

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



**MADRID**



**UCLG**  
United Cities  
and Local Governments

**REPORT**

# Towards a new generation of Voluntary Local Reviews

## Connecting VLRs and VNRs

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING**  
February 23<sup>rd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021



IMPLEMENTING  
THE NEW  
URBAN AGENDA





## ÍNDICE

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Informe.....  | 3  |
| Resumen de intervenciones .....   | 4  |
| Day 1 - 23 February 2021 .....  | 3  |
| Opening session .....   | 3  |
| Session 1: LESSONS LEARNED AND NEW CHALLENGES: Towards<br>a new generation of VLRs .....                          | 4  |
| Session2: JOINING THE DOTS: Linkages between VLRs and VNRs .....  | 6  |
| Day 2 - 24 February 2021.....   | 9  |
| Opening.....  | 9  |
| Session 3: A NEW GENERATION OF VLRs IN THE MAKING: exploring<br>diversity of reviewing approaches worldwide ..... | 9  |
| Session 4: WHAT IS NEXT? Main challenges towards a new generation<br>of VLRs and the VNR connection .....         | 12 |
| Concept Note.....   | 16 |
| Programme.....  | 26 |
| Biographies .....   | 31 |





## Expert Group Meeting on Voluntary Local Reviews

### Report

(Event time is fixed according to CET / GMT+1)

DAY 1 \_23 February 2021

#### OPENING SESSION

**Carmen Sanchez-Miranda**, Head of UN-Habitat Country Office in Spain highlighted the importance of aligning the policy making to the 2030 agenda. VLRs are changing how we think about the localization of the SDGs, supporting multi-level and multi-stakeholder connections.

#### OPENING REMARKS

- **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, UN-Habitat Executive Director

Maimunah Mohd Sharif assured that cities are making a great effort to recover from the pandemic but this recovery must be anchored at the local level. We need development strategies and policies that not only seek recovery, but are aligned with the SDGs. The global community has embraced VLRs and at UN-Habitat considers them a very powerful tool to advance in the localization of the SDGs and connect citizens with decision-making. We are seeing unprecedented investment in city data and VLRs facilitate collaboration across different levels and administrations to manage it. VLRs provide the mechanisms for structural dialogue to build a strong commitment to better institutional cooperation and share better information.

- **Emilia Saiz**, UCLG Secretary General

Emilia Saiz explained that VLRs are very important in terms of monitoring and triggering the process. SDGs are still a very important and useful framework but capacity needs to be further developed at the local level. The new urban agenda is a very important and forgotten piece. It doesn't matter how many VLRs we have if there is no dialogue. The forums are tools for localization in each country and we must ensure that these forums can help to create reports and change the policies of the future. She also stressed the importance of creating a link between local and national exams beyond the roles of each administration.

- **Santiago Saura Martínez**, Councillor for International Affairs and Cooperation of Madrid City Council

Santiago Saura explained that the focus of this meeting is crucial to align the efforts of the cities to a common goal in the fulfillment of the agendas. He also assured that a VLR will be carried out in Madrid taking into account national and European efforts. It is intended to work with all the actors involved to build a shared vision and promote cooperation between the different levels and departments. In this context, one of the main problems that limits monitoring is the lack of

structural links in which there are mechanisms for the integration of the national government with local governments. For this reason, Madrid has decided to set up a strong and solid association that has multi-level actors to monitor the process and reinforce the power of the local government.

## Session 1: LESSONS LEARNED AND NEW CHALLENGES: Towards a new generation of VLRs

- **Aissata M.B.Camara**, Deputy Commissioner for Operations and Strategic Partnerships in the Mayor's Office for International Affairs, New York

Aissata M.B.Camara assured that the city of New York was the first to submit its report in 2018 during the high-level political forum. Since then, thousands of global actors have joined the commitment to the strategy to meet the SDGs. The VLRs are more than a report, they allow listening to the different actors to have a strategic plan and demonstrate how the SDGs impact people's lives. We want to invite other local governments to join this movement. When VLRs began all the information, tools and technical support that can be found today was not available. She also explained the intention to create exchange platforms to ensure that all people feel the impact of our interventions.

- **Dirk Temmerman**, Director of International Relations, City of Gent

Dirk Temmerman explained that VLRs are a strong communication tool. One of the main challenges for VLRs is getting them to be long term process keeping all actors active. Another of the great challenges is data, for which it is needed more capacity building for local administrations.



Left: **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**; Right: **Emilia Saiz**

- **Natasha Primo**, Head of Policy & Research, Strategic Development Information & GIS, City of Cape Town

Natasha Primo highlighted the efforts put into developing indicators. The focus has been placed not so much on the data but on the participation and production of VLRs and the limitations that arise. Localization focuses on internal capacity building and participation at the international level. She highlighted the importance of links between national and local governments and that regional governments take the lead and take responsibility for the VLRs.

- **Mariana Cammisa**, SDG officer, City of Buenos Aires

Mariana Cammisa remarked that the VLRs are a process and a structural dialogue and open the possibility of mapping where we want the city to go. It also allows all decisions during the process to have been made based on specific data. To get this data it is necessary to work with many actors and make the VLRs more accessible to anyone. She also highlighted that VLRs have demonstrated their ability to adapt to different circumstances during the pandemic.

#### **DISCUSSANT:**

- **Alice Siragusa**, Project Leader, European Commission Joint Research Centre

Alice Siragusa highlighted that VLRs are the most powerful tool to fill the gap between the SDGs and the everyday of cities and life. To that end, two of the most important areas that VLRs facilitate are data collection and citizens engagement. Local governments are beginning to receive recognition for their important role in these processes, but their voice needs to be heard more. The next generation of VLRs must engage the different levels of the administration and have greater citizen participation and at the same time be based more on data and objective facts. She also highlighted the importance of having quality VLRs that can play a fundamental role in the development of VNRs.

- **Marlène Siméon**, Director of Operations, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) – UCLG Europe

Marlène Siméon explained that VLRs are a multistakeholder experimentation and a dynamic process. Citizens have to be the target and they have to be userfriendly in terms of data access. They are a very good communication tool and are able to trigger different processes on municipalities. She remarked the fundamental role of local associations and the importance of building a European movement with European priorities. They must also have a clear link with VNRs, so that they work together and collaboratively to join forces. For this, it is necessary to break silos between different levels and departments.

## **Session 2: JOINING THE DOTS: Linkages between VLRs and VNRs**

### **The case of Finland**

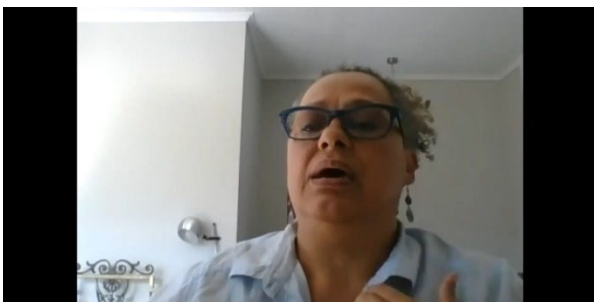
- **Riina Pursiainen**, Project Coordinator, Prime Minister's Office

**Riina Pursiainen underlined that to carry out these processes it is necessary to take into account the entire government and the entire society. Local processes can help other countries assess their own SDG compliance processes, hence local efforts have a clear impact on a global level. In that regard, peer to peer review is a very useful tool for information exchange. The exchange of information must also occur between the different levels of government to achieve the greatest possible coordination and cooperation. Indicators are key to guiding decision-making, but they**

should not saturate administrations with work.

- **Mia Malin, SDG Programme Officer, City of Helsinki**

Mia Malin highlighted that cities have been quite active in producing VLRs in Finland. The cooperation has been very active although sometimes in an informal way. VLRs should be less structured and more flexible, giving the freedom to choose the best way to carry them out and to communicate them. VLRs represent the collaboration and support of the national and local governments, being very important the co-creation and cooperation for the production of the VLRs. During the process in Helsinki, the support received from the Prime Minister has been very important and the foundations have been laid for the work of other cities.



Left: **Natasha Primo**; Right: **Aissata M.B. Camara**

### **The case of Japan**

- **Aya Yoshida, Director, Global Issues Cooperation Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Aya Yoshida stated that in order to realize a society that leaves no one behind we need to spread SDGs widely throughout the world and to this end it is important to incorporate SDGs into strategies and the politics not only of the national government but also of the local governments. Promoting SDGs in a local government also helps revitalization of local economies, community approaches and contributes to resolving the local challenges.

- **Hitomi Shimizu, SDGs Ambassador, Shimokawa Town**

Hitomi Shimizu highlighted the importance to the Shimokawa process of the alignment with the Japanese government. The VLRs must ensure that no one is left behind and this requires the participation of as many actors as possible. Another important factor in the development of the VLRs is the awareness of citizens, disseminating and teaching what is being done. The VLRs also allow the SDGs to be used as a tool for city planning and regional revitalization with a sustainable community.

### **The case of Spain**

- **Gabriel Ferrero, Director General of Sustainable Development Policies, Ministry of**



## Foreign Affairs.

Gabriel Ferrero explained that in Spain, the work that the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces has carried out has been fundamental. It is important to accompany support for localization with support at the global level through government collaboration and an articulation of governance not so focused on reporting but on how to develop the 2030 agenda. He also underlined the importance of knowledge exchange between peers and the challenge of being able to involve not only the big cities but the rest of the territories.

- Jonan Fernández Erdozia, General Secretary for Social Transition and 2030 Agenda, Basque Government

Jonan Fernández emphasized the importance of dissemination of the 2030 agenda in society to create awareness and greater commitment. There is a tendency to consider how to connect what is already being done with the 2030 agenda but what needs to be addressed is how the agenda transforms or changes what was already done. Governments committed to the SDGs are an asset for the implementation of the agenda and should have a greater presence in its governance. Local reports should gain strength and weight to demonstrate local commitment. The reports should respond to the knowledge of the agenda and pay attention to the change in the content of the policies.

- Carmen García, Manager Director CIEDES, Málaga City Council

Carmen García explained that one of the first steps in the process is to observe what is happening on the international scene in order to learn from other experiences. It is essential to identify lever policies and ensure a good monitoring and evaluation system based on an international framework. In addition, awareness, information, and involvement of society is necessary so that no one is left behind in the knowledge of the agenda. For an effective and efficient implementation, it is essential to align the strategies and funds for their fulfillment and to establish a follow-up on how the investment is achieving or not the established objectives.

## DISCUSSANT:

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