



National Capacity Building Workshop on Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) in South Africa
Johannesburg, South Africa
27-29 March 2023
Draft Concept Note

I. Purpose of the workshop

The Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DSDG/UNDESA), in collaboration with the South Africa National Planning Commission and the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office and the United Nations Development Agency, is organizing a national capacity building workshop on "Voluntary Local Reviews in South Africa" from 27-29 March 2023.

The capacity building workshop is convened in the context of UNDESA's mission to advise interested Governments on the ways and means of translating policy frameworks developed in UN conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance that helps build national capacities. Capacity building activities are also aimed at strengthening and maintaining the capabilities of states and societies to design and implement strategies that minimize the negative impacts of unprecedented and overlapping challenges, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis that has been triggered by rising inflationary pressures and conflicts, and extreme weather events from climate change. As a cross-cutting entry point, capacity building activities promote the integration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional development frameworks such as AU Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community's Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan into national sustainable development planning frameworks, sharing lessons learned and good practices through workshops and related events.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that capacity-building forms part of the means of implementation for the SDGs (paragraph 41). Each SDG contains targets relating to means of implementation, including capacity- building. Moreover, SDG 17, which covers means of implementation and the global partnership for sustainable development, contains target 17.9 which aims to: "Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation".

In that regard, UN DESA's Division for Sustainable Development Goals' (DSDG) supports sub-national VLR processes through the provision of policy guidance, including through its [Global Guiding Elements](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf)¹ for the VLRs, and through capacity development, including workshops at international, regional, national and sub-national level.

¹ https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf

The present national inception workshop is carried out through the DESA-led project “*Improved local and national government capacities for localizing SDGs progress through Voluntary Local Reviews*”, supported by the Government of Italy. The workshop will launch a comprehensive support for the development of new VLRs in South Africa in collaboration with the National Planning Commission, participating local governments and the United Nations Resident Coordinator’s Office and UNDP South Africa.

II. Background

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has made significant progress in critical areas such as the provision of access to free education for children from poor households, clean water and sanitation, and health. Individuals benefiting from the social protection system increased from 3 million in 1994 to 17,5 million in 2018. South Africa also has the largest anti-retroviral treatment programme in the world - over 4.5 million people.

Despite major progress in social outcomes, South Africa remains the most economically unequal country in the world. According to the country’s Voluntary National Review of its progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals at the 2019 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), inequality has grown in the last decade, undermining progress towards Goal 10 and the achievement of other SDGs and targets. Levels of poverty have also increased in recent years, including disparities in poverty and unemployment levels between regions and population groups. It is in that regard that the National Development Plan prioritises the eradication of poverty, reduction of inequality and growing an inclusive economy by 2030. NDP goals are aligned to SDGs and to AU Agenda 2063 and are integrated into Government planning systems and processes at national, provincial and local level.

Hence, there is recognition that localizing the national and internationally agreed development goals is essential for ensuring that these goals reflect local needs, norms, and values, thus ensuring that local actors find them relevant and meaningful. With regard to the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, local and sub-national governments are increasingly playing a pivotal role in implementation, addressing core issues including poverty, food security, access to quality education, health care and water and sanitation services, and in advancing gender equality and reducing inequalities, among others. It is estimated that at least 100 of the 169 SDG targets will not be reached without proper engagement and co-ordination with local and regional governments.

The 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1: *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*) recognizes this important role, pledging that “Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities”. In paragraph 27 (e) of the Political Declaration of the 2019 SDG Summit (A/RES/74/4), Member States commit to empowering and supporting cities, local authorities and communities in pursuing the 2030 Agenda, and recognized their critical role in implementing and realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Agenda encourages Member States to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (paragraph 79). This further underscores the critical importance of implementing the SDGs at local level, while empowering local authorities and actors as stewards of monitoring and review for the Goals. Furthermore, the Ministerial declaration of the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development welcomed “... voluntary subnational and local reviews as an essential tool to show

progress and foster exchange on local implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, in coordination and synergy with national actors.”

To reinforce vertical coherence and complement Voluntary National Reviews, local and regional governments are increasingly engaging in sub-national reviews of their SDG implementation, also called Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). VLRs can be a powerful accelerator of SDG implementation. They have the potential to contribute to the collection and analysis of timely, accurate and disaggregated data on SDG implementation and on the furthest behind at the local level; to bring stakeholders, including those in vulnerable situations, closer to decision-making processes; to strengthen multilevel governance and inform the elaboration of Voluntary National Reviews; and to foster integration of the SDGs into local planning. VLRs can also help to better respond to the specific needs of local communities and geographical areas.

III. Objectives and Methodology

This capacity building workshop aims to support the acceleration and scaling up of SDGs implementation and localization in South Africa through the preparations of voluntary local reviews (VLRs) and their linkages to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and, through this process, 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. Specifically, the inception workshop will:

- Strengthen awareness and multi-stakeholder partnerships for sub-national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs through the Global Guiding Elements for voluntary local reviews (VLRs);
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation and experience sharing on the SDGs monitoring and review at local level;
- Build capacity for conducting comprehensive sub-national reviews of SDG implementation that complement and feed into follow-up and review processes carried out by the national government’s Voluntary National Review; and
- Strengthen awareness regarding how the VLR process can be utilized to enhance data gathering and analysis for tackling urban-rural differences within South Africa.

Promoting VLRs in South Africa will be a powerful tool to advance the localization of the SDGs. It will also stimulate and drive local action to implement the SDGs at regional and local levels, including at the municipal level. In addition, the process will strengthen coordination and strengthen cooperation and institutional interaction between levels of government. The national government and the local authorities will be encouraged to work together, exchange data, practices, and techniques on the implementation of SDGs. In addition, the VLRs will contribute to creating awareness of the goals, and significantly contribute to the capacity of local governments 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 VLRs to the local authorities, they can also complement and contribute to the future national

Voluntary National Reviews to be produced by South Africa for presentation at the High-level Political Forum.

To accomplish these objectives, national and sub-national experts will be drawn from various line ministries, local and regional governments, academia, research centers, the United Nations Country Team, and civil society organizations engaged in SDGs implementation. UNDESA and the RCO/UNCT will build the capacities of participants through the provision of a combination of substantive presentations and hands-on practical exercises.

IV. Expected outcome of the Capacity Building Workshop

At the conclusion of the capacity building workshop, it is anticipated that the participants will:

- Have acquired enhanced capability and a better understanding of the requirements for successfully undertaking a voluntary local review and how to link it to the national VNR process.
- Be able to participate in ongoing and planned national development activities to advance the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs implementation at the national, local and regional levels.
- Be able to remain in a community of similar practitioners and experts to support one another in localizing the SDGs.

V. Contacts

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