

Concept Note

Voluntary Local Review (VLR), The Gambia

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015 by World Leaders provides a plan for action for People, Planet and Prosperity. The agenda represents the commitment of all United Nations (UN) member states to end poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 through a comprehensive, far-reaching and people centered set of universal and transformative 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ The SDGs are an urgent call for action through a partnership of all developed and developing countries globally and integrates three dimensions of sustainable development – Economic, Social, and Environmental. They are designed to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth while preserving our oceans and forests, tackling climate change without leaving no one behind.²

Although the SDGs were formulated for and adopted by national governments, paragraph 79 of the 2030 agenda encourages member states to regularly conduct inclusive country-led reviews of progress at the national and subnational level. In addition, paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda calls on major stakeholders and key groups, including local authorities, to report on their contribution to the implementation of the agenda.³ Progress on SDG implementation has primarily been evaluated at the national level through a process known as the Voluntary National Review (VNR). Since 2016, countries have presented their VNR to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development.

However, as the world embarks on the Decade of Action- the 10 years left to deliver the SDGs, critical action is needed at all levels to accelerate progress particularly at the local government level. The critical role of local governments was highlighted by member states in the political declaration under the auspices of the General Assembly in 2019.⁴ The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) made commitments to empower and support cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and recognized their critical role in implementing and realizing SDGs.

Furthermore, the New Urban Agenda⁵ and Addis Ababa Action Agenda have highlighted the important role local governments play in sustainable development, from participating in national coordination and follow-up mechanisms at the local level to contribute to overall policy. The New Urban Agenda further notes that up to 65 per cent of SDG targets risk not being met if local and regional governments are not assigned a clear implementing role.

¹ The 17 Goals can be found here: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

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Africa Voluntary Local Review Guideline

³ https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

⁴ (A/RES/74/4). paragraph 27 (e), <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/4>

⁵ The new Urban Agenda is a global agenda focused on tackling a wide range of urban challenges

The important role of cities and local governments has also been echoed by the UN Secretary General as he underscored the importance of local participation in the last 10 years of implementing the SDGs by insisting on the creation of enabling environments that maximize the potential of cities and local authorities if the world is to advance the 2030 Agenda.⁶ Moreover, meeting the ambitious goals of SDGs will depend on local governments since they are at the forefront of delivering public service.

Since 2018, local and regional governments have increasingly been reviewing the implementation of SDGs through the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). VLRs have proven useful for cities and regions to foster the localization of SDGs and demonstrate their capacity and commitments towards the 2030 agenda. Additionally, VLRs are seen as an effective tool for monitoring progress at the subnational level as they take local context into consideration in setting goals and targets as well as in determining indicators for measuring and monitoring progress through a process called localization.

1.2. Rationale for VLR in The Gambia

The Gambia, being one of the countries that actively participated in the formulation of the SDGs, demonstrated its commitment to the implementation of the SDGs by aligning its development priorities with the SDGs targets and indicators through its national Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021.⁷ The Gambia conducted its first VNR and presented it at the July 2020 session of the HLPF. Through the VNR, The Gambia was able to assess and present the progress it has made in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the pledge to leave no one behind. The objective of the VNR was to help accelerate progress through experience sharing, identification of gaps and good practices, peer learning as well as mobilization of partnerships. The VNR gave The Gambia the opportunity to engage different stakeholders from the civil society organizations (CSOs), Development Partners, Private Sector, Vulnerable Groups and the population at large to draw lessons on the implementation and progress of SDGs in the country.

Some of the key lessons learned from the VNR include the need to raise the level of awareness on the agenda 2030 and the need to mainstream the SDGs into policies and strategies at National, Sectoral and Sub-national levels. Following the RCO's engagement with relevant government colleagues on the VLR, government engaged local authorities on the potential to embark on VLR initiatives that will inform the tracking of progress at all levels of government authority.⁸

It is against this backdrop, Local Government Authorities with the support of Government of the Gambia (GoTG) and the UN System will conduct VLRs to report on the progress of SDGs in their local government area.

⁶ Antonio Guterres. Remarks at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. September 24, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-09-24/state-of-the-voluntary-local-reviews-2020-local-action-for-global-impact-in-achieving-the-sdgs-9-09-24/remarks-high-level-political-sustainable-development-forum>

⁷ The Gambia, National Voluntary review July 2020, retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/263072020GambiaVNR.pdf>

⁸ e Gambia, National Voluntary review July 2020, retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/263072020GambiaVNR.pdf>

To pilot the VLR in The Gambia, the following three LGAs were encouraged to undertake the VLR to serve as a diagnostic tool on their implementation of the SDGs: Brikama, Kanifing and Kuntaur. An analysis of the country context informed the rationale behind the three LGAs. Kanifing is one of the two entirely urban settlements in The Gambia. However, despite its status, a huge disparity exists in the LGA. For example, settlements in the LGA such as Tallinding, Ebo Town, Kotu Quarry and the back of Buffer Zone are more disadvantaged on certain basic services compared to other neighborhoods within the LGA. Brikama and Kuntaur on the other hand, represent the predominantly rural LGAs. Whilst Kuntaur is disadvantaged in most demographic and socio-economic indicators in The Gambia, Brikama is the most populous region in The Gambia and has a huge disparity within the LGA on certain demographic and socio-economic indicators.

The VLR in the Gambia will therefore be a powerful tool to advance the localization of the SDGs. It will also stimulate and drive local action to implement the SDGs in the LGAs. In addition, the process will strengthen coordination and strengthen cooperation and institutional interaction between levels of government. The national government and the LGAs will be encouraged to work together, exchange data, practices, and techniques on the implementation of SDGs.

In addition, the VLR will contribute to creating awareness of the goals, and significantly contribute to the capacity of LGAs to solve urgent local issues, create partnerships and advance priorities related to equity and sustainability. They will be empowered to support local ownership of the SDGs and advance local priorities. Beyond the multiple benefits of the VLR to the LGAs, it can also complement and contribute to the national VNR.

1.3. Objectives

The overall objectives of engaging in the VLR include:

- To assess the progress of the implementation of the SDGs in the LGA.
- To communicate local progress of the implementation of SDGs in LGAs to government stakeholders, civil society organizations, residents and other local government authorities.
- To communicate strengths and weaknesses to other local authorities, opening opportunities for best practice in the implementation of SDGs.
- To contribute to and complement the national level voluntary review in order to advance the implementation of the 2030 agenda and SDGs.

2. Methodology

The methodology for the VLR preparation would include literature review, use of qualitative and quantitative data, inclusive and participatory engagements with stakeholders such as the Government, National Assembly, private sector, Academia (e.g. University of The Gambia), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)/Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Development Partners, youth, and women.

The expectation is for the LGA to facilitate the VLR process with support from the national government, the UNS and any other partners willing to support the process. Ultimately, the details of the methodology in each LGAs will be contextualized and developed by the VLR

committee in each LGA. A detailed roadmap and methodology will be developed by each LGA which would include the coordinating structures, the timelines and resource requirements. The template in the annex can serve as a guide. Using the available guidelines from UNDESA, UNECA and other partners, a common template will be developed that would be used by the three LGA's for ease of comparison.

The local VLR will report to the national VLR steering committee comprised of the United Nations System (UNS), Gambian Bureau of Statistics (GBoS), Gambian Association of Local Government Authorities (GALGA), and Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA).

3. Scope of work and deliverable

Ultimately, the deliverable for the VLR is a report that reflects the SDG implementation progress in each LGA. However, a series of consultations, workshops and launch events will be held to accompany the literature review and data analysis that will be used to develop the report.

Bibliography

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<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/263072020GambiaVNR.pdf>

Annex

ECA, UCLG-Africa, and UN-Habitat. 'Africa Voluntary Local Review Guideline' 2021 (draft)



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Document

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Roadmap Template



Roadmap%20VLR%20DRAFT%20(CN).xlsx