



**Voluntary Local Review Series: Monitoring, data and indicators**  
**Division for Sustainable Development Goals**  
**20 January 2021**

**SUMMARY**

The third thematic workshop of the DESA Voluntary Local Review Series was held on 20 January 2021 from 8:00 to 9:40 a.m. EST virtually. The workshop, organized by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), focused on monitoring, data and indicators in the context of SDG implementation and the Voluntary Local Reviews. Over 140 participants representing cities, regions and national governments from around the world as well as United Nations entities and other international organizations took part in the workshop, which consisted of a panel discussion, breakout group discussions and lightning presentations by different international entities on available indicator sets and guidance documents.

**Mr. Amson Sibanda, Chief of the Capacity Building and National Strategies Branch** at DSDG gave the opening remarks of the workshop, which was moderated by Ms. Riina Jussila, Sustainable Development Officer in the Division. In his opening remarks, Mr. Sibanda pointed out that monitoring, data and indicators are a crucial key component for any evidence-based policy formation and follow-up. The Open Working Group that developed the SDGs highlighted particularly the need to take urgent steps to improve the quality, coverage and availability of disaggregated data and the Secretary General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development called data “the lifeblood of decision-making”. While the SDGs pose an unprecedented statistical challenge in the form of their complex monitoring framework with even greater challenges at the local level, Mr. Sibanda encouraged local monitoring which can provide new innovations for everyone to learn from and help the global community to truly see the progress, gaps and challenges behind the national aggregations.

**Ms. Yongyi Min, Chief of the SDG Monitoring Section, Statistics Division, DESA**, made an introductory presentation on lessons learned from evidence-based Voluntary National Reviews. She stressed that timely, quality, open and disaggregated data are critical for the successful implementation of the SDGs at all levels. At the local level this includes tracking performance, designing evidence-based policies and allocating resources, holding stakeholders accountable and better communicating the SDGs. Ms. Min emphasized that decisions about local indicators should be driven by local priorities, while being aligned with national and global indicators, to the extent possible. Dialogue between policy makers and data producers is key to developing SDG indicators and monitoring process. Data gaps for key indicators, the lack of timely data and disaggregated data, as well as a lack of financial and technical support are common data challenges for both the VNRs and VLRs. Ms. Min mentioned building partnerships, mobilizing resources, identifying non-traditional data sources, as well as investing in data innovations as potential data solutions.

## Monitoring progress towards the SDGs

During the opening panel discussion, three experts shared their experiences on monitoring, data and indicators for the SDGs.

**Ms. Angela Kim, SDG Program and Data Manager at the City of Los Angeles**, highlighted the data reporting platform [Open SDG](#), which is an open source, free-to-reuse platform for managing and publishing data and statistics related to the SDGs. This platform is already used by 18 countries and 4 cities/regions. Ms. Kim showcased Los Angeles' efforts to make SDGs and related data more actionable and explained the way in which global indicators have been translated into local realities using categorizations of “revised”, “proxy” and “new”. One of the ways to make data more actionable is to bring the leave no one behind principle of the 2030 Agenda directly into data reporting efforts through measures such as data disaggregation by population groups, geographical mapping, and new targets and indicators for marginalized groups. Ms. Kim also highlighted some of the data sources Los Angeles is utilizing for their local reporting, including official national statistics, city department generated data, earth observations, and community generated data.

**Ms. Natasha Primo, Head of the Organisational Research Branch in Cape Town, South Africa**, shared the main challenges Cape Town has been facing in its monitoring progress towards global goals and targets at the local level, including the fact that indicators at local level are not fully formed yet. She also noted the high costs of generating local data and the fact that the city currently relies strongly on census data. According to Ms. Primo, Cape Town has recently focused on a three-pronged approach: strengthening its own reporting capacity; engaging with the national government and its departments; and engaging with other cities and regions to learn from good practices. Ms. Primo also stressed the use of non-traditional data, including from the private sector, as an area of development.

**Mr. Masayuki Kitahiro, Counsellor at the Office for Promotion of Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy of the Government of Japan**, presented Japan's initiatives on localizing the SDGs. As part of the Japanese Government's SDG Implementation Guiding Principles, local governments are expected to accurately measure their SDG initiatives in order to disseminate and share results and to set local indicators. Mr. Masayuki Kitahiro highlighted that the national government has designated “SDGs Future Cities” based on their efforts to integrate the SDGs into their policies. Of these, the ten most outstanding receive subsidies to accelerate actions on the SDGs. Moreover, the national government established the “Working Group on Local Indicators to Promote the SDGs in Local Governments” which published the “List of Local SDGs Indicators” in August 2019. Each municipality provides annually an assessment of their SDG achievements to the national government. Based on the national assessment, 39.7 per cent of local governments in Japan are already working on the promotion of the SDGs.

## Utilizing data for your VLR: overview of approaches, strategies and activities

During the breakout group discussions, each of the eight groups was chaired by an entity that had already conducted a review of their SDG implementation or had initiated useful monitoring activities. At the feedback session following the breakout group discussions, each Chair shared one main lesson learned, challenge or finding with the plenary:

- Data is the backbone for implementing the SDGs. Each city and region has to define for itself the relevant indicators to monitor their progress towards the SDGs. When indicators are chosen, their relevance for the local context and needs is crucial. It was noted that there exists a “jungle of possibilities” when assessing the available indicator sets, and a taxonomy of indicators was mentioned as one way forward in reducing the complexity.
- Cities have used different ways of constructing their VLRs, some taking a data-based and others a project-based approach. Each approach should be tailored to the local governments’ needs.
- It was noted that when starting a VLR, a simple and solid framework is fundamental. While at the beginning a longer-term plan and a commitment of the city council are a good starting point, as the process progresses, it is fruitful to scale up and link the local monitoring efforts with national regional and national efforts, where possible. The linkages between the VLRs and the national-level Voluntary National Reviews were also raised in this regard.
- The use of participatory processes for indicator development and for data collection was highlighted. More innovative approaches, strategies and partnerships are needed to ensure that cities can learn from each other regarding new ways for data collection.
- One innovative way for data collection mentioned was the use of social media and focus groups for data collection.
- Each city should ideally set their own target levels for each SDG target and also establish the baseline of progress based on their chosen indicators.
- The use of administrative data and linking it from the start with the plans, expected actions and local targets was highlighted as one way to ensure access to timely data.
- The importance of ensuring the participation of smaller cities in SDG monitoring was stressed. It was noted that a shared regional assessment instead of local report may be a good option for those municipalities that don’t have the resources to conduct their independent assessments. Existing reporting mechanisms should also be utilized to reduce the monitoring burden. Local government associations and city-to-city networks can assist in these processes and VLRs at large.

### **Utilizing different indicator sets and guidance**

**Ms. Agata Krause, Consultant at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**, presented the [UNECE’s Key Performance Indicators \(KPI\) for Smart Sustainable Cities](#) and the upcoming ECE guidelines for VLRs. The objective of these guidelines is to focus on specific methodologies to assess the performance of cities, using the Key Performance Indicators as a standard to collect and evaluate data. The KPIs include 91 indicators and have been developed by ECE and ITU. The KPIs provide a way to measure the performance and progress of becoming a smarter and more sustainable city and form the basis for Smart sustainable cities profiles that can be utilized for VLRs. Ms. Krause noted that the upcoming guidelines will also address digitalization, digital transformation, innovative finance and budgeting, social innovation and partnership building as key areas of the VLRs.

**Mr. Stefano Marta, Coordinator of the programme on [A Territorial Approach to the SDGs at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#)**, elaborated on the OECD localized indicator framework to measure SDGs progress in cities and regions. The indicator framework measures progress for 600+ regions and 600+ cities in OECD and partner countries. It includes over 130 localized indicators for SDG monitoring, developed together with member states and 11 pilot local and regional governments. The main sources of data are the national statistical institutes of the OECD Member Countries through the Working Party on Territorial Indicators questionnaire and complementary data sources through surveys and non-standard data sources such as GHS Grids, Gallup World Poll and World Database on Protected Areas, among others. Furthermore, OECD has developed the [Visualization tool for SDGs in regions and cities](#) that compares progress against national averages and other cities and regions.

**Ms. Nana Urakami, Researcher at the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD)**, introduced the monitoring and evaluation tool for SDG Local Actions in Chubu, Japan. The Monitoring Package for SDG Management includes tools for data collection, SDG evaluation and information dissemination. The SDG evaluation tools are evaluated from a viewpoint of SDG governance and SDG achievement. From a governance perspective, quantitative indicators are developed in the areas of governance system, goal setting, monitoring and partnership. From the SDG achievement perspective, the tools include 56 localized SDG indicators which take into consideration interlinkages between the targets. The tools also include a visualization tool of progress towards the targets.

**Ms. Alice Siragusa, Team Leader of the European Commission Joint Research Centre**, presented the Urban 2030 project and the [European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews](#). The starting point of the European Commission was to provide cities with already available and robust indicators which were linked to the European and local context. The Handbook focuses on explaining the available indicators and their limitations. In the context of the project, several European cities are piloting the indicators, improving the methodologies, mapping data availability and assessing their use in VLRs. Ms. Siragusa noted that one focus area is also to work on techniques to ensure affordability of data collection, including through automatization of data collection and relying on other reporting processes cities already have in place such as environmental reporting and reports of utilities companies.

## Materials and resources shared by the participants during the workshop:

UN DESA's Global Guiding Elements for VLRs of SDG implementation - [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf).

City of Los Angeles data for SDG indicators - <https://sdgdata.lamayor.org>. SDG Activities Index - <https://sdg.lamayor.org/activities-index>. Student project advancing the SDGs in Los Angeles - <https://sdg.lamayor.org/node/2611>.

OECD Programme on A Territorial Approach to the SDGs - <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>.

OECD Localized Indicator Framework for the SDGs - <https://www.oecd-local-sdgs.org/>.

VLR Barcelona, Spain - <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/agenda2030/sites/default/files/2021-01/Agenda%202030%20Barcelona%20SDG%20Targets%20and%20Key%20Indicators.pdf>.

VLR Buenos Aires, Argentina - <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/jefedegobierno/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/documentos>. Article published by Brookings Institution on how Buenos Aires uses the SDGs to advance women's rights - [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/City-playbook\\_Buenos-Aires.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/City-playbook_Buenos-Aires.pdf).

VLR Ghent, Belgium - <https://stad.gent/en/international-policy/think-global-act-local/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-voluntary-local-review>. Based on the local SDG indicator set, the SDG monitor was developed (only in Dutch) – <https://www.sdgmonitor.be>. Publications, recommendations and tools collected can be found on - <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/sdg-documents-in-foreign-languages> (multiple languages).

VLR Shimokawa, Japan - <https://www.iges.or.jp/jp/pub/shimokawa-town-sustainable-development-goals/en>.

VLR State of Yucatan, Mexico, - <http://www.seplan.yucatan.gob.mx/agenda2030>

2030 Agenda implementation in Catalonia, Spain - [http://cads.gencat.cat/en/Agenda\\_2030/index.html](http://cads.gencat.cat/en/Agenda_2030/index.html).

Asker, Norway, work on SDGs and an indicator taxonomy: <https://www.asker.kommune.no/asker-mot-2030/fns-barekraftsmal/askers-work-on-the-sdgs/>

MayorsIndicators, shared by Tampere, Finland: <https://mayorsindicators.com/index.cfm>

SDG Network Scotland, United Kingdom, - <https://globalgoals.scot>.