



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

**Piggs Peak Hotel, Eswatini**

**15-17 October 2024**

**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 Ministries of Economic Planning and Development and of Housing and Urban Development of the Kingdom of Eswatini and the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) Eswatini, is organizing a national capacity building workshop on “Improved Local and National Government Capacities for Localizing SDGs Through Voluntary Local Reviews in Eswatini” from 15-17 October 2024.

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. The recent confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic, cost-of-living crisis, conflicts, and the escalating climate crisis has caused severe setbacks to poverty eradication, food security, education, and combating inequality. More frequent and intense global shocks in an era of increased globalization and interconnectedness can make crises more widespread and dangerous, as spillovers across borders and between systems (economic, social, and environmental) mean that crises that originate in one sector or country can rapidly cascade into broader multisystemic crises, posing a complex challenge to SDG progress. 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. 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 Elements](#)<sup>1</sup> for the VLRs, and through capacity development, including hybrid workshops at international, regional, national and sub-national levels.

The present national capacity building workshop was organized in response to a request from the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to build capacity of the SDG Core Team, Technical Team and SDG stakeholders on the Voluntary Local Review process.

Addressing this request, UNDESA, in collaboration with partners will hold this workshop for national and local policy makers to complement Eswatini ongoing efforts to accelerate SDG implementation, by providing training modules, guiding tools, and illustrative examples from other countries on the SDG localization review process. Linkages between VNR and VLR processes will also be highlighted considering Eswatini's intention to present its third VNR at the 2025 HLPF.

## **II. Background**

Eswatini is actively engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and has completed two Voluntary National Reviews in 2019 and 2022, with the intention to produce a third in 2025. National strategy is primarily guided by the National Development Plan (NDP) 2023-2027. This document emphasizes the drive for economic recovery and improve quality of life for the Swazi people. This goal is to be achieved under the overall theme of "Good governance in the anchor for economic recovery, green growth and sustainable livelihoods. The Eswatini SDG Recovery and Acceleration Plan developed in 2023 identified SDG8 and job creation as a driver to achieve progress in other SDGs.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Eswatini for 2021 to 2025 concentrates on three strategic priorities (Prosperity, People, Planet) and four outcome areas (Inclusive Growth; Human Capital & Social Development; Governance, Justice, and Human Rights; and Environmental Sustainability) that are harmonized with the national development goals outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP). Despite economic growth in recent years, challenges such as extreme poverty, high unemployment, economic inequality, limited access to finance, and vulnerability to external shocks persist, emphasizing the need for inclusive growth efforts in Eswatini.

The 2022 VNR highlighted five key issues to accelerate SDG implementation at national level including enhancing resilience to external shocks, financing of SDGs, credible and timely data, SDG popularity and urgent need for government to decentralize functions and powers to local level in order to fast-track developmental projects and programmes and reduce disparities.

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,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf)

health care and water and sanitation services, and in advancing gender equality, youth empowerment 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.”<sup>2</sup>

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 Eswatini expressed in its 2022 Voluntary

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<sup>2</sup>A/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 towards social and economic inclusion, and iii) Mitigating impacts of climate change and endeavor to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation.

### **III. Objectives and Methodology**

This capacity building workshop aims to support the acceleration and scaling up of SDGs implementation and localization in Eswatini 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:

- Enhance common understanding of the SDGs and the VLR amongst stakeholders and build 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 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;
- Strengthen awareness regarding how the VLR process can be utilized to enhance data gathering and analysis across Eswatini.
- 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); and
- Share experience and best practices in the implementation of the SDGs at local level and guidance on SDGs/ VLR institutional arrangements, monitoring and review at local level

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 regional, tinkhundla and council 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. 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, 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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