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Voluntary Local Review Series – Monitoring, data and indicators
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OPENING REMARKS
Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief, National Planning and Capacity Building Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals of UN DESA

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

A warm welcome to all of you to our third thematic Voluntary Local Review workshop, focusing on monitoring, data and indicators.

Our little community of practice is growing, and we again have quite a few colleagues joining us for the first time. We would like to thank all of our cities, regions, national governments and international organizations for joining and contributing their experiences from monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

We started this peer learning process online in June last year with a longer, more general discussion on the VLRs. Between then and now, we have also had two thematic discussions, the first one focusing on stakeholder engagement and the second one on integrating the SDGs into strategies, plans and budgets.

We are very excited to continue this work with you, providing these peer learning opportunities between cities and regions that have already conducted a VLR and those who are only beginning to embark on this journey. We hope that you will find some useful insights today and perhaps hear about initiatives you may wish to learn more about going forward.

Today we will be focusing on **monitoring, data and indicators**, a crucial key component for any evidence-based policy formulation and follow-up. We are delighted to have the Statistics Division of our Department of Economic and Social Affairs join forces with us and deliver an opening presentation.

From the beginning, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs recognized the importance of strengthening national statistical capacity and monitoring systems to ensure access to data that are of high quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated.

In that regard, Member States continue to stress the importance of using multidimensional indicators and developing transparent measurements of progress on sustainable development in order to effectively reflect the reality of all segments of society at the national, regional and sub-national levels and to ensure that we deliver on the core principle of ensuring that no one is left behind.

Similarly, the report of the Secretary General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development called data the lifeblood of decision-making. The report stressed that we now face an exponential increase in the volume and types of data available, creating unprecedented possibilities for informing and transforming society and protecting the environment.

But the report also acknowledged that the SDGs also pose an unprecedented statistical challenge presented by its complex monitoring framework.

The 2030 Agenda committed to strengthening data collection and capacity building in Member States. However, we are very cognizant of the fact that the challenges can be even greater at the local level, where no agreed upon global indicators exist and subnational governments need to identify their own suitable indicators or localize indicator sets into their own context - often with very limited resources. At the same time, local monitoring can provide new innovations for all of us to learn from and help the global community to truly see behind the national aggregations.

The issue of monitoring and indicators is addressed in the Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews that we have prepared and shared with you all. These Elements aim at providing a useful checklist of issues to be addressed in in a VLR. They may also foster coherence with the national level Voluntary National Reviews and make peer learning easier by providing a proposed shared structure for the reports.

As you may have seen, the Global Guiding Elements encourage cities and regions to assess the status of progress towards all SDGs, even though data may be lacking in many cases. They propose sections in which the city or region may wish to reflect on the methodology and institutional arrangements used for data collection, their key lessons learned, and the challenges faced. As with national governments, we recommend including a statistical annex in the VLRs.

All of this is underlined by the acknowledgement that lack of high quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data should not constrain any city or region from engaging in a VLR process. A VLR is an opportunity to take stock of your current situation. It also contributes to policy formulation and the

mainstreaming of the Sustainable Development Goals into local development plans and strategies. Further, it is also an opportunity to spell out in which areas of monitoring you would benefit from additional support or guidance going forward.

Today, we will hear examples of how cities, regions and national governments around the world have tackled their challenges related to monitoring their SDG progress. We will also hear from a number of great international organizations that have developed tools and indicator frameworks that you may find beneficial in your work.

I look forward to hearing about your experiences.

Thank you!