

Opening Remarks

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“National Capacity Building Workshop on Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in South Africa”
27-29 March 2023

Birchwood Hotel and OR Tambo Conference Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa

Commissioner Zondi, NPC, RSA,

Dr. Kefiloe Masiteng, Secretary, National Planning Commission, RSA

H.E. Ms. Silvia Marrara, Deputy Ambassador of Italy to the Republic of South Africa,

Mr. Nelson Muffuh, UN Resident Coordinator, South Africa,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you for the opening of this workshop on advancing implementation of the SDGs, AU Agenda 2063 and the National Development Plan 2030, with a particular focus on voluntary local reviews.

I would like to thank the Government of South Africa, the Resident Coordinator Office and the UN Country Team for their tremendous work to organize this workshop in partnership with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

I would like to sincerely thank the Ambassador of the Government of Italy to South Africa for having joined us today and for its continued support to the capacity development activities of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG). The Government of Italy is supporting UNDESA's project on “Improved local and national government capacities for localizing SDG progress through Voluntary Local Reviews”.

This project, that was launched in June this year and ending in December 2024, will support the acceleration and scaling up of SDGs implementation and localization through the preparations of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG implementation in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay. Through this process, the project seeks to build the

capacities of government officials at the national and subregional levels for effective SDGs implementation at all levels, including the subnational level and reviewing and monitoring of progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs largely depends on inclusive national and local actions.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the need to engage all stakeholders in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, among others, pledges that “Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities”.

The critical role of local and regional governments for the 2030 Agenda implementation was also highlighted by Member States in the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit and in various Ministerial Declarations of the High-level Political Forum. These Ministerial declarations note that VLRs are a useful tool to show progress and foster exchange in local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. In his recent Report on Our Common Agenda, the Secretary-General stated that: “The role of parliaments, cities and other subnational authorities is particularly being recognized in inclusive approaches, with, for example, voluntary local reviews of Sustainable Development Goal implementation providing a model on which to build. Cities, local authorities and specifically VLRs are key actors and processes to advance sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism.”

The centrality of localization of the SDGs has similarly been emphasized by the G20 where, in 2021, under Italy’s Presidency, the G20 Development Working Group agreed to establish a G20 Platform on SDG Localization and Intermediary Cities and adopted High Level Principles on city-to-city partnerships to help maximize synergies across existing initiatives and address gaps that cities face to realize their development potential.

We are therefore all gathered here because we strongly believe that localizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is essential for ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals and

their pledge to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first reflect local needs, priorities, norms and values.

This will ensure that local and regional governments and the communities they serve find them relevant and meaningful in the spaces they occupy and operate.

While the SDGs are global, their achievement will depend on our ability to make them a reality at subnational levels.

Simply put, the translation of national development plans and priorities into local action is what gives meaning to the translation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into national development plans. Resourceful and motivated local and regional actors can have a multiplier effect on the localization of SDGs as they are much closer to the everyday challenges faced by the communities they serve.

Furthermore, it is the local and regional level where the implementation of the SDGs is more rewarding. It is at this level that local communities and citizens, civil society organizations, local businesses and other stakeholders interface with their local governments on very concrete challenges like how to generate decent jobs, provide safe drinking water and sanitation, or how to manage waste disposal.

In that regard, the cities and local governments that you serve have a huge responsibility to translate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in ways that make them appear recognizable, urgent and meaningful.

And with less than eight years to go, countries are seized with fierce urgency of now. In that regard, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2022 called for the SDG Summit that will be held in September to “mark the beginning of a new phase of accelerated progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.”

The SDG Summit will mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will bring together political and thought leaders from governments, international organizations, private

sector, civil society, women and youth and other stakeholders in a series of high-level meetings. They will carry out a comprehensive review of the state of the SDGs, respond to the impact of multiple and interlocking crises facing the world, and provide high-level political guidance on transformative and accelerated actions leading up to the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs.

As countries are preparing for the 2023 HLPF, which will be a pre-summit for preparing the SDG Summit to be held in September 2023, they should start asking themselves some hard questions.

How do we develop an inclusive and participatory local process that is linked to national level processes? How do we establish a realistic local and regional agenda based on reliable data and evidence and meaningful public engagement, including securing support from local institutions and influential political actors? How do we establish realistic goals for implementing the 2030 Agenda? How do we monitor and evaluate progress toward achieving the SDGs at the local level? And how do we mobilize local resources, and identify and engage strong local champions who can accelerate localization efforts?

I do not have answers to all these questions, but I believe our deliberations over the next three days will provide some important answers to these burning questions.

I thank you for your attention!