SDGs Learning Module 3: Reporting to national reviews

The Role of Local Government Associations in the Voluntary National Review elaboration process

Presentation

In 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations. Since then, the awareness of this set of universal goals and the localizing process amongst local and regional governments (LRGs) has increased in a great manner.

Following the valuable lessons learned from the conclusion of the MDG era, UCLG, UNDP and UN-Habitat have made a great effort to reach LRGs and foster their engagement in the achievement of the SDGs. In this process, the Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs, drawn up by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP and UN-Habitat, offers LRGs a set of strategies that will enable them to take part in this process. The Training Modules on the SDGs carried out by UCLG, UNDP and UN-Habitat are also in-depth approaches to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that have proved very successful so far.

Annually, a set of countries submit their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) to the UN High-Level Political Forum to present their progress in achieving the SDGs. Countries should submit at least 2 VNRs between 2015 and 2030, in which the participation of LRGs is essential. LRGAs have in this context an especially important role as they have to ensure that LRGs are adequately considered in the national reporting process and provide at the same time sufficient support to them to monitor their efforts.

Last year, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) made an important effort, with the support of its regional sections and the Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) working group, to support members in both getting connected to the VNR process and to prepare their own input on the progress of LRGs in achieving the SDGs. This resulted in the UCLG report National and Subnational Governments on the way towards the Localization of the SDGs.

Objective of Module 3

The objective of Module 3 is to enhance LRGAs' involvement in the preparation of the national VNRs and help them develop their own reports on the involvement of LRGs in the localization of the SDGs and the global agendas. These actions will serve as key inputs to support their involvement in the national process and contribute to the report to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. The following Chapters look into the different elements that need to be taken into account by LRGAs to perform the reporting task appropriately.

LRGAs are not alone in the challenge of the reporting task. The lessons of their peers in other countries can be helpful for better reporting. Peer learning between LRGAs and virtual learning sessions will be

prepared by the CIB and the UCLG learning team to make sure that no association is left behind. In addition, the UCLG research team will be permanently observing and supporting the results of LRGA to be seen in VNR and on the global sphere.

Course attendee's background & readings

Any course attendee of this Module 3 needs good knowledge on the 2030 Agenda and the localization process. Before starting this Module 3, we recommend reading the following texts:

- Learning Module 1: Localizing the SDGs / Introduction
- Learning Module 2: The SDGs as the roadmap for the planning process at territorial level (work in progress)
- Roadmap for localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level
- The Sustainable Development Goals: What Local Governments Need to Know
- National and Subnational Governments on the way towards the Localization of the SDGs
- HLPF Sustainable Development Platform
- Proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for the VNR

Complementary documents:
- From MDGs to Sustainable Development For All: Lessons from 15 Years of Practice
- Local and Regional Voices on the Global Stage: our Post-2015 Journey
- Getting started with the SDGs in Cities: a Guide for Local Stakeholders
- Localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Dialogues on Implementation
- Delivering the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Opportunities at the National and Local Levels
- UCLG's GOLD reports
- Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2018 HLPF (July 2018, UCLG, Global Taskforce)

Target audience

This training or Module 3 is aimed at the development of capacities of LRGAs at political and technical level. Aware of the huge differences there might exist between the LRGAs participating in this Module in terms of competences, territorial scope, composition etc., this Module 3 is precise but broad enough so as to include and reflect all kinds of LRGAs.

Methodology

Module 3 has been conceived as an on-line training module that will offer you information for better managing the SDG reporting process. The document is divided into 5 Chapters:

- Chapter 1: The role of LRGAs in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Short introduction
- Chapter 2: The SDG reporting and localization process

- Chapter 3: Participation of LRGs in the reporting process
- Chapter 4: Collecting local results and views, drafting the LRGA's own review and aiming for global impact
- Chapter 5: Sharing the results

Each of these Chapters is designed as an independent learning module divided into shorter units with given timings that make up to 4hs of training. The different contents, which are more practical than theoretical, are flexible and adaptable to the reality, needs and aspirations of the attendees as well as to the political, economic, social and cultural environment of their territory.

At the same time, the Chapters present real case studies and best practices from different regions of the world with the main aim of offering a more practical view based on success stories, but also as a way to encourage LRGAs to embark on development and decentralized cooperation experiences, as pointed out in the Roadmap.

Glossary

CSO – Civil Society Organization
ECOSOC – United Nations Economic and Social Council
HLPF – UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
LRG – Local and Regional Government
LRGA – Local and Regional Government Association
MDG – Millennium Development Goal
SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
UCLG – United Cities and Local Governments
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat – United Nations Human Settlements Programme
VNR – Voluntary National Review
CEMR – Council of European Municipalities and Regions
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Chapter 1: The role of LRGAs in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Short introduction

This module enriches the central tasks of LRGAs by connecting to the reporting of global agenda. What can LRGAs do in this sense?

Awareness-raising

LRGs may be unaware of their role in the 2030 Agenda, or fear that they are too small or lack the necessary knowledge or capacity (human, technical or financial resources) to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Based on this, LRGAs can carry out awareness-raising campaigns for LRGs to understand their role in 1) the implementation of the SDGs in their territories, 2) the definition and evaluation of national and territorial strategies (participation in the VNR included).

Advocacy

LRGAs have an important task in facilitating the participation of LRGs in the development of national SDG strategies so that they reflect and respond to local circumstances, needs and priorities in a bottom-up approach. For this, LRGAs should gather the data, knowledge and experience of their LRGs but also of their territorial stakeholders and conceive a consolidated political message based on that. If LRGs have a sense of ownership of the SDGs and a role in determining their roles and responsibilities, their involvement in implementation will be greater.

Support to implementation

LRGAs can promote the exchange of best practices among their members, identify policy challenges that impact on the localization of the SDGs and make recommendations for improvement. They can also foster decentralized cooperation and effective development cooperation. They are important to promote the effective implementation of decentralization, while forging links with key sectoral ministries and the ministry of local government to collaborate on localization.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

LRGAs play a key role in promoting the participation of LRGs and other stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs at national level, supporting them in data collection, monitoring and assessment at local level and pooling efforts and resources to ensure local achievements are incorporated in the national reports. This fact is directly related to the LRGAs' advocacy role, as they should work, through advocacy actions towards the national government, to ensure that the national monitoring systems include the local realities. Reinforcing the local capacities in this sense should also be a priority of LRGAs.

Chapter 2: The SDG reporting and localization process

Why is reporting key?

Reporting is essential to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda inasmuch it provides key information, feedback and learning mechanisms at every stage of implementation and provides scope for inclusiveness and broad participation. Through reporting, all stakeholders (LRGs included) can learn from each other's experiences while they share their own and contribute to the improvement of these other stakeholders in a collaborative manner.

LRGs reporting could help strengthen coordination bodies at the highest levels of government. Many reviews also highlight that coordination with subnational tiers is likewise essential for policy cohesion and an effective implementation of the SDGs.

But reporting also serves as a way to be transparent and accountable to oneself and to the citizenship and stakeholders, as well as foster ownership and coordination with other stakeholders who are also contributing to the 2030 Agenda.

As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, 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). These national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the high-level political forum (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of UN ECOSOC. As stipulated in paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda, regular reviews by the HLPF are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and involve multiple stakeholders.

The VNR aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The VNR countries are expected to submit comprehensive written reports that will be made available in the VNR database. In addition, each VNR country will also provide main messages summarizing their key findings. These main messages are also posted in the VNR database. In 2019, 42 countries will be conducting voluntary national reviews at the HLPF (see box with the list of countries below).

The HLPF Voluntary National Review website will help you find information on those countries participating in the voluntary national reviews of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in order to answer the questions made above. It is possible to filter this information by suggested keywords such as "local government". On those countries whose national governments have not yet elaborated their reviews, other sources of information will have to be used.

What has been done so far?

As implementation advances, the scope of national reviews at the HLPF is expected to be as broad as possible, while taking into account country specific circumstances. Governments are expected to report on the actions and measures taken to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, and where available, to provide information on progress made. This means that there may still be focus on baselines, strategies, and policies that are being put in place to facilitate implementation, but it is also expected that countries will begin to share progress and accomplishments, as well as gaps and lessons learned, related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

A total of 22 countries submitted their VNR in 2016. This number went up to 44 in the year 2017 and to 46 in 2018, demonstrating the commitment of the countries worldwide to report and contribute to a process of teaching and learning amongst peers.

Upcoming years

A total of 42 countries have announced their intention to present VNRs during HLPF 2019.

The countries that are going to present their VNR in 2019 are: Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Congo (Republic of the), Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Eritrea, Fiji, France, Ghana, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Philippines, Saint Lucia, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Vanuatu.

Azerbaijan, Chile, France, Guatemala, Indonesia, Philippines and Sierra Leone will conduct VNRs for the second time.

In addition to national VNRs, HLPF 2018 focused on the extent of implementation of SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 15 (life on land). SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) is analyzed yearly.

As regards 2019, HLPF 2019 will review the implementation of SDGs 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), 13 (climate action) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). By now, some countries have already committed themselves to presenting their VNR such as Burkina Faso, Serbia and South Africa.

Who is in charge of leading the 2030 Agenda and its review in your country?

Within the national governments, the **units in charge** of leading the 2030 Agenda differ from country to country. In many cases this role is assumed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (such as Spain, Cyprus), but other ministries or national agencies can also be in charge such as the President or Prime Minister (Belgium, Brazil, Czech Republic), the Ministry of Finance (Denmark), the Ministry of Economy (Azerbaijan), the Ministry of Planning (Benin, Indonesia), the Ministry of Environment (Maldives), the Ministry of International Cooperation (Jordan) etc. What is important to underline is that the higher the rank of the person or unit in charge of leading the 2030 Agenda, the more commitment the Government conveys.

The **department of Statistics**' role has become increasingly important in the implementation of the SDGs. One of the key lessons learnt from the MDGs is that there exists the need for more and better data in order to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the global agendas. Now, the statistical departments play a key role in the process of formulating the targets and indicators, identifying related data sources and executing proper data compilation, thus ensuring that the monitoring is firmly grounded on established principles and sound statistical practices. For this, their relationship and exchange of information with the key stakeholders, especially LRGs and their associations, will be essential. As the 2030 Agenda greatly exceeds the content typically collected by the departments of Statistics,

mechanisms should also be put into practice, where applicable, for the systematic collection of data by all institutions that, in addition to the department of Statistics, have relevant databases.

In **Jordan**, the Department of Statistics has the responsibility of quality assurance and clearance of all indicators and a special SDG team within the Department was created for this purpose. The responsibilities related to quality assurance for the SDG indicators will be reflected in the National Statistical Strategy, currently under development, which will also focus on the importance of strengthening the quality of administrative records in covering important data gaps in the future.

The data collected, compiled and analyzed by the departments of Statistics in the context of the machinery established for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda will be the core of the reporting process that is explained below.

How is the consultation process taking place? Who is invited to participate?

The consultation process for the elaboration of the VNR should be as participative as possible in accordance with paragraphs 78 and 79 of resolution 70/1. The specific modalities for engagement are likely to vary from country to country and are to be decided by the national governments.

Albeit not particularly recommended, some national governments may decide not to include stakeholders in the process. The elaboration of the VNRs is then circumscribed by the participation of the different national Ministries or even by the work of the group piloting the SDG implementation (the high-level group, the expert team etc.). Other governments may opt for the inclusion of key stakeholders with national relevance, also paying particular attention to leaving no-one behind such as the indigenous community or the youth.

It is essential to include LRGs and their associations in the process of elaboration of the VNR. However, many countries do not perceive subnational levels or localization as the core of necessary bottom-up approaches. Top-down approaches might lead LRGs to conceive SDGs as an external burden or imposition, and to lose interest in their implementation at local level.

The methodology may vary substantially, but it should allow stakeholders to give their opinion and even submit their own SDG reports, which should be used for the final version of the VNR (e.g. Netherlands, Sweden, see example below). There are several principles that should be borne in mind in this participatory process:

- Sharing the different steps to take and schedules to stakeholders
- Conducting public campaigns to encourage active participation in the entire preparation process
- Utilizing various channels, online and offline, to give opportunities to the public to provide input
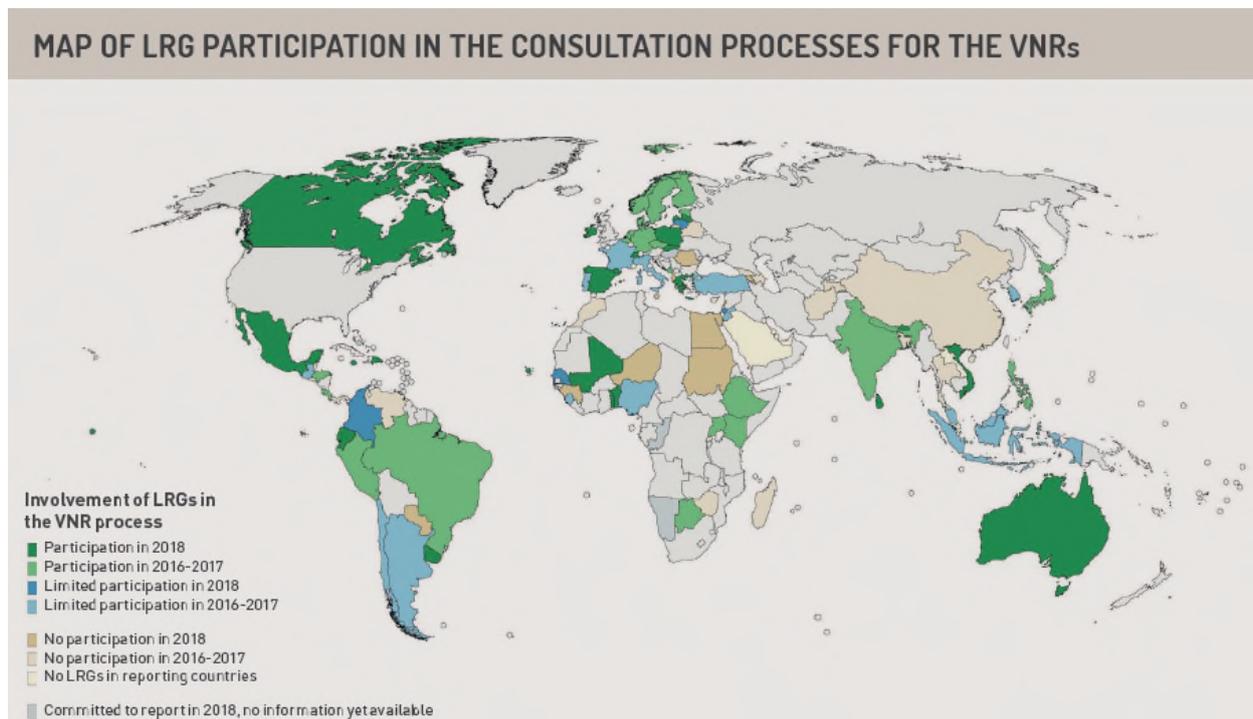
- Involving all stakeholders, both government (including LRGs) and non-state actors such as academics and experts, philanthropy and business actors, civil society organizations and the media to ensure representation of all groups or public elements
- Documenting and publicizing to ensure accountability and transparency of the process in line with the open government principle
- Using easy-to-understand language to reduce the information gap of the involved parties

National governments should interact with relevant stakeholders and listen to their opinions and evaluations of the work done. National governments may also resort to national and international studies and analyses, whether sectoral or cross-sectoral, especially in the fields where the country might not have methodology and resources for conducting research. This will be useful for the VNR but also for implementation purposes. This includes using administrative data provided by ministries and agencies, as well as reports and reviews produced by international organizations, expert evaluations, monitoring results of regional development programs, and other information from international sources.

UCLG, in the framework of the GOLD Report, is mobilizing regional experts to collect information and develop regional reports, which could be useful for LRGAs. Other international networks (ICLEI, C40, CLGF) are collecting information and developing databases on different issues –e.g. carbon reporting– that could be useful as well. Other examples are the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC, one of whose management team members being CEMR), the SDG Index developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and the OECD Study on Distance Measurement to the SDGs' Goals. These indexes offer country rankings as well as overall SDG performance rates according to their own specific criteria, which might prove very helpful for the countries' self-assessment.

What is the specific situation of LRGs and their associations as regards participation in the VNR?

At the moment of publishing the Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2018 HLPF (July 2018), in 23 out of the 43 countries which submitted information to UCLG (53%) LRGs affirm to have participated in the reporting process and the preparation of the VNRs. Although LRGs of only 28 countries out of 65 in 2016 and 2017 combined stated the same, meaning that there has been progress, the integration of the local and regional perspective in reporting and follow-up remains a major challenge.

MAP OF LRG PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESSES FOR THE VNRs

Involvement of LRGs in the VNR process

- Participation in 2018
- Participation in 2016-2017
- Limited participation in 2018
- Limited participation in 2016-2017
- No participation in 2018
- No participation in 2016-2017
- No LRGs in reporting countries
- Committed to report in 2018, no information yet available

Source: Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2018 HLPF (July 2018, UCLG, Global Taskforce)

Chapter 3: Participation of LRGs in the reporting process

The participation of LRGAs in the reporting process is essential for the inclusion of the local perspective into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. LRGAs, however, may or may not be directly invited to participate in the elaboration of the VNR.

National governments may launch consultation processes that involve LRGs, but they may also do it without them. Actually, the presence of LRGs will be most probably channeled through their national associations and networks (maybe big cities, metropolises and federal regions are directly called to participate by national authorities, but it is not guaranteed either). Once the consultation process has been launched, LRGAs should prepare themselves to participate and guarantee that the local and regional perspective is taken into account.

If LRGAs have been invited to participate, they will adjust their participation to the framework given (or even strive for a more prominent role if they do not feel represented enough). If LRGAs have not been invited to participate, which may be the case in many countries, a formal request should be addressed to national authorities justifying the importance of including the views and contributions on LRGs to the SDGs. In this context, alliances with other stakeholders, including the international community present in the country, will be essential.

Today the picture of LRGs in all countries that have either submitted or committed to submit a VNR on the implementation of the SDGs to the HLPF in 2016 (22 countries reporting), 2017 (43 countries) and 2018 (46 countries) is quite diverse. Two lessons learnt from the elaboration of the UCLG Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2017 HLPF can be underlined in this vein:

1. **Stronger efforts are needed to involve LRGs** i**n the VNRs and institutional mechanisms for coordination and follow-up.** Less than half of the VNR consultations and one third of the follow-up mechanisms in 99 countries involve local governments. The achievement of the SDGs will require collaboration within and between governments 'to a level that has not been seen before'. Current levels of involvement are clearly insufficient and threaten to become an unbridgeable gap for the achievement of the goals. National governments and UN institutions need to further develop multilevel spaces for dialogue and joint action. These must ensure the participation and engagement of local and regional leaders, both in the reporting process through the VNRs and in the national and global follow-up institutional mechanisms, with adapted agendas and policy support.

2. **New institutional frameworks for collaborative governance**. Progress towards more collaborative governance requires better spaces for dialogue between different levels of administration. Many countries acknowledge the role of LRGs, and yet their VNRs or national strategies do not always demonstrate a clear strategy for the 'localization' or 'territorialization' of the SDGs. The SDGs are an opportunity to catalyze both local sustainable development as well as a more inclusive and resilient urban development.

How to foster ownership within the LRGA?

It is clear that LRGAs will not be able to report on the LRGs' performance as regards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda if these do not fully participate in the process. LRGAs have the duty and need to get LRGs involved through the political and technical staff present in the organization, and especially those with high ranks (the President, the Mayor or any other official leading the organization) aiming to foster as much commitment and ownership as possible. In this sense it needs a well-balanced mix of bottom-up initiative from the LRGs and rather top-down efforts from LRGAs to ensure full participation.

LRGAs have been very active in raising awareness amongst their LRGs about the importance of the 2030 Agenda. In **Brazil**, 7,000 local elected officials participated in the national congress of the National Confederation of Brazilian Municipalities (CNM) and the national association of municipalities provided newly-elected local authorities with a Guide for the Incorporation of SDGs into Municipal Multi-Year Plans. In **Germany**, the national association has drafted a charter to express the support of local governments to the process of SDG implementation, while in the **Netherlands**, the national association has involved LRGs via a number of dedicated campaigns (e.g., the Municipalities4GlobalGoals campaign). In **South Africa**, SALRGA aligned its internal working groups with each of the SDGs, and the national association of Benin (ANCB) created a special thematic commission on the goals.

One in every five **Flemish** municipalities has signed the Global Goals, Local Focus declaration, sponsored by the regional association of local governments, VVSG. In **Portugal**, the Inter-Municipal Network for

Cooperation and Development (RICD), with a membership of 20 municipalities, has organized a travelling exposition on the SDGs and their localization that has been roving the country since 2016. The **Finnish** association organized regional 'tours' on the SDGs in collaboration with the 2030 Agenda Coordination Secretariat at the national level. Many other associations have been intensively active in this regard, mapping initiatives by LRGs and fostering exchange (**Sweden**), promoting workshops (**Botswana**) and training activities (**Togo**), and communication on various media, magazines, and web-based portals and resources (e.g., **Belgium**, **Denmark** and the city of Seoul, in the Republic of **Korea**) to further engage their members.

The success of these and other activities should be the platform to reach these local governments again and get them involved in the continuation of the process.

Possible exercise: discuss what would hamper the promotion of the SDGS within the LRGA internally:

- would the presidency/board pose problems to the Agenda? Would they deem it unnecessary?

- would the technical staff see it as a new burden on their daily activities?

- would the upcoming finalization of the mandate be encouraging or discouraging for the implementation of the SDGs?

How can LRGAs get in touch with the authorities in charge of the VNR?

LRGAs should arrange institutional contacts with the authorities in charge of the consultation process in order to clarify modalities and procedures of participation. This includes:

- Getting in touch with the national focal point at the highest political level in order to seek the commitment of the national government to include the local data and views in the process
- Maintaining permanent contact with the national focal point at technical level aiming to exchange information that might be useful in a bidirectional sense
- Reaching a consensus on the modalities and procedures for LRGA's effectively participation in the VNR. The national authorities in charge of the VNR and the LRGA will have to agree upon whether the local visions are presented in a LRG report, if the association is allowed to participate in the high-level meetings or in specific working sessions, if it will share the participative space with other stakeholders, if participation will be limited to filling in a questionnaire etc. A duly concretized calendar shall be given to the association in order to ensure its participation is designed and prepared in the best possible manner. It is essential that LRGAs ensure that those modalities and procedures allow for an effective participation of LRGs and not a mere formal one
- Co-organizing, with the national government, a conference to present the national strategy and the way LRGs have been involved in the process – thus offering visibility to the work done by LRGs and to their critical role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

- Promote new initiatives to support the localization of the SDGs, generate more consensual alignment mechanisms in order to foster a bottom-up approach, give more visibility to local political initiatives etc.

> Possible exercise: create a template of letter that could be sent to the national government in order to request the involvement of LRGAs in the VNR. For this, the LRGA will need to ascertain who is the department in charge of elaborating the VNR and thus the most appropriate recipient of the letter.
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> The answer could contain the main key points that the trainee should have included and reflections thereof.

What are positive aspects of building alliances with local, national and international stakeholders?

LRGAs should analyze what other stakeholders need to be involved in the process: private sector, academia, CSOs, foundations, international organizations… This analysis should include information on how these stakeholders are contributing to the SDGs and what characteristics the paths for collaboration should have.

CSOs and the private sector are good allies to influence the reporting process. In many situations, LRGs and CSOs are already working together to implement the SDGs. If they are already sharing strategies, including the reporting process would be an asset.

> Local governments also participate in various platforms and initiatives in collaboration with civil society organizations, the private sector, professional organizations, and many other stakeholders. The **Belgian** SDG Charter counts on the support of a very diverse consortium of eight partners – ranging from a retail supermarket company to a municipality, to several big and small NGOs – delivering information on the SDGs and their implementation at the local level to their respective audiences and was signed, among many other stakeholders and governmental bodies, also by 73 municipalities.

Building alliances with the academia, experts and research centers could also be crucial as these can support LRGAs efforts to influence the reporting process by providing data and information. Strategic partnerships with the departments of Statistics ensure the expansion of data sources and complementarity of information, thus offering more specific and reliable results as well as a clearer description of the reality of the SDG implementation process.

According to the VNR submitted, many countries still consider the availability of disaggregated data and the reliability of data collection capacities and resources as one of the key vulnerabilities of the localization process. It is nevertheless important to underline the need to include geographical disaggregation broken down to the regional and municipal levels to guarantee the effective participation of subnational governments in the monitoring process.

In May 2017 the **German** associations of cities (DST), towns and municipalities (DSTGB) and counties (DLT), with the support of federal and academic institutions and foundations, launched an initiative to develop SDG Indicators for Municipalities, in order to design adequate and consistent indicators to assess SDG implementation at the municipal level – i.e., in both cities with 5,000 inhabitants or more and rural districts.

Several international organizations such as the UNDP, UN Habitat or the European Union have a solid experience working with LRGs and are strongly committed with the localization of SDGs. Taking advantage of their direct official contacts with the central government, international organizations can bridge many of the difficulties that LRGAs might face in the consultation process.

Many national networks and associations are supporting their members in the integration of the SDGs into local policies; sometimes in partnership with UN agencies. They have done so through training activities (e.g., in Colombia), guidelines and roadmaps (the example of Brazil is relevant, in this regard, while at the global level the GTF has disseminated a Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs), portals and other resources for knowledge exchange and the delivery of innovative solutions to implementation problems.

UNDP, in particular, is currently working with national LRG associations in various countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, supporting awareness-raising efforts via fora and workshops (e.g., Ethiopia and Uganda), dedicated programs and training (e.g., Bangladesh, Costa Rica, and Honduras) or assisting regions and municipalities in the elaboration of their local plans and making them compatible with the SDGs (in Brazil, Ecuador or Mexico, for example, in the states of Chiapas and Jalisco).

The UNDP-ART initiative and UN-Habitat, which in partnership with the Global Taskforce have co-led the UN dialogues on the localization of the SDGs worldwide, have also contributed to the dissemination of the localization approach in various regions. As a consequence of these efforts, several bilateral cooperation schemes and multilateral development banks are now considering the localization approach as a key strategic tool to convert their global agendas into sub-national initiatives and actions, thus improving policy coordination by adopting multi-level coordination and governance systems. UNDESA and some UN Country Teams have worked with countries to identify countries' needs and provide capacity building in these areas, and it would be a great opportunity to extend this collaboration to LRGs as well.

Other key international stakeholders in this sense are the European Union and its delegations around the world, international or regional development banks and all kinds of donors such as NGOs, foundations etc.

A useful exercise for the course attendees is stakeholder mapping. The aim is to analyze their own context and point out the different stakeholders they would involve in the process. Ensure participants identify specific stakeholders of their territory and not just categories (CSOs, academia, private sector, national government). After identifying specific stakeholders, they should also consider the pros and cons of each of them.

Chapter 4: Collecting local results and views, drafting the LRGA's own review and aiming for global impact

What data and information are needed… and how to collect them?

In order to contribute to the VNR with the local and regional perspective and ensure that this perspective responds entirely to reality, LRGAs should collect data and information (best practices, new policies) on good practices of LRGs' contributions to achieving the SDGs.

LRGAs can use different methodologies to collect data and information. The most common one is the submission of a survey with specific questions on the state of the art of SDG implementation at local level, aimed both at LRGs and local stakeholders.

The information gathered through the survey allows for the mapping of the LRGs that are committed to the new Agenda as well as for sorting out the information as regards:

- Top implemented SDGs and targets
- Top priorities
- Types of interventions (awareness raising, alignment, projects etc.)
- Best practices
- Allocated budget

This process should also help ascertain how the priorities defined by LRGs in their local development plans are recognized in the national strategies for the implementation of the SDGs. At the same time, it should help identify the major gaps between national SDG strategies and LRGs' demands and consequently develop an advocacy strategy for more support.

> **Colombia** has carried out an extensive review on how the country's territorial development plans and capital cities development plans include the SDGs. Next steps will be the analysis of how the local authorities strive to improve the contribution to the SDGs detected in the review, which should be ascertained through, amongst others, a selected set of indicators aligned with the indicators defined by the UN for the monitoring and evaluation of the progress made.
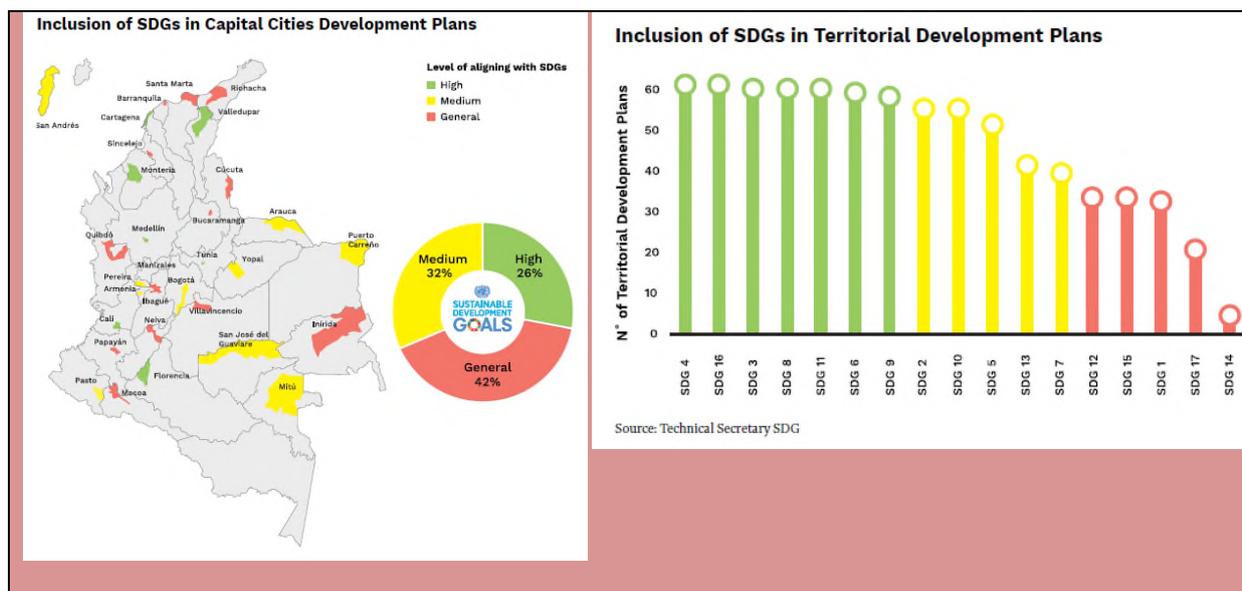
Indeed, LRGAs should identify those indicators that are used by LRGs to monitor their plans, programs and projects and measure results. An effort should be made to align the local indicators available to the LRGs and those proposed by the UN. This important exercise will allow for an easier comparison of progress made amongst the different local governments in the world. It is however a hard task given that the UN indicators are aimed for the calculation of national variables, which are sometimes far away from those at local level. In any case, LRGAs should ensure comparable results are included in the report.

Is there a template to draft the review?

At the end of the process, LRGAs should develop their own review based on local achievements and share it with the appropriate national, regional and global organizations (UCLG sections and World Secretariat) to contribute to strengthen the voice of LRGs in regional and international fora.

Aiming for more homogeneous results, the UN Secretary General made a proposal for voluntary common reporting guidelines for VNR (UN SG Report A/70/684, Annex 1). In turn, UCLG adapted the structure proposed by the UN for the VNR and made a new proposal that can be found below. The text between brackets explains the content of each issue as extracted from the UN's Guidelines for Voluntary Countries Reviews. The LRGAs' country reports should be limited to three-four pages.

1. **Summary** (half page): synthesis of the report, highlighting the role of LRGs in localizing the SDGs and underscoring one or two good practices and one or two challenges, where LRGs would need support in terms of capacity-building, finance, partnership, technology, etc**.**

2. **Introduction** (two paragraphs): a short paragraph presenting the national context. Has the country started the SDGs implementation process? Why are LRGs developing their own country report? What are the key challenges for LRGs in the 'localization' of the SDGs in their country?

   A paragraph with a short description of the current LRGs situation: number of LRGs, key responsibilities for urban and territorial management – e.g., service delivery, economic

development, etc. – key figures on local finances (ratio of local revenues, expenditures and investments on national government total revenues, expenditures and public investments).

3. **Methodology and process for the preparation of the review** (one short paragraph): To what extent have LRGs been consulted for the National Voluntary Review? To what extent have their views been considered?

4. **Policy and enabling environment** (2 pages)

   a. **Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals:** [outline the efforts made to inform and involve all stakeholders – including LRGs – in the process, including dissemination of review process]

      – *Participation of LRGs in the SDG national debate***:** if the country has initiated the process for the implementation of the SDGs, the report should provide more information about how LRGs have been involved in the political debate. How can political and institutional balances contribute to the involvement of LRGs in the implementation of the global agendas?

      The LRGs report should also highlight any initiatives taken by the associations of local governments and sub-national governments to disseminate information about the SDGs and initiate the implementation process at the sub-national level (localization).

   b. **Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national (and local) frameworks:** [It may describe national efforts made to integrate the SDGs into the country's legislation, policies, plans and programmes, including the sustainable development strategy. Countries could consider referring to major efforts undertaken by local authorities and non -State actors to implement the Goals, including partnerships.]

      This point can be **developed jointly with point f** (see below) on "institutional mechanisms".

      – *LRGs and national policies*: how have LRGs been associated to the definition of national policies or strategies for SDG implementation? To what extent have LRGs priorities and positions been considered in national policies or national development plans to support the 'localization' process?

      – *Multilevel governance*: is there any specific mechanism created to ensure the follow-up of the implementation and review processes? If so, how have LRGs been associated (e.g., in Brazil, the creation of a National Committee on the SDGs – via Decree 8892, October 2016 – that includes representatives from ministries, LRGs and civil society)? Have the SDGs had any impact on national legislation or institutional frameworks to promote reforms and improve coordination between national and subnational governments (multilevel governance)?

      – *Current institutional framework*: the report should explain the role of LRGs in the 'localization' of SDGs, based on the current distribution of responsibilities between different levels of government (as defined through decentralization laws, rules and policies); on national capacity building programmes for sub-national governments; and on what reforms are being or should be considered in order to strengthen the achievement of SDGs in territories and thus "leaving no one behind".

      – *On local democracy*: given the critical role of the involvement of local stakeholders in SDGs implementation, the LRGs report should analyze if the national legislation and the local institutional framework facilitate and promote civil society and economic stakeholders' participation in local decision making (e.g., Goal 16.6: "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels"). LRGs should highlight sub-national governments' initiatives to promote the participation of local stakeholder (e.g., via participatory planning and budgeting).

- *Create an enabling environment:* the LRGs report should stress how national frameworks either facilitate or hinder LRGs' initiatives. Even if in most countries it is probably too early to identify any important legal or institutional reforms, the LRGs report can define what the key areas are at the legislative and national policy levels that should be revised in order to support SDG localization and the creation of an 'enabling environment' for LRGs.

- *On indicators*: as regards monitoring and review, what can national governments do to 'disaggregate' national data? How are LRGs associated to these initiatives?

- On the other hand, the LRGs report should highlight any sub-national initiatives taken to integrate SDGs into local development plans, local policies, the strengthening of institutional coordination, planning mechanisms at local or regional levels, and the creation of new local alliances (between LRGs and local stakeholders) to support the localization process.

C. **Integration of the three dimensions** [discuss how the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) are being integrated, as well how principles of the 2030 Agenda, for example, leaving no one behind, have been mainstreamed in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals]

Whenever possible, LRGs should highlight, through concrete examples, how local and regional development plans bring about a more integrated approach that includes the three dimensions (plus culture).

d. **Goals and targets** [brief information on progress and the status of all Sustainable Development Goals, and critical difficulties encountered in reaching them. If possible, provide a more in-depth analysis on a few selected Goals and targets and innovative policies. The discussion could focus on trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues, and lessons learned]

e. **Thematic analysis** [include an analysis of progress and initiatives related to the high-level political forum's thematic focus for that year]

Point D and E could be developed together, focusing on the analysis of national policies and LRGs actions to support specific thematic areas, e.g., Goal 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements.
The LRGs report should highlight specific initiatives undertaken by sub-national governments in relevant areas, e.g., slum upgrading, strengthening urban participatory planning, urban mobility, water and waste management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, among others.
Whenever possible, the report will refer to SDG indicators collected by national and international institutions and, if needed, will add indicators identified by LRGs to pinpoint major gaps in the official statistical systems on SDG achievements.

f. **Institutional mechanisms** [How views of different ministries, agencies, levels of government and non-governmental stakeholders are taken into account and on the institution in charge of coordination and integration. How responsibility is allocated among various levels of Government (national, subnational and local) for coherent implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda]

This issue should be addressed jointly with **point b** (see above).

5. **Means of implementation** (one paragraph, half a page max.) [discuss how means of implementation are mobilized, what difficulties this process faces, and what additional resources are needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, including in terms of financing, capacity development needs, including for data and statistics knowledge-sharing, technology and partnerships]

This section should introduce a general analysis of the evolution of local financing; whether and how resources have been decentralized to allow LRGs to meet their responsibilities; and what needs to be improved to fiscal decentralization and develop equalization mechanisms between regions and

territories, in order to support a balanced and cohesive territorial development and "leave no one behind".

6. **Conclusion** (half a page) [a summary of the analysis, findings and policy implications]

A less detailed version of the review is proposed below for those LRGAs experiencing difficulties to collect the relevant data required. This version includes the minimum aspects that should be included in order to have a broad perspective on the localization of the SDGs in a given country.

1. **Summary**: synthesis of the report, highlighting the role of LRGs in localizing the SDGs and underscoring one or two good practices and one or two challenges where LRGs would need support in terms of capacity-building, finance, partnership, technology, etc.

2. **Methodology and process for the preparation of the review**: sources of the data and information collected, number of participating LRGs etc.

3. **Policy and enabling environment**

   a) *Mechanisms of participation (multi-level governance) of LRGs in the SDG national debate for the definition, follow-up and evaluation of the contributions to the Agenda (ad-hoc mechanism, informal consultations, no participation at all…)*

   b) *Extent to which LRGs' priorities have been considered in national laws, policies or plans to support the localization process, as well as the possibility of LRGs to contribute to the Agenda. Data collection mechanisms*

   c) *Initiatives taken to integrate SDGs into local laws, plans and policies; the strengthening of institutional coordination, and the creation of new local alliances (between LRGs and local stakeholders) to support the localization process*

   d) *Main difficulties for LRGs (legal constraints, lack of financing, capacity development needs, necessary technical resources, differences between territories…)*

4. **Goals and targets: thematic analysis**

   a) *Analysis of progress, initiatives and challenges related to the HLPF's thematic focus for that year, and others considered relevant. Whenever possible, by using SDG indicators or indicators adapted to this end*

5. **Conclusion**

With these guidelines on how to draft the report on local achievements as regards the 2030 Agenda, course attendees should be able to elaborate a draft version (of course with incomplete information and preliminary conclusions) about the situation in their own country. It is thus proposed here to offer them some information regarding the state of the art of the SDG implementation in a country (real or imaginary) so that they can elaborate their own report.

Chapter 5: Sharing the results

Once the report has been drafted and agreed upon by all LRGs being part of the association, the LRGA has to ensure this document is received and read by the national authorities, and subsequently introduced in the VNR. LRGAs should also seek to extend the report to regional and international local government networks such as the UCLG regional sections and World Secretariat. UCLG and other organizations will ensure the message is heard worldwide, particularly at the High-Level Political Forum, as the official UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The message aims to underline the role of strong local leadership and commitment of LRGs in the achievement of the SDGs.

By now, the 2017 report mentioned above, entitled "National and sub-national governments on the way towards localization", introduces some of the initial outcomes drawn from first-hand information collected by networks of local and regional governments in over 30 countries, complemented by an analysis of the 63 official VNR and 'Main Messages' presented so far by national governments for the 2016 and 2017 HLPF.

The report shows that LRGs are taking action or are beginning to act for the localization of the SDGs in all regions, but also that 'localization' remains unaddressed by the HLPF agenda. With nowhere to report from a local perspective or to showcase what is being done, the international community risks missing an opportunity to enhance the role of local and regional governments in achieving the SDGs. An adequate reporting framework should reward governments taking action to localize the SDGs and foster more local involvement where localization is lacking.

The report shares UCLG's high hopes for the 'Localizing the SDGs' partnership with UNDP and UN-Habitat, the Local 2030 Hub (promoted by the office of the UN Secretary General), and the Local4Action Hub, which will support the localization strategy of UCLG and contribute to the broader agenda of the Global Taskforce.