

PROGRESSING NATIONAL SDG IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2023

III. IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA IN PARTNERSHIP

Chapter 7: Localizing the SDGs



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Introduction

This chapter provides a quick overview of how countries report on their progress in translating the SDGs to local realities. It highlights the interaction between national and subnational government structures to effectively devolve 2030 Agenda planning, implementation and monitoring to the local level. We further outline emerging voluntary local reviews (VLRs) and similar initiatives by regions, municipalities and other local actors to support more iterative SDG policy making. Corroborated by views from civil society, the chapter also includes a brief overview of inclusion of local non-state actors in these processes.

The SDGs serve as a transformative agenda for local and cantonal authorities, aiming to enhance the overall quality of life for citizens.

[Voluntary National Review, Bosnia]

1. Localization of the SDG agenda

Approximately three-quarters of reporting countries refer in general terms to institutional arrangements in place to support the integration of the 2030 Agenda into everyday planning and implementation programmes at regional and local levels. A few countries also provide specific examples of how such arrangements are articulated. The **DRC** asserts that efforts by the Ministry of Planning go “beyond popularization, training and awareness,” and are aimed at defining priority targets specific to each province to underpin local planning processes and to put in place mechanisms for monitoring and review. **France** highlights sustainable development-based partnerships between the government and territorial institutions, further noting it has instituted mandatory sustainability reports for cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants prior to budget discussions. **Viet Nam** reports that 51 out of 63 provinces and centrally affiliated cities have issued Action Plans to implement the 2030 Agenda.

Several reports focus on localization efforts relating to specific sectors or themes, such as sports and health (**Croatia**), environmental education (**Lithuania**), payments for ecosystem services (**Guyana**), women’s political leadership (**Mongolia, Maldives** and **Croatia**), water governance (**Maldives**) or developing more context-specific data on SDG progress (**Slovakia, Turkmenistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina**). **Bosnia and Herzegovina** notes, for example, that the aim of its SDG localization initiative is to gather data and examples of good practices in local SDG implementation and serve as a platform to address challenges and obstacles faced by municipalities and cities “as they translate the SDGs into tangible actions and sustainable policies.”

Some reports also highlight horizontal linkages created through international partnerships to foster localization of the SDGs, such as Child Friendly Cities (**Iceland**), UN-Habitat SDG Cities Programme (**Portugal**) or Global Goals for Cities (**Slovakia**). **Slovakia** notes the value of such international benchmarking efforts in refining SDG targets and indicators and targets and monitoring the performance of local governments.

Other countries note their intentions to further strengthen localization efforts, for instance through the creation of regional chapters of the National SDG Council (**Chile**) or strengthening the role of local governments in SDG implementation (**Ireland**). Ireland notes that such capacity building efforts include “embedding the SDGs in governance, reporting and local planning frameworks and through community engagement.”

CSO View: Decentralized SDG governance arrangements in Chile



***Chile’s** VNR highlights plans around the creation of sub-national chapters of the National SDG Council, in the context of a broader re-design of this governance arrangement.*

According to information obtained by Chilean NGO platform ACCION, no concrete initiatives have been taken at the moment regarding the restructuring of the National Council, which was an aspect highlighted in the new SDG Strategy, and to some extent in the VNR.

That said, there have been talks on the subject of decentralizing the Council's structure, since the government is considering establishing "regional coordination councils" through a pilot programme. This initiative aims to select certain regions to establish preliminary subnational chapters of the Council, serving as a test before nationwide implementation. The specific regions for these pilot councils are still to be determined. The role of civil society in these regional Councils, as well as at the national level, remains unclear.

Source: Adapted from email exchanges with ACCION

CSO View: Fostering SDG Localization in Ireland



Ireland's VNR mentions provisions in its Second National Implementation Plan for integrating the SDGs into Local Authority work, to better support the localization of engagement around the SDG.

Ireland civil society through Coalition 2030, acknowledges the introduction of various initiatives geared at strengthening the involvement of Local governments in SDG implementation, such as an SDG Local Authority reporting mechanism, as well as a provision to foster SDG-integration in local strategic frameworks and development plans.

However, Coalition 2030 also notes that the National Implementation Plan doesn't establish any mechanism for holding local authorities accountable for SDG integration into their local strategic frameworks. The Coalition thus suggests that annual reports on progress and spending on the SDGs in each local authority should be produced and published by the County/City Manager each year up to 2030, with these reports feeding into the national report presented to both houses of the Parliament annually.

Regarding local development plans, there is currently no mechanism for ensuring consistency between development plans; as the stark discrepancy between those for Cork and Dublin demonstrates.

Source: Adapted from Coalition 2030's Recommendations on the Second National Implementation Plan

However, some also highlight an unfinished localization agenda. **St Kitts and Nevis** acknowledges that while a broad segment of the population is aware of the SDGs, "there is still much work to be done to foster a deeper understanding of the roles that the community and every individual play in the implementation of the SDGs at the local level." **Saudi Arabia** concedes "there is still much work to be done to address the underlying social, cultural, and legal barriers" that limit women's participation in decision-making processes at the local level.

GOOD PRACTICE:



Portugal reports on growing ownership of the SDGs by Portuguese municipalities, citing the following examples:

- The creation of a programme on “municipalities for the SDGs” within the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, currently with 79 members;
- Increasing incorporation of the 2030 Agenda in municipality planning and budgeting instruments, such as strategic plans, activity plans and council budgets;
- Creation of municipality technical teams responsible for promotion of the SDGs;
- Creation of communication elements and content for dissemination in council communication channels and promotion of awareness-raising actions and dedicated events for citizens and local stakeholders.

2. Voluntary local reviews

Only 33% of countries (13 out of 39) report that VLRs have been conducted in parallel with the VNR, with **St. Kitts and Nevis** and **Chile** expressing interest in launching VLRs in future. However, the EU's report notes that many local and regional authorities are increasingly engaging through voluntary local reviews, "which help foster the delivery of SDGs close to citizens and often contain tangible commitments in support of the 2030 Agenda." The report states that, so far, about one third of 129 local reviews conducted "have been adopted."

The **Central African Republic** includes a "mini-VNR" from the city of Bambari in its report. **Poland** explains that 12 voivodeships (provinces) participated in the review, revealing that most regional programmes are aimed at counteracting negative demographic trends and improving people's quality of life.


Romania submitted a synthesis report on SDG localization (see box, page 7), noting one of the main objectives was to reflect the contribution of municipalities and communes to SDG achievement, "especially in cases where there is no aggregated statistical or administrative data at local level." The VLR by Suva City in Fiji is described as "a unifying exercise at the local level, acting as a model for comprehensive bottom-up action to achieve the SDGs in Fiji."

While it does not present a VLR, **Iceland's** report includes a dedicated section prepared by the Association of Local Authorities. Emphasizing that localization of the SDGs is critical to their delivery and will help ensure that those who are at risk of being left behind are reached, **Ireland** notes that financial assistance and support should be provided to local authorities for the production of VLRs.

Some examples of voluntary local reviews

Belgium: Ghent was the first Belgian municipality to produce a baseline SDG report in 2020 with environmental data for all SDGs. The report was subsequently updated annually, each focusing on one of the three pillars of sustainable development: People in 2021, Prosperity in 2022 and Planet in 2023. Each report also addresses the crosscutting SDGs 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies) and 17 (partnerships for the goals).

Saudi Arabia: The VLR produced by Al Madinah Region Development Authority engaged various stakeholders to undertake an analysis of each of the 17 SDG areas. In addition to identifying key challenges related to data availability, stakeholder engagement, and the institutional framework for monitoring and review, the VLR also identified important lessons learned throughout the process that can contribute to future VLRs in other cities and regions.



The process reveals that preparing subnational reports can be a powerful local awareness raising tool that helps to improve policy-making process and stimulate bottom-up transformation.

[Voluntary National Review, Romania]

GOOD PRACTICE: Romania: Unpacking a VLR process



Conducted between January and May 2023, the parallel VLR process entailed collection and primary analysis of qualitative and quantitative data at the level of municipalities and communes in **Romania**. With a focus on both specific SDGs and the enabling policy framework, the VLR examined the contribution of municipalities and communes to the implementation of 12 SDGs (excluding 2, 8, 14, 15 and 17). The report notes that the scope of the review included projects subsumed to the respective SDGs, “regardless of their degree of knowledge, or formalization at the level of development strategies at the local level.”

The VLR process also sought to understand social perceptions and prioritization of SDGs at the local level, as well as the degree of knowledge and acceptance of the SDGs by local authorities. Another component in the review was exploring barriers to the implementation of sustainable development projects at the local level, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and response policies at the local level.

The VLR was produced by the Romanian Municipalities Association and the Association of Communes of Romania, with support from United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe. The review process also entailed close collaboration between coordinating entities at the local level and the Department of Sustainable Development.

3. Inclusion of local non-state actors in 2030 Agenda implementation

Approximately 41% of VNR reports do not provide information on this topic. The bulk of reports addressing stakeholder engagement at the local level do not provide an overarching analysis, but highlight specific projects and actors involved. Examples include organizing by indigenous peoples networks (**Canada** and **Guyana**), advancing women’s rights (**Brunei**) and youth programmes (**Cambodia**).

While only a few VNRs provide explicit examples, some mechanisms of engagement mentioned in reports include public consultation forums, civil society-led community projects, and issue-based advocacy platforms. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** describes “well-structured support” for CSO-led projects and initiatives in many local government units, “following a standardized methodology for the transparent selection of projects financed by public funds.” **Portugal’s** report emphasizes that in addition to the institutional dimension, “a critical mass” of individuals and organizations is necessary to change mindsets and build a society-wide movement that supports sustainable development principles and practices.

Echoing its reporting on other SDG governance parameters, **Lithuania** explicitly states that “there are no groups responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in municipalities, and the potential to involve civil society, experts and NGOs is not used.” **Ireland** highlights its five-year strategy to support the engagement of marginalized communities in consultation and decision-making processes, noting a key goal is to provide resources and toolkits at a local level “to enable meaningful participation, breaking down barriers.”

CSO View: SDG localization in Tanzania



*In **Tanzania**, the Five-Year Development Plans have been used to guide the medium-term strategic plans of all Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as Local Government Authorities (LGAs). This has enhanced the process of integrating the SDGs, into these local-level processes and ensured they are also integrated into their strategic plans and implemented through both the annual development plans and budget.*

According to the United Nations Association of Tanzania, in 2022, the Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform collaborated with the President’s Office-Regional Administration and Local Government and Local Government Training Institute to formulate a Toolkit for updating Strategic Plans in Regional Secretariats and LGAs, as well as the mainstreaming of the SDGs within local development plans. Although the document is not yet used by the LGAs due to procedural requirements in the ministry, a piloting exercise showed how effective it is for guiding SDG integration into LGAs’ development plans and budgets.

Regarding participation in the governance and monitoring of local development plans, there are indeed established structures for monitoring or decision making at LGAs that provide a space for participation of CSOs and communities from village/ Mtaa level where extraordinary meetings are held for planning and budgeting discussions. Every resident is entitled to participate in these meetings. The process then follows to the ward level, where consolidation takes place by combining each village/mtaa plans to respective wards. This is done by the Ward Development Committee where communities and civil society are allowed to participate.

The process is completed at local council, through the council management team which reviews the consolidated plans and budget is allocated. At this point, civil society and communities are also invited to participate and can even present on different topic(s) of concern.

In all these structures however, there hasn't been effective participation of civil society and communities particularly in terms of monitoring the implementation of national, regional and global agendas such as national five year plans, African Union Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

Source: Adapted from email exchanges with UNA Tanzania

CSO View: Decentralized monitoring system in Zambia



Zambia: *Zambia has integrated the SDGs within its National Development Plan (NDP). At the sub-national level, development coordination committees at the provincial, district, and ward levels are responsible for coordinating the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes outlined in the NDP, and are multi-stakeholder in nature.*

According to the report on Civic Space from the Zambian Council for Social Development regarding matters of development in Zambia, a decentralized structure for policy coordination and monitoring has been established. This structure is based on the implementation and monitoring of the National Development Plan, which is aligned with the SDGs.

At the national level, a National Development Coordinating Committee (NDCC) is active, within which CSOs participate in decision-making on national policies.

Regarding localization, the first layer is the Provincial Development Coordinating Committee (PDCC) which looks at the development priorities at provincial level, with the participation in principle of religious leaders, NGO representatives, the business associations, local authorities, line ministries, and the Permanent Secretary at the province.

Below the PDCC is the District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC) that in principle draws its participation from community-based organizations in the district, as well as from the different sectors highlighted in the NDCC. Around half of the DDCC also integrate Ward Development Committees in their deliberations.

However, in practice the PDCCs, and particularly the DDCCs are mostly government-driven, and broadly lack steady representation from CSOs and community-based organizations. Regarding inclusivity, there are still gaps that need to be closed on participation of women, youths and people with disability in these spaces currently existing. In some cases, the infrastructure where such consultations/dialogues are made presents a barrier for participation. In other circumstances, language used during such processes hinders the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples.

Source: Adapted from ZCSD's Civic Space report