

The Gambia Voluntary Local Review workshop Closing remarks, 14 January 2022

Ladies and gentlemen, over the past two and a half days, you have taken important steps toward the preparation of your Voluntary Local Reviews.

I wish to express our appreciation to the Government of the Gambia, The Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities, and of course all our UN colleagues for their partnership in organizing this important workshop.

I congratulate the three Local Government Areas, Brikama Area Council, Kanifing Municipal Council, and Kuntaur Area Council, for your commitment to producing your first VLRs. Over the course of the last two and half days, through your active participation in this inception workshop, you made significant progress in moving this process forward. In doing so, you have also joined cities, provinces, and districts from all regions of the world who have also set out on this journey.

We have covered a lot of ground here, including focusing on the benefits of the VNRs and VLRs, engaging in peer learning based on the experience of Kenya and exploring the linkages of your current work on VLRs with processes for Voluntary National Reviews, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, and the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

In the course of sessions and break out groups, you have:

- Identified priority SDGs for your VLR and for implementation;
- Mapped key stakeholders, assessing their actual or potential contributions to the VLR process and SDG implementation; how strongly they are impacted by SDG implementation, and their capacity to engage; and

- Considered data sources for measuring SDG implementation in your LGAs, considering government, UN, civil society and other data sources.

Here, I wish to reiterate that qualitative data can also support SDG reporting and monitoring, and to note the connection between the stakeholder mapping and data exercises that you carried out. The stakeholders that you've identified may also prove to hold important data to support the VLR process. This was a point also emphasized by Mr. Papa during our peer learning session.

When you depart today, you will take with you your updated LGA workplan for the VLRs and further developed plans for stakeholder engagement. We hope that in the coming weeks, that you will continue to develop these.

DESA is committed to supporting you to do so.

Mr. Sarr, working with the DESA team in NY, will soon begin to reach out to you to support your planning. Given the importance of stakeholder engagement, as highlighted in this workshop, Mr. Sarr and DESA, working closely with the RCO and UNCT colleagues, will also accompany you as you plan and organize this engagement, to facilitate a genuinely participatory process.

We do hope that once the VLRs have been finalized, we will reconvene in-person to discuss the results and the next steps we can all take in advancing SDG implementation in your LGAs and in The Gambia at large. The VLRs will also constitute an important input to The Gambia's voluntary national review, to be presented at the 2022 High-level Political Forum.

Please allow me to again take this opportunity to express sincere thanks to the organizers, in particular our RCO counterparts, Ms. Oumie Joof and Mr.

Sambou Diakite, as well as our speakers. We truly appreciate your dedication. We thank all of you for taking the time and wish you a safe journey home.

Thank you very much.