

**VNR Lab 2021**  
**Enhancing the dialogue between the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and**  
**the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)**  
**Monday, 12 July 2021, 8:00 AM (EDT / New York time)**

**Opening remarks by Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, OIC, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA**

Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I am pleased to welcome you to this VNR Lab entitled “Enhancing the dialogue between the Voluntary National Reviews and the Voluntary Local Reviews.”

We are meeting on the margins of the High-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), which is being held under the theme of “Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.”

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals provide a unique, comprehensive and universal framework to align global, national and sub-national priorities, and engage all stakeholders at all levels, in our efforts towards sustainable development.

As we are striving to transform our world for people, planet and prosperity, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed many development gains of the past decades and exacerbated prospects for the future. At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted the critical role of local and regional governments that have been at the forefront of addressing the devastating impacts of such a global calamity.

But even before the pandemic, there was a growing appreciation of the contributions that local authorities can make for attaining the SDGs and an understanding that the United Nations must do better in supporting their efforts.

For that reason, the UN Secretary-General has identified SDG localization as one of the three key areas of the Decade of Action for sustainable development and has recently established a Task Force on the Future of Cities to consider how we can better engage local governments in our work.

Distinguished participants,

As the global secretariat of the HLPF, UNDESA is committed to ensuring robust monitoring and review of progress in SDG implementation at all levels.

In this context, we have witnessed that sub-national reviews, also known as the Voluntary Local Reviews, pick up pace. They are modelled after the Voluntary National Reviews and are conducted by cities and regions to showcase their commitment to transformative actions for a more sustainable future.

Cities as diverse as New York, Buenos Aires, Harare and Tokyo have already published their reports or are in the process of doing so. These VLR reports are available on our website.

Although these reviews do not currently hold an official status at the HLPF, they provide multiple benefits for SDG implementation at large, helping to ensure that no one is left behind.

These benefits include more integrated policymaking, enhanced coordination of actions and increased stakeholder engagement. They can also serve as a tool for better data collection, support communication between different levels of government, and forge new partnerships and innovative means of implementation.

For the first time, this year's HLPF dedicated a formal session to discussing challenges and opportunities for effective SDG localization, including through the VLRs. In that regard, the local reviews have proven useful for an increased dialogue between national and local levels of government.

This year's Voluntary National Reviews are a practical example of this increased collaboration. In previous years, we saw just a few cases of local reviews being reflected in the national reviews. This year, several VNR countries have integrated in different forms findings from their VLRs.

Moreover, the recent update of the Secretary-General's voluntary common guidelines for the VNRs also encourages countries to consider local reviews as inputs to the review process.

We are privileged to have here today representatives of two 2021 VNR countries, Sweden and Japan, who will share their experiences of such collaboration. We will

also hear from Argentina about their plans on utilizing the VLRs in their upcoming 2022 VNR.

Several other countries have also worked with their local counterparts on their VNRs this year and we would encourage you to look at the reports of Mexico, Malaysia, Norway, and Germany to name a few.

Dear colleagues,

This event has been organized by UNDESA together with the five United Nations Regional Commissions. Their representatives have been frontrunners in supporting cities and regions in their VLR preparations and several Regional Forums on sustainable development have already included VLRs. This year, we have also collaborated with some of the Regional Commissions in organizing joint VNR-VLR workshops for the 2021 VNR countries.

From our side, UNDESA has been promoting the participation of local actors in SDG implementation and the HLPF for several years, including by organizing the annual Local and Regional Governments Forum, the fourth edition of which starts today.

Last year, we made available the Global Guiding Elements for VLRs in all six official UN languages. These elements aim at providing a proposed shared structure for the local reports and give a checklist of issues that could be reflected in the process.

We have also been organizing a series of capacity-building workshops for cities and regions conducting VLRs, bringing together colleagues from around the world. We welcome any city or region that is interested in the VLRs to join our upcoming workshops. In addition, we stand ready to provide targeted support to individual national governments and cities in producing a new wave of local reviews.

On this note, I will now pass the floor to my colleague Ms. Riina Jussila who will guide us through today's programme.

Thank you.