

# **The Gambia Voluntary Local Review workshop**

## **Opening remarks**

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Ladies and gentlemen, many thanks to all of you for joining us in this kick-off workshop for the first Voluntary Local Reviews in The Gambia. We are delighted to be working with the Government of the Gambia, the Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities, and of course all our UN colleagues on this effort. We are very sorry that we are unable to join you in person, as was planned, due to the travel restrictions caused by the recent Omicron wave of the pandemic.

First of all, we would of course like to congratulate the three Local Government Areas, Brikama Area Council, Kanifing Municipal Council, and Kuntaur Area Council, for committing to producing your first VLRs. You are joining cities large and small, from Cape Town to Tokyo, from New York to Harare in this movement. We hope that this journey will be useful for your work and that your experiences and leadership will inspire other LGAs in The Gambia going forward.

### VLR background and benefits

When we speak of VLRs, we talk about SDG implementation reviews conducted by subnational governments themselves - by cities, provinces, regions and towns. These reviews are modelled after the Voluntary National Reviews done by the national governments.

For the cities and regions, the VLR process can bring multiple benefits, among them more integrated policymaking and coordination within the government and facilitate the search for new and innovative means of implementation.

The VLRs can also help national governments in addressing geographical inequalities within your country. It can almost be a diagnostic tool to see why a certain region, city or even a city district is doing well or being left behind others in development outcomes and what could be done.

### Linkages with the Voluntary National Review

Last but not least, the VLRs can also truly enhance a country's Voluntary National Review.

We have been extremely happy to see that these VLRs have increased the dialogue between national and local levels of government in many countries. In 2020, we saw the first Voluntary National Reviews that benefitted from the reports of local and regional governments, namely from Kenya, Uganda and Finland. Last year, over ten VNR countries referred to the VLRs in their reports.

The Gambia has volunteered to present its next Voluntary National Review at this year's High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, the main global platform for discussing the SDGs, and we look forward to seeing how the VLRs produced now can best support also that process.

### DESA's VLR work

Our Department has for the past few years been actively working in supporting local and regional governments with their VLRs at global, regional and national levels. In 2020, we made available the Global Guiding Elements for

VLRs, a guidance document for anyone conducting the VLRs. We have also organized a series of online capacity building workshops for cities and regions conducting VLRs, bringing together colleagues from all over the world.

During the High-level political forum, we have aimed at increasing the participation of local actors, including by organizing the annual Local and Regional Governments Forum as a special event. We also organize a number of other events where we highlight the experiences of VLR cities and regions around the world.

Regionally, we have worked with the United Nations Regional Commissions, including with the Economic Commission for Africa, in organizing workshops that bring together local and regional governments with their national counterparts working on the VNRs. We are very happy to be partnering with our ECA colleagues also here today.

At the national level, we are now supporting three countries and their local governments in The Gambia, Zimbabwe and Paraguay with their VLRs.

#### DESA's support to The Gambia

For our collaboration with the three Gambian LGAs, we are committed to supporting you with your VLRs throughout the process. Today's workshop provides the starting point. We have also hired an accomplished consultant, Mr. Alieu Sarr, who will be providing you support in addition to our team in New York.

In addition, we have reserved resources for supporting stakeholder consultations in each LGA and will help you in organizing this engagement. We also hope, that once the VLRs have been finalized, we will all get together again

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.

I would just like to conclude by saying that the VLR should be a flexible tool that supports in the most effective way the work of each individual LGA. We look forward to starting this journey with you and to working with you in the months ahead.

Thank you.