LOCALIZING VNR FINDINGS THROUGH SUBNATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

WHAT IS IT?

Localizing SDG 16+ speaks to contextualizing and grounding SDG 16 in local-level realities and structures, formal and informal. Focused on bottom-up engagement, localization of SDG 16 is key to a "Leave No One Behind" approach.

- Achieving 2030 Agenda commitments to peace, justice and inclusion depends on ownership and action by a range of actors, sectors and institutions at subnational levels and supporting locally led processes to advance SDG 16.

Localizing the VNR for SDG 16 can take two tracks, one focused on Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), and the other more broadly focused on inclusion and engagement of a range of stakeholders, non-state and state.

This module will focus on LRGs, with the role of civil society in localization of the VNR and SDG 16 addressed in the subsequent civil society module.

Localizing VNR Findings through LRGs: This relates to
- The specific roles and responsibilities of LRGs in a VNR process;
- How LRGs might support, take forward or contribute to VNR processes, including through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) or Voluntary State Reviews (VSRs); and
- How different levels of government can improve their coordination and collaboration.

The degree to which VNR findings are integrated into, applied, or informed by subnational policy, programming and governance can be impacted by:

- How decentralized the larger governance system is,
- How much legal authority is held by local actors,
- How effective intergovernmental transfers are, and
- The level of public sector resources and capacity at regional and local levels.

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

While LRGs are essential institutional building blocks for local governance, the wider local governance sphere comprises a **set of state and non-state institutions, mechanisms and processes**, through which public goods and services are delivered to citizens and through which citizens can articulate their interests and needs, mediate their differences, and exercise their rights and obligations.

Local governance authorities include locally and regionally elected and appointed officials, as well as civil servants, service providers and public administrations. Elected officials include mayors, local councils, committees, and boards. These officials manage and provide oversight for local development priorities.

Non-state actors can include CSOs and community activists, religious authorities, tribal leaders, youth leaders, and other community figures.

As seen with COVID-19, local actors often play a critical, 'frontline' role in emergencies and situations of insecurity, particularly when trust in the (national) state is low.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The relevance of local governance to SDG 16+ implementation through VNR and post-VNR processes is evident by their inherent role as representatives of local communities. As highlighted by UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner, "local governments are critical in turning Agenda 2030 from a global vision into a local reality".

From the provision of public goods and the building of transparent and inclusive local institutions, to violence prevention and anti-discriminatory policies, addressing inequalities in access to justice, protecting public access to information and maintaining civic space, local institutions and actors, state and non-state, are central to translating national policies, development plans, and strategies into local action.

> 💡 **Bottom Line:** Local governance actors are key to delivering upon SDG 16 and to rebuilding trust between communities and authorities.

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

Overarching approaches and entry points for localization (relevant for SDG 16 and all SDGs) include:
- LRGs providing input for VNRs, with this input being either incorporated into a VNR or being included as supplementary information e.g. in an annex,
- Representatives of local governance structures being directly included in a national VNR coordination structure,
- Local actors integrating VNR findings into local programming and policy, and
- Monitoring sub-national and local-level progress in advancing the SDGs and connecting these reports and findings with national-level reporting (VNRs) and policy.

While some LRGs act independently from their national governments in advancing the SDGs, collaboration and coordination across levels of government – local, regional, and national – enables policy coherence and makes meaningful a whole of government and whole of society approach.

LRGS FEEDING INTO SDG WORKING GROUPS OR INTEGRATING LRGS INTO WORKING GROUPS DIRECTLY

Some national SDG Committees or Working Groups include LRGs and other local actors in VNR preparation.

However, regular consultation with LRGs has only been acknowledged in 31% of the countries that have reported since 2016, highlighting the need for more continuous collaboration both leading up to and following the VNR to strengthen policy coherence across levels of government and further link NDPs and sectoral strategies with local planning.

- For a list of these countries, see this report by local and regional governments to the 2020 HLPF.

LRGS INTEGRATING THE SDGS, NDP PRIORITIES AND VNR FINDINGS INTO LOCAL PLANS AND STRATEGIES, INCLUDING THROUGH RAPID INTEGRATED ASSESSMENTS

In addition, a number of LRGs are integrating the SDGs into local plans and strategies, involving local stakeholders in institutional and coordination mechanisms, awareness-raising activities, data collection and monitoring.

Reflective of NDPs or strategies, **rapid integrated assessments** help in developing local plans and strategies.

Guatemala, for example, has developed a methodological guide to help municipalities formulate their local development plans in alignment with their NDP.

Given that there are usually local government planning processes in place that link to NDPs (with assessments), it can often be a matter of using existing methodologies and policies and examining how they align with SDGs, SDG targets and the integrated nature of the SDGs.

LOCALIZING TARGETS AND MONITORING AT LOCAL LEVELS

About one third of the 232 SDG indicators can be measured at the local level, "while 65 percent of the SDGs depend on the direct action and involvement of local governments for their achievement".

Therefore, many LRGs are adapting national indicators to regional and local contexts, increasing data collection at territorial levels and developing their own indicators, monitoring frameworks, and accountability systems.

To this end, the 2020 "Comparative Study on SDG Monitoring Systems at Local and Regional Levels" found that of the 35 local systems studied, SDG 16 was among the top three SDGs monitored (by about 80% of systems studied).

Figure 6 SDG coverage by monitoring system
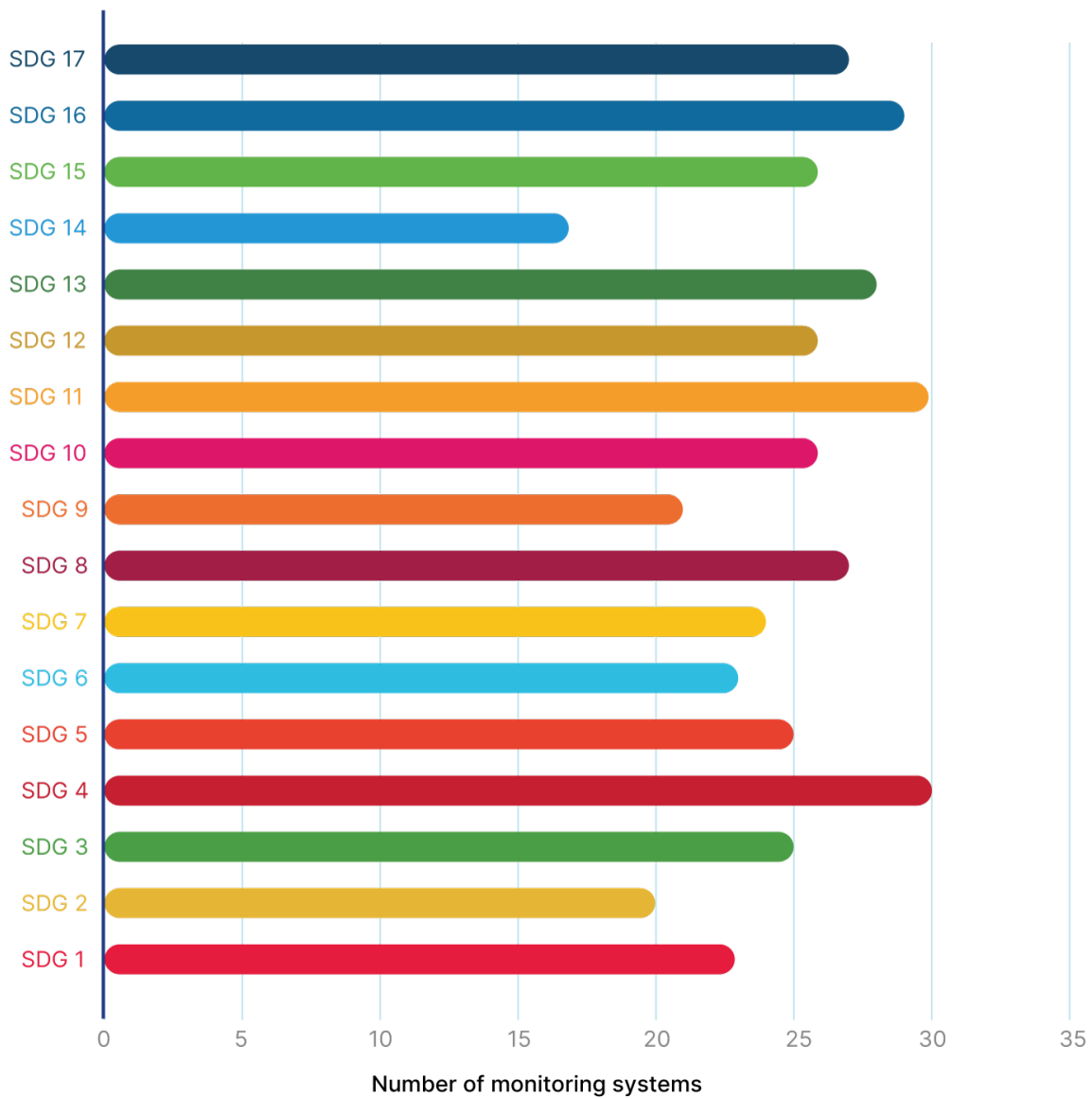
SDG coverage by monitoring system. Colours according the 5 Ps of sustainable development (People in red, Prosperity in blue, Planet in green, Peace in purple, and Partnerships in orange) **Source:** Author. r.

While rarely comparable across country contexts, this push for local and regional level monitoring has accelerated the localization process.

LRGs need to be empowered to ensure more effective monitoring practices at subnational levels. This includes strengthening SDG indicators and monitoring and reporting systems at the local level by filling identified knowledge gaps to influence the design of better-informed policies.

To this end, the OECD has developed a framework to localize the SDG targets and indicators in regions and cities, including for SDG 16.

Together2030 offers tools and guidance for developing local reporting frameworks.

VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS, VOLUNTARY SUB-NATIONAL REVIEWS AND PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

A Voluntary Local Review (VLR) or Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) is when local and regional governments conduct their own reviews to track and share progress in localizing the SDGs.

An increasing number of cities and LRGs are also conducting their own **VSR or VLR** modeled on the VNR. These are often and most effectively conducted in partnership with CSOs (see case studies).

By definition, VLRs and VSRs often strengthen intergovernmental coordination and policy coherence around the SDGs and NDPs.

While useful in advancing localization, driving ownership and ambition, and demonstrating commitment, VLRs are not officially based in the 2030 Agenda or other intergovernmental agreements.

Case Study: Oaxaca and the VSR, Mexico

Oaxaca, one of Mexico's 32 federal states, presented its first <u>Voluntary Sub-national Review (VSR)</u> at the 2020 UN General Assembly. In revising its State Development Plan (2016-2022) to align with Mexico's NDP (2019-2024), the Oaxacan Government sought to create an integrated, multi-level strategy that relates to national and regional planning in achieving the SDGs. The State Plan is to have three SDG 16 specific local indicators for future reporting. Further, in linking governance levels, Oaxaca prepared, in collaboration with GIZ, a guide for its municipalities to align local plans with the SDGs. In addition, the state government selected 10 local governments to work closely with GIZ to develop legal and planning tools for reaching the SDGs through their sustainable development plans guidelines.

Recognizing a historical lack of trust in multi-stakeholder activities, Oaxaca prioritized multi-stakeholder engagement, inclusion, and transparency in developing its VSR and next steps. The VSR's main operating body, the State Council for the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda charged with integrating the SDGs into state policy and monitoring implementation with office or department attribution, has three Working Committees that include civil society, academia, and government institutions, with civil society acting as chair. These Committees feed into the VSR and cover social inclusion (where SDG 16 lies), economic growth and environment sustainability. In addition, civil society also takes part in the Council's 'ordinary sessions'.

Furthering inclusion, the VSR has been translated into native languages, with the purpose of being socialized among various groups through partners, including different actors from the governor's cabinet as well as state TV and radio. In strengthening citizen awareness and transparency, Oaxaca also publishes online how public resources are spent and who the beneficiaries of social programs are.

Take-aways and Going Forward: Include civil society and other actors in drafting and designing the VSR, as well as implementation through national and local policy – for example, through multi-stakeholder partnerships and participatory budgeting.

Civil society is often better equipped to understand local needs, particularly for the most vulnerable, and what actions need to be prioritized. Furthermore, VSRs should be strengthened and promoted at HLPF.

Finally, VSR-generated data should be considered for the VNR (accompanied by additional standardization efforts) to better track SDG progress at local levels.

Case Study: The First VLR, New York City, U.S.

New York City (NYC) created the concept of the VLR in 2018 and has submitted two (2018 and 2019). For NYC, producing a VLR strengthened intergovernmental coordination at the local level for SDG 16 and all SDGs. Lessons learned from the 2018 VLR were incorporated into the OneNYC strategy meetings that set the policy priorities for NYC every four years. The <u>OneNYC 2050</u> strategy now includes a commitment to submit a VLR to the UN every year.

The VLR also allowed NYC to highlight partnerships that strengthen SDG 16 implementation. For example, the Mayor's Office to Prevent Gun Violence (16.1) serves as a coordinating agency, linking City initiatives, community-based nonprofits and everyday New Yorkers to partner in creating healthy, vibrant communities and addressing the causes and traumas of gun violence. In addressing issues related to corruption (16.4), the Department of Investigations within law enforcement was consulted. In unpacking links to SDG 16.3 and SDG 5.2, 2019 site visits informing the VLR included a tour of the Manhattan Family Justice Center hosted by the NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence.

Take-Aways and Going Forward: Modeled after the VNR, the VLR is an opportunity to reflect on a city's successes, areas for improvement, and how to best address challenges, including as related to SDG 16.

DECENTRALIZATION AND PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

VNR findings can also be applied to local and regional governance structures through a [transference of authority and decision-making.](#)

For example, Benin has reorganized its governance structures to make sure decisions are taken and authorities are held accountable at the local level (SDG 16.6). Eight (out of 22) ministries have developed decentralization and deconcentration plans to transfer competences to communities.

Further, a Local Governance Index has been designed to annually assess the quality of governance in Benin's 77 municipalities. Local and regional authorities are obliged to organize 'accountability sessions' in every community.

Participatory budgeting is a decision-making process or mechanism by which citizens and community members determine how part of the public budget is spent. Through participatory budgeting, citizens can prioritize spending on public resources and influence local policy, a powerful tool for inclusive and accountable governance, and as such, directly related to both localization and SDG 16.

While its impact can range from symbolic gestures to structural change in local governance systems, participatory budgeting processes can make a difference in supporting LNOB.

In Indonesia, where the SDGs are integrated in national and subnational development planning, the "Village Law", enacted in 2014, has opened up the possibility for participatory budgeting in the country's 74,000+ villages.