UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG Community of Practice {Voluntary Local Reviews}

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE ON VLRS

The latest news and updates from the UCLG CoP on Voluntary Local Reviews

FACING THE CRISIS OF COVID-19

WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ISSUE!

1. **Editorial**
2. **News and resources**
3. **A typology of VLRs**
4. **Repository**
5. **What is next?**

WHY A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP) FOR VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS (VLRS)

Meaning, creation and main objectives

Access the HLPF2020 programme here

A **VLR** is a tool to report local and regional governments (LRGs) progress towards achieving the SDGs. Modelled on the Voluntary National Review (VNR), It shows how LRGs are taking the lead of the localization process in many countries through innovative and participatory approaches.

VLRs are a contribution to the global reporting process of the Sustainable Development Goals. Every year the SDGs are reviewed at the **High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)**, a two-week meeting at the United Nations in New York City. For this year's edition (7 - 16 JULY 2020), in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the limitations it entails, the ECOSOC Bureau has made adjustments to the format and programme of HLPF 2020. All meetings and debates are being held virtually.

The First week was focused on "Thematic review"- with a day dedicated to "bolstering local action to accelerate implementation" and the 2nd week to the presentation of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRS), where we organized, in partnership with UNDESA, a Forum of Local and Regional Governments.

Within the structure of UCLG, a Community of Practice is composed of a group of local and regional governments and professionals who meet around a specific topic at the initiative of a member of UCLG.

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG Community of Practice [Voluntary Local Reviews]

1. EDITORIAL: MAIN OBJECTIVESTHE PRINCIPAL AIMS AND GOALS

A Community of Learners and Makers

The all-encompassing transformations required by the 2030 Agenda call for innovation at almost any terrain, which means continuous experimentation and learning. We see Voluntary Local Reviews on the SDGs as honest exercises to acknowledge, understand and communicate what happens and what works, what is unique and what is shared across the different local contexts. In sum, they mean more knowledge building and sharing than city ranking and marketing.

In this context, the aim of this Community of Practice (CoP) -to facilitate the exchange of ideas and practices on Agenda 2030 reporting- becomes particularly relevant. The CoP will propose a compilation of methods, tools and indicators that have already been developed by cities and regions, and develop analysis to promote joint learning.

We wholeheartedly believe that working together we will make significant contributions to accelerating SDG implementation.

This first newsletter is issued at a critical moment for our societies, when all the humanity is fighting against the Covid19 pandemic and all our attention is duly focused on the survival of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

This health emergency, however, does not question but underline the need for 2030 Agenda, because it demands essential public services and global goods protection, aiming at leaving no one behind.

As stressed by the UN Secretary General, **"we must keep our promises for people and planet!", and the CoP will help us at that.**

Miquel Rodríguez Planas
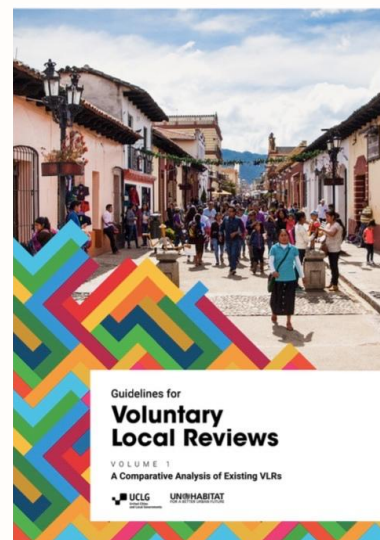Commissioner for 2030 Agenda
City Council of Barcelona

The core group of cities taking the lead of the Community is composed by 9 cities:
Barcelona, Bristol, Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Durban, La Paz, Montevideo (and ALLAs network), New Taipei and Utrecht.

2. NEWS & RESOURCES

News from our community of practice

VLR SERIES LAUNCH ✦

- In the framework of the High-Level Political Forum UCLG, together with UN-Habitat, presented the first volume of the **Guidelines for VLRs**.

- The **Helsinki Workshop** on sub-national reviews of SDG implementation was held virtually with an Online Pre-meeting on sub-national reviews of SDG implementation (29 June 2020) and the Expert Group Meeting Accelerating SDG localization through sub-national review processes the 2nd July 2020 with the intervention of representatives of institutions like UNDESA, UNESCAP, UN HABITAT, CEPAL, UNECE, UNECA, OECD, UCLG, IGES and Brooking Institution. Additionally, representatives from some local governments also intervened : Bristol, Helsinki, New York City, Buenos Aires, Mannheim, La Paz, the State of Pará, Basque Government and the Ngora District.

- As part of the discussion, UNDESA presented a document with guiding elements to provide a starting point for local and regional governments considering producing their own Voluntary Local Review.

Access the Guidelines
here!

HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2020

In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and expected limitations on in-person meetings and international travel, the ECOSOC Bureau has made adjustments to the format and programme of HLPF 2020. All the debates, interactions and sessions (including all side and special events. have been virtually held.

- **UCLG and UN Habitat: VLR Series Launch (8th July):** The Guidelines are aimed at showcasing the value of subnational reporting as much more than a part of the reporting process. Throughout the session, participants highlighted the power of Voluntary Local Reviews as an element that can contribute towards multilevel governance and transformation. Read more about the session **here.**

- **VNR LAB 3 (8th July):** The Lab explored how Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which are being prepared by an increasing number of cities around the world, can be useful tools for cities and regions to guide their implementation of the SDGs, and how they can support the **VNR** processes coordinated by national governments.

  More information **here**

Multi-level governance and subnational reporting on VNRs and VLRs
Wednesday 8 July 2020, 8:00-9:00 New York time

3. A TYPOLOGY OF VLRs*

Even though there is no official recount available, we acknowledge **at least 50** Voluntary Local Reviews published and recorded, to date (see below section 5). No official or universal template exists, so there is no common document to which all VLRs may be referring as a unique legitimate source, although the UN Secretary General VNRs reporting guidelines is often used as a reference. There are key variables that can be identified in order to analyse the practices and experiences of different local and regional governments in the VLRs development process:

1. Who is being involved in the VLR? This question elicits an analysis of the process that leads to the VLR and aims to identify the main actors involved in its realization, studying whether the initiative is taken by the local authority itself, and if so, by what offices or departments (e.g. New York Mayor's Office for International Affairs, in Barcelona the commissioner for the 2030 Agenda); and to what extent other stakeholders and actors — local or not — are engaged in the process (e.g. In Bristol capitalized on its collaboration with the University and on an informal coalition of citizens, stakeholders and institutions organized in the Bristol SDG Alliance).

This sheds lights on the political legitimacy of the monitoring and reporting process and on the balance between different stakeholders at the local level and their ability to create effective coalitions and 'alliances' .

2. Where is the VLR process located within the larger institutional and policy scheme? This question relates to larger questions of intergovernmental coordination (or multi-level governance and institutional organization) and local institutional context (e.g. Japanese cities have benefit of the support of a national institution – IGES supported by the Japanese Government, or Kenyan counties voluntary reports contributing to the national progress report).

At the same time, many cities face the issue of overlapping jurisdictions and competences with other levels of government (e.g., regions, counties), and have to request the compliance of other institutions (including close municipalities), or demanding to another level of government consistency with its own planning and data-collection methods. However, even if VLR locates itself in the global framework of implementation and monitoring, many VLRs do not establish a direct connection with the national strategy or attitude towards the SDGs. Perhaps the largest impact that VLRs can have is at the local level, often within the functioning of a local administration itself, engaging departments or offices to overcome internal barriers and compartmentalized operations and opt for more transversal cross-sector initiatives, institutional creation and decision-making.

3. What is the content of the VLR? Several blueprints, recommendations, content guides, reviews and handbooks have been produced and circulated over the past few months. Various VLRs refer to two of the foundational documents of the monitoring and reporting strategy at the UN level: the guidelines for the production of Voluntary National Reviews issued by the UN Secretary General's Office in 2016 and updated in 2018; and the yearly VNR Handbook, edited and published by UNDESA.

At the same time, various VLRs do not follow a specific blueprint or model. This understanding should encourage LRGs willing to produce a VLR to contribute to this richness of approaches with their own; but encouraging them to show similarities with other local authorities and to share and pool together common solutions to common problems. Finally, there is a significant diversity as for the resources — human, technical, and financial — that LRGs have available for the production of their VLRs. This translates into a very different pattern of materials, length, information and data that is poured into the reviews. Some LRGs have studied the 17 SDGs, others the SDGs that were under examination at that year's HLPF; while others have simply chosen to address those SDGs for which they had the most recent or adequate data available.

4. How is the VLR made? This question provide answers to essential doubts about what data is needed for a VLR; what kind of indicators has been used, why and in what context; what kind of data should a subnational government be able to produce, collect and disaggregate; and how can alignment with other reporting/monitoring processes and actors (e.g., national institutions, international organizations) work.

Most strategies adopted in VLRs can be grouped in three different approaches: A) VLRs that have adapted official indicators to the specifics of their local context, reworking terminology, method and sources to make them accessible; B) reviews that look as systematically as possible for a correlation between the 'official' indicators and relevant datasets or local indicators; and C) VLRs that use the SDGs or their themes to present a qualitative assessment, sporadically accompanied by hard data. Beyond the fact that data is locally sourced, authorship and political responsibility is at the heart of VLRs. True localization has to stem from the full-fledged involvement of different local dimensions: people, territory, politics and representation..

*This information was extracted from our VLR Guidelines

4. REPOSITORY OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS VLRS

***This information is available in the VLRs Guidelines here (P.15-16)

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Cap Town (written by Sylvia Croese), Localisation of the 2030 Agenda an its Sustainable Development Goals in Cap Town, November 2019, South Africa: https://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/sites/mistraurbanfutures.org/files/cape_town-_final_city_report-_sdgs_project-_nov_2019-_croese.pdf

Chimbote Informe Local Voluntario sobre el cumplimiento del ODS en las ciudades de Chimbote y Nuevo Chimbote: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nlFwTqgSAA4-5-xNJthp6BNeldhO1abJ/view

Deqing's Progress Report on Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustinable Development, A comprehensive Measurement with Statistical and Geospatial Information, 2017, China: http://218.244.250.80/GLC30Download/Deqing2017Report_EN.pdf

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Resources and Webpages where VLRs can also be downloaded:

- **Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (Japan) and its VLR Lab:**
  https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr

- **UN-based repository of VLRs and other local reporting tools:**
  https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11/local

- **The Local2030 Hub portal, which collects a catalogue of stories, publications and events on SDG localization:** https://www.local2030.org/

HIGH-LE
ON SUST

New York, USA
7-16 July 2020

In accordance with paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda, Member States have decided that the HLPF shall carry out regular voluntary reviews of the 2030 Agenda which will include developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders.

5. WHAT IS NEXT?

New actors, new approaches. To date, the discussion on the development of VLRs has been mostly steered by LRGs and only a few international and global institutions. New actors, however, may now be keen on joining this conversation.

- Strengthen own knowledge-sharing and mutual training activities to identify synergies for an articulated response to common challenges.

- Further joint work and collaboration between UCLG and UN-Habitat, with the aim to upgrade the global discourse and local action on VLRs.

- Publication of the next volume of the Guidelines on VLRs.

- Setting up Expert Group Meetings.

- Developing knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

July 2020

Launch of
Vol. 1 of the UCLG-UN-Habitat
Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews
at the 2020 High-Level Political Forum

June - July 2020

UNDESA VLR
Workshop, online
pre-meeting

September - October 2020

Virtual meeting of the Community of
Practice on VLRs, in preparation of UCLG's
World Council

November 2020

Expert Group Meeting on
Voluntary Local Reviews, hosted
by the city of Madrid

Late 2020

Launch of Vol. 2 of the UCLG-UN-Habitat
Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews

* This information is available in the VLRs
Guidelines (P.47-48)