



Validation Workshop on the Voluntary National and Local Reviews in Eswatini
tbd, Eswatini
7th – 8th May 2025 (tbc)
Concept Note

I. Background

The 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1: *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*) 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). 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."

Eswatini is actively engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and has completed two Voluntary National Reviews in 2019 and 2022, and is preparing the third Voluntary National Review in 2025. In recognition that localizing the national and internationally agreed development goals is essential for ensuring that these goals reflect local needs, norms, and values, and that local actors find them relevant and meaningful, the government of Eswatini has encouraged local governments to prepare voluntary local review informing the national level review. In response, seven local governments are preparing VLRs (Ezulwini, Manzini, Matsapha, Mbabane, Ngwenya, Nhlangano, Siteki).

Local and sub-national governments play a pivotal role in implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 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 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.

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.”¹ 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.

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.

II. Objectives and Methodology

¹A/78/80-E/2023/64, Para. 52

This validation workshop aims to support the acceleration and scaling up of SDGs implementation in Eswatini through the coordinated preparations of the voluntary national and voluntary local reviews and their linkages to national development plans. This process aims 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 validation workshop will:

- Review and validate key findings from the VNR and VLRs to ensure accuracy and relevance;
- Emphasize the importance of data and statistics in VNRs and SDG reporting.
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices and lessons learned in preparing the VNR and VLRs including on the implementation of the SDGs.
- Identify priority actions and policy recommendations that align with local development needs.
- Identification of key messages, challenges and opportunities from the VLRs for integration into the Voluntary National Review (VNR);
- Foster dialogue among stakeholders to strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration, and share experiences and best practices in the implementation of the SDGs at local level and national level;
- Establish a roadmap for implementing the recommendations and integrating them into local urban policies and planning frameworks.

The production of the VNR and VLRs would serve a double purpose: (i) first, it could help the national and local authorities to assess their own achievement of the SDGs; and (ii) second, the assessment and implementation at the local level can contribute to the achievement and holistic reporting of the 2030 Agenda at country level. If done in a harmonised manner, it could attract resources to areas requiring much attention while sustaining the gains in areas of better improvement. 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, support local ownership and advance local priorities. In addition, the coordinated VNR/VLR process is expected to strengthen coordination and cooperation and institutional interaction between levels of government. They will be empowered to

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.

Expected Outcomes

- **Improved VNR and VLR Processes:** A refined and improved VNR process that is more effective and relevant.
- **Enhanced Capacity:** Increased capacity of national and local government to prepare evidence-based SDGs/ VNR/ VLR reporting.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** A platform for knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning among stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs at national and local government levels.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Improvement in the availability of accurate and timely data to inform the VNR/VLR or SDG reports.
- **Recommendations:** Accelerated progress in the implementation of the VNR/VLR report recommendations.

III. Organizers

The workshop is organised by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of UN DESA, UNDP Eswatini and the RCO/UNCT in collaboration with the Ministries of Economic Planning and Development and of Housing and Urban Development of the Kingdom of Eswatini.

IV. Contacts

Ms. Nonhlanhla Shongwe

Senior Economist
Ministry of Economic Planning &
Development
Poverty Reduction, Monitoring & Evaluation
Division
Email: shongwen81@gmail.com

Mr. Jurgen Gafke

Senior Programme Management Officer
National Strategies and Capacity Building
Branch
Division for Sustainable Development Goals
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
United Nations, New York
Email: gafke@un.org

Mr. Mangaliso Mohammed

Sustainable Development Specialist
UNDP Eswatini
Email: mangaliso.mohammed@undp.org

Mr. Benjamin Ofosu-Koranteng

Head of UN Resident Coordinator's Office
RCO Eswatini
Email : benjamin.ofosu-koranteng@un.org