



National Capacity Building Workshop on “Improved Local and National Government Capacities for Localizing SDGs Through Voluntary Local Reviews in Ghana”

**Kumasi, Ghana
14-16 November 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 Ghana National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the United Nations Resident Coordinator (RCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ghana, is organizing a national capacity building workshop on “Improved Local and National Government Capacities for Localizing SDGs Through Voluntary Local Reviews in Ghana” from 14-16 November 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 to integrate the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs into national development plans and strategies. 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 the triple planetary crisis, namely climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. 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 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 this regard, UN DESA’s Division for Sustainable Development Goals’ (DSDG) supports localization of the SDGs through sub-national Voluntary Local Review (VLR) processes and their

linkages to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) through the provision of advisory and policy guidance, including through its [Global Guiding Elements¹](#) for the VLRs, and through capacity development, including hybrid workshops at international, regional, national and sub-national levels.

The present national capacity building inception workshop is supported by UNDESA's United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) that is supported by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Korea, Incheon Metropolitan City and Yonsei University. UNOSD has trained a variety of national level actors from Ghana on the SDGs and seeks to advance national policy support on multi-level governance and SDG localization, given the challenges and priorities expressed in the 2022 Ghana VNR. The workshop will build on the first voluntary local report that was prepared in 2020 by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly² with technical support from the National Development Planning Commission and provides a benchmark for replication in other metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies.

II. Background

In 2020, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly conducted the first [Voluntary Local Reviews \(VLR\)](#) in Ghana with technical support from the NDPC. Key stakeholders including the Government appreciated the significance of VLRs as an effective mechanism for monitoring and tracking progress in SDGs implementation at sub-national level. Subsequently, the NDPC launched a Voluntary Local Review Programme for the period 2023-2025 aiming to holistically involve local authorities in the implementation of the 2030 agenda at the local level. Accordingly, the Government requested assistance for supporting interested Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies for the preparation of VLRs, facilitating the localization of SDGs within the national development policy framework.

The preparation of VLRs is expected to: 1) Enable Local Authorities to assess their own achievement of the SDGs; 2) Attract resources to key areas identified in the VLRs as priority to advance the achievement of the SDGs at the local level; and 3) contribute to accelerating progress and reporting on SDG achievement at national level.

Ghana has mainstreamed the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063 into the national development policy framework as well as the medium-term national development plans. As required by statute, the ministries, departments and agencies as well as Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies derive their plans from the national development policy framework. Therefore, the implementation of plans of the line ministries and sub-national governments unvaryingly imply the implementation of the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063.

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, youth empowerment

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

² [2020voluntarylocalreviewreportaccra.pdf \(knowledge-uclga.org\)](#)

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.

Further, 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 high-level segment of the 2022 session of the Economic and Social Council and the 2022 high-level political forum on sustainable development (E/HLS/2022/1) encourages "... the full, equal and meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, including local governments, civil society organizations and academia, in the design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of national sustainable development strategies and in the preparation of voluntary national reviews. ... We further encourage the involvement and empowerment of local authorities, to ensure ownership and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular by citizens, communities, civil society, local organizations, the private sector and academia. In this regard, we welcome 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.”

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

The value of VLRs in advancing SDG implementation has been increasingly recognized at national and international level. In his 2023 report on *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals*, the Secretary-General notes that, since 2018, the voluntary local review global movement has provided “an unprecedented push towards localization,” contributing “to advances in all dimensions of localization of the Goals – from data innovation to planning and policy coherence to project development and financing.”³

SDG localization has further been identified as one of 12 high impact initiatives, to be showcased at the SDG Summit at UN Headquarters in September 2023. In this regard, strengthening multi-level governance and SDG localization can address key challenges Ghana expressed in its 2022 Voluntary

³A/78/80-E/2023/64, Para. 52

National Review such as: i) The need to restore the economy amidst current global and national economic challenges such as rising oil prices, fiscal deficits, depreciation of the local currency, and youth unemployment, ii) Broadening social protection coverage for the vulnerable including PWDs towards social and economic inclusion, iii) Addressing infrastructure inadequacies in key sectors such as health, education, and sanitation services as well as supporting digitalisation drive; and iv) Mitigating impacts of climate change and variability for green growth.

III. Objectives and Methodology

This capacity building workshop aims to support the acceleration and scaling up of SDGs implementation and localization in Ghana through the preparations of voluntary local reviews and their linkages to national development plans and, through this process, to build the capacities of government officials at the national and subnational levels for effective SDGs implementation through an innovative, evidence based and inclusive process at all levels, and reviewing and monitoring of progress. Specifically, the inception workshop will:

- Strengthen capacity of local, regional and national government officials to conduct inclusive sub-national reviews of SDGs implementation, including reporting, and identifying main messages, challenges and opportunities;
- Enhance capacity of local and regional government officials to integrate the SDGs into local plans and strategies, and enhance policy coherence of these plans with national development plans and national to local financing gaps;
- 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);
- Building the capacity of government officials for integrating Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) into local plans and strategies;
- Strengthen multi-stakeholder cooperation and experience sharing on the SDGs monitoring and review at local level; and
- Strengthen awareness regarding how the VLR process can be utilized to enhance data gathering and analysis for tackling urban-rural inequalities and prioritization of vulnerabilities within Ghana.

The production of VLRs would serve a double purpose: (i) first, it could help the local authorities to assess their own achievement of the SDGs; (ii) second, if done in a harmonised manner, it could attract resources to areas requiring much attention while sustaining the gains in areas of better improvement; and (iii) third, the priority of assessment and implementation at the local level can contribute to the achievement and holistic reporting of the 2030 Agenda at country level. On the basis that development happens at the local level, the VLR would then provide opportunity to assess outcomes and impacts of government's priority flagships being implemented towards achieving the SDGs at the Metro, Municipal and District levels. Further, the VLR would offer an opportunity to report on the resilience of the local economies amidst ongoing global challenges that include the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and conflicts. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution that are reinforcing each other and

driving further damage to the environment and to people's health and wellbeing and the adaptation measures of local assemblies would be highlighted to better harness potentials to achieve the SDGs.

Further promoting VLRs and their linkage to national development plans will also stimulate and drive local action to implement the SDGs at metropolitan, district and municipal levels. 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 and the AU Agenda 2063. In addition, the VLRs will contribute to creating awareness of the goals, deepen citizen engagement, promote ownership of both the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, 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.

To accomplish these objectives, national and sub-national policymakers, experts and relevant stakeholders will be drawn from various line ministries, local and regional governments departments and agencies, academia, research centers, the United Nations Country Team, civil society organizations, traditional authorities and development partners. UNDESA, UNECA 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 localizing the SDGs by successfully undertaking a voluntary local review and how to link it to the national development policy framework.
- 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.

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