. The ANCB has been an active implementer of the 2030 Agenda, following the engagement of the national government. Since 2018, the ANCB has: set up an SDG Thematic Commission; developed a roadmap to support SDG localization; offered 35 municipalities awareness-raising and training activities; developed a benchmarking initiative for exchanging experiences; and assessed best practices in 77 municipalities, with respect to the SDGs.

The national strategy for the localization of the SDGs in Benin includes, as mentioned above, a “spatialization” analysis to support the prioritization of the SDGs in almost all the municipalities; the alignment of the local development plans with the SDGs; and support to priority projects included in the National Action Programme, such as: urban roads; integrated waste management in Greater Nokoué; the modernization of local markets; water supply; childhood nutrition in school canteens; school infrastructure; and rural electrification. With the support of decentralized cooperation, LRGs have developed several projects: Cité Bj (on SDGs 8, 11, 12 and 16); and also projects relating to: education, health, food security, children, gender equality,

the improvement of land management, the circular economy, and environment protection.

In November 2019, a national study was launched to calculate the cost of implementing the SDGs in the country, including at the local level. The estimate was 5.700 billion USD per year, until 2030: 60.8% of GDP, which underlined the size of the funding challenge. By the end 2019, the ANCB had developed a proposal for the local financing of the SDGs. It alerted against the creation of various state agencies, as they were seen as being more likely to erode, rather than strengthen, LRG powers. In its report, the ANCB demands that national policies should contribute to empowering local authorities in accordance with the laws governing decentralization. It also calls for a revision of the role of national agencies, in order to prevent overlaps. It recommends increasing the resources dedicated to supporting the localization process and also of the National Fund for Municipal Development, as well as the respect of the calendar for transfers from the national budget to the municipalities. The ANCB demands to reinforce local human capacities and improve coordination with development partners to cover all the territories. The overall aim is to leave not one and no territory behind. It underlines the need to improve the system of national statistics and disaggregating key indicators. Another goal is to strengthen the involvement of stakeholders in the definition of the key strategies and in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

<sup>13</sup>  
COSTA RICA

In Costa Rica, local autonomy is well embedded in the national institutional framework but municipalities have limited resources. The two LGAs, UNGL and ANAI, signed the National Pact for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals launched by the national government, in September 2016. Since 2017, the UNGL has: adopted a work plan for the SDGs; published a manual explaining methodologies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in municipalities; held regional SDG workshops; and produced guidelines to support pilot projects. An analysis of the work done shows that the number of municipalities trained to implement the SDGs is still limited (42%). Since 2019, the UNGL has therefore developed a training programme, involving more than 40 municipalities, to facilitate this process. This followed on from the creation of a Municipal Observatory to strengthen local statistical capacities, which was set up in 2018.

According to the country-wide survey carried out in the framework of the UNGL Report, 88% of the 50 (out of 82) responding municipalities have a good knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, but only 22 of them (44%) reported having aligned a planning instrument with the SDGs and only 13 of them had also aligned their budgets with the SDGs. Several examples of good practices have so far been collected: adopting an integral approach to pursuing the 17 SDGs (Desamparados), and adopting more sectoral approaches, focusing on environmental sustainability and waste management (San Rafael).

The study underlines that the different municipal development plans are not necessarily aligned with the priorities of the National Development and Investments Plan 2018-2022.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, as mentioned already in Subsection 3.2, the involvement of the LGAs in the national coordination mechanism (the National High Level Council for the SDGs) has lost momentum in recent years.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the mechanisms envisaged for the coordination of policies in the different territories are still not fully operational across the whole country: Inter-institutional Coordination Councils at the municipal level; Councils for Rural Development and Regional Development Councils; and sectoral committees. Those that are operational have not aligned their objectives and plans with the SDGs yet.

Among the key recommendations proposed by the UNGL to strengthen the localization process are the need to: strengthen the national mechanisms of governance of the SDGs; provide better mapping of national government projects related to local government organizations; improve the coordination between local and national agendas, through the previously mentioned councils, in the territories; reinforce planning processes and tools; foster civic participation; reinforce decentralization and the financing of local government bodies; support local monitoring; and facilitate the exchange of good practices for the localization of the SDGs.

## Voluntary Subnational Reviews

In Ecuador, the constitutional reform of 2008 created a new decentralized framework. The three LGAs: the Association of Municipalities of Ecuador (AME), the organization of provincial governments (CONGOPE) and the National Council of Rural Parish Governments (CONAGOPARE), have been active in the implementation of the Global Agendas since 2016. In May 2019, new local authorities were elected. To support the development of their new local development plans, and as required by law, the national government launched the "Guidelines to articulate the Development and Territorial Plan with the 2030 Agenda" and introduced a new Technical Norm for the National Decentralized Participatory Planning System. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the term for the presentation of the Development and Territorial Plan has since been extended until December 31, 2020.

All the LGAs mentioned have undertaken regular training initiatives on the "territorialisation" of the SDGs, in collaboration with different partners (e.g. UNDP), and promoted a number of specific projects.<sup>17</sup> Ecuador's 2020 VNR includes 58 local initiatives developed by LRGs at different levels.

In its first provincial-level voluntary report, CONGOPE collected information from 15 (out of 23) provincial governments. The report shows that nine provinces have already adopted SDG policy documents, action plans and legal frameworks aimed to support the SDGs, and have initiated several actions with this aim. 50% of the provincial councils have developed initiatives

related to reducing poverty and providing attention to vulnerable groups, as well as promoting agriculture, water, gender equality, decent work, and measures to combat climate change and protect the environment. The report underlines the lack of localized indicators and the weakness of the National Information System.

The study mentions several critical issues related to the National Decentralized System of Participatory Planning: weak institutional capacities, centralized management, and lack of a culture of multi-level and multi-stakeholder planning. It acknowledges, nevertheless, some efforts made in 2020 to update the development and territorial plans through "special dialogues" with municipalities and parish councils. It concludes with several proposals: i) to improve access to information and data at subnational levels in order to establish a comprehensive strategy; ii) to improve multi-level coordination processes in the implementation of the SDGs and develop more bottom-up approaches; iii) to increase awareness among citizens, communities and the private sector to develop joint responsibilities; iv) to strengthen the capacities of technical and political teams in national and local institutions; v) to mobilise specific resources to contribute to the financing of the SDGs as a national territorial and local policy; and vii) to develop innovative projects that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in the different territories, taking advantage of their local capacities and endogenous knowledge.

<sup>16</sup>  
ECUADOR

In Kenya, the Constitution of 2010 was followed by several reforms which devolved important powers to the state's county governments. Both the Council of Governors (CoG) and the County Assemblies Forum (CAF) have shown active commitment since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The CoG has developed a strategic plan for 2017-2022 and has established an SDG unit to coordinate SDG implementation and support for county governments in mainstreaming SDGs through programmes and plans. The counties have appointed and trained SDG Champions to steer the SDG process. They have run training sessions and created the Maarifa Centre. This is Kenya's premier devolution knowledge-sharing and learning platform for effective governance and is used to disseminate experiences related to the SDGs. The CoG has prepared Guidelines for the five-year county integrated development plans to support efforts to achieve alignment with the SDGs and to establish a framework for SDG Multi-Stakeholder Engagement at the county level. The national Performance Management Framework was also adapted by counties to guide planning, performance contracting, monitoring and evaluation. This framework seeks to eliminate the "siloed approach" to the management of public affairs.

The joint *Voluntary County Report* prepared by the CoG and the CAF explains that the 47 county governments are currently at different stages in the localization of SDGs in their respective integrated development plans 2018-2022 and in their annual development plans. Thirty-four counties have enacted legislation that promotes public participation and 45 counties have designated Public Participation Offices. Counties report on progress relating

to the provision of health facilities, gender policies, water coverage, and the granting of municipal status to urban areas. They have created a County Climate Change Fund with the support of the National Drought Management Authority, adopting specific rules, establishing specialized units, and mainstreaming planning initiatives in order to fight climate change. Drawing on the success of the five pilot counties, the County Climate Change Fund is currently being scaled up and extended to 14 counties. The counties have also established County Gender Sector Working Groups: all the counties have met the two-thirds threshold for gender parity, with three counties: Kilifi, Nyeri and Kericho, having attained a 50-50 representation.

With regard to monitoring activities, the counties are currently working in collaboration with the national Monitoring and Evaluation Department to develop a county monitoring and evaluation framework that incorporates the SDG indicators. Handbooks for monitoring have already been produced in four counties. Five counties (Busia, Kwale, Kisumu, Marsabit and Taita Taveta) have undergone a reporting process and published their own VLRs, while Machakos county has disaggregated relevant indicators with the support of Kenya Statistics Unit and is able to track SDG implementation.<sup>19</sup> Despite all these initiatives, the counties identify the following challenges: inadequate linkages and coordination between the national and subnational levels of government; high political turnover and changes of administration, poor policy coherence, the need to strengthen infrastructure investment, inadequate monitoring and evaluation and the need for increased local stakeholder awareness and participation.

<sup>18</sup>  
KENYA

## Voluntary Subnational Reviews

In Mozambique, the situation of local government bodies, and particularly of the majority of its municipalities, is challenging. A recent reform of the Constitution, enacted in June 2018, created two new levels of decentralized government: provinces and districts, above the pre-existing municipal level. The district level will only be elected in 2024 and remains as deconcentrated structure until then. At provincial level there is a decentralized and a deconcentrated structure in parallel. The deconcentrated districts receive 13.5% and both provincial structures 17.1% of the national budget. The municipalities only receive less than 2%, and have limited sources for their own income, a situation that greatly reduces their capacities. The National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique (ANAMM) is engaged in ensuring the representation of municipalities in the national consultative mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs.

Since 2016, with the support of international partners, the association has initiated a cycle of training sessions to disseminate the SDGs. In its Report, ANAMM analyses a sample of 16 (out of 53) municipalities, which are representative of local governments of different sizes and regions. The study found that 76% of these municipalities considered that the SDGs provide an important framework for their daily work. Although the majority of them have not yet aligned their plans with the SDGs, more than 100 projects and activities have been identified and linked to different SDGs. These range from providing support to groups of poor women and children to helping small enterprises, from aiding people affected by particular diseases to providing infrastructure for schools, from reconstructing settlements after natural disasters (such as hurricanes Idai and Kenneth) to carrying out reforestation programs. The municipalities receive important support from international NGOs,

cooperation agencies, and UN agencies to help them to develop local initiatives. The context also differs from province to province, as well as from municipality to municipality. In Nampula, for example, the process is more advanced due to greater local tradition and more consolidated partnership structures; this has helped when coordinating the process of drawing up the Provincial Strategic Plan for 2030.

As in other countries, several challenges still remain. These include the need to align the objectives of the country's national development plans and aligning local plans with the SDGs. It also implies adapting the recently approved National Framework of SDG Indicators (QNI) to the provincial, district and municipal levels. The current reform of the national subsystem for Planning and Budgeting (SPO) could generate gains in terms of alignment in the long, medium and short term, as well as for vertical and horizontal harmonization of the planning instruments (sectoral, provincial, district and municipal strategic plans), thereby facilitating the inclusion of the SDGs.

The national government plan is to strengthen the provincial and district governments, which are still in the process of being set up. This should help to consolidate their planning and budgeting tools, and also to help analyze their fiscal space within the current decentralized framework.

The ANAMM report identified that there is a need to support training and the strengthening of local officers, to improve local capacities and resources to ensure alignment of the five-year local plans and budgets with the SDGs and between different levels of governments, to facilitate partnerships with international institutions by ensuring an equal distribution of support among the different municipalities, and foster the adaptation of monitoring mechanisms and indicators at local level.

MOZAMBIQUE<sup>20</sup>



## Voluntary Subnational Reviews

In accordance with the Constitution of Nepal, which was adopted in 2015, the country shifted from a unitary to a federal system, structured into three tiers (federal, provincial and local level). Local-level bodies started functioning from September 2017. They are, nevertheless, restricted by insufficient human and financial resources.

The National Planning Commission, which steers the SDG implementation process, has readied the *Planning, monitoring and evaluation guidelines* for provincial and local governments to facilitate SDG plans of action and budgets aligned to the national plan, although this still remains to be rolled out. The Commission is also working on the integration of localised indicators and on making an estimation of the funds required to achieve the SDGs at the provincial level to facilitate future assignments to local budgets. The Commission is facilitating this process through training on SDG localization and through the deployment of trained facilitators; this is currently being done in 11 municipalities, on a pilot basis.

The three existing associations: ADDCN, MuAN and NARMiN, are also making efforts to disseminate the SDGs, and support their members, through communication and training activities. NARMiN, for example, has adopted a Directive with 15-Point for Rural Municipalities to help with mainstreaming the SDGs into the local planning and monitoring process. With the support of different partners, MuAN is currently running several projects related to SDGs (e.g. Strengthening Municipal Governance and the Localization of the SDGs, Enabling Local Governance, and Strengthening Municipal Institutional Capacity).

At the province level, all the provincial governments have formed policy and planning commissions, but the majority of local governments have not yet formed specific mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs. A few municipalities have, nevertheless, released a white paper on implementing the SDGs (Tulsipur submetropolitan, in Dang district/Province 5), or an SDG strategy (Phalebas municipality, in Parbat district/Province 4). More

specifically, the Byas municipality, in Tanahun district, and Phalebas municipality have initiated programmes for priority SDGs, while the Tulsipur submetropolitan area has opted for projects related to all 17 SDGs. The LGA report contains more than 30 different experiences that have been implemented by municipalities and which relate to different SDGs. At the provincial level, the alignment of the SDGs with provincial plans and budgets is making progress, but is still incomplete. Gandaki Province, for example, has formulated the 5-Year Province-Level Periodic Plan 2019/2020-2023/2024 and has also set province-level development targets relating to the SDGs (*SDGs Baseline Report of Gandaki Province 2019*).

With regard to national coordination mechanisms, a civil society report considers that, despite the efforts made, governance still needs to be strengthened at all levels. Government should give a high priority to integrating the SDGs into provincial and local government plans and to building up the capacity of these new institutions.<sup>22</sup>

Both reports (by the LGA's and the civil society's) call for action. They request that with the support of the federal government, each local and provincial government should formulate a plan of action, covering at least the period until 2023/24, in line with the 15<sup>th</sup> plan. This should include a mention of the sources of funding needed (own revenues, transfers, loans and donations). Local government bodies also need to put in place an SDG implementation and monitoring mechanism. Improvements in horizontal and vertical coordination are also imperative: Inter-Province Councils and Inter-Local Government Councils should be functional and help to advance coordination and cooperation at both the national and provincial levels, working with local stakeholders. The federal level should strengthen its dialogue with provincial and local government bodies with regard to providing the resources needed according to the provincial and local plans of action.

21  
NEPAL



## Brief summary of LRG actions in other countries reporting this year

Besides the six countries analysed above, the following Subsection provides a quick region-by-region view of the efforts undertaken by national governments, LRGs and their respective organizations in the other countries reporting in 2020.

### Africa

**“The SDG agenda is stronger if localization is stronger”<sup>23</sup>**

According to the different sources (VNRs, GTF survey, reports), localization and, particularly, efforts to align local plans with the SDGs are now in course in almost all the countries reporting this year (except in Libya). In some countries the process involves a significant group of local government organizations (e.g. the Gambia, Malawi, and Uganda); in others, it is still at an incipient stage (e.g. Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Zambia).

The mobilisation of LRGs and the process of aligning subnational plans with the SDGs can take advantage of the support of LGAs. In **Uganda**, for example, LGAs (ULGA and UAAU), the national SDG Secretariat and the National NGO Forum joined forces to support the localization of the SDGs, and SDG focal staff have been appointed by the majority of LRGs. Capacity-building initiatives for district planners and officials have been organized. To monitor LRG performance, ULGA and ACODE (a national NGO) launched a scorecard initiative, which has already been introduced in 35 districts, that has demonstrated an improvement in accountability and service delivery. The Ngora Local Government, in the Eastern region, presented its first VLR in 2020.

In **the Gambia**, the Regional Technical Advisory Committee has promoted the process and encouraged VLRs to promote local ownership. In **Malawi**, the alignment efforts are in the hands of local councils, which should also include the demands of ward and village committees in their city/district development plans. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development collaborates with local councils to ensure that local development plans are appropriately aligned with national plans. A Programme Framework for Integrated Rural Development and Decentralization has been developed to promote ownership through devolution.

In **Comoros**, the governor of each island (which has an autonomous government) chairs a Steering

Committee for Development in charge of aligning that island's policies with national development priorities and the SDGs, and of facilitating similar alignments in municipal plans. In **Niger**, the localization of the 2030 Agenda is promoted in regional development plans and municipal development plans. In **Nigeria**, the state and local government levels are responsible for similar efforts (e.g. Benue, Taraba, Yobe, Kaduna, Ebonyi, Kano, Jigawa, Anambra, and the Delta States all have plans that are aligned to the SDGs).<sup>24</sup> SDG focal staff were appointed in each of the 36 states and in the federal capital and it is envisaged to extend these human resources to the 774 local government bodies.<sup>25</sup>

In other countries, the support of the national government has been more restrained. In **Zambia**, for example, the coordination between the national and subnational levels is quite limited, principally because of the low level of devolution. As recognized in Zambia's VNR, “slow implementation of the Decentralisation Policy has hindered effective operationalisation of coordination structures at the sub-district levels”.<sup>26</sup> In **Liberia**, the national planning process is top-down as there are no elected local authorities. However, a Local Government Act was passed in 2018, and a five-year Decentralization Programme (2020–2024) is currently being designed for its implementation.

In **Morocco**, the government has collaborated with LRGs to strengthen their planning capacities and considers that the SDGs should be mainstreamed through the country's different national sectoral plans. This should be particularly evident in the renewal of urban policy and through national plans for rural areas. It also supports the participation of LGAs (AMPCC and ARM) in the International Programme for Subnational Climate Finance and for the strengthening of LRG resilience and environmental plans (regional and city plans for climate).

The involvement of LGAs varied between countries. In **the Gambia**, GALGA is directly involved in the national coordination mechanism at the technical level and also runs training sessions for its members. In **Malawi**, MALGA participates in the national initiative, which is led by the Ministry of Local Governments, to identify key challenges. In **Niger**, the Association of Municipalities of Niger (AMN) has developed a communications strategy on SDG localization, but it has rarely been consulted by the national government.

**Asia-Pacific**

The Government of **Bangladesh** considers localization to be one of the key areas for making progress in the implementation of the SDGs. Awareness-raising programmes have also been run through workshops and the training of trainers has been conducted at both the division and district levels. The *Upazila* Action Plans and the District Action Plans for SDGs are currently being planned and finalized.<sup>27</sup>

The **Indian** VNR makes a strong statement in favour of the localization of the SDGs (see Figure 3.2). However, there is a significant difference between the government’s support at the state level and that of local government bodies. Almost all the Indian states and union territories have set up nodal departments for the implementation of the SDGs. They have also prepared or adopted SDG vision documents and developed state indicator frameworks, adapted from the national

framework (in 60% of the states). In contrast, the involvement of district administrations and rural and urban local government organizations is lagging behind. A few states have created district development coordination and monitoring committees, but these mechanisms tend to be still at a relatively primitive stage of development. Efforts are currently being made to strengthen local development planning and SDG implementation through: national guidelines, capacity building, technical assistance structures, greater fiscal decentralisation (since 2015), and adapted indicators. Progress has been uneven to date and has varied significantly between states.<sup>28</sup> In **Papua New Guinea**, the central government is steering the implementation at the local level and has plans to develop a roadmap to help mobilise local government initiatives.

**Figure 3.2**

**Steps in SDG localization at subnational level in India**

Source: India, 2020 VNR



## Eurasia

In **Russia**, as mentioned above, LRGs has been active in the VNR process. The federal Law on strategic planning (2014) stipulates strategies for sustainable development that should be elaborated by regional and municipal governments. Its objectives should be in line with the medium-term federal development strategy, which is updated every six years (currently running until 2024). Several frontrunner cities (such as Kaluga) are now adapting their local development plans to integrate the SDGs. Moscow is currently developing its first VLR. Other cities have developed projects related to different SDGs (social aid, healthy food and school nutrition, quality education, gender equality, microbusiness, open government, participatory budgeting). Such initiatives are developed by cities like Arkhangelsk, Kaliningrad, Kazan, Makhachkala, Moscow, Nizhnekamsk, Novosibirsk, Vologda, and Yakutia. Various regions are also engaged in this process. In 2019, for example, the Rostov region presented its own report: *Towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and in February 2020, a 2nd report, Regions of the Russian Federation: the Republic of Tatarstan and the SDGs*, was launched.

In most countries in the region, the role of LRGs in planning is quite limited. Nevertheless, the Global Agendas have, to some extent, managed to trickle down into strategic documents and planning. In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, the national government has approved the Strategy for Regional Development, which acknowledges the subsidiarity principle and discusses the decentralization of public governance, providing incentives for socio-economic development through local, self-governing bodies. Despite these commitments, urban policy implementation in Kyrgyzstan still remains a predominantly top-down process. In **Ukraine**, thanks to the implementation of decentralizing reform, all 25 of the country's regions have fully approved and implemented regional development strategies that have been developed with public participation. The Association of Ukrainian Cities is a partner in the Sustainability Leadership Programme of the EU Eastern Partnership. Within the context of this programme, a meeting was held with Ukrainian municipalities in order to map out their needs and the challenges that they face when localizing the SDGs and to better define the programme in line with this mapping.

In **Georgia**, the secretariat of the SDGs has already drawn up an action plan for the effective localization of the SDGs; this is in line with the Decentralization Strategy of the government,

which was adopted in 2019. The national association of local authorities (NALAG) reports having created indicators for the local level.

## Europe

In Finland, "most municipalities have sustainability related goals as a part of their strategic processes" (45% of Finns live in a municipality committed to carbon neutrality by 2030).<sup>29</sup> Helsinki was among the first cities in Europe to develop a VLR, followed by the cities of Espoo and Turku.<sup>30</sup> In 2019, the Åland islands received recognition from the European Commission for their Development and Sustainability Agenda, which is aligned with the environmental and social pillars of the SDGs. The Association of Finnish Municipalities is currently working on the development of a series of social SDG indicators. With support from the private sector, it has created the *Mayorsindicators.com* tool for municipalities to help them benchmark their SDG implementation processes. This acts as a complement to the Sustainable City programme website (*kestavakaupunki.fi*).

In **Austria**, the national LGA: *Österreichischer Städtebund*, has been particularly active in raising awareness (through brochures, tools, and events). It has disseminated information about the efforts made by cities like Vienna, Steiermark, and Kremsmünster, and several municipalities.<sup>31</sup>

In **Bulgaria**, the mobilization process is being facilitated by international cooperation. The municipality of Sofia has participated in the "Mobilizing European young people in support of the SDGs (Walk the Global Walk)" initiative (which was launched in 2018 and supported by the European Commission). The Platform of Partners for Good Democratic Governance at the Local Level was created in 2019 with the support of the national LGA and the Council of Europe. In **Estonia**, a 2017 administrative reform resulted in the merger of many local government bodies (whose number was reduced from 213 to 79) to strengthen their capacities and support more balanced regional development. The majority of local governments are engaged in the development of comprehensive plans that will include the SDGs.

In **Moldova**, 14 towns and municipalities currently benefit from a project to support the implementation of the National Regional Development Strategy for 2016-2020. This includes a series of integrated and sustainable urban development projects. However, no work on SDGs has been carried out by the LGA yet due to a "lack of commitment amongst public authorities in the

country”.<sup>32</sup> In **Slovenia**, since 2015, the association ZMOS has played a coordinating role in the preparation of sustainable urban development strategies, which are compatible with the SDGs, in 11 municipalities. The Association of Municipalities and Towns has recently started to design an initiative to localize SDG indicators, which will enable it to monitor SDG implementation at the local level. Several examples of this are mentioned in the VNR on municipal initiatives for pursuing the majority of the SDGs. In **North Macedonia**, the city of Split has participated in the “Shaping Fair Cities: Integrate 2030 Agenda” initiative, which examines local policies at times of great migration, and also a refugee flow project.<sup>33</sup> Within the framework of this project, the cities involved have developed a campaign to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda. The VNR mention is the next step in the process; the priority is the alignment of municipal action plans with the Agenda 2030 and to identify SDG accelerators to help localize the 2030 Agenda.

### Latin America

#### “The 2030 Agenda is a territorial agenda” (Argentina’s VNR)

In **Argentina**, the national government has signed agreements with 20 (of 24) provinces to implement the SDGs.<sup>34</sup> Seventeen provinces presented progress reports between 2017 and 2019. An SDG network of provinces emerged in 2018 to facilitate coordination, exchanges, monitoring and the development of indicators. Municipalities also benefited from tools, workshops and training sessions. Local government organizations in different provinces have promoted new local development plans using the SDGs as a reference. The city of Buenos Aires has been at the forefront of the localization process, aligning local plans, raising awareness (e.g. the Youth Olympic Games 2018) and developing its VLRs.

**Honduras** has made progress in the inclusion of the SDGs in its regional planning agendas to foster the “territorialisation of the 2030 Agenda”.<sup>35</sup> The VNR reports on the progress made by a number of municipalities with their municipal development plans (265) and strategic plans focused on results (185). However, the implementation has been rather limited. Training and tools are being undertaken (by 62 municipalities and 21 inter-municipal agencies). The association AMHON is one of the main partners of the government in this programme.

**Panama** has linked its strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to progress in deconcentration and decentralization,

## Localization, as expressed through efforts to mainstream the SDGs into local development plans and policies, appears to be a prominent objective in the strategies adopted by an increasing number of countries.

strengthening planning (in particular, regional plans), and institutional coordination. More specifically, the programme against poverty (*Plan Colmena*) looks to strengthen the LRGs (municipalities, governors and *corregimientos*).

In **Peru**, as mentioned above, the mid-term national development strategies aligned with the SDGs have included territorial integrated development plans to advance in the localization process. The new implementation strategy adopted in May 2018 mentions “effective decentralization” as one of its five priorities. It is worth noting that cities such Chimbote and Trujillo have drafted their own VLRs on SDG 11 with the support of the *Foro Ciudades para la Vida* and UN-Habitat, and that Lima has committed to presenting its first VLR in 2021.

This quick review of the localization efforts in the majority of countries reporting this year shows positive progress compared to previous years (2016-2019). Localization, as expressed through efforts to mainstream the SDGs into local development plans and policies, appears to be a prominent objective in the strategies adopted by an increasing number of countries. There is a sort of groundswell towards mainstreaming the SDGs into local plans in almost all regions.

At the same time, the examples show how much an institutional enabling environment is needed to boost local action. An essentially top-down approach continues to prevail in many countries, which cannot always be explained by the institutional weakness of their local government bodies. The example of Benin shows how, even in a less developed country, local governments can ensure that a critical role is given to the localization effort. What is clear is that the different modalities and scopes of the localization processes depend on the structures and progress made by local institutions and their ability to promote greater local ownership and actions.

Decentralization is essential for empowering local governance and for providing local institutions with the necessary technical assistance and means to propel mobilization in local communities. At the same time, it requires making greater efforts to strengthen the existing institutional frameworks, to foster collaboration and to improve coordination between different levels of government. The crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how collaboration and solidarity are essential foundation stones upon which to build our responses to the current challenges and to try to catch up with our quest to deliver the SDGs within the next decade.

The following Subsection analyses the trends in the localization process regarding non-reporting countries in 2020.

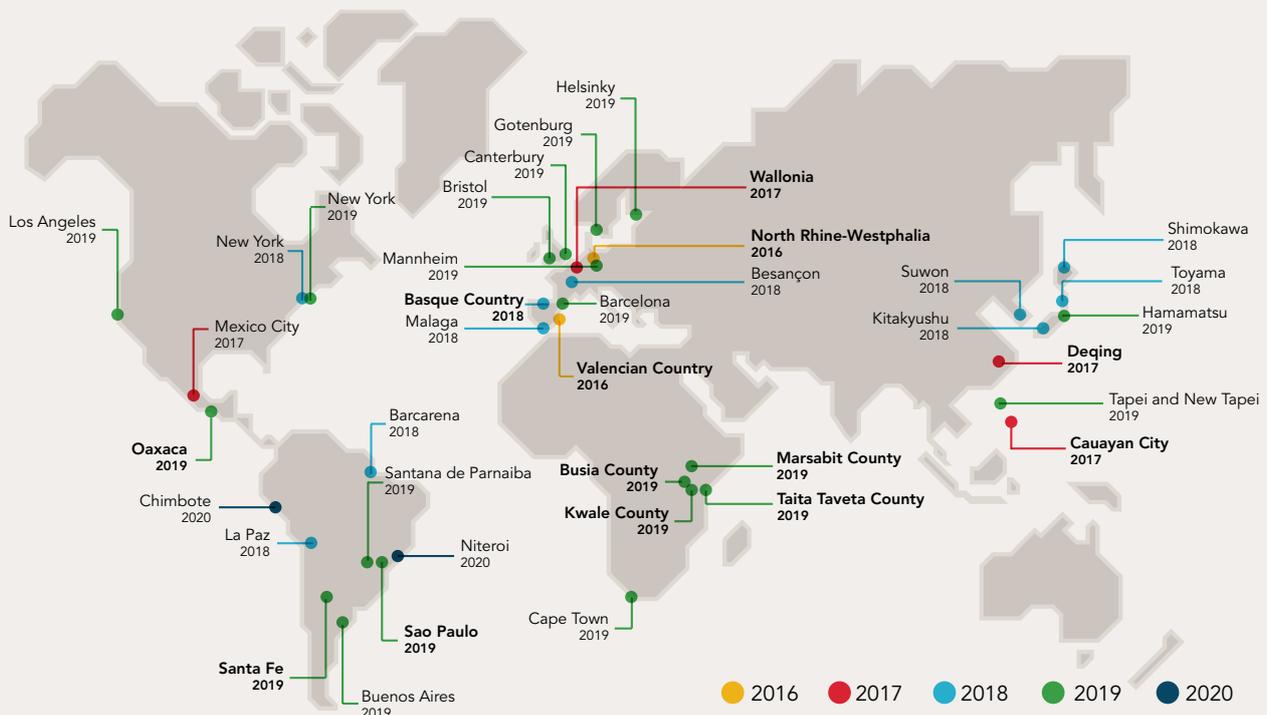
### Local and regional government actions, region-by-region

Following the trends observed in previous years, evident progress and innovative efforts can be highlighted in all regions of the world when referring to the localization of the SDGs, albeit with different scopes and at different paces. This is precisely the aim of this Subsection, which draws on the information extracted from different sources: 1) the surveys collected by the GTF (see Box 2.1 in Section 2. Methodology); 2) previous VNRs; 3) the regional reports compiled for the Fifth Report of the Global Observatory of Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD V); and 4) the reporting efforts made by frontrunner LRGs to develop their own VLRs (see Box 3.2).

#### Box 3.2

### Voluntary Local Reviews<sup>36</sup>

Over the past few years, VLRs have become a common tool used by cities and regions to present the outcomes and results of the localization of the SDGs in their territories. While the UN-led monitoring system is designed to engage national governments, VLRs are a tool that LRGs have employed to contribute, share and learn. Since 2017, at least 40 VLRs have been collected (see figure).<sup>37</sup> Many other LRGs are also currently in the process of producing VLRs. These frontrunner VLRs have had an important impact on the international legitimacy of LRG reporting and have also fostered changes at the local level: many of them are testaments to the de-siloing nature of the SDG framework and have prompted the LRGs producing them to engage in more transversal, cross-sector initiatives, institutional creation and decision-making.



Source: UCLG and UN-Habitat, *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews. Volume 1. A Comparative Analysis of Existing VLRs*. Provincial/state-level governments in bold.

## Africa

Throughout the continent, LRGs and their networks are actively supporting the localization process. They have developed dissemination and communication tools and organized numerous workshops and training sessions to raise awareness of the SDGs. Besides the countries that are reporting this year, in countries like **Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda** and **Zimbabwe**, LGAs have ensured the continuity of earlier efforts to actively involve their members.<sup>38</sup> LRGs from 19 countries have answered the GTF survey in 2020, the majority of which are national LGAs.<sup>39</sup> Their answers show progress in raising awareness and in the adoption of strategies and action plans for the different localization processes and for efforts to support the alignment of the SDGs with local strategies.<sup>40</sup> Even so, only seven countries answered positively regarding the monitoring of local implementation.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the countries that are reporting this year, African LGAs stress the difficulties that they encounter when trying to take part in national consultation and coordination processes relating to the SDGs (e.g. Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Mali, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe). Only Madagascar, Rwanda, and South Africa consider that their participation was satisfactory.

In Eastern Africa, the **Rwanda** Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA) has partnered the national government to strengthen LRG capacities; it is also working with various different partners on a number of pilot actions (e.g. with GIZ for SDG 5, and CLGF for alignment

monitoring tools). In **Madagascar**, several municipalities (including Morondava) and regions (Atsimo-Andrefana, Menabe, Androy and Anosy) are now aligning their development plans with the SDGs.

In Western Africa, the Association of **Cape Verde** Municipalities (ANMCV) is currently leading a project in partnership with UNDP to support the localization of SDGs in nine municipalities. In **Burkina Faso**, the programme to strengthen LRGs includes a component to support local development plans linked to the SDGs. The LGA of **Ghana** (NALAG) addressed the question of the SDGs at its 2019 national conference. It has undertaken SDG training sessions and made efforts to align medium-term district development plans with the national development plan and the SDGs. The Association of Municipalities of **Mali** (AMM) is now implementing an EU-funded programme to support the localization of the SDGs in 100 of its municipalities before 2021. In June 2019, **Togo** held its first local elections for more than three decades. Its LRGs are now benefitting from training to support the alignment of its local plans with the SDGs (although this is still at an incipient phase).<sup>42</sup> In **Cameroon**, Central Africa, efforts for the alignment of the SDGs are also being planned (e.g. Nguemendouka and Mbona).

In Southern Africa, the **South African** Local Government Association (SALGA) has built on previous initiatives<sup>43</sup> and is working in partnership with UN agencies, UCLG-Africa and ICLEI to develop workshops, and promote the alignment of local plans with national strategies and the SDGs. SALGA also uses the “municipal barometer” web-based portal and its smart mobile application, working in close collaboration with Statistics South Africa, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research to develop disaggregated local data.<sup>44</sup> Several cities (e.g. Durban) have aligned their plans with the national development plan and the SDGs. CLGF has launched pilot initiatives to assess how local economic development can help local governments deliver the SDGs in Botswana, Eswatini, Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In North Africa, in **Tunisia**, the National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities (FNVT), with the support of partners, is leading a project to develop strategic plans to help localize the SDGs (e.g. in 10 cities involved in the Madinatouna project<sup>45</sup>). In addition, the municipalities of Monastir and Tozeur are the pilot territories for an initiative promoted by UN-Habitat and the national government to develop indicators aligned to the SDGs.

Madagascar  
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## Asia-Pacific

In the ASPAC region, 70% of the LGAs and LRGs from the ten countries that answered the survey affirmed that within their organizations they have either a good or a very good knowledge of the SDGs.<sup>46</sup> LGAs are adopting strategies and actions plans, developing campaigns to raise awareness, organizing communication events, and providing training and technical assistance. Only 45% are aware of initiatives to monitor and report at the local level.<sup>47</sup> With the exceptions of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the majority of the LGAs and LRGs that responded to the survey mentioned that they were consulted during the reporting process for the preparation of the VNRs. Their participation was, however, limited. With regard to their involvement in coordination mechanisms, the findings were similar: 30% were consulted on an *ad hoc* basis and 48% on a regular basis.<sup>48</sup>

Local government networks, such as UCLG-ASPAC and Citynet,<sup>49</sup> and a wide range of other actors are currently contributing to the emergence of local initiatives, supporting dissemination and training, and providing technical assistance. These also include regional organizations such as UNESCAP, ASEAN, the Asian Development Bank and the regional offices of LRG global organizations like AIMF, C40, CLGF, ICLEI and Regions4.

LRGs in **Indonesia**, **Japan** and **Korea** are among the frontrunners in SDG alignment, while those in **Australia** and **New Zealand** increasingly refer to the SDGs as a framework. In **Malaysia**, the national government is supporting local initiatives. In **Vietnam**, it is the provinces that are taking the lead. In other countries, such **Cambodia**, **Laos**, **Sri Lanka** and **Pakistan**, on the other hand, difficult circumstances and more limited local capacities are hampering the development of local initiatives.

In **Japan**, over 30 cities and towns are involved in the implementation of the SDGs, with the support of the national government through the “Future City Initiative”.<sup>50</sup> In **Korea**, the Korea Local Government Alliance for Sustainable Development, the Local Sustainability Alliance of Korea and ICLEI Korea have proposed a multi-stakeholder shadow report on SDG 11 for cities. Five metropolitan and regional governments (Seoul, Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do, Chugbuk-do and Chungnam-do) and eight local governments (Suwon, Dangjin, Yeosu, Damyang, Dobogn-gu, Gangbuk-gu, Michuhol-gu, and Bupyeong-gu) have already finished the task of developing local SDG monitoring systems.<sup>51</sup>

In **Indonesia**, SDGs are being mainstreamed at all three of Indonesia’s development planning levels.<sup>52</sup> The Association of Indonesian Municipal Governments (APEKSI) and UCLG-ASPAC

(supported by the EU) are currently running the LOCALISE SDGs project, which was launched in July 2018, to promote awareness and deliver technical support to help integrate the SDGs into the local development plans of 16 provinces and 14 cities. Foundations, academia and UN agencies, with UNDP at the forefront, have also been promoting various initiatives on the SDGs at the subnational level.<sup>53</sup> LRGs have underlined several obstacles to advance in the localization process, particularly in the coordination between their provincial, city and local level administrations.<sup>54</sup>

In the **Philippines**, both the League of Cities (LCP) and the League of Municipalities (LMP) have been active in SDG localization. The report sent to the Senate by the League of Cities mentions three programmes designed to support city initiatives: the LCP City Database Project (2016-2019 to consolidate city data), the Liveable Cities Challenge (a competition to design better solutions), and the City System Capacity Development Project (to improve children’s learning at primary level), as well as other programmes undertaken with partners (including local initiatives on gender advocacy, and building up climate resilience through urban plans and designs).<sup>55</sup> More than 30 cities are now developing projects related to the Global Agendas. **Malaysia** has made efforts to align the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda with national development plans and the Ministry of Local Government has developed local indicators for the SDGs. Subang Jaya, for example, has aligned its policies to the SDGs and its Strategic Plan 2025.

In **Cambodia**, alignment and implementation are still at only a preliminary stage. In **Sri Lanka**, LRGs are often bypassed by the national government and not consulted in the VNR process.<sup>56</sup> The *LEAD* project, promoted by UCLG-ASPAC in **Pakistan**, promotes greater awareness of the SDGs in various districts of Balochistan, Punjab and Sindh provinces and is trying to develop an SDG-aligned plan in four pilot districts.

In **New Zealand**, the central and local governments are working together (through the LGNZ) and have joined forces to monitor the progress towards the SDGs and towards improving wellbeing measures on a regional basis.<sup>57</sup>

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**In all regions, LRGs and their networks are actively supporting the localization process.**



Belarus (Photo: Dmitry-vechorko-MRMnkiJE7nA-unsplash)

## Eurasia

Involvement of LRGs is growing in the region, facilitated by several conferences around different issues related to the SDGs and the Global Agendas.<sup>58</sup> Actually, a common feature of Eurasian countries is that national governments acknowledge the significant responsibilities of LRGs with regard to the implementation of the SDGs. Even so, their role is only understood as being that of an implementing agency for initiatives and objectives defined by central government.<sup>59</sup> However, relations between the different levels of government are evolving and there is a tendency towards greater participation. In response, LRGs are redefining their development strategies (e.g. in **Belarus** and **Kazakhstan**) to reflect the need to improve urban infrastructures (including housing, water supply networks, sewage treatment plants and central heating systems). Progress has also been observed with respect to the participation of women in local elected bodies.<sup>60</sup> In **Kazakhstan**, there is growing interest, at the grassroots level of civil society, in fairer and more empowering planning at the local level. This has raised the profile of more decentralized urban development processes that more clearly connect with local priorities and needs. Since 2017, both **Azerbaijan** and **Tajikistan** have been planning to integrate the 2030 Agenda into their respective national and subnational plans and budget allocations. Cities and regions such Minsk, Vitebsk and Almaty often supported by international organizations, are progressively integrating the SDGs into their development strategies.<sup>61</sup>

## Europe

In line with the trends observed in previous years, great efforts have been made by LRGs and their associations in Europe to accelerate action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. According to the results of an annual survey launched by CEMR and PLATFORMA about the localization of the SDGs, progress has been made regarding the level of awareness of the SDGs in Europe.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, this progress has not been homogenous. Northern and Western Europe lead the localization process in this region. In many countries (e.g. France, Italy, Spain, and the Baltic countries), engagement and mobilization around the SDGs is rising, while it remains more limited in Ireland and Central Europe, and it is still only just emerging in East and South-East Europe (with the exception of Serbia, where LRGs are more committed).

Hundreds of European LRGs have adopted the SDGs as guidelines and frameworks, aligned them with their local development plans and policies, and developed related advocacy strategies at both the national and European levels. Almost all European LGAs have integrated the SDGs into their policies and activities. Out of the 33 LGAs from 27 countries that responded to the CEMR/PLATFORMA survey, 82% are aware of and refer to the SDGs, and even use them as an important point of reference in their strategies, compared to 31% in 2019. The majority have adopted specific policy documents or plans to deal with the SDGs, following integrated approaches and developing activities to advise and support their members

(60%).<sup>63</sup> One crucial point for LRG and LGA actions related to the SDGs in Europe is collaboration with national governments and EU institutions.<sup>64</sup> Meeting the SDGs requires multilevel collaboration between all levels of government, and the role of LGAs has been determinant in this regard. In general, the coordination mechanisms

on the SDGs “have proven to have had a positive impact on the relations between LRGs and their associations and central governments”,<sup>65</sup> but progress is still required with the consultation mechanisms.<sup>66</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the answers given by LRGs to the European survey, see Box 3.3.

### Box 3.3

## A brief analysis of LRG answers to the survey on Europe

Besides the 31 LGAs (mentioned above), 51 LRGs also responded to the survey. The majority were cities of different sizes (29), followed by departments or provinces (11) and regions (8), as well as some subnational networks of LRGs (in Spain and France). The bulk of the respondents were from Spain and France, followed by Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Finland. The answers to the LGA surveys were analysed by CEMR and PLATFORMA.<sup>67</sup> This Box briefly analyses the answers provided by the LRGs.

While 82% of LGAs were aware of, or used, the SDGs as a framework of reference in their daily work, this percentage dropped to 52% for LRGs, with 30% stating that the majority of the staff working for their institution had only heard about the SDGs but not worked on them. Intermediary and regional-level government organizations showed a higher level of awareness. 37% of LRGs had adopted political statements to support the SDGs and 48% had approved specific strategies and action plans (for LGAs, these percentages were 31% and 41% respectively). To ensure their implementation, 52% of LRGs had developed awareness and dissemination activities, while 18% had organized training sessions and provided technical assistance. The Basque Country incentivises the coordination between the regional, provincial and municipal levels for the alignment and monitoring and has created a specific fund to this aim. Flemish municipalities stand out for the initiatives relating to the SDGs; the municipality of Harelbeke, for example, has integrated SDGs in all municipal policies and has been appointed as an SDG-voice by the Belgian federal government. Utrecht launched an awareness campaign: *Utrecht4GlobalGoals*. The Barcelona Provincial Council has developed a training strategy for municipalities and guidelines for the localization process. It has also offered technical and financial support to help develop local plans aligned with the SDGs.

64% of the respondents had aligned their SDGs with local strategies and development plans, but there were still some LRGs that had not (e.g. 12 municipalities in Spain). The Lombardy region organized a multi-stakeholder formal signature to launch its Regional Strategy for Sustainable Development, in September 2019. In France, some LRGs have adopted different approaches for SDG alignment: from holistic ones (Normandy) to other approaches centred on climate change (Centre Val de Loire). A group of six Norwegian municipalities and regions, together with the national LRG association KS and international partners, have created a network to join forces in localizing the SDGs and to accelerate impact. Czech LRGs have aligned their policies to the SDGs through the Local Agenda 21 initiative and the Healthy Cities initiative (130 municipalities). In Sweden, several municipalities have integrated the SDG framework in their municipal budgets and programmes.

60% of the LRGs pointed out that they are trying to carry out monitoring and reporting efforts, while 40% were not. However, almost all of them said that they wanted to work on local indicators (90%). Some of the LRGs in Spain stated that they publish periodical reports (as a VLR by Valencia), have developed their own indicators (the province of Jaen), or support initiatives to report through a national think tank (Red Española para el Desarrollo Sostenible, with the support of the LGA of Spain, FEMP). In France, some LRGs are currently using the annual report on sustainable development, which is mandatory for any LRGs with more than 50,000 inhabitants, to report on the SDGs. In Belgium, municipalities are working with their LGA (VVSG) to develop localized indicators. In the Netherlands, Utrecht is developing a local SDG monitor for Healthy Urban Living for All and working with the national LGA (VNG) and other cities.

Finally, with regard to the involvement of LRGs in the governance of the SDGs (in the definition of national strategies for the implementation of the SDGs, in the reporting processes to the UN, and in the national coordination mechanisms) the participation of LRGs tended to be more limited than that of national LGAs. For example, with regard to the VNR reporting process, only 43% of the respondents considered that they were associated with the reporting processes; for the majority of participants (42%).

At the EU level, the main sustainability-related challenge for the coming decade is to decouple its economic development from environmental degradation and to overcome the remaining social inequalities in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda.<sup>68</sup> LRGs are key to this purpose and they are triggering regional and national policies in important fields related to the SDGs (the environment, public services, education, health, and economic and territorial development) and to reinforce the existing consensus to upscale territorial priorities within the framework of EU policy.<sup>69</sup> Many LRG networks have established task forces in which members share information and experience on the implementation of the SDGs in their respective countries and ensure the advocacy towards the European Commission. Among the regional networks that are particularly active and have contributed to the 2030 Agenda with specific knowledge, the following are worth mentioning: the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Eurocities, the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, and also the Network of Associations of Local Authorities (NALAS) in South-East Europe. Many international networks are particularly active at the European level (CLGF, C40, ICLEI, Regions4, UCLG, etc.) At subnational levels, there are also a lot of networks, such as the Network of Cities and Towns for Sustainability in Spain, which is operative in the province of Barcelona.<sup>70</sup>

European LRGs have developed important decentralized cooperation strategies as a channel to promote exchanges, synergies, support and solidarity linked to the SDGs. PLATFORMA is currently playing a particularly important role in promoting the alignment of decentralized cooperation with the Global Agendas, as well as in advocacy work, targeting the EU, on international cooperation.

While European LRG associations and networks are among the most advanced in the localization of the Global Agendas, there is still a need to develop strong, up-to-date, local databases in many countries, and also at the pan-European level to enable cities and regions to monitor their progress more efficiently (for more information, see Subsection 5.2 on the means of implementation).

Among the key challenges identified by the CEMR/PLATFORMA, in its survey on how to strengthen the localization movement in Europe, LGAs mentioned the need for increased support and acknowledgment from national governments to localize the SDGs and promote learning

between peers at the European Union and international level; strengthened multilevel and multi-stakeholder partnerships as a prerequisite for implementation of the SDGs; the allocation of funds and increase support dedicated to the localization of the SDGs; maximization of the functions of LRG associations to help bolster SDG awareness-raising initiatives and accelerate the localization process; and the provision of relevant information to subnational governments, including support to collect inclusive, transparent and available data to monitor progress.<sup>71</sup>

### Latin America and the Caribbean

(Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries)

In Latin America, the main associations and networks of LRGs operating in the region are: the Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Latin America (FLACMA), Mercociudades, AL-LAs (Euro-Latin-American Alliance for the Cooperation between Cities), and the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI), all four of which have now regrouped in the platform CORDIAL; and the Confederation of Associations of Municipalities of Central America and the Caribbean (CAMCAYCA). These associations have all integrated the 2030 Agenda into their respective agendas and have organised several workshops and training actions.

Ten national LGAs and 25 LRGs answered the GTF survey.<sup>72</sup> Half of the answers received mentioned that the institutions concerned had already adopted SDG strategies and action plans, while another 31% had made public their commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda. To support this implementation, 53% have already organized workshops, conferences and training events, 30% have run awareness campaigns, and 15% are now offering technical assistance with local development plans. 65% of the answers received mentioned that they were taking initiatives to align their strategies and plans with the SDGs. A small majority (56%) mentioned local initiatives to monitor the implementation of the SDGs.<sup>73</sup> The participation of LRGs in Latin America during the reporting process through consultation and coordination mechanisms has resulted in limited progress being made in the last year. However, there are still no LGAs involved in Chile, Mexico and Paraguay. In some countries, participation at the national level has stagnated or even decreased (as in Brazil).

The LGAs from Bolivia, Brazil and the Dominican Republic, along with those from the previously mentioned reporting countries (Argentina, Costa

Rica and Ecuador) have been very active in the promotion of advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. Many major cities (including Bogota, Brasilia, Buenos Aires, La Paz, Medellin, Mexico, Montevideo and Sao Paulo) and middle-sized cities and regional authorities (such as Cordoba and Santa Fe, in Argentina; Parana, in Brazil; and Campeche and Oaxaca, in Mexico) are also taking the lead in the localization process within this region.

In **Bolivia**, the city of La Paz developed a very complete strategy (2019) for the localization of 16 SDGs that covers the alignment of its policies, actions, monitoring and reporting.<sup>74</sup> As well as La Paz, the Association of Municipalities of Bolivia (AMB) also supports the “territorialization” of the SDGs and their integration into the local integrated development plans of three cities (Tarija, Sucre, and El Alto). In the same vein, the Association of Bolivian Women Local Councillors (ACOBOL) is promoting local economic empowerment initiatives based on the SDGs in 33 municipalities, supporting 27 mayoresses, and working against gender violence.<sup>75</sup>

In **Brazil**, the national LGAs: the *Confederação Nacional de Municípios* (CNM) and the *Frente Nacional de Prefeitos*, have continued efforts that began in previous years. The CNM currently offers training, carries out online campaigns (CNM Bate-papo), supports the Municipal Women’s Movement and female local leaders in 16 municipalities through the project *Innova Juntos*, and also awards local practices related to SDGs (*MuniCiencia*). Following previous efforts initiated with the “mandala” to develop local indicators, the CNM is now revising its methodology (*Mandala 2.0*) with a view to reinforcing prioritization and results-oriented planning strategies.<sup>76</sup> Within Brazil, the State of Parana is currently mainstreaming the SDGs within its multiannual plan, as it sees the SDGs as a powerful tool to help reduce territorial disparities and support municipalities with the support of the regional LGA, AMP.<sup>77</sup> The city of Sao Paulo has adopted the 2030 Agenda as a framework for public policies (2018), defined a programme for the 2030 Agenda and adopted a set of indicators (August 2019).<sup>78</sup> Belo Horizonte and Brasilia have also aligned their strategic plans (PEDF 2019/2060 for the Federal District, and *Belo Horizonte 2030*).<sup>79</sup> Dozens of Brazilian municipalities have promoted awareness-raising activities, aligned their plans, and developed institutional arrangements to involve local stakeholders.<sup>80</sup> After Barcarena, in 2017, Niteroi produced its first VLR in 2020.

In **Colombia**, the national government reaffirmed its strategy for the alignment of local development plans. This involved an important effort.<sup>81</sup> The Colombian Federation of

## In Latin America, national LGAs have been very active in the promotion of advocacy and awareness raising.

Municipalities (FCM) has also promoted various projects that contribute to different SDGs. In Bogota, the recently elected mayor has created spaces for debate in order to follow-up on the SDGs in the existing city plan (*Bogotá mejor para Todos 2016-2020*) and to incorporate them within the new plan for 2020-2024 with the aim of accelerating their implementation. Medellin has already integrated the SDGs into its development plan and in 2019. It has also run various awareness-raising campaigns and training sessions (or *Cátedras Medellín*) to help social organizations to localize the SDGs, and has organized a “World Cup for the SDGs” for women’s soccer.

In the **Dominican Republic**, in previous years FEDOMU presented the roadmap for the “Municipal 2030 Agenda” to its municipalities. It also integrated a coordination platform at the national level to promote SDGs, and followed the UN MAPS mission for the prioritization of the SDGs.<sup>82</sup> In **Mexico**, the National Conference of Governors has promoted the creation of specific offices for the follow-up and implementation of the SDGs in 31 states, but not all are fully operational yet.<sup>83</sup> In 2019, only nine states had reached an advanced level of alignment (these include Campeche, Colima, Hidalgo, Mexico, Morelos and Oaxaca), seven had aligned with the guiding principles, and 19 had not yet begun with the initiative. After Mexico City, the state of Oaxaca has also developed its own VLR.

In **Uruguay**, six departments have worked with the national government, UNDP and academia to develop: awareness-raising and training campaigns; a roadmap that follows the UNDP’s Rapid Integrated Assessment methodology; and the alignment of, several initiatives designed to implement the SDGs.<sup>84</sup> The city of Montevideo has implemented a new approach for reporting on SDGs called “government commitments”. It has done this to improve transparency and accountability, and the city also plans to launch its first VLR in June 2020.<sup>85</sup>

Other LGAs, such as those in **Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala** and **Paraguay**, have taken rather more modest steps towards SDG localization, although some municipalities are making significant progress.<sup>86</sup>

### The Middle East and West Asia

In the MEWA region, with the exception of Turkey, the empowerment of LRGs and thus SDG localization are still a pending matter. Turkey, Lebanon and Palestine are essentially the only MEWA countries with established local government organizations. In **Turkey**, the Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT) participated in the VNR drafting process in 2019. As with the regional Municipal Union of Marmara, it has organized workshops and seminars on the SDGs for its member municipalities. In addition, several LRGs are currently raising awareness: Nilufer, Nevsehir and Seferihisar. Bakirköy, Esenler and Maltepe, and have already developed their own local reports on the SDGs.<sup>87</sup>

Despite its difficult local context, the **Palestinian** association of local authorities (APLA) has aligned its strategy for the years 2019-2022 with the SDGs,<sup>88</sup> launched awareness-raising campaigns for its local authorities to promote the localization of the SDGs,<sup>89</sup> and worked with partners to develop the Municipal Technical Exchange Hubs project that also supports the SDGs.<sup>90</sup>

### North America and the English and French speaking Caribbean region

Several high-profile, pioneering cities (Montreal, Los Angeles, New York City, San Jose, and Toronto) in North America have initiated efforts that explicitly pursue the SDGs and have embedded them in their local strategies and medium-term planning objectives. In smaller territories, sometimes LRGs are not explicitly using the SDGs as part of their development policy framework or are not “branding” their policy decisions and initiatives within the SDG framework. Even so, their actions often address fundamental issues relating to sustainable development. They usually work in partnership with NGOs, the public and private sectors, and grassroots organizations to achieve them.

Relevant actions and initiatives have been implemented by actors within the “ecosystem” of North America's LGAs. These include that of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities,<sup>91</sup> which is involved in partnerships with civic organizations and non-profit institutions (IISD, SDSN, Canadian Urban Institute, etc.).

In **Belize**, the city of Belmopan has implemented a City Urban Development Plan and a Blue Green Network in alignment with SDG 11.<sup>92</sup> In the Caribbean, **Jamaica** stands out for having adopted an SDG implementation framework and strategy in 2017, which explicitly acknowledges the crucial role of local governments.

⋮ Istanbul, Turkey  
⋮ (Photo: Svetlana Gumerova, unsplash)



## Actions of the global networks of local and regional governments

Throughout 2019 and 2020, the networks that form part of the GTF have continued to work intensely with their members with the aim of achieving the Global Agendas and, in particular, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Set up in 2013 and facilitated by UCLG, the GTF is a consultation mechanism that brings together the 25 major international LRG networks to undertake joint advocacy work on global policy processes.<sup>93</sup>

The GTF co-organises the Local and Regional Governments Forum within the framework of the HLPF and has actively promoted the development of VLRs as well as the structural engagement of LRGs in the VNRs. The following segment provides an overview of specific work developed by the different networks.

**AL-LAs** has promoted the preparation of VLRs with its partners in Latin America (Montevideo 2020) and has facilitated the exchange of experiences on the localization of the SDGs. In coordination with Metropolis and UCLG, it has launched [www.citiesforglobalhealth.org](http://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org): a virtual space to showcase what cities are currently doing and their plans to combat the COVID-19 outbreak and other health emergencies.<sup>94</sup>

Throughout 2019-2020, the **Assembly of European Regions** (AER) has organized a regional conference called "Agenda 2030: Transforming Regions, Changing the World" (postponed until 2021). It has also helped its member regions develop regional sustainable strategies aligned to the SDGs and advocated for their presence in SDG-related fora and in activities promoting SDG implementation through the AER Taskforce on Sustainable Development.<sup>95</sup>

The **C40** has focussed on the decarbonisation of societies and fostered the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration (which contributes primarily to SDG 2). It has also issued the C40 Clean Air Cities Declaration to reduce emissions in cities and improve their air quality. The C40 Cities Knowledge Hub facilitates exchanges amongst its members. It has also put in place the new City-Business Climate Alliance.<sup>96</sup>

**Cités Unies France** created a working group on SDGs in 2018 that contributed to the Guidelines developed by the French Committee 21 on the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. This organization supports the efforts of LRGs to mainstream the SDGs within their international cooperation programmes and to participate in international activities and conferences.

The **Council of European Municipalities and Regions** (CEMR) and **PLATFORMA** have been active in advocacy work on localizing the SDGs toward the European Commission. They launched the report *How local & regional government associations bring the SDGs to life*<sup>97</sup> and in September 2019 PLATFORMA presented the 4th edition of the European Days of Local Solidarity at the EuropeAid InfoPoint Lunchtime Conference.<sup>98</sup>

The **Commonwealth Local Government Forum** (CLGF) has continued advocating and organising regional awareness-raising events (15) in Commonwealth countries and has developed knowledge products related to localizing the SDGs (e.g. local economic development and gender equality). In partnership with national LGAs and ministries of local government, the CLGF has worked in nine countries developing plans to localize SDGs and establish M&E systems.<sup>99</sup>

**FLACMA** has created a Commission on the 2030 Agenda, supported by thematic committees. It promotes regional and subregional events, municipal cooperation programmes and projects to exchange experiences delivering the SDGs (e.g. Project SDGs-Municipalities). The federation promotes exchanges between Latin American municipal networks relating to gender equality and SDGs, and encourages the involvement of its members in national reporting processes, monitoring and training activities.

The **Global Fund for Cities Development** (FMDV) has supported ministries in charge of LRGs, helping them to develop strategies and instruments; providing them with technical assistance; encouraging peer-to-peer exchanges; providing training; and disseminating knowledge. At the global level, it has contributed to the development of the International Municipal Investment Fund (IMIF), in collaboration with UCLG and UNCDF, to support LRGs and encourage them to invest in SDGs.

**ICLEI - Local Government for Sustainability** includes ambitious cities interested in diagnosing the status of cities with regard to seven of the targets of SDG 11. It also helps its members to deliver SDGs and to prepare their VLRs. ICLEI is currently promoting "Daring Cities" (next conference, in October 2020): a virtual, action-oriented, forum to recognize and empower courageous urban leaders and encourage its partners to abandon business-as-usual and shift towards business-as-possible.

The **International Association of French Speaking Mayors** (AIMF) has set up a working group on SDGs and added the SDG perspective

to its ongoing city-to-city support for local policies: health, sanitation, waste management, access to water, education, entrepreneurship for women and young people. To face up to the COVID-19 crisis, it has mobilized EUR 1.5 million to support LRGs in its partner countries.<sup>100</sup>

**Mercociudades** has created a bank of good practices on SDGs; an observatory to monitor collaboration between cities; and an academy to develop training initiatives and facilitate exchanges between its members. The aim is to provide a cooperation programme to contribute to the SDGs. This year's priorities are SDGs 11, 5, 6 and 10. Mercociudades regularly offers advocacy services at both the regional and national levels.<sup>101</sup>

**Metropolis** contributes to the 2030 Agenda through 38 metropolitan indicators (23 of which are aligned with the SDG indicators) and the Urban Sustainability Exchange platform (350+ urban cases have been indexed with the SDGs). Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this association, along with AL-LAs and UCLG, launched the website [citiesforglobalhealth.org](http://citiesforglobalhealth.org), to which over 550 initiatives have been uploaded by almost 100 LRGs.<sup>102</sup>

**Regions4** has launched the Community of Practice Regions4SDGs, which is the flagship initiative for the localization of the SDGs. It promotes the exchange of best practices and helps its member to develop strategies aligned with the SDGs. Regions4 also contributes to the SDGs through its thematic initiatives: RegionsAdapt to help accelerate climate adaptation; and the Regions4 Biodiversity Learning Platform to help with capacity building and cooperation.<sup>103</sup>

The **Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities** (UCCI) has fostered training action for localization with the support of stakeholders including UN agencies, international organizations and academia. Its Program of Comprehensive Cooperation supports various projects: awareness-raising tools, based on the experience of Quito; SDG strategies in Sao Paulo, Madrid; and the VLRs of La Paz and Buenos Aires. UCCI has pursued an advocacy strategy together with the CORDIAL alliance.<sup>104</sup>

**UCLG** has put the localization of SDGs at the heart of its strategy. Its learning agenda is organised around the localization of Global Agendas (4 modules). UCLG supported five national LGAs, helping them to develop Voluntary Subnational Reviews; facilitates a VLR Community of Practice; and launched its flagship report on the localization of the Global Agendas

(GOLD V) in November 2019. To combat the pandemic, UCLG has organized over 15 global Live Learning Experiences covering most of the SDGs and created a cooperation fund to support initiatives affected by COVID-19.<sup>105</sup>

Through its academy ALGA, **UCLG Africa** has organized: training sessions for trainers on localizing the SDGs and territorial planning (Accra); seminars on local plans, monitoring and reporting on SDGs; the 3rd edition of the annual Forum of Territorial Managers and Training Institutes (FAMI-2019); several events on culture and heritage to localize SDG 11.4; territorial coaching (involving 11 countries); and several other events.<sup>106</sup>

**UCLG-ASPAC** has incorporated the SDGs into its Strategic Plan and organized: training sessions in Kathmandu; a training-of-trainers course (in Bangladesh and Pakistan); and peer-learning sessions for mayors (in Indonesia and the Philippines). It has also collaborated with LGAs and aided their participation in the VNR process (Nepal). It is currently leading a project on SDG localization in Pakistan and Indonesia, with EU support, and participates in regional forums on sustainable development.<sup>107</sup>

**UCLG-Eurasia** has been a key stakeholder in, and contributor to, the first-ever Russian VNR, where it has been directly involved in work on SDGs 5, 9, 11, 13 and 17. UCLG-Eurasia has also participated in the All-Russian Congress of Municipalities and the Association of Volga Region Cities, taking part in the working group on SDG 11: "Sustainable Cities and Communities".<sup>108</sup>

**UCLG-MEWA** has organized a training session on methodology and alignment in Tehran and also worked with Izmir Metropolitan Municipality. It has supported the VLR processes of Izmir and Sultanbeyli (Turkey). It has also launched a project in coordination with the Human Development Foundation (INGEV) aiming to match the human development index with the SDG targets for the reports of Turkey, Jordan and Palestine.<sup>109</sup>

As highlighted in this Section, actions for localizing and implementing SDGs have been gaining ground in all regions. However, accelerated actions are required to deal with the current challenges and move forward at the speed and on the scale required, particularly now in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. Based on the results of the surveys conducted in 2020, LRGs and their associations will find both challenges and opportunities in the localization of the 2030 Agenda in their territories.

The major challenges that the localization of the 2030 Agenda poses for LGAs are: limited

support from national governments (in terms of administrative and financial support and capacity building); inadequate human resources, or weak capacities; and insufficient financial resources. For individual LRGs, besides the limited support received from national governments, the main challenge is the limited capacity for coordination across different levels of government and limited local interest and/or awareness (e.g. many local governments do not understand the SDGs, do not find them relevant, or see them as a new burden that does not fit in with local priorities). Challenges need to be tackled worldwide and, even when they are similar, LRGs tend to face them in different ways.

In the Africa and Asia-Pacific regions, LRGs require new governance frameworks, adequate resource mobilization, and more effective management to catalyse territorial development and boost SDG implementation. Eurasian LRGs are now pursuing decentralization and strengthening collaboration between different levels of government in order to limit top-down approaches. In Europe, LRGs are working to ensure that the sustainable commitments and the territorial dimension are considered in policy-making processes at the pan-European level, that there is multi-stakeholder dialogue, and that permanent institutional mechanisms are established. Latin American LRGs, for their part, need to work on creating favourable social and economic conditions that will reduce inequalities, foster enabling environments and establish institutional mechanisms. This should

be part of the solution and help them to advance towards achieving the sustainability agendas and mobilizing the capacities and resources of the different stakeholders. For the MEWA region, in spite of the historical legacy, which is linked to traditionally centralized processes and pressures associated with conflict situations, LRGs are working to create growth and drive through changes. They need to increase the autonomy and capacities of local government bodies by embracing the opportunities that the SDGs offer for their territories. Finally, in North America, LRGs must overcome increasing economic, social and political disparities. As a consequence, greater efforts must be made to leave no one behind and to advance in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In all regions, LRGs must be involved in the production and monitoring of the data used to assess progress in SDG implementation.

The new context created by the COVID-19 crisis obliges LRGs to respond to the current urgencies to ensure the safety and the protection of their communities, and the continuity of essential services and of adequate support for the most vulnerable. LRGs need to address the recovery from the pandemic mindful of the development agendas to ensure an inclusive process that can allow to truly bounce back and achieve the results that are expected from the global community by 2030. The following Section will address the initiatives and actions developed by LRGs to respond to the challenges created by the pandemic and bolster local actions to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.●

2019 Local and Regional Governments' Forum (Photo: UCLG Communication)



A young girl is shown from the chest up, smiling as she washes her hands under a stream of water. The water is splashing around her hands. The background is a blurred green, suggesting an outdoor setting. A large, diagonal graphic overlay in shades of red and orange is positioned in the bottom right corner of the image. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**4. Progress on goals and targets: bolstering local action to accelerate Implementation**

The examples of LRG actions included in Section 4 were collected by the different members of the GTF and particularly by: ARE, C40, CLGF, ICLEI, Regions4 and UCLG. The GTF would also like to acknowledge UN-Habitat and UNDP for sharing their data sources and selected case studies.

**In his report to the HLPF in 2020, the UN Secretary-General again underlined, in reference to the SDGs, that “the world is not on track to deliver by 2030”.<sup>1</sup> He also added that the magnitude of the impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic even threatens the progress made so far. “All of this underscores the need for international solidarity and cooperation more than ever before”, stated the UN Secretary-General.**

As shown in the previous Section, and in many reports, LRGs and their organizations are strongly committed to accelerating the delivery of the SDGs and their related agendas (the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the New Urban Agenda) through increasing their involvement efforts to promote localization.<sup>2</sup>

Urbanization is increasingly acknowledged as one of the megatrends shaping the future of our societies. Urban areas are the places where opportunities to foster economic prosperity, social inclusion, and low-carbon and more resilient societies are most concentrated. As a result, in the majority of recent UN reports, and particularly in the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019, the role of cities and of urban development has been identified as one of the six key “entry points” via which to accelerate the transformative development pathways. They have also highlighted the unique and crucial role that LRGs have played in this process.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, their contributions have also been decisive in facilitating the progress made in all the other five entry points as well as in activating many of the “levers”, particularly relating to governance, financing and collective action. The COVID-19 crisis has also brought local authorities to the forefront in order to help their communities. Indeed, their responses will help to reshape our future.

In order to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, alternative approaches are currently being implemented—by national governments, international institutions, and LRGs themselves—to measure the progress that has been made in cities and at the subnational level in general. The available analyses show a sharp contrast between cities and LRGs in the global North and

in the global South.<sup>4</sup> In the former (Europe and the United States), sources indicate that cities are making progress, even though greater efforts will be needed to achieve many of the SDGs. This will particularly apply to the environmental SDGs (12 and 13) and to SDG 10, given the inequalities in US cities and other cities.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, in the global South, with relatively few exceptions, progress has generally been modest and some setbacks have been observed.<sup>6</sup> In the Asian region, for example, UNESCAP considers that no subregion has made adequate progress along the urban and peri-urban development transformative area to meet the SDGs and has underlined some of the setbacks experienced in South and South West Asia.<sup>7</sup> In Africa, UNECA also qualify the progress made as “varied and at best modest”.<sup>8</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, UNECLAC considers that, despite improvements, cities are suffering and that there has been insufficient progress to overcome the main challenges.<sup>9</sup>

Following the approach adopted for the HLPF assessment in 2020, this Section will summarize and highlight initiatives promoted by LRGs that have contributed to the different entry points under assessment. This Section is introduced by Subsection 4.1, which will provide an overview of the responses developed by LRGs to deal with the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 crisis, which have radically transformed the global situation. It is followed by Subsection 4.2, which will introduce a brief selection of initiatives undertaken by LRGs for “Urban and peri-urban development”. It will also examine these initiatives within a much broader context. The rest of this Section will focus on LRG initiatives that have contributed to: “Advancing human wellbeing and ending hunger” (Subsection 4.3); “Protecting the planet and building resilience; and ensuring access to sustainable energy” (Subsection 4.4); and “Sharing economic benefits” (Subsection 4.5). The examples presented underline the role of the LRG networks, and particularly the forces assembled at the GTF, which are crucial for propelling city-to-city and region-to-region exchanges. They also play a key role in supporting the localization of the Global Agendas and establishing partnerships between national and subnational levels of government, international institutions and other stakeholders.<sup>10</sup>●

## 4.1 The COVID-19 pandemic: LRGs on the frontline

Japan (Photo: Jeremy-stenuit-3mErKfgolzM-unsplash)



**The COVID-19 pandemic is putting our communities, cities and territories under unprecedented strain and is also having a direct impact on the SDGs. As the level of government closest to the populations that they serve, LRGs are playing a key role in protecting local people, as they act as the first line of defence against the pandemic. Throughout the world, LRGs are helping to improve preparedness, responding to the outbreak and planning for the aftermath.**

LRGs in China and Korea were among the first respondents to contain the virus. They achieved this through different strategies. These ranged from adopting full lock-down measures, decided by their national governments, to applying

relatively limited restrictions on mobility. For example, **Seoul** launched a “24-hour Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters” during the early stages of the outbreak, back in mid-February. This initiative served to coordinate the application of pre-emptive response measures and to promote the sharing of information. Such action subsequently succeeded in reducing the rate of infection and limiting death rates. **Daegu** launched “drive-thru” COVID-19 testing to ensure that an increasing percentage of the population has been tested.<sup>11</sup>

LRGs have based their responses to the pandemic on putting people at the centre of their action, actively engaging in collective learning processes, and exchanging experiences based

on the principle of solidarity. Cities have been mobilized in regions throughout the world to ensure that their populations have access to adequate housing, water, sanitation and other basic services, and to ensure food supplies for the most needy and vulnerable. LRGs have been committed to making daily efforts to lay out and explain the procedures that need to be implemented in order to contain the spread of the virus, such as hand washing, disinfection and self-quarantining policies.

**The magnitude of the challenge posed by the pandemic is daunting. The response to the crisis will therefore have critical consequences on the capacity of states and local authorities to meet the commitments outlined in the Global Agendas, and particularly in the 2030 Agenda.** Even so, this crisis is also proving a window of opportunity to accelerate change and to “build back” better. The present Section examines the challenges posed by the pandemic and provides a brief analysis of how cities and regions have so far responded to the crisis.

### Challenges and responses to the COVID-19 crisis in cities and regions

The impacts of COVID-19 will have deep knock-on effects on cities and regions worldwide, stemming from both the exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities and the creation of new ones. Over the past two decades, global megatrends—such as intensified climate change, unsustainable urbanization, increasing inequalities and protracted conflicts—have led to many territories accumulating chronic vulnerabilities. This, in turn, has critically undermined the resilience of many cities and regions to periods of distress. **The virus has hit urban areas hardest and, in particular, cities and metropolises which are densely populated, highly connected and/or which have high levels of inequality. It has had a particularly dramatic effect on the lives of people without access to adequate housing, basic services and secure livelihood opportunities.**<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that over 1,430 cities in 210 countries have been affected by COVID-19, with over 95% of total cases having been registered in urban areas.<sup>13</sup>

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is putting extraordinary pressure on all city systems: it is simultaneously straining healthcare, housing, transportation, safety, education and food provision resources. Like a magnifying glass, the virus outbreak is exposing how unprepared our territories were to deal with a major health, social and economic crisis. It is also shedding light on what the key dimensions are that we need to

reinforce in order to increase our preparedness to tackle other, forthcoming crises. Responding effectively to the crisis requires moving away from responses based on short-term economic fixes and instead focusing on long-term policies that can trigger structural change. One crucial aspect of achieving it involves empowering LRGs so that they can provide adequate responses to the pandemic and address the current problems of unsustainable production, consumption and urban development models.

LRGs have been leading innovative responses to the crisis and are now calling for action and to take advantage of the lessons learnt in order to carry out a complete overhaul of the existing systems of governance. Doing this is a necessary prerequisite for truly accelerating transformative action towards achieving the Global Agendas (see Box 4.1, next page).

**One key dimension that the crisis is bringing to the forefront is the necessity to acknowledge that solidarity is vital for ensuring sustainable development and that this, in turn, is incompatible with allowing inequalities to continue to grow.** The challenges posed by COVID-19 are particularly grave in territories where there is a high prevalence of poverty and informality; the disease is widening the existing social and economic divide which, in turn, is making the virus deadlier, in a self-reinforcing cycle.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, special note needs to be made of the impact of the crisis on women and girls, who are overrepresented in informal contexts and care jobs. Both are exposed to significantly higher risks of contagion and are more vulnerable to the economic impacts of the crisis.<sup>16</sup>

As the current crisis is demonstrating, **achieving SDG 11 and ensuring the access of the population to adequate housing is indeed a matter of life or death.** This is particularly true when self-quarantining has emerged as the central strategy



**Responding effectively to the crisis requires moving away from responses based on short-term economic fixes and instead focusing on long-term policies that can trigger structural change.**

## Box 4.1

## Building on LRG solidarity: Live Learning Experiences #BeyondTheOutbreak

After launching a first global site ([www.citiesforglobalhealth.org](http://www.citiesforglobalhealth.org)) to collect and exchange initiatives in mid-March, UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat initiated the Live Learning Experiences series (LLEs). Its aim was to promote collective learning and to help LRGs, the GTF members, international organizations, partners, CSOs and private sector representatives address the crisis and its aftermath. The initiative was launched on 25 March 2020. The LLEs create a virtual living community in which LRGs and engaged stakeholders can exchange experiences of crisis management and the protection of the commons through a series of monographic sessions on specific topics. The fifteen sessions that had already been held at the time writing have brought together hundreds of LRGs from all over the world, each of which is facing different stages of the COVID-19 crisis. They have also involved international partner organizations including: the Habitat International Coalition; the International Union of Public Transport; the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing and other UN-coordinated agencies; Cities Alliance; Public Service International; and World Enabled, amongst others. It aims to make online resources available to LRGs and to allow the active sharing of material that will help other similar entities rapidly scale up the fight against the virus (see the Briefing Notes, which include several guidelines and joint statements, UCLG's #BeyondTheOutbreak site). Many other initiatives have also been initiated by the LRG networks at the global and regional levels.<sup>14</sup> Several networks have also undertaken initiatives to help their members to respond to the COVID-19 crisis (e.g. the International Association of French-Speaking Mayors has launched a EUR 1.35 million support plan for partners in Africa, UCLG and Cités Unies France have also launched several solidarity funds).

**in the global response to the crisis.** Delivering the right to housing is also a necessary condition for the fulfilment of other, associated human rights and for curbing the spread of the virus. Amongst other reasons, having access to adequate housing is necessary for access to on-site water and sanitation, which are necessary for the implementation of hand washing measures.<sup>17</sup> With one billion people living in informal settlements, and between 30 and 70% of inhabitants in some cities, there is an urgent need to consider the feasibility of change and to develop locally appropriate approaches to protect these populations from the worst impacts of COVID-19. Several cities, such as **Freetown**, have developed initiatives based on their previous experience of combating Ebola. These have included policies to: ensure information flows; foster community ownership; protect the most vulnerable; and ensure improved access to water, sanitation and food provision. **Even in richer territories, the global housing crisis, which was already putting a strain on cities prior to the virus outbreak, makes managing this threat a highly complex challenge** (see information about housing and basic services in Subsection 4.2).<sup>18</sup>

As a result, LRGs across the world are managing major efforts aimed at ensuring access to adequate housing, which is a crucial element of the response of cities and regions to the

pandemic.<sup>19</sup> LRGs are calling for a halt to evictions everywhere and for whatever reason, and for the waiving of payments for local social housing in order to prevent an increase in homelessness and in the development of informal settlements in the midst of the crisis. In response, LRGs are reaching agreements with local stakeholders to increase the availability of emergency accommodation, to mobilise empty hotel accommodation and to vacate empty housing units that were previously being offered for short-term rental via websites. In **Bogota**, a special programme has been implemented to attend to households affected by the emergency and to help ease their spending. In **Vienna**, as in other European cities, new measures introduced have included the simplification of the Regulations for Access to Housing Assistance and an extension of the city's Winter Package through until August 2020. The municipal government of **Montreal** has extended the deadline for paying the second instalment of its municipal taxes and has increased the budget allotted to the municipal housing office in order to give support to more vulnerable households.

**LRGs have, nonetheless, stressed the basic importance of multi-level collaboration to effectively address the challenges being faced.** In countries such as France, Latvia and the United States, national governments are supporting LRGs

and helping them to negotiate debt moratoriums with financial institutions, establishing housing solidarity funds, and providing enabling frameworks for advancing housing justice.<sup>20</sup>

**Most importantly, and as emphasised by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, the crisis has demonstrated that ending homelessness and securing adequate housing for all is, indeed, possible.**

As already demonstrated in cities like **Barcelona, Paris** and **London**, adequately empowering and supporting LRGs will be critical to achieving this.<sup>21</sup>

It is necessary to ensure that the implementation of lockdown measures is carried out in a way that does not, *de facto*, aggravate the precarious economic situations of vulnerable households. It is of vital importance to ensure that lockdown measures do not push vulnerable households, and others who also depend on daily income flows into poverty or extreme poverty. This particularly applies to those living and working informally. The COVID-19 pandemic is already having significant impacts in terms of unemployment and underemployment.<sup>22</sup> In fact, some 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, who constitute half of the global workforce, either are, or will be, significantly affected by unemployment and underemployment.<sup>23</sup> **It is therefore critical to ensure that response measures will also address the needs of these groups and help to reduce social exclusion and, more specifically, the problems that women suffer as a result of increasing domestic violence.** The role of LRGs is proving pivotal in limiting the risk of triggering further instability, displacement and/or an increase in the number of people in need of life-saving assistance.

### **Local and regional governments are stepping up efforts to ensure the provision of basic services**

Ensuring the provision of basic services is crucial not just for containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also for making sure that no one is left behind either during the outbreak or in its aftermath. Billions of people around the world still lack access to safely managed water and basic services at home, yet this is critical for preventing the spread of COVID-19 (see Section 4.2, below).<sup>24</sup>

**LRGs in different regions of the world are focusing their efforts on ensuring the delivery of essential services: WASH, health and social services, housing, education, food provision and mobility, especially for the most vulnerable groups.** The local government of **Mexico City** has implemented measures to tackle mobility

## **LRGs across the world are managing major efforts aimed at ensuring access to adequate housing, which is a crucial element of the response of cities and regions to the pandemic.**

challenges during the crisis by: protecting users and operators (safeguarding hygiene and social distance); maintaining the frequencies of essential services as much as possible; flattening the demand curve; and assuring daily communication.<sup>25</sup>

**Strasbourg** has adapted its public transport system to target the needs of the health sector with the Flex'hop Z1 initiative and by introducing special transport sharing for medical staff.<sup>26</sup> During the pandemic, many cities have expanded the spaces available for biking and walking. They have also redoubled efforts to: disinfect public transport and spaces; encourage physical distancing; limit traffic; and reduce levels of traffic congestion. It will be key for the success of the 2030 Agenda to maintain many of these initiatives throughout the recovery period and even beyond that.

Within the context of the global health crisis, LRGs are making strategic shifts to ensure that increasingly limited resources provide maximum benefits for all. **San Jose**, in Costa Rica, has launched a protocol for COVID-19 preparedness and a specific response in informal settlements which includes improving the provision of basic services (such as water, energy and connectivity); in **Subang Jaya** (Malaysia), the city council is monitoring public places and ensuring that essential services are provided safely by regulating operating hours, keeping safe distances, and providing refuse disposal and cleaning areas.<sup>27</sup> To guarantee food supplies, many cities are strengthening local supply chains (e.g. **Guangzhou, Iriga** "Vegetables on Wheels"), and some have also established popular kitchens (**Surabaya**) and/or foodbanks (many cities in Spain and Latin America).

### **#BeyondTheOutbreak: how to accelerate transformation?**

The COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating change in every dimension of development and is challenging many accepted concepts of urban design and planning. Its disruptive capacity means

that, if it is not soundly managed, the spread of the disease will accelerate and jeopardize efforts to achieve the SDGs. However, it also presents a window of opportunity that could be used to trigger structural change and contribute to other efforts to deliver the Global Agendas. **The COVID-19 crisis has prompted a rethinking of the way in which we live, consume and produce. In an undeniable manner, it has exposed the fact that maintaining “business as usual” is simply not an option. Indeed, the radical nature of the crisis has shown that society is actually capable of overnight transformation.** No other “slow emergency” faced by humanity has triggered such radical responses from institutions and individuals alike. This would include climate change (and its comparably pressing consequences) and also the global housing crisis.<sup>28</sup> Establishing mechanisms and initiatives to deepen what we can learn from the pandemic, and to apply this knowledge to the six entry points identified in the UN *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019*, will therefore be essential for accelerating transformation, achieving the 2030 commitments, and ensuring a sustainable future for humanity.

The widespread lockdown measures implemented worldwide have brought almost all activities in cities to a stop, had a drastic impact on people's lives and habits, and also had a significant impact on the environment.<sup>29</sup> **The pandemic is already accelerating trends such as the digitalization of retail and service delivery and promoting a shift to remote work (for those parts of the population for whom this has been made possible, including LRG staff).** This phenomenon could transform prior urbanization trends, bringing additional challenges to smaller and intermediary cities, as well as sway the flows of urban-rural migration and amongst cities of different sizes. At the same time, bolstering these trends offers a good opportunity to transform the

world of work and to promote ways of mitigating climate change, both of which will have an impact on several SDGs (8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15).

However, addressing the growing digital divide and having sufficient independent oversight to ensure people's privacy will be key to actually harnessing these opportunities. Otherwise, they may simply exacerbate inequalities between territories with and without internet access and have a negative impact on existing efforts to achieve the SDGs. Likewise, violations of privacy may result in growing distrust and even cause unrest. For LRGs, facing up to the crisis has required rapid adaptation and a major investment in capacity building. The key objective has been to build up trust, as this is a necessary prerequisite to implement the emergency measures needed to address the pandemic. LRGs are innovating in the field of communications, using both traditional and new technologies (such as hotlines and toll-free numbers, digital platforms, COVID-19 text alerts, and special apps) and mobilizing social networks and volunteers alike.

As such, **the current crisis has led LRGs to improve their accountability and their engagement with communities.** In this respect, LRGs are stressing the importance of proactively reaching out to, and establishing clear communication flows with, the populations most at risk. This has proven a determinant element in addressing the pandemic, particularly in informal contexts, and has allowed the adoption of a granular approach to responses that stems from an understanding of local communities and their needs at the neighbourhood level.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond these efforts, and in order to provide those services that cannot be delivered digitally, **LRGs have undertaken the responsibility of ensuring the safety of public service workers at first-hand.** These efforts have been grounded upon social dialogue and offer an opportunity to further improvements.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, **the efforts undertaken by LRGs to extend the coverage of basic service provision constitute an important contribution to adopting a human-rights-led approach to development: one which puts the protection of people and the global commons at the heart of the agenda.**<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, LRGs around the world are voicing their concerns regarding the need for proper resource and capacity endowment at the local and regional levels. This will be needed to enable them to respond to the crisis and trigger a meaningful transformation.

In spite of the committed efforts of LRGs to protect their populations, their capacity to do so is limited by how enabling national environments are

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**The COVID-19 crisis has prompted a rethinking of the way in which we live, consume and produce. In an undeniable manner, it has exposed the fact that maintaining “business as usual” is simply not an option.**

for local action. Furthermore, the pandemic is also having a significant impact on local democracy itself. In some parts of the world, national responses to the crisis have been accompanied by provisions for increased centralization. At times, they have also involved a disproportionate use of force to ensure lockdowns that violate human rights. Check and balance mechanisms are needed to prevent such tendencies from causing a backslide and jeopardizing the achievement of the SDGs. Instead, **strengthening both vertical and horizontal cooperation is necessary in order to unlock existing local potentialities and to address the pandemic in a manner that effectively accelerates SDG implementation.** In the current scenario, vertical collaboration is required to ensure policy coherence and support for local health, education, sanitary, housing and mobility systems that are on the front line and to also ensure the delivery of assistance packages to vulnerable communities.<sup>33</sup> Horizontal integration is needed to help local government bodies to work closely together, with collaboration between departments as diverse as health care, policing, public transport, education, and economic policy. It is also necessary to provide a range of social safety nets and to share data to ensure effective response planning. Moreover, **as LRGs have demonstrated throughout the crisis, collective learning, combined with inter-municipal and municipal-regional cooperation, is key to providing appropriate responses as the virus spreads across administrative frontiers.** The

preliminary lessons learnt from this experience have been summarized in the Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath (see Box 4.2).

The COVID-19 crisis is highlighting how critical it is to build up the preparedness and resilience of our cities and regions to combat crises yet to come. The crisis has confronted LRGs with important challenges relating to the provision of basic services and the need to acknowledge the widening gulf of inequality between the richest and poorest members of society. LRGs have also experienced the importance of creating enabling environments, including regulatory frameworks and coordination mechanisms, to ensure appropriate resource endowment and that local authorities have the capacity to allocate them based on the principle of subsidiarity. Following years of disinvestment in the public sector, particularly at the local level, LRGs are struggling to ensure the protection of their citizens through emergency measures. **Considering that the severity of the pandemic diverged across and within different countries, the levels of preparedness of cities and regions and the capacities of governments to take action have proven decisive for curbing the spread of the virus and for mitigating its effects. Arrangements to ensure effective multi-level governance will be key to achieving such preparedness.** National policy environments that properly acknowledge local action and support it, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, will be central to attempts to increase our global preparedness for future crises.●

#### Box 4.2

## The Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath

Acknowledging the magnitude of the crisis and the critical role LRGs must play not only now, but also in the aftermath of the crisis, UCLG has produced the Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath. Through ten lines of action, it aims to transform how the existing system of governance interacts with communities and to protect those who most need protection. It seeks to transform the existing multilateral system and to ensure that the sacrifices that we are currently making do not become a burden for the communities of the future. It highlights the relevance of the Local 2030 principles and the SDGs, particularly in these most trying of times, and offers a framework for transformational measures. It also calls for a renewed and stronger multilateral system and for financial measures that will ensure the sustainability of local public service provision and the continuity of what is required to address the crisis, and enable us to build back better in its aftermath. In sum, the Decalogue focuses attention on the following ten key dimensions: guaranteeing public services; providing financial support packages; establishing proximity models for global consumption and production; implementing a worldwide green new deal; adopting a new approach to citizenship and ensuring freedoms within a renewed democracy; promoting greater generation equality; having territories that care for their public providers; promoting culture as an antidote to the secondary effects of the crisis; establishing interurban systems to foster sustainability; and help achieve next-generation multilateralism.

For more information, access the UCLG Decalogue for the COVID-19 aftermath here: <https://www.uclg.org/en/node/31076>

## 4.2 Urban and peri-urban development



Bohrawad, Sidhpur, India (Photo: Lisa Therese - unsplash)

**Frontrunner LRGs are putting forward a wide range of initiatives to address the many dimensions of urban and territorial sustainable development. They are mainly focusing on the interlinkages between urban planning, poverty, housing, access to public services, inequalities, economic development and environmental protection, cultural diversity, and rights-based agendas—which have a direct or indirect impact on safeguarding many of common goods of humanity.**

Globally speaking, the efforts made by LRGs can be observed in many SDGs: the alignment of urban and local plans with the SDGs; access to basic services; the mitigation of climate change; the resilience of cities; respect for women and human rights; and civic participation and accountability. However, the scope and pace of LRG action needs to be accelerated and upscaled in order to unleash the potential of urban and peri-urban areas to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in 2030.

Urban growth has accelerated over recent decades. At the same time, the majority of countries have adopted decentralization processes that have devolved greater powers to locally elected authorities and made them responsible for the management of cities and territories and the delivery of the main public services. Globally speaking, people's wellbeing is better in cities than elsewhere. Well-planned cities and peri-urban areas and improved links with their hinterlands can make a critical contribution to reshaping urban and rural interactions and promoting more balanced systems of cities.<sup>34</sup>

However, the current reality of many cities, regions and local governments, particularly in developing countries, is constrained by limited capacities and resources to formulate adequate responses to unsustainable patterns of urbanization. The majority of local authorities are still not fully aware of the SDGs and further efforts are urgently needed to increase their involvement, as shown by the results of the GTF survey.

Without well-defined policy interventions, the consequences of the increases in population that are expected to take place in urban areas over the next thirty years—85 million more urban dwellers per year—will be greater than any previously seen in human history in terms of environmental depletion and social inequality.<sup>35</sup> Poverty, food, health, the provision of basic services, inequalities, environmental and climate stress, and natural hazards are challenges that have all become increasingly urban issues. As already underlined

in the previous Subsection, this reality will be particularly affected by the process of recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and the respective capacity of LRGs to enhance planning.

The following Subsection assesses the progress made by LRGs towards achieving targets 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.6 and 11.a. Target 11.4 will be addressed in Subsection 4.3: Advancing human wellbeing, and targets 11.5 and 11.b will be examined in Subsection 4.4: Protecting the planet and building resilience.

### **Urban planning and design: a key lever for more inclusive, sustainable and safer cities (SDG 11.3)**

As a key responsibility of local governments, urban planning and the creation of local development plans is an entry point to urban transformation, fostering stronger citizen participation and adequate collaborative governance. These are key determinants that cities need to form the coalitions of forces required to meet the SDGs and exploit the added value provided by sustainable urbanization.

An important stimulus to positive reform and changes in planning has emerged in recent decades in the form of more strategic and integrated planning; the promotion of integrated development by combining urban policies with economic development; and new social policies and management strategies.<sup>36</sup> Many of the more liveable cities in the world, in all regions, have adopted new modalities of integrated planning which directly involve local partners and citizens. The most advanced metropolitan cities are increasingly emphasizing the importance of using integrated planning to address the fragmentation of urban services. They are also harnessing the potential of a more comprehensive urban design to manage sprawl, public space and social fragmentation. Many other regional governments and intermediary cities are developing alternative solutions.

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**LRGs worldwide are directing major efforts at ensuring access to adequate housing as a crucial element of cities' and regions' response to the pandemic.**

Within the framework of the localization of the SDGs, frontrunner LRGs are revising their policies and development plans to include the SDGs as reference frameworks and fostering more participative approaches. Processes of aligning city plans with the SDGs have proved effective in breaking down existing silos, encouraging collaboration through consultative processes, and fostering the development of sustainable paths (see Box 4.3). Following similar approaches, many cities and regions are currently undertaking VLRs and integrating the SDGs and other Global Agendas in their plans and policies (see Subsection 3.3). Many others cities are following the lead of frontrunners (e.g. **Accra, Brasilia, Harare, Montevideo, Moscow, Yaoundé**, amongst others).

Box 4.4 presents a brief snapshot of the impact of the SDG alignment effort on local plans worldwide. The examples mix different types of plans with different time horizons. These range from the short-term local action plans and mid-term local development plans required by laws in urban areas and at the provincial level, to long-term strategic plans. Not all these efforts, however, are moving into a full implementation phase or are linked to regular and formal urban plans, as well as determined indicators and monitoring processes. Nevertheless, the global localization movement is propelling different modalities of planning, all aimed to promote sustainable development. These efforts need to be strengthened, operationalized, and transformed in long-term engagements.

#### Box 4.3

### Urban and regional planning and the Global Agendas: selected examples

In Asia, in 2015, the **Seoul Metropolitan Government** (10.1 million inhabitants) established a Master Plan for Sustainable Development and adopted a comprehensive strategy to fight climate change: “The Promise of Seoul, Taking Actions against Climate Change”, which covers energy, air quality, transport, waste, ecology, urban agriculture, health, safety and urban planning. In 2017, the 2030 Seoul Plan for the implementation of the SDGs was adopted following a bottom-up approach.<sup>37</sup>

In Europe, the **Berlin Strategy/Urban Development Concept Berlin 2030** (3.8 million inhabitants) provides an inter-agency model for the long-term sustainable development of the German capital. It was developed following the participative process entitled “Shaping the City Together”, which involved more than 100 associations, local authorities, and institutions from the whole Berlin-Brandenburg region.<sup>38</sup>

In Africa, the city of **eThekweni-Durban** (3.5 million inhabitants) aligned the 2030 Agenda with its metropolitan plan (Integrated Development Plan) using a bottom-up approach. This initiative forms part of the city’s strategy to achieve sustainability, which has four main pillars: human rights, people, the planet, and prosperity. This is planned within the framework of a “post-apartheid city”.

In Latin America, **Buenos Aires** (2.9 million inhabitants, with 15 million people living in the city’s metropolitan region) has adopted the Participative Strategic Plan 2035, which has five strategic axes aligned with the SDGs. One of these is the metropolitan axis, which includes all competences related to sustainable mobility, infrastructure, services, waste management, rivers, ports and airports, and metropolitan information systems.<sup>39</sup>

In Eastern Europe, the city of **Moscow** (12.5 million inhabitants, with 20 million people in its metropolitan area) is currently revising its Master Plan 2010-2035, Investment Strategy 2025 and Smart City 2030 projects in order to integrate the SDGs. The Master Plan 2010-2035 promotes “balanced urban development” throughout the metropolitan area. Its aim is to strike a balance between access to green areas, efficient transportation, and quality housing.<sup>40</sup>

Several regional governments have also adopted the SDGs as part of a reference framework to align their plans and strategies (e.g. **Azuay**, the **Basque Country**, the **Brussels Region, Flanders, Fribourg, Oaxaca, Sao Paulo, Valencia, Wales**, and **Wallonia**). For example, the **Åland region** of Finland has established the “Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland” within the framework of the **Bärkraft.ax**: a network created for all citizens, organizations, authorities and companies. The Agenda for Åland consists of a single vision with seven strategic targets for 2030; these focus on both environmental and social sustainability. It is part of a plan to make Åland totally sustainable by 2051.<sup>41</sup>

## Box 4.4

## Global snapshot of the impact of the localization process on urban and territorial planning

In **Africa**, for example, 19 countries stated that they were undertaking initiatives or specific projects to facilitate the alignment of local development plans with the SDGs (e.g. ten intermediary cities in Tunisia, the majority of counties in Kenya, and the majority of municipalities in Benin, as part of the third-generation of local development plans).<sup>42</sup> In **Asia-Pacific**, in Japan over 30 cities and towns are involved in SDG localization as part of the "Future City Initiative". In Indonesia, 19 out of its 34 provinces and 514 districts had formalized their SDG local action plans in 2019. In China, provinces and cities are competing through ambitious programmes, while the national government has launched "Innovation Demonstration Zones" for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In Korea, as of 2016, 210 of its 243 LGAs had formulated their local Agenda 21. In Nepal, all of the provinces have readied, or almost readied, SDGs aligned to development plans. In Australia, Sustainable Sydney 2030, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, and Perth Regional Environment Strategy 2016-2020 were among the first plans to integrate the SDGs; they have since been followed by others. In **Europe**, hundreds of cities, provinces and regions have aligned, or are in the process of aligning, the SDGs with their local development plans or policies. A recent analysis reveals the holistic approach adopted by 27 municipalities to mainstream Agenda 2030 within their local plans or strategies, or as part of specific projects, in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.<sup>43</sup> In **Latin America**, Colombia provides an example of one of the best-documented cases of efforts to align local government development plans with SDGs since 2017.<sup>44</sup> In Mexico, by early 2019, nine states, with nearly 100 municipalities, had already reached an "advanced" level of alignment. In Brazil, 70 municipalities are aligning and undertaking projects related to the SDGs in at least eight different states. In Ecuador, the provinces and main cities are all making significant progress. In Costa Rica, 10 municipalities (out of 89) have been working on alignment. Several examples have also been reported in **Russia** and **Central Asia**. In **North America**, with only a few exceptions (such as New York and Los Angeles), federated states and cities in the United States and Canada have so far failed to adopt strategies to align the SDGs with their plans, but many are taking action focusing on certain specific dimensions (such as climate change, resilience, energy transition, sustainable waste management, and solidarity with immigrants).

The capacities of LRGs to enhance planning vary tremendously. In many countries, and particularly in less economically developed ones, the capacities of cities and the tools available to them to implement adequate planning and promote paths to sustainable development are highly deficient, if not non-existent.<sup>45</sup> Planning tools need to be linked to, and backed up with, financial and legal frameworks. The predominance of economic informality in most cities in developing countries further restricts the capacity of local institutions to guide their urban development. This calls for a transformation in the overall approach to urban planning in order to allow cities to take advantage of the alternative "non-formal" modalities that have been created by communities in many of their neighbourhoods.

At the same time, structural constraints produced by demographic trends and globalization are reshaping urban space and urban economies (e.g. the youth bulge and ageing population, the financialization of the urban economy, the commodification of urban assets, new technologies, and the systemic

transformation of labour markets) and having a serious impact on local policies, urban planning modalities and sustainability. Seemingly endless urbanized areas, mega-cities and urban regions are becoming more complex and their governance frameworks are often not fit for purpose. Globally speaking, urban sprawl continues to expand (the land occupied by urban areas could triple by 2050),<sup>46</sup> and public space is shrinking, albeit with many significant contrasts between regions (see "Housing and basic services", below).

Social and economic polarization, both between and within cities, is growing. This includes gentrification processes that are pushing the middle classes and popular sectors to the periphery in developed countries and to slums in developing economies. It is also observed in globalized metropolitan areas and intermediary cities, and between well-integrated cities and those located on the periphery (e.g. shrinking cities and towns in declining zones). Intermediary cities and peri-urban areas are experiencing rapid population growth in the global South,

creating expanding urban corridors. While many intermediary cities can offer liveable alternatives to congested metropolitan areas, the majority suffer from inadequate infrastructure and service provision. This process is hindering the reduction in inequalities and promotion of more balanced territorial development sought by SDG 10 and the New Urban Agenda.

Based on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, cities should revise the health principles related to urban planning. Cities should reconsider their density standards and seek to reconcile the need for compactness with health and safety requirements. Cities should therefore: adapt social mixed zoning that takes into consideration the new modalities of work and learning from home; expand and provide greener public spaces and areas for walking, cycling and street activities (including adequate space for informal activities); reduce pollution and mitigate climate change by fostering universal access to relevant public services, including IT; and also promote more polycentric city development.

Sustainable urban and territorial planning can provide the foundation for a sustainable urban future which leaves no one and no territory behind and contributes to the preservation of the planet. **Urgent action is needed to improve and adapt urban planning, particularly in those regions where rapid urban growth will be most concentrated** (Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and South-East Asia). **Countries need to reform their planning regulations and frameworks and strengthen their LRGs and civil society organizations to help them develop and actively participate in planning. All LRGs must adopt the principle of inclusive and participatory planning involving stakeholders. This must also include the most vulnerable members of society and explore integrated long-term development plans that can effectively shape and promote more sustainable and inclusive cities and human settlements.**

### Ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing and basic services (SDG 11.1)

#### Housing

Housing is one of the most critical expressions of the expansion of poverty and inequality. The scale and complexity of the housing challenges faced by cities are unprecedented. As a result of the global trends observed in recent decades (reductions in the provision of social housing and the deregulation of real-estate markets), the

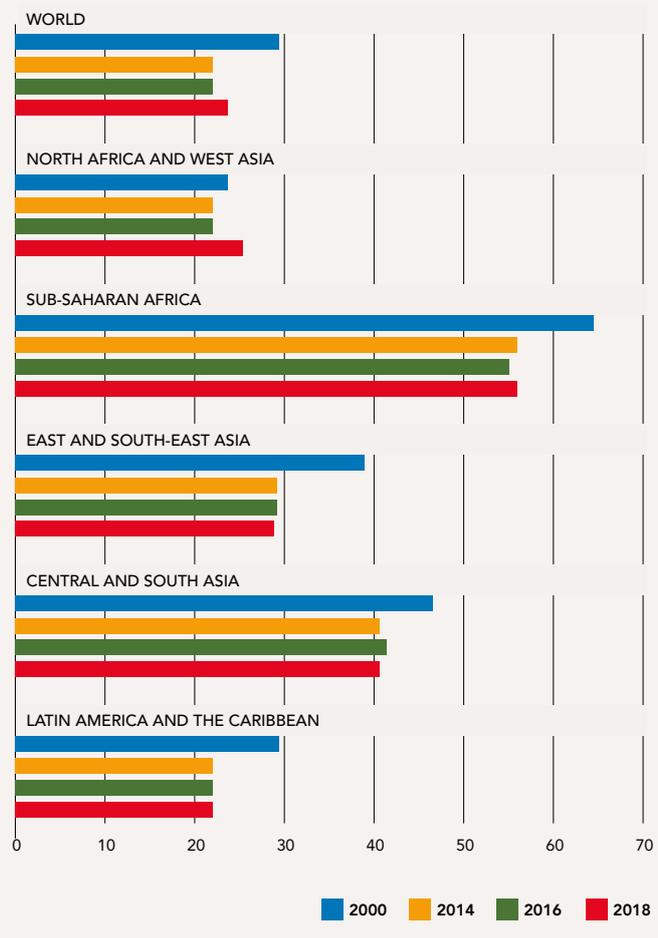
current global housing crisis now affects a very large percentage of the world's population and of lower, middle and even upper-middle income households, as well as the historically marginalized lowest-income sectors of the population.

Around 1.8 billion people lack access to adequate housing and over one billion are currently living in slums. After a slight improvement in the last decade, the percentage of people living in slums is now increasing again (it rose from 23% to 24% between 2014 and 2018).<sup>47</sup> In 2018, 50% of the urban population living in Sub-Saharan Africa (238 million people) was doing so in slums. This underlines the unsustainable process of urbanization on the African continent and contrasts with 31% in Central and South Asia, 27% in East and South-East Asia and 21% in Latin America (see Figure 4.1). This is a critical trend that must

Figure 4.1

### Proportion of urban population in slums by subregions 2000-2018

Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>



be changed if the world really wants to eradicate extreme poverty and leave no one behind.

Frontrunning LRGs are currently developing more inclusive schemes of neighbourhood renewal and slum upgrading.<sup>48</sup> Cities are already taking action in this field: supporting their communities by building housing and reconstructing after disasters (e.g. in Mozambique, Nepal), undertaking incremental improvements and supporting community-led initiatives (e.g. inclusive housing policies in **Rosario**, Argentina, and special planning areas for participatory upgrading, in **Mukuru**, Nairobi); actively participating in national and local partnerships (e.g. the Baan Mankong Collective Housing Program, which has been operative in Thailand since 2000, and the “Transform the Settlements of the Urban Poor” project, in Uganda, which involves intermediary cities); and involving communities in decision-making processes to define alternative sources of accommodation (e.g. Badia East in **Lagos**). LRGs are supporting housing registrations and revisiting land-titling procedures to ensure secure tenure (see Subsection 4.3, below). A number of countries have made progress in reducing or stabilizing slum growth rates in the last fifteen years, including Brazil, Mexico, Morocco, South Africa, Malaysia and Tunisia. Success is attributed to political commitment at central and local government levels to large-scale upgrading and service provision for the poor. LRGs’ responses to informal settlements are increasingly tending to involve *in-situ* upgrading. There are still cases, however, in which settlers face eviction (e.g. in Kajiji, Sewage area of Kariobangi North, **Nairobi**, in the first week of May 2020). **Forced evictions and relocations without participative dialogue and concertation are a violation of fundamental rights and must be prohibited.**

Moreover, within the framework of the global housing crisis and increasing rental prices, the **right to affordable and adequate housing** is increasingly prominent on many local government agendas. The leaders of the largest cities, both in developing and developed countries, have launched a global initiative to promote their populations’ right to housing (see Box 4.5). More committed cities have: imposed certain parameters in short- and long-term rent regulations; introduced surtaxes; reallocated empty houses; taken other initiatives to expand the supply of social housing (establishing a social housing quota in any major new-build or renovation projects); imposed rent control, including lowering rents or subsidizing rentals to low-income groups; freed affordable land; and developed housing trust funds (e.g. US and Canada). They

#### Box 4.5

### Cities for Adequate Housing Initiative<sup>50</sup>

The global housing crisis led cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Birmingham, Buenos Aires, Durban, Geneva, Jakarta, Lisbon, London, Mexico, Medellin, Montreal, Montevideo, New York, Paris, Seoul, Strasbourg, Taipei and Vienna to bring a firm pledge in favour of the right to housing to the 2018 UN HLPF in the form of the Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration. This was added to the “Make the Shift” initiative promoted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. A growing number of cities have committed to promoting renewed housing strategies to overcome obstacles to making the right to housing a reality. The obstacles include a lack of national funding, market deregulation and housing commodification. Possible remedies could involve the co-production of affordable housing by the public and private sectors upscaling the provision of community-driven alternative housing and the promotion of a form of urban planning that encourage housing provision, as well as more inclusive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

are also supporting a wide range of alternative measures (such as cooperatives and community and social housing production, e.g. Community Land Trust experiences) and revising planning regulations to ease community upgrading (i.e. to adapt plot standards to improve affordability).<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the action stemming from this particular field of action is still being undertaken on a far smaller scale than that needed given the magnitude of the housing crisis.

The challenge posed by addressing the COVID-19 crisis has also shown that solutions can be found. However, the existence of marginal neighbourhoods and informal settlements add greater complexity to the housing crisis (see the Subsection on COVID-19, above).

**As the world gradually moves into the recovery phase, the right to housing must be kept at the forefront of the urban agenda.**

The economic crisis can aggravate the global housing crisis due to the difficulty to pay rents and mortgages, thus increasing evictions and homelessness in the upcoming years. All levels of government need to bear in mind the need to ensure the provision of more adequate and affordable housing, to increase public investment on social housing and to upgrade slums. **Incremental housing policies should seek to prevent centralized national policies with sectoral and disconnected approaches; they need to be embedded in city development strategies, forming part of integrated urban plans, in order**

to take into consideration a constellation of solutions that would better articulate both local and national policies.<sup>51</sup> Inclusive and participatory policies are needed which can help develop a wide range of co-design and co-production methods involving local communities; this would help accelerate and upscale housing solutions. National financial and regulatory frameworks should seek to empower LRGs to tackle the housing crisis. This should particularly be so in the aftermath of the crisis, during which LRGs have depleted their resources to fight the pandemic. Forward-thinking

initiatives and innovative policy are required if cities are to pursue the overall target and leave no one behind.

**Basic services: the example of water and sanitation (SDG 11.1, 6.1 and 6.2), access to energy (SDG 7.1) and public spaces (SDG 11.7)**

Given the multi-dimensional nature of poverty in cities, planning and ensuring inclusive social policies to support universal access to **basic public services** must be at the core of the 2030 Agenda (water, sanitation, education, health, electricity, social care, public spaces, to mention just a few). Providing most of these services (including waste management and, at times, electricity) is a direct or shared responsibility of LRGs, although national government policies and support are also essential. Globally speaking, the provision of access to drinkable water and electricity has seen significant progress, but the provision of access to sanitation and public open spaces is currently lagging behind.

It should be noted that the available data on urban water supplies contain significant limitations and do not necessarily reflect the daily reality for more vulnerable people. Many cities in the fast-growing cities of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia cannot ensure adequate piped water supplies to their populations, or regular or reasonable quality supplies. This may have a severe impact on the poorest sectors of society.<sup>52</sup>

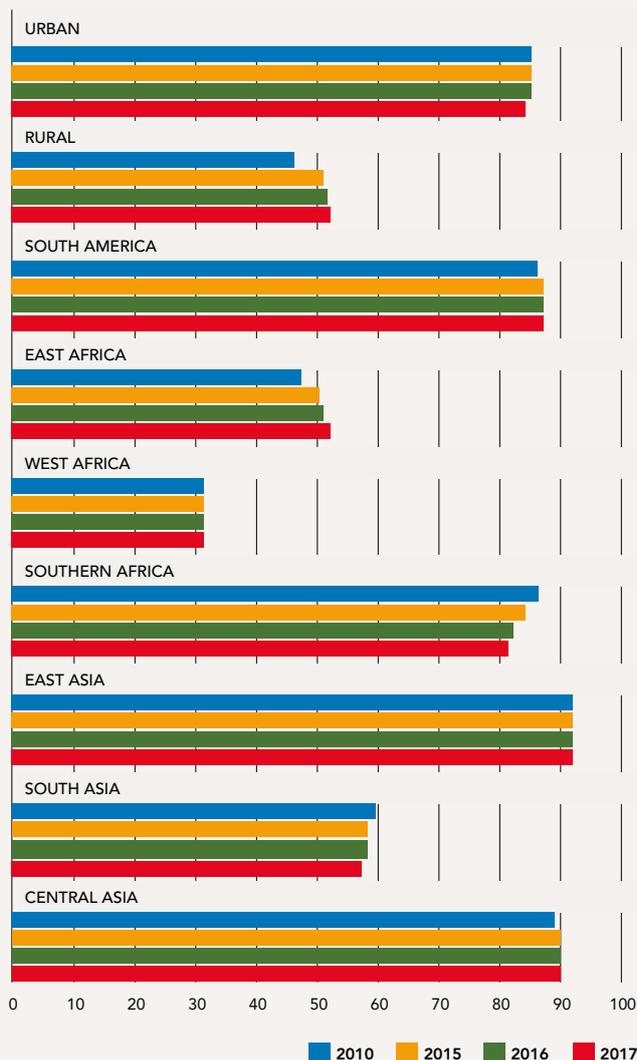
Equitable access to safe, reliable and affordable water is a human right. The UN considers that access to safely managed drinking water has improved at the global level, putting SDG 6.1 within reach for 2030. An increase from 61% to 71% has been identified from 2000 to 2017, although there is still a gap in the coverage of supplies to urban areas—86%—and rural areas—53% (see Figure 4.2). Even so, 785 million people still lacked access to even basic drinking water services in 2017. During the same period, access to piped water, which is particularly critical in urban settlements, increased significantly. Remarkable progress was made in East and South-East Asia (with a population of more than half a billion people), but there were **setbacks in urban areas in Sub-Saharan Africa** (67% of households had access to water in 2003, but only 56% in 2017, with only 46% having access on their premises).<sup>53</sup>

At the same time, the relative stagnation in the regularity of services (“availability when needed”) and in the quality of water (“free of contamination”) in urban areas shows the increasing stress on access to water and its quality in many regions. Many large cities (including **Bangalore, Beijing,**

**Figure 4.2**

### Proportion of urban population using safely managed drinking water services, by region (%)

Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>



**Brisbane, Cairo, Cape Town, Istanbul, Karachi, Mexico, Rome, and Sao Paulo**, amongst others) now fear a “Day Zero” for access to water and the situation is even more critical in slum areas (e.g. Kalimali, in **Kampala**; Mokoko, in **Lagos**; and Siddarth Nagar, in **Mumbai**).<sup>54</sup> This has been particularly dramatically reflected during the COVID-19 crisis when limited access to water in slum areas has exacerbated the impact of the pandemic.

In all regions, municipalities take actions to expand the access to drinking water (e.g. a priority domain for municipalities in Benin and Mozambique). In the face of increasing water stress, cities and regions are now developing renewed water management strategies based on integrated approaches inspired by the Global Agendas. These seek to improve efficiency, diversify sources and promote the reuse of water (in **Cape Town, Rome, and Sao Paulo**, amongst others).

**More critical is the situation of safely managed sanitation (SDG 6.2), which is only accessible to 45% of the global population, with a significant gap between supplies to cities (47%) and rural areas (43%).** Meanwhile, 673 million people (9% of the world’s population) still practised open defecation in 2017 (the majority in South Asia). Achieving universal access to even basic sanitation services by 2030 will require a doubling of the current annual rate of progress. This is particularly critical if we take into consideration the fact that many cities in regions with lower access to public services (Central and South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa) house millions of inhabitants whose dwellings have only the most limited sewerage connections (e.g. **Abidjan, Bamako, Lagos, Accra, Dar-es-Salam, Gao, Hyderabad, and Kampala**).<sup>55</sup>

Localized solutions to wastewater treatment, such as decentralized wastewater treatment systems, are now emerging, however. For example, **Rajkot** (India) developed a Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System in 2015. **Xiangyang City**, in Hubei Province (China) is currently testing out technologies for recycling sludge from wastewater treatment plants to turn into energy, and also recovering resources through an innovative, cost-effective, green treatment process. **However, as the 2020 UN Secretary-General Report to the HLPF has stressed: in about one quarter of 79 countries, less than half of all household wastewater flows are safely treated;** this has critical consequences for both water resources and human health.

It should be remembered that in 2017, 47% of schools lacked basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services and that 40% of health-care

facilities were not equipped to permit basic hand hygiene at points of care. This affects over 2 billion people and increases the risk of infecting people seeking medical care.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, the world is making good progress in increasing access to **electricity** (from 83% in 2010, to 90% in 2018, with 97.4% coverage in urban areas). Even so, there are still millions of people around the world who lack access to electricity (789 million, with more than 100 million living in urban areas and more than 50% of these living in Sub-Saharan Africa).<sup>57</sup> Many urban residents continue to suffer from unreliable access to electricity due to frequent power outages and low energy access (e.g. in **Lagos**, electrical power is not available to neighbourhoods for around one-third of the time in an average month). In general, national authorities control energy generation and grid infrastructure. However, LRGs can have a greater influence on local policies related to electrification (including responsibilities regarding energy distribution and grid, sharing responsibilities with the private sector to distribute and charge for electricity), the implementation of subsidies or incentives that facilitate access to electricity, and the promotion of renewable energy systems and energy saving. Besides, decentralized energy sources should be an increasingly frequent modality in the near future.

**Open and green spaces** (streets, squares and green spaces, SDG 11.7) are public goods and play a fundamental role in strategies for public health (SDG 3), gender equality (SDG 5), sustainable mobility (SDG 11.2), air pollution (SDG 11.6), risk prevention (SDG 11.5) and also the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change (SDG 13). **Based on 2019 data from 610 cities in 95 countries, the share of land allocated to streets and open spaces averaged only about 16% globally, while the target allocation is 30% of land for streets and pavements and 20% for green open spaces and public facilities.**<sup>58</sup> There has been a worrying tendency for the stock of open space in cities to decline, especially in Asia and Africa (70% of cities have less than 50% of their urban surface reserved for public space).<sup>59</sup>

The previous summary shows that although many LRGs and countries have managed to expand their basic services to cover a significant percentage of the urban population (and lesser percentage of the rural population), millions of people are still without access to quality services. Facilitated by limited local resources and market deregulation, public service delivery models have evolved over recent decades and encouraged the continual expansion of private sector participation in service provision (e.g.

in water and sanitation, energy, transport and waste management). Already widely observed in economically developed countries, this process has also been transferred to developing countries, and particularly to large cities.<sup>60</sup> The results obtained vary widely, with both positive and negative outcomes, depending on the sector and context, including some negative effects on access to services and their affordability. Many cities and communities are therefore seeking alternatives by bringing essential public services back into public ownership through a process known as “(re)municipalisation” (1,408 cases have been listed since 2000, involving 2,400 cities in 58 countries).<sup>61</sup> At the same time, some visionary cities are also promoting decentralized solutions, particularly in poor neighbourhoods and slum areas that do not have access to formal grids or to promote renewable energy sources.

**The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the fact that, albeit essential, public service provision remains largely underfunded. In many regions, and particularly in those regions where urban growth will concentrate in the coming decade, efforts to provide basic infrastructure and services have been unable to keep pace with rapid urban population growth. It is, however, a core responsibility of LRGs and countries throughout the world to guarantee universal access to basic services as a critical dimension towards achieving the SDGs.**

### **Mobility (SDG 11.2)**<sup>62</sup>

LRGs play a critical role in several aspects of effective and sustainable mobility, with public transport constituting an important lever to help achieve this target. **The responsibilities of LRGs range from the provision of safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for everyone, to improving and guaranteeing road safety.**<sup>63</sup> Lack of access to transportation, especially in more peripheral urban areas in developed countries and in marginalized neighbourhoods in developing ones, and in rural areas worldwide, frequently aggravates economic and social isolation and segregation. Two indicators: SDG 3.6 and SDG 11.2 monitor road safety and access to sustainable mobility (i.e. the percentage of the population within 500 m of a public transport stop).

With regard to the first indicator, the number of road traffic deaths continues to rise steadily, while the rate of death relative to the size of the world's population has remained constant. This means that we are still a long way off delivering SDG 3.6.<sup>64</sup> For SDG 11.2, the 2020 UN Secretary-General's report

to the HLPF mentions that, in 2019, for the 610 cities from 95 countries for which data were available, half of the world's urban population seems to have had convenient access to public transport.<sup>65</sup>

Data to measure access to transport infrastructure and services for urban areas are not readily available on a global scale as this remains a Tier 2 indicator. However, the data that are available suggest that the accessibility gap is huge, and potentially growing. This makes it urgent for urban access to be measured more consistently and comprehensively in cities and countries around the world. Measuring access based on income level, gender, age, disability status, and location adds further complexity to the task. As a result, more basic measures, such as the number of journeys per person made using different modes of transport, would perhaps give a better, and more indicative measure of SDG 11.2 performance. In doing so, it helps to paint a better picture of trends in urban mobility over time, which is particularly important in the current circumstances.

In developed countries, the previous trend of increasing motorisation appears to have stopped. In cities from developing countries, however, and particularly those in emerging economies, motorisation rates have increased significantly since 1995. With most of the urban growth for the coming decades projected to take place in developing countries, this trend is rather worrying. While the ownership of motor vehicles theoretically improves access for individuals, it comes with increased external costs and environmental impacts, which are spread across the whole urban population and beyond.

**While the overall supply of public transport almost doubled in developing country cities during the period 1995-2012, the growth in their urban populations was even greater. As a result, the overall level of public transport provision per capita actually decreased over the same period.** In all regions, the supply of rapid transit has increased relative to urban population, and particularly since 2000. By far the highest ratio is found in Europe, where it is mostly concentrated in the largest cities. Developed countries have recently experienced moderate per capita growth in the use of public transport.<sup>66</sup>

If the trends observed in the last decade of the 20th century prevail, urban areas in emerging economies could see a shift away from walking and cycling and towards the use of private motor vehicles, while public transport could see an erosion in its market share. If this occurs in all the world's regions, it could make attaining SDG 11.2 almost impossible. If we are to reverse this dynamic, policies will need to be put into place

to reverse the trends observed in developing countries and to avoid the problems that are already present in car-dependent cities in developed countries.

An increasing number of cities are currently implementing sustainable transport reforms that could be inspirational for others. These include measures: to promote multimodal approaches to transport (including, underground trains, light trains, bus rapid transit systems,<sup>67</sup> cycling and walking); to regulate and reduce traffic (congestion charges, road pricing schemes, traffic-free zones,

etc.); to introduce integrated fare systems; and to develop new planning approaches (see Box 4.6). Green mobility is also at the centre of many local government strategies (e.g. transitioning to public transport driven by electricity or other renewable forms of energy, cycle routes, etc.). Frontrunner cities have already committed to using zero-emission vehicles by 2025.<sup>68</sup>

With regard to road safety, more and more cities are adopting new strategies, including: low traffic speeds, “vision zero” strategies, and safe systems approaches.<sup>70</sup> Although the use of new technologies is critical for increasing connectivity and automation in order to facilitate accessibility and improve safety, there is still room to improve in terms of the compatibility of information and general integration.<sup>71</sup> It is still necessary to: develop more accessibility-based plans; improve mobility, connectivity, proximity, affordability and user information in order to increase system efficiency; reduce traffic problems; and to ensure that all residents, including economically, physically and socially disadvantaged groups, can access sustainable mobility.

**During the COVID-19 crisis, analyses have shown how passenger mobility trends in urban environments have been affected since the first weeks of the pandemic. The lessons learned from this crisis must now be used to accelerate and consolidate sustainable, low-carbon transport and mobility schemes and to use them to carry out a balanced implementation of SDG 11.2.**

### Waste management and air pollution (SDG 11.6 and 12.5)

In the majority of countries, LRGs have direct responsibilities for the management of waste and can exercise a certain amount of control over air pollution. In 2018, 65% of the world’s urban population had access to municipal waste management (today two billion people do not).<sup>72</sup>

**Globally speaking, the proportion of municipal solid waste that was collected increased to 81% between 2010 and 2018.** Human settlements are producing solid waste at increasing rates and unless trends change by 2050 the amount of solid waste generated annually could double. Much of the current solid waste that is produced takes the form of plastics and, to a lesser extent, electronic waste. With regard to air pollution, the World Health Organization (WHO) has underlined that nine out of ten urban residents breathe polluted air and that there are critical health problems in cities on all continents.<sup>73</sup>

Although the lockdown of half of the global population due to the COVID-19 crisis has

#### Box 4.6

### Selected examples of city actions relating to mobility<sup>69</sup>

In Europe, **Copenhagen’s** long-term vision for the city dictates that “at least one third of all driven traffic in the city should be made by bicycle, at least one third by public transport, and no more than one third by car”.

**Helsinki** aims to make it unnecessary to own a private car by 2025. **Lisbon** is reshaping its mobility landscape with new park and ride projects, bus corridors, and the use of electric vehicles for public transport (with 420 new buses and 25 new trams by 2023).

In Latin America, in **Brazil**, 3,300 cities should develop sustainable urban mobility plans as a pre-condition for receiving financing for their transport infrastructure, but they do not always do this in an integrated manner.

In the Gulf States, in **Dubai**, the Roads and Transport Authority is aiming for 20% of total trips to be made by public transport by 2020 and 30% by 2030; this would effectively double the 2015 share of 15%.

**Asia** has already developed some of the most advanced and innovative transport systems (e.g. in Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo). bus rapid transit currently serves around 10 million people per day in Asian cities, half of whom are in China. Since 2017, China has had 40% of the world’s electric passenger cars and over 99% of its electric buses. **Malaysia** has established a nationwide goal of public transport being used for 40% of all trips in urban areas by 2030.

In Africa, the city of **Windhoek**, working together with the Ministry of Works and Transport of Namibia and GIZ, has set up the Move Windhoek project, whose aim is to develop a sustainable urban transport master plan for Windhoek. This will look into ways of integrating informal transport systems and building a more affordable, accessible and efficient public transport system over the next 20 years.

produced a rapid reduction in air pollution in many cities, the progress made before the crisis was very limited. According to the WHO air quality database, in 2018, the air in 97% of cities in low- and middle-income countries with more than 100,000 inhabitants did not meet global standards, while in high-income countries the percentage was 49% (see Figure 4.3).<sup>74</sup> Air pollution in South and South-West Asia, as reported by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), has fallen from 2000 levels.

An increasing number of cities and regions are developing tools for monitoring air pollution and adopting action plans for air quality. **In October 2019, 35 mayors from large cities committed to ambitious pollution reduction targets and to implement substantial clean air policies by 2025 affecting more than 140 million citizens.**<sup>75</sup> Cities in developing economies are making efforts to: promote more sustainable transport and mobility; introduce low-emission zones; reduce industrial emissions; and promote alternative sources of energy for heating and cooking. These measures should help to reduce both indoor and outdoor air pollution (that often affect the health of women and children) and contribute to reducing environmental damage (e.g. the Dakar Territorial Climate Energy Plan to reduce pollution, Clean Stoves Initiative in Indonesia).<sup>76</sup> Access to clean cooking fuels and technologies had globally increased to 63% in 2018, from 60% in 2015. The only exception to this trend was in Africa, where the number of people without access to clean fuels for cooking increased.<sup>77</sup>

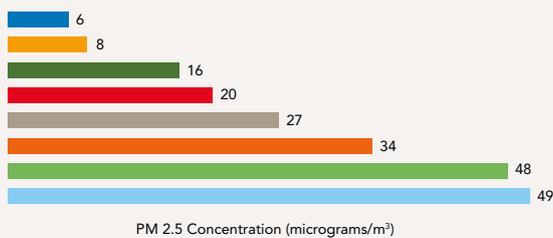
As reflected in the previous Subsection, **there is also a global divide in the management of waste.** In high-income countries, 90% to 100% of domestic waste is collected and managed in an environmentally safe manner. In low-middle and low-income countries, the median collection coverage ranges from 43% to 66%, while from 66% to 93% goes to dumps that remain largely uncontrolled and the open burning of waste remains common. **Even so, the collection of waste in low-income countries has significantly increased from about 22% to 39% in the last decade.** In middle and upper-middle income countries, around 80% of the waste is collected and 80% is adequately managed (see Figure 4.4).<sup>78</sup>

Moving beyond these general groupings, there are important differences within each region, both between and within countries, and between large and small cities. In Europe, for example, only six countries reached the EU target of recycling 50% of waste by 2020: in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands less than 5% of waste is sent to landfills, while in Bulgaria and Greece, the figure is as high as 80%.<sup>79</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, which is currently the world’s largest producer of waste (40% of global waste), an average of 77% of waste was collected in urban areas in 2016-2017.<sup>80</sup> An increasing number of large cities are promoting integrated waste-management strategies (around 20% of the waste collected is separated, with a percentage of it being composted or recycled); examples include **Chennai** in India, **Surabaya** in Indonesia, and **Bangkok** in Thailand. However, in

Figure 4.3

### PM 2.5 concentration, by region (2015)

Source: State of Global Air report, 2017

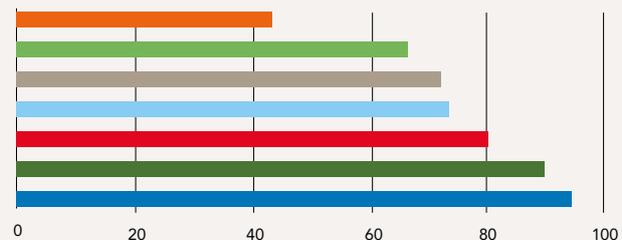


- AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND
- OCEANIA
- NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE
- LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
- EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA
- SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
- CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA
- WEST ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA

Figure 4.4

### Municipal solid waste collection coverage, by region (2017)

Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>



- SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
- CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA
- EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA
- WEST ASIA AND NORTH AFRICA
- LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
- NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE
- AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

South Asia, three quarters of waste is still openly dumped. In Latin America and the Caribbean (11% of global waste) waste collection coverage has reached 85% in urban areas, more than 50% of which is disposed of at sanitary landfill sites; recycling is still limited, but progress is being made. In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 44% of waste is collected (but only 9% in rural areas) and 69% is openly dumped (there are, however, enormous differences between countries and cities, ranging from 82% waste collection coverage in **Johannesburg** to only 11% in **Monrovia**), although various initiatives have been developed to improve the final disposal (11% is disposed of at controlled landfill sites and 6% is recycled).<sup>81</sup>

Across the world, LRGs are taking initiatives to improve waste collection and to significantly reduce waste generation. In 2018, 25 leading cities and regions, mostly in more economically countries, stepped up their actions towards achieving zero waste.<sup>82</sup> Many cities, including frontrunner cities in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, are currently developing initiatives based on the 3R (reduce, reuse and recycle) principles. They are also moving away from landfill and incineration practices and instead promoting the capture of landfill gases, transforming waste to energy, adopting zero-plastic policies, and applying taxes and fees (usually based on the “polluter pays” principle). Intelligent systems and innovative planning can contribute to innovative solutions for the selective collection and recycling of household waste (e.g. WINPOL, a project including cities and regions from different countries that is funded by the EU; and a project in **Kigali**, where sensors are being deployed to aid waste and utility management).<sup>83</sup> A number of countries are currently taking action in response to the pressure created by plastic and electronic waste and their devastating consequences. Informal waste-workers and communities are also being integrated within a more holistic approach which seeks to promote inclusiveness and better management (e.g. **Accra**, **Dar es Salaam**, **Bogota**, **Belo Horizonte**, etc.). In **Accra**, for example, the official recognition of its informal waste collectors has helped increase municipal waste collection from 28% to 48% in just two years.<sup>84</sup>

It is worth noting that **during the COVID-19 crisis, LRGs and public workers from the waste sector have been at the forefront of ensuring the continuity of this service, despite facing an important risk of contamination.** As a result, in many cases, they have suffered important consequences. Furthermore, the pandemic may give way to an overall increase in the use of plastic and single-use items.

However, the reality is that most cities, and particularly those in developing economies, struggle to manage solid waste in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible way. In middle-low and low-income countries, waste management could represent an important part of local expenditures, but recovering the associated cost is difficult. In some countries, LRGs are also struggling to cope with waste management as it has historically been a centralized competence (e.g. **Greater Beirut**).

**Promoting a resource-efficient, circular and waste-free society, by reducing consumption; fostering the reuse of material from the construction, industrial, food, domestic and apparel sectors; phasing out single-use plastics; and diverting at least 70% of waste away from disposal or incineration by 2030 are all major challenges that will need radical changes in human behaviour and lifestyles. The world needs to accelerate the pace of investment in the safe environmental management of waste in order to reduce pollution and GHG emissions.**

### **Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning (SDG 11.a)**

**To take full advantage of the cumulative benefits of our increasingly complex urban systems, our societies need to renew their approaches to urban and territorial governance.**

The transformative impact of cities and their interactions with peri-urban and rural areas—the so-called “rural-urban continuum”—call for empowered LRGs, real cross-sectoral approaches, and an increased level of vertical and horizontal coordination between institutions and different levels of government. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda undoubtedly represents an opportunity to strengthen and expand this institutional collaboration, to establish effective multilevel governance, to foster policy coherence, to reduce overlaps and critical gaps between institutions, and to increase stakeholder involvement.

In March 2020, the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators adopted a new indicator for target 11.a. The new indicator proposes considering the “number of countries that have national urban policies or regional development plans (...)”.<sup>85</sup> In this case, national urban policies are seen as providing a proxy with which to measure the number of countries that

facilitate the most integrated policies for urban and regional development. NUPs are considered an overarching coordinating framework that supports the spatial organization and functioning of a system of cities.<sup>86</sup>

An analysis carried out in 2018, and which is to be updated in 2020, found that fewer than two in five countries had an explicit national urban policy: a policy called “National Urban Policy”, “National Urbanisation Policy”, “National Urban Strategy” or something similar. Another 74 countries had either an implicit or a partial NUP: the country had many of the elements of a NUP in place but these had not been brought together as formal or explicit NUPs (see Figure 4.5).<sup>87</sup>

The measurement of this indicator requires detailed attention. In Africa, for example, 38 countries are considered to have explicit or implicit NUPs in an early or more developed stage.<sup>88</sup> However, using a narrower definition of NUPs, or of policies that resemble them, only 18 African countries would have NUPs.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, many explicit NUPs lack sufficient resources to deploy comprehensive urban strategies. In some countries, established urban strategies have expired and need to be reviewed,<sup>90</sup> and it is not only Africa that is facing these difficulties.<sup>91</sup> Finally, NUPs often remain disconnected from the SDGs, NDCs and DRR principles of the Sendai Framework for Action, which makes it difficult to articulate really integrated and coherent policies that can take advantage of the added value associated with urbanisation.

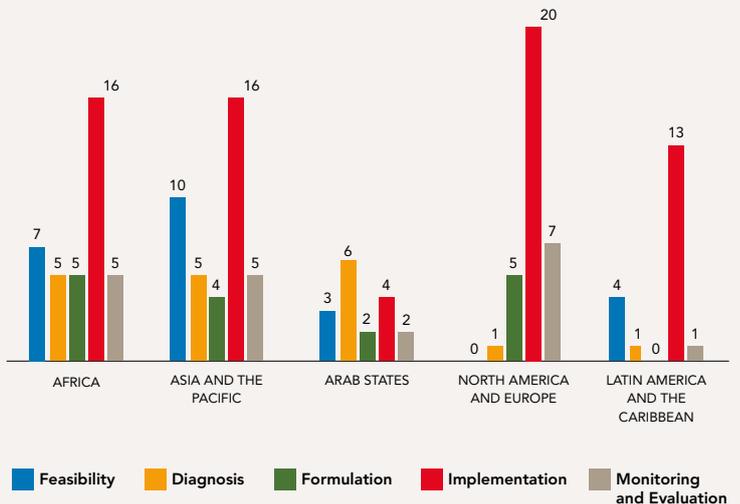
As governmental level bodies with direct responsibilities for urban and territorial management, LRGs need to be effectively involved in the definition, implementation and follow-up of NUPs.<sup>92</sup> Without strong subnational ownership, NUPs will struggle to overcome political, financial and practical barriers. Hence, the quality of intergovernmental relations and policy coherence is key to overall progress towards the sustainable development agendas, including the extraction of the added value associated with urbanization.

**Well-tailored multilevel governance arrangements, based on the principle of subsidiarity and respect for local autonomy, can facilitate the involvement of local institutions and actors and create local ownership. This facilitates the adaptation of national strategies to meet local realities and helps to nurture national strategies with local innovation and experimentation.**<sup>93</sup> In a framework of increasing inequalities between cities and territories, the integration of NUPs and regional planning, as well as the support to and recognition of intermediary cities, could serve as the foundations for more balanced and equal

Figure 4.5

### Status of NUPs in countries, by regions

Source: UN Habitat and OECD (2018), Global State of National Urban Policy. United Nations Settlements Programme, Nairobi



urban and territorial development, which are core principles of sustainable agendas that seek to avoid leaving anyone or any territory behind.

The transcendental transformation of the urban landscape, which has already been mentioned in previous sections, has resulted in the expansion of metropolitan areas, intermediary cities and peri-urban areas, which poses incremental challenges to local, regional and national governments alike. Urban-rural areas are increasingly mutually reliant. This is a tendency that has been spurred on by the expansion of urban settlements, new economic opportunities, enhanced communications and technologies, and also the need to protect natural and environmental resources (water, land, coastal areas, agriculture, forestland, etc.) and to cooperate in order to increase resilience (e.g. to natural disasters such as floods and droughts).

Within this context, the nature of rural-urban partnerships is directly influenced by external conditions: national and regional institutions; regulatory constraints and political bottlenecks; asymmetrical information flows; and/or the lack of cooperation between different levels of government and actors. The fragmentation of policy-making can influence the effectiveness of such partnerships to spur on development strategies. On the other hand, awareness and inclusion, a deeper understanding of the regional context and of the rural-urban linkages that strengthen partnerships, and the promotion

of democratic participation and the grassroots leadership that stems from it, are all factors that can galvanize the positive impact that such partnerships can have on a given territory. There is a need to develop adequate instruments to facilitate partnerships that effectively link together urban and rural plans; it is also necessary to provide the necessary institutional, political and economic resources.

For their part, LRGs need to advance initiatives to reinforce cooperation between territories through horizontal cooperation (inter-municipal, regional). **Initiatives that aim to promote urban-rural partnerships by combining environmental, economic and socio-cultural objectives through an integrated strategy could improve governance, strengthen research and innovation, and give a greater role to public institutions at all levels, from local to regional.** Forging new partnerships and fostering smart specialisation that promotes the sustainable development of rural and peri-urban areas located on urban fringes can take many forms. Key components usually include shared development strategies (e.g. eco-tourism), better access to social services in peri-urban and rural areas, local food systems, and the protection of environmental resources that are critical for urban systems (e.g. watershed management, wetland and coastal area protection schemes, reforestation, etc.).<sup>94</sup>

The UN-Habitat Urban-Rural Guiding Principles and Framework for Action are a key reference for those working to adopt a more proactive approach to the articulation of urban, peri-urban and rural areas into the wider territories to which they belong. They explicitly acknowledge the fundamental importance of understanding and promoting sustainable development across the whole urban-rural continuum.<sup>95</sup>

To summarise, this Subsection underlined the diversity and breadth of the initiatives implemented by LRGs to bolster the localization of the 2030 Agenda and, particularly, the implementation of SDG 11. LRGs are making massive efforts to align urban and local plans with the SDGs, enhance access to basic services, improve sustainable mobility, and overcome the housing crisis. And they do so while taking in consideration the need to leave no one behind and to reduce the impact of urban areas on the environment. Frontrunner LRGs are mobilized to defend the rights to housing and to water, and to reduce inequalities and social segregation.

**Globally, however, the scope and pace of these efforts need to be upscaled to achieve the SDGs by 2030.** Structural constraints, such as demographic change and globalization affect

LRGs' limited powers and resources. Moreover, entrenched power systems hamper LRGs' effective capacity to steer sustainable development in urban areas. Some regions (such as Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia) are particularly lagging behind in this respect. As already stressed above, in regions where LRGs have more limited resources and capacities, service delivery has been unable to keep pace with rapid urban population growth. LRGs, particularly in peripheral regions, smaller cities and towns, are still not fully aware of the SDGs. Inequalities between metropolitan, intermediary cities and peripheral regions are also growing.

Urgent actions are needed to improve and adapt urban planning regulations and frameworks, particularly in those regions where rapid urban growth will be most concentrated (Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia). **All LRGs must adopt the principle of inclusive and participatory planning to involve local stakeholders in decision making processes.** Recovery packages and funding policies need to prioritize investments in basic services and infrastructures to enhance the inclusiveness and resilience of cities and local communities.

More comprehensive urban and regional strategies should be embedded in national sustainable development plans and in NUPs. These strategies need to associate LRGs in their definition and implementation. They need to take advantage of the privileged connections between rural, peri-urban and urban areas within different territories. More balanced systems of cities should help to reduce the increasing territorial divides observed in almost all regions. They could be used to promote closer and better coordination of policy for the achievement of the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda.●

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**More comprehensive urban and regional strategies should be embedded in national sustainable development plans and in NUPs. These strategies need to associate LRGs in their definition and implementation.**

## 4.3 Advancing human wellbeing and ending hunger



Albanian woman and child, in Theth Valley, Albania (Photo: Theth Valley)

Advancing human wellbeing, ending poverty and reducing inequalities lie at the centre of achieving all of the SDGs. Defining wellbeing is rather challenging because it requires looking at many aspects of people's lives as well as understanding their interlinkages.<sup>96</sup> Human wellbeing includes: no poverty (SDG 1) and zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality

(SDG 5), respect for cultural diversity (SDG 11.4), the guarantee of a safe environment without fear of violence, respect for human rights and having a voice in the community (SDG 16), amongst other dimensions.<sup>97</sup> Globally speaking, urban residents benefit from better living conditions than people living in rural areas, but with important differences within and between cities.<sup>98</sup>

## Ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions (SDG 1)

With regard to extreme poverty, the UN indicates that after a decline from 15.7%, in 2010, to 10%, in 2015, “the pace of reduction of extreme poverty slowed down with a ‘nowcast’ rate of 8.2% in 2019”.<sup>99</sup> Although the rate of extreme poverty is three times higher in rural than in urban areas, in the World Social Report (2020), the UN highlights the fact that poverty and the exacerbation of inequalities are increasingly urbanized.<sup>100</sup> In fact, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the global rate of extreme poverty is projected to increase in 2020. This will cause the first increase in global poverty in more than 20 years, further exacerbating the profound inequalities that exist both within and among countries and territories.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond using income to measure poverty, the targets included in SDG 1 also consider: the development of systems of protection; ways to ensure equal rights to economic resources and access to basic services; land ownership; ways of improving the resilience of the poor to disasters and of risk prevention; and sound pro-poor and gender-sensitive policies. As already discussed in previous sections, LRG policies and actions have either direct or shared responsibilities in several of these dimensions.

At the global level, for a sample of 67 countries, social protection was the second largest area of spending for LRGs after education. It was then followed by general public services and health.<sup>102</sup> LRGs in these countries all had a long tradition of social services as well as investment in social infrastructure (e.g. support for poor families, children and young people, the elderly, the unemployed, disabled people, deprived people, and immigrants).<sup>103</sup> Cities are implementing innovative social programmes in all geographical areas. The *Medellín Solidaria* initiative in **Medellín**<sup>104</sup> and the *Abre* programme in Rosario<sup>105</sup> are just two valuable examples of this kind of initiative. South African cities, such as **eThekweni-Durban**, have also established a comprehensive package of measures to help poor and vulnerable people, including indigenous communities.<sup>106</sup> In Africa, the Network of Local Elected Women (REFELA) of UCLG Africa is working in partnership with UNICEF on a regional campaign entitled “African Cities without Children in street situation”.<sup>107</sup> Such local initiatives are often limited in scope, but can complement national redistributive policies (such as the past successful programme in Brazil called *Bolsa Família* or *Bolsa Escola*) with an important impact.

## Although the rate of extreme poverty is three times higher in rural than in urban areas, poverty and the exacerbation of inequalities are increasingly urbanized.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also made LRGs rethink the way in which they deliver local policies. They have brought social programs to the ground through door-to-door approaches in order to maintain the continuity of public services, especially for the most vulnerable groups. Thousands of LRGs have organised food distribution services and implemented new local policies to face the emergency situation (distribution of food baskets, food banks, etc.). The city of **Sfax** has launched a large-scale operation with civil society organizations to identify migrants in precarious situation and ensured their protection from potential contagion.<sup>108</sup> **Mexico City** has arranged home delivery of food and medicines for the elderly population and the most marginalised.<sup>109</sup>

Access to adequate housing and land is also one of the most pressing challenges of today. Several stakeholders are highlighting the potential aggravation of the living conditions as a result of the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>110</sup> With regard to land tenure, LRGs can do much to recognise different forms of tenure and work to formalise the land rights of their citizens.<sup>111</sup> Even so, secure land tenure needs to be complemented by public policies to provide services and assistance, improve neighbourhood living conditions, prevent socio-economic marginalisation, and also reduce the risk of disasters and the effects of climate change, which tend to primarily affect poorer sectors of the population. Subsection 4.2 showed different policies developed by LRGs to deal with the housing crisis and improve slum living conditions. Subsection 4.4 below will address policies for building resilience. These include stronger partnerships between LRGs, local communities and organizations representing slum dwellers to co-create local solutions and also better national-local coordination to promote decentralized housing and urban renewal policies embedded within city development strategies. This could help to accelerate and upscale local solutions and contribute to reducing poverty and inequalities.

However, earlier studies that analysed the performance of such schemes in a sample of cities in developing countries showed that **local authorities will probably need to achieve rates of progress that are more than twice as fast as those we have seen in recent years if they are to meet their targets (putting an end to child malnutrition, achieving universal access to drinking water and sanitation, and providing universal access to adequate housing)**. It is also necessary to improve data collection and to develop tools with which to address the severe deprivation that still remains largely invisible to policy makers.<sup>112</sup>

### Ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition (SDG 2)

The fight against poverty remains inextricably linked with access to food and nutrition. The total number of people suffering from severe food insecurity has been on the rise since 2015 and there are still millions of malnourished children.<sup>113</sup> The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated hunger and food insecurity.<sup>114</sup>

LRGs often have a strategic role to play in developing sustainable food systems and promoting healthy diets (e.g. for children at schools).<sup>115</sup> In urban settings, various different trends have been observed across the world. While in the Asia-Pacific region undernutrition still continues to be higher in rural areas than in urban ones, the latter present higher average rates of overall food insecurity than the former (in the least developed countries, this rate is 50% in cities and 43% in rural areas).<sup>116</sup> LRG actions related to food security must therefore be aligned with policies to alleviate poverty and foster social inclusion. **The informal economy plays a critical role in food security, especially in urban contexts, as it is the main source of income for the poor (accounting for 72% of non-agricultural employment in Africa), for financially independent women, and for newly arrived rural migrants.**<sup>117</sup> Many cities have focused on the role of women as providers of food security and protectors of agro-biodiversity. Indeed, agricultural production and purchasing have become increasingly feminised.<sup>118</sup>

Several local government networks have been created to share experiences on food security and sovereignty. While most of them are operative in the North (North America and Europe)<sup>119</sup>, innovative initiatives are now also emerging in regions such as Latin America and Africa.<sup>120</sup> The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact fosters city-to-city cooperation on food policy and aims to provide

all members of their populations with permanent and reliable access to adequate, safe, local, diversified, fair, healthy and nutrient-rich food by reducing unbalanced distribution and access, environmental degradation, resource scarcity, climate change, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and food loss and waste.<sup>121</sup>

Broader-scale **territorial food systems** therefore require cooperative strategies between urban, peri-urban and rural territories. As urbanization grows exponentially, particularly in the global South, cities and urban agglomerations run the risk of falling short in the quest to provide the whole of their populations with accessible, affordable and quality food without encroaching upon viable agricultural land.<sup>122</sup> According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, **urban and peri-urban agriculture can, and must, work with rural areas to improve local food security while, at the same time, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and protecting against major climate hazards.**<sup>123</sup> Indeed, as

Mid day meal beneficiaries of Askhaya Patra having lunch in a school of Puri (Photo: AkshayaPatra Foundation - Pixabay)



## In times of COVID-19, the lockdown of schools and the digital divide will further widen the existing gaps in educational equality.

noted in the Quebec Declaration (2015) on territorial food systems, making food systems the driving force will not only foster new, more local and shorter food and agricultural chains, but it will also “contribute to the preservation of natural resources, the improvement of the environment, (...) and the protection of food and agricultural diversity”.<sup>124</sup> In this endeavour, intermediate levels of government (provinces, departments) around the world, whose main competences usually include territorial planning, economic development, health, and protecting the environment, but also intersecting competences, such as biodiversity, soil erosion and water availability, can play a crucial role. This was clearly advocated by the Dakar Declaration (2010), the Medellin Summit and the Charter of Cuenca (2018).<sup>125</sup>

In other regions, LRGs are also propelling the development of **urban agriculture** to improve food security for the most vulnerable, to make food more affordable, and to create new, income-generating activities (as in **Detroit, Barcelona, Madagascar**<sup>126</sup> and **Rosario**<sup>127</sup>). In the same vein, many LRGs are now taking stronger action against **food waste**. A third of global agricultural production is wasted in the course of the whole production and distribution cycle; this occurs in the form of losses and waste (accounting for almost 65% of total municipal waste production).<sup>128</sup>

Ending hunger, improving food production and moderating consumption form part of a global challenge that has been exacerbated and made more clearly visible during the COVID-19 crisis. By working hand in hand with their local communities and raising awareness, LRGs in both the global South and the global North are in the position to improve food security for everyone. This task involves ensuring the right of every person to accessible, nutritious and culturally appropriate food produced in a close, sustainable and ecological way, as well as their right to decide their own food and production systems.<sup>129</sup>

## Ensuring healthy lives and quality education (SDG 3 and 4)

Health and education are two essential dimensions for developing human wellbeing and reducing poverty and inequality. The UN Secretary-General’s report summarized the situation as follows: “Progress in many health areas continues, but the rate of improvement has slowed down and will not be sufficient to meet most of the Goal 3 targets”. Despite having made considerable progress on access to education, “at the end of 2019, 258 million children and youths were still out of school and more than half of those in school were not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and numeracy”. The COVID-19 pandemic is already threatening the progress made towards health targets and has affected over 90% of the world’s student population. The lockdown of schools and the digital divide will also further widen the existing gaps in educational equality.<sup>130</sup>

**Education is the primary area of LRG spending, taking up 23.6% of their budgets (spent on primary and secondary as well as higher education in some countries), while health spending comes in fourth, representing 10.7% of subnational expenditure (in the same sample of 67 countries).** In many federal states (Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Germany, and the United States), regional government bodies or specialized decentralized authorities (and local government organizations in several unitary states, including some North European countries and Korea) have wide responsibilities over both education and health, including the management of public hospitals.<sup>131</sup>

Outside of these countries, LRGs play different, and often significant, roles in promoting significant prevention and educational policies, linking national policies to local contexts. Their contributions can cover a wide spectrum ranging from providing primary health care and education infrastructure (i.e. building maintenance) to raising awareness of health issues, providing social assistance to people without health care, programming professional training for the young, and organizing extra-curricular activities for children. LRGs have often to assess the impact of public policies on the day-to-day lives of communities and help to find and develop answers to different health and educational needs, structuring them along the lines of urban-rural location, gender and other dimensions linked to local realities.

With regard to health, over recent years, LRGs in many countries have been confronted with the

need to reduce their health and healthcare services (in a process that has even created some “medical deserts”). Inequalities in access to health services are evident between urban and rural areas, but also in many cities. For example, life expectancy in London can vary by almost 20 years depending on where a person lives. As underlined in UN reports, **at least half of the global population does not have access to essential health services and even many of those who do, still suffer undue financial hardship, which could potentially push them into extreme poverty.**<sup>132</sup>

Where LRGs do not have key responsibilities within health systems, they are often responsible for health information campaigns and preventive healthcare policies, support primary health care centres, lead action in favour of the most vulnerable groups,<sup>133</sup> and are on the frontline when it comes to facing up to emergencies. As already explained in Subsection 4.1, they have been particularly reactive in the face of the pandemic, having made a valuable contribution in providing support to the health system and related services.

For 30 years, the European Healthy Cities Network, supported by WHO, has brought together some 100 flagship cities and approximately 30 national networks. In February 2018, the Copenhagen Consensus of Mayors: Healthier and Happier Cities for All was adopted, marking a transformative approach towards building safe, inclusive, sustainable and resilient societies in line with the 2030 Agenda.<sup>134</sup> Within the framework of the pandemic, several new initiatives have emerged, such as “Cities for Global Health”, which is supported by numerous global LRG networks.<sup>135</sup>

With regard to the educational system, LRGs help to guarantee universal access to childhood and youth education (funding educational costs, ensuring school transport, and also providing social assistance to reduce absenteeism and dropout rates, etc.) and help to make school environments safer, more inclusive and more innovative (e.g. by the creation of school district zoning to fight segregation, by redesigning educational facilities, and by integrating children with disabilities, etc.). In many countries, LRGs are in charge of early childhood education and care; indeed, a recent UN report underlines significant progress in this

area.<sup>136</sup> Even so, the conditions and performances of educational systems vary widely, both between countries and within them.<sup>137</sup> In regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, “still less than one-half of primary and lower secondary schools had access to electricity, the Internet, computers, and basic handwashing facilities, key basic services and facilities necessary to ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all students”.<sup>138</sup> It should, however, also be noted that LRGs in this region are currently involved in many initiatives to improve school conditions.

**LRGs can also take charge of technical and vocational education and training programmes for young people and adults, adapting them to meet the needs of local labour markets and to groups that are at risk of social exclusion.** Some cities are currently implementing pioneering pedagogical programmes using the power of football as a universal language in order to reach out to populations from different backgrounds and origins, as in **Munich**. LRGs can also provide the tools required to engage citizens in lifelong learning, motivate them to become active learners and acquire the skills that they need to develop in life, and help them to enjoy the opportunities that their cities offer. For example, projects for the elderly such as the Happy Learning Centre in **Paju**, university courses for the elderly in **Quebec** and in **Shenzhen**. Some LRGs also provide support to civic organizations by offering training courses, guaranteeing funding, offering local facilities to promote their work, or getting them actively involved in local policy-making processes. The work carried out by city networks such as the International Association of Educating Cities proves that education is a key local policy area which can have an unquestionably transformative impact at both the local and global levels.<sup>139</sup>

LRGs are key actors in implementing educational and health policies at different levels. If adequately empowered, LRGs can act as levers to strengthen health systems and promote prevention strategies. They can support the education system through life-long learning initiatives and fostering the principle of leaving no one and no territory behind. For this reason, the participation of LRGs in the process of policy-making within the health and educational sectors, and also in more localized policies, needs to be actively encouraged. This should be done in association with reinforcing local capacities and resources and by involving local actors in the planning process. Multilevel cooperation in the policy-making process guarantees coherence and efficiency. It also gives greater reach for promoting quality health and education and better solutions to meet local needs.

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**LRGs can act as levers to strengthen health systems and promote prevention strategies.**

## Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5)

“The commitments to advancing gender equality have brought about improvements in some areas, but the promise of a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed remains unfulfilled”.<sup>140</sup>

**Although women continue to be under-represented at all levels of political leadership, progress has been observed in the number of women who are currently serving in national parliaments and local governments in decision-making positions.** “In 2019, women have better access to decision-making positions at local level, holding 36% of elected seats in local deliberative bodies, based on data from 133 countries and areas”.<sup>141</sup> In national parliaments, women’s representation reached 25% at the end of 2019 (up from 22.3% in 2015).<sup>142</sup> Women’s representation in local government is 40% or higher in only 22 countries and areas (see Figure 4.6 for the percentages by regions).<sup>143</sup> When legislated gender quotas are adopted, significantly higher proportions of women are elected at both the national and local levels. Countries with higher levels of representation of women in local government also tend to have higher representation in parliament.<sup>144</sup> It should be remembered that **gender balance in political participation and decision-making is an internationally agreed target that was set in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.**<sup>145</sup>

Alongside the admittedly varied progress of female representation in local governments, LRGs are mainstreaming gender-specific approaches to urban management and policy-making. They are doing this through programmes that range from initiatives addressing the problem of gender-related violence to others that acknowledge the role of women in the informal economy. The aim is to develop targeted initiatives to promote equality for women and girls. In 2006, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions launched the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, which currently has 1,777 LRG signatories in 36 countries.<sup>146</sup> The charter supports the mainstreaming of gender in all public policies, including gender-responsive budgeting, urban planning, governance, adequate provision of basic services, countering gender violence, and raising awareness about harmful gender stereotypes. Several global and regional networks of elected women are now actively promoting women’s rights and have been particularly active in all of the

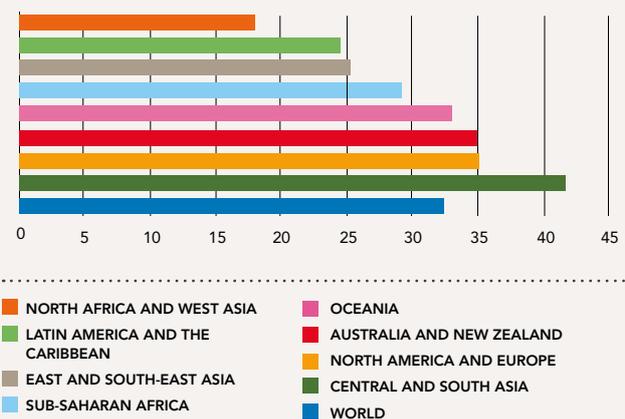
processes led by the UN Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing+25).<sup>147</sup> The work of the Network of the Locally Elected Women of Africa (REFELA) was recognised by UNESCO in January 2020 for its African Cities Campaign for Zero Tolerance to Violence against Women and Girls.<sup>148</sup>

Examples of LRG initiatives around the world aimed at reducing and preventing violence against women and empowering them to participate in public life in order to protect women’s rights are currently expanding. Action has been taken in many countries to assist women who have been victims of domestic violence (these include: hotlines and municipal women’s houses in France, district services for women in **Bogota**, the SARA integral service in **Barcelona**, etc.). In relation to urban spaces, information has been gathered on places where women feel unsafe (for example, **New Delhi’s** free *SafetiPin* app includes an alarm service; it is now also available in **Bangalore** and **Jakarta**, among other cities<sup>149</sup>). Action has been taken to protect women using public transportation (e.g. **Quito’s** “Down with Harassment” project<sup>150</sup>; and **Toronto’s** buses stopping at the request of women between 9pm and 5am to shorten walking distance<sup>151</sup>) and to raise public awareness to problems (e.g. **Paris’s** campaign against the harassment of women on public transport “Never minimize sexual harassment: Victim or witness, speak up!”<sup>152</sup>). Similar actions have also been implemented in a large number of other cities, including **Seoul**, **Montreal** and **Barcelona**.<sup>153</sup>

Figure 4.6

### Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local governments, in % (2019)

Source: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/> - Indicator 5.5.1.



Gender equality is also inextricably linked to the right to specifically adapted policies for health and education. In this respect, LRGs can assess local barriers and adopt specific measures, such as promoting certain educational practices that foster greater gender equality. In Indonesia, for example, the government of **North Lombok District** promotes a Women's School for women born in grassroots communities; this is helping to reduce discriminatory barriers to political participation in village and district consultative fora.

Although the mobilization of LRGs to promote gender equality has made considerable progress in recent years, discriminatory laws and norms remain pervasive and women and girls continue to face violence. Within the framework of the lockdown generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of domestic violence have increased. **Urban policies continue to have a sexual bias and to affect the possibility of women and girls accessing economic, social and cultural opportunities. LRG networks are committed to fostering gender equality and bold and sustainable action that addresses**

**the structural impediments and root causes of discrimination against women and girls.**

### **Strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage (SDG 11.4)**

Culture, including heritage, is an essential dimension of human wellbeing and of sustainable development. The role of culture has been particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in relation to the cohesion and survival of our societies, and cultural institutions and actors have been particularly affected by the situation created.

LRGs have advocated and acknowledged culture as the "fourth pillar of sustainable development" since at least 2010.<sup>154</sup> They have adopted a series of tools to support cities across the world and to help them to share a common framework for the operationalization of culture within their individual approaches to sustainable development. A specific network of LRGs has also emerged around the Agenda 21 for Culture.<sup>155</sup>

Inca woman weaving alpaca wool, Urubamba Valley, Peru (Photo: FG Trade - iStockphoto)



The consideration of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development goes beyond the promotion of cultural policies, programmes, or projects within the field of heritage, creativity, diversity and knowledge. Of course, such policies are important, and a community will not be able to progress without them and unless they are well-funded, transparent and accountable. **The importance of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development lies in the invitation to adopt a cultural perspective in the long-term planning of all policies: making explicit that the fact that policies in such fields as health, gender equality, racism, urban planning, tourism and education cannot be successful unless this perspective is adopted and applied. This implies providing meaning, empowering the community and ensuring the best possible use of public resources to achieve our goals.**

A few specific examples can be summarised to explain this innovative way of understanding culture in local development. The cities of **Bogota** and **Medellin** have involved artistic and cultural groups and organizations in the provision of educational programmes in several of their neighbourhoods, especially targeting disadvantaged groups. In **Segou**, the Festival on the Niger Foundation leads a local programme that relates the SDGs to cultural activities and practices. **Lyon** has a Local Charter of Cultural Cooperation that relates each of its major cultural institutions and events (its Opera House, libraries, Dance Biennial, and Lights Festival, etc.) to specific commitments in all fields of local sustainable development.<sup>156</sup> The shire of **Yarra Ranges** has persuaded local social and economic stakeholders to shift its tourism policies towards providing decent economic opportunities for local artists and creative businesses. **Timbuktu** has presented the outstanding, lasting results of its strategy for the reinvigoration of its socio-economic and urban fabric, which was much-needed after its occupation in 2012 and 2013. Linking traditional knowledge to the conservation of natural resources have been acknowledged by both the Seed Swap Festival of **Seferihisar** and the **Ha Long** Ecomuseum, which are unique cultural experiences that promote the conservation of land and water.

To better integrate culture into local sustainable development policies, LRGs should promote appropriate cross-departmental collaborations and design, implement and evaluate policies and programmes in which cultural aspects intersect with economic, social and environmental interests and dimensions. **Cultural actors must be invited to participate in these exercises.** Evidence must

be collected and presented about both explicit and implicit references to cultural phenomena (tangible and intangible heritage, creativity, diversity, etc.) in national, regional and local sustainable development strategies designed in accordance with the SDGs.

The COVID-19 pandemic is generating hundreds of thousands of initiatives. These range from offering online events, including theatre, dance and musical recordings and virtual collections in museums and art centres, to the emergence of totally new initiatives, in which COVID-19 is the main theme. These have mainly been presented in the digital and multimedia sphere. People are turning to culture to create meaning, to show their solidarity, and to boost their spirits. LRGs, together with their workers, actors and institutions, are making a tremendous effort to maintain activities that help to ease people's feelings of isolation. There can be no better illustration of why culture should be consolidated as the fourth pillar of sustainable development.

## Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)

"Conflict, insecurity, weak institutions and limited access to justice remain a great threat to sustainable development. (...) The COVID-19 pandemic is potentially leading to an increase in social unrest and violence that would greatly undermine our ability to meet the targets of SDG 16".<sup>157</sup>

### Peace, conflict and violence (SDG 16.1)

Challenges related to insecurity, fragility, conflict and violence need to be addressed by LRGs as major issues that can obstruct progress towards the advancement of human wellbeing and other SDGs. In 2018, the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million; this was the highest level recorded by UNHCR in almost 70 years. "The global rate of homicide per 100,000 people slowly declined from 6.8 in 2000 to 5.9 in 2015 and then 5.8 in 2018". Two thirds of the victims were concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>158</sup>

Peace was one of the main pillars used for the foundation of the historical, century-old, global organizations of cities and regions to establish bridges, support solidarity between different peoples and promote local diplomacy. With the increasing urbanization of war, several networks became stronger, including Mayors for Peace, which was initiated by the Japanese city of Hiroshima and currently brings together

7,900 cities from 164 different countries.<sup>159</sup> Since 2010, the UCLG Peace Prize has acknowledged city-based initiatives from all around the world that seek to promote peace, dialogue and reconstruction. In 2019, **Arsal** was recognised for facilitating mediation between communities. In 2016, **Kauswagan** was awarded the prize for its “From arms to farm” initiative. Others awarded experiences were **Bogota** and **Cali**, **Duhok**, and **Shabunda**.<sup>160</sup> African LRGs have played critical roles during many times of crisis. For instance, they helped through the reception of refugees during the crisis in Mali, in 2012, which was a result of a *coup d'état* and the occupation of the north of the country by insurgent and Islamist groups; this has been widely recognized by the international community. This is also the case of the Jordanian, Greek, Lebanese and Turkish municipalities which had to handle a large influx of migrants and refugees fleeing from the war in Syria and to ensure that they received basic services and accommodation, working with relatively limited resources.

**Poverty and inequality exacerbate risks and serve as an instigator of urban violence. This is a key consideration in the governance of cities and metropolises in Latin America, North America and Africa. This violence may be the product of exclusionary processes, interpersonal violence, hate crimes and/or organized crime and is further aggravated when corruption undermines social trust in public institutions.** In the framework of the expansion of the recourse to new technologies (e.g. the use of surveillance cameras and smart emergency management centres, etc.), many cities are now trying to rebuild confidence and improve security. They are also developing more inclusive social policies based on respect for diversity and human rights. Such policies include: campaigns to raise public awareness; getting local stakeholders more involved in preventive policies; improving responsive health initiatives (including more integrated approaches to dealing with drug-users); training local police; getting the police more involved with local communities in the management and reduction of violence; developing mediation to solve conflicts; and providing greater social assistance. For example, **Seoul's** Crime Prevention through Environmental Design project targets troubled neighbourhoods and enjoys the active involvement of communities, schools, the private sector, the police, and local district offices, who are working together in an effort to find innovative new ways to tackle crime.<sup>161</sup> **Medellin** used to be one of

the most violent cities in the world, back in the 1990s, but by 2000, its local government had succeeded in reducing its murder rate ten-fold; this was achieved thanks to participatory and inclusive policies involving all sectors of its society.<sup>162</sup> **Logan** City Council in Queensland has introduced a Safe City Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020.

The city of **Madrid** and **Mexico City** co-host the international Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace, for the transformation of cultures of violence into cultures of peace, promoting policies that undercut the legitimization and recourse to violence, while encouraging the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts. A culture of peace requires the transformation of conflicts through dialogue and negotiation on an equal footing, using non-violent means. For example, Mexico City developed a “buy-back” programme to tackle rising gun violence.

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**A culture of peace requires the transformation of conflicts through dialogue and negotiation on an equal footing, using non-violent means.**

**Protecting human rights, migrants and vulnerable groups – Actions against racism and xenophobia (SDG 16.a and 10.7)**

Although state compliance with national human rights institutions has made important progress in recent years, in 2019, access to them was still insufficient in 78 countries, and particularly in East and South-East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>163</sup>

As part of their efforts to strengthen people's confidence in local institutions, LRGs all over the world are choosing to mainstream rights-based approaches into their development strategies in order to tackle all forms of discrimination and support diversity and social inclusion (this applies to women, people in extreme poverty, young people, the elderly, minorities, LGBTQIA+ populations, people with disabilities

and migrants). Within the framework of the preparations for Habitat III, a large coalition of LRGs and CSOs undertook a joint initiative to promote the Right to the city: an approach that was included in the outcome document. This approach asks cities to ensure universal access to good-quality basic services, nutritious food, health and education, economic opportunities, adequate housing and disaster and risk prevention, with a special emphasis on the most vulnerable.

Before that, more than 400 mayors signed the European Charter for Human Rights in the City and ran awareness-raising campaigns and education programmes, created human rights commissions and offices, and appointed ombudspersons and *mediateurs*.<sup>164</sup> These networks have played an active role in the process that began with the Human Rights Council Report [A/HRC/30/49 (2015)] and Resolution [A/HRC/RES/33/8 (2016)] on the recognition of the role of LRGs in the promotion and protection of human rights.

A wide number of LRGs are also addressing racism and xenophobia.<sup>165</sup> In the city of **Torino**, for example, the Action Plan Against Racist Hate Crimes develops an anti-racism approach as an urban common and includes trainings on human rights for the law enforcement sector.<sup>166</sup>

LRGs are also addressing the question of welcoming, protecting and creating enabling

environments for migrants, as they play a key role in local development processes, turning cities into hubs of diversity and innovation, and contributing to SDG 10.7.<sup>167</sup> **Although it is important to remember that most migratory flows happen legally and safely, often within continents and countries, vulnerable groups undergo the migration process in hazardous conditions. In such cases, migrants are constantly confronted with precarious and informal living and working conditions. They face risks, social exclusion, limited access to basic services, and language and cultural barriers.**

LRGs are often the ones in charge of welcoming different migrants and asylum seekers fleeing from poor living conditions, conflict or political persecution, regardless of their legal status. This is the case across several migratory routes in the Mediterranean or in Central America towards the United States, but also within the African, Latin American and Asian continents. The cases of certain Jordanian, Greek, Lebanese and Turkish municipalities have already been mentioned above. They have received more than 1 million immigrants over the past five years, the majority of whom they have welcomed in cities. Other examples include the creation of Sanctuary Cities in the United States (in more than 500 jurisdictions), the Solidarity Cities that were launched by the mayor of **Athens**

Photo: Ehimetalor-akhere-unuabona-zswLbyR\_b58 - iStockphoto



to welcome refugees and asylum seekers into Europe (more than 80 cities and towns),<sup>168</sup> and the “Cities and Regions for Integration” initiative of the European Committee of the Regions that was launched in 2019.<sup>169</sup> In 2016, European LRG networks adopted the Joint Guidelines on Migration and Strengthening Anti-Discrimination in Local and Regional Governments<sup>170</sup> and, in 2017, they associated with the European Action Plan on integration. Initiatives of this type range from local government bodies providing services of attention, welcome and advice for irregular migrants, to **Hamburg’s** “finding places” project to help accommodate 20,000 refugees, **Vienna’s** local programmes related to the right to work and skill-building for migrants and refugees, **Grenoble’s** project to encourage migrants to participate in public life, and schemes to foster greater coexistence and social cohesion, as in the case of **Castelfiorentino**, where the old city centre is a multicultural neighbourhood.<sup>171</sup>

Several African LRGs have also adopted the Charter of LRGs on Migration, to which over 30 cities have so far adhered. Cities such as **Tangier** and **Nador** acknowledge their humanitarian responsibilities and facilitate immigrant access to basic services such as shelter, education and health. **Pikine** has inaugurated an Office of Rights to provide services of attention, welcome and advice for irregular migrants.<sup>172</sup>

Decentralized cooperation has also focused on migration issues, as highlighted by the successful Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM). Since 2015, this project has worked with twenty cities around the Mediterranean to enhance rights-based approaches and evidence-based policies on urban migration, while the EU’s Urban Innovative Actions have funded several projects to promote the integration of refugees and migrants.

LRGs also play an increasing role in international fora like the Global Forum for Migration and Development, as shown by the establishment

of the Mayoral Mechanism in December 2018, steered jointly by UCLG, the Mayors Migration Council and the International Organization for Migration. The Mayors Mechanism aims at ensuring substantial and continuous dialogue with States and stakeholders concerning the global governance of migration and the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration adopted in the same year by the UN. The Marrakech Declaration of Mayors acknowledged the role of cities in the global governance of migration and looked to extend the role given to them in the process of defining and implementing the Global Compact.<sup>173</sup>

### Developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions: participation and accountability (SDG 16.6 and 16.7)

“The number of countries with binding laws and policies giving individuals a right to access information held by public authorities (right to information) has continued to climb, reaching 127 as of 2019.” Expert assessments, however, suggest that in many cases, the legal framework could be improved.<sup>174</sup>

In order to advance human wellbeing and capacities, more advanced LRGs are looking for innovative ways to: boost citizen participation; bolster open government practices and accountability; improve access to information; increase trust in public administration; and promote a renewed social contract that acknowledges the evolution of the concept of participation.

Thousands of cities and regions have institutionalized different forms of citizen participation, and these modalities are currently being expanded as part of the localization efforts in pursuit of the Global Agendas. Participatory planning and budgeting (e.g. more than 3,000 participatory budgets) are just a couple of the potential modalities for citizen participation (referendums, open councils, e-participation,

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**The concept of participation is changing; it is moving beyond simple consultation and towards the co-creation of a space that will help to rebalance the distribution of decision-making power within society.**

etc.). Indeed, they are becoming increasingly essential practices and enhance ownership and accountability. At the same time, participatory planning is becoming mandatory in many countries (e.g. Dominican Republic). Open government practices and e-democracy have also transformed participation over the past two decades, by introducing greater transparency and more accountable mechanisms and promoting civic involvement at different stages of the decision-making process (e.g. “Smart Citizen”, “Digital Civics”, etc.).<sup>175</sup> Participatory and rights-based approaches are helping to develop a new framework for the co-creation of cities and territories for improved service delivery and urban design.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also helped LRGs to develop renewed relationships with the citizenship through the digitalization of most of public services. Several LRGs have been using digital tools to support the logics of solidarity fostered by the civil society during the crisis.

The notion of participation is not, however, a solution *per se*. Participatory budget experiments, for example, can cover a broad spectrum of realities. They range from symbolic, participatory gestures, with little transformative impact, to vectors of structural change that affect city governance and systems. They can address the needs of different groups (young people, the homeless, minorities, migrants, etc.) and involve very different amounts of money and resources being allocated to participatory budgets.<sup>176</sup> The concept of participation is changing; it is moving beyond simple consultation and towards the co-creation of a space that will help to rebalance the distribution of decision-making power within society.

As a conclusion, achieving the 2030 Agenda is inextricably linked to the incorporation of the different dimensions of human wellbeing into the daily lives of people living in cities and communities. LRGs have direct or indirect responsibilities over all the dimensions analysed in this section and their contributions could serve as catalysts for other local action.

In some of these dimensions, frontrunning LRGs are supporting transformative initiatives. They are doing this by promoting more territorialized food systems and localized social and educational policies; and by encouraging more participatory and inclusive policies to tackle social violence. **LRGs may offer innovative cultural policies (Agenda 21 for culture), highlight peace efforts and promote social mediation, thereby ensuring respect for key principles, such as human rights and welcoming migrants. They are also involved**

**In many areas, local policies show tremendous potential for boosting transformative forms of social behaviour, improving the participation of women in local decision-making and developing initiatives to fight against violence and harassment.**

**in developing virtuous circles to promote civic engagement (through participatory mechanisms and more open government) and move their societies forward towards the co-creation and co-production of better cities and communities.**

In many areas, local policies show tremendous potential for boosting transformative forms of social behaviour, improving the participation of women in local decision-making and developing initiatives to fight against violence and harassment. If their scope is upscaled and adequately supported, some of these actions could help establish new trends. Some cases have already produced impressive results when national and local policies have been aligned to accelerate change (e.g. redistributive policies and localized actions to eradicate poverty). In all sectors that LRGs have participated in, they have assumed responsibilities, even in some regions that are still affected by restrictive budgetary policies. At the same time, in many other countries, LRGs are limited by their resources and competences, and their awareness of the Global Agendas could be insufficient.

In order to face up to the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and to limit its serious setbacks with respect to many dimensions of human wellbeing, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs need to be established as the flagship guidelines of every country. LRGs on all continents need to be fully mobilized and engaged. However, in the majority of areas, LRGs cannot act alone and need to be adequately empowered. Accelerating action to achieve these goals requires more collaboration from all levels of government and involving all the different components of civil society. ●

## 4.4 Protecting the planet, building resilience and ensuring access to sustainable energy



Photo: Mircea Iancu from Pixabay

**“The battle for the planet will be won or lost in cities”. As already stressed in many UN reports, LRGs have a critical responsibility in actions to combat climate change and protect the environment. As mentioned in previous sections, cities produce more than 75% of greenhouse gas emissions and consume two thirds of the world’s energy. Cities are particularly affected by rising temperatures and the impact of disasters, which affect both their populations and infrastructure and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities. Science**

**tells us that if we are to prevent global temperatures from rising by more than 1.5 °C, cities will have to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century.<sup>177</sup>**

The present Subsection aims to introduce concrete practices and policies developed by LRGs to: reduce GHG emissions; foster the transition to renewable energies; strengthen resilience; preserve natural resources and biodiversity; and change their citizens’ attitudes in order to promote more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

## Making communities sustainable to protect the planet and face up to the climate change emergency (SDG 12 and 13)

As pointed out in our previous reports to the HLPF, cities and regions have developed a wide range of initiatives to: advocate in favour of climate change agreements at international forums; integrate climate action into local and regional planning; reduce GHG emissions; develop sustainable mobility and infrastructure; facilitate the transition to renewable energy; make the urban landscape greener; and—at the same time—ensure social inclusion for all.

Indeed, LRGs have been at the forefront of climate action and have helped raise targets in global negotiations over the past decade. Recently, during the Climate Action Summit in New York in September 2019, more than 100 cities and over 20 regions joined 77 countries and 93 companies in a commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, through a combination of net-zero carbon buildings, zero-emission transport, the use of 100% renewable energy, and producing zero-waste by 2030. They also agreed to do this in an equitable and inclusive way.<sup>178</sup> In June 5, 2020, this Climate Alliance reached 449 cities, 21 regions, 505 universities, 992 companies, 120 countries and UN agencies ready for the launch of the initiative “Race to the Zero Emissions by 2050” in the run towards the COP 26.<sup>179</sup>

Over the past year, the “Talanoa Dialogues” have served to help push for more ambitious and inclusive Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). They have offered an opportunity to review and improve NDCs and sought to combine sustainable urban development with climate action and to engage with all levels of government.<sup>180</sup> It is important to note that many cities and regions have already set targets in line with their NDCs, but even more it is possible when national governments support cities and help them to achieve reductions in emissions and greater resilience.

The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), which brings together the main global and regional networks of LRGs that are active on climate-related affairs, has managed to obtain a commitment from more than 10,000 cities from 135 different countries, with 864 million inhabitants, to take measurable action to help move to low-carbon societies.<sup>181</sup> At the same time, global local government networks (such as C40,<sup>182</sup> ICLEI,<sup>183</sup> and UCLG) and regional government networks (such as Regions4 Sustainable Development,<sup>184</sup> R20: Regions of Climate Action,<sup>185</sup> and Under2

Coalition,<sup>186</sup> amongst others) have assumed global commitments and are currently implementing a wide range of initiatives to help mitigate climate change and adapt to it at the subnational level. To formalize their strategies, LRGs have been developing climate action plans not only for adaptation and mitigation, but also to improve the air and create more healthy territories. This has especially been so since the climate emergency declaration, which has served as an interesting tool with which to accelerate efforts. As a result, this emergency has been declared through more than 1,500 formal and binding resolutions.<sup>187</sup> The next important step forward will be strengthening LRGs monitoring and reporting efforts.<sup>188</sup> All networks are becoming aware that issues relating to Climate, Biodiversity and Nature should be approached holistically if we are to limit average global temperature increases to a maximum of 1.5 °C. This approach may enable us to accelerate the action taken and its effects, since the interlinkages between the causes and effects will be multiplied.

It is worth noting that in the United States, despite the decision of the Federal Government to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, LRGs are continuing to advance with their commitments. The “We Are Still In” coalition unites 280 US cities, counties and civil society organizations; the US Climate Mayors organization includes 400 cities, while 23 of the 50 state governors have joined the US Climate Alliance. In Europe, in May 2019, before the EU launched its “European Green Deal”, mayors from 210 cities (representing 62 million EU citizens) issued an open letter calling for a new, long-term climate strategy whose objectives would include achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. These initiatives gained more support thanks to rising concern expressed by grassroots movements (such as Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion), which pushed LRGs to take bolder action.<sup>189</sup> Across all continents, LRGs are now taking action in this area beyond the main networks and big cities.<sup>190</sup>

Even so, tracking the achievement of all these initiatives remains a challenge.<sup>191</sup> As underlined by the GCoM report, LRGs only have the power to potentially reduce less than a third of the emissions in their respective cities, while national governments have responsibilities governing another third. Control over the remaining third requires close multi-level collaboration<sup>192</sup> and this is not always a reality. **Many countries could certainly increase their ambitions about NDCs by building upon existing city, region and company commitments in their national climate policy formulation processes.** However, adequate tools to better coordinate, monitor and evaluate still need to be developed.<sup>193</sup> **It has been officially**

**Many countries could certainly increase their ambitions about NDCs by building upon existing city, region and company commitments in their national climate policy formulation processes. However, adequate tools to better coordinate, monitor and evaluate still need to be developed.**

recognized by the United Nations system and by the networks that are members of the GTF that the involvement of LRGs in multilevel coordination and governance relating to climate policy would permit a true acceleration in its implementation. In addition, it would also be seen as a sign of a strong commitment to raising future targets in dealing with the climate emergency.

As already underlined, well-managed cities and regions can make a difference: they can ensure the interdependence of their sectoral policies, raise awareness, and adopt a participatory approach when formulating and implementing climate plans. Moreover, numerous technological and organisational solutions already exist and could be used to reduce GHG emissions by 90% while still meeting the citizens' socio-economic needs.<sup>194</sup> Many of these initiatives have already been mentioned in previous Sections: sustainable mobility, water and waste management, greener public spaces, local food systems, and integrated urban planning, fostering more compact, connected and cleaner cities. While transport and waste could account for 26% of urban GHG savings, the construction sector (for both residential and commercial properties) can also make a decisive contribution to the global material footprint and carbon savings (as it represents 58% of urban GHG emissions). Building renovation strategies and retrofitting projects, in combination with other policies (such as the recovery and reuse of building materials)<sup>196</sup> therefore form a central part of transformative actions that LRGs can, and do, support. This helps to reduce the urban footprint, boost the circular economy, and address climate or energy policies in order to uncouple

footprint growth from that of population and GDP. For instance, in **Cape Town**, the framework of its Reconstruction and Development Programme focuses on retrofitting ceilings in low-income communities, which will have a direct impact on health and energy efficiency. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, national and local government bodies, with the support of UNDP, have launched a project funded by the Green Climate Fund. Its aim is to scale-up investment in low-carbon public buildings and to support the adoption of local Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans in 37 cities, while also adopting a gender sensitive approach.<sup>197</sup>

The per capita material footprint and domestic material consumption continue to rise at unsustainable levels across the world and so urgent reactions will be required to reach the 2030 targets.<sup>198</sup> Energy and the protection of ecosystems are also essential dimensions that will be analysed below.

### **Renewable forms of energy and energy efficiency (SDG 7.2 and 7.3)**

Improving energy management and adopting renewable energy sources are other important components of achieving reductions in GHG emissions and contributing to the achievement of SDG 7. It is also one of the tenets of the climate finance strategies as applied at the global level, together with buildings and construction. According to the *Energy 2020 Report*, the global share of renewable energy has recently increased, reaching 17.3 % in 2017, up from 16.3 % in 2010. It has increased at a faster pace than overall global energy consumption, but global primary energy intensity (energy used per unit of GDP) has improved by only 2.2% per year, a rate that still falls short of the 2.7% annual rate needed to reach the SDG target.<sup>199</sup>

Energy production is often not a direct responsibility of LRGs. However, they can facilitate initiatives and regulatory policies to make energy management more efficient and adopt renewable energy-specific targets based on energy consumption for water management, heating and cooling systems, street lighting, public transport, mobility and buildings. 250 cities worldwide have adopted targets for introducing 100% renewable energy in the coming 5 to 10 years.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, many cities and regions may be given responsibilities for energy distribution and their local grid. If so, they could apply certain criteria to ensure an increase in the use of renewable sources within the energy matrix. For instance, **Barcelona** has established a public energy company which

initially targeted supplying public buildings, but which has since moved on to supply energy from 100% renewable sources to up to 20,000 households within its metropolitan area.<sup>201</sup>

Global and specialized LRGs networks (e.g. Energy Cities) and thousands of LRGs are incentivizing reductions in energy consumption and promoting the use of renewable energy within their communities. They do it through pilot programmes (e.g. 100 Positive Energy Neighbourhoods across Europe),<sup>202</sup> direct investment, regulation (e.g. making it mandatory to use solar thermal systems for hot water in new buildings), procurement (e.g. Procura+ in Europe and Global Lead City Network on Sustainable Public Procurement),<sup>203</sup> and fiscal incentives (e.g. to install rooftop solar photovoltaic and facade systems). LRGs can also facilitate coordination between local actors to foster the number of renovation actions and of private projects through one-stop-shop to progressively set up a complete public service for energy efficiency.<sup>204</sup>

Projects to process local landfill gas emissions are making progress in all regions (e.g. **Addis Ababa**), as is the use of smart technologies and renewable energy in order to reduce municipal energy costs (e.g. **South Tarawa City, Shenzhen, Melbourne** and its wind farms), and the decarbonisation of municipal district heating and cooling networks (e.g. **Helsinki** and **Linköping**), amongst others. **Seoul** has introduced One Less Nuclear Power Plant, a programme which aims to increase energy independence, renewable energy generation, and energy efficiency, thereby saving energy equivalent to that produced by a nuclear power station.<sup>205</sup> There are also plans to facilitate access to cheaper and more decentralized alternative energy sources. This should help to supply sections of the population that do not have access to national power supplies (e.g. **Bujumbura, Rajkot**).

### Protecting terrestrial and marine ecosystems and biodiversity (SDG 14 and 15)

Forerunner LRGs and their networks have taken initiatives to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. Since 2008 and the establishment of the Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity,<sup>206</sup> LRGs have actively participated in global negotiations on the preservation of biodiversity. This has been shown by the adoption of the Aichi/Nagoya Declaration on Local Authorities and Biodiversity and the 2011-2020 Convention on Biological Diversity Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity at the COP

16 (2010). LRGs were introduced at the COP by the Advisory Committee on Subnational Governments to the Convention on Biological Diversity and have since then organized successive events called “Global Biodiversity Summit of Cities and Subnational Governments”. The 6th Summit (2018, Sharm el-Sheikh) discussed the role of LRGs in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. LRGs also participate in the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Regions4 coordinates, together with the government of **Quebec**, the Advisory Committee

Photo: Justin-lim-Fpcy-AdFhUg-unsplash



on Subnational Governments<sup>207</sup> before the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and has developed the Regions for Biodiversity Learning Platform.<sup>208</sup> In 2018, ICLEI launched the Cities Biodiversity Center and Urban Natural Assets for Africa.<sup>209</sup> The development of local biodiversity strategies and action plans and their national counterparts under the framework of the Convention has become a key policy tool for many LRGs when planning their subnational biodiversity strategies (e.g. the Integrated Regional Development Plan 2012-2018 developed by the **Fatick** region in Senegal).

LRG actions involve: restoring natural systems, water sources, coastal and mangrove areas; reforestation; and the protection of local species. Following the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Canadian government of Quebec established that, by 2020, 20% of the area covered by the 2015 Plan Nord should be made up of protected areas. This envisaged a protected area of which at least 12% comprised boreal forest north of the 49th parallel. Quebec also committed to reaching the international target of protecting 10% of its maritime environments.<sup>210</sup> **Barcelona** has adopted the Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan 2020, while a middle-sized city like **Quelimane**, in Mozambique, has restored its mangrove forests to reduce flooding and rises in sea-level and to provide economic opportunities for its poor communities. The United Nations Oceans Conference<sup>211</sup> highlights topics such as waste management and ways to deal with marine litter (which have been covered in earlier Sections of this report) and coastal management. It also identifies LRGs as essential partners for working to address problems involving marine and ocean ecosystems and protecting habitats and species.

Many LRGs are currently dedicating significant efforts to forest protection and reforestation in cities. For example, **Edmonton** has developed the Urban Forest Management Plan, **Bonn** aims to restore 150 million hectares of degraded land, and **Melbourne** created the Metropolitan Urban Forest Strategy. Regional governments have also produced some ambitious initiatives: the **Kyzylorda** region administration (Kazakhstan) has planted 20,000 hectares with trees, resulting in a total of 61,000 hectares of what was once the bed of the Aral Sea now being covered with vegetation; and the **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa** province (Pakistan) has now exceeded the initial objective of its “one billion tree tsunami” project, which started in 2014.<sup>212</sup> Facing critical problems of water scarcity since 2014, the state of **Sao Paulo** has now linked the protection and conservation of its water resources to biodiversity through the

Water Springs Program (*Programa Nascentes*). This project aims to extend the protection and recovery of forests, springs and water sources.<sup>213</sup>

**Chennai** city has created a Water Restoration and Resilience Framework to unify and coordinate the efforts of all the organisations and citizens working on water body restoration; this will help to prevent future flooding and recharge aquifers.<sup>214</sup>

Cities are increasingly recognizing the value and benefits of the natural ecosystem as they integrate blue and green infrastructure into their master plans. Good examples of this are provided by **Atlanta**’s Proctor Creek Greenway and **Medellin**’s green corridors which seek to reconnect wildlife with cities.<sup>215</sup> On the other hand, regions have made efforts to scale-up local initiatives to ensure both vertical and horizontal integration of biodiversity policies. For example, **Campeche** has implemented the Jaguar corridors to protect and monitor jaguar population across the Yucatan Peninsula with support from local communities, neighbour states, the private sector and academia.

**Integrated urban and territorial management programmes that harness the benefits of ecological systems, protecting and nurturing these assets for future generations, form part of pilot Eco-cities projects that have flourished of late, in several countries.** They often offer innovative models for urban sustainability. Examples include: the city of **Zenata** (Morocco), **Wuxi** and **Kunming** (Japan), and the new eco-city of **Yennenga** (Burkina Faso). Some of these eco-city concepts have been awarded national prizes (e.g. the city of **Tarusa**, in Russia). Likewise, the whole-of-government approach allows and recognizes the importance of the joint work of all levels of government, including local authorities, cities and subnational governments, to pursue national and global targets aiming to stop biodiversity loss.

### **Building more resilient cities and regions (SDG 1.5, 11.5, 11.b, 13.1)**

The number and impact of natural disasters have multiplied over the last decade and are increasingly urban in nature. Eighty countries reported disaster-related losses in 2018, due to floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, droughts, wildfires and other extreme events that periodically cause enormous human and infrastructure losses, particularly in urban areas in the most impacted regions (the Asia-Pacific region, followed by Africa and Latin American and the Caribbean).<sup>216</sup> For example, by 2050, about 800 million people in 570 cities will be affected by rises in sea level.<sup>217</sup>

The alignment of national and local disaster risk reduction strategies with the Sendai Framework has made significant progress, but the 2020 deadline has still not been reached.<sup>218</sup>

**To comply with the Sendai Framework, which acknowledges the role of LRGs as the primary responsible authorities during disasters, in 2018, 8,900 LRGs from 55 countries adopted DRR strategies in line with national strategies that were aligned with the Sendai Framework; this represents significant progress since 2015.**<sup>219</sup>

LRG networks participated in the UN World Conferences on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai, by sending a delegation. This event discussed the role of LRGs as the main institutions responsible for authority during disasters. They are increasingly committed to the implementation of comprehensive resilience strategies in partnership with national and international institutions, such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and UN-Habitat, etc. More than 4,270 cities had signed up to the “Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient Campaign” by 2020. This was launched by UNDRR to create awareness, disseminate the “Ten Essentials for Making Cities Resilient”, and help 500 cities to create their own local disaster risk reduction and resilience strategies.<sup>220</sup> UN-Habitat also launched its own Urban Resilience Hub and developed the City Resilience Profiling Tool to analyse city strategies from a resilience perspective.<sup>221</sup> In 2019, UN agencies, national and local governments, humanitarian organizations, academia, CSOs and professionals came together within the Global Alliance for Urban Crises to develop tools and mobilise and exchange expertise, training and knowledge

sharing.<sup>222</sup> Another approach was prompted by the former 100 Resilient Cities initiative, which was subsequently replaced by the Global Resilient Cities Network, that sought to help cities to adopt an integrated approach to tackling the physical, social, and economic challenges faced by cities all around the world (e.g. **Amman** in Jordan, **Dakar** in Senegal, **Danang** in Vietnam, **New York** in the United States, and **Santa Fe** in Argentina).<sup>223</sup>

**The mainstreaming of disaster risk prevention strategies by LRGs has been facilitated when national policies have supported the localization of DRR resilient actions**, in line with the Sendai Framework. In Indonesia, for instance, most provinces have adopted disaster management plans, while at district/city level, 30% (or about 118) of cities have adopted such plans. In the Philippines, a large majority of LRGs in nine regions (over 17) have incorporated DRR strategies into their local plans, even though their capacity to implement them remains rather limited.

The latest UNDRR report, which is based on an analysis of a limited sample of LRGs from all regions, underlines the fact that 85% of the LRGs included in the study have plans that offer either full or partial compliance with the Sendai Framework. However, only 12% of these LRGs have, so far, implemented a fully integrated DRR plan in accordance with the Sendai Framework, while 15% of these LRGs have no plan at all. Among the major obstacles that hinder LRG initiatives, which the study identified as important problems, is the insufficient allocation of financial resources. Others include the partial, or limited, authority and capacities that have been devolved, together with information and data gaps, inadequate coordination and insufficient stakeholder involvement.<sup>224</sup> Some DRR strategies and plans are simply too general to guide concrete action.

Disaster resilience policies need to be integrated into existing urban and territorial development strategies, supported by multi-risk assessments, and implemented through sound cross-sectoral approaches with strong multi-stakeholder involvement. A better use of green and blue infrastructure could help drive cities and territories towards more sustainable and resilient development: 75% of the cities studied by UNDRR, in its 2019 report, promote green infrastructure (e.g. by greening streets, roadsides, and roofs; restoring embankments; and creating urban green corridors, etc.) and blue infrastructure (e.g. river corridors; wetlands; and waterways, etc.). As part of their resilient strategies, many LRGs are working with their

**Cities are increasingly recognizing the value and benefits of the natural ecosystem as they integrate blue and green infrastructure into their master plans.**



Photo: Hermann Traub from Pixabay

local communities to show how they can improve their livelihoods while, at the same time, reducing the risk of disasters (e.g., the city of **Yaounde**, in Cameroon, with a plan for the period 2019-2030).

To facilitate the involvement of local communities, LRGs need to develop communication and education initiatives and mobilize local stakeholders to carry out diagnostic and planning processes. Putting environmental justice at the centre of the agenda will help cities and regions to address issues relating to resilience and climate change with a specific focus on vulnerable populations, which often live in risk-prone areas (which are most impacted by natural disasters, such as flooding, landslides, and pollution, etc.). By aligning resilience and social policies, not only are LRGs focusing on mitigating the effects of natural disasters and climate change, but they are also tackling issues such as food security, reducing poverty, revitalizing the economy, improving access to basic services, and fighting against inequality (e.g., **Bangkok's** Resilience Strategy, the **Barcelona** Climate Plan, **Mexico**

**City's** water resilience strategy). LRG strategies are also increasingly focusing on confronting race-related matters, such as bias, discrimination and other issues that cause inequity (e.g. **Boston's** first ever Resilience Strategy).

**Despite all the efforts made, progress in reducing the environmental footprint left by urban areas is still insufficient if the world wants to keep the increase in average global temperatures at no more than 1.5 °C with respect to pre-industrial levels, to strengthen resilience, and to reduce human victims and the depletion of natural resources.** Urgent action is needed to mainstream action to combat climate change and resilience in urban and territorial plans. In addition, such plans should involve input from local stakeholders in all of their phases. Rapid and far-reaching transitions need to be accompanied by bold actions to transform our patterns of production and consumption toward low-carbon, renewable forms of energy, sustainable mobility, a green urban environment and clean air, improved resource-efficient management, and the inclusion of the most vulnerable people. More resilient infrastructure is required to preserve and restore ecosystems, while strengthening urban-rural linkages will be critical to achieving more resilient territories.

**Sustainable urban and territorial development should be at the core of the implementation of current NDCs and NAPs, as should: better articulation with the SDGs and the Sendai Framework; adequate policy coordination; and coherence between all levels of government, including between cities and regions.**

There should also be a significant upscaling of associated investment, which should be channelled to local and subnational governments and local communities. Transformational policies should promote innovation and include: adopting vertically-aligned NDC investment plans; investing in specific instruments to support project implementation; and facilitating direct access for cities and regions to UN climate funds and to the Adaptation Fund.●

## 4.5 Sharing economic benefits



Ljubljana, Slovenia (Photo: rok-zabukovec-q74l6t6t0k-unsplash)

**“Even before the current crisis, the global economy was growing at a slower rate than in previous years, despite improvements in labour productivity and unemployment. The COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly and profoundly disrupted the global economy, pushing the world into a recession” (UN Secretary-General Report 2020 to the HLPF).<sup>225</sup>**

Cities and territories are where work opportunities tend to concentrate, all around the world. They have been badly hit by the current global socio-economic crisis and now need to respond to the climate of incertitude created by this new context and to help their communities through it. While the commitment of national governments to promoting economic growth and

## Cities have been acknowledged as fundamental "engines of growth".

decent work, in line with SDG 8, is mainly based on national level policymaking and economic targets, LRGs can also play a significant role in supporting national economic, social and employment policies within their territories.

In this regard, **cities have been acknowledged as fundamental "engines of growth", as they bring together key productive activities and investment, host the critical infrastructure required for economic growth, and serve as hubs that provide public services for local communities.**<sup>226</sup> Decentralization and devolution processes have increased LRG responsibilities and competences regarding the establishment of an enabling environment for local economic development. Well-empowered LRGs can contribute to development strategies tailored to meet the needs of their territories and communities in the face of the current adverse situation. They can participate in initiatives to support local businesses and investors, formulate local policies that help to keep jobs, and also foster innovation, working in collaboration with relevant local actors. In many countries, LRGs are also exploring options and possibilities related to green and circular economies, sharing and social economies, and stronger urban-rural partnerships. They can facilitate the integration of the informal economy into the urban fabric in which it develops. Last but not least, LRGs are also important local employers in their own right, often being responsible for ensuring social dialogue and enforcing labour rights through sustainable and viable procurement policies. The present Subsection provides selected examples that illustrate some of the initiatives driven or supported by LRGs for the implementation of SDG 8, and also of SDGs 5 and 10.

### **Inclusive local economic development: the role of LRGs in innovation and the development of job opportunities**

As already underlined in previous Sections, LRGs play an important role in the delivery of public services and in the provision of vital infrastructure. In many countries, they are also responsible for establishing administrative conditions that are

conducive to an enabling business or socio-economic environment that favours growth, innovation and productivity (SDG 8.2). LRGs can facilitate partnerships and dialogue between economic institutions (e.g. chambers of industry or commerce), SMEs, universities, research centres, trade unions and civil society organizations. These coalitions can make a crucial contribution, helping to strengthen local actors, and propel endogenous and inclusive sustainable development based on territorial approaches.

In response to new economic cycles, many LRGs have led **regeneration and renovation processes** to help declining economic sectors adapt to the needs, instruments and language of new technologies, and promote creative industries and more sustainable forms of manufacturing. In different parts of the world, LRGs have been active in the creation of business districts and industrial and technology parks, to which they have looked to attract competitive firms that require quality infrastructure, services and facilities, skilled workers, and good education centres. They have sought to achieve this by applying collaborative approaches. **Seoul's** Cheonggyecheon district, which has been redeveloped to support the city's need for more creative and services industries, is one of the best-known examples of this.<sup>227</sup> In **Ljubljana**, the Technology Park (which is owned by the municipality) has played a catalysing role in promoting networking, greater flexibility, and the co-creation of ideas and opportunities.<sup>228</sup> **Montevideo** has established a new industrial technology park in one of the poorest areas of the city: El Cerro. This is a district that has been profoundly hit by industrial decline, where the local authorities are working to create jobs, address inequality, and promote more socially-inclusive forms of innovation.<sup>229</sup>

It is, however, important to note that the success of these initiatives often requires major involvement by different levels of government and economic actors. These tend to be concentrated in only a limited number of cities. Other regions, in the meantime, may witness modest performance in terms of endogenous innovation. To support **regional development**, without limiting it to the largest cities, it is necessary to look to wider territorial solutions. Such initiatives may include

the development of smaller cities and their hinterlands (surrounding rural areas included), while many regions may also develop alternative strategies. The EU has been supportive of efforts to overcome the digital divide in rural and more isolated areas as a way of creating decent, innovative and technology-driven work even in the remotest parts of territorial systems<sup>230</sup> (e.g. support for an agri-food and bio-technology business accelerator in Greece,<sup>231</sup> and the installation of over 150km of broadband infrastructure in the Dutch countryside).<sup>232</sup>

Many LRGs are giving increasing importance to the leading role that technological innovation can play in sustainable development and to plans to increase productivity and employability, with growing interest in **smart city, smart village**<sup>233</sup> and **smart region** solutions.<sup>234</sup> China implemented 611 smart city pilot projects between 2013 and 2016. As of March 2017, more than 500 Chinese cities (95% of its cities at or above the deputy-provincial level and 83% at the prefecture level) had either devised ways to become a smart city, or were in the process of doing so, according to the 13th Five-Year Plan.<sup>235</sup> In Europe, the Digital Transition Partnership, with the support of CEMR, Eurocities and Open and Agile Smart Cities, has called for a financial framework to help cities and regions with the digital transition and for this to be guaranteed in the EU post-2020 budget.<sup>236</sup>

**Efforts to promote new technologies also contribute to a more efficient use of resources and to advances in urban governance. New technologies are increasingly being used in public administration to facilitate access to services and public information, such as tax systems and public procurement.** They are also being used to improve the efficiency of existing public services (e.g. the monitoring and reduction of waste and of energy and water consumption, through the use of smart grids and metres, etc.), mobility (traffic sensors and passenger flows), and also in many other areas (such as health services and education). More advanced cities are also integrating data obtained from sensors, microphones, cameras, social networks and/or websites in order to make connections that will permit simulations and the development of prevention models, which will foster better management of cities. The measures being incorporated include analyses of population density for the planning of public spaces and the monitoring of information in real time in order to prevent recurrent problems.<sup>237</sup>

LRGs are, similarly, key partners in supporting **small and medium-sized enterprises and clusters** in order to densify productive and

economic fabric of local territories, facilitate connections and the collection of market intelligence, support access to grants and credit, facilitate local synergies, and attract expertise (traditional artisans, high-tech development staff, skilled workers, etc.). For example, with the support of the EU Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization (RIS3), in the **Basque Country**, cluster policies have enhanced cooperation among SMEs by providing co-financing and technical assistance to help face up to global challenges.<sup>238</sup> In Latin America, the city of **Rafaela** provides a well-known example of a local government organization with an established track-record of supporting its local agroindustry and mining clusters.<sup>239</sup>

LRGs are equally active in the development of **business incubators**. These are specifically planned areas and districts that offer technical support and training to different economic activities while, at the same time, promoting youth and women employment. Many of them have gained international recognition (e.g. **Barcelona Activa**, whose motto boasts the promotion of “equal opportunities for all”).<sup>240</sup> **Ulaanbaatar** has developed a nationally recognized Business and Women's Incubator Centre, which provides technical assistance, training, personalized advice, and financial consultancy services, and also a co-working space endowed with a playroom for children.<sup>241</sup> In South Africa, **Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality** is currently partnering various business incubators specializing in ICT, design, fashion, furniture, the green economy, and renewable energies, amongst many other fields.<sup>242</sup>

LRGs are also active in fostering **green and circular economy** policies through investment, procurement, and conducive fiscal and regulatory frameworks (relating to renewable energy, green building, waste management, eco-tourism, ecosystem protection and park management). Different studies provide evidence of the growing efforts that have been made by local authorities

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**Different studies provide evidence of the growing efforts that have been made by local authorities to turn their economies greener over the past decade.**

to turn their economies greener over the past decade.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, several county governments in the United States have developed guidelines to do so.<sup>244</sup> In Europe, city networks and LRGs have supported integrated regional planning for green growth, with major involvement of private partners.<sup>245</sup> The **circular economy** requires a systemic and holistic approach, going beyond the waste sector and making connections and exploiting synergies with the use of water, energy, transport and land in an integrated manner. This approach has now been mainstreamed in many cities. A recent study collected 130 city-led initiatives for transition to a circular economy, including city-wide strategies adopted in **Amsterdam, Cape Town, Ljubljana, Maribor, Tel Aviv and Samsø**.<sup>246</sup>

Cities are also currently working to integrate cultural aspects into **strategies for sustainable tourism** (as per SDG 8.9).<sup>247</sup> Several examples have been collected that highlight more sustainable alternatives: **Abitibi-Temiscamingue, Cesis, Bilbao, Nevsehir, Seferihisar, Yarra Ranges, Strasbourg, Kanazawa, Segou, Jeonju, Jeju, Regensburg, Pekalongan, and Ha Long**. There are also countless other examples of cities and communities that have put these policies into practice in their territories.<sup>248</sup> As already mentioned in previous Subsection, **sustainable local food systems** and food security provisions have significant implications for a territory's environmental sustainability; they also provide added opportunities for job creation in rural areas and an impetus to develop local food systems. Several initiatives by LRG networks have involved promoting a more holistic approach to production and consumption cycles, especially through sustainable agro-food transitions and "responsible and sustainable regional food initiatives". The aim of this approach is to promote more the application of sustainable criteria and objectives to the whole food chain: from production through to the final consumption. Several LRGs in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, France, Morocco and the Ivory Coast, to name but a few, have already adopted this strategic approach.<sup>249</sup>

The **sharing and collaborative economy** has grown over recent years, presenting both challenges and opportunities of its own. It first emerged as an opportunity to drive change, innovation and entrepreneurship from the bottom up. It has also attracted increasing attention from cities and local governments seeking to guarantee—often via regulation—decent job creation and sustainable innovation (in line with SDG 8.3). Many experiences within the wider scope of the collaborative economy developed out of the

provision of direct personal services and as a result of measures to promote cultural empowerment, education and training, care services, housing, energy, food production and environmental protection, in all regions. Many cities and networks have sought to introduce collaborative economy practices into their communities to promote solidarity, greater participation and inclusive involvement.<sup>250</sup> The shared economy is now expanding in more than 80 American and European cities.<sup>251</sup> Similar experiments are also gaining traction in Africa, where a large capital like **Abidjan** has already established a one-stop office for the social economy and the shared economy.<sup>252</sup>

In many contexts, LRGs have actively promoted the **social economy** as an alternative model for achieving greater inclusion. The Global Social Economic Forum is an international association that implicates LRG and civic actors in the recognition of the social economy as a key factor in local economic development.<sup>253</sup> For example, the municipality of **Cordoba** has adopted the Pact for a Social and Solidarity Economy as "a fundamental vector for social cohesion, a more equitable distribution of wealth and the protection of the values of sustainability, equality, equity and participation".<sup>254</sup>

In other urban contexts, especially in developing countries, the **informal economy** plays a critical role too. The ILO estimates that at least two billion workers belong to the informal economy (61% of the world's working population), with little or no access to social protection.<sup>255</sup> Informal activities are found in a broad range of economic sectors and

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**Many cities recognise that the informal economy contributes to the overall economy and guarantees a baseline for the social inclusion of informal workers; others focus on the downside of their non-transparent fiscal impact, lack of work safety and rights, and the risk of unsanctioned exploitation.**

services, with women being disproportionately represented in this part of the economy. Although informal employment is not, by definition, “decent work”, LRGs have adopted a rather ambiguous stance with regard to it: many of them recognise that it contributes to the overall economy and guarantees a baseline for the social inclusion of informal workers; others focus on the downside of their non-transparent fiscal impact, lack of work safety and rights, and the risk of unsanctioned exploitation. Several cities have already made important progress in the recognition of their respective informal economies. Municipalities have long established formal partnerships with organizations of waste-pickers, as in **Quito, Belo Horizonte**<sup>256</sup> and **Surabaya**.<sup>257</sup> Other promising initiatives have emerged in **Asuncion**,<sup>258</sup> **Esquel**,<sup>259</sup> **Pietermartizburg**, **Lagos**, **Nairobi**, and cities in Egypt.<sup>260</sup> In **Solo**, the administration has provided up to five options for street vendors to upgrade their status to legitimate merchants and kiosk owners at local markets.<sup>261</sup>

Together with other relevant dimensions of local economic development, LRGs across the world have shown the relevance of their initiatives for the creation of a truly territorial approach. Many of these experiences can help build responses to reactivate local economies in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis and shape alternative bottom-up policies. They can do this through circular, shared and social economies, which they can use to meet the expectations of global commitments and their targets.

### **LRG initiatives to ensure that public administration and public service policies promote decent work and respect human rights**

As public employers, LRGs are responsible for the employment conditions of LRGs workers in charge of local policy implementation and public service provision. As shown during the COVID-19 crisis, local employees and workers worked on the frontline to ensure the continuity of essential services during the lockdown period.

Social dialogue and collective bargaining are rights for public sector workers; this is defined by ILO Conventions 151 and 154. They are, however, also closely associated and interconnected with public sector efficiency and performance. Several municipalities have put into practice valuable examples of social dialogue processes, designed to empower local workers while, at the same time, ensuring quality service.<sup>262</sup>

The **quality of public service management** is essential for sustainable growth and public

employment conditions. Recent decades have been dominated by the outsourcing, (partial) privatization and corporatization of many public services. This has limited the power of public management to provide quality services to local communities. As mentioned above, over the past decade, the re-municipalization of public services has emerged as a trend on different continents and in many sectors. More than 1,400 LRGs around the world have, to a lesser or greater degree, taken some essential services back under public control in order to reduce costs and improve their quality and working conditions.<sup>263</sup> Examples of this include: the re-municipalization of energy distribution grids in **Hamburg**,<sup>264</sup> the establishment of a public electric power provider in **Barcelona**,<sup>265</sup> and bottom-up pressures to re-municipalize water supplies (in **Paris, Jakarta, Stuttgart** and **Terrassa**), waste management (in **Oslo, Fribourg, Dortmund**, and **Conception Bay South**), transport (**Dunkirk**)<sup>266</sup> and social services (**Bergen**), amongst many others. It must be stressed that **municipal workers’ unions have played a key role in the public sector’s attempts to meet a growing demand for quality services, and also in the fight to protect workers’ rights in public institutions.**<sup>267</sup>

In many contexts, LRGs are also important public procurement agents. They account for nearly 40% of total global public investment.<sup>268</sup> **Socially responsible public procurement, based on aware and sustainable criteria, as well as economic convenience, can be an important driving force for guaranteeing the centrality and effectiveness of LRGs initiatives as they implement and localize the SDGs.** The inclusion of clauses to safeguard labour and the environment in public procurement tenders and contracts enables local authorities to promote sustainable sourcing practices for both short and long supply chains.<sup>269</sup> In the Netherlands, the Joint investment agenda of municipalities, provinces and water authorities (2017) provides a particularly relevant example of sustainable investment and procurement policies: combined, the three tiers of governance spend EUR 28 billion per year on investment and have committed, wherever possible, to opt for energy neutral, climate-proof and circular economy solutions.<sup>270</sup>

LRG networks also promote local economic development initiatives, knowledge sharing, and the development of resources to strengthen locally-based policies and capacities. They have long advocated for reinforcing local competences and resources (e.g. the Global Social Economic Forum; the work of UCLG’s Committee on Local Economic Development; the Local Economic



Hong Kong (Photo: lifeofpix)

Network of Africa; and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum).<sup>271</sup> Since 2011, the joint efforts of several UN agencies and local government networks have created the World Forum on Local Economic Development. This is a platform that promotes dialogue on key issues such as: local employment and decent work policies, sustainable entrepreneurship, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and encouraging and facilitating greater involvement of civil society and of organizations of workers and employers in local decision-making.<sup>272</sup>

This wide overview summarizes some of the highlights of the role played by LRGs in achieving the targets of SDGs 8, 5 and 10, and how they can help societies to combat the current economic recession at the local level. LRGs can promote sustainable **local economic growth and endogenous development**. They can promote synergies between local actors; support **local initiatives for innovation; and nurture and scale up local capacities** (through working with SMEs and incubators, and circular, shared and social economies). They can do this while paying special attention to guaranteeing opportunities

for vulnerable workers, such as women, young and migrant workers, among others. They can also develop tailor-made policies for the informal sector. They are involved in **social dialogue to uphold workers' rights** and to ensure the active engagement of local administration staff in the development of sustainable policies. They promote knowledge sharing and exchanges between LRGs. There is, however, a clear need to strengthen policy coordination and **collaboration across different levels of government and to foster inclusive dialogue** in order to improve local economic development strategies in cities and regions and to ensure the meaningful involvement of all relevant local actors. All of this also involves the need to ensure an adequate and sustainable stream of financing and resources in order to be able to implement and support policies conducive to more inclusive local economic growth and the generation of quality employment.●

# 5. Means of implementation

## 5.1 Strengthening multilevel governance to bridge the SDG investment gap

**With only ten years left to achieve one of the most ambitious development agendas ever agreed upon, the contribution of all stakeholders, including LRGs, will be vitally important to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. Yet, in order to truly contribute to SDG implementation efforts, LRGs will require adequate resources and increased competences, and will also have to collaborate much more closely with all levels of government to implement consistent and well-integrated policies.**

The Fifth Report of the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD V Report), which focuses on the localization of the Global Agendas, provides a good overview of the progress that has been made in promoting enabling environments for LRGs in the different regions of the world.<sup>1</sup> It analyses trends in political, fiscal and financial decentralization, multilevel governance, and also the means available to finance the required shift towards more sustainable patterns of development. **According to the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment, LRGs currently account for 24.6% of total global public spending, 25.7% of public revenue, and 37% of public investment.**<sup>2</sup> Although the latter accounts for only a small share of global GDP (1.3%), it provides a useful indicator for assessing the role of LRGs in

investment in public services and key infrastructure throughout the world, and—to a broader extent—in SDG implementation (see Figure 5.1).

LRGs have the potential to raise funds for investment and service delivery through a variety of financial and fiscal strategies and partnerships if and when they are empowered to do so. The paradox is that while cities account for around 80% of global GDP, many fast-growing cities fail to capture much of the wealth created and therefore continue to suffer the consequences of having insufficient budgets, infrastructure deficits, informal economies and substandard services.

Much evidently remains to be done to empower LRGs from regions all over the world and to help them to play a full role in promoting sustainable development policies. Firstly, there is still a significant gap between *de jure* decentralization and the reality on the ground: as shown in Figure 5.1, investment capacities do not always reflect the actual autonomy of LRGs and their ability to mobilize local resources. In fact, there are many remaining challenges and obstacles that undermine their capacity to exert effective control over their sources of revenue. As well as the prevalence of poverty and informality (which reduce the revenue base that LRGs receive, especially in low- and middle-income countries), other factors that effectively restrict local autonomy, and which need to be reformed,

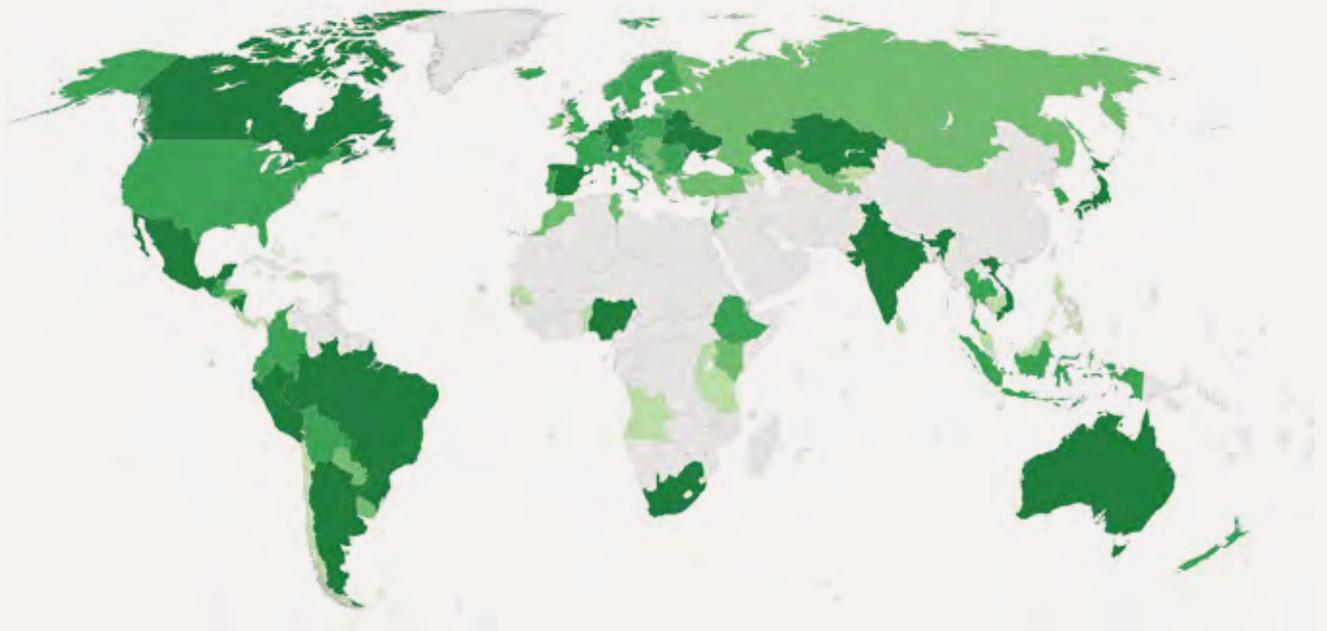
include: constrained institutional frameworks, overlapping power allocations, blatant oversights from the higher tiers of government, and unpredictable intergovernmental transfers (both in terms of amount and timing). In particular, the mobilization of local resources needs to be strengthened and incentivized. This should be based on: a dynamic and buoyant local tax system; adapting intergovernmental transfer mechanisms to ensure a fairer share of national fiscal revenues; and revising equalization grants to support those territories that are furthest behind. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and local self-government, local fiscal systems should not prevent LRGs from employing their own discretion or limit their capacity to establish local priorities for their own communities.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, borrowing is still constrained for the majority of LRGs in developing countries. As of 2019, LRGs in 113 countries have officially had the formal right to borrow money, whether on domestic markets or internationally via "on-lending" loans.<sup>4</sup> In practice, however, most LRG proposals tend to be tightly controlled by higher tiers of government. When LRGs seek to borrow directly from financial institutions, their projects often fail to meet the feasibility, bankability and risk criteria imposed by lenders. **Access to responsible borrowing should be facilitated in order to allow LRGs to deliver quality public services, always ensuring transparency and accountability.**

In all the regions across the globe, the cumulative shortfall in the financing of local services and infrastructure constitutes a critical

Figure 5.1

### Direct investment by LRGs as a % of total public investment (2016)



#### LRG direct investment as % of total public investment

- Above 60%
- Between 30% and 60%
- Between 15% and 30%
- Less than 15%

Note: There were no available data for the countries left blank or they were not covered by the 2019 analysis.

Source: OECD/UCLG, World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment.

## The implementation of reforms to improve the rationality of assigning greater powers, capacities and resources to LRGs is one of the most critical dimensions for urban and territorial governance.

problem. This is particularly true in developing countries, but is also applicable to retrofitting projects undertaken in developed countries in response to the problems of climate change and ageing populations. The challenge is most acute where urbanization is expected to continue to concentrate, as in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia. At the local level, and looking from the perspective of sustainable development, most cities will be unable to raise the finances that they require to meet their existing and projected demands for infrastructure. The implementation of reforms to improve the rationality of assigning greater powers, capacities and resources to LRGs is one of the most critical dimensions for urban and territorial governance.

**There is a growing mismatch between the funds available at the global level and the funding that actually reaches territories and communities that are most in need; this is, undermining many SDG localization efforts.** Financing the global development agendas (the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the New Urban Agenda, as proposed by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development) entails ensuring that investment reaches subnational levels, and particularly the communities that most need it. This also implies that investment must be used to reconcile economic, environmental and social goals. This presents an important challenge, especially when we consider that implementing the SDGs would cost between USD 50 trillion and USD 70 trillion over the next ten years (2020-2030),<sup>5</sup> with a financial gap estimated at around USD 2.5 trillion per year in developing countries.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in 2017, the Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance<sup>7</sup> estimated that, on average, cities would need USD 5 trillion per year to meet the global demand for low-emission, climate-resilient urban infrastructure. Similarly, UN-Habitat recently

launched its “Counting the Costs” project to estimate the cost of meeting SDG 11 by 2030 and implementing the New Urban Agenda from a city-centred perspective. According to the initial study, which was based on 129 cities in four sampled countries (Bolivia, India, Malaysia and Colombia), the total average annual cost of achieving SDG 11 for small cities in a developing country is between USD 20 million and 50 million; for intermediary-scale developing cities, this cost could be from USD 140 million to more than USD 500 million, and for larger developing cities, it ranges from around USD 600 million to over USD 5 billion.<sup>8</sup> This would therefore require a significant increase in investment as a percentage of GDP.

Looking beyond these broad figures, it is evident that most states lack the type of integrated national financing framework required to support SDG implementation strategies at the national level that are called for in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. An analysis of the VNRs submitted in recent years (2018-2020) reveals that very few countries have assessed how much money they will require to implement the SDGs. In 2018-2019, **Benin** carried out a financial assessment which revealed that the financial and technological resources required would amount to nearly 61% of its GDP, while its domestic tax income barely reached 18% of its annual GDP. With this year’s VNR in sight, the country has committed to convening several fora and roundtables to identify the main gaps to be filled and what is needed to mobilize national resources, including collaborations with development partners.<sup>9</sup> Processes to align national investment plans in order to deliver the financial resources needed for SDG implementation are also underway in **Bangladesh** and **Honduras**. In the case of Bangladesh, the financing needs are estimated at USD 928.5 billion for the period 2017-2030,<sup>10</sup> while the Honduran government has underlined the need to improve the mobilization of revenue at all levels, including that of municipal governments.<sup>11</sup> Aligning national financing and planning processes with local needs is vital if countries are to achieve the Global Goals. At the city level, several LRGs in countries such as **Costa Rica**, **India** and **South Africa** have reported efforts to align local and regional budgets with the SDGs.<sup>12</sup> However, such initiatives remain relatively fragmented and need to be scaled up. **Greater efforts are urgently needed to assess the real costs involved and the financial gaps that exist both within countries and between the different levels of their government structures.** Only then will it be possible to deal with these gaps and to accelerate the implementation of the Global Agendas.

**The mobilization of these financial resources is more pressing than ever with the COVID-19 crisis, the multidimensional impacts of which are undermining progress towards all the SDGs and other development agendas, at all levels of government.** From an international perspective, the financing for the sustainable development framework was already in turmoil prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, with a 4.3% decline, in real terms, in the gross official development assistance (ODA) going to developing countries, and a 2.2% decline, in real terms, in the gross official development assistance (ODA) going to the least developed countries in 2018.<sup>13</sup> With this outbreak, global FDI is expected to shrink by between 30% and 40% during the period 2020-2022.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, funding needs for emergency and recovery actions are likely to further increase. This is happening in a context of fragile macroeconomic activity and high public debt, which is of particular concern in developing and the least developed countries. In a majority of countries, the COVID-19 outbreak has also highlighted the fact that public service provision remains largely underfunded; yet this is a core responsibility of LRGs, worldwide, and a critical dimension of the work required to achieve the SDGs. The greatly differing capacities of LRGs to cope with the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure the continuity of public service provision could jeopardize efforts to achieve all the SDGs and also to deliver other global development agendas. The limited capacities and resources available to fulfil many of the assigned functions will no doubt continue in the coming years. The ability of LRGs to invest in measures to build up resilience to protect against future shocks will similarly be compromised.

**Given the challenges mentioned above, there is an urgent need to ensure that adequate funding reaches the territories and communities most in need. This must be done, however, without losing sight of the long-term objectives of promoting resilience and sustainability** that are embodied in the 2030 Agenda as its ultimate objective. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for strong, multilevel and collaborative governance and the urgent need for special fiscal and monetary measures to provide tailor-made and effective responses. Exchanges between LRGs during the COVID-19 crisis<sup>15</sup> have showcased some of the proactive measures taken by certain cities and regions. These have included measures such as the reallocation and prioritization of local spending in order to support the local economic actors and households most affected by the crisis. However, reallocating what are already strained local budgets will probably result in

efforts falling short of meeting all but the most pressing of needs. As already mentioned, national government support is of the utmost importance if LRGs are to secure sustainable levels of finance for the provision of local public services throughout the emergency and recovery periods. Stable and predictable intergovernmental transfers are particularly vital, especially considering that most international financial resources earmarked for relief and recovery purposes are primarily directed to national, rather than subnational, levels of government. Nonetheless, recent initiatives have emerged to support cities and to help them in their response to the COVID-19 crisis. For example, the AIMF has launched a EUR 1.35 million support plan for partners in Africa. The 2020 Financing for Sustainable Development Report also stresses that increased international support is required to reverse the decline in ODA, to inject more liquidity, and to provide emergency funding to the countries most affected by the socioeconomic crisis and, in particular, developing and the least developed countries.<sup>16</sup>

These short and medium-term measures should go hand in hand with longer-term investment in resilient infrastructure and more sustainable sectors and services. This will be needed in order to mitigate future shocks and to build more sustainable and resilient communities in the aftermath of the crisis. **Public investment in crisis prevention, combined with incentives for private investment, risk reduction and planning, should not be postponed**, but should rather be supported in order to provide access to essential services and help offset the decline in investment associated with the COVID-19 crisis. Rebuilding their fiscal space will also be critical for LRGs in the aftermath of the crisis.<sup>17</sup> In practice, this will require cities and regions to reorganize their local taxation systems. This will need to be based on local economic sectors generating revenue (e.g. digitalization and IT sectors). In developing

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**Greater efforts are urgently needed to assess the real costs involved and the financial gaps that exist both within countries and between the different levels of their government structures.**

## Increased access to diverse sources of financing will be instrumental if LRGs are to play a greater role in providing emergency responses and recovering from COVID-19 while promoting sustainable development solutions.

countries, where informality in the urban economy is widespread, this could also require increased collaboration between LRGs and community-based organizations to overcome the challenges posed by a weak fiscal base.

**Increased access to diverse sources of financing will be instrumental if cities and regions are to play a greater role in providing emergency responses and helping the recovery while promoting sustainable development solutions.** Innovative investment instruments, such as land value capture, environmental user fees and taxes, and digital financing mechanisms, could potentially be harnessed and used as key levers to help LRGs to increase their own-source revenues and catalyze investment dedicated to promoting greater resilience to climate change and more sustainable infrastructure. Regarding the former, additional efforts should be promoted to improve the capture of land added value to reinvest in local infrastructure. Improvements in land management need adequate cadastral tools and different land-based financing mechanisms to charge those who directly benefit from public investment in infrastructure, such as developers, private individuals and the business sector.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, when it comes to environmental taxes, stronger multilevel governance collaboration is required to shape fiscal policies, apply incentives and/or disincentives, such as carbon taxes, and establish pricing strategies. In particular, in an era of climate emergencies and socio-environmental impact assessment, the debate concerning what constitutes LRGs' fair share of natural resource taxation is one that still needs to be more thoroughly engaged.

Furthermore, blended finance (the use of public and philanthropic funds to leverage private sector investment in developing countries), increased access to borrowing, municipal or green bonds and climate funds are important tools for mobilizing public, private and capital market funds in order to finance local sustainable development and the transition to low-carbon cities and regions.<sup>19</sup> Other mechanisms could also be deployed to steer resources towards local sustainable development.

These could include lending in local currencies to improve LRGs' capacity to make repayments and pooled financing mechanisms operating at the subnational or municipal level. Such initiatives are generally carried out through the creation of national and local investment vehicles, international finance vehicles and renewed public-private-people partnerships (PPPPs).<sup>20</sup> In **India**, for example, a state-level pooled finance development fund scheme has been established by the Ministry of Urban Development to provide credit enhancement to LRGs wishing to access bond markets. In the case of climate funds, a recent study showed that, between 2003 and 2016, less than 10% of global climate funds were earmarked for local action; climate finance is therefore still not getting to where it is most needed.<sup>21</sup> At the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019, the 47 least developed countries put forward their 2050 vision for a climate-resilient future. In it, they committed to develop a strong climate finance architecture, with 70% of climate finance supporting local-level action by 2030.<sup>22</sup> Prioritizing sub-sovereign guarantee programmes on municipal climate action plans and nature-based solutions for climate resilience is a way for international donors and financing institutions to support LRGs in planning for a more sustainable future.<sup>23</sup> In disaster-prone regions, such as the Pacific, improved access to climate-change and disaster-risk finance is one of the key priorities for climate change adaptation and mitigation. In **Micronesia**, for instance, the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat have conducted an assessment to help the country access and secure climate-change and disaster-risk financing from external sources.<sup>24</sup>

National and subnational development banks, and also DFIs that support local governments, can be powerful allies for mobilizing additional financing for local development.<sup>25</sup> **Municipal development funds are crucial for addressing the financial needs of local authorities. This is particularly so in the case of intermediary cities and small municipalities, where infrastructure needs are growing rapidly.** Examples of such

funds include the Colombian Financiera de Desarrollo Territorial S.A. (Colombian Financial Corporation for Territorial Development), the Bangladesh Municipal Development Fund, the Philippines Municipal Development Fund Office, the Moroccan Municipal Equipment Fund, and the Special Council Support Fund for Mutual Assistance in Cameroon.

Finally, numerous city-focused project preparation facilities have supported city climate project pipelines in order to comply with bankability standards. Examples include: the Cities Development Initiative for Asia,<sup>26</sup> C40 Cities Finance Facility,<sup>27</sup> and ICLEI's Transformative Actions Programme.<sup>28</sup> This has resulted in better mapping and matching of projects with financial opportunities. For example, the GCoM and the European Investment Bank have come together to help "prepare and fast-track financing of urban climate action projects".<sup>29</sup> LRG networks are working with DFIs to develop strategies to combine the transformative impact of each project preparation facilities. Initiatives such as the Gap Fund and the proposed Green Cities Development Bank, respectively led by the GCoM and C40, have also taken significant steps to fill the gaps in the subnational financial architecture.

Other mechanisms to help project preparation and linkages with financing institutions include the African Territorial Agency (ATA), championed by UCLG Africa,<sup>30</sup> and the International Municipal Investment Fund (IMIF), which was set up by UNCDF and UCLG in collaboration with the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV). These

initiatives are intended to help LRGs to access finance and mobilize public and private resources earmarked for sustainable urban projects whose objectives reach beyond purely climate-related criteria. As of 2020, ten pilot municipalities from Africa, Latin America and Central Europe have been preselected for potential access to the IMIF, while 50 cities from 25 countries have demonstrated their commitment and subscribed to the ATA. Finally, the Malaga Global Coalition for Municipal Finance<sup>31</sup> brings together LRG leaders, UNCDF and international institutions to discuss alternative strategies to foster LRG access to finance. There is another return on investment from this modality of development cooperation that should also be considered: the possibility for LRGs to exchange knowledge and acquire and retain local expertise.

**Providing a pathway and regularized, predictable processes to access long-term finance can have an enormous impact and help LRGs to advance their investment in sustainable infrastructure. This could include: improvements in the structuring of intergovernmental transfers between national and local tiers of government; strengthening systems for generating own-source revenue; providing help with localized development; and giving access to innovative financing mechanisms. The unequal access that LRGs have to resources must be high on the agenda at both the international and national levels; this must be discussed and remedied through meaningful change in the financial ecosystem.**



UCLG participating at the High-Level Policy Dialogue on Municipal Finance held in Malaga in April 2018

## 5.2 Local and regional monitoring for responsive policy action

**As soon as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted, the international community also committed to reporting and monitoring on their achievements. However, the progress made in the disaggregation of data to ensure that no one and no territory is left behind has so far been extremely limited. Most of the indicators established by the UN IAEG-SDGs are difficult to transpose to local realities as they are defined to measure national development policies. Most of the attempts carried out by different organizations have also required reviews, proxies and alternative indicators.**

National governments, which periodically report at the UN HLPF, often have difficulties compiling a comprehensive collection of subnational indicators. Many countries are, however, making substantial efforts to strengthen their monitoring processes and to collect localized data (e.g. Belgium,<sup>32</sup> China, Colombia,<sup>33</sup> Indonesia,<sup>34</sup> Kenya, South Africa,<sup>35</sup> and Sweden,<sup>36</sup> among others). Nevertheless, the majority of national systems lack disaggregated data that fully grasp the nature and extent of the main challenges currently facing different people and territories that are struggling to embark on the path to sustainable development and who are often at risk of falling behind.

Some LRGs have already started to develop monitoring and evaluation tools. Many cities, and particularly those engaged in the development of VLRs (see Section 3, above), and regional governments (in Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Germany and Spain, among others) are now developing their own monitoring systems. National LGAs (in Brazil,<sup>37</sup> Flanders,<sup>38</sup> Germany,<sup>39</sup> Netherlands,<sup>40</sup> Sweden<sup>41</sup>) have built tools to develop subnational monitoring and support through training.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, with support from France, has developed the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, which includes a set of indicators that are not always aligned with the SDGs. Some other initiatives have proposed data for a specific category of cities. For example, Metropolis, the association of major cities and metropolitan areas, with the support of the London School of Economics – LSE Cities, has collected a limited set of indicators,<sup>43</sup> while the

World Council on City Data currently holds data about over 100 metropolitan cities worldwide.<sup>44</sup>

International institutions like UN-Habitat, through initiatives such as the New Urban Agenda Platform<sup>45</sup> and the City Prosperity Initiative,<sup>46</sup> help monitor the SDGs based on the collection of data through a sample of around 600 cities from regions all over the world.<sup>47</sup> The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN),<sup>48</sup> with the support of academia and leading experts, has monitored extended selections of cities in different countries (including the United States, Italy and Spain). The SDSN's publication on India includes both of its levels of subnational government: the state and city levels. The European Commission has launched the Joint Research Council's Handbook to help cities to develop their own VLRs and with the selection of relevant indicators.<sup>49</sup> The OECD, through the Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals initiative, has put in place its own system of indicators in order to ensure comparative analysis between a limited pilot group of regions and cities.<sup>50</sup>

All these initiatives are, however, still too limited in their scope and capacity to strengthen the policy-making process at the local level. All in all, **there is a demonstrated need to provide LRGs with adequate human, technical and financial resources and capacities to enable them to develop sound indicators and monitoring mechanisms. This is a pre-requisite for them to have the capacity to contribute to national reporting processes at the same time as developing better, and more inclusive, policies at the local level.**●

**The majority of national systems lack disaggregated data that fully grasp the nature and extent of the main challenges currently facing different people and territories.**

## 6. Conclusions and way forward

**The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals remain essential to build a more inclusive and sustainable future, and even more so in the present circumstances, when the global pandemic is having an immeasurable impact on the social and economic fabric of our communities. The 2030 Agenda should be the framework to guide the recovery process in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis, in order to preserve the wellbeing of our populations and for the protection of our planet. Its ambitious goals represent the fundamentals that breathe life into the concepts of solidarity and cooperation. This was the message of the UN Secretary-General in his report to the HLPF this year. This is the feeling of our constituency based on the experiences in cities and territories. The achievement of the SDGs, however, is at risk. In this context, LRGs from all over the world reaffirm their strong commitment with the Global Agendas (the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda), as this report shows.**

LRGs are leading the expansion and amplification of the SDG localization movement, in all regions and continents. It is impressive how powerful regions, provinces, cities from all sizes, metropolises, intermediary cities and towns (from New York to Seoul, from the Åland region in Finland to the Azuay province in Ecuador, from Kisumu county in Kenya to Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic), are all making efforts to mainstream the SDGs into their local plans and policies, mobilizing their communities, even when their resources and capacities are limited, even in least developed countries such as Benin.

*Towards the Localization of the SDGs*, being the fourth edition of this report, demonstrates that there is a sort of shifting tide towards the localization of the SDGs. It underlines LRGs' role on the front lines of COVID-19, keeping people safe and delivering vital services. It shows the important progress made in local plans and policies to mainstream the SDGs and related agendas. Progress is happening at different paces and with different scopes. It emerges from the bottom, driven from cities and territories with the support of their communities, and some other times it is propelled by national policies that acknowledge that "the SDG agenda is stronger if localization is stronger" (Uganda's 2020 VNR). Yet, such progress still needs to be bolstered, strengthened and upscaled.

The report presents a wide range of LRG contributions to "Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation" and participates in the annual assessment efforts at the HLPF 2020. It lists hundreds of experiences and policies: from responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to groundbreaking policies that contribute to sustainable urbanization and more balanced territorial development. It shows the contrast between the progress made by cities and regional governments in the global North as well as those in the global South. It highlights the challenges faced by cities in the regions where urban growth will be concentrated during the coming decade and where the battle for the achievement of the SDGs will be particularly challenging. It analyses the experience of LRGs in the 47 countries reporting this year, but also addresses many other countries. This conclusion summarises the key findings and proposes next steps for the Decade of Action.

## A diversified and expanded localization movement

Following the trends observed in previous years, the localization movement has been making progress, albeit at distinct paces, in all regions. Progress has been faster in Europe, followed by countries of Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. In US and Canada, an increasing number of pioneer high-profile cities and states have been demonstrating their commitment, with the support of civil society, foundations, the private sector and grassroots organizations. Meanwhile, progress in Eurasian, Middle Eastern and West Asian countries remains slower, with the notable exception of Turkey and a recent acceleration in Russia—as a result of the efforts made for the reporting process in 2020. In the MEWA region the persistence of severe conflicts has prevented real progress. In different countries, such as Argentina, India or Mexico, localization efforts have remained more concentrated at the state or provincial level, or in the main cities.

Regions and provinces are also remarkably active in other countries (such as Ecuador, Nigeria and Russia, to mention only a few among the countries reporting this year). Big cities, across all continents, have played a leading role and have broadly communicated their initiatives. Intermediary cities are increasingly following suit. Both big and intermediary cities, as well as few regions, are leading the VLR efforts that have contributed to the promotion of more cross-sectoral initiatives, overcoming internal barriers to involve civil society, the business sector and academia in monitoring processes. At the global level, LRG networks, and the GTF in particular, have played a driving role in encouraging and supporting a more systematic local and regional implementation of the Global Agendas. During this last year, hundreds of conferences, workshops, awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building actions, technical support actions and pilot projects took place aimed at SDG localization.

**The report shows how, in many regions, LRGs are moving from mere commitments to alignment actions through mainstreaming the SDGs into their local development plans, policies and territorial strategies. While these are all positive trends, outreach and overall implementation are still limited and their expansion needs to be accelerated.** It is worth noting, however, that these trends took place before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be necessary to observe the impacts of the crisis on SDG implementation at local and regional levels during and after the crisis.

## Local and regional government responses to COVID-19: the answer to the pandemic requires emboldened local actions

As these lines are written the COVID-19 crisis continues to cause tremendous human suffering across the world. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, LRGs have been on the frontline of the global response against the virus. The report summarizes the massive efforts undertaken by LRGs to ensure the provision of basic services and the safeguarding of their communities, placing people and human rights at the core of their actions.

The crisis has given rise to new vulnerabilities, but it has also largely exacerbated previously existing ones. The widespread and increasing inequalities that permeate contemporary societies have fuelled the virus expansion and magnified its consequences. The prevalence of informality and poverty in many cities has posed further challenges to mitigation efforts, as the lack of access to water and sanitation, energy and secure livelihoods further reduces the possibility of self-quarantining for a massive segment of the population.

As terrible as it is, this crisis has also shed light on how we will need to transform our current development patterns if we are to meet the 2030 Agenda. The COVID-19 crisis has also proven to have a potential for spurring radical change. It has proven that it is indeed possible to end homelessness, stop evictions and find quick solutions to extend the provision of water, sanitation and energy networks—including in informal contexts. It has proven that it is possible to rethink the way in which our cities and territories are run: properly acknowledging the vital importance of care, solidarity, and of valuing the people—in the majority of cases, women—who take care of us. These principles must be acknowledged as necessary to guide our societies.

LRGs are aware that responding to this unprecedented crisis calls for triggering structural change, not short-term fixturs. They have stepped up to protect their populations—particularly those that are furthest behind. Innovative LRGs have developed pre-emptive response measures and promoted the sharing of information through digital tools to strengthen accountability. They have made efforts to ensure the disinfection of public spaces and enforce social distancing practices. They have promoted soft urban mobility alternatives and propelled the redesign of urban spaces. They have facilitated access to the internet, prompted short food circuits and boosted sharing and social economy and solidarity

community networks. They have redoubled measures to support women victims of violence. The pandemic also has a significant impact on local democracy itself. LRGs have demonstrated throughout the crisis that collective learning, combined with inter-municipal and international cooperation, is key to providing appropriate responses as the virus spreads across administrative frontiers (see the summary of lessons learned in the Decalogue for the COVID-19, Subsection 4.1).

**The context created by the COVID-19 crisis opens up the opportunity to propel structural change. In order to do so, it is necessary to consolidate the innovative policy approaches championed by many LRGs, putting the protection of their populations at the centre. This approach entails including basic services and sustainable infrastructures in the recovery packages that many governments are defining. It also entails accelerating the governance reforms needed to ensure that LRGs are able to harness the transformative potential of their actions. This will be key in order to ensure an inclusive recovery and is a big step towards the achievement of the SDGs.**

### **From commitments to action: progress and pitfalls**

Over the past years, as shown by the previous editions of this report, LRGs have been developing groundbreaking experiences related to the different dimensions of the SDGs. This report has provided a selection of the latest policies led by LRGs to promote inclusive and sustainable urban and territorial development. These policies have been organized following the four dimensions for assessment proposed by the HLPF: “Advancing human wellbeing and ending hunger” (Subsection 4.3); “Protecting the planet and building resilience; and ensuring access to sustainable energy” (Subsection 4.4); “Bolstering Local Action, urban and peri-urban development” (Subsection 4.2); and “Sharing economic benefits” (Subsection 4.5).

This report underlines the leading role played by LRGs in combating climate change and strengthening cities’ and territories’ resilience. More than 10,000 LRGs from 135 different countries, representing 864 million inhabitants, have committed themselves to take measurable actions to reduce GHG emissions. These include a combination of ambitious policies to move towards net-zero carbon buildings and zero-waste and promote the transition towards low carbon transportation and renewable energies. Until 2018, 8,900 LRGs from 55 countries had adopted DRR strategies aligned with the Sendai

Framework. The report also highlights policies that foster nature-based solutions based around governance of proximity to enhance sustainable urbanization, and also different policies for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity.

LRGs’ major efforts in policy innovation are concentrated in promoting sustainable “urban and peri-urban development”, central to harnessing the transformative potential of cities. The report points out how hundreds of LRGs are revising their policies and development plans to mainstream the SDGs, fostering participative approaches. LRGs are developing slum upgrading and retrofitting policies, increasingly making the right to adequate housing a prominent element of their agendas. The provision of access to drinkable water, often a responsibility of LRGs, has seen significant progress. These efforts have put SDG 6.1 within reach for 2030. Moreover, an increasing number of cities are currently implementing sustainable transportation reforms, fostering innovative cultural policies (such as the Agenda 21 for culture), reducing waste production (promoting recycling and reusing practices), and making efforts to improve air quality.

The report underlines the potential of local actions to “advance human wellbeing”. LRG actions contribute to reducing poverty by targeting the people more in need, promoting territorialized food systems and developing localized health and educational policies. Globally, although still insufficient, progress is observed in the participation of women in local political leadership, as well as in the mainstreaming of gender-specific approaches in urban management. Different LRG networks support initiatives to foster peace and respect of human rights by tackling all forms of discrimination and welcoming migrants. Thousands of LRGs are developing virtuous circles to promote civic engagement (like participatory budgeting and planning and open government practices) for the co-creation and co-production of better cities and communities.

LRGs are equally active actors for “sharing economic benefits” and their contribution could be important to reactivate local economies in the aftermath of the pandemic, fostering alternative economic models such as: the circular economy, the sharing and social economy, and promoting tailor-made policies for the informal sector.

On the other hand, this report also underlines the pitfalls and setbacks that LRGs face. Structural trends are reshaping the urban landscape with a serious impact on urban management and on sustainability. These include rapid urbanization, demographic change, the dominance of “financial rationality” and the commodification of urban

assets, and also new technologies and the systemic transformation of labour and real-estate markets. Social fragmentation and economic polarization are growing within cities and between metropolitan areas and intermediary cities, and also with respect to peripheral regions and deserted rural areas. This is making the governance of cities and regions more complex, leading to contrasting realities (which may be characterized by an increasing urban sprawl, slumification, increasing informality, declining regions, etc.).

The current reality of many cities and regions, particularly in developing countries, is constrained by limited capacities and resources to formulate adequate responses to the unsustainable patterns of urbanization. This is particularly grave in those regions where rapid urban growth will be most concentrated, namely Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia. Local authorities will need to accelerate progress if they are to meet the targets related to poverty and inequalities, ensure inclusive prosperity and reduce the impact of urban expansion on the environment. Inclusive and participatory policies are essential to develop a wider range of alternatives, create stronger local coalitions and involve local actors in the co-design and co-production of pathways to sustainability.

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis obliges LRGs and all partners to revise and discuss the recovery pathways. As a consequence of COVID-19, as well as of previous budget restrictions, the ecosystems that allow for the delivery of local public services are under enormous stress. In order to facilitate recovery while taking in consideration SDG-related objectives, it will be necessary to: strengthen health and safety requirements in public services management; adapt urban development patterns to the new modalities of working and learning from home; reduce the digital divide; and promote more polycentric cities that facilitate more sustainable mobility models (among many others issues). A world-wide green deal is needed to support massive rebuilding efforts, strengthen public services, re-invigorate the economy and ensure environmental protection.

**The current scope and pace of LRGs actions are insufficient to curb current unsustainable trends on their own. LRG actions for sustainability need to be both accelerated and upscaled in order to unleash the full potential of sustainable urban development and to strengthen the links with rural areas. Without well-defined policy interventions and an adequate mobilisation of resources, the consequences of urban growth—estimated at 85 million more urban dwellers per year—on**

**environmental depletion and social inequality over the next decade will be larger than any previously seen in human history (UN GRSD 2019).**

### **Effective whole-of-government and whole-of-society strategies are key to strengthening cooperation and overcoming the current crisis**

Only through strengthened collaboration between all levels of government, and the involvement of all the different components of civil society, can the progress to achieve the SDGs be accelerated. Since its adoption in 2015, it was acknowledged that the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

Several conditions have been identified as levers that contribute to fostering the localization process: 1) the existence of robust national SDG localization strategies, 2) institutional environments conducive to LRG actions and the existence of a collaborative framework between all spheres of government, 3) adequate technical and financing support, and 4) political will and engaged local communities. In general, localization is stronger when backed by a clear national localization strategy and where local governments are empowered with the necessary capacities and resources to act and innovate.

Decentralization is thus essential to strengthen local governance and to provide local institutions with the necessary means and technical assistance to propel mobilization in their communities. At the same time, decentralization requires making greater efforts to strengthen national institutional frameworks. It is necessary to foster collaboration and improve coordination between different levels of government, in order to avoid overlapping and ensure policy coherence for effective SDG implementation.

In this regard, the progress achieved in LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms for the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs is still unsatisfactory. The global figures for 2020 show a slight decrease in the share of countries where LRGs participated in the high-level coordination mechanisms established (from 34% in previous years to 26% in 2020). LRG participation is still “weak” in 40% of countries reporting this year—meaning that participation is marginal or *ad hoc* and LRGs are not fully recognized as main actors of the SDG decision-making process. There is no LRG participation at all in 9% of reporting countries. There are no elected LRGs or clear information is lacking in the remaining 26%.

The report also underlines the recent acknowledgment of national urban policies (NUPs) as a proxy to measure the number of countries that facilitate more integrated policies for urban and regional development (namely, indicator 11.a.1). This evolution could contribute to improving policy cohesion for a more balanced and equal urban and territorial development: core principles of the sustainability agendas. However, LRGs need to be effectively involved in the definition, implementation and follow-up of NUPs. At the same time, NUPs should be better included in SDG strategies and follow-up mechanisms. These are necessary steps to take in order to truly promote integrated and coherent policies that can take advantage of the added value associated with urbanisation.

On their part, LRGs need to advance initiatives to reinforce cooperation between territories through horizontal cooperation, at inter-municipal and also at regional level. They must also take advantage of the privileged connections between rural, peri-urban and urban areas within different territories. More balanced systems of cities can help, reducing the increasing territorial divide observed in almost all regions.

**More collaboration between institutions and stakeholders and well-tailored multilevel governance arrangements, based on the principles of subsidiarity and respect for local autonomy, can facilitate the involvement of local institutions and actors. This is needed to create local ownership of the SDGs. Strengthened collaboration and adequate multilevel governance systems ease the adaptation of national strategies to suit local realities. They contribute to nurturing national strategies with local innovation and experimentation. However, adequate means of implementation continue to be one of the main bottlenecks for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs at all levels.**

### **Financial empowerment for the localization of the Global Agendas**

Well-planned cities and sustainable territorial development are critical elements for achieving the SDGs. The effective financial empowerment of LRGs for the achievement of the SDGs is the commitment corresponding to paragraph 34 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted by UN Member States.

In spite of this, we can see a critical mismatch in all regions between the increase in transferred responsibilities and the revenues allocated to LRGs. Notwithstanding the overall, albeit uneven,

progress of decentralization, financing remains the dimension where progress is globally more bounded. This gives rise to several paradoxes. One is that cities concentrate around 80% of the global GDP, but many rapidly growing cities fail to capture the wealth created. Instead, they continue to struggle with insufficient budgets and accumulate infrastructure deficits. This is particularly true in economically developing countries. Yet, it is also applicable to retrofitting projects undertaken in developed countries in response to the problems of climate change and ageing populations. The challenge is most acute in the regions where urbanization is expected to concentrate, namely in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia.

Financing the global development agendas entails ensuring that investment reaches the communities that are most in need. An analysis of the VNRs submitted in recent years (2018-2020) reveals that very few countries have assessed how much money they will require to implement the SDGs. Even less countries have done such assessment at the subnational level. Aligning national financing and planning processes with local needs is vital if countries are to achieve the Global Goals. The mobilization of these financial resources is more pressing than ever with the COVID-19 crisis. In a majority of countries, the COVID-19 outbreak also highlighted the fact that public service provision remains largely underfunded; yet, this a critical dimension of the work required to achieve the SDGs.

Given the challenges, there is an urgent need to ensure that adequate funding reaches the territories and communities most in need. Increased access to diverse sources of financing will be instrumental if cities and regions are to play a greater role in helping promote sustainable development solutions. Providing a pathway and regularised, predictable processes to access long-term finance can have an enormous impact for LRGs to advance their investment in sustainable infrastructure. This could include: improvements in the structuring of intergovernmental transfers between national and LRGs to ensure a fairer share of national fiscal revenues (including equalization grants to reduce territorial inequalities); strengthening own-source revenue sources (from land value capture to taxes on local economic activities and environmental taxes) and giving access to innovative financing mechanisms (municipal development funds, improved access to borrowing, municipal and green bonds, increasing access to climate funds and blended finance mechanisms). As mentioned in the report, LRG networks are working with

development financial institutions (DFI) to develop strategies to better map and match local projects with financial opportunities.

**The unequal access that LRGs have to resources must be high on the agenda at both the international and national levels. This must be discussed and remedied through meaningful change in financial ecosystems. Reforms that improve the rationality of assigned powers, capacities and resources to which LRGs have access are one of the most critical dimensions to boost urban and territorial governance and bolster local action. Recovery finance packages governments are adopting need to integrate investment in local public services as a priority.**

### **Ensuring full local and regional participation in VNR processes and improved monitoring of localization progress**

The increasing efforts of LRGs to participate in the national and global commitments is reflected in the progress made in levels of participation in VNR processes. In more than 55% of the countries reporting this year (against 42% in 2016-2019), LRGs consider that they have had the possibility to participate with direct contributions to the VNRs, sharing their practices or, at least, answering a questionnaire or participating in a workshop. It should be noted, nevertheless, that in a majority of countries the lockdown limited consultation processes to virtual mechanisms, weakening the richness of face-to-face interactions.

LRG efforts are also expressed in the increasing number of Voluntary Local Reviews. As of July 2020, over 50 VLRs have been elaborated by LRGs worldwide. This year has also seen the development of six pilot experiences of countrywide, bottom-up reports called "Voluntary Subnational Reviews", in order to assess the state of localization processes at subnational levels. These are only the tip of the iceberg. These reports are increasingly being recognized at the national and international levels as powerful initiatives to strengthen local ownership and bolster local actions. Four of the six Voluntary Subnational Reviews developed were integrated in their national VNRs. This is an important step forward in terms of strengthening the dialogue between national and local governments and the reflection of localization processes in national reports.

**Despite the progress observed, the figures of LRG participation in the VNRs and, as mentioned above, in national coordination**

**mechanisms, indicate with varied intensities that there is still a long way to go to ensure an adequate level of participation of LRGs in the entire monitoring and reporting process.**

Despite the fact that the number of VNRs that integrate localization strategies is increasing, very few show data disaggregated at the local level. A handful of countries are, however, making substantial efforts to strengthen their monitoring processes and to collect localized data. Also, some international institutions (such as UN-Habitat, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, SDSN and the OECD) participate in these efforts. LRGs have already started to develop monitoring and evaluation tools. These are the cases of some LGAs (those from Brazil, Flanders, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden) and some regional networks (such as CEMR in Europe). Some other initiatives have focused on producing data for a specific category of cities (e.g. Metropolis and the World Council on City Data for big cities) and, obviously, those engaged in the development of VLRs. All these initiatives are, however, still too limited in their scope and capacity to strengthen the policy-making process at the local level. **This is an enormous gap that all countries need to face. Local monitoring and data disaggregation must be strengthened if the principle of "leaving no one behind" is to be reached. The collaboration between national authorities and LRGs for data localization is, in a large majority of countries, still extremely limited.**

At the global level, the participation of LRGs in the international and regional fora for reporting is also improving (e.g. the Local and Regional Governments' Forum during the HLPF). However, it is still necessary to strengthen the spaces for an effective renewal of the multilateral system and multi-stakeholder dialogue, to foster the exchange of experiences and knowledge-sharing and to ensure the real oversight of commitments and policy implementation. **Without revamping international fora's mechanisms to strengthen institutional and stakeholder engagement, the efforts realized around these international platforms will not be optimally capitalized. Mechanisms that promote coordination and greater accountability are needed to ensure that initiatives advanced in these fora perform in a resource-efficient and effective manner.**

# 1.

## **Continue the efforts to galvanize forces for the localization of the SDGs in cities and territories**

LRGs have pioneered the localization of the SDGs, and thus, the movement should continue in the framework of the recovery efforts after the pandemic to ensure that the new context propels the structural changes and innovative policies championed by LRGs. LRGs worldwide should: reaffirm their commitments with the Global Agendas; continue their efforts to adopt the SDGs as a reference framework to transform societies; align their local plans and strategies; and support effective local implementation that pertains to the different aspects of the 2030 Agenda.

# 2.

## **Empower LRGs to secure the provision of essential services and trigger structural change by accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda**

LRGs have been at the forefront of the global response to the pandemic. They have protected their populations by ensuring the provision of basic services and by providing care, solidarity and the protection of human rights. If properly empowered, innovative policy responses led by LRGs could be consolidated into the long-term strategies that are needed to fulfil the SDGs and to build up the preparedness required to confront crises yet to come. These may involve addressing the different dimensions of the SDGs (e.g. poverty reduction, sustainable urban development, climate change, social inclusion, the social economy, culture, etc.).

# 3.

## **Advocate for strong national localization strategies of the SDGs**

LRGs cannot act alone. National SDG strategies that include robust localization policies and clear support to LRGs with the aim to accelerate the localization process are needed. A strong localization strategy can contemplate clear mechanisms to incentivise localization efforts and to strengthen cooperation between national development plans and LRG plans. This could include the support for localization mapping and “costing” analyses of local plans. An institutionalized dialogue among LRGs and national

governments could consolidate these efforts and define adequate technical support and financing to implement local and national plans aligned with the SDGs. Examining and strengthening synergies between local and national plans will be essential for achieving the SDGs.

# 4.

## **Create an enabling institutional environment for localization and ensure adequate financing flows to support localization**

Developing a more inclusive ecosystem, through an enabling institutional environment with an adequate legal framework and a clear share of responsibilities and resources, is now more urgent than ever if we are to ensure the capacity of LRGs and all stakeholders to act in favour of the SDGs. A multilevel and collaborative governance based on the principle of subsidiarity and respect for local autonomy can facilitate the involvement of local institutions and foster local ownership. Given the current challenges, it is urgent to give LRGs increased access to diverse sources of financing and pathways to access long-term finance to fulfil the commitment towards the Global Goals. It is necessary to generate an adequate stream of finance to empower LRGs and to boost innovation and investment in sustainable public services.

# 5.

## **Effective involvement of all spheres of government, civil society and key stakeholders is imperative to strengthen the governance of the SDGs and the localization process**

Progress of LRG participation in the national coordination mechanisms for the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs is still unsatisfactory. Strong partnerships and the participation of LRGs, the civil society, the private sector, social partners and academia in national SDG coordination mechanisms, and also in the definition, follow-up and monitoring of the SDGs, are critical to achieve the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. It is also crucial to ensure policy and institutional coherence both internally and externally. Without the active and collaborative involvement of all stakeholders, the SDGs will remain aspirational goals.

## 6. Strengthen LRG voices in voluntary national reporting to achieve a qualitative leap in SDG implementation

Progress has been made in terms of acknowledging the need to include LRGs in national reporting processes. LRGs' efforts are also expressed in the increasing number of Voluntary Local Reviews and the development of six new pilot experiences of country-wide bottom-up reports (called "Voluntary Subnational Reviews") to assess localization. Despite the progress observed, the pace at which this process has advanced has been insufficient and needs to be accelerated. The participation of LRGs in the reporting process and coordination mechanisms is necessary to properly incorporate and reflect localization strategies. This is key to developing national strategies, reflecting all voices, and incorporating the principle of leaving no one and no territory behind.

## 7. Acknowledge, support, and promote bottom-up monitoring and localized indicators based upon disaggregated data

An increasing number of countries and LRGs are devoting efforts to developing bottom-up reviews of the state of SDG implementation in their territories. However, the number of reporting countries that show data disaggregated at local level are very limited. Fragmented reporting systems hinder ownership and the institutionalization of the SDGs across different spheres of government. Strengthening local reporting capacities and closing the data gap require particular attention and support. National and local capacities to define and collect disaggregated and localized data should be part of the SDG localization strategies. This would ensure that planning processes at all levels are founded on realistic targets and that effective implementation can be monitored, and would facilitate accountability and citizen follow-up.

## 8. Strengthen global cooperation through a renewed and reinforced multilateral system

The current crisis has reaffirmed the fact that local and territorial issues cannot only be solved at these levels. Global cooperation is critical for a thorough transformation through the achievement of the SDGs. Global and national institutions, working according to the principle of subsidiarity, have a key role to play in providing the support and tools which LRGs need to address the challenges that face their territories. Global fora, such as the HLPF, and regional fora for sustainable development organized by the UN regional commissions should be strengthened to become spaces for true multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogue. A vital step in this direction would involve strengthening the voice of LRGs at these fora. As global challenges become more complex, interconnected and pressing, reinforcing global cooperation and solidarity through the revitalisation of a multilateral system that speaks to local communities and the civil society becomes an increasingly urgent necessity. LRGs have demonstrated that they play a key role in creating a bridge between local communities and global institutions.

The constituency of local and regional governments is committed to achieving the global development agendas, accelerating the SDGs and rebuilding our societies in line with our common vision for 2030. The solidarity and the cooperation displayed by LRGs is critical to enhance ownership among local communities, and to ensure a world that leaves no one and no place behind.●

# Notes

## 1 Introduction

- 1 The assessment is drawn from UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance, *Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Brussels: Cities Alliance & UCLG Africa, 2018). The report establishes 12 criteria for assessing local government enabling environments across this region. These correspond to: the constitutional (1) and legal (2) framework; local democracy (3) and governance; financial transfers (4) and own revenues (5); local competences (6); transparency (7) and civic participation (8); local government performance (9); urban strategy (10); gender equality (11); and climate change (12).
- 2 Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin, "Rapport de La Localisation Des ODD Au Bénin" (Cotonou: ANCB, forthcoming, 2020).

## 2 Methodology and report preparation process

- 1 United Nations General Assembly, "Political Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Convened under the Auspices of the General Assembly" (New York: United Nations General Assembly, 2019).
- 2 UCLG's Community of Practice on VLRs launched, in partnership with UN-Habitat, the *Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews* in July 2020. The Guidelines seek to provide LRGs with a practical analysis of existing VLRs. The aim is to reflect on the diversity of processes involved in the elaboration of the VLRs; the resources that have been available to each LRG for the elaboration of its VLR; the institutional arrangements made for SDG implementation and coordination in situ; and any other variables that have been identified as forming part of key practical knowledge and that LRGs would benefit from knowing about in order to advance with their own, local reporting efforts. See: [https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg\\_vlrlab\\_guidelines\\_2020\\_volume\\_i.pdf](https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_vlrlab_guidelines_2020_volume_i.pdf).
- 3 These countries are Benin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Kenya, Mozambique and Nepal. UCLG is promoting the elaboration of their respective subnational reports in collaboration with the national LGAs of these five countries. These subnational reports provide an analysis of the importance of enabling national environments for LRG actions and also first-hand experiences of implementing the SDGs on the ground.
- 4 GTF members have devoted great efforts to step up their contributions to addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Many initiatives may be found on their web pages and resources. ICLEI: [https://iclei.org/en/COVID19\\_Resources.html](https://iclei.org/en/COVID19_Resources.html). C40: <https://www.c40.org/other/covid-task-force>. CLGF: <https://www.clgf.org.uk/whats-new/local-government-action-on-covid-19/>. CEMR-CCRE: <https://ccre.org/activites/view/42>. Regions4: <https://www.regions4.org/covid-19-resources/>. Mercociudades: <https://mercociudades.org/covid-19/>. See also Metropolis' Cities for Global Health initiative, and the series of Live Learning Experiences developed by UCLG in partnership with UN-Habitat. Furthermore, GTF members are also engaging in monitoring efforts to inform evidence-based reforms needed to address this crisis and the ones to come. See the Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions, which was launched on June 5, 2020, by UCLG, Metropolis and LSE Cities: "Launch of the 'Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions' – Monitoring the Impact of COVID 19 and Its Aftermath," News, 2020, <https://www.metropolis.org/news/launch-emergency-governance-initiative-cities-and-regions-monitoring-impact-covid-19-and-its>.

## 3 Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 1 These LRGs are from Argentina (4), Ecuador (1), Finland (1), Kenya (2), Kyrgyzstan (3), Morocco (1), Peru (2), Russia (3), Ukraine (1). They include some capital cities (Bishkek, Buenos Aires, Lima, Rabat); a few regional governments (Åland, in Finland; Azuay, in Ecuador; Makueni and Machakos in Kenya), intermediary cities (Arkhangelsk, in Russia; Lugansk, in Ukraine; Mendoza and Villa Maria, in Argentina); and towns (Bamabo Ya Mboini Iconi, in the Comoros; Kyzyl Kiya, in Kyrgyzstan).
- 2 The information contained in this Subsection has been extracted from an analysis of the VNRs presented to the 2020 HLPF.
- 3 In 2020, the reporting countries that have developed long-term NDPs aligned with the SDGs are: Bulgaria (National Development Programme for Development: Bulgaria 2030, to be adopted); Burundi (National Development Plan for Burundi 2018-2027); India (National development Agenda 2030); the Kyrgyz Republic (National Development Strategy 2018-2040); Moldova (National Development Strategy 2020-2030); Slovenia (National Development Strategy 2017-2030); and Solomon Islands (National Development Strategy 2016-2035).
- 4 In 2020, the reporting countries that have developed mid-term NDPs aligned with the SDGs are: Benin (National Development Plan 2018-2025); Costa Rica (National Development and Investment Plan 2019-2022); Ecuador (National Development Plan 2017-2021); the Gambia (National Development Plan 2018-2021); Malawi (Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2017-2022); Peru (Strategic Plans for National Development 2016-2021 and 2022-2030); Seychelles (National Development Strategy 2019-2023); Uganda (National Development Plan 2019-2021); and Zambia (Seventh National Development Plan 2017-2021).
- 5 As of June 2020, 20 provinces had signed the provincial agreements that kickstart localization processes at the provincial level.
- 6 See the *Estrategia Territorial para la Implementación y Seguimiento de la Agenda Nacional 2030*, mentioned in República de Honduras, "II Informe Nacional Voluntario de La Agenda 2030: De La Recuperación Al Desarrollo Sostenible" (Tegucigalpa: Comisión Nacional de la Agenda 2030 para los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, 2020).
- 7 From the 47 countries reporting this year, information on LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms is not available for four countries: Libya, Solomon Islands, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. There are no elected LRGs in eight of the reporting countries: Barbados, Brunei, Liberia, Micronesia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Seychelles and the Syrian Arab Republic. It is worth noting, however, that in Liberia there has been a consultation with deconcentrated subnational authorities. Likewise, in Samoa, a consultation has been held with traditional authorities.
- 8 The other countries in the region reporting this year were: Solomon Islands and Micronesia (for which information had not been published by 28 June 2020) and Brunei and Samoa (where there are no elected LRGs). It should be noted that there was consultation with the traditional authorities in Samoa.

### 3 Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 9 The committee now includes a member of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industries, who represents the private sector; a member from the NGO Affairs Bureau, which provides one-stop services to NGOs operating with foreign assistance; a member from the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation, which leads a platform entitled "People's Voice: Strengthening SDGs Implementation in Bangladesh"; a member from the Centre for Policy Dialogue, which is the secretariat of the Citizens' Platform for SDGs in Bangladesh; and the United Nations Resident Coordinator, who represents the UN system in Bangladesh.
- 10 The other two countries are Barbados and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.
- 11 These LRGs are from Argentina (4), Ecuador (1), Finland (1), Kenya (2), Kyrgyzstan (3), Morocco (1), Peru (2), Russia (3), Ukraine (1). They include some capital cities (Bishkek, Buenos Aires, Lima, Rabat); a few regional governments (Åland, in Finland; Azuay, in Ecuador; Makueni and Machakos in Kenya), intermediary cities (Arkhangelsk; in Russia; Lugansk, in Ukraine; Mendoza and Villa Maria, in Argentina); and towns (Bamabo Ya Mboini Iconi in the Comores; Kyzyl Kiya in Kyrgyzstan).
- 12 Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin, "Rapport de La Localisation Des ODD Au Bénin." This report was drafted with the support of UCLG and with contributions from the GIZ.
- 13 Eugenia C. Aguirre Raftacco, "Informe Sobre La Localización de Los ODS En Los Gobiernos Locales de Costa Rica" (San José: Unión Nacional de los Gobiernos Locales de Costa Rica, 2020). The report was elaborated with the support of UCLG.
- 14 The national plan includes several priorities that should involve municipalities: mobility, strategic infrastructures, rural planning and poverty reduction. But the modalities are not clearly defined. Two specific programmes benefit a group of 30 municipalities (urban development and reduction of GHG).
- 15 After the national election in 2018, the High-Level Committee has met only 3 times in two years. See: Contraloría General de la República de Costa Rica, "Informe de La Auditoría Operativa Sobre La Eficacia de La Preparación Para La Implementación de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS), Con Énfasis En Género (ODS 5)" (San José: CGR, 2018).
- 16 CONGOPE, "Examen Voluntario de La Implementación de La Agenda 2030 Por Los Gobiernos Provinciales Del Ecuador" (Quito: Consorcio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador, forthcoming, 2020). The 14 provincial governments are: Azuay, Cañar, Carchi, Cotopaxi, El Oro, Esmeraldas, Imbabura, Loja, Los Ríos, Morona Santiago, Pastaza, Santa Elena, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas and Tungurahua.
- 17 CONGOPE, for example, organized an international summit on food security (in April 2018) and supports the "Cuenca-Zero Hunger Charter". They support the Provincial Strategies for Climate Change with a gender focus (in 21 provinces), as well as several projects aligned with the SDGs in the province of Cañar (equality and reducing poverty 2017-2022) and Ecuador's SDG Territory project, in five provinces.
- 18 Council of Governors and County Assemblies Forum, "Draft Status Report on the Localization of the SDGs by County Governments in Kenya" (Nairobi: CoG, CAF, 2020). The report was written with the support of UCLG.
- 19 Reporting on Good Governance - Kenya, "County Integrated Development Plans: Machakos" (RoGG, 2018).
- 20 Associação Nacional dos Municípios de Moçambique, "Relatório Local Voluntário" (Maputo: ANAMM, forthcoming, 2020). This report was drafted with the support of GIZ and UCLG.
- 21 Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal, Municipal Association of Nepal, and National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal, "Voluntary Review of Local Level SDG Implementation in Nepal" (Katmandu: ADCCN, MuAN, NARMiN, 2020); SDG National Network Nepal, "Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDGs 2020," Voluntary Peoples Review of SDGs in Nepal (SDG National Network Nepal, 2020).
- 22 SDG National Network Nepal, "Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDGs 2020," 7.
- 23 Government of Uganda, "Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Kampala: Office of the Prime Minister, 2020), 82.
- 24 Federal Republic of Nigeria, "Implementation of the SDGs. A National Voluntary Review" (Abuja: Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President, 2017).
- 25 To further promote the SDGs, the federal governments of Nigeria has created a conditional matching grant (NGN 250 million) for co-financing key policy areas (health, education, water and sanitation). See also: Federal Republic of Nigeria, "Implementation of the SDGs. A National Voluntary Review."
- 26 Republic of Zambia, "Zambia Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary National Review 2020" (Lusaka: Ministry of National Development Planning, 2020).
- 27 Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, "Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) 2020. Accelerated Action and Transformative Pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development" (Dhaka: Prime Minister's Office, 2020).
- 28 Government of India, "India VNR 2020: Decade of Action. Taking SDGs from Global to Local" (New Delhi: NITI Aayog, 2020); Garima Jain et al., "Localising SDGs for India" (Bengaluru: Indian Institute for Human Settlements, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.24943/sdgsindia.2018>.
- 29 Government of Finland, "Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Helsinki: Publications of the Prime Minister's Office, 2020).
- 30 City of Helsinki, "From Agenda to Action. The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019" (Helsinki, 2019).
- 31 See the *Agenda 2030 für Städte und Gemeinden*, at: <https://agenda2030.at/umsetzungen.htm>.
- 32 Answer of the Congress of Municipalities of Moldova to the GTF Survey 2020.
- 33 Regione Emilia-Romagna, "Shaping Fair Cities: International Campaign Start," European and International Programs and Projects, 2019, <https://progeu.regione.emilia-romagna.it/en/faircities/news/2019/shaping-fair-cities-international-campaign-start>.
- 34 Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales, "Manual Para La Adaptación Local de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible" (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Gobierno de Argentina, 2017).
- 35 See the *Estrategia Territorial para la Implementación y Seguimiento de la Agenda Nacional 2030*, mentioned in República de Honduras, "II Informe Nacional Voluntario de La Agenda 2030: De La Recuperación Al Desarrollo Sostenible."
- 36 UCLG and UN-Habitat, "Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews. A Comparative Analysis of Existing VLRs," VLR Series (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2020).
- 37 The 40 LRGs are: Buenos Aires (Argentina), Barcarena and Santana de Parnaíba (Brazil), La Paz (Bolivia), Helsinki (Finland), Besançon (France), Mannheim (Germany), Kitakyushu, Toyama, Shimokawa and Hamamatsu (Japan), Suwon (Korea), Mexico City (Mexico), Chimbote (Peru), Cape Town (South Africa), Barcelona and Málaga, Gothenburg, Taipei and New Taipei, Bristol and Canterbury, and Los Angeles and New York (United States), as well as the following second-tier SNGs (i.e., counties, provinces, regions and federated states): the province of Santa Fe (Argentina), Wallonia (Belgium), Sao Paulo (Brazil), Busia, Kwale, Marsabit and Taita Taveta (Kenya), Deqing (China), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Oaxaca (Mexico), and the Basque Country and the Community of Valencia (Spain).

### 3 Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 38 UCLG, "The Localization of the Global Agendas" (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2019).
- 39 Nineteen countries but 23 answers. National LGAs of: Benin (ANCB), Burkina Faso (AMBF), Gambia (GALGA), Guinea Bissau (AALGB), Kenya (CoG), Libya (NMCA), Madagascar (AMGVM), Malawi (MALGA), Mali (AMM), Morocco (AMPCC), Mozambique (ANAMM), Rwanda (RALGA), South Africa (SALGA), Togo (UCT), Tunisia (FNVT), Uganda (ULGA), Zambia (LGAZ), Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) and LRGs from: the Comoros (1), Kenya (2) and South Africa (1).
- 40 84% of the answers mention the adoption of statements, strategies and actions plans. The majority (76%) implement training and workshops, 14% provide technical assistance. 74% are making efforts to support the alignment of the SDGs with local strategies and development plans. However, only 45% of the answers refer to the SDGs being used as important points of reference for day-to-day activities.
- 41 Answers from Kenya (2 answers), Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and several cities in Tunisia.
- 42 La Francophonie, "Togo : Former Au Développement Durable Les Agents de La Fonction Publique," Actualité, 2019, <https://www.francophonie.org/togo-former-au-developpement-durable-les-agents-de-la-fonction-publique-860>.
- 43 SALGA Draft Localization Framework and its learning tool "Leading change, delivering the New Urban Agenda through Urban and Territorial Planning" in support of SDG 11, in July 2019, organized through South Africa's first SDG symposium, which brought together local government representatives to discuss SDG localization.
- 44 See: <http://www.municipalbarometer.co.za>.
- 45 Cities Alliance, "Tunisia Country Programme," Country Programmes, 2016, <https://www.citiesalliance.org/how-we-work/our-programmes/country-programmes/tunisia-country-programme>.
- 46 Countries that answered the 2020 GTF survey: national LGAs from Cambodia (NLLC), Indonesia (APEKSI), Nepal (ADDCN), New Zealand (LGNZ), the Philippines (LCP), Vietnam (ACVN), and Sri Lanka (FSLGA); regional associations from Pakistan (Balochistan and Punjab); and LRGs from Indonesia (9), Japan (1), Malaysia (1) and the Philippines (2). A specific report was received from ICLEI Korea.
- 47 60% of the institutions that answered the surveys have adopted strategies and action plans and 27% more have issued political statements supporting the SDGs. 53% have organized communications, campaigns or conferences on the SDGs, 17% have run training sessions and 25% are now providing technical assistance. 45% of the institutions know about initiatives to monitor and report on efforts undertaken at the local level.
- 48 The respondents from the following countries produced positive answers in consultations made during the VNR processes: Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Vietnam. In general, participation was limited to national or regional conferences or answering a questionnaire, except in the cases of Cambodia, New Zealand and Hamamatsu (Japan) and for several provincial governments in Indonesia, which presented their own contributions during the reporting process. The cities of Iriga and LCP (the Philippines) presented a note to the Senate in February 2020. For information about coordination efforts, the following LGAs were consulted on an ad hoc basis: Nepal, APEKSKI, and Malaysia, and the following were consulted on a more regular basis: New Zealand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Hamamatsu (Japan), and several provincial governments in Indonesia.
- 49 For the Urban Portal see <http://www.urbansdgplatform.org/>. CityNet is an association of urban stakeholders which was established in 1987 and includes over 135 municipalities in 23 countries. It has organized an 'SDG cluster' to share best practices. See: <https://citynet-ap.org/>.
- 50 11 Future Cities and 19 Eco-cities. The Japanese government has committed to selecting 29 SDG Future Cities. See: Japan for Sustainability, "'Future City' Initiative," Past and current JFS projects, accessed July 3, 2020, [https://www.japanfs.org/en/projects/future\\_city/index.html](https://www.japanfs.org/en/projects/future_city/index.html).
- 51 ICLEI Korea, "Local Governments Actions for SDGs in the Republic of Korea" (Seoul: ICLEI Korea, 2020).
- 52 A Presidential Decree (No. 59, July 2017) requires the integration of the SDGs into national and subnational mid-term development plans and calls for the preparation of an SDG roadmap and various action plans that must establish clear deadlines for fulfilment at the national, provincial, district and city levels. The government has developed technical guidelines and a set of metadata indicators for each of the SDG pillars and targets. At the provincial level, Regional Coordination Teams (TKD) have been established for SDG implementation.
- 53 The Tanoto Foundation, working in collaboration with LIPI (Indonesian Knowledge Agency) and UNDP, has established an Indonesian Leadership Academy and a capacity development programme to localize SDGs for local government in Indonesia.
- 54 UCLG, "The Localization of the Global Agendas."
- 55 Letter from Atty Shereen Gail Yu-Pamituan, Executive Director of the LCP, to Atty Joanna Gaña-Teves, Office of Senator Pia S. Cayetano, Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Sustainable Development Goals and Innovations, 21 February 2020.
- 56 Answer of the Sri Lankan LGA, FSLGA, to the 2020 UCLG Survey: "The Sustainable Development Act speaks about getting members from the regional governments to the SDG councils, nevertheless in absence of the proper functioning of the council, the regional representation was not observed."
- 57 See: <https://www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz>. Many LRGs have adopted plans that incorporate many of the SDGs, for example the cities of Auckland, Christchurch, Dunedin, Canterbury, Southland, Taranaki, and Wellington, among others.
- 58 The 2<sup>nd</sup> Climate Forum of Russian Cities was held in Moscow, in 2018, and attended by representatives from ten countries and over 70 cities, as well as by LGAs and international experts. Kiev also hosted a large regional conference on 'Municipalities for Sustainable Growth', co-organized by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, with over 350 representatives from local and national authorities, LGAs, and other stakeholders attending. Delegates from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine participated in the event. See also: Mayors for Economic Growth, "High Level Conference 'Municipalities for Sustainable Growth' to Gather Together over 350 Representatives of Municipalities and National Ministries from the Eastern Partnership Countries in Kyiv, Ukraine," News, 2018, <https://www.m4eg.eu/en/news/high-level-conference-municipalities-for-sustainable-growth-to-gather-together-over-350-representatives-of-municipalities-and-national-ministries-from-the-eastern-partnership-countries-in-kyiv-ukraine/>.
- 59 LRGs in Eurasia (whether they are self-governing bodies or deconcentrated bodies linked to central government) tend to perform important social and development-related functions.
- 60 According to UCLG-Eurasia's Analysis of Women and City Leadership, in which 48 cities were studied, Dushanbe had the highest rate of female representation on its city council – 41.4%. There are 29 women out of 70 deputies.
- 61 See, in Belarus, the Vitebsk Region's 2025 Development Strategy, adopted in 2015, and Minsk's 2020 Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development. In Kazakhstan, Almaty's 2020 Development Strategy (adopted in 2017).
- 62 CEMR-CCRE and Platforma, "The 2030 Agenda through the Eyes of the Local and Regional Government Associations," ed. Sarah Bentz and Nathalie Noupadja (Brussels: PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), forthcoming, 2020).

### 3 Policy and enabling environment for SDG localization

- 63 LGAs involved: Austria, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Denmark, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (and, in particular, the Scottish association). According to the findings of the Flemish LGA, VVSG, for example, in May 2019 one in every three municipalities was using the SDGs in their new multi-annual policy plans for 2020–2025. VVSG has organized several campaigns and produced a variety of didactic material to raise awareness of the SDGs, including a handbook on local SDG indicators. In 2018, 120 municipalities (out of a total of 300) participated in the Week of the Sustainable Municipality: Local Heroes for Global Goals. A second edition of this campaign was launched in September 2019. See for more information: <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/week-van-de-duurzame-gemeente>. All the materials are available at: <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-material>. The KESTO project (*Leadership and implementation of sustainability: Action research on the localization of the SDGs in Finnish municipalities*) also supports strategic and integrative approaches to sustainable urban development. For more information, see also the website of the programme of Finland's Ministry of Environment, Sustainable City: <https://kestovakaupunki.fi>. See also the MayorsIndicators tool: <https://mayorsindicators.com/index.cfm>.
- 64 However, although 79% of the countries have adopted official national strategies or roadmaps to implement the SDGs, only 58% of these countries mention the need to support LRGs. CEMR-CCRE and Platforma, "The 2030 Agenda through the Eyes of the Local and Regional Government Associations."
- 65 CEMR-CCRE and Platforma.
- 66 While the majority of LGAs were consulted over the definition of national strategies for the implementation of the SDGs, five associations were not consulted at all and five others considered that the process was not truly inclusive. See: CEMR-CCRE and Platforma.
- 67 CEMR-CCRE and Platforma.
- 68 The European Commission will refocus its economic coordination mechanism — the European Semester — to integrate the SDGs; put forward a European Green Deal; and strive to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent. For more information on the strategy, see the following document: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet-eu-delivering-2030-agenda-sustainable-development\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet-eu-delivering-2030-agenda-sustainable-development_en_0.pdf).
- 69 Norwegian LRGs such as Trondheim, Baerum, Asker, Rana, Stavanger and Aalesund, and the region of More and Romsdal have formed, in collaboration with U4SSC, KS, Innovation Norway and DOGA, a network to join their forces in localizing the SDGs, demonstrate local adaptation, and accelerate their impact by linking local action to regional, national and international partners for knowledge sharing and funding. The SDG Societal Transition network is expanding rapidly and is closely connected to ongoing work in the U4SSC Implementation Programme. United for Smart Sustainable Cities, "Building Smart Sustainable Nations by Nurturing Learning Societies," SDG Societal Transitions - Network of Excellence (Bærum: United for Smart Sustainable Cities, 2019).
- 70 Eurocities has been crucial for the organization of workshops, in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions and CEMR, on the implementation of the SDGs: the European Week of Regions and Cities is one of the most relevant examples. Other international networks such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, C40, CLGF, the Global Parliament of Mayors, ICLEI, Regions4, Metropolis and UCCI have all played a key role in supporting the localization process in Europe. For Barcelona, see: <https://www.diba.cat/es/web/xarxasost/xarxa>.
- 71 CEMR-CCRE and Platforma, "The 2030 Agenda through the Eyes of the Local and Regional Government Associations."
- 72 By countries: Colombia 6, Argentina 5, Brazil 5, Ecuador 4, Mexico 3, Bolivia, El Salvador and Peru 2 each one, and one answer from each of the following countries: Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Paraguay and Uruguay.
- 73 Monitoring is assured by national bodies with the support of international institutions (UNDP), but also by national LGAs (Ecuador and Brazil) or through local initiatives (Belo Horizonte, Bogota, Brasilia, La Paz, Lima, Niteroi, and Sao Paulo).
- 74 Gobierno Autónomo Municipal de La Paz, "Agenda ODS Para El Municipio de La Paz" (La Paz: Secretaría Municipal de Planificación para el Desarrollo, 2019).
- 75 For more information about the ACOBOL projects, see: <http://www.acobol.org.bo>.
- 76 See CNM's Mandala: <http://www.ods.cnm.org.br/mandala-municipal>.
- 77 OECD, "The State of Paraná, Brazil: The SDGs as a Tool to Address Territorial Disparities," Issue Note, 2<sup>nd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2019); Associação dos Municípios do Paraná, "AMP Integra Esforços Para Que Paraná Cumpra Metas de Desenvolvimento Sustentável," AMPr Notícias, 2018, <http://www.ampr.org.br/2018/8/875/>. 54 municipalities have been the beneficiaries of a series of training sessions carried out by UNDP Brazil and Itaipu Binacional: Nações Unidas Brasil, "PNUD Divulga Objetivos Globais Sobre Desenvolvimento Sustentável No Oeste Do Paraná," 2018, <https://nacoesunidas.org/pnud-divulga-objetivos-globais-sobre-desenvolvimento-sustentavel-no-oeste-do-parana/>.
- 78 This group, made up of 27 organizations from the municipal public administration, was responsible for providing information on 156 indicators at the Sustainable Cities Platform and for linking more than 50 indicators from the Observatory of City Indicators to the SDGs, available online at this link: <http://observasampa.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/ods-sao-paulo>.
- 79 Governo do Distrito Federal, "Plano Estratégico Distrito Federal 2019-2060," ed. André Clemente Lara de Oliveira and Adriane Luiza De Carvalho Lorentino (Brasília: Governo do Distrito Federal, 2019); Governo do Distrito Federal, "Planeta ODS," Escritório de Assuntos Internacionais, 2018, <http://www.internacional.df.gov.br/planeta-ods/>; Governo do Distrito Federal, "Secretaria de Relações Internacionais Participa Do World's Largest Lesson, Evento Internacional Para Promoção Dos ODS," Escritório de Assuntos Internacionais, 2019, <http://internacional.df.gov.br/secretaria-de-relacoes-internacionais-participa-do-worlds-largest-lesson-evento-internacional-sobre-os-ods/>.
- 80 For example, all the municipalities of the state of Pernambuco, and the following municipalities: Alto Paraíso, Arinos, Barcarena, Bom Despacho, Cabeceira Grande, Carnauba dos Dantas, Contagem, Coronel Fabriciano, Dom Bosco, Duque de Caixas, Itajaí, Manaquiri, Niteroi, and Teresina.
- 81 CONPES, "Estrategia Para La Implementación de Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) En Colombia," Documento CONPES (Bogotá: Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social, 2018); Secretaría Técnica de la Comisión Interinstitucional de Alto Nivel para los ODS en Colombia, "Inclusión de Los ODS En Los Planes de Desarrollo Territorial, 2016–2019" (Bogotá: Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2016). In 2017, of 32 departmental plans (intermediary level) and 31 plans for the municipalities of the capitals of each department, linkage with the SDGs was high in 24% of the plans, average in 38% of them, and general or limited in 38% of them. Although all departments are included, this is only a sample of 5% of the country's municipalities.
- 82 Federación Dominicana de Municipios, "FEDOMU Presenta a Alcaldes y La Sociedad Civil Agenda Municipal 2020-2030," Noticias, 2019, <https://fedomu.org.do/2019/12/11/fedomu-presenta-a-alcaldes-y-la-sociedad-civil-agenda-municipal-2020-2030/>.
- 83 UNDP Mexico, "Estudio Presenta Estado de Localización de La Agenda 2030 En Ámbito Subnacional," Noticias, 2019, <https://www.mx.undp.org/content/mexico/es/home/presscenter/articles/2019/03/localizacion-de-la-agenda-2030-en-el-ambito-subnacional.html>.
- 84 Uruguay's *Informes en Territorio* can be accessed online at: <http://ods.gub.uy/index.php/avance-pais/territorio/100-informes-en-territorio/137-informes-en-territorio>.
- 85 See: <https://montevideo.gub.uy/compromisos-de-gobierno>.

- 86 UCLG Survey, April 2019. In Chile 23 municipalities, Calama (Antofagasta region) and Puerto Aysén (Coyhaique region), for example, signed a commitment in 2019 with other local actors to train and generate proposals to combat the effects of climate change and raise awareness of climate change and the SDGs, in order to know whether people are prepared to respond to certain situations. In El Salvador, the municipalities of San Lorenzo, Atiquizaya, Nahulingo, Ahuachapán, Atiquizaya, Metapán, Candelaria de la Frontera, Suchitoto, and Las Vueltas are developing initiatives based on SDGs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8.
- 87 The association Yerellz, which issued a publication in which LRGs shared their own SDG initiatives, has played a crucial role in this endeavour. Yerellz, "Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Hedeflerinin Yerelleştirilmesinde İyi Örnekler Kitabı" (Istanbul: Yerel İzleme Araştırma ve Uygulamalar Derneği, 2018).
- 88 APLA, "Strategic Plan 2019-2022" (Ramallah: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities, 2019).
- 89 APLA, "Localizing the SDGs," Media Centre, 2019, <https://www.apla.ps/en/media-center/3362.html>.
- 90 APLA, "Municipal Technical Exchange Hubs," Projects, 2019, <https://www.apla.ps/en/projects/14.html>.
- 91 The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) is the most influential national municipal network in Canada. It has actively contributed to both domestic and international development efforts. The FCM supports the SDGs as a development assistance monitoring tool in all its international initiatives.
- 92 World Urban Campaign, "Belmopan/UN-Habitat Collaboration to Update the Master Plan of the Capital of Belize," accessed July 4, 2020, <https://unhabitat.org/belmopan-un-habitat-collaboration-to-update-the-master-plan-of-the-capital-of-belize>.
- 93 See: <https://www.global-taskforce.org/>.
- 94 See: <https://proyectoallas.net/>.
- 95 See: <https://aer.eu/>. See also the link to the 2030 Agenda Conference, jointly organized by AER, UCLG, the Global Taskforce, Regions4, the City of Strasbourg and the Grand Est region: <https://regions2030.com/>. Assembly of European Regions, "AER Political Priorities 2020-2025" (Brussels: AER, 2019).
- 96 C40 Cities, "14 Cities Commit to Sustainable Food Policies That Will Address the Global Climate Emergency," Media, 2019, [https://www.c40.org/press\\_releases/good-food-cities](https://www.c40.org/press_releases/good-food-cities); C40 Cities, "Landmark City & Business Climate Alliance Launched at World Mayors Summit," Media, 2019, [https://www.c40.org/press\\_releases/city-business-climate-alliance](https://www.c40.org/press_releases/city-business-climate-alliance). See also the Clean Air Cities Declaration at this link: <https://www.c40.org/other/clean-air-cities>. See also C40 Cities' Knowledge Hub: [https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/?language=en\\_US](https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/?language=en_US).
- 97 CEMR-CCRE and Platforma, "How Local and Regional Government Associations Bring the SDGs to Life," ed. Sarah Bentz et al. (Brussels: PLATFORMA and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), 2019).
- 98 CEMR-CCRE, "PLATFORMA - European Platform of Local and Regional Authorities for Development," UN Global Goals, 2019, <https://www.ccre.org/en/actualites/view/3930>.
- 99 See: <https://www.clgf.org.uk/>.
- 100 See: <https://www.aimf.asso.fr/>.
- 101 See: <https://mercociudades.org/>.
- 102 98% of the initiatives uploaded are responses to the Covid-19 outbreak. See also: <https://indicators.metropolis.org>. USE can be accessed at this link: <https://use.metropolis.org>.
- 103 See online Regions4's strands of initiative and research, on the SDGs: <https://www.regions4.org/our-work/sdgs/>; on climate change: <https://www.regions4.org/our-work/climate-change/>; on biodiversity: <https://www.regions4.org/our-work/biodiversity/>.
- 104 See: <https://ciudadesiberoamericanas.org/>.
- 105 For more information, see: <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>.
- 106 UCLG Africa, "Training of 46 Trainers on Localizing the SDGs and Territorial Planning," News, 2019, <https://www.uclga.org/news-ware/training-of-46-trainers-on-localizing-the-sdgs-and-territorial-planning/>.
- 107 See: <http://www.uclg-aspac.org/>.
- 108 See: <http://euroasia-uclg.ru/en/>.
- 109 See: <http://uclg-mewa.org/en/>.

## 4

**Progress on goals and targets: bolstering local action to accelerate implementation**

- 1 United Nations Secretary-General, "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals 2020: Report of the Secretary-General" (New York: United Nations, 2020).
- 2 UCLG, "The Localization of the Global Agendas" (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2019); UCLG and GTF, "Towards the Localization of the SDGs," LRGs' Report to the HLPF (Barcelona, 2019). The GTF has presented yearly reports to the HLPF since 2017.
- 3 Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, "Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future Is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development" (New York, 2019); UNEP, "Global Environment Outlook - GEO 6" (Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2019); Coalition for Urban Transitions, "Climate Emergency, Urban Opportunity" (Washington, D.C., 2019).
- 4 However, only a few indicators are reported at the global level, and specifically those relating to slums (SDG 11.1.1), persons affected and economic losses due to disasters (SDG 11.5.1, 11.5.2), solid waste collection and air pollution (SDG 11.6.1, 11.6.2), and cities that have adopted integrated plans for risk prevention (SDG 11.b.1 and 11.b.2). Source: UN Global SDG Database, SDG Indicators (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>). For more details, see Section 5, below.
- 5 According to SDSN, "EU cities are generally outperforming US cities, in some cases with the US lagging seriously behind", in Alainna Lynch, Anna LoPresti, and Caroline Fox, "2019 US Cities Sustainable Development Report" (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 2019), 10. Within Europe, more detailed analysis shows important difference between countries.
- 6 Economic Commission for Africa and Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, "Background Paper on Prosperity (in Reference to Sustainable Development Goals 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11)" (Victoria Falls: UNECA, 2020); Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Five Years on, Where Do We Stand? Note by the Secretariat" (Bangkok: UNESCAP, 2020); Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Urban and Peri-Urban Development" (Bangkok: UNESCAP, 2019).
- 7 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Five Years on, Where Do We Stand? Note by the Secretariat."

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- 8 Economic Commission for Africa and Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, "Background Paper on Prosperity (in Reference to Sustainable Development Goals 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11)."
- 9 CEPAL, "Informe de Avance Cuatrienal Sobre El Progreso y Los Desafíos Regionales de La Agenda 2030 Para El Desarrollo Sostenible En América Latina y El Caribe," ed. Alicia Bárcena, Mario Cimoli, and Ricardo Pérez (Santiago de Chile: Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2019), chap. V Section B.
- 10 For more information, see Section 3.3. See also: <https://www.global-taskforce.org/>.
- 11 Other cities in the Asian region, such as Taipei, took advantage of different technological options and a high level of civic involvement to identify clusters of contamination while respecting privacy.
- 12 In Bangladesh, COVID-19 has spread quickly through Dhaka, the capital city. It is home to almost 9 million people, 40% of whom live in slums. In Rio de Janeiro, where at least 1.5 million of the 6.7 million favela residents have tested positive for COVID-19, 90% of the intensive care beds are occupied. See: <https://bit.ly/2BOvxBw>. The New York City Health Department also estimates that the virus mortality rate is 2.36% higher in neighbourhoods with very high rates of poverty (over 30%) than in those with low levels of poverty (under 10%). See: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-data.page>. For the global context on informal settlements and access to basic services before the pandemic, see Subsections below.
- 13 According to UN-Habitat, USD 72 million are needed to help meet the urgent needs of cities and communities in 64 different countries. See UN-Habitat's COVID-19 Response Plan: <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-covid-19-response-plan>.
- 14 For a detailed explanation of LLEs, visit: <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>. Hubs initiated by different LRG networks include: COVID-19 Hub (AER), Local Government and COVID-19 (CLGF), Live Updates COVID-19 (Eurocities), Mayors Act Now (Global Parliament of Mayors), COVID-19 Local Action Tracker (National League of Cities and Bloomberg Philanthropies), Cities and Coronavirus (C40), COVID-19 (CEMR), COVID-19 Crisis: a selection of Platforms to Support Cities and Towns (Covenant of Mayors Europe Office). Many others published experiences and guidelines or Webinars have also been developed (UCLG Africa, ASPAC, MEWA, FLACMA, Mercociudades).
- 15 UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, "Addressing COVID-19 in Informal Contexts: Briefing and Learning Note," Live Learning Experience: Beyond the Immediate Response to the Outbreak of COVID-19 (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2020).
- 16 Rates of informal employment affecting women in lower-income countries are higher than those affecting men and so women are more at risk of losing income in the current situation. Additionally, existing trends point to less access to sexual and reproductive health and a rise in domestic violence during the crisis. See: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>.
- 17 For more details, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25727&LangID=E>.
- 18 UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, "COVID-19 Guidance Note: Protecting Residents of Informal Settlements," ed. Leilani Fahra, United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures (Geneva: OHCHR, 2020).
- 19 For particular experiences shared by LRGs, see: UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, "Housing: Ensuring Everyone Can Safely #StayAtHome: Briefing and Learning Note," Live Learning Experience: Beyond the Immediate Response to the Outbreak of COVID-19 (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2020). See also the exchanges between LRGs that were held within the framework of UCLG's Community of Practice on Housing: <https://bit.ly/3cxqmmB>; and at this link: <https://t.ly/lyeU>.
- 20 See: <https://bit.ly/2XSvGLy>; and: <https://bit.ly/2Ms3wBV>. Visit also: <https://t.ly/Ybgh>.
- 21 See the following links: <https://bit.ly/2XVYWTf> and <https://bit.ly/3hrGdXk>.
- 22 The International Labour Organization estimates the crisis will result in an increase in unemployment ranging from 5.3 million to 24.7 million people (to add to the 188 million unemployed people who already existed in 2019). International Labour Organization, "A Policy Framework for Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis," ILO Policy Brief on COVID-19 (Geneva: ILO, 2020).
- 23 The income of informal workers was estimated to have fallen by 60% in the first months of the crisis. See United Nations Secretary-General, "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals," 2020.
- 24 United Nations Secretary-General.
- 25 For detailed information about these experiences, visit UCLG's Live Learning Experience website: <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>.
- 26 For detailed information, visit: <https://velhop.strasbourg.eu/?lang=en> and <https://grand-est.citiz.coop>.
- 27 Other social assistance programs include support for homeless populations, as planned in Spain; subsidies that let utilities waive fees for basic services, as in El Salvador; waivers for loans and other financial obligations, as in Bolivia; and COVID-19-sensitive public works, which are being tested in the Philippines. See Michal Rutkowski, "How Social Protection Can Help Countries Cope with COVID-19," Voices: World Bank Blogs, April 15, 2020, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/how-social-protection-can-help-countries-cope-covid-19>.
- 28 See UCLG, Metropolis, and LSE Cities, "COVID-19 Monitors of Relevance to Urban and Regional Governance. Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions," Analytics Note (Barcelona, 2020), for more information on the governance of the COVID-19 crisis and other emergencies.
- 29 According to recent studies, nitrogen dioxide pollution has decreased by an average of 40% in Chinese cities and by 20 to 38% in Western Europe and the United States during the 2020 lockdown, compared to the same period in 2019, see: <https://bit.ly/371zY7J>; Some observers estimate that the global response to COVID-19 could cause CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to fall by about 8% in 2020; this would be the sharpest drop in modern history: <https://bit.ly/2z6Frh4>.
- 30 Furthermore, there is rarely any official data available for informal contexts. Community-driven data production and management was highlighted as a key element for effective strategic planning and building up resilience during UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat's Live Learning Experience: UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, "Addressing COVID-19 in Informal Contexts: Briefing and Learning Note."
- 31 More information in UCLG, Metropolis, and UN-Habitat, "Local Public Services: Keeping Frontline Workers Safe. Briefing & Learning Note," Live Learning Experience: Beyond the Immediate Response to the Outbreak of COVID-19 (Barcelona: United Cities and Local Governments, 2020).
- 32 United Nations Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, "COVID-19: Urgent Appeal for a Human Rights Response to the Economic Recession," ed. Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, United Nations Human Rights Special Procedures (Geneva: OHCHR, 2020).
- 33 OECD, "COVID-19 and Fiscal Relations across Levels of Government," ed. Sean Dougherty et al., OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19) (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020).
- 34 UCLG, "The Localization of the Global Agendas."

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- 35 Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, "Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future Is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development."
- 36 UN-Habitat, "The Implementation of the Principles of Planned Urbanization: A UN-Habitat Approach to Sustainable Urban Development" (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2019). Strategic plans have flourished in cities in regions throughout the world. Examples include: Barcelona (since the 1990s), Dar-es-Salaam, Johannesburg, Lima, London, Melbourne, Nairobi, New York, Quito, Seoul, Shanghai and Tokyo. They have been applied in cities of all sizes. Strategic planning and City Development Strategies have also been propelled by many city networks and international agencies with the aim of giving a voice to residents regarding the future of their cities (examples of this can be seen in the work of Cities Alliance and various of its partners and include the Medinatouna project which affects nine medium-sized cities in Tunisia). For Latin America, see the Emerging and Sustainable Cities Programme, online at: <https://www.iadb.org/es/desarrollo-urbano-y-vivienda/programa-ciudades-emergentes-y-sostenibles>. The programme includes cities such as Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Medellín, Mexico City, Porto Alegre and Rosario, among others.
- 37 Seoul Metropolitan Government, "Seoul Sustainable Development Goals 2030, 17 Ways to Change Seoul," 2018.
- 38 Senate of Berlin, "Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment" (Berlin: Senate Department for Urban Development and the Environment, 2015).
- 39 See: <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/noticias/plan-estrategico-participativo-buenos-aires-2035-pep-ba-2035>.
- 40 2<sup>nd</sup> OECD Roundtable on Cities and Regions for the SDGs, December 2019.
- 41 Examples provided by ARE and Regions4. Bärkraft Network, "Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland" (Mariehamn, 2017); Bärkraft Network, "Statusrapport 3" (Mariehamn, 2019, in Swedish only). See also the resources of the Welsh government: <https://gov.wales/well-being-future-generations-wales-act-2015-guidance>.
- 42 UCLG, "The Localization of the Global Agendas." The report gives a more detailed vision of the process of alignment in each continent.
- 43 Nora Sánchez Gassen, Oskar Penje, and Elin Slåtmo, "Global Goals for Local Priorities: The 2030 Agenda at Local Level," Nordregio Report 2018:2 (Stockholm, 2018).
- 44 Government of Colombia, "Colombia Voluntary National Review 2016" (Bogota, 2016); Government of Colombia, "Colombia Voluntary National Review 2018" (Bogota, 2018). 32 departmental plans (intermediary level) and 31 plans for the municipalities of the capitals of each department; the linkage with the SDGs is high in 24% of the plans, average in 38%, and general or limited in 38% of them.
- 45 Bharat Dahiya et al., "Planning Sustainable Cities: UN-HABITAT Practices and Perspectives" (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2010).
- 46 2019 data collected from a sample of 755 cities from 95 countries show that, during the 1990-2015 period, most urban areas recorded a general increase in the extent of their built-up area per capita (UN SG 2020 Report to the HLPF). Two thirds of this urban expansion took place in Asia and one fifth in Africa.
- 47 UN SDG Indicators Database (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>), updated by UN-Habitat. Data show that the 1 billion slum dwellers are distributed as follows: 50% in the Asian region, 24% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 8% in Latin America and the Caribbean.
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- 56 United Nations Secretary-General, "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals," 2020.
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- 182 C40's programmes and projects include Deadline 2020, Building Energy 2020 Programme, Inclusive Climate Action, Women4Climate Action. More information on these programmes and C40's Knowledge Hub is available online at: <https://www.c40.org/>.

#### 4 Progress on goals and targets: bolstering local action to accelerate implementation

- 183 ICLEI jointly with CDP developed the carbonn® Climate Registry (cCR) for subnational Climate Action reporting, which has attracted 1065 entities from 89 countries, with a registry of over 5,500 mitigation and adaptation actions. The database is available at: <https://carbonn.org/>. ICLEI has run several training activities and programmes related to climate change actions — e.g. Urban LEDs II, City Climate Planner Program, the Urban Transition Alliance Roadmap, or the Global Lead City Network. In partnership with the German Land of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Ministries of the Environment and Development Cooperation of the German Federal Government, ICLEI will organize *Daring Cities - The Global Virtual Forum for Urban Leaders Taking on the Climate Emergency*, in October 2020.
- 184 Its RegionsAdapt initiative aims to help LRGs take concrete action, collaborate together and report on climate adaptation. Driven by the governments of Rio de Janeiro and Catalonia, RegionsAdapt was launched at COP 21 in Paris, and now encompasses more than 71 signatory regions from five continents, representing over 270 million inhabitants. For more information, see: <https://www.regions4.org/project/regionsadapt/>.
- 185 The R20 – Regions of Climate Action (<https://regions20.org/>) was founded in 2011 by the former Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger. It has more than 50 member regions and more than 130 partners.
- 186 The Under 2 Coalition brings together more than 220 LRGs which represent over 1.3 billion people and 43% of the global economy, mostly in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Europe, Peru and the United States. At present, 118 individual states and regions have signed the Under20 memorandum of understanding. The signatories have committed to work to keep global temperature rises well below 2°C and to make an effort to reduce this to 1.5°C. Twelve states and regions belonging to the coalition have also committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 or earlier. For more information, see: <https://www.under2coalition.org/about>.
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- 190 In Asia, 1,073 Filipino LRGs out of 1,700 had formulated Local Climate Change Action Plans by 2019 (although only 29 are listed on the GCoM website). In Indonesia 12,500 mitigation actions in 34 provinces have been recorded by the national government since 2010. Climate Chance, “Local Action Book’. Synthesis Report 2019 on Climate Action by Local and Subnational Governments,” 17.
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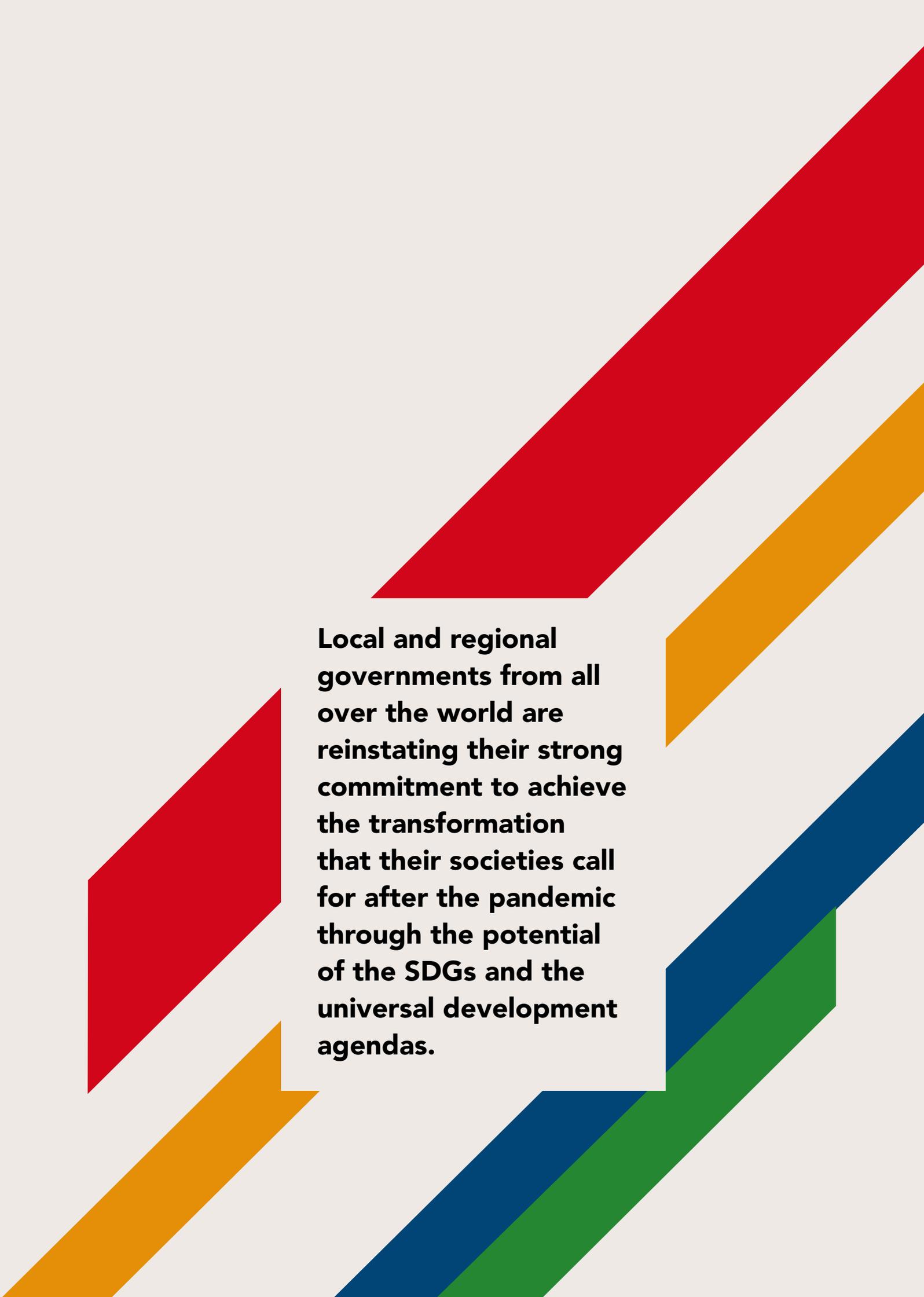
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**Local and regional governments from all over the world are reinstating their strong commitment to achieve the transformation that their societies call for after the pandemic through the potential of the SDGs and the universal development agendas.**





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