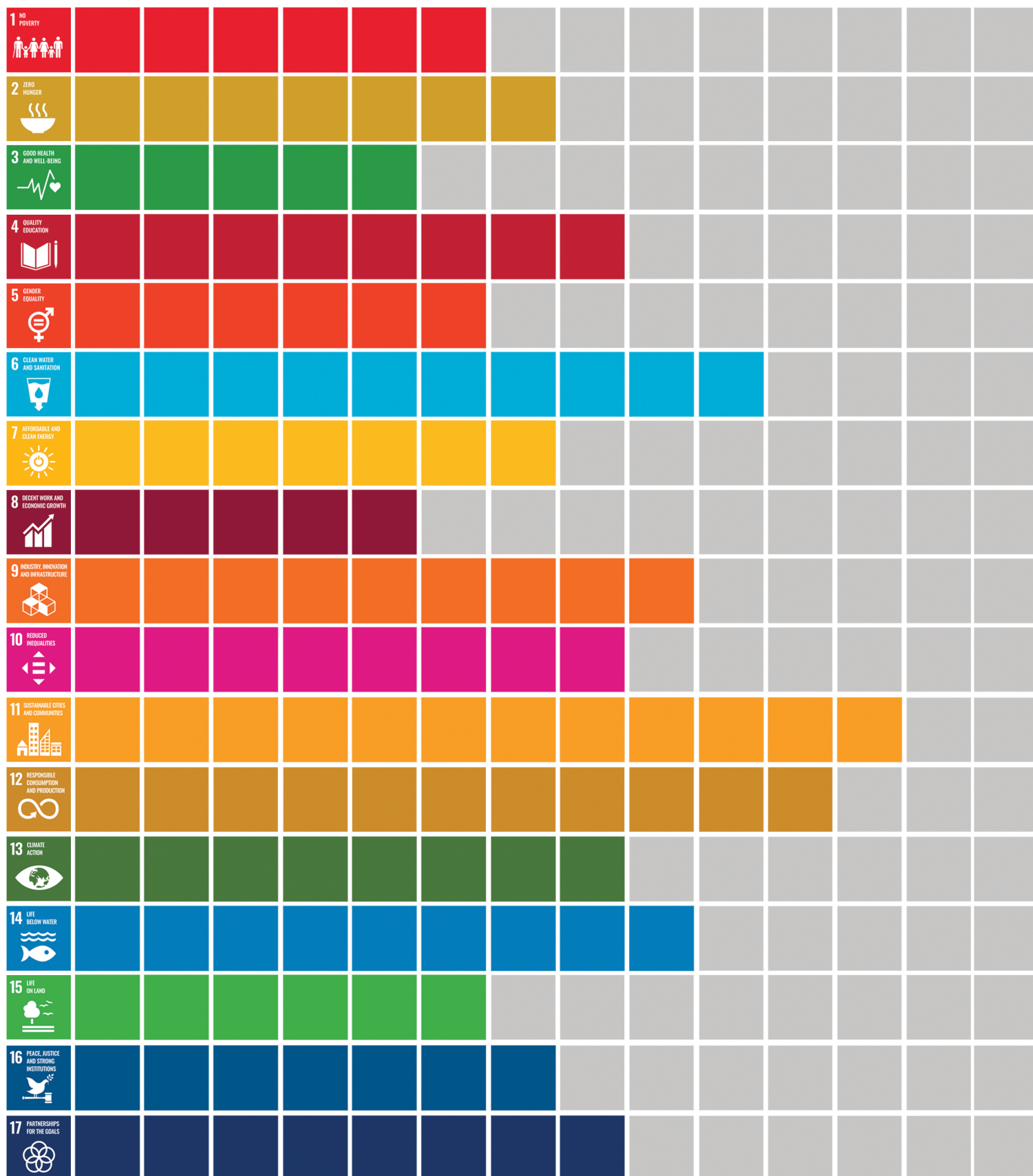


STATE OF THE VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS 2020

– Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs –



STATE OF THE VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS 2020 **—Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs—**

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Table of Contents

Summary.....	i
Acknowledgements	i
List of Acronyms	ii
Introduction.....	1
History of VLRs.....	3
Methodology of the Study	4
Comparative Analysis.....	5
General Characteristics of the VLRs.....	6
Stakeholder Engagement	7
Structure of the VLR Alignment with the VNR Format.....	7
Conclusions and Way Forward.....	10
IGES’s Approach to VLRs.....	12
Analysis of Voluntary Local Reviews	14
Kitakyushu City.....	15
New York City.....	16
Shimokawa Town	17
Toyama City	18
Bristol City.....	19
Buenos Aires City	20
Hamamatsu City	21
La Paz	23
City of Los Angeles	24
New Taipei City.....	25
Santana de Parnaíba	26
Taipei City.....	27
Mannheim City.....	28
State of Oaxaca.....	29
Annex 1: Reference Materials on Voluntary Local Reviews.....	30
Annex 2: VLR Bibliography	30
Endnotes	32

Summary

With only ten years left to achieve the ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN member States in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, action is more urgent than ever. Cities, which are responsible for delivering many of the targets highlighted by the SDGs are accelerating their efforts. This is recognised by the growing number of local and regional governments that have embarked on a process to track their progress and plan for future strategies. Known as a Voluntary Local Review (VLR), this exercise becomes an opportunity for local governments to engage in global processes to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, while at the same time, capitalising on the SDGs inherent potential to induce change.

This report reviews all the VLR Reports identified by the authors¹ (as of February 2020) carried out by local governments in their determination to localise the SDGs. It compiles their main messages and provides the current stage of this emerging movement. Along with the description of the overall contents of each VLR, this report focuses on two key aspects of the VLR process: first, the stakeholder engagement process following the SDGs motto of leaving no one behind; and second, their relation to the national review process of the SDGs or Voluntary National Review (VNR). In doing this analysis, this report aims to become a reference guide for other cities seeking to carry out their own VLR process.

Through this review, two main themes emerged as needing further attention for cities embarking on their own VLR journey. First, in many cases, the VLR process focused on aligning current policies with the SDGs and their targets and on monitoring progress, but did not explicitly include a stakeholder engagement process. Second, cities have started this effort even though there is no current official United Nations' process giving local governments similar opportunities to national governments. To address this issue, the present report presents a five tier approach to VLRs intended to strength the transformative potential of the next generation of cities intending to localise the SDGs. Nevertheless, the first generation of VLRs shows a praiseworthy commitment to sustainable development and to the 2030 Agenda.

Acknowledgements

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List of Acronyms

ADA: Asia Development Alliance

APFSD: Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

IGES: Institute for Global Environmental Strategies

LRGF: Local and Regional Government Forum

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

UCLG-ASPAC: United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific

UN: United Nations

UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNR: Voluntary National Review

Introduction

There are enormous social, economic and environmental challenges ahead of us. From poverty alleviation to social inequality. From high unemployment to guaranteeing quality health and education for all. From reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to resource insecurity and scarcity. The magnitude of the task is such that it is now more urgent than ever to find integrated approaches to achieve sustainable development.

To this end, the global community launched the 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', in short, the 2030 Agenda, and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, the SDGs are "a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all"². They encapsulate a basic idea: policies to ensure inclusive and sustainable development need to integrate social, economic and environmental aspects. This spirit infuses the 169 targets and 232 progress indicators that make up the 17 SDGs³.

Efforts to implement the SDGs have been followed by the creation of mechanisms to track their progress. The 2030 Agenda urges national governments to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven"⁴; this has been pursued in the Voluntary National Reviews, which are presented every year by Member States at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF⁵) held in New York. VNRs are a vehicle for national governments to share their experiences in implementing the SDGs, outlining both successes and challenges, and accelerate progress based on the lessons learnt.

The SDGs were designed to guide the policymaking of national governments⁶. While only one out of the seventeen SDGs expressly target cities—SDG 11,

Sustainable Cities and Communities—cities are responsible for accomplishing a much larger share of the 2030 Agenda. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) remarked, "an estimated 65% of the 169 targets behind the 17 SDGs will not be reached without engagement of local and regional governments"⁷.

*"Even though (the 2030 Agenda) was signed by Member States, cities are responsible for its implementation, since all SDGs include targets related to competences and responsibilities at the local level, chiefly in the provision of basic services and in the promotion of a sustainable and inclusive territorial development"*⁸

The increasingly important role of cities⁹ in sustainability debates and policymaking has placed them at the forefront to achieve the SDGs¹⁰.

However, this is not the first time cities have reported on their sustainable development efforts based on a global initiative. Agenda 21—which was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, known as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit—was the first attempt to emphasize the engagement of local stakeholders. It called local governments to develop their own action plan, referred as "Local Agenda 21"¹¹. The localising process of the SDGs aims at addressing some of the difficulties confronted by Local Agenda 21, such as the lack of synchronised action, or processes to monitor and evaluate progress¹². It is in the spirit of the SDGs to strength collaboration between different actors and levels of government, calling for local communities to take an active role in advancing sustainable development¹³.

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, highlighted local action as one of the three essential areas when he inaugurated the so-called 'Decade of Action'—referring to the ten years remaining to deliver the 2030 Agenda in which

1 | State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2020: Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs

implementation strategies will need to speed up. He insisted upon “the creation of an enabling environment that maximizes the potential of cities and local authorities”¹⁴ if we want to advance the 2030 Agenda. This reinforces the need for multilevel forms of governance, while acknowledging that the urban is not a separated entity but rather embedded in a nested variety of scales of governance¹⁵.

“In Buenos Aires, the SDGs are the roadmap for building a more sustainable and inclusive city, which prioritizes sustainable mobility, prepares for the future of work and is committed to achieving gender equality.”¹⁶

Given the transformative potential of the SDGs, cities around the world are also adapting to them in framing their future policy strategies. The growing number of cities utilising the global goals to guide their sustainable development strategies reflects this. As this report will show, cities worldwide are finding novel ways to rethink their inner functioning based on the SDGs.

One of the advantages of cities is that they enjoy a greater flexibility to implement the SDGs at the local level, directly engaging with citizens in addressing their main priorities and therefore, becoming a touchstone for innovative ways to advance the 2030 Agenda, underlying that cities are often moving faster than national governments on the international agenda¹⁷. They have greater powers to localise actions towards achieving the SDGs, making them an integral part of daily lives. Indeed, the 17 SDGs touch on the everyday problems of people, from good education and health, to reducing gender and socioeconomic inequalities to name but a few.

As more cities take on the SDGs, some are engaging in a voluntary review process similar to the VNRs—the process in which national

governments track their progress in achieving each and every goal and target. Moreover, cities have found that they can utilise the VNR process as a framework to review local actions on the SDGs. Eventually, this local review might be linked to national review processes.

As of February 2020, 15 local and regional governments have conducted their own Voluntary Local Review (VLR). Four VLRs were presented in 2018, ten in 2019, and already two in 2020. Through them, cities pledge their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, review their current standing, and plan for future action. Similarly to VNRs, VLRs are a tool for local and regional governments to periodically follow-up and review their progress and share their experiences and challenges in localising the SDGs.

“Voluntary Local Review (VLR) is a process in which local and regional governments (LRGs) initiate voluntarily an assessment of their progress of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. This makes it possible for LRGs to share experiences, challenges, and lessons learnt as well as to open their door for new partnerships, filling the gap of means of implementation for their local vision.”¹⁸

By adopting the common language provided by the SDGs, VLR is a process that strives for better policy integration, peer learning and accountability to citizens. As a result, the VLR culminates with the publication of a Voluntary Local Review Report documenting the experience, process and results of this exercise. Nevertheless, VLRs go well beyond simply reviewing progress. They are a powerful tool to accelerate transformation for cities by providing four meaningful opportunities:

- **A VLR allows the local government to listen to the needs of its people and reflect them into local policymaking.** It seeks to engage a wide range of stakeholders and to give them an opportunity to

create their vision to be achieved by 2030 and actions taken to realise the vision.

- **A VLR invites self-reflection.** By tailoring the 17 SDGs and their targets to the local context, they diagnose challenges and highlight areas needing improvement. A VLR provides an invitation to develop integrated and multi-sectoral responses to those existing challenges.
- **A VLR provides for a process that is data-driven and can be used to plan for action to achieve the future we want.** The indicators associated with each SDG and its targets can support policymakers in developing sustainable development strategies.
- **A VLR gives a local take on the global conversation on sustainable development.** It is an initial step for local governments wishing to make a difference. Therefore, a VLR ignites action that is locally focused but has global implications.

As the VLR process gains momentum, this report reviews all the VLRs identified by the authors as of February 2020 and compiles their main messages to become a reference guide for other cities seeking to conduct their own VLR process and provides the current stage of this emerging movement. By reviewing the current VLRs, this report intends to recognise the pioneering role of these 13 cities, one regional government, and one town, and points out recommendations for the second generation of VLRs. This report concludes by presenting the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies' (IGES) approach to the VLR process, based on its experience supporting the VLR of cities in Japan as well as in other parts of Asia.

History of VLRs

The first public event that shed the light on the VLRs was the HLPF in July 2018. During the HLPF,

the first-ever 'Local and Regional Government Forum' (LRGF) was co-organised by the Global Taskforce for LRGs, the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) as the official space for the LRGs constituency to showcase successful experiences in implementing the SDGs and to establish multi-level, institutionalised dialogue between national, local, and regional governments. At this important inaugural event, the Mayor of the City of Kitakyushu, Kenji Kitahashi, took the floor and launched the first-ever Voluntary Local Review, along with other two Japanese municipalities—Shimokawa and Toyama. The city of New York also published its first VLR during the HLPF2018.

" Kitakyushu is taking on the initiative to address the sustainable development goals of the United Nations that have been taken up in the 2030 Agenda and is working together with the Japanese government and OECD to achieve the SDGs model at the urban and regional levels." ¹⁹

In March 2019, following the events in New York, it was at the sixth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD)²⁰ that the official VNR session included the VLR in its discussion. Kazuhide Umemoto, Deputy Mayor of the City of Kitakyushu, gave insights into his city's VLR and how it could contribute to enhancing the VNRs. On this occasion, the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) and the United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG-ASPAC) launched the "VLR Lab"²¹—an online centralised information hub for VLRs by sub-national and local governments to make all the cities and their reports accessible and comparable. In July 2019, a two-day event was organised by the UN-wide Local2030 network²² under the name of "VLR Lab" and held at the meeting in New York. Along with the HLPF, IGES organised an expert group meeting on the VLR—VLR Lab in collaboration with United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP) and Asia Development Alliance (ADA) that brought together more than 10 cities to explore and deepen conversations on sub-national reporting. In October 2019, the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and UN-Habitat, featured several commitments by cities and agencies working on VLRs, resulting in the priority action area of the Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanisation—an implementing mechanism of the New Urban Agenda and territorial dimensions of the SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region. As a leading agency working on the VLRs, IGES has been committed to connecting partners and cities to help more cities to integrate the SDGs into both urban development plans and climate actions.

Encouraged by these four pioneering occasions featuring the VLRs in 2018, many cities have taken up the idea and implemented the process in their own ways. While these are all called “VLRs”, there is significant variety in the contents, scope, purpose, depth, and duration of each of these. To give some examples of this variety, there is one case which is led and concluded by one division within the administration, and another which focuses on data, visualisation and transparency. Further, there is a case which focuses on the process of engaging stakeholders to build trust and consensus. However, focus has shifted in terms of what matters within the VLRs. Initially, the focus was more on conducting the VLR and reporting it at global conferences. This indeed brought about changes in discourse in terms of how LRGs engage in the VNR. Even though these different focuses still hold true and play important roles, the focus has shifted to the quality of the VLR process and its impacts—as will be detailed in the following sections.

As elaborated above, a momentum for VLRs has steadily gained support and buy-in from more

cities and actors, including, crucially, the UN member states. It is not yet certain how this newly emerged initiative will look in the coming years. Whether or not VLRs become something truly transformative in UN politics as well as in the real lives of local communities depend on how narratives and frameworks are developed.

Methodology of the Study

This report is a desk study based solely on information presented in the publicly available VLRs, of which the authors have identified 16 as of February 2020 (shown on Figure 1 on p. 14). Fourteen of them are available in English, one (Santana de Parnaíba, Brazil) was written in Portuguese, and one (La Paz, Bolivia) was written in Spanish. New York is the only city with two VLRs (2018 and 2019).

As recommended by the UN, VNRs “are most meaningful when they involve an inclusive, participatory, transparent and thorough review process at the national and sub-national levels, when they are evidence-based, produce tangible lessons and solutions, and when they are followed by concrete actions and collaboration that drives SDG implementation”. (UN, 2020, p. 1). This statement has two clear implications.

First, it reinforces the idea of reaching out to each and every stakeholder, aiming to make sustainable development an inclusive process. This basic principle should also infuse the VLR process by including an extensive engagement process integrating a wide range of stakeholders.

Second, it highlights the need for vertically integrated collaboration between different levels of government. While the United Nations has published a ‘Handbook for the Preparation for Voluntary National Reviews²³’, there are no specific guidelines for VLRs. As a matter of fact, VLRs are

still not an integral part of the United Nations review process for the 2030 Agenda.

These two premises are the basis for the analysis carried out in this report. In reviewing the VLRs, the first step was to identify the general scope and nature of the VLR. This report thus focuses on the two abovementioned key elements, which should be considered when conducting a VLR. First, and in line with the SDGs motto of ‘leaving no one behind’, is the process for stakeholder engagement. Second is their relationship with the VNR process and format, seeking to maximise the contribution of local governments in attaining the 2030 Agenda.

This review identifies whether the VLR process counted with its own stakeholder engagement process, and if any, its characteristics. To assess whether the VLR aligns with the VNR format, this report focuses on the structure of the respective documents. As indicated in the UN’s Handbook, Annex 2, VNRs need to include the following sections:

1. Opening Statement.
2. Highlights.
3. Introduction
4. Methodology and process for preparation of the review.
5. Policy and enabling environment.
 - a. Creating ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals and the VNRS.
 - b. Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks.
 - c. Integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions.
 - d. Leaving no one behind.
 - e. Institutional mechanisms.
 - f. Structural issues.
6. Progress on Goals and targets
7. Means of implementation
8. Conclusion and next steps.

The results of this review has been compiled into 15 independent fact sheets, one for each city that have conducted a VLR—New York’s two VLRs are grouped together into one single fact sheet. The fact sheets include basic information on every city—year in which the VLR was conducted, name of VLR, population, area, and GDP—to better grasp its context. To ensure comparable GDP data, this has been obtained from the Brookings Institute’s Global Metro Monitor, 2014 edition²⁴, which provides the value of total GDP (PPP, USD million) for the majority of the cities that have conducted a VLR to date.

Each fact sheet summarises the main characteristics of the VLR and the significant elements regarding this report’s two main lines of inquiry— stakeholder engagement and alignment with the VNR process. When a page number is indicated in any of the review fact sheets, it refers to the page within its own VLR.

This review is of the VLR reports themselves, and excludes any information regarding the VLR process that is not included in the reports; it is possible that this review does not thoroughly incorporate all the aspects of the VLR process in terms of stakeholder engagement and integration with the VNR process.

Comparative Analysis

This section compares the VLR reports made by the frontrunner cities identified by the authors for this study—as of February 2020. Firstly, it summarises the general characteristics and approach of the frontrunner VLRs. It then goes on to compare them in terms of their stakeholder engagement process and its structure and alignment with the VNR format. This comparison is based solely on the content of the VLR reports themselves, as summarised in each VLR’s fact sheets of the following section, and does not include any other

policy, process or mechanism utilised to review the progress towards and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda that might be in place in each city.

General Characteristics of the VLRs

There exists a wide variety across the VLRs of the frontrunner cities, which indicates the broad spectrum of cities in terms of population, GDP, stage of development, or even the resources available to conduct the VLR process. For instance, the cities range in size from a population of 3,000 in Shimokawa to more than 8 million inhabitants in New York. The majority of the VLRs have been carried out by medium size-cities, with a population between 100,000 and one million. Fifteen of the reviewed VLRs were conducted by municipalities, at the city or town level, and only one was done by a regional government—State of Oaxaca, Mexico. The frontrunner cities are predominated by those in developed countries (12 out of 15), with only three of them compiled by developing cities. Some of the VLRs—e.g. the five Japanese cities or Bristol—partnered with research and academic institutions for conducting this process.

"This voluntary local review is both a chance to share what is working in Los Angeles, and an opportunity to ask for help with what is not. So, whether you are reading this in Boyle Heights or Benin, please join us on this path to collectively realize the world we want." ²⁵

All the VLRs are similar in their subject matter and approach. They describe the city's history, its challenges, and the localisation process, and review progress towards all SDGs or some particular goals. As a peer-learning mechanism, the VLRs compile the stories of cities, their policies and challenges, with the hope that this process will support the SDG implementation journey in other locations.

Besides reviewing progress, some VLRs have unique elements showing a city's own take on the 2030 Agenda. For example, Los Angeles emphasised its localisation process and how the global language of the SDGs is translated into local context; in so doing, the city created its own targets to cover important areas that are ignored by the SDGs, such as a target within SDG 5 to include the LGBTQAI+ community. Shimokawa focused on the vision setting and stakeholder engagement process.

Cities employed different strategies to their VLRs. Despite the SDGs aim at being an all-encompassing approach to sustainable development addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development, the majority of the VLRs focused only on particular SDGs—as shown in Table 1. Some cities reviewed the SDGs prioritised by the HLPF in a particular year (such as New York, and Helsinki), and others looks at their own priority goals (such as Taipei). Los Angeles adopted a mixed approach by reviewing the priority Goals of HLPF 2019 and then adding its own. These findings are similar to other studies focusing on VNRs²⁶. Only Bristol, Hamamatsu, La Paz, and Manheim reviewed the 17 SDGs, while the State of Oaxaca reviewed none; in this case, the VLR works as an implementation roadmap rather than a review of progress, which will take place at a later stage.

Cities had very different purviews when conducting their VLRs. They can be classified into two distinctive groups. First are the cities that reviewed their implementation efforts based on their existing planning framework to illustrate how previous strategies also align with the 2030 Agenda. Second are the cities that take up the SDGs as an opportunity find novel pathways for sustainable development, localise the SDGs, and plan for their implementation.

The first group includes cities such as New York or Helsinki. They show the alignment between existing policies and the SDGs, and how those policies are contributing to attaining the 2030 Agenda. The VLR reports does not indicate any review or follow-up process based on the spirit of the SDGs

The second group includes places such as Shimokawa and Bristol. For this group of cities, the VLR process presented an opportunity to create a new policy framework fully embracing the ethos of the SDGs. In both cases, the VLR initiated a process to create a vision for where the city wants to be by 2030. Therefore, their VLR is not just a review of the progress towards certain goals or targets but a collective effort to think about current problems and possible solutions.

Stakeholder Engagement

Cities have adopted a wide range of approaches to engage with stakeholders as part of their review and implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Stakeholder engagement aligns with the two distinct groups of VLRs listed in the previous section.

In general, the cities whose VLR simply review progress towards all SDGs or some particular goals did not carried out an expressly engagement process. Some of them, like New York, refer to the engagement process that took place when formulating their main policies. Other cases, like Buenos Aires or Los Angeles describe existing citizen consultation or participatory processes that are used in the city, not only for SDGs but for any other topic. However, there is no indication of any process to bring on board a wide range of people into the SDGs processes in many VLR reports; their focus is on implementation and monitoring progress.

"If Shimokawa wants to use the SDGs to achieve its vision, it must have a diverse group of stakeholders from both within the town and outside, take charge of rolling out its policies and projects." ²⁷

The cases for which the VLR became an instrument to frame their future vision coincide with those also performing an extensive consultation process. A notable example is Shimokawa's VLR, which was the municipality with the most comprehensive engagement process. As is described in its fact sheet (p. 17), Shimokawa puts in place special institutional mechanisms for the SDG implementation and review process. The town formed the 'SDG FutureCity Subcommittee' as the body responsible for creating the Shimokawa Vision 2030. This subcommittee was responsible for 13 activities engaging the local community and a wide range of stakeholders in the localisation process of the SDGs. Bristol was another example, with a dedicated working group aiding the City Council, the "Bristol SDG Alliance", which is an organisation bringing together a myriad of key stakeholders to support local efforts in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Structure of the VLR Alignment with the VNR Format

The reviewed VLRs exhibit a wide diversity in formatting. This is the aspect showing more discrepancies and presenting more difficulties in grouping them together. Most of the VLRs acknowledge this limitation by referring to the lack of UN official guidelines for local governments reporting to the HLPF—as is the case for national governments and the VNRs. Some VLRs adopted the general structure of the VNRs and translated it to the local conditions. This approach is followed significantly by the four Japanese cities (Shimokawa, Toyama, Kitakyushu, and Hamamatsu) and also by the cases like New York among other. Despite these examples, there is a weak correlation

between the format and structure of the frontrunner VLRs and the one recommended for VNRs by the UN.

Another aspect that needs further consideration is the vertical collaboration between different levels of government in tracking progress on the SDGs. Throughout this review, it has become evident that there is weak collaboration between the national and local processes. Vertical integration in reporting to the HLPF could benefit both local and

national administrations in monitoring and attaining the 2030 Agenda. For national governments this represent a precious opportunity to really monitor what is happening at the local level and to identify the regions and cities needing more support. This will also help to strength linkages and peer-learning processes within the same country. For local governments this is a chance to reach out to higher levels of government for help in attaining currently underperforming SDGs²⁸.

Table 1 - SDGs Reviewed in each VLR. Source: Authors

SDG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	TOTAL
2018																		
HLPF 2018 ²⁹						•	•				•	•			•		•	6
Shimokawa						•	•		•		•	•			•			6
Toyama						•	•		•		•	•			•		•	7
Kitakyushu					•		•	•	•			•					•	6
New York						•	•				•	•			•			6
2019																		
HLPF 2019 ³⁰				•				•		•			•			•	•	6
Bristol	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	17
Buenos Aires				•				•		•			•			•	•	6
Hamamatsu	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	17
Helsinki				•				•		•			•			•	•	6
La Paz	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	17
Los Angeles				•	•			•		•	•		•			•	•	8
New Taipei				•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	11
New York				•				•		•			•			•	•	6
Santana	•		•	•							•				•	•	•	7
Taipei			•			•	•				•	•	•				•	7
2020																		
Manheim	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	17
Oaxaca																		0
VLR TOTAL	5	4	6	10	6	9	10	10	7	9	11	10	10	4	9	10	13	

Table 2 – Main Components of each VLR. Source: Authors

City	Statement by the Mayor	Methodology and process	Policy and enabling environment						Progress on Goals and targets	Means of implementation	Conclusion
			Creating ownership of the SDGs	SDG alignment	Integration of the three dimensions	Leaving no one behind	Institutional mechanisms	Structural issues			
2018											
Kitakyushu	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	
New York	●	★	△	●	★	●	★	★	◆	★	
Toyama	★	★	★	★	★	●	★	★	★	★	
Shimokawa	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	
2019											
Bristol	★	★	◆	△	★	★	★	★	●	★	
Buenos Aires	●	●	★	◆	◆	★	◆	★	◆	★	
Hamamatsu	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	
Helsinki	★	★	★	●	●	★	●	★	●	★	
La Paz	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	△	★	
Los Angeles	★	★	★	●	◆	★	◆	★	●	★	
New Taipei	★	★	★	●	●	★	●	★	●	★	
New York	★	★	★	●	●	★	●	★	◆	★	
Santana	★	★	★	●	●	★	●	★	★	★	
Taipei	★	★	★	●	●	★	●	★	●	★	
2020											
Manheim	★	●	★	●	★	★	★	★	★	★	
Oaxaca	●	★	★	★	★	★	●	●	★	★	

LEGEND

- ★ VLR refers to this element
- VLR does not refer to this element
- △ VLR refers partially to this element
- ◆ VLR refers to other documents, policies, or mechanisms

Conclusions and Way Forward

The 2030 Agenda laid out the SDGs as an ambitious end-point towards a more sustainable future addressing universal problems needing urgent action, from climate change to poverty or gender inequality. Originally conceived at the national level, cities and regions are also utilising the global goals to re-examine their own strategies. Yet, to fully achieve these ambitious goals, there needs to be a monitoring and reviewing progress at regular intervals. The UN provided countries with the Voluntary National Reviews for this purpose, but did not include any provision for subnational levels of government.

To fill this gap, frontrunner cities have mirrored the VNR process at the local level in what is known as a Voluntary Local Review. VLRs help cities to implement their commitment to deliver the 2030 Agenda. In doing so, cities embark into a self-exploratory journey to make their current policy frameworks more inclusive and sustainable.

This report has analysed the 16 VLRs published by frontrunner cities as of February 2020. It has showed that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to the VLR process, but rather a wide range of options, from review of a city's current policies, to mapping localisation strategies or even to utilise the VLR as a tool to plan for the future. It is this last approach that has the potential to capitalise in the SDGs inherent capacity to trigger change.

Through this review, a series of themes has emerged needing close attention, especially in regards to the common challenges faced by the 15 frontrunner cities. Two of the most significant challenges come from the conceptual inception of the SDGs as an end to be delivered by national

governments. The VLRs recurrently note two key aspects requiring further consideration: 1) the inadequacy of many targets to be tackled at the local level; and 2) the lack of a guiding framework for subnational levels of government.

"There is a clear need for an indicator framework that is tailored to the urban scale and suitable across income contexts" ³¹

One problem is a matter of scale and the current jurisdictional complexity when evaluating progress towards the SDGs. Cities have conducted their VLRs based on their municipal political boundaries, thus excluding more accurate spatial formations such as the functional urban area or ecological boundaries. This challenge, common to most studies focusing on cities, materialises in issues such as data availability or competence to implement policies responding to particular targets.

Another issue is the lack of a guidance framework for subnational levels of governments to conduct and report to the HLPF—similar to the one existing for VNRs. This is shown in the great variety of VLR formats as opposed to the more standardised one used for the VNRs. Indeed, frontrunner VLRs have been conducted largely disconnected from each other, and in most cases, without help from the national governments. As more local governments are joining the VLR movement, it is advisable to integrate them into the official VNR process at the national level. Ideally, this should be funnelled by an UN-made guidance giving local governments similar opportunities to national governments. This enables a nuanced and territorialised picture of respective counties' progress against the SDGs in the VNR process and also the concerted, focused efforts by national governments to alleviate deteriorating areas.

This report has focused on two keys aspects— stakeholder engagement and connection to the

national review process or VNRs. It is clear, however, that future research should expand analysis on the first generation of VLRs and aim to address current gaps to fully unleash the transformative potential of the SDGs at the local level. The introductory section of this report highlighted four meaningful opportunities opened by the VLR process. Future research should explore these in more details in order to advance our understanding of what a good VLR is and to find novel ways for action.

Conducting a VLR can help local governments to unleash the real transformative power of the SDGs.

Indeed, the SDGs, which are a common language for all humankind striving for a better future, require local action. By speaking a common language, cities can join the conversation to discuss the best pathways to reach the world we want by 2030. VLRs are a way to foster international cooperation and peer-learning, and to share strategies that are yielding results elsewhere.

IGES's Approach to VLRs

As we have become involved in the VLR process in various locations, and having organised many gatherings and workshops for VLRs, IGES has learnt a great deal since we began work on this issue around the end of 2017. Reflecting on these valuable experiences and expertise brought by different cities from different countries, it seems worthwhile to take this opportunity to present what IGES considers the next generation of VLRs should look like. This discussion initially started at the workshop organised in New York in July, 2018.

IGES's approach to the VLR process revolves around five key pillars involving different actors:

1. Local administration itself
2. Local communities and citizens
3. Other cities and regions
4. National government
5. Global community

The first key pillar contains the different divisions and departments within the city hall. They often fail to speak to each other, perpetuating the silo approach to complex, interlinked issues, such as greening energy and buildings, providing affordable housing, as well as maintaining water and sanitation system. In some cases, the environment bureau is tasked to coordinate the SDGs and has failed to incorporate people from other departments, such as planning and buildings, due to lack of political capital. The VLR must take a "silo-busting" approach and aim to establish an internal mechanism that is capable of delivering cross-department solutions.

The second key pillar plays a crucial role in determining the usefulness of VLRs within the city. Delivering the ambitious 2030 Agenda requires a whole-society approach. Engaging communities, women and youth groups, SMEs and cooperatives

should be an integral part of the VLR process. This type of inclusive process nurtures a sense of ownership of the SDGs and a new local vision among local communities, thereby transforming them from stakeholders into active partners for change.

The third key pillar has been neglected in the majority of VLR examples so far. Despite the lack of demonstrated cases, we see other cities and regions as important entities with which the VLR should engage. Many issues, especially improving transport access and natural environment can only be achieved by taking a cross-boundary, regional approach. Administrative boundaries do not reflect the flow of economic activities and biological space, it is crucial that cross-boundary cooperation is explored in the VLR process, if it is to seriously address issues at the local level.

The fourth key pillar could be considered the most crucial element of all. The reason for this is that LRGs rarely have all necessary means to achieve the SDGs. Fiscal transfer, energy source, setting up financial regulations, tax intervention, and many other policies require the national government to take action. All VLRs need to include components that craft messages directly addressed to the national governments. This can include both policy demands and best practices that can be scaled up and shared through the national government channels.

The fifth key pillar deals with global advocacy. Firstly, achieving the ambitious 2030 Agenda requires a global range, implying the need for every level of government of every country to take action. At its core, it is also a peer-learning and review process, aiming at sharing experiences, both those yielding results and those that have failed to do so. This creates a common database that can be shared globally, thus accelerating the implementation of the SDGs. Secondly, joining the

global coalition of (LRG and sharing local solutions to global challenges enables each constituency to make the case for LRGs to have bigger roles in agenda-setting, which leads to a more enabling environment for LRGs at the national level.

The combination of these five key pillars of action into a VLR process will support cities to deliver the 2030 Agenda. In line with Shimokawa's example, a

VLR should leave no one behind and include a wide range of stakeholders to envision the future a city wants for itself and for the world. The SDGs are one of the most ambitious global efforts for a more sustainable and inclusive future, and conducting a VLR will help create a blueprint to reach to that ideal end point.

Analysis of Voluntary Local Reviews

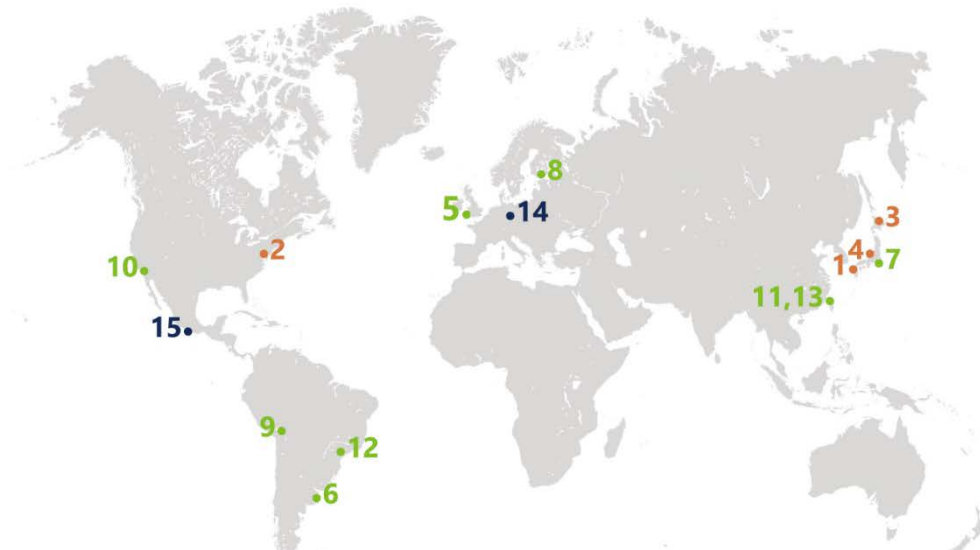


Figure 1 – The 15 frontrunner cities as of February 2020.

Kitakyushu City

VLR Year:	2018	Area	487 Km ²
VLR Name:	Kitakyushu City the Sustainable Development Goals Report - Fostering a trusted Green Growth City with true wealth and prosperity, contributing to the world	Population (year)	939,450 (2020)
		GDP (year)	USD 193,340 million (2014) ³²

VLR description

The City of Kitakyushu, located on the south-western island of Kyushu, Japan, has developed as a “Gateway to Asia” with geographically strategic port and railways, and also as an “Iron City” with the establishment of Japan’s first steel industry since 1901. Kitakyushu prospered as a driving force of Japan’s industrialization, but suffered serious air and water pollution in the 1960s. An anti-pollution campaign by a women’s association triggered multi-stakeholder engagement to overcome the pollution. This experience led Kitakyushu to develop its vision to be the world capital of environmental cities, which eventually paved the way to the SDGs.

The sustainable development of Kitakyushu is reviewed by tracing back its history and stages of transformation from a polluted industrial city to an environmental model city, up to the present SDGs City. The SDGs principles such as back-casting, goal setting, multi-stakeholder engagement, and integration of environment and economy are embedded throughout the experiences in creating environmental-frontier prototypes. Today, Kitakyushu faces emerging challenges such as an ageing population and the hollowing out of manufacturing. Kitakyushu developed the SDGs Future City Plan in 2018 with cross-sectoral actions under the three pillars of economy, society and environment to solve the interweaving issues of the present day.

Stakeholder engagement process

The process was propelled by the strong leadership of the mayor. Kitakyushu was the first municipality in Japan to create an internal governing body for the SDGs in February 2018, namely the “SDGs Future City Promotion Headquarters of Kitakyushu City” headed by the mayor, in which all heads of departments and offices are engaged. The contents of the VLR are largely derived from the Kitakyushu City SDGs Future Plan which was advanced through these Headquarters. Kitakyushu VLR identifies key stakeholders and their contributions, and announces a plan to create two other bodies, the “SDGs Club” as an open platform and the “Kitakyushu City SDGs Council” as an advisory group with equal general representation.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The structure of Kitakyushu’s VLR aligns with the UN’s VNR format. Alignment efforts are made in collaboration with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). Concrete projects are demonstrated in “Integration of the Three Dimensions” and “Leaving No One Behind”. Comparison between locally available indicators and the UN global SDGs indicators are analysed in “Goals and Indicators”.

New York City

VLR Year:	2018 and 2019 (2 nd Edition)	Area	784 km ²
VLR Name:	Voluntary Local Review: New York City's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Population (year)	8,398,748 (2018)
		GDP (year)	USD 1,403,463 million (2014)

VLR description

New York is the largest city in the United States of America, and its financial heart. In April 2015, ahead of the 2030 Agenda, New York presented its masterplan to address the city's main challenges. This was known as OneNYC, and was a strategy aiming at becoming an example for sustainable development. As the host city of the United Nations, New York decided to take up the challenge of conducting a Voluntary Local Review to gauge the level of alignment of its plan with the SDGs. New York's VLR compiles existing data and translates it into the common language of the SDGs. In this way, its VLR gathers previous information following the guidelines of the VNR format to showcase the achievements of OneNYC strategy.

The VLR was presented at HLPF 2018, and focuses on the priority SDGs reviewed that year—SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, and 15. The VLR expresses the intention of New York City of annually engaging in the SDG review process and updating its report (p. 12). The VLR report refers to OneNYC annual progress reports to find information regarding other aspects not prioritised in each year's corresponding HLPF. New York City then updated its VLR in 2019, reviewing SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, and 16.

Stakeholder engagement process

The VLR report refers to the engagement process that took place to shape OneNYC, which began in late 2014. The first step was the creation of eight cross-departmental working groups encompassing 71 city agencies to identify priority areas for future development. This process was complemented with an outreach campaign to gain insight from citizens, including: 1) Resident outreach, face-to-face interaction with over 1,300 residents; 2) Business roundtables; 3) Advisory board, comprised of 38 persons from different backgrounds; 4) Regional coordination; 5) Online survey, with over 7,500 responses in seven languages; and 6) Telephone survey with over 800 interviewees. Altogether, this information served to highlight the priorities of citizens for New York's future. For future iterations, it might be advisable to bring together stakeholders to review New York's take on the SDGs.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

New York's VLR is expressly modelled after the VNR format (p. 8). Sections 1 to 4 replicate the Handbook's recommended structure; from section 5 onwards, the report adopts its own structure to express the relation between the VLR and OneNYC, mostly covering similar building blocks. The report then follows the review of HLPF 2018 priority SDGs, linking each target to OneNYC's own indicators and the progress to date.

Shimokawa Town

VLR Year:	2018	Area	644.20 km ²
VLR Name:	Shimokawa Town the Sustainable Development Goals Report –the Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting People and Nature with the Future.	Population (year)	3,383 (2016)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

Shimokawa is a small town in the north of Hokkaido, one of Japan's five main islands; as of February 2020, it is the smallest locality to have developed a VLR. The town must confront a host of social and economic problems, including the rapid ageing and decline of its population. Since 2006, it has made sustainable development principles the core of its policies, and has striven to find integral approaches to the challenges ahead. It resorted to its forestry industry as the main source for local revitalisation, jointly developing forest products and providing energy through forest biomass. This integral approach anticipated the spirit of the SDGs.

Shimokawa's continuous efforts to achieve sustainable development led the town to embrace the ethos of the SDGs and integrate them into its municipal planning. The town utilised the 17 SDGs as a way to identify its future concerns and possible solutions. This resulted in the 'Shimokawa Vision 2030', a roadmap for the years to come in accordance with the SDGs. This vision translated the spirit of the SDGs into seven goals that reflect better the local conditions. In 2017, Shimokawa received the Prime Minister's SDGs Award as recognition of its leading efforts to localise the SDGs. Shimokawa's VLR culminates these efforts, by showcasing to the world how, despite its small size and limited economic resources, one place can take up the SDGs and make use of them to find new pathways for sustainable and inclusive development.

Stakeholder engagement process

To conduct its VLR, Shimokawa reached out to each and every stakeholder through an extensive consultation process. The first step was to create the SDG FutureCity Subcommittee as the main body responsible for formulating the Shimokawa Vision 2030. The subcommittee was comprised of 10 citizens from diverse backgrounds and a facilitator from out of town. In addition, Shimokawa launched a series of awareness-raising activities, including lectures and workshops, as well as presenting articles about the SDGs in the town's own magazine. The subcommittee carried out 13 activities, each of them with its own thematic focus—such as creating a loop diagram or discussing concrete actions (p. 15). Through this process, the town engaged the local community in the planning process. In moving forward to realise its 2030 vision, Shimokawa will continue its engagement work with key agents within and beyond the town.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Shimokawa's VLR is aligned with the format of VNRs. The VLR echoes the structure of the 'Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews 2018 edition' (p. vii), and includes all the recommended sections. The report also has a section highlighting its consistency with the national SDG framework (p. 15). Moreover, Shimokawa's efforts are framed within the National Government's initiative to promote the SDGs at the municipal level, namely the SDG FutureCity programme.

Toyama City

VLR Year:	2018	Area	1,241.77 km ²
VLR Name:	Toyama City the Sustainable Development Goals Report – Compact City Planning Based on Polycentric Transport Networks.	Population (year)	415,430 (2020)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

Toyama is the capital city of Toyama prefecture, which is located in the Chubu Region faces the Sea of Japan. The Japanese Government have long recognised the city as a frontrunner example of sustainable development; its efforts ensured its designation as an ‘Eco-Model City’ and a ‘FutureCity’. More recently, in line with the Japanese Government’s emphasis on localising the SDGs, it was recognised as a ‘SDG FutureCity’.

Like most other Japanese cities, Toyama faces serious socioeconomic challenges. Its population is ageing rapidly and will sharply decrease in the coming decades. To adapt its built environment to better meet this problem, Toyama has been promoting a compact city model structured around public transport. Its VLR has become a tool for self-reflection; through this process, the city aims to find ways to improve its current masterplan, starting a process to review the city and its policies as a whole (p. 6). Although Toyama’s strategies have been consistent with the SDGs holistic approach integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development even before the 2030 Agenda 2030 emerged, the realisation of its VLR has allowed for further interconnecting issues and finding ways to simultaneously address various SDGs.

Stakeholder engagement process

As part of its ‘SDGs FutureCity’ initiative, Toyama established five thematic working groups—city, civic life, energy, industry, and regional and external development—to improve its existing stakeholder engagement process. In addition, Toyama City has created issue-specific working groups focusing on particular plans. For example, one of them focused on its urban resilience strategy and involved the private sector, NGOs, academic institutions, and municipal employees. Another one, dubbed ‘Team Toyama City’, brought together households, business, and citizens groups to work on the city’s climate change strategy. These working groups have created a sense of ownership for the citizens.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Toyama’s VLR emulates the format of the VNRs as recommended by the ‘Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews 2018 edition’ (p. vii), and includes all the recommended sections. Toyama hopes to use the platform provided by the ‘SDGs FutureCity’ programme to scale up its current sustainable development model, subsequently, building a business model for local revitalisation. The VLR also reports the progress made on goals and targets for different relevant SDGs based on locally-available data. It maps all the SDGs and the relevant existing policy framework, identifying areas needing further work. The report also reviews in detail concrete SDGs and their progress, including Goals 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, and 17.

Bristol City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	110 km ²
VLR Name:	Bristol and the SDGs: A Voluntary Local Review of Progress 2019	Population (year)	463,400 (2017)
		GDP (year)	USD 47,659 million (2014)

VLR description

Situated in the south-west of England, Bristol is one of the 10 most populous cities in the UK and a thriving knowledge and tech hub. Bristol Council became the first UK city to declare a state of climate emergency (November 2018) and has pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030, even before the United Kingdom's commitment to 2050. As a frontrunner environmental city, Bristol joined the UK government to present their respective first voluntary reviews at the HLPF 2019. However, despite performing well in many areas, Bristol still has many challenges ahead, including socioeconomic inequality which has worsened in recent times across neighbourhoods, ethnicities, gender, and income groups. Hence, the VLR becomes an instrument to identify the aspects needing policymakers' attention.

Bristol's VLR shows the city's progress towards achieving the 17 Goals. Drafted independently by academics from the University of Bristol, this VLR features dozens of local initiatives and the engagement process aiming at addressing the SDGs. The report highlights the localisation process embedded within the city's current landmark One City Plan, which was developed in accordance with the 2030 Agenda and through extensive consultation and citizen's engagement.

Stakeholder engagement process

The VLR notes that achieving the SDGs "requires a multi-sectoral and partnership-based approach" (p. 8), especially in the highly centralised UK context where local authorities have very few powers to effectively drive change. The 'Bristol SDG Alliance' is one of the platforms playing a key role in enabling SDG localisation as well as awareness-raising efforts. Established following the city's designation as European Green Capital in 2015, the Alliance has grown to include individuals from the city's anchor institutions such as academics from its two main universities, Council officials, business leaders, and representatives from other voluntary organisations or networks. The VLR process engaged stakeholders by means of an online city-wide consultation survey aimed at identifying organisations working to bring the spirit of the SDGs to Bristol; 88 organisations responded to this survey. Although the VLR report acknowledges the limitations of this approach, this survey helped to map organisations working on the SDGs and increased the visibility of the SDG Alliance.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Bristol aimed at mirroring the review process of national governments and reporting their progress towards the SDGs on the HLPF. The format of its VLR is based on the guidebook for VNRs and includes the mapping of the city's policies and their alignment with the SDGs, a statistical review of publicly available data, and a stakeholder consultation process. Even though it was presented at the HLPF 2019, the VLR reviews progress towards all 17 SDGs. Progress towards each Goal is assessed based on statistical data. The report then notes what the city is doing to meet underperforming targets and what plans are working well.

Buenos Aires City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	203 km ²
VLR Name:	Voluntary Local Review: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Buenos Aires	Population (year)	3,063,728 (2017)
		GDP (year)	USD 315,885 million (2014)

VLR description

The Autonomous City of Buenos Aires is the capital of the Republic of Argentina. Since 1996, the city has adopted the three dimensions of sustainable development to shape its strategies. In line with this commitment, the city embraced the SDGs as a central strategic decision-making tool to guide its future. In pledging to the SDGs, Buenos Aires prioritises sustainable mobility, climate action, diversity, and gender equality. The VLR report highlights Buenos Aires' contribution to the 2030 Agenda based on building a sustainable city. In this, the city is showing the world its commitment to contributing to achieving the global goals. This VLR is only the initial step of a much broader process, which has continued with the publication of the city's localisation plan.

Stakeholder engagement process

The localisation process of the 2030 Agenda happened in three stages—adaptation, awareness, and partnerships. The second stage of awareness and visibility in the city, directly deals with stakeholder engagement. In this regard, the local government works with existing mechanisms for citizen participation. For example, there is a programme called 'BA Elige' (Buenos Aires Chooses), which is an initiative to amplify the voice of citizens in policymaking. With the motto of building Buenos Aires together, 'BA Elige' allows citizens to suggest and vote for projects to be implemented at the neighbourhood level. As a novelty, the 2019 edition aligned the project's categories with the SDGs. That year, there were 28,098 proposals and 25,201 votes, resulting in the selection of 108 winning projects³³. Local authorities also took advantage of global events happening in Buenos Aires—such as the Youth Olympic Games or the G20 summit, both in 2018—to raise SDG-related awareness.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The main focus of Buenos Aires' VLR is to highlight the SDG localisation process at the municipal level following the institutionalisation of the 2030 Agenda, which began once the city signed the Cooperation Agreement with the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies. However, its VLR report does not replicate the VNR format; it focuses rather on how the city is localising the SDGs and on reviewing the five SDGs highlighted in the HLPF 2019, where the VLR was presented. The VLR also includes SDG 5 (Gender Equality) since it is a priority area for the city government. After introducing Buenos Aires and the localisation process, the VLR assess the progress on the HLPF 2019 priority Goals—i.e. SDGs 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 16. Buenos Aires hopes that its VLR will advance the city's standing in localising the global goals.

Hamamatsu City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	1,558 km ²
VLR Name:	Hamamatsu Voluntary Local Review “Hamamatsu, a creative city built on civil collaboration, shining into the future”	Population (year)	798,252 (2015)
		GDP (year)	USD 52,269 million (2014)

VLR description

Hamamatsu City is localising the SDGs through incorporating the goals into its comprehensive plan, the highest level city plan covering 30 years from 2015 to 2044. The comprehensive plan set out a vision for Hamamatsu called “One Dozen Future” - twelve futures the city wants to realise over 30 years, with a first 10-year basic plan to attain the vision. The plan was developed using backcasting techniques and with a variety of stakeholder engagement. As such, the development process of the comprehensive plan itself was aligned with the SDG localising process. The city also linked its original key performance indicators (KPIs) with the SDGs. By regularly reviewing the comprehensive plan and any relevant related plans, the city can check the progress of the SDGs against local KPIs. As a SDGs Future City designated by the Government of Japan, the city is implementing projects integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, such as integration of sustainable forest management, local economy revitalisation and renewable energy use promotion, and measures to ensure children of foreign residents are enrolled in school through connecting with local relevant organisations and checking the progress with data that used to be managed by different departments.

Stakeholder engagement process

Hamamatsu City incorporated the SDGs into its Comprehensive Plan (2015-2044). The plan originally had a lot in common with the SDGs and the development process was inclusive - the Hamamatsu Future Design Council consists of various local stakeholders including youth met seven times from September 2013 and October 2014 to discuss the draft plan. The city government also conducted a series of interviews with residents who were active in various fields such as industry, welfare, medical care, urban development, education etc. In May 2019, the city established the Hamamatsu SDG Promotion Platform with wide participation by local stakeholders. As of September 2019, the member of the platform had 120 members, including private companies, organisations and 27 individuals. The platform plays a role to facilitating networking of local stakeholders, as well as needs-seeds matching of SDG related actions and enhancing information sharing.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The structure of Hamamatsu’s VLR report aligns with the UNSG’s guidelines for VNR. In addition to incorporating the SDGs into local policy, there was additional consistency with national policy to show the linkage between local and national SDG policies/implementation. Alignment efforts have been made in collaboration with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). Concrete projects have been demonstrated in the “Integration of the Three Dimensions” and “Leaving No One Behind”.

Helsinki City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	715.48 km ²
VLR Name:	From Agenda to Action: The Implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Helsinki 2019	Population (year)	650,058 (capital city, 2018)
		GDP (year)	USD 77,084 million (2014)

VLR description

Helsinki is the capital of Finland, and a thriving cultural and economic centre in Northern Europe. Rather than a VLR, this report shows the alignment between the SDGs and the city's flagship 'The Most Functional City in the World – Helsinki City Strategy 2017-2021' and to a lesser extent the 'Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035' s. The main objective is to report on how well the city's current strategy is succeeding in attaining the SDGs and to highlight its ongoing challenges.

The city's strategy revolves around three main themes: 1) securing sustainable growth; 2) developing services; and 3) responsible financial management. These themes will be materialised through 14 concrete goals. The city's implementation process consists of two mapping exercises. The first exercise explores how each theme in the city's strategy fits with the UN's goals; for example, the first theme 'Securing sustainable growth' aligns with all SDGs apart from SDG 17. The second mapping exercise takes a reverse approach and explores how the SDGs fit with the city's own goals; for example, SDG 1 aligns with five of the city's goals, namely 'sound and healthy', 'minds the wellbeing of children and young people', 'digital', 'learning', and 'financially sustainable'. Through this double and reverse exercise all the SDGs get incorporated within the city's own priority themes thereby linking up global and city goals. Following this mapping, the implementation report reviews the progress made towards the HLPF 2019 priority SDGs.

Stakeholder engagement process

Representatives from different municipal divisions and units drafted this report. In this process, the team worked together with New York City. Helsinki also expresses its hope in producing a network of city-level governments working on implementation reports. For future reviews of the Goals, the city could benefit from conducting an expressly stakeholder engagement process.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Helsinki's VLR followed New York City's own model for reviewing and reporting progress towards the SDGs at the HLPF. Since this report was presented at the HLPF in 2019, it focuses on that year's priority goals—i.e. SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, and 16. The report also stresses the need to better coordinate efforts between the national and subnational levels of governments in terms of reporting and implementation. Without this, it claims, might be difficult to meet successfully the ambitious goals set out in the 2030 Agenda.

La Paz

VLR Year:	2019	Area	472 km ² (city area)
VLR Name:	Agenda ODS para el Municipio de la Paz	Population (year)	757,184 (2012)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

La Paz is considered to be the de facto capital of the Plurinational State of Bolivia—the constitutional capital being Sucre—and its main political, cultural and financial centre. Located at an average altitude of 3650m above sea-level, La Paz is the world's highest metropolitan area. Bolivia is responsible for implementing the "Territorialising the SDGs³⁴" programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and La Paz's VLR forms part of this. The city conducted its VLR as a way to monitor and reinforce current efforts towards achieving and localising the SDGs.

The VLR first identifies some 111 targets that can be tackled at the municipal level in Bolivia, and then aligns them to its current ongoing masterplan, "La Paz 2040: La Paz We Want" (La Paz 2040: La Paz que Queremos in Spanish). Here, the VLR becomes a pragmatic instrument working as a conceptual and methodological framework to formulate the policies that will guide sustainable development towards 2030. The VLR first diagnoses the current situation of La Paz in reference to the SDGs, and identify priorities through a stakeholder engagement process. Then, as a result of this localisation exercise, the city proposes three areas of integral action that will simultaneously address multiple issues—namely 'healthy life', 'inclusive sustainable mobility', and 'decent work'. Each of these wholistic areas of action will have their own accelerators with concrete strategic actions to deliver their main objectives by 2030. These three 'policy-combos' become an instrument to speed up progress towards attaining the SDGs in La Paz.

Stakeholder engagement process

La Paz's VLR emphasises throughout the need to leave no one behind. The first step was the creation of vertical—between different levels of government—and horizontal—cross departmental—government working groups. This was followed by awareness-raising campaigns to better inform citizens of La Paz's intention of utilising the SDGs as a benchmark to monitor sustainable development. The city also conducted stakeholder engagement processes as part of quantitative and qualitative diagnoses of its current state and to identify priority areas for future action. To complement official statistics, quantitative analysis included a survey targeting 3,839 households, interviewing people over 18 years old. Focus groups comprised of 46 representatives of the Organism for Participation and Social Control and 51 Young Leaders were the key engagement processes to qualitatively assess the city's standing in regards to the SDGs.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The starting point of La Paz's VLR is understanding that cities are responsible for delivering many of the SDGs' targets. The VLR has six building blocks, which cover most of the VNR requirements. The VLR identifies those targets that can effectively be delivered by Bolivian municipal governments and reviews all the 17 SDGs.

City of Los Angeles

VLR Year:	2019	Area	1213.8 km ²
VLR Name:	Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goals: A Voluntary Local Review of Progress in 2019	Population (year)	3,990,456 (2018 estimate)
		GDP (year)	USD 860,452 million (2014)

VLR description

Los Angeles is the second largest city in the United States after New York. Home to Hollywood, its entertainment industry is one of its stronger economic sectors. As Mayor Garcetti highlighted in the introduction to the VLR report: “this voluntary local review is both a chance to share what is working in Los Angeles, and an opportunity to ask for help with what is not”. This VLR helps LA to measure its contribution towards achieving the SDGs at the global level. By adopting the common language of the global goals, LA is improving the daily lives of its citizens. The VLR report focuses on explaining why LA is implementing the SDGs and emphasises the localisation process. The report highlights the three main lessons learnt in carrying out this VLR: 1) the inherent interlinkages existing among SDGs and their targets; 2) the city’s central role in SDG implementation and monitoring; and 3) the importance of justice and equity when pursuing sustainable development.

The city localised the SDGs in three phases. First, mapping and alignment, to identify existing policies already working towards achieving particular targets. Second, implementation based on the gaps identified during phase 1. Third, adding local context by questioning whether the city has the agency to implement measures towards achieving a particular target and also, whether the language of the target was inclusive enough to recognise all citizens. For example, given the lack of acknowledgement to LGBTQIA+ communities, LA added its own target under SDG 5, Gender Equality; referred as Target 5.x. “end all forms of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons and ensure that LGBTQIA+ persons have equal access to services, education, and employment opportunities” (p. 9). This methodology was applied to all goals and targets to better reflect the local reality of the city.

Stakeholder engagement process

A stakeholder engagement process as such did not form part of Los Angeles’s VLR. However, in some instances, it mentions that particular measures or programmes did have their own stakeholder engagement process, and credit is given to the Mayor’s office, the city’s departments, the City Council, and partners in civil society (including public, private, non-profit, academic, and philanthropic sectors).

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Los Angeles’ VLR follows its own format. For the most part it focuses on the city’s own understanding of the SDGs and localisation process. As it was presented during HLPF 2019, the VLR highlights that year’s priority goals. It also reviews the city’s own priority areas related to SDGs 5, 11, and 15.

New Taipei City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	1,140 km ²
VLR Name:	New Taipei, A Livable and Thriving City. New Taipei City Voluntary Local Review for Sustainable Development Goals 2019	Population (year)	4,014,560 (2019)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

New Taipei wants to become a liveable and thriving city. In 2010, it became the largest city in Taiwan, and its population has continued growing ever since. The city faces challenges common to any other large city such as growing inequality, pollution, and providing high quality public services.

New Taipei City's VLR shows how local actions can have global repercussions, with the report representing the city's commitment to act locally to achieve the global goals. Over the past few years, New Taipei City has strived to bring sustainable principles into local policies, but the VLR presents a unique opportunity to re-examine the city's trajectory based on the common language of the SDGs.

Stakeholder engagement process

New Taipei City's VLR serves to translate local policies—usually written from an expert viewpoint in language difficult to understand—into a more approachable language for citizens to grasp ongoing policies so that they can be part of the conversation regarding where New Taipei City should head going forward. New Taipei City hopes that by conducting the VLR, citizens and government officials alike will increase their sense of ownership of the SDGs in general and the city's future development in particular. The city will create a bottom-up feedback mechanism to engage with all its citizens. With this VLR, the city hopes to prioritise the notion of 'citizenry' to seek citizen's participation in reviewing SDGs implementation and progress. Moreover, through its VLR, New Taipei increased its level of multi-stakeholder participation by establishing closer dialogues.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

New Taipei's VLR follows the main building blocks of the VNR format. The VLR focuses mainly on reviewing SDG 11, but complements this assessment with a shorter review of every other SDG to show how the city is advancing the 2030 Agenda. Due to the lack of guidelines by the UN, New Taipei resorted to publicly available toolkits, including the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat)'s 'Localising the SDGs' tool, the OECD's 'Towards the Localisation of the SDGs', and IGES' 'VLR Lab'.

Santana de Parnaíba

VLR Year:	2019	Area	185 km ²
VLR Name:	Santana de Parnaíba, Conectada Ao Futuro. Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (available in Portuguese only)	Population (year)	136,517 (2018)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

Santiago de Parnaíba is a city and municipality in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. It is the safest city within São Paulo metropolitan region, and performs better in education and children mortality rate than the national average. In 2018, Santana de Parnaíba became the first city in Latin America to commit to conduct a voluntary review of its progress towards achieving the SDGs. In this endeavour, the city collaborated with Gaia Education³⁵, adapting its 'One City at a Time' process to ensure that the 2030 Agenda became a local reality. The SDGs are the most complex tool ever used by the city to evaluate its own standing in regards to sustainable development.

Santana de Parnaíba takes its VLR as an opportunity to systematically scrutinise its current policies as well as infusing its existing efforts with the ambitions of the goals. The VLR process also served to find synergies between different departments and to optimise actions towards achieving a better living environment for its citizens, hence advancing more strategic policymaking while also finding interlinkages across initiatives.

Stakeholder engagement process

The first step of the VLR process was that of engagement. The city selected a group of civil servants across all government departments to form a working group focusing on SDG implementation. In this stage there was also a participatory learning process, 'Formação de Multiplicadores de ODS', for all the municipal technical secretariats to create a common understanding of the SDGs to subsequently, facilitate their implementation. This was just the first step since the city aims to expand stakeholder engagement mechanisms in the future to reach out to a wider number of people.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The city identified three catalysers in the form of SDGs 3, 4, and 16. Implementation of these goals will be more effective towards achieving the remaining ones. The VLR also reviewed four goals that require additional work—SDGs 1, 11, 15, and 17. After the introduction and methodology, the report focuses on reviewing the progress towards the identified goals. Each of the priority SDGs is analysed paying attention to existing policies, current situation and areas of improvement to finally recommend concrete actions to be taken over the next 10 years, and thus achieving them by 2030.

Taipei City

VLR Year:	2019	Area	271.8 km ²
VLR Name:	2019 Taipei City: Voluntary Local Review	Population (year)	2,646,204 (2019)
		GDP (year)	USD 327,295 million (2014)

VLR description

The recent impact of climate change related environmental hazards has indicated the need to reinforce efforts to curb GHG emissions and to seek sustainable development pathways. To oversee sustainable development, the Taipei City created the 'Council for Sustainable Development' in 2004. Taipei conducted its VLR to pledge its commitment to the SDGs and to measure its progress towards achieving them. The VLR report highlights the different measures implemented to localise current international trends in sustainable development.

The VLR explores the alignment of Taipei's vision of being a 'Livable and Sustainable City' and its three main dimensions—namely 'Engagement of Environmental Regeneration and Resource Circulation', 'Promotion of Social Security and Sharing Society', and 'Smart Growth of Economy and Technology'. It emphasises the implementation and review process carried out to conduct the VLR. Its VLR process is divided in four stages: 1) 'Incubation' is with the decision-making process preceding the VLR work; 2) 'Preparation' describes the localisation process and the selection of indicators as well as the correlation between the SDGs and Taipei's Strategic Development Plan; 3) 'Development' explores how the city revised its policies to meet the needs of the SDGs; and 4) 'Announcement' focuses on disseminating the VLR and its findings. The VLR report then goes on to review particular SDGs and related initiatives.

Stakeholder engagement process

The VLR refers to existing mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, and in particular, to the above-mentioned 'Council for Sustainable Development'. This body was created to guide the city's efforts on environmental protection, economic development, and social equity based on the principles of global sustainable development frameworks valid at the time. Chaired by the mayor, this body comprises government officials, NGOs, experts and scholars, and business representatives. It is subdivided in seven functional divisions: 1) livable urban environment; 2) sustainable education; 3) sustainable society; 4) sustainable transportation; 5) energy and ecology; 6) water and land resources; 7) and sustainable development vision. In addition to this top-down approach, the city has also set in motion mechanisms for citizens' participation by providing avenues for voicing their concerns and proposing policies regarding sustainable development.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Taipei's localisation of the SDGs looked for interlinkages between city policies and 16 out of the 17 SDGs—it excludes SDG 14, Life Below Water. The VLR report focuses on the priority areas for the government: SDGs 3, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 17. Among them, the city has made significant progress in SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). However, the report does not align itself with the VNR format in regards to its structure and process.

Mannheim City

Published Year	2019	Area	145 km ²
Title of VLR	The Implementation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in Mannheim 2030	Population (year)	300,000
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

Mannheim City's VLR is the review of the implementation of the "Mission Statement Mannheim 2030", a future vision for the city towards 2030. This Mission Statement was developed through extensive civic participation and adopted by the Local Council of the City of Mannheim in March 2019. Seven different strategic goals are set out in the Mission as follows: 1) Social and cultural empowerment, social integration and lifelong learning; 2) Health, well-being and demographic change; 3) Equality, diversity and integration; 4) Democracy, engagement and participation; 5) Digitalization, innovation and sustainable growth; 6) Climate, environment and alternative mobility; and 7) International cooperation, global responsibility and consumption.

Mannheim VLR thus describes the methods to implement those seven strategies, by integrating SDGs at the local level, and placing emphasis on financial sustainability and concrete project outlines. The Mission Statement forms the framework of city administration for the budget plans for 2020 and 2021. It also highlights the importance of civic participation in achieving this goal.

Stakeholder engagement process

The process to develop the Mission Statement took over two and a half years using a broad-based participation approach. The city posed two questions to residents and stakeholders— "what should our life in Mannheim look like in 2030, and how can the 17 SDGs be implemented". As result, more than 2,500 residents, companies, institutions, and universities participated in active discussion and workshops, with around 10,000 involved in opinion polls, culminating in over 1,500 ideas and proposals being suggested. This participatory process was financially supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Engagement Global. The City Council also passed various rules and regulations for civic participation, and provided descriptions of a common understanding about what civic participation actually is and what it means, and how well it works in Mannheim.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

The central structure of the Mannheim VLR is the detailed description of the seven strategic goals, including background, methods, indicators and definitions with associated the SDGs, as well as concrete strategies and projects. It is not strictly organised in the way the VNR Handbook suggests, but it does cover the key building blocks of the VNR such as ownership of the SDGs, structural issues, goals and targets, and means of implementation under the description of each strategic goal. Changes in results of indicators have been shown since 2012.

State of Oaxaca

VLR Year:	2020	Area	95,364 km ²
VLR Name:	Voluntary Subnational Review	Population (year)	3,967,889 (2017)
		GDP (year)	Not listed

VLR description

The State of Oaxaca is located in Southern Mexico. A total of 23% of its land is natural vegetation. Despite its large territory, Oaxaca is sparsely populated and 51.6% of its inhabitants live in rural areas. The state has the country's highest share of people identified as indigenous (65.7%). Out of its 570 municipalities, 417 are governed by Internal or Indigenous Normative Systems (referred in Spanish as “usos y costumbres”). Oaxaca has also the largest concentration of poverty within Mexico, with 70.4% of its people in this situation.

This preliminary Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) is the first stage of the implementation and review process to be carried out by the Government of Oaxaca. Following the Mexican Federal Government, which in 2015 signed the 2030 Agenda and created appropriate bodies for its implementation and monitoring, the State Government promulgated the ‘Decree that creates the Council for compliance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the State of Oaxaca’ (hereinafter, State Council) in 2018. The State Council will coordinate, both horizontal and vertically, actions to achieve the SDGs and to outreach to other stakeholders. To this end, the State Council formed three work committees—Social Inclusion, Economic Growth, and Environmental Sustainability—in line with the three dimensions of sustainable development. The working groups are institutional mechanisms to advance the SDGs and are made up of representatives from government agencies, civil society, academia, and the private sector. Rather than reviewing the progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, Oaxaca’s VSR is a roadmap for its implementation. The VSR shows the alignment process between the SDGs with state and municipal policies, and provides a gap-finding exercise, as well as identifying appropriate indicators for monitoring its implementation.

Stakeholder engagement process

This preliminary version of the VSR includes provisions for subsequently conducting a complementary stakeholder engagement process—including citizens, academia, and the private sector—at both the state and municipal level. The stakeholder engagement process is explained in section 7 of the VSR, and stresses the need to involve civil society, academia, and the private sector. To localise and implement the 2030 Agenda, and in line with its spirit of forming partnerships, the Government of Oaxaca has been supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). To raise awareness and engage a wider range of stakeholders, Oaxaca is carrying out two additional strategies. First, it is publishing its own magazine—Sostenibilidad, enfoques y estrategias para el desarrollo en Oaxaca—a space for people to come together around the ideas underlying the SDGs. It also organised the First Convention for Sustainable Development in Oaxaca.

Structure of the VLR and alignment with the VNR format

Oaxaca’s VSR represents the commitment of the State to support the Federal Government’s efforts in attaining the SDGs. Although no particular goals are reviewed, the VSR report follows the building blocks of VNRs. The Government of Oaxaca plans on submitting a follow up VSR.

Annex 1: Reference Materials on Voluntary Local Reviews

This report has analysed the VLRs made by [Buenos Aires](#), [Bristol](#), [Hamamatsu](#), Helsinki, [Kitakyushu](#), [La Paz](#), [Los Angeles](#), [Manheim](#), [New Taipei](#), New York (2018 and 2019), [Oaxaca](#), [Santana de Parnaíba](#), [Shimokawa](#), [Taipei](#), and [Toyama](#). The majority of them are part of [IGES' VLR Lab](#).

As the VLR movement gains momentum, there has been released a series of tools and handbooks to support cities' efforts. A group of students from Carnegie Mellon University published a [handbook](#) to support cities review process. The city of Bristol also published a [handbook](#) similar in scope based on its own experience.

The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) has developed a [handbook](#) for cities wishing to carry out their own VLR based on Shimokawa's experience.

The European Commission's Science and Knowledge Service published a new [handbook](#) to help cities measure their progress towards the SDGs. 'The European Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Review' focuses on indicators at the local level.

The Brookings Institute published a [report](#) with suggestions for the next generation of VLRs entitled "Next Generation Urban Planning: Enabling Sustainable Development at the Local Level through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)".

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs published a [report](#) to support policymakers' efforts in localising the SDGs.

The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) launched a [report](#) comparing the VLRs of G20 countries.

Annex 2: VLR Bibliography

Bristol: Fox and MacLeod (2019) Bristol and the SDGs: A Voluntary Local Review of progress 2019. University of Bristol's Cabot Institute for the Environment.

Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires Ciudad (2019) Voluntary Local Review: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires Ciudad.

Hamamatsu: Hamamatsu City and Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) (2019) Hamamatsu Local Voluntary Review 2019 – Hamamatsu, a Creative City Built on Civic Collaboration, Shining into the Future.

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Santana De Parnaíba: SDG Working Group of Santana de Parnaíba (2019) Santana de Parnaíba 2030: Vision Connected to the Future. Prefecture of Santana Di Parnaíba.

Shimokawa: Kataoka Y., Asakawa K., Fujino J. (2018) Shimokawa Town the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies City Taskforce.

Taipei City: Taipei City Government and Council for Sustainable Development (2019) 2019 Taipei City Voluntary Local Review, Sep. 2019. Global Perspective . Taipei Action.

Toyama: Nakano, R., Fujino, J., and Kataoka, Y. (2018). Toyama City the Sustainable Development Goals Report - Compact City Planning based on

Endnotes

¹ The authors have made every effort to ensure this report includes all the available VLRs as of February 2020. If any have been overlooked, please contact the authors for its inclusion in further editions.

² Source: United Nations, About the Sustainable Development Goals. Webpage available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

³ Smith, M. S., Cook, C., Sokona, Y., Elmqvist, T., Fukushi, K., Broadgate, W., & Jarzebski, M. P. (2018). Advancing sustainability science for the SDGs. *Sustainability science*, 13(6), 1483-1487.

⁴ This is mentioned in paragraph 79. UN-DESA. *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. (2015). Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

⁵ The UN defines the HLPF as: “the main United Nations platform on sustainable development and it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global level”. Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>

⁶ Mcleod and Fox. “Voluntary Local Reviews: A Handbook for UK Cities, Building on the Bristol Experience.” (2019).

⁷ OECD Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/territorial-approach-sdgs.htm>

⁸ Opening statement to the VLR of La Paz by Luis Revilla Herrero, Municipal Mayor of La Paz.

⁹ For the sake of clarity, this report uses the term ‘city’ to refer to subnational levels of government, including regional governments, cities, towns, or villages. This is also because of the important role cities are playing in localising the SDGs.

¹⁰ Elmqvist, T., Andersson, E., Frantzeskaki, N., McPhearson, T., Olsson, P., Gaffney, O., Takeuchi, L., & Folke, C. (2019). Sustainability and resilience for transformation in the urban century. *Nature Sustainability*, 2(4), 267-273.

¹¹ For discussion on the localisation of the Agenda 21, see for example Smardon, R. C. (2008). A comparison of Local Agenda 21 implementation in North American, European and Indian cities. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*. Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 118-137; or Tonami, A., & Mori, A. (2007). Sustainable development in Thailand: Lessons from implementing Local Agenda 21 in three cities. *The Journal of Environment & Development*, 16(3), 269-289.

¹² Fenton, P., & Gustafsson, S. (2017). Moving from high-level words to local action—governance for urban sustainability in municipalities. *Current opinion in environmental sustainability*, 26, 129-133.

¹³ Moallemi, E. A., Malekpour, S., Hadjidakou, M., Raven, R., Szetey, K., Moghadam, M. M., & Bryan, B. A. (2019). Local Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. *The Lancet Planetary Health*, 3(6), e240-e241.

¹⁴ Antonio Guterres. Remarks at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. September 24, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/20190924-remarks-at-the-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development>

[9-09-24/remarks-high-level-political-sustainable-development-forum](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25245Handbook_2020_EN.pdf)

¹⁵ Bulkeley, H., & Betsil, M. (2005). Rethinking sustainable cities: Multilevel governance and the 'urban' politics of climate change. *Environmental Politics*, 14(1), 42-63.

¹⁶ Opening statement to the VLR of Buenos Aires by Horacio Rodríguez Larrieta, Chief of Government of Buenos Aires City.

¹⁷ Bulkeley, H., & Betsill, M. M. (2013). Revisiting the urban politics of climate change. *Environmental politics*, 22(1), 136-154.

¹⁸ Source: IGES Online Voluntary Local Review (VLR) Lab. Available at: <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr/about>

¹⁹ Opening Statement by Mayor Kitahashi to the city's VLR.

²⁰ APFSD is a regional, intergovernmental forum, served as a preparatory meeting for the HLPF. It feeds in the voices of Asia-Pacific countries concerning the challenges, opportunities, lessons learnt and policy needs to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Source: <https://www.unescap.org/apfsd/7/>

²¹ The VLR Lab is supported by the following organisations: United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG-ASPAC), Asia Development Alliance (ADA), the Hawaii Institute for Human Rights (HIHR), CITYNET, Gaia Education, and Local Government for Sustainability Japan (ICLEI Japan).

²² The UN-wide Local2030 was established under the purview of the Deputy Secretary-General with the aim to enhance the UN engagement with stakeholders to advance the SDGs at the local level. Source: <https://www.local2030.org/about-us.php>

²³ Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25245Handbook_2020_EN.pdf

²⁴ The Global Metro Monitor has an interactive tool listing economic data of the world's 300 largest metro areas. It is available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/global-metro-monitor/>

²⁵ Opening remarks by the Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti to the city's VLR report.

²⁶ See for example Elder and Bartalini (2019) for a review of the G20 countries approach to VNRs.

²⁷ Shimokawa's VLR, p. 38. Throughout the VLR process, the city emphasised the the SDG's motto of 'leaving no-one behind'.

²⁸ This idea have been constantly addressed in much of the literature on climate change and multilevel governance. See for example: Corfee-Morlot, J., Kamal-Chaoui, L., Donovan, M. G., Cochran, I., Robert, A., & Teasdale, P. J. (2009). *Cities, climate change and multilevel governance*. OECD Environment Working Papers, No 14, OECD Publishing, Paris.

²⁹ According to the HLPF 2018 official webpage. Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018>

³⁰ According to the HLPF 2019 official webpage. Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2019>

³¹ Bristol's VLR, p. 9.

³² The Brookings Metro Global Monitor groups together Kitakyushu and Fukuoka cities.

³³ All information about BA Elige can be found on its webpage. Available at:
<https://baelige.buenosaires.gob.ar/>

³⁴ More information about this programme is available at:

<https://www.bo.undp.org/content/bolivia/es/home/projects/territorializacion-de-los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible.html>

³⁵ For more information on Gaia Education visit:
<https://www.gaiaeducation.org/>

