

Workshop Concept Note

National Inception Workshop on Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in Paraguay *Localizing Progress on the SDGs in the Paraguayan Chaco*

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1: *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*) recognizes the need to engage all stakeholders in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, among others, pledges that “Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities”. The resolution also encourages Member States to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven” (paragraph 79). This underscores the critical importance of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at local level, while empowering local authorities and actors as stewards of monitoring and review for the Goals. To reinforce vertical coherence and complement Voluntary National Reviews, local and regional governments are increasingly engaging in sub-national reviews of their SDG implementation, some of which have adopted the term Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) for these reviews.

The role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda was also highlighted by Member States in the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit (A/RES/74/4). In paragraph 27 (e), member States committed to empowering and supporting cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda, and recognized their critical role in implementing and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, 18 Voluntary Local Reviews have been conducted by cities and regions,¹ including in Paraguay’s bordering countries of Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. So far, 42 reports by towns, cities and state governments from around the world have been published by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals on its dedicated website². However, very few VLR focusing on rural regions have been conducted, even though rural areas are less likely to achieve the SDGs and are at risk of being left further behind.

UN DESA’s Division for Sustainable Development Goals’ (DSDG) supports sub-national VLR processes through the provision of policy guidance, including through its [Global Guiding Elements](#)³ for the VLRs, and through capacity development, including workshops at international, regional, national and sub-national level. . Through this cooperation with the United Nations in Paraguay, UN DESA is piloting the use of the Global Guiding Elements for the VLRs through cooperation with local authorities and actors in Paraguay, recognising the need to strengthen monitoring and review at local and rural levels. This national inception workshop will launch a comprehensive support for the development of the first VLRs in Paraguay, in collaboration with participating local governments and the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT).

Objectives of the National Inception Workshop

¹ UN DESA, 2021. Online at: <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>

² <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews>

³ Available here in Spanish: https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/2016125S_0.pdf

- Strengthen awareness and partnerships for sub-national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs through the Global Guiding Elements for the VLRs;
- Strengthening multi-stakeholder cooperation and experience sharing on the SDGs monitoring and review at local level;
- Building capacity for conducting comprehensive sub-national reviews of SDG implementation that complement and feed into follow-up and review processes carried out by the national government's Voluntary National Review; and
- Utilizing the VLR process for enhanced data gathering and analysis for tackling urban-rural differences within Paraguay.

Background

Paraguay is situated in the heart of South America and has experienced positive trends towards poverty eradication despite its status as a Land-locked Developing Country (LLDC). The total poverty rate fell from 41.6% in 2009 to 23.5% in 2019 (INE, 2021). Economic growth and other macroeconomic indicators have also shown positive trends that have contributed to the decline in poverty. However, these trends mask high levels of inequality and acute vulnerabilities in this middle-income country of 7.3 million inhabitants.⁴

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean notes that in 2020, poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America reached levels not seen in the last 12 and 20 years, (33.7% poverty, 12.5% extreme poverty) setting back progress on achieving the first Sustainable Development Goal.⁵ While the impact in Paraguay has not been as severe as for other countries, the pandemic has set back the country's progress on poverty eradication by four years.⁶ This brought the total number of persons living in poverty to 1,921,721 or an estimated 26.9% of the population. However, rural areas such as the Chaco, experience the highest concentration of poverty in the country, with 34% of rural areas falling under the poverty line and 7.4% of the rural population classified as extreme poor (196,899 inhabitants) compared to only 1.8% (82,710) in urban areas. These urban-rural differences in poverty continue to spur rural to urban migration, including informal settlements in urban areas that lack access to basic services and are vulnerable to flooding and other climate related disasters.

The importance of local level data for monitoring and review of progress on the SDGs cannot be over-emphasized. Paraguay is improving its data collection and analysis with the creation of its first National Institute of Statistics in the final quarter of 2020, with a new Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MDPI) launched in May 2021 and improvements on data collection through the Permanent

⁴ National Institute of Statistics of Paraguay - latest population data and projections available at: https://www.ine.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/documento/7eb5_Paraguay_2021.pdf

⁵ ECLAC, 2021. <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/pandemic-prompts-rise-poverty-levels-unprecedented-recent-decades-and-sharply-affects>

⁶ Paraguay country level poverty data obtained by the latest poverty statistics bulletin published by the National Institute of Statistics of Paraguay, 2021. Accessed here: https://www.ine.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/documento/b6d1_Boletin%20Pobreza%20Monetaria_%20EPHC%202020.pdf

Household Surveys process and a foreseen national Census in 2022.⁷ This has led to some improvements on data at national level for SDGs 1-10.⁸

However, there are key gaps regarding local data, inclusion, and representativeness in national reporting. For example, regarding SDG 1 on No Poverty, recent years include local poverty data on only six out of 17 departments (San Pedro, Caaguazú, Caazapá, Itapúa, Alto Parana, Central). At national level, two departments (Boquerón and Alto Paraguay, in the Chaco region) are also often not included in statistical reporting. Boquerón and Alto Paraguay, along with Presidente Hayes are the 3 departments constituting the Chaco Region, which includes rather remote and marginalized areas and communities, high inequalities, and in many cases a dearth of specific data.

The Paraguayan Chaco is also part of the Gran Chaco Americano, which includes Argentinian and Bolivian sections. A forthcoming study from the United Nations Resident Coordinator Offices in Paraguay, Argentina and Bolivia on the Gran Chaco Americano region notes that it is one of the most vulnerable areas of Paraguay, with the highest Unsatisfied Basic Needs scores among the departments comprising it (67,8 % in Presidente Hayes, 92,9% in Boquerón y 78,9% in Alto Paraguay)⁹.

The Chaco region of Paraguay (western region) would particularly benefit from an analytical review of progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Leaving No One Behind, on the basis of Voluntary Local Reviews that strengthen bottom-up data collection, analysis and reporting. This would also build on existing projects in the Chaco, where eight United Nations agencies operate projects and activities for this underserved region in the country.

The Chaco region bears many risks from climate change and deforestation, with recent disasters due to drought, bush fires, flooding and extreme heatwaves. The Chaco region is home to half of Paraguay's indigenous communities, an estimated 14 indigenous groups are under increasing risk due to climate change and other environmental and socio-economic challenges.^{10,11} These include the indigenous groups Guaraní Occidental, Guaraní Ñandéva, Toba Maskoy, Enlhet Norte, Enxet Sur, Sanapaná, Angaité, Guaná, Nivaclé, Maká, Manjui, Ayoreo, Ybytosó, Tomaráho, y Qom¹².

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) aims to achieve key results as agreed with the government of Paraguay for the 2020-2024 period to ensure progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The UNSDCF affirms the need for tools and methods such as the VLR in the context of institutional mechanisms for multi-stakeholder participation where the UN contributes with funds and technical support and monitoring and review of the SDGs.

The VLR would specifically contribute to the achievement of two Strategic Priority Areas under the UNSDCF, specifically Strategic Priority Areas 1 (*Paraguay reduces inequalities and increases access to quality*

⁷ National Institute of Statistics. See: <https://www.ine.gov.py/>

⁸ National Institute of Statistics – Estadística por Tema. See thematic areas currently covered at: <https://www.ine.gov.py/>

⁹ Forthcoming United Nations Office of the Resident Coordinator with Redes Chaco, 2021.

¹⁰ Redes Chaco, 2021 - forthcoming.

¹¹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20210204%20SEQUIA%20PARAGUAY%20%281%29.pdf>

¹² <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20210204%20SEQUIA%20PARAGUAY%20%281%29.pdf>

social services and the protection of all persons, with the goal of ensuring social inclusion, strengthening quality of life, guaranteeing human rights and achieving gender equality) and 4 (Paraguay strengthens transparent institutions with mechanisms for citizen participation that promote diverse representation). The UNSDCF guides the engagement of the United Nations system with the national government of Paraguay in support of the Sustainable Development Goals at national to local levels.

Structure

The National inception workshop will cover two days of introductory sessions, meetings and engagement activities to strengthen multi-stakeholder knowledge and partnerships for the Voluntary Local Reviews in Paraguay, with a special emphasis on the Chaco. This will include panel presentations, discussions, stock-taking dialogues, awareness-raising on monitoring tools, and cross-sector engagement exercises.