LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS' REPORT
TO THE 2022 HLPF

6th REPORT

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TOWARDS
THE LOCALIZATION
OF THE SDGs

Local and regional governments breaking
through for a sustainable and just recovery

**GLOBAL
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#. ABBREVIATIONS

A

ABEMA: Associação Brasileira de Entidades Estaduais de Meio Ambiente (Brazilian Association of States Entities of Environment)

ABM: Associação Brasileira de Municípios (Brazilian Association of Municipalities)

AChM: Asociación Chilena de Municipalidades (Chilean Association of Municipalities)

ACOBOL: Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia (Association of Bolivian Women Local Councillors)

ADCCN: Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal

AECM: Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities

AER: Assembly of European Regions

AFD: Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency)

AFLRA: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

AICCRE: Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa (Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

AIMF: Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (International Association of Francophone Mayors)

ALGAJ: Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica

AMB: Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia (Association of Municipalities of Bolivia)

AME: Asociación de Municipalidades Ecuatorianas (Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities)

AMGVM: Association des Maires des Grandes Villes de Madagascar (Association of Mayors of Major Cities of Madagascar)

AMLOGAL: Association of Mayors and Local Government Authorities of Liberia

AMM: Association des Municipalités du Mali (Association of Municipalities of Mali)

ANAMM: Associação Nacional dos Municípios de Moçambique (National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique)

ANCB: Association Nationale des Communes du Bénin (National Association of Municipalities of Benin)

ANCG: National Association of Municipalities of Guinea

APEKSI: Association of Indonesian Municipalities

APLA: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

APPSI: Provincial Government Association of Indonesia

ARDCI: Assemblée des Régions et Districts de Côte d'Ivoire (Assembly of Regions and Districts of Côte d'Ivoire)

ARDCZ: Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe

ASPAC: Asia-Pacific region

B

BALA: Botswana Association of Local Authorities

BWP: Botswana pula (national currency)

C

C40: C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

CAF: County Assemblies Forum of Kenya

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CI: Congreso de Intendentes (Uruguayan Congress of Intendants)

CIB: UCLG Capacity and Institution Building Working Group

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Cités Unies Liban/BTVL: Cités Unies Liban/Bureau Technique des Villes Libanaises (United Cities Lebanon/ Technical Office of Lebanese Cities)

CLGF: Commonwealth Local Government Forum

CNM: Confederação Nacional de Municípios (National Confederation of Municipalities of Brazil)

CoG: Council of Governors of Kenya

COMURES: Corporación de Municipalidades de la República de El Salvador (Corporation of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador)

CONGOPE: Consorcio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador (Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador)

COP: United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change

COVID-19: coronavirus disease, originated by SARS-CoV-2 virus

CSO: civil society organization

CSW: Commission on the Status of Women

CUF: Cités Unies France (United Cities France)

D

DALCA: Dominica Association of Local Community Authorities

DR: Danish Regions

DSTGB: Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund (German Association of Towns and Municipalities)

E

ECA: Ethiopian Cities Association

ECLAC: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

ELGA: Eswatini Local Government Association

ENPE: Association of Greek Regions

EU: European Union

EUDEL: Euskadiko Udalen Elkartea (Association of Basque Municipalities)

EUR: euro (currency)

F

FAM: Federación Argentina de Municípios (Argentine Federation of Municipalities)

FAMSI: Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity

FCM: Federación Colombiana de Municipios (Federation of Colombian Municipalities)

FCM: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

FCT: Faîtière des Communes du Togo (Association of Municipalities of Togo)

FEDOMU: Federación Dominicana de Municipios (Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic)

FEMP: Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces)

FEMULP: Federación de Municipios Libres del Perú (Federation of Free Municipalities of Peru)

FENAMM: Federación Nacional de Municipios de México (National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico)

FLACMA: Federación Latinoamericana de Ciudades, Municipios y Asociaciones de Gobiernos Locales (Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Latin America)

FMDV: Fonds Mondial pour le Développement des Villes (Global Fund for Cities Development)

FNCT: Fédération Nationale de Communes Tunisiennes (National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities)

FNP: Frente Nacional de Prefeitos (Brazilian National Front of Mayors)

FSLGA: Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities

G

GALGA: Gambia Association of Local Governments Authorities

GBF: global biodiversity framework

GCoM: Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

GDP: gross domestic product

GiZ: Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)

GTF: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments

H

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

I

ICLEI: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICT: information and communication technology

ICZM: integrated coastal zone management

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

K

KEDE: Central Union of Greek Municipalities

KS: Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities

L

LALRG: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments

LATAM: Latin America and the Caribbean

LCA: Local Councils' Association of Malta

LCAS: Local Councils Association of the Sindh (Pakistan)

LCP: League of Cities of the Philippines

LDC: least developed country

LGA: local government association

LGA: Local Government Association of the UK

LGNZ: Local Government New Zealand

LMMA: locally managed marine area

LMP: League of Municipalities of the Philippines

LPP: League of Provinces of the Philippines

LRG: local and regional government

M

MALGA: Malawi Local Government Association

MEWA: Middle East and West Asia

MMC: Mayors Migration Council

MMU: Marmara Municipalities Union

MOOC: Massive and Open Online Course

MPA: marine protected area

N

NALAG: National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana

NALAS: Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe

NAMRB: National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria

NARMIN: National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal

NGO: non-governmental organization

NORAM: North America and the English and French speaking Caribbean region

O

ODA: official development assistance

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

R

RALGA: Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities

REFELA: Réseau des Femmes Elues Locales d'Afrique (Network of Locally Elected Women of Africa)

S

SALAR: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions

SCTM: Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SIDS: small island developing state

SNG: subnational government

SOS: Skupnost občin Slovenije (Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia)

SYVICOL: Syndicat des Villes et Communes Luxembourgeoises (Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities)

U

UCAZ: Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe

UCCC-CVUC:United Municipalities and Cities of Cameroon

UCCI: Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas (Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities)

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG Africa: UCLG's regional section in Africa

UCLG ASPAC: UCLG's regional section in Asia-Pacific

UCLG-MEWA: UCLG's regional section in the Middle East and West Asia

UK: United Kingdom

ULGA: Uganda Local Governments Association

UMT: Union of Municipalities of Turkey

UN: United Nations

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNCDF: United Nations Capital Development Fund

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNECA: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

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

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNESCWA: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

UNFCCC :United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNGL: Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales (National Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica)

US/USA: United States of America

USD: US dollar (currency)

UVICOCI: Union des Villes et Communes de Côte d'Ivoire (Union of Cities and Municipalities of Côte d'Ivoire)

V

VAWIP: violence against women in politics

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNG Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Association of Dutch Municipalities)

VNR: Voluntary National Review

VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review

VVSG: Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)

Z

ZELS: Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

ZILGA: Zimbabwe Local Government Association

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#. JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2022 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZED CONSTITUENCY OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

In the midst of the interconnected crises that the world is facing today, local and regional governments and their representative associations have been and still are at the forefront of efforts to overcome these difficult times as providers and protectors of their communities and of the planet.

Local and regional governments have been working to protect their communities even in these complex contexts, working to safeguard those most vulnerable and ensuring their safety by sanitizing transport, ensuring the provision of food, and working to halt evictions as well as safeguarding the health and human rights of people. Local and regional governments have worked to protect women from situations of violence in the pandemic delivering gender-based responses and by fostering systems of care. Moreover, city diplomacy has worked to ensure that solidarity and the providing of essential services to those who need them most continue during the worst of times.

To truly ensure that no one and no place is left behind and that we achieve the SDGs, a more networked multilateral system based on multilevel governance, and multi-stakeholder collaboration is needed. This renewed multilateral system needs to consider the many dimensions of an urban world: a system of rural and urban territories, small and intermediary cities, metropolitan entities and regions; and needs to deliver financial support and capacity development for local and regional governments (LRGs) to participate in this transformation. A whole of government and whole of society approach is also essential to address inequalities, climate change, and to foster peace to transform our systems.

Localization in 2022: the SDGs in review this year

■ **Strengthening local public service provision to ensure the right to education and a better shared future**

The impact of the pandemic among those who already had less opportunities is tangible. Older persons, workers and persons living in informality, women, children, and persons with disabilities and older persons have been among the hardest hit. The current crises in Ukraine, Mali, or Lebanon are also hitting marginalized populations the most, causing displacement and refugees, as well as the tragic loss of lives.

The role of local and regional governments as hubs of learning and innovation is critical to ensuring quality education and providing accessible, safe and supporting environments to all which foster equality and equal opportunities, and which will allow us to be more resilient to future crises. Education is a fundamental human right for unlocking the full development of individuals and communities at all stages of life. Indeed, investing in educational attainment is key to overcoming inequalities. This involves fostering formal education, including free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, combatting early school dropout and incentivizing return; enriching school curriculums; promoting healthy and safe learning environments, early childhood development, and equitable participation in post-secondary education, including university. It also includes promoting technical and vocational skills, employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship, both through TVET and higher education, as well as informal and non-formal forms of providing education, particularly to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Local and regional governments have a privileged position to foster educational policies and to create

enabling environments for exchange and learning to empower their communities. Participatory policy-making is crucial in order to ensure that lifelong educational programmes meet the needs and priorities of all citizens.

The recovery of the learning crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wiped out 20 years of learning gains, will only occur if extraordinary efforts are made. It is estimated that 11 million girls will not return to school due to COVID-19 school closures. For this reason, a bottom-up, proximity and community-based education approach that goes beyond the boundaries of traditional schooling is critical. This includes addressing the digital divide through public services, engaging families in educational policies of their children, fostering gender-responsive education and overcoming barriers to women and girls in education and, all in all, providing adaptation measures for populations that face structural discrimination.

The provision of adequate education requires responding to a number of fundamental needs that include access to water and sanitation (SDG 6), health (SDG 3), food (SDG 2), transport, housing and other types of infrastructure, especially in cities (SDG 11).

■ **Addressing the interconnected crises through gender equality and feminist policy making**

The gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are well-known and far-reaching, disproportionately impacting women, girls, transgender and non-binary people, especially visible minorities and racialized people, those with different accessibility needs, those of migrant background, older

women, and other marginalised groups. And many stem from the same cause: the persistent association between care work and women's work, coupled with the devaluing of this work both in the home and in society.

Challenges related to violence against women have also been significantly increased in the last years, causing serious consequences and potential mid to long-term impacts on health and well-being, affecting the whole of society. Civil society movements and local governments raised special awareness on the growing prevalence of femicides.

Fostering gender equality and the participation of women and local feminist leaders in decision-making is core to the democratic process, and key to enabling governance with care and empathy, and responding to the diverse needs and aspirations of communities. Feminist local politics, which promotes solidarity and partnership over competition, can contribute to creating spaces for people and the planet to be nurtured and respected and can ensure all citizens' rights be met through enabling environments which are sensitive to gender and account for a diversity of needs. Local and regional governments and their active role and growing engagement in promoting public policies to address violence against women is essential for an enabling environment for women development and empowerment and for feminist politics.

Feminist local leadership is about placing our communities at the centre, emphasising governance of proximity, peaceful collaboration, and delivering services in a way that cares for those who provide them.

■ **Achieving better life on land, below water, and in all cities and territories**

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the intrinsic connections between people and nature and how climate change threatens livelihoods and biodiversity. **Achieving better and sustainable life on land and below water will only be possible through SDG localization processes that consider the role of big and intermediary cities, small towns, and regions and territories**, which are essential to resilience and to foster alternative models of production and consumption. Sustainable territorial development requires strategies that approach the territory as a multifunctional and connected system. Local and regional governments are essential to embody a vision for a better life on land as the closest level of government to communities and as the protectors of the biodiversity of their territories.

To replace our current extractive paradigm by a regenerative future, unsustainable resource use, population growth, inequality and the flawed economic system that have caused ecosystems decline must be systematically addressed. **All climate action must be supported and reinforced by a change in our relationship with our ecosystems through a structural change in economic models and production-consumption systems. A shift towards caring systems, through culture as a lever for sustainable development; as well as the protection of environmental rights and eliminating all forms of injustices with regard to** access to a quality and healthy environment are critical contributions from a local and regional perspective.

Moreover, protecting our oceans and fostering life below water will not be possible without the strong inclusion and involvement of all local and regional governments even beyond coastal areas, fostering biodiversity protection, the management of watershed and reducing coastal and marine pollution. An increasing number of local and regional governments are engaged in maritime spatial planning and in the management all coastal and maritime activities and the blue economy. In short, protecting our oceans cannot be achieved without multilevel and multistakeholder ocean governance involving all government levels and actors through vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation.

Combining scientific monitoring, civil society inclusion and traditional knowledge is critical for ecosystem restoration. Local and regional governments can engage multiple levels of government and stakeholders across sectors in a coordinated manner, facilitating cooperation, trust and mutual learning, as well as greater inclusivity and justice.

■ **Commitment to the localization of the universal development agendas and fostering Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews.**

Local and regional governments and their networks are committed to the localization of the universal development agendas and to leaving no one and no place behind. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, LRG involvement in monitoring and reporting processes has evolved.

Over 2020 and 2021, the total number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) available worldwide has more than tripled (from approximately 40 VLRs in June 2020 to more than 150 in June 2022). In the same period of time, 15 Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) (country-wide, bottom-up subnational reporting processes on the state of localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a specific country) have emerged in 14 countries worldwide. Ten more are going to be published in July 2022. These VLRs and VSRs -representing now a total of 1.2 billion people- have proved to influence national dialogues and mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs, and have also had direct positive impacts in local governance by increasing awareness, transparency, accountability and ownership of the Global Goals by local and regional governments and their associations. Key results include better vision of localization processes, more attention from national governments and sometimes even better coordination with the involvement of local government associations in national mechanisms. Such reporting processes also strengthen the dialogue between local governments and international institutions.

Participation, however, remains unequal: LRG participation in the preparation of VNRs increased gradually from 32% of countries in 2016 to 48% in 2022 while LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms to steer SDG implementation made slower progress. The participation was 28% on average between 2016-2021 and reached 34% in 2022, although with strong regional contrasts. In Europe the participation reached 88% in VNR processes and 63% in national coordination mechanisms in 2022 but declines this year in Asia-Pacific and in Latin America were felt.

VLRs and VSRs should be seen as policy tools in order to create more traction and ownership of the Goals on top of their use in reporting. Local and regional governments and their associations reiterate their commitment to fostering the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSR). The synergies that arise from the combination of these reports and processes are invaluable in promoting ownership and the achievement of the SDGs and increase local and regional government participation in national coordination mechanisms.

Our hopes for the 2022 HLPF

Local and regional governments are bringing to light the new essentials for a world that cares. The time has come to develop an enabling environment for basic services as the cornerstone of the life and prosperity of our communities. To foster educational policies that can develop human capacities and creativity and promote equal opportunities in quality education. For women and girls to be represented in all facets of public life. To protect life above land and below water through a change in our relationship with our ecosystems and in economic models through a system of cities approach. To strengthen the localization of the SDGs to promote the ownership and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda at local and regional levels.

Efforts shared among local and regional governments and their networks and partners in maintaining local service provision and fostering peace through city diplomacy will be critical to reach these shared objectives.

In this sense, and following the SDGs in review in 2022, the constituency of local and regional governments calls on the HLPF to:

- Include local and regional governments, who have understood the importance of the current context and the **vitality of basic services as the lever for improving the lives of our neighbors**, in decisions at all levels that involve service provision and mitigating the negative impacts of complex emergencies.

- **Foster the uninterrupted support of all levels of government in ensuring the health and human rights protection** to everyone and especially to the most vulnerable facets of the population.

- **Recognize the importance of city diplomacy as the transformative diplomacy that local and regional governments can bring to the table in times of crisis** and the key role that decentralized cooperation can play as an integral element to enhance our ability to foster peace and solidarity.

- **Build upon the display of care provided by local and regional governments** over the past years and recognize care as the dimension that needs to be incorporated into any and all policy decisions to protect the most vulnerable, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and those living in informality.

- **Prioritize education as a motor for sustainable development and strengthen it as an essential public service** responding to the needs of all and to the increasingly digital world.

- **Guarantee access and participation in cultural life as an antidote to crises** and as a critical driver of sustainable development and shift towards caring systems.

- **Mainstream gender equality and women empowerment within all policy-making processes** and recognize the transformative power that feminist policy making has in addressing inequalities, overcoming climate change, and achieving the SDGs.

- **Foster the inclusion of women and girls in local**

leadership and promote participatory, inclusive approaches that ensure all voices are accounted for and represented in decision-making.

■ **Strengthen capacities of local and regional governments in building sustainable management models of our ecosystems and biodiversity** to protect life on land and below water.

■ **Strengthen the role of intermediary cities, small towns, and rural areas** and territories in the achievement of the universal development agendas.

■ **Highlight the crucial role of multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration in the protection of our oceans** and the inclusion of cities and territories in ocean related policy making beyond coastal areas.

■ **Rethink fiscal architecture and strengthening local finance** to achieve the universal development agendas.

■ **Consider VLR and VSR processes as policy consolidation opportunities that are integral to foster ownership and achievement of the universal development agendas** and recognize VLRs and VSRs in official HLPF deliberations.

■ **Involve local and regional governments and their associations in VNR processes, and promote the development of VLRs and VSRs** (country-wide, bottom-up subnational reporting processes on the state of localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a specific country).

■ **Leverage linkages between the New Urban Agenda and the universal development agendas** to ensure service delivery, and coordination among spheres of government to accelerate their implementation.

■ **Foster a renewed, more inclusive, multilateral system based on ownership, co-creation and peace**, including and engaging local and regional governments and their representative associations in all stages of decision-making processes.

#. HIGHLIGHTS

Over the past two years, LRGs have positioned themselves as frontline responders to the complex and interconnected crises that our societies are facing. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of LRGs as the level of government closest to their populations has been put in the spotlight. This report provides the most updated and comprehensive understanding of the efforts that LRGs have been undertaking to sustainably and justly recover from COVID-19. This is done through a thorough and worldwide analysis of SDG localization in the 44 countries that are presenting VNRs this year, as well as of the actions led by LRGs to implement the SDGs under review this year.

Since 2020, it has become clear that empowered and resourced LRGs are critical for the recovery. **The role that LRGs play in securing universal access to local public services has come through as simply essential to address the current crisis and build resilience to protect societies from upcoming crises.** In particular, this report analyzes LRGs' strategic roles in promoting quality and lifelong education for all, gender equality, life below and above water, and partnerships for the SDGs. In order to do so, it draws upon all national and subnational sources available at the time of publication. These sources include all VNRs; around 150 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs); all 26 Voluntary

Subnational Reviews (VSRs) produced to date; the annual GTF/UCLG survey on SDG localization, with responses from 220 LRGs worldwide this year; and the recently published Country Profiles on SDG localization. Together, these provide an unparalleled understanding of the state of SDG localization and evolution since the first *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report published in 2017.

Some key conclusions from this analysis are concerning. Although a certain degree of improvement in terms of LRGs' inclusion in national strategies for SDG localization can be observed, there is a pressing need to accelerate action. Strategies to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic represent almost unprecedented resource mobilization. Yet, for resources to trigger transformation, they must target dimensions that are key to sustainable development, namely, ecologically sensible and fair infrastructure, universal public service access and enabled local democracy mechanisms. However, the VNRs presented this year at the HLPF show that there is still much to be done in this respect. And the window of opportunity will not last long.

All in all, this report is testimony of an increasingly and widely acknowledged reality: if we aim for a fairer and more sustainable post-COVID-19 pandemic world that does not leave any person or territory

behind, then LRGs must be given a seat at the table in order to contribute to defining and implementing national and global strategies. With less than eight years left to achieve the SDGs, **learning from and supporting actions that are transforming realities from the bottom-up is necessary**. It is also necessary to invest in scaling up actions by overcoming the barriers to effective SDG localization.

Good practices

Consolidating care as the central element in the COVID-19 recovery for improved access to education and gender equality

Throughout this past year, LRGs and their associations have continued to put care at the centre of their policy and advocacy actions. **Advancing "caring cities" concretely impacts not only the most vulnerable populations, such as older people or people requiring medical care, but also humanity as a whole.** Regarding education (SDG 4), the present report sheds light on LRGs' efforts to combat early school dropout, incentivize return and promote healthy learning environments and childhood development; populations' participation

in post-secondary education; and vocational training and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In different countries, LRGs are actively promoting policies to prevent the socio-economic segregation of students. For instance, many cities have developed preschool initiatives that actively seek to be accessible to economically disadvantaged families, or they are promoting partnerships with national governments, civil society and employers to broaden disadvantaged populations' access to post-secondary education. LRGs are also implementing policies aimed at eliminating gender disparities in access to all levels of education and fostering racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Moreover, LRGs have redoubled efforts to counter the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on educational opportunities, which moved online during school closures. As a result of this shift, addressing the digital divide between poorer and richer students, both in terms of access to internet-enabled devices and the skills to use them, has been of particular importance. **In all, LRGs have proven to be key actors in developing improved learning environments, promoting synergies that exist between SDG 4 and the other goals.**

Adopting care as a holistic approach to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and promote more just and sustainable societies requires mainstreaming gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approaches (SDG 5) in local policy-making and actions. Beyond adopting global and regional commitments on gender equality, LRGs worldwide have made feminist perspectives a central aspect of their planning and budgeting processes. Oftentimes, this entails developing gender action plans, which also focus on improving women and girls' educational and employment opportunities. Notably, many LRGs are creating specific programmes to promote women's employability and entrepreneurship – for instance, by implementing non-discriminatory recruitment programmes, promoting women-led business through incubators and targeting support programmes to migrant women and survivors of human trafficking and abuse. LRGs and their associations have put significant efforts into mentoring and supporting women and non-binary leaders to reinforce their participation in local decision-making processes, and many national and regional networks of locally elected women, such as REFELA in Africa, have emerged to further support women's access to these positions.

LRGs have led innovative policies to track, respond to and eliminate violence and harassment against women and girls. LRGs are making changes in the urban built environment, for example, by mainstreaming a gender perspective into the design of public spaces and transport systems. Some LRGs are creating "care maps" for their populations to easily access care-related services across the city. LRGs are also developing observatories and committees, as well as one-stop centres to combine access to legal and psychological support. LRGs are taking important steps to recognize and value women's work, provide social protection and, increasingly, push for a redistribution of care work between women and men.

LRGs' actions to contribute to the protection of terrestrial and marine environments

The COVID-19 pandemic has also shed light on the complex relationship between humans, urban growth and ecosystems. LRGs, particularly those in coastal areas, are striving to prevent marine pollution and invest in coastal areas' protection (SDG 14). LRGs have taken the lead in promoting a local-level, integrated ecosystem-based management approach by promoting locally managed marine areas and addressing livelihood development, including sustainable tourism and small-scale fisheries. Cities and regions are also acting to protect and restore seaweed forests and mangroves in tropical areas, as well as in wetland areas. For instance, many LRGs invest in depollution (in solid and liquid waste treatment) through a circular economy approach: improving recycling, reducing discharges and protecting livelihoods. In the framework of the UN Ocean Conference, different stakeholders, including LRGs, have made more than 1,600 voluntary commitments to advance SDG 14 as of late 2020. Also in 2020, the Urban Ocean Programme was launched; this programme involves a group of cities across all regions.

With respect to protecting life on land (SDG 15), over 200 LRGs signed the Edinburgh Process and Declaration, a key milestone for LRGs in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. LRGs, particularly in tropical countries, are striving to halt deforestation and foster sustainable forest management. They also participate in combating desertification and promoting land restoration, for example, through the Great Green Wall Initiative for the Sahara and Sahel. In many parts of the world, LRGs are adopting risk mitigation strategies to prevent wildfires and protect biodiversity and ecosystems. They are doing so, for instance, by developing urban forests: Cities4Forests, a voluntary coalition that supports and encourages cities to invest in forests, has 73 members across all continents. LRGs also play active roles in managing national protected areas. They enact and administrate local and regional protected areas, as is the case of **Narok County** (Kenya) and **Victoria State** (Australia). Moreover, LRGs are increasingly leveraging nature-based solutions such as sustainable forest management and green infrastructure.

Growing subnational efforts to monitor and report on SDG implementation

LRGs and their associations have continued to prepare VLRs and VSRs over the last year. As of June 2022, LRGs from around the world have produced around 150 VLRs, while LGAs from all continents have produced 26 VSRs. Over the past year, they have contributed to improving multilevel dialogue between LRGs, LGAs and national governments for SDG implementation. Notably, **the past year has seen these different actors increasingly leverage synergies between these reporting processes**. They have been consulted in 48% of the reporting processes and taken part in 34% of the national coordination mechanisms of the countries that are reporting to this year's HLPF (these figures only amonted to 39% and 28%, respectively, in the period 2016-2021). Although these cross-fertilization processes need to be further encouraged and accelerated, particularly in terms of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes, they are slowly leading to an expansion of the quantity and quality of information on the state of SDG localization across countries. This is particularly evident in countries where VLRs, VSRs and VNRs have all been produced.

Lessons learned

LRGs and the COVID-19 pandemic recovery

Over the past year, recovery strategies have evolved from their initial stages and are beginning to take concrete shape across territories. This is not to say that the COVID-19 pandemic itself is over: COVID-19 is still a threat to populations' health and wellbeing in many territories.

The crisis has revealed systemic structural vulnerabilities stemming from growing inequalities at all levels – and it has further aggravated them. LRGs, largely through ensuring access to local public services and their links with health systems, have contributed to protecting their communities and serving populations to meet their fundamental needs. However, the impacts of the pandemic, combined with the increased demand for local public services and socio-economic recovery demands, largely strained LRGs' resources.

The present moment could either lead to accelerating SDG implementation, if recovery strategies are well-designed, or it could push countries definitively off track to achieve the global commitments. Taking the SDGs as a reference framework, as well as supporting local public services and initiatives, can boost LRGs' involvement in accelerating the recovery process by mobilizing local communities. To this end, it is crucial to continue nurturing multilevel dialogue and engagement and to further strengthen complementarity between recovery efforts and SDG localization.

Alignment of SDGs with national, regional and local development plans

Progress has been observed in a number of countries that have aligned national and local

development plans with the SDGs. Nevertheless, different paths can be distinguished in terms of SDG alignment in subnational development planning. On the one hand, as particularly reflected in VLRs and VSRs, a number of front-running cities and regions are taking the lead in reviewing and reinforcing the relationship between local priorities and needs, the SDGs and planning. On the other hand, the analysis of VNRs reveals that, in a substantial proportion of countries, national governments have adopted a top-down approach to SDG alignment, whereby local and regional plans are required to reflect national priorities that, in turn, are outlined in national development strategies aligned with the SDGs.

However, the most commonly observed challenge is the need for further efforts and assistance to ensure these plans are effectively implemented. Many plans are not supported by appropriately allocated budgets nor are they buttressed by adequate local capacities or monitoring and benchmarking mechanisms. It is still uncommon to find countries where planning mechanisms allow interaction and bidirectionality between national and regional/local plans. Aligning local and regional plans with national plans and strategies is key for policy coherence. However, local realities, capabilities and experiences must also be supported and reflected in national plans. If lacking a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach, SDG alignment efforts will not be effectively monitored and implemented, thus rendering them ineffective in achieving the SDGs.

Recommendations

1. Coordinate and leapfrog COVID-19 recovery strategies with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and global sustainability commitments through multilevel governance

The COVID-19 pandemic's impacts have put the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a critical situation. Moreover, the pandemic's effects are complex and interconnected with the other challenging emergencies, including the climate crisis and protracted armed conflicts. Hence, the COVID-19 recovery entails an increasingly pressing need to accelerate progress to meet the 2030 Agenda, as well as the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and other commitments.

It is thus necessary to actively coordinate the design and implementation of recovery strategies with the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and global sustainability commitments. This requires LRGs to be recognized and actively consulted as political actors with decision-making capacity. In turn, this will enable local needs to be effectively reflected in national strategies and key lessons from these experiences to be successfully embedded in recovery strategies. If accompanied with

reinvigorated local resources and capacity building, a multilevel governance approach to recovery strategies can prove to be a tool for leapfrogging COVID-19 recovery and implementing the global agendas.

2. Through multilevel coordination and revised fiscal systems, empower LRGs to centre public service provision and social inclusion, build resilience to future crises and achieve the SDGs

Ensuring access to quality, universal local public services for all populations is essential to develop sustainable and just recovery pathways in cities and regions, as well as to protect populations' rights and foster social inclusion. Recovery strategies need to devote the necessary attention and resources to increasing the capacity of subnational governance systems to effectively respond to, and be prepared for, such crises. LRGs have gone the extra mile to protect populations' housing rights, provide safe drinking water to households, protect people's health and livelihoods and broadly ensure households have access to essential services. Oftentimes, they go beyond their designated responsibilities and incur large deficits. Therefore, it is also critical to revise in depth the fiscal architecture for subnational governments to allow LRGs to autonomously implement and expand their crisis management, mitigation, adaptation and recovery efforts. Such an approach needs to be urgently mainstreamed into

national strategies and packages, or the window of opportunity provided by the crisis to transform governance will be lost.

3. Acknowledge and support the strides of the international Feminist Municipal Movement to streamline care, women's empowerment and gender equality within all policy-making processes at all levels

Feminist policy-making has proven to have large transformational potential to address inequalities, climate change and the SDGs. The Feminist Municipal Movement has strived to promote a shift in views based on the evidence, particularly from the past two years, that adopting care as an overarching approach to planning and development has the potential to transform our societies and systems. If incorporated in policy decisions, a feminist perspective that puts care and human rights at the centre can be decisive for reaching those furthest behind first, including women, older people and youth, racialized and migrant populations and people living and working informally. It also means empowering women, non-binary people and individuals whose voices have traditionally not been represented in policy-making at local but also national levels.

4. Leverage the traction of the global SDG localization movement to catalyze SDG implementation by improving LRGs' involvement in SDG coordination mechanisms and reporting processes

The expansion of subnational reporting efforts, as reflected by an increasing number of VLRs and VSRs prepared by LRGs and their associations worldwide, illustrate their strong commitment to achieve the SDGs. LRGs and LGAs are increasingly prioritizing sustainable development and, consequently, the fulfilment of global commitments, aligning them with their agendas and resources. Since 2017, the international SDG localization movement has gained powerful traction and, as the annual editions of this report have shown, LRGs and their associations are now more aware of the SDGs, have more ownership, are progressing with SDG alignment and, at times, are leading localization efforts from the bottom up.

It is key for national governments, as well as the international community, to leverage this traction, commitment and lessons learned to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. Yet, although some progress has been made in incorporating LRGs into reporting processes, there is a critical need to expand their involvement: LRGs have been consulted in the reporting processes and in the national coordination mechanisms in only 21 and 15 countries, respectively (of 44 countries reporting this year). These are mechanisms to encourage,

resource and support LRGs' involvement in achieving the SDGs. Moreover, effective LRG involvement in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes strengthens national implementation strategies, enabling expanding localization efforts in the country, improving data gaps and ensuring the adoption of a whole-of-government approach.

5. Acknowledge and incorporate LRGs as full-fledged decision-makers within the multilateral system

Over the past years, LRGs and their associations and networks have been increasingly present in global forums such as the UN HLPF or the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. However, their presence is still limited and does not correspond to LRGs' responsibility in recovering from the COVID-19 crisis and steering sustainable development from the bottom up. For these spaces to become truly multilevel and multistakeholder, as the global agendas call for, LRGs need to be given a permanent seat at the global table and decision-making capacities,

in order to have global debates actually reflect their populations' needs, aspirations and capacities. Moreover, as political tensions mount and protracted conflicts worsen, LRGs are stepping up as historical and strategically positioned actors in peacekeeping, playing a crucial role in the protection of human rights and embracing solidarity.

#1. INTRODUCTION

Over more than two years of multiple and overlapping crises due to the COVID-19 pandemic, local and regional governments (LRGs) have taken a very active response role, ensuring the protection of their communities and the continuity of essential public services. During this process and even more today, with restrictions slowly being lifted, many LRGs have considered the 2030 Agenda to be a critical reference point to guide recovery strategies and "build back better".

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the fragility of our economic and social systems. Together with intensifying climate change impacts (e.g. droughts, floods, rise of CO_2 emissions) and violent conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere (two billion people were already living in conflict-affected countries by the end of 2020), political uncertainties and adverse economic trends are putting the viability of achieving the SDGs by 2030 at risk. Rising inflation, major supply chain disruptions and unsustainable debt in developing countries are impacting our global economy and society and, at the end of 2021, caused another economic slowdown.[1] After the progress observed in pre-pandemic years, we are facing critical setbacks, for example, with an additional 100 million people pushed into extreme poverty and 161 million more people facing hunger.[2]

Thus, COVID-19 recovery efforts must catalyze structural change beyond the mere strengthening of our economies. Deficits in our health and caring systems, as well as the threats that harmful human activities pose to the planet, should be at the heart of recovery policies to strengthen the resilience of our cities and territories to multidimensional crises. We are all responsible for advancing systemic transformations to eliminate the inequalities that undermine our societies, repairing the devastating effects of our modes of production and consumption and engaging in the actions and partnerships that will guide us towards a democratic, just and sustainable future. As it has been largely demonstrated, public policies have the most decisive impacts. We must seize the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to make the political choices needed to place life and people above economic, partisan and sectoral interests.

To contribute to the Decade of Action for the 2030 Agenda, this report shows how LRGs are taking vital actions to promote transformative recovery processes for sustainable local development. This sixth edition of the Global Taskforce (GTF)'s report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), *Towards the Localization of the SDGs*, provides an overview of mechanisms and practices to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels. It will reflect on the constraints that LRGs have overcome since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to advance towards a just and sustainable recovery. LRGs' emergency responses have now given way to new mid- or long-term visions and strategies aimed at implementing actions to achieve the SDGs, as well as other international agendas (e.g. the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change, the New Urban Agenda).

Nearly halfway down the road to 2030, 176 countries have submitted their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the HLPF; if the new countries that committed to submit this year are also counted, this number increases to 187. These reviews evaluate progress and share experiences and lessons learned in SDG implementation at the national level. Although the majority still insufficiently refer to local-level actors, these state-led reports are an opportunity to advocate for more bottom-up approaches to the SDG reporting process and showcase the key role that LRGs and local stakeholders are playing on the ground. This year, 11 local and regional government associations (LGAs) have conducted a Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) to reinforce dialogue with their respective central governments and participate in sharing information about local action. Since 2020, 26 VSRs have been published, representing 165,000 LRGs and 1.25 billion inhabitants. At the local level, around 150 LRGs from 38 countries conducted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), representing 350 million people. Civil society organizations from many countries are also producing their own reports.

Although the COVID-19 crisis has emphasized the necessity for coordinated and multilevel responses, decentralization facilitates countries' shift towards a more bottom-up approach in the reporting process. When LRGs, based on the principle of subsidiarity, have adequate powers and resources, they can better provide adequate public services and engage in local development policies.

This introduction will briefly review the decentralization of government systems in each country reporting to the HLPF this year, so as to set the stage for LRGs' capabilities to actively support COVID-19 recovery and SDG implementation. Beyond constitutional and legal frameworks recognizing LRGs, the effective devolution of powers, capacities and resources determine LRGs' role in the localization journey. Limited capacities condition their ability to engage in SDG localization, limit the outcomes of global efforts and compromise the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Box 1.1
LOCALIZATION

SDG localization encompasses the definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies by LRGs to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Localization is, therefore, the process of implementing the SDGs in different territories, taking into account their specific contexts from an inclusive perspective. The process for localizing the SDGs includes setting goals and determining targets and means of implementation, as well as using various indicators to track progress towards the realization of the goals.

Source: GTF and UCLG, "Towards the Localization of the SDGs. Sustainable and Resilient Recovery Driven by Cities and Territories" (Barcelona, 2021); UN-Habitat, UNDP, and GTF, "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level," 2016.

Forty-four countries are reporting to the HLPF this year, and Table 1.1 outlines the great diversity among them in terms of subnational governance structures. The number of LRGs per country ranges from seven in Andorra and Dominica to over 2,500 in Kazakhstan. The reporting countries also present very different decentralization processes and regulatory frameworks which, in turn, result in policy environments that may or may not be conducive to SDG localization actions.

The COVID-19 crisis has also had a direct impact on systems of governance. During the different stages of the emergency, there have been power shifts and a reallocation of responsibilities between central and subnational levels of government. These have, nevertheless, predominantly depended on the national context. Even two years after the pandemic's outbreak, whether these shifts in governance will be temporary or become permanent is a question to be monitored beyond this report. The following subsections offer an analysis of the situation in the reporting countries by region, from the least to the most decentralized country.

Table 1.1 Local self-government in the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2022

Country	Type of state	Regional/ state level	Intermediate level	Municipal level	Total LRGs
Andorra	Unitary			7	7
Argentina	Federal	24		2,327	2,351
Belarus	Unitary	7	128	1,190	1,325
Botswana	Unitary			16	16
Cameroon**	Unitary	10		374	384
Côte d'Ivoire	Unitary	31		201	232
Djibouti	Unitary	5	1	3	8
Dominica	Unitary			7	7
El Salvador	Unitary			262	262
Equatorial Guinea	Unitary			30	30
Eritrea	Unitary	6		56	62
Eswatini	Unitary			67	67
Ethiopia	Federal	11		928	939
Gabon	Unitary	47		50	97
The Gambia	Unitary			8	8
Ghana	Unitary			260	260
Greece	Unitary	13		325	338
Italy	Unitary	20	107	7,904	8,031
Jamaica	Unitary			14	14
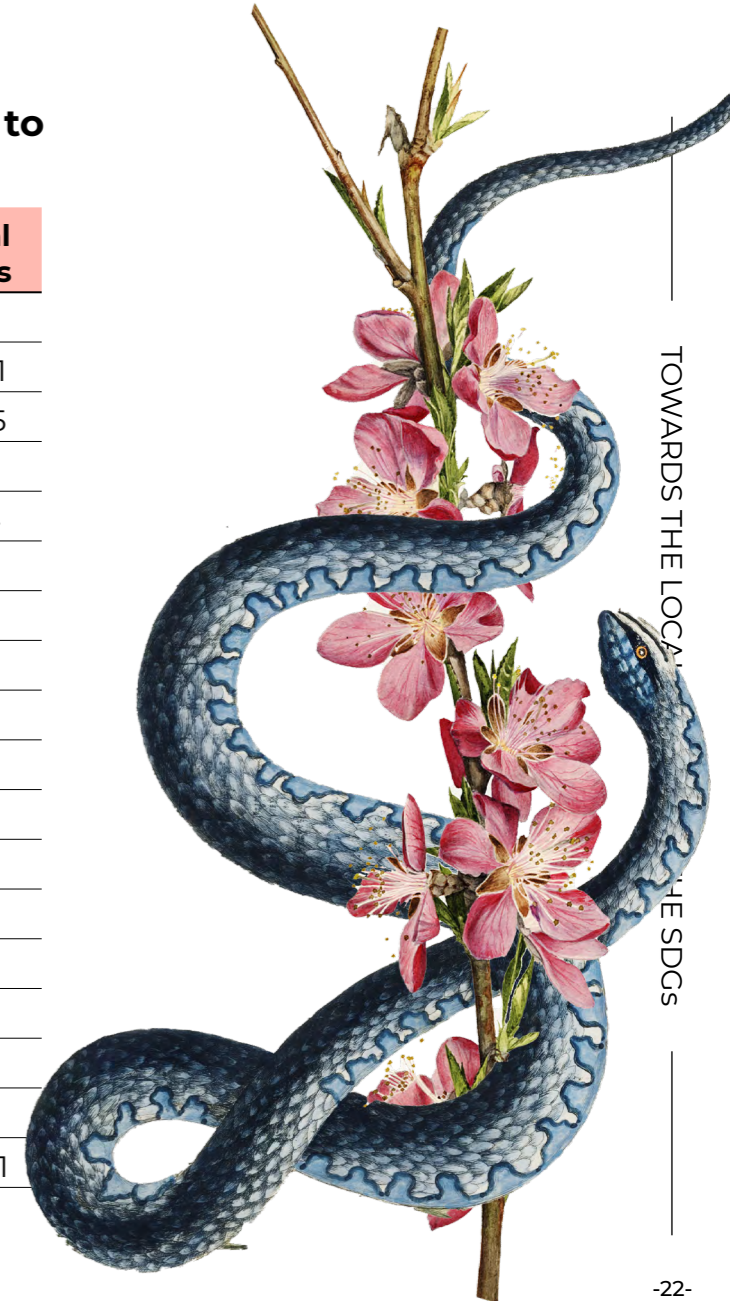
Country	Type of state	Regional/ state level	Intermediate level	Municipal level	Total LRGs
Jordan	Unitary	12		101	113
Kazakhstan	Unitary	17	216	2,345	2,578
Latvia	Unitary			52	52
Lesotho	Unitary		10	76	86
Luxembourg	Unitary			102	102
Malawi	Unitary			35	35
Mali	Unitary	11	58	750	819
Montenegro	Unitary			24	24
The Netherlands***	Unitary	12		344	356
Pakistan****	Federal	4		684	688
The Philippines*****	Unitary	81	146	1,488	1,715
São Tomé and Príncipe	Unitary	2	7		9
Senegal	Unitary	43		557	600
Somalia	Federal	18		146	164
Sri Lanka	Unitary	9		341	350
Suriname	Unitary	10		63	73
Switzerland	Federal	26		2,148	2,174
Togo	Unitary	5	1	117	123
Tuvalu	Unitary			8	8
Uruguay	Unitary	19		125	144

* Of the 44 countries reporting this year, there are 5 countries which do not have elected LRGs. In **Grenada**, the government is looking at how it can fulfill the constitutional rights of the people of Carriacou and Petite Martinique by setting up a council. In **Guinea-Bissau**, although the country is divided into eight regions and subdivided into 40 sectors and communes (including the autonomous sector of Bissau, the capital), local governments are appointed by the central government. Likewise, in **Sudan** (whose territory is divided into 18 regions), the central government appoints local authorities, and in **Liberia**, the President of the Republic appoints both the local governments' supervisory body and the mayors. In the seven states of the **United Arab Emirates**, there is no evidence of elected local governments.

** Cameroon is organized around 10 regions, 58 departments and 374 local governments (315 municipalities, 45 urban neighbourhood councils and 14 urban communities).

*** In the Netherlands, there are three types of decentralized government: 12 provinces, 344 municipalities and 21 waterboards. The waterboards are not included in the table.

**** In Pakistan, there are four provinces (Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh) and 684 local governments (which include metropolitan and municipal corporations, district councils and authorities and tehsils). Local elections are likely to take place in Sindh and Punjab in 2022. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local elections were held in one part of the province in December 2021. Balochistan established its system of local governments through a 2010 provincial act. At the submunicipal level, there are 11,685 unions and village councils.

***** In the Philippines, beyond the 81 provinces, 146 cities and 1,488 municipalities, there are also 42,045 Barangays (village-level councils).

Source: prepared by the authors based on different sources[3]

1.1 AFRICA

This year, 21 African countries are submitting a VNR to the 2022 HLPF. Local governments are currently elected in most of these countries, except in **Guinea-Bissau**, **Liberia** and **Sudan**, where they are appointed by the national government, and in **Somalia**, where local governments do not have distinct legal status. In the analysis, four distinct groups emerge according to the countries' level of decentralization.

In the first group of African countries, the institutional environment set up by central governments is unfavourable to subnational governments' initiatives

and actions. **Equatorial Guinea**'s local governments are recognized by the Constitution but have no local autonomy and depend on the regional administration. Although proposed legislation will operationalize the transfer of responsibilities to local governments, it has not yet been adopted. In **Eritrea**, the 1997 Constitution established local governance structures, but, to date, this has yet to be implemented, and local governments are only responsible for policy implementation. In **Lesotho**, the implementing regulations of the 1997 Local Government Act are still partially lacking. In **São Tomé and Príncipe**, the 2003 Constitution recognizes decentralization, establishing the same level of responsibility for provinces and districts. However, legislative and regulatory texts for operationalizing transfers of responsibilities are lacking.

The second group of countries requires serious efforts to improve the institutional environment for local governments, and some countries have even taken steps backwards. **Ethiopia** has been a federal country since 1991. The last phase of its decentralization process started in 2001 and deepened the transfer of powers, resources and functions beyond the regional states to local governments. However, the conflict between the national government and forces in the northern Tigray region has been going on since November 2020 and destabilizes local autonomy, in addition to affecting thousands of victims and worsening famine risk. In **the Gambia**, the Constitution and the Local Government Act recognize local governments. A national policy for 2015-2024 was formulated to create an enabling environment for promoting local and democratic governance. Yet, progress to build local capacity to ensure the transfer of responsibilities to local levels is urgently needed. Decentralization is enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of **Djibouti**, but the first local elections did not take place until 2006. In 2010, a constitutional law definitively anchored decentralization in the national institutional landscape. A national commission was set up in 2016 to reflect on strengthening the decentralization process; however, its outcomes are still limited.

In the third group of countries, local governments face similar problems to those of the previous group, although some progress has been made during the past years. **Botswana** has one of the oldest decentralization policies in Africa, even though its Constitution is neutral on this topic. The legislative framework for LRGs was consolidated in 2012 with the Local Government Act. More recently, in 2016, the country released a development plan called Vision 2036, which supports the development of a decentralization policy (a draft version was presented in 2019). A countrywide consultation on a constitutional reform is currently ongoing. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the decentralization policy dates back to 1985. The fourth phase of revising the subnational government structure began in 2011, designating municipalities and regions as two decentralized government levels. In 2014, two districts were recognized as decentralized subnational governments. In 2021, 12 new districts were created.

Nonetheless, the 2016 Constitution's provisions on the concomitance of the transfer of competences and related financial resources have not been effectively implemented. The 1991 Constitution of **Gabon** specifies that local governments are freely self-governed by elected councils. However, the process of transferring responsibilities was not initiated until 2009, and, in practice, many responsibilities still remain centralized. In **Eswatini**, the last decentralization policy dates back to 2006. In 2015, a bill was introduced to replace the 1969 Urban Government Act, which grants legal status to rural councils, but it was not passed into law. Political parties are excluded from local elections. The latest local elections were held in October 2017, and the next are scheduled for 2022. LRGs are enshrined in **Malawi**'s Constitution. Putting decentralization and local democracy into practice makes progress at a slow pace. However, the amendments to land and local government laws made in 2016 and 2017 have contributed to moving forward. In **Mali**, in 2015, the revision of the main texts on decentralization, territorial administration and elections followed the adoption of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation.[4] The Code of Local Authorities, the General Statute of Local Authority Officials and the Statute of the District of Bamako were adopted in 2017. Due to the current institutional crisis, their implementation has been delayed. In **Togo**, the desire to revive the decentralization process materialized in the 2016 adoption of a national roadmap for decentralization and local elections.

In 2019, a constitutional revision adjusted the decentralization landscape. The first local elections since 1987 were held in 2019, but the transfer of powers to local governments has not been fully completed.

Finally, decentralization processes have made recent progress in a fourth group of countries. In **Cameroon**, decentralization has been enshrined in law since 1996. In 2019, the General Code of Decentralized Local Governments established the general framework for decentralization (free administration and functional autonomy of local governments). In **Ghana**, local governments and decentralization are explicitly mentioned in the 1992 Constitution. The Decentralization Policy Framework II (2015-2019) and National Decentralization Action Plan (2015-2019) were launched in 2015, and in 2016, a Local Government Bill (Act 936) consolidated the different laws. In 2017, a tentative proposal to introduce direct universal suffrage for the election of local executives was abandoned. The district chief executive, as well as 30% of municipal council members are appointed by the central government following consultation with local primary actors. More than a century after the launch of a historic process of decentralization, **Senegal** entered its third phase of decentralization in 2013. The 2013 General Code of Local Authorities sets out the legal, institutional and financial framework for decentralization. Discussions are currently being held to advance further reforms.

1.2 ASIA-PACIFIC

Four countries from the Asia-Pacific region are reporting this year: **Pakistan**, **the Philippines**, **Sri Lanka** and **Tuvalu**. Unfortunately, their decentralization efforts do not appear to have made much progress, and the difficult social and political situations in some of these countries add uncertainty and complexity to the overall panorama.

In **Tuvalu**, no major changes in terms of decentralization have happened since the Falekaupule Act, which forms the legal basis of the country's island councils, was enacted in 1997. In **Sri Lanka**, the constitutional assignment of powers to the two tiers of subnational government has not led to rearranging responsibilities based on the principle of subsidiarity. Indeed, the constitutional reform superimposed an additional tier of governance (the provinces) within the existing subnational government structure, which increased fragmentation in terms of planning and budgeting, as well as across service delivery sectors. The current political, economic and social crisis is also weakening local institutions. In **Pakistan**, a constitutional amendment in 2010 made it mandatory for all federal provinces to establish a local government system. This was the first time that local governments were constitutionally recognized as a second tier of subnational government. Their composition, functions, fiscal arrangements and method of electing local representatives differ substantially from one province to another. Local elections are likely to take place in Sindh and Punjab in 2022, and local elections were held in one part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in December 2021. Balochistan has a system of local governments established by a 2010 provincial act. **The Philippines**'s Constitution lays out a clear provision for local governments. Overall, the country has a high degree of political decentralization, despite a lower score on fiscal decentralization (except for metropolitan areas).

1.3 EURASIA

Two countries from Eurasia are reporting to this year's HLPF: **Belarus** and **Kazakhstan**. Although **Belarus** accords *de jure* autonomy to its LRGs, they have neither real authority nor resources to make and execute decisions. Nonetheless, there have been gradual steps in the direction of strengthening local governance since 2016. The Law on Local Government and Self-Governance adopted in 2020, which aimed to regulate LRGs' competences, has not significantly altered this situation. **Kazakhstan** has engaged in a decentralization process since 2012. In 2020, a reform was implemented to strengthen local self-governments, which led to the first direct elections of over 700 rural heads of local administrations in 2021. This reform is scheduled to be extended to larger cities and districts in 2024, which, to date, have had heads appointed by the central government

1.4 EUROPE

In Europe, all eight countries reporting to the HLPF this year – **Andorra**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Luxembourg**, **Montenegro**, **the Netherlands** and **Switzerland** – have elected local governments. In **Andorra**, the Constitution granted powers to local governments. Nevertheless, decentralization remains limited. In **Luxembourg**, under the national Master Programme for Territorial Planning established in 2003 and revised in 2018, state-municipal conventions are implemented to promote intermunicipal strategies. In **Latvia**, the competences of local authorities can either be autonomous (determined by law or voluntary) or delegated by the central government. In 2020, a territorial reform reduced the number of local governments from 119 to 43. The creation of new regional governments was considered, but the responsibility for regional development was finally given to five planning regions established at a supramunicipal level. These regions are not directly elected. As for **Italy**, it is a decentralized country which recognizes and promotes local autonomy. A reform in 2001 enshrined the role of regions, provinces and municipalities in the Constitution. In 2009, fiscal decentralization and subnational government functions and relations across levels of government were reshaped, initiating the country's transformation towards a "regionalized country".

Recent reforms are making clear progress towards further decentralization in **Greece**, **Montenegro**, **the Netherlands** and **Switzerland**. **Greece**'s process of decentralization entered its third phase in 2018. The country introduced a new electoral system with local and regional elections, a new system of representation in local and regional councils and a reorganization of supervisory authorities. In 2020, a draft law on multilevel governance was introduced to further increase subnational governments' independence vis-à-vis the state and to extend their responsibilities, resources and staff accordingly. In **Montenegro**, the principle of local self-government is enshrined in the Constitution, and a legal provision to this effect is laid out in two laws adopted in 2010. Since 2011, the central government has launched successive reforms on the administration of local governments. In January 2022, a new Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2022-2026 was introduced, with an accompanying 2022-2024 Action Plan, to improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery. **The Netherlands** has been gradually decentralizing services through coalition agreements since the 1950s. In 2015, the latest decentralization process resulted in the transfer of significant responsibilities to municipalities in the social sector and strengthened the provinces' role by granting them more powers in regional planning, economic development and coordination. However, because of insufficient transfer of funds for the additional powers, a certain degree of re-centralization occurred in some municipalities. As a federal state, cantons in **Switzerland** benefit from far-reaching autonomy and sovereignty, as defined in the Constitution. The 2008 federalism reform, recently amended in 2020, improved the fiscal equalization system, clarified the assignment of responsibilities and provided incentives for the formalization of intercantonal cooperation agreements. In 2017, the tripartite conference (between the Confederation, cantons, towns and municipalities) was extended to rural areas and mountainous regions.

1.5 LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Eight countries from Latin America and the Caribbean (including from both UCLG Latin America and North America regional sections) are reporting to the HLPF this year: **Argentina**, **Dominica**, **El Salvador**, **Grenada**, **Jamaica**, **Uruguay**, **Saint Kitts and Nevis** and **Suriname**. Except for Grenada, all of them have elected local governments with different degrees of decentralization. As a federal country, the provinces of **Argentina**, plus the federal capital of Buenos Aires, have their own executive, legislative and judicial powers. The Constitution recognizes municipalities, but each province defines its own legal framework, and progress in decentralization at the municipal level has been limited. In **El Salvador**, the 2015 revision of the municipal code has broadened local responsibilities. However, in 2021 reforms have recentralized national transfers to municipalities, and 75% of these resources will now be managed by a new Office for Municipal Works. In **Uruguay**, departments have a long tradition as local self-governments, and their responsibilities have expanded beyond the constitutional provisions. At the local level, a constitutional reform in 2009 established municipalities as local governments – yet they are subject to the hierarchy of the head of departments. In **Suriname**, some factors such as district

governments' weak capacity and a weak fiscal situation have restricted decentralization thus far, particularly with respect to the transfer of responsibilities and resources.

Among the reporting Caribbean countries, decentralization has made some progress in **Jamaica**. Despite limited financial and political resources, the national government passed a series of local government reform acts in 2016 that established a new governance framework, based on the principles of participatory local governance and local self-management. These regulations also expanded local mandates to foster sustainable development.[5] **Grenada** does not have any form of local government.[6] In **Saint Kitts and Nevis**, there is no local government on Saint Kitts, which is governed by the federal government, but the Nevis Island assembly serves as a local government for that island. In **Dominica**, there is no constitutional provision for local government. Districts contain a network of town, village and urban councils, whose responsibilities are generally limited to road maintenance.

1.6 MIDDLE EAST AND WESTERN ASIA

In the Middle East and Western Asia, two countries are reporting this year: **Jordan** and the **United Arab Emirates**. The latter is a federal country without local elected governments. In **Jordan**, recentralizing trends have hindered competence devolution over the past few years. The Decentralization Act adopted in 2015 established the creation of governorate councils, whose members are partially elected, although the governor and executive council were still appointed. In 2021, the new Local Administration Law set the share of appointed members of the governorate councils at 40% and established that municipalities' elected mayors should also be members of the governorate councils.

Following this overview of the different environments for LRG recognition, responsibilities and action in the countries reporting to the HLPF this year, this report will follow a structure based on the UN *Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews*. Section 2 covers the methodology used to prepare this report. Section 3 analyzes the institutional framework for SDG localization, focusing on LRG involvement in national reporting processes, as well as LRGs' and LGAs' initiatives for SDG localization around the world. Section 4 is devoted to analyzing LRG actions to localize SDGs 4, 5, 14 and 15, which the 2022 HLPF addresses. Section 5 focuses on the means of implementation available to LRGs. Finally, Section 6 concludes the report and proposes ways to take SDG localization forward.

#2. METHODOLOGY

This year's edition of the LRG report to the HLPF calls for urgent, accelerated action capable of triggering change. It takes into account that nearly half of the time laid out by the international community to implement the 2030 Agenda has passed and also considers the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and interrelated social and economic crises across the globe. If the world is to achieve the 17 SDGs and their underlying principles by 2030, the international community, with LRGs at the forefront, needs to progress at maximum speed in this Decade of Action, ensuring a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery from this pandemic of unprecedented nature.

This report presents first-hand information on the experiences shared by LRGs and their associations, as well as by other partners, to localize the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the context of the COVID-19 recovery. This evidence is based, first, on the results obtained from the 2022 survey on the role of LRGs and their associations in the localization of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, which was facilitated by UCLG on behalf of the GTF (see Box 2.1 and Figure 2.1).

BOX 2.1
SURVEY RESPONSES COLLECTED BY THE GTF/UCLG IN 2022

To prepare this year's edition of *Towards the Localization of the SDGs*, the GTF conducted a survey, ultimately collecting 220 responses from all around the world. The responses came from 93 different countries, 25 of which are reporting this year. Of the total responses, 82 correspond to LGAs (18 from reporting countries), 119 to LRGs (including from 8 reporting countries not covered by LGA responses) and 19 to partners. Most responses came from Europe (53), followed by Latin America (44), Africa (40), Eurasia and Asia-Pacific (22 each), the Middle East and West Asia (17) and North America and the Caribbean (3).

The distribution of responses from LGAs and LRGs varied across regions. In Africa, responses were balanced: 20 came from LGAs and another 20 from LRGs. In Asia-Pacific, responses from LGAs and LRGs were also balanced, with 10 and 12, respectively. In Eurasia, most responses came from Russian LRGs (14 out of 22), and only one LGA sent in a response. In Europe, 30 LGAs responded, in addition to NALAS, the subregional network from South-East Europe, and 23 LRGs. In Latin America, the majority of the responses came from LRGs (30), particularly from Argentina and Brazil, and Ecuador and Mexico to a lesser extent. In the Middle East and West Asia, where four responses from LGAs and 13 from LRGs were received, most responses came from Turkish local authorities (10). In North America and the Caribbean, all three responses came from LGAs.

FIGURE 2.1

COUNTRIES THAT COMMITTED TO SUBMITTING THEIR VNR TO THE HLPF IN 2022 AND COUNTRIES WHOSE LRGs RESPONDED TO THE GTF/UCLG 2022

Countries whose LRGs responded to the GTF/ UCLG 2022 survey

Countries committed to present a VNR in 2022
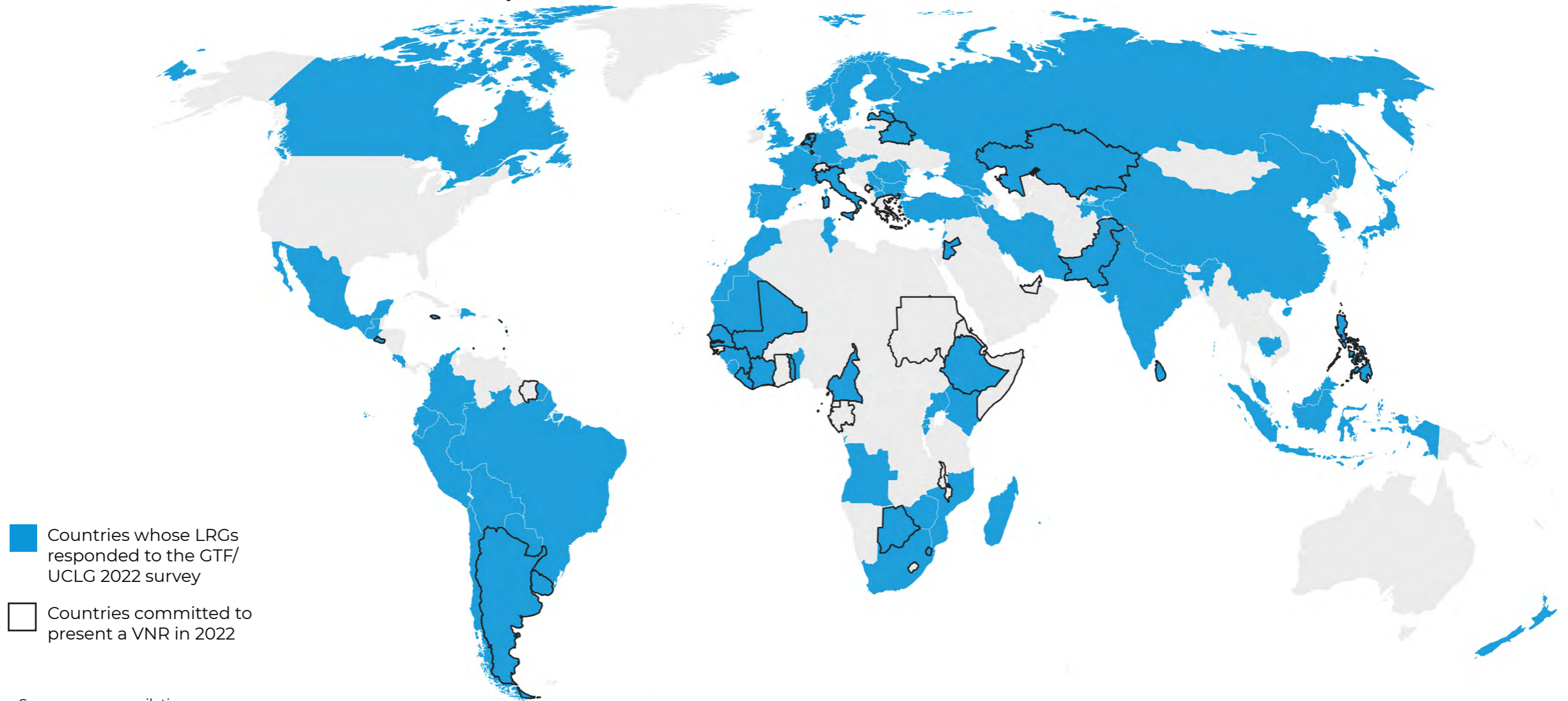
Source: own compilation.

A thorough analysis of the existing Voluntary Local Reviews and the Voluntary Subnational Reviews has also been conducted as the basis for this report. The analysis also draws upon the *Guidelines for VLRs* (**volume 1** and **volume 2**) developed in partnership between UCLG and UN-Habitat, as well as the ***Guidelines for VSRs*** produced by UCLG and the UCLG Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group. Both VLRs and VSRs document critical milestones in the localization of SDGs in the cities and territories of the reporting local authorities. They represent monitoring and reporting efforts led by LRGs and LGAs, respectively. While VLRs allow for an in-depth understanding of the state of SDG localization in a given city or region, VSRs offer an analysis and overview of SDG localization across an entire country.

This country-level perspective is complemented by information extracted from the newly published **Country Profiles on SDG localization**. These are based on the VNRs published in 2016-2021, as well as responses from LRGs and their associations to the GTF/UCLG survey in previous years, research publications from UCLG and other documents. The profiles present, country by country, a brief analysis of the national strategies, coordination mechanisms and reporting processes related to the 2030 Agenda; they also highlight LRGs' involvement in SDG localization. The Country Profiles also contain examples of local initiatives, in addition to SDG indicators related to subnational government responsibilities.

Finally, the report includes a thorough analysis of the 35 **Voluntary National Reviews** (out of a total of 44 VNRs expected) that have been published as of the time of writing this report for this edition's HLPF. **Comparing, contrasting and putting together locally and nationally produced information, data, best practices and lessons learned is what enables us to produce such a rich and rigorous examination of progress towards accomplishing our shared Global Goals.** This exercise allows us to establish regional trends and trends based on other indicators, paying attention to the different paces at which progress is being made and the institutional, financial, relational and policy changes that are needed to reinforce positive momentum and address inactivity or backward movement.

In addition to this, LRGs and their associations have been working relentlessly to overcome the negative effects of this global pandemic, striving to build back better while advancing the full implementation of the SDGs and their underlying principles. In line with the goals prioritized this year by the UN Secretary-General, this report puts forward an in-depth analysis of the manifold activities, planning strategies, policies, budget arrangements and other initiatives that LRGs from around the world have carried out in order to localize and achieve SDGs 4 on Quality Education, 5 on Gender Equality, 14 on Life Below Water, 15 on Life on Land and 17 on Partnerships for the SDGs. It is worth noting that VLRs and VSRs have been critical background publications documenting a number of the initiatives included in the report section highlighting these SDGs.

Ultimately, this report aims to raise awareness of the critical importance of the actions undertaken by LRGs, the challenges they have faced in this endeavour and the opportunities that arise from a collective movement working hand-in-hand to accelerate action towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

#3. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

3.1 STRENGTHENING OWNERSHIP: LRG PARTICIPATION IN VNR PREPARATION

Between 2016 and 2022, a total of 291 VNRs will have been submitted by 187 countries. In 2022, 44 countries have committed to presenting their VNR: 11 are doing so for the first time, 28 for the second time, three for the third time and, finally, two for the fourth time.

With regards to the involvement of LRGs and their respective associations in national reporting processes and the production of VNRs, a clear positive evolution can be observed since 2016, as highlighted in Table 3.1. **Overall, there has been a notable increase in LRG participation in VNR processes since the first VNRs were published in 2016: LRG involvement was medium to high in 32% of countries that produced one in 2016, compared to 48% in 2022.** However, progress is not linear, as there has been a decline in the number of countries that reported in 2019 and 2021, compared to previous years.

A region-by-region analysis allows us to spot huge differences in LRGs' level of involvement in the VNR processes, as well as the evolution of this involvement over the years. As evidenced by Table 3.2, in Europe, LRGs' medium to high degree of involvement in VNRs continues to spread across countries, increasing from 60% of the countries that prepared VNRs between 2016 and 2021 to 88% in 2022. It also grew slightly in Africa, from 38% to 43% in the same period. However, this degree of involvement has fallen significantly in Latin America and Asia-Pacific, from 39% between 2016 and 2021 to 25% in 2022 in Latin America and from 33% to 25% in Asia-Pacific.

From 2016 to 2022, LRG consultation and involvement in VNR processes have been most prevalent in Europe (62%), followed by ASPAC and Africa (43% and 42%, respectively) and Latin America (32%). This year, North America shows a higher rate of LRG participation than usual, reaching 40% for the 2016-2022 period (although it should be noted this average is based on three countries). In Eurasia and MEWA, LRG participation in the VNRs in the same period is still much more limited.

Table 3.1 Global LRG participation in VNR preparation from 2016 to 2022 (by year)

	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2016-2022 period	
Total no. of countries reporting (per year)*	22	100%	43	100%	46	100%	47	100%	47	100%	42	100%	44	100%	291	100%
Medium to high degree of LRG consultation	7	32%	15	35%	20	43%	19	40%	21	45%	16	38%	21	48%	119	41%
Low degree of LRG consultation	4	18%	11	26%	11	24%	11	23%	10	21%	7	17%	9	20%	63	22%
No LRG consultation	11	50%	16	37%	12	26%	13	28%	11	23%	17	40%	7	16%	87	30%
No elected LRGs or no information	0	0%	1	2%	3	7%	4	9%	5	11%	2	5%	7**	16%	22	8%

* The 291 VNRs presented in 2016-2022 correspond to a total of 187 countries, of which 72 presented VNRs twice, 13, three times and two, four times.
** Five countries that have no elected LRGs (Grenada, Guinea Bissau, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates) and two countries from which there is no information available (São Tomé and Príncipe and Tuvalu).

Table 3.2 LRG participation in VNR preparation by regions for the 2016-2021 period and 2022

	Africa		ASPAC		Latin America		Eurasia		Europe		MEWA		North America		Total	
	2016-2021	2022	2017	2022	2016-2021	2022	2016-2021	2022	2016-2021	2022	2016-2021	2022	2016-2021	2022	2016-2021	2022
Total no. of countries reporting (per year)	66	21	48	4	38	4	10	2	58	8	18	2	9	3	247	44
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Medium to high degree of LRG consultation	25	9	16	1	15	1	2	0	35	7	1	1	3	2	97	21
	38%	43%	33%	25%	39%	25%	20%	0%	60%	88%	6%	50%	33%	67%	39%	48%
Low degree of LRG consultation	16	3	15	2	10	2	1	2	9	0	4	0	0	0	55	9
	24%	14%	31%	50%	26%	50%	10%	100%	16%	0%	22%	0%	0%	0%	22%	20%
No LRG consultation	24	5	11	0	13	1	6	0	13	1	9	0	4	0	80	7
	36%	24%	23%	0%	34%	25%	60%	0%	22%	13%	50%	0%	44%	0%	32%	16%
No elected LRGs or no information	1	4	6	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	1	2	1	15	7
	2%	19%	13%	25%	0%	0%	10%	0%	2%	0%	22%	50%	22%	33%	6%	16%

FIGURE 3.1
LRG PARTICIPATION IN THE PREPARATION OF THE VNRs 2016-2022

Medium to high
consultation of LRGs

Low degree of
consultation of LRGs

No LRG consultation

No elected LRGs

No information available

YEARS

2016-2021

2022

Note: In Nigeria, Ethiopia, India and Mexico (four federal states), LRG participation has taken place primarily at the state level and to a lesser extent at the local government unit (municipal) level. In Brazil, local government consultation took place in 2017 (under the previous government). Brazil has not reported since then.

Source: own compilation.

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

In total this year, 30 countries have involved LRGs in their VNR processes. Degrees and forms of participation vary widely. In a first group made up of 21 countries, LRGs have actively taken part in national reporting processes and sometimes even directly interacted with the reporting units appointed by their national governments. This includes LRGs who have presented their own contributions to the VNR, were part of the national reporting team and/or have held regular consultations and meetings with this team. In a second group, composed of nine countries, LRGs have had the opportunity to participate in conferences, informative workshops and surveys and contribute to the VNR process through a more limited approach. Finally, there has been very little or no LRG involvement in seven countries in this year's reporting process. The detailed analysis below is based on the 35 reporting countries with elected local governments whose VNRs were published at the time of finalizing this report, complemented by the information collected through the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey.[1]

3.1.1 COUNTRIES WITH A MEDIUM TO HIGH DEGREE OF LRG INVOLVEMENT IN THE VNR PROCESS

This section highlights the different forms of participation of LRGs with a medium to high degree of involvement in countries around the world.

In **Andorra**, in contrast to the 2018 process, the municipalities were able to participate in the reporting process and submit their contributions in 2022. The VNR shares several best practices from the municipalities. In **Botswana**, the national reporting unit in charge of the 2022 VNR conducted an extensive consultation that covered the national, district and community levels. The report validation process included representatives of the Botswana Association of Local Authorities (BALA), which also developed its own VSR. The association United Municipalities and Cities of **Cameroon** (UCCC-CVUC) participated in the 2022 VNR through its VSR. Even though the subnational report shows that very few LRGs (41%) were informed of the preparation of this VNR, the national government took this process as an opportunity to strengthen SDG awareness among local authorities, community leaders, community-based associations and civil society organizations.

An interesting progression has been identified in **Côte d'Ivoire**, where for the first time the national government has put LRGs' efforts at the heart of its 2022 VNR. As part of the reporting process, consultations were held in districts with representatives from all tiers of subnational government, local leaders and civil society groups, with the aim of preparing local reviews of SDG implementation to nurture the VNR. Furthermore, representatives of the Assembly of Regions and Districts of Côte d'Ivoire (ARDCI) and the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Côte d'Ivoire (UVICOCI) participated in the national reporting team in charge of the VNR. In particular, UVICOCI has been invited to participate in the validation of each stage of the drafting process and to contribute through its VSR, amongst other ways, to the country's bottom-up data collection process.

The **Eswatini** Local Government Association (ELGA) has regularly been involved in all stages of the 2022 reporting process. Specific regional-level consultations were held, involving municipalities together with development practitioners in government ministries and entities, NGOs, CSOs, faith-based organizations and traditional authorities. In **the Gambia**, the national government increasingly acknowledges localization: the Gambia Association of Local Governments Authorities (GALGA) has been appointed a member of the VNR Project Steering Committee. In addition, both the national government and GALGA are promoting, with the support of the United Nations, the production of three VLRs that are supposed to feed into the VNR as well. In **Ghana**, metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, acknowledged as key stakeholders in the reporting process, submitted case studies and best practices.

In **Greece**, LRGs participated regularly in the VNR process. Contributions from the Association of Greek Regions (ENPE) and the Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE), as well as those from other partners, can be found in the VNR's annex. In **Italy**, the VNR highlights the strong involvement of LRGs, particularly regions and metropolitan cities. Notably, the VNR was planned as a collective year-long process involving main actors at national, regional and local levels through the participatory mechanisms set in place since 2017 to implement the national strategy for 2030 and the mid-term planning documents. However, the Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) – which produced a VSR – regretted that municipalities and provinces were not adequately involved in the reporting process.

In **Jordan**, over 130 public and private institutions, including governorates, municipalities and the Greater Amman Municipality (which, according to the survey, has been present in all meetings), participated in various task forces set up to review the different SDGs for the 2022 VNR. These task forces have now become permanent. Efforts were also made to hold local consultations and engage entities at the local level and governorates, along with other public and private stakeholders. Notably, the preparation of the 2022 VNR required close coordination with Amman's VLR team, which also participated in the VNR process that assessed progress on SDG 11. This helped ensure coherence

and complementarity between the VNR and VLR, and the VNR has included many practices led by Amman.[2]

In **Latvia**, the national government sent a letter to a high number of stakeholders, including the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) and municipalities, asking them about their SDG-related activities, their opinion on which SDGs are a priority for the country and proposals to improve performance. According to the LALRG, after filling out the survey, no response was received, and no further meetings were organized up until the presentation of the 2022 VNR. Nonetheless, the VNR offers a summary of the responses received by stakeholders, including those of LALRG, five municipalities and one region. It also includes a link to a webpage where the complete responses from these institutions were uploaded. As for Mali, the Association of Municipalities of **Mali** (AMM) has been invited for the first time to participate in the core group in charge of drafting the Malian 2022 VNR, together with representatives from the national government, CSOs, the private sector and international partners. In **Montenegro**, VNR preparation included three consultative regional meetings with representatives from 17 municipalities, as well as other stakeholders. The VNR draft was submitted to all stakeholders involved in its preparation to obtain their opinions.

In **the Netherlands**, the national government asked the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) to

designate representatives from the decentralized government per VNR topic to contribute to SDG dialogues for input into the VNR. The association also published a VSR. In **the Philippines**, the VNR process included activities at the subnational level. These included the collection of subnational best practices on the SDGs; an alignment meeting with the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) on the VSR it jointly prepared with the Leagues of Municipalities and Provinces (LMP and LPP, respectively); focus group discussions with Naga City, which prepared a VLR; and 18 events, meetings, or workshops to support the special regional committees on the SDGs.

In **Senegal**, the committee in charge of the VNR mobilized several stakeholders, including LRGs. It also organized a virtual workshop with local authorities to present the report to them. In **Switzerland**, the preparation of the VNR took advantage of the SDGital2030 platform, mobilizing the federal offices. Fourteen cantons and 26 municipalities contributed to this platform. The Cantonal Sustainable Development Network facilitates cantons' involvement. Cities and municipalities are also very active but not always clearly engaged in the reporting process. The city of Geneva, for example, states that it did not participate and only received the VNR for its information after it was finalized.[3]

In **Togo**, the Association of Municipalities (FCT) has been part of the drafting team. Its involvement has grown stronger over time: although it did not

participate in the first VNR in 2016, it was consulted for the 2017 and 2018 VNRs, as well as this year's VNR. To date, four VNRs have been produced. The national government and/or association send surveys on a regular basis to municipalities so as to keep track of the state of SDG localization. **Uruguay** also presented its fourth report this year. The National Office for Planning and Budgeting in charge of the VNR process has had regular dialogue with local authorities and collected information through surveys. It received a copy of the VSR produced by the LGA, the Congress of Intendants (CI), to contribute to the reporting process.

3.1.2 COUNTRIES WITH LIMITED OR MODERATE LRG INVOLVEMENT IN THE VNR PROCESS

In other countries, LRGs' involvement in the reporting processes was rather moderate (specific, one-time consultations) or their contributions were not taken into consideration. In **Argentina**, the Argentine Federation of Municipalities (FAM) presented a VSR this year and has, for the first time, been called to participate in informative meetings. Nevertheless, to date, the national government has not asked the association for inputs. The Federal SDGs Network and the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies have held exchanges with different LRGs presenting a VLR this year (e.g. Santa Fe, Villa María) so as to showcase these LRGs' experience in the VNR. In **Belarus**, some LRGs such as Mogilev participated in the VNR through a survey. Similarly,

in **Djibouti**, LRGs took part in the VNR development process through a consultation.

In **El Salvador**, LRGs participated in drafting the VNR. According to the published VNR, 31 representatives from 17 municipalities, including the Metropolitan Area of San Salvador, took part in the sectoral workshops organized online for the purpose of drafting the VNR. However, before the VNR's publication, they had not received any information as to how their contributions would be taken into account in the report, and the final VNR does not include references to LRGs' actions, priorities or best practices. In **Eritrea**, LRGs have been consulted and have taken part in working groups that monitored progress on SDGs 3 and 13. In **Ethiopia**, regional authorities, but not municipalities, participated in the consultations for the preparation of the VNR, together with the private sector, civil society, the scientific community and academia, parliaments and other stakeholders. In **Kazakhstan**, two cities' responses to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey reflect specific contributions to the VNR. In addition, the VNR mentions the participation of representatives from local executive bodies. UNDP launched a consultation that involved regions, representatives of local authorities and civil society to identify priorities to be included in the VNR.

In **Pakistan**, the local councils associations have not been involved in VNR preparation. According to a survey conducted for the purposes of the VSR produced this year, LRG representatives were not

aware of the VNR process. The VSR states, however, that provinces and districts were consulted through the SDG units, technical committees and focal points, depending on the context of each province. In **Sri Lanka**, data collection for the 2022 VNR involved the direct engagement of different stakeholders at both national and subnational levels, via various thematic consultations. In particular, representatives from the provinces participated in five provincial consultations. However, local governments' involvement was a one-time occurrence, and the VNR does not mention the VSR prepared by the Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities (FSLGA).

3.1.3 COUNTRIES WITH LITTLE OR NO LRG INVOLVEMENT IN THE VNR PROCESS

Finally, LRGs' participation was very limited in a number of reporting countries this year. In **Gabon**, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic context, the national government decided not to extend consultations to provinces and departments. The analysis, however, capitalized on previous exchanges held in 2017 and 2018 with the LRGs during the drafting process for local development plans. In **Suriname**, there was also no direct LRG participation in the VNR, but similar to Gabon, reports of prior engagement and consultations with local communities – under the Localizing the SDGs initiative – in certain urban, rural and interior areas were useful and enabled incorporating local communities' perceptions into the VNR.

In other countries, no information of any LRG involvement in the VNR process has been found. In **Lesotho**, LRGs are not mentioned among the many stakeholders that participated in consultations held to produce the VNR. In **Luxembourg**, the Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities (SYVICOL) has not been involved with the national government's VNR coordinating team. The **Malawi** Local Government Association (MALGA) did not participate in the 2020 VNR process, nor is there evidence of any LRG involvement in the 2022 VNR.

3.1.4 HOW ARE LRGs AND LOCALIZATION MENTIONED IN THE VNRs?

As observed above, LRG participation in VNR processes still requires progress. Yet, the local sphere is usually mentioned in the reports, which range from merely depicting LRGs as implementers of nationally led policies and programmes to more robustly demonstrating their role as key actors in endeavours for sustainable development. **The number of VNRs that reserve a section or subsection for SDG localization and subnational governments and/or that mention VSRs and VLRs has decreased this year to 12 countries.**

Most notably, **Argentina** and **Italy** have introduced a specific section on SDG "localization" or "territorialization" in their VNRs. **The Philippines**'s VNR tackles local challenges and opportunities in two different sections: "SDG adoption and implementation at the local level through a whole-of-nation approach using the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS)" and "Subnational mechanisms and localization of the SDGs". The VNR of **Eswatini** contains a section titled "Review of SDGs Implementation at regional level", while that of **Luxembourg** highlights efforts to "involve and accompany territorial stakeholders". **Sri Lanka**'s VNR includes a subsection on national and subnational ownership of the SDGs, while **Switzerland**'s VNR includes one on collaboration with subnational governments. **Greece** and **Latvia** have included

contributions and best practices from both LRGs and the LGAs. Finally, **Kazakhstan**'s VNR includes a review of the objectives set out in its 2019 VNR, one of which regards the localization of the SDGs.

VSRs and VLRs have also been mentioned, although a number of countries missed an opportunity to do so. The **Greek** VNR mentions Skiathos' 2020 VLR. The case of **Jordan** is paradigmatic: the VNR and the Greater Amman Municipality's 2022 VLR were drafted as a result of significant collaboration amongst authorities, and there is even a specific page dedicated to the VLR. However, beyond this, the VNR only mentions some LRG experiences (there is a very short subsection on SDG localization that is more forward-looking than focused on reporting progress). The VNR of **the Philippines** dedicates two pages to the country's VSR and Naga City's VLR. The VSR of **the Netherlands** and, albeit more succinctly, the VSR of **Cameroon** are mentioned in the countries' respective VNRs. On the contrary, **Côte d'Ivoire** has failed to benefit from connecting VNR and VSR processes. However, its VNR includes a box with conclusions from the regional consultations held as part of the reporting process, which includes recommendations for SDGs 4, 5, 14 and 15. Similarly, **Italy**, although it has disregarded the VSR process, has an annex fully focused on regions and metropolitan cities. It includes 12 full-fledged VLRs recently published in the framework of the VNR process. Finally, an opportunity has been missed in countries such as **Ghana**, where no reference to Accra's VLR is made, and **Argentina**, **Botswana** and

Sri Lanka, where the VNRs have not leveraged the potential of VSRs for a territorialized review of the state of SDG localization and subsequent policy change.

Overall, ten countries frequently referenced LRGs in their VNRs, and 12 countries considered decentralization to be part of their implementation strategies (**Argentina**, **Botswana**, **Eswatini**, **Ghana**, **Greece**, **Guinea-Bissau**, **Jordan**, **Latvia**, **Lesotho**, **Mali**, **Senegal** and **Togo**). A group of ten countries made very limited references to LRGs, and four countries do not mention LRGs at all. It is worth highlighting that the **Ethiopian** VNR recognizes decentralization of power and resources, as well as multilevel coordination, as critical for better service delivery and outreach to structurally marginalized groups. In the VNR of **Gabon**, local authorities are perceived as actors that need to be made aware of the steps to take to improve planning aligned to the SDGs. In **El Salvador** and the **United Arab Emirates**' reports, the SDG localization and the alignment of national and local plans for policy coherence are still an objective for the years to come. In **Djibouti** and **Togo**'s VNRs, mentions of LRGs are scarce. In many cases, even if LRGs are mentioned, they are only depicted from a top-down approach as territories where national programmes are implemented: this is the case of **Belarus**, **Ghana**, **Malawi**, **Senegal** and **Suriname**, amongst others.

Although progress can be observed in many countries, a stronger connection between national and local processes for SDG localization is highly required. Only through institutionalized and constant exchanges, together with a stronger commitment by all the parties involved, will it be possible to fully integrate a bottom-up perspective in national reporting processes.

3.2. NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS, IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND LRG PARTICIPATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to have well-prepared national institutions to ensure the achievement of the SDGs. Most countries have adjusted their institutional frameworks to respond to the pandemic and now to move towards recovery, while reaffirming their commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda.

As underlined by the *World Public Administration Report 2021*, **the first five years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda saw unprecedented institutionalization at the national level, even if many countries are still putting in place or adjusting key elements of their institutional systems for SDG implementation**. Almost all countries are developing national strategies or plans aligned with the SDGs and, in some cases, roadmaps and action plans for their implementation. Countries are also establishing and reinforcing national coordination and monitoring mechanisms. This subsection first offers an overview of these strategies and mechanisms, and then it delves into the degree to which LRGs are participating in them and how they are doing so.

In a large number of countries, national steering mechanisms for SDG implementation are led by the highest levels of government (e.g. the prime minister's office or one or more ministries). In other countries, several ministries or specific interministerial mechanisms share leadership. Overall, **on most occasions, prime ministers or heads of state are responsible for the strategic oversight of SDG implementation, while ministries are responsible for the technical mechanisms that exist within national coordination mechanisms**. In some countries, some ministries have explicitly been tasked with SDG localization (also called "domestication" or "territorialization"). In others, coordination is handled by national planning systems that are being strengthened or adapted to support SDG alignment.

The composition of these national steering mechanisms shows that institutionalized arrangements for SDG implementation increasingly facilitate the involvement of different stakeholders in the process, which may or may not include LRGs, depending on the country. This indicates that the adoption of a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach is progressing, albeit not at the necessary pace.

In a few countries, national coordination mechanisms remain composed of only national-level actors. For example, in **Argentina**, the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies brings together members of ministries, the national statistics institute and the bodies that make up the national public administration.

In other countries, national coordination mechanisms include multiple stakeholders. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, there is a multistakeholder committee made up of private actors, civil society, LRGs (represented by the associations UVICOCI and ARDCI) and development partners. In **Jordan**, the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development is headed by the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, and it includes members from relevant line ministries, the private sector and CSOs, as well as representatives of women, youth, the Senate, the House of Representatives and local communities. In **Togo**, the national mechanism includes the private sector, civil society and, according to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, the local government association, FCT. In some cases, these multistakeholder mechanisms have an advisory role, such as in **Montenegro**.

In a number of countries, specific multistakeholder mechanisms with a more technical character have been created, such as in **Eswatini** or **Ghana**. A few countries do not have national coordination mechanisms per se. In **the Netherlands**, SDG governance is organized on the basis of existing responsibilities and institutions, whereby the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation coordinates SDG implementation with the support of the National SDG Coordinator.

In **Kazakhstan**, an SDG Council was created, with permanent inter-agency working groups, in order to build a dialogue with multiple stakeholders.

In most countries, long-term development strategies have been adopted to align the SDGs with national development visions. These include **Belarus**'s National Strategy for Sustainable Development, **Cameroon**'s National Development Strategy 2030, **Latvia**'s National Development Plan 2021-2027, **Luxembourg**'s National Plan for Sustainable Development ("Luxembourg 2030"), **Malawi**'s first ten-year Implementation Plan, **Switzerland**'s Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, **Senegal**'s Plan for Emerging Senegal 2035 and **Ethiopia**'s 2021-2030 Ten Year Development Plan, among others. Gabon, for instance, revised in 2016 its 2012-2025 Emerging **Gabon** Strategic Plan to include the SDGs.

In other countries, mid- and long-term development strategies have also been accompanied by roadmaps or action plans for their implementation. This is the case, for instance, of **Botswana**, which has complemented its National Development Plan with an SDGs Roadmap, including a five-year plan of action implemented through annual work plans. **Jordan** has also developed a roadmap for SDG implementation. In **Switzerland** and **Montenegro**, action plans have been adopted to implement the national strategies. In **Greece**, complementing the adoption of the National Implementation Plan for

the SDGs, the government has approved a National Reform Plan to improve multilevel governance, as well as national plans, strategies and programmes that integrate sustainable development dimensions: the Just Transition Development Plan, the National Energy and Climate Plan, the National Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and its extension for the 2021-2022 period and the National Strategy for Research and Innovation. In **Kazakhstan**, the government adopted in 2021 a new planning system which contains newly approved SDG indicators.

Some other countries have aligned their mid-term development strategies with the SDGs. Such examples include **Côte d'Ivoire**'s National Development Plan 2021-2025, **Djibouti**'s national development plan "Djibouti ICI" 2020-2024, **Eswatini**'s Strategic Roadmap 2019-2023, and **Jamaica**'s Medium Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework 2018-2021. In **Ghana**, for instance, the SDGs are mainstreamed in the government's Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies 2017-2024 and the Medium-term National Development Frameworks 2018-2021 and 2022-2025. The SDGs are also mainstreamed in **Grenada**'s National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2035, **Mali**'s Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development 2019-2023, **Liberia**'s Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018-2023, **Togo**'s National Development Plan 2018-2022, **the Philippines**'s 2017-2022 development plans (which complement

the long-term vision AmBisyon Natin 2040) and **Suriname**'s Multi-annual Development Plan 2022-2026. **Senegal** is using five-year priority action plans to implement its Plan for Emerging Senegal.

In a few countries, no national strategies aligned with the SDGs have been adopted, as is the case of **Eritrea**. In **the Netherlands**, an action plan for the national implementation of the SDGs was adopted in 2017, but there is no national SDG strategy as such.

Several countries are planning to align their development strategies with the SDGs in the future, such as **Guinea-Bissau**; **El Salvador**, where the previous National Sustainable Development Agenda expired in 2019; and **Argentina**, where a new process of aligning the SDGs with national strategies started in 2020. In the **United Arab Emirates**, the national development plan is not explicitly aligned with the SDGs.

In some cases, these long- and mid-term development plans reflect countries' COVID-19 recovery needs. These are the cases of the following countries: **Liberia**, where the VNR reports the need to recalibrate and revise the country's national development plan, the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and the 2018-2023 mid-term development plan due to COVID-19 impacts; **Ghana**, where the Medium-term National Development Framework emphasizes "emergency planning and COVID-19 recovery response"; **Togo**, where the national government revised the National

Development Plan 2018-2022 by adopting the Togo 2025 roadmap to account for the impacts and needs posed by the COVID-19 crisis; and **Andorra**, which has a 2021-2023 action plan focused on promoting economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that lays the foundation for more sustainable development. Many countries, such as **Greece**, **Malawi** and **Botswana**, have developed specific recovery plans: the National Reform Plan, the COVID-19 Socio-economic Recovery Plan and the Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan, respectively.

Analysis of LRGs' role in national government-led SDG strategies and actions

The localization of the SDGs and other related global agendas is instrumental to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The analysis of the VNRs published in 2022 shows the extent to which national governments prioritize or do not prioritize SDG localization; it also illustrates how they perceive LRGs' role within their SDG implementation strategies and actions. Several groups may be distinguished.

A first group of countries that consider LRGs and their associations as key partners for the achievement of the SDGs stands out. An expanding number of localization initiatives can be found in these countries. This is the case, for instance, of **Italy**, whose VNR shows how the national government is attributing great importance to

adopting an integrated territorial approach and an effective multilevel governance system. These are acknowledged as key elements to align the objectives in the National Sustainable Development Strategy with local and regional planning processes. In order to achieve this, Italy is focusing on improving "policy coherence for sustainable development" (SDG 17.14) by revising the national strategy and including a National Action Plan and specific policy coherence tools within it. Moreover, the VNR dedicates a specific chapter (and an annex) to SDG localization, also showing the will to give visibility to LRGs' localization efforts. However, while the national strategy pays great attention to the roles of regions and autonomous provinces, this is not the case for provinces and municipalities, which creates an important gap in the multilevel governance approach.

Similar to Italy, in various federal countries, there are often gaps in the involvement of different types of LRGs in localization. In **Switzerland**, the federal government is strengthening cooperation with the cantonal sustainability offices (at the regional level). In order to reinforce vertical cooperation, the newly created Cantonal Network for Sustainable Development is supporting the cantons. Cantons prepare their sustainable development strategies, establish coordination mechanisms to support localization initiatives and serve as the first point of contact for the municipalities, but municipal levels are less involved in federal coordination mechanisms. Similar gaps are observed in **Argentina**, where 21

out of the 23 provincial governments and the city of Buenos Aires have signed agreements with the national government and joined the Federal SDGs Network, but where despite several efforts, municipal involvement remains insufficient.

Greece is another country that stands out for its localization efforts. The Ministry of the Interior's Annual Action Plan for 2022 aims to both redistribute responsibilities among the national, regional and local levels of government and clarify the framework for responsibility allocation. The objective is to conduct a detailed mapping of the current allocation of competences and amend the legal framework by the third quarter of 2022. In **the Netherlands**, there is strong multistakeholder collaboration for SDG localization. For example, the Netherlands Foundation is a platform of more than 1,250 social actors, including municipalities. Each year, two progress reports are submitted to the House of Representatives, produced jointly by the national government, local authorities, social organizations, the business community, knowledge institutions and young people. However, a key obstacle that limits localization efforts to monitor progress towards SDG achievement is the lack of a national SDG strategy and targets for 2030.

Reforms to promote a more enabling environment for subnational involvement have had a positive impact on the localization process in several countries reporting this year. This is the case, for instance, of **Jordan**, where localization has made significant progress due to LRGs' inclusion in national coordination mechanisms, the passing of a new decentralization law and placing the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development in charge of SDG localization. The 2022 decentralized elections represent an opportunity to accelerate mainstreaming the SDGs at local levels, particularly in the Greater Amman Municipality. However, progress still needs to be driven forward. In **Togo**, the VNR places emphasis on the importance of decentralization and territorial development for inclusive local governance. The year 2019 marked a milestone in the decentralization process, as 117 municipalities were elected for the first time in 30 years. Since then, regular awareness-raising sessions have been held with the elected governments to improve their capacities to integrate the SDGs in local development plans. A support fund for LRGs was also established in 2019. In **Uruguay**, the national government has promoted localizing the SDGs through the development of guidelines and training. In partnership with UNDP, the SDGs were mapped against national and subnational priorities through a Rapid Integrated Assessment. Coordination efforts have also included specific studies to monitor and evaluate SDG progress in certain departments, as well as awareness-raising and dissemination campaigns.

In other countries, national planning mechanisms are being revised as a lever to support a better alignment of the SDGs at subnational levels. In **Cameroon**, the VNR emphasizes the need to reinforce coordination with regional and local levels; there have been recent reforms that seek to accelerate the decentralization process and strengthen regional

and local planning mechanisms. At the local level, SDG monitoring responsibilities will be devolved to local technical participatory committees for the monitoring of public investment. At the regional level, the Regional Committee for Public Investment will undertake SDG monitoring. It will be tasked with the production of regional monitoring reports. These will be based on the local-level reports and will then be considered by the national SDG reporting unit. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the government is seeking to provide all regions with appropriate planning instruments that integrate the SDGs in line with the National Development Plan 2021-2025. Moreover, since 2020, active efforts to promote the localization of the SDGs have reinforced local ownership. Such efforts have included awareness-raising (about both the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063) and consultations in the 31 regions and two autonomous districts. These consultations have enabled incorporating a granular understanding of populations' needs and aspirations into the National Development Plan.

In **Mali**, the VNR stresses LRGs' ownership of the SDGs as an urgent necessity for advancing sustainable development across the national territory, highlighting the importance of reinforcing decentralization to do so. The country has initiated alignment of economic, social and cultural programmes with the SDGs, as these are meant to be a reference framework guiding operational planning and the implementation, monitoring and

evaluation of activities led by the local level. In **the Gambia**, regional technical advisory committees, supported by the Directorate of Development Planning and multidisciplinary facilitation teams will ensure that ward and local development programmes and projects are aligned with the National Development Plan and the SDGs. In **Ghana**, the country's decentralized planning system leads SDG coordination. The policy objectives, strategies and results matrix of the Medium-term National Development Frameworks (2018-2021 and 2022-2025), which are aligned with the SDGs, should be translated into actions by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. Moreover, partnerships with traditional authorities are being renewed to strengthen local governance and foster sustainable development actions in local communities.

In **the Philippines**, the approach to enabling SDG localization is comprehensive, albeit top-down. The Department of the Interior and Local Government, together with the National Economic and Development Authority, issued a Joint Memorandum Circular that provides guidelines on the localization of the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022. It binds LRGs to align local plans with the national/regional development plan and SDG targets, using result matrices.

At the same time, in a range of countries, the institutional context or the absence of clear mechanisms still limit LRGs' active engagement. For instance, in **Belarus**, the VNR includes very limited

information on LRGs' role in the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development for the period up to 2035 and the Programme of Social and Economic Development for 2021-2025. In **Kazakhstan**, the VNR does not mention the participation of LRGs in the national SDG strategy, yet local executive agencies participated in training seminars on SDGs nationalization and localization.

In **Pakistan**, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives – the focal ministry for SDGs – is coordinating horizontally with all the pertinent ministries' focal persons. In the same vein, SDG support units have been established with the planning ministry/departments at federal, provincial and area government levels in order to foster vertical and horizontal institutional collaboration and provide technical support. Yet, higher tiers of government (federal and provincial) tend to exclude local governments from planning and implementation of SDG-related interventions. In **Sri Lanka**, a government circular on the "Formulation of Sustainable Development Strategies" directed the national and subnational tiers of government (provincial and local) to integrate the SDGs in their plans. However, national coordination mechanisms are not ensuring the cohesive inclusion of the provincial governments and local government entities in the SDG implementation process.

In many other countries reporting this year, the VNRs consider local implementation to be a pending issue (e.g. **Gabon**, **Lesotho**) or provide no

evidence of localization strategies nor LRG involvement in national strategies (e.g. **Djibouti**, **Equatorial Guinea**, **Eritrea**, **São Tomé and Príncipe**). In other countries, the absence of elected LRGs makes localization strategies less relevant (e.g. **Grenada**, **Liberia**, **Somalia**, **Sudan**, **United Arab Emirates**).

Analysis of LRGs' role in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation

Table 3.3 below offers an analysis of LRGs' involvement in national coordination mechanisms from 2016 until 2022. The upper half of the table shows the extent to which LRGs are involved in national mechanisms in 2022, and the lower half provides cumulative data on LRGs' participation in national coordination mechanisms between 2016 and 2021. This includes information concerning the 247 VNRs submitted in 2016-2021 and the 44 VNRs submitted in 2022 (except for two countries: São Tomé and Príncipe and Tuvalu, of which no information is available, and which are included in the column "No elected LRGs/no information").

Table 3.3 LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation in 2022 and 2016-2021

* Five countries that have no elected LRGs (Grenada, Guinea Bissau, Somalia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates) and two countries from which there is no information available (São Tomé and Príncipe and Tuvalu).

** The 247 VNRs analyzed correspond to a total of 176 countries, of which 47 presented VNRs twice between 2016-2021 and 12 countries, three times.

2022	Total countries	Medium to high participation		Weak participation		No participation		No elected LRGs/ no information	
Region	Countries per region	No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%
World	44	15	34%	11	25%	11	25%	7*	16%
Africa	21	6	29%	5	24%	6	29%	4	19%
ASPAC	4	1	25%	1	25%	1	25%	1	25%
Eurasia	2	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Europe	8	5	63%	3	38%	0	0%	0	0%
LATAM	4	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%	0	0%
MEWA	2	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%	1	50%
NORAM	3	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%

2016-2021	Total countries	Medium to high participation		Weak participation		No participation		No elected LRGs/ no information	
Region	Countries per region	No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%	No. countries	%
World**	247	70	28%	53	21%	109	44%	15	6%
Africa	66	16	24%	15	23%	34	52%	1	2%
ASPAC	48	10	20%	8	17%	24	50%	6	13%
Eurasia	10	1	11%	3	30%	5	50%	1	10%
Europe	58	31	53%	8	14%	18	31%	1	2%
LATAM	38	10	26%	15	39%	13	34%	0	0%
MEWA	18	1	6%	2	11%	11	61%	4	22%
NORAM	9	1	11%	2	22%	4	44%	2	22%

As of 2022, LRGs participate in national coordination mechanisms in 34% of reporting countries. That is, in 15 out of 44 reporting countries, LRGs regularly participate in the decision-making processes of coordination mechanisms as an equal partner (perhaps with voting rights), or they regularly participate with consultative roles (such as advisory councils). This kind of participation is denominated "medium to high participation" in the table.

In 25% of the reporting countries, that is, in 11 out of the 44, LRGs have participated in a more limited manner in such coordination mechanisms. This may entail ad hoc consultations or having been invited to one-time meetings. In the table, this kind of participation is called "weak participation". In another 25% of reporting countries, namely in 11 different countries out of the reporting 44, there has been no LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms. In the remaining 16% of countries (7), there are either no elected LRGs or there is no information on their involvement in national coordination mechanisms (São Tomé and Príncipe and Tuvalu).

Contrasting the 2022 figures with those observed for the 2016-2021 period, it can be seen that LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms has increased from an average 28% in 2016-2021 to 34% in the present year. Although this increase is positive and encouraging, LRGs still do not participate in coordination mechanisms in over half of the countries reporting this year. It is necessary to speed up the pace at which LRGs become involved in these mechanisms, as this will strengthen both SDG localization and national implementation strategies.

A regional analysis reveals that this year, LRG involvement in coordination mechanisms is highest in Europe, followed by Africa and Asia-Pacific. Although the North America and Middle East and West Asia regions show high rates of LRG involvement, these cannot be considered statistically significant as the number of reporting countries is too small for the sample to be representative. However, the LRG involvement experiences of Jordan, Jamaica and Dominica are important to highlight. In Jordan, governorates and the Greater Amman Municipality participated in the task forces set up by the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development to review each SDG. These task forces have now been made permanent. In Jamaica, since 2021, the Planning Institute of Jamaica, in charge of SDG implementation, has held consultations with the ALGAJ and started involving them in SDG implementation work. In Dominica, the DALCA reports regularly participating in the national coordination mechanism, but at a consultative level.

In Europe, LRG participation in national mechanisms has slightly increased from 53% in 2016-2021 to 63% in 2022. A group of front-running reporting countries includes the Netherlands, Greece, Italy, Montenegro and Andorra. In the Netherlands, there is an official interdepartmental SDG Focal Points working group, in which VNG participates on behalf of the local authorities. In Greece, the Presidency of the Government, in charge of SDG implementation, established a multistakeholder working group on the SDGs in 2021. In Italy, the State-Regions Conference facilitates dialogue between the national government and the regions. The Ministry for Ecological Transition, in close cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, set up VNR/VLR roundtables under the auspices of the National Forum for Sustainable Development. The roundtables involved regions and metropolitan cities. AICCRE notes, however, that provinces and municipalities are not adequately integrated. In Montenegro, LRGs participate in the multistakeholder National Council for Sustainable Development. The Council underwent structural changes in 2021, and one of the new expert working groups will focus on "sustainable development at the local level". Switzerland is a special case that needs clarification since based on the cantons' involvement, it should be in the previous group of front-running countries. However, the municipal governments continue to be involved in coordination mostly on one-off

occasions. The Steering Committee on the 2030 Agenda has established a support committee, with representatives from academia and civil society. It conducts a periodical Dialogue 2030 as well as a yearly Forum on Sustainable Development that involves regions, cities and municipalities. A second group including **Latvia** and **Luxembourg** can be distinguished, characterized by more limited LRG involvement.

In Africa, participation has also slightly increased from 24% in 2016-2021 to 29% in 2022. Botswana, **Cameroon**, **Eswatini**, **the Gambia**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Mali** and **Togo** make up the group of African countries reporting this year in which LRGs have had some degree of involvement with national coordination mechanisms, notably in SDG task forces, committees or technical working teams. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, UVICOCI and ARDCI take part, at a consultative level, in the steering committee for the implementation of the SDGs and in the national monitoring unit. In **Mali**, the AMM is part of all the coordination and monitoring mechanisms of the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery. For its part, in **Togo**, the FCT states that it is involved in national coordination mechanisms through regular participation in the decision-making process. **Ghana**, **Lesotho** and **Malawi** make up a second group in which LRGs have had more limited involvement with national mechanisms. In **Senegal**, LRGs do not directly participate in coordination mechanisms. There is no evidence of LRG participation in **Djibouti**, **Equatorial Guinea**, **Eritrea**, **Ethiopia**, **Gabon** and **Liberia**.

In the Asia-Pacific region, LRG participation in national mechanisms has gone up from 21% in 2016-2021 to 25% in 2022, thanks to the involvement of LGAs in **the Philippines**. Provincial governors usually chair the Provincial Development Council, acting as the formal mechanism for coordination and multilevel governance. However, local government organizations perceive that local governments are not completely aware of ongoing SDG-related processes. LRG participation is significantly more limited in **Pakistan** and in **Sri Lanka**.

In the Latin America region, LRG involvement in national coordination mechanisms has decreased over the past two years.

3.3 LRG ACTIONS FOR SDG LOCALIZATION IN REPORTING COUNTRIES

This subsection includes a country-by-country analysis of the 2030 Agenda localization efforts made by LRGs and their associations from countries that are reporting this year to the HLPF. The analysis is based mainly on the responses to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey (see Section 2 on survey methodology). Concretely, it collects and analyzes the responses shared by LGAs and LRGs from 25 out of the 44 countries reporting in 2022. It provides an in-depth assessment of the VLRs and VSRs produced in 2021 and 2022 in the reporting countries. This analysis also builds on the information contained in the VNRs on local action for the SDGs. Section 3.4 complements this information with an analysis of localization efforts in countries that are not reporting this year.

As seen in the previous subsections, LGAs participate, to a greater or lesser extent, in national coordination mechanisms, in the definition and implementation of national strategies and in reporting processes such as VNR production. Within their territories, they also play a critical role by mobilizing and raising awareness amongst their LRG members, communities and local stakeholders through campaigns, training sessions and other activities; by aligning their own strategies, plans and budgets to the SDGs; by raising funds for specific SDG-related projects; and by monitoring the achievement of the SDGs, amongst other actions.

The responses to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey show that the majority of the 18 LGAs from reporting countries (80%, an increase from 71% last year) demonstrate a very high level of acquaintance with the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs are used as an important reference framework in the strategies of over half of the responding LGAs, which come from several regions. Most LGAs' staff are aware of and reference the SDGs, although more could be done to prioritize and bolster the potential of the 2030 Agenda. Despite these positive results, an alarming 20% of LGAs worldwide still present a low level of awareness – a pending matter requiring urgent solutions. Several LGAs that responded to the survey this year have developed VSRs (**Argentina**, **Botswana**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Italy**, **the Netherlands**, **Pakistan**, **the Philippines** and **Sri Lanka**), amounting to 50% of the responding LGAs. However, this is not representative of the global situation, and, aside from some efforts to adopt a strategy or action plan (**the Gambia**, **Mali** and **Dominica**), there is still a large number of LGAs who have not made concrete commitments for SDG implementation.

Turning to LRGs, two-thirds of the respondents are familiar with the SDG framework, of which half report possessing good knowledge of and having placed the SDGs high on their political agendas. This has led many to develop VLRs, such as those produced this year by **Santa Fe**, **San Justo** and **Villa María** (Argentina) and **Amman** (Jordan). Almost half of the responding LRGs adopted concrete strategies and policies. However, as with the LGAs, over a quarter of the respondents have not made any kind of commitment yet.

3.3.1 PERSPECTIVES FROM VLRs AND VSRs

VLRs and VSRs are an expression of LRGs and LGAs' increasing involvement in the monitoring process. VLRs provide first-hand information on how LRGs are leading the way in SDG implementation and innovation in a specific city or region. A total of 150 VLRs have been collected from 38 countries, representing more than 350 million inhabitants (Section 3.4 provides more details on the VLRs published in each region). VSRs are led by LGAs and offer a broader country-wide analysis of subnational efforts and challenges to localize the SDGs. In 2020-2021, 15 VSRs were published in 14 countries. In 2022, LGAs have developed VSRs in 11 countries, ten of which are reporting to the HLPF this year. In total, these VSRs represent more than one billion inhabitants around the world. The following boxes summarize these ten 2022 VSRs and the situation in the respective countries.

Box 3.1

ARGENTINA'S 2022 VSR

Argentina is a federal country with 23 provinces, in addition to the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, and 2,327 local governments. The National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (CNCPS) is the institution responsible for coordinating and reporting on 2030 Agenda implementation and promoting localization. To that end, in 2019, the CNCPS created the Federal SDGs Network, which includes 21 provinces and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. The CNCPS has also signed cooperation agreements with nearly 100 local governments. Nevertheless, coordination to prepare the reports and develop policies aimed at localizing the SDGs at the municipal level needs a greater push, as pointed out by the Argentine Federation of Municipalities (FAM). Recently, in 2022, the CNCPS and the FAM have made progress to develop a common agenda.

In the different provinces, progress has been observed in developing and materializing programmes related to different SDGs in local governments, although many municipalities do not establish a clear identification with the 2030 Agenda. The VSR brings together good practices reflecting these advances.

However, there is a major challenge to ensure dissemination and awareness of the 2030 Agenda in all of the country's local governments; this requires joint work among the three levels of government and the allocation of adequate resources. Progress in integrating the SDGs into local government agenda planning is also still limited. There is a strong need to incorporate culture, strategic planning tools and localized indicators for oversight and monitoring. There is no national strategic plan for SDG localization nor resources allocated for this purpose. There are no national statistics aligned with and disaggregated to monitor the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

The country's critical socio-economic situation (a poverty rate above 40%, an 8% unemployment rate, 35% of workers in informal employment and very important external debt) has been a significant constraint to implementing the 2030 Agenda. However, a need has arisen to discuss ways of solving these problems, beginning with the definition of a new development model that facilitates sustainability. This is a fundamental opportunity to localize the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

Box 3.2

BOTSWANA'S 2022 VSR

The SDGs are integrated in Botswana's Vision 2036 and its eleventh National Development Plan, as well as subnational development plans. In September 2020, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, the Parliament of Botswana approved the Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan for the nation. At the national level, the Joint National Steering Committee on SDGs, amongst other entities, coordinates SDG implementation, (see Section 3.2). At the subnational level, the country has 16 districts with locally elected and appointed officers. Governance at the village level also recognizes a traditional system of *kgosi* (chiefs) and *kgotla* (assemblies) that work collaboratively with district institutions. The national government provides an average of 90% and 80% of district and urban councils' recurrent budgets, though transfers are often irregular.

Currently, the Constitution is undergoing a national review. One of the expected outputs of the reforms is the deepening of decentralization. At the local level, the SDGs are coordinated by local authorities, together with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; the Botswana Association of Local Authorities (BALA) provides oversight.

The bottom-up planning process that the country has adopted ensures that district and urban development plans inform the National Development Plan. Local-level participation is ensured through village/ward, district and urban development committees. A survey conducted at the local level identified some discrepancies in areas such as planning, implementation, resource mobilization and allocation, and monitoring and evaluation. For example, 37% of district-level respondents indicated non-participation, and 31% indicated limited participation, pointing to the need to uncover the reasons behind this phenomenon and strengthen the localization of the SDGs.

The VSR highlights several examples of local programmes geared towards the SDGs addressing poverty and hunger; providing decent work; bridging the digital divide; servicing agricultural land and creating agricultural opportunities for youth; ensuring proper sanitation and waste management; and implementing social protection projects. Limited financial and technical resources, as well as limited engagement with key stakeholders, were among the main challenges mentioned by the interviewed district councils.

During the COVID-19 crisis, LRGs' efforts were more impactful, easily accessible and accepted by communities. These developments point to the prospects of decentralization as a potentially effective and efficient vehicle for service delivery. To enhance SDG implementation and monitoring at the local level, there is a need to empower BALA, build its capacity and, where possible, even reposition it to play a meaningful role in this process.

Box 3.3

CAMEROON'S 2022 VSR

The government of Cameroon has integrated the SDGs into its 2020-2030 National Development Strategy. The Ministry of Economy, Planning and Territorial Development coordinates this strategy's implementation (see Section 3.2). The country's LRGs include ten regions and 360 municipalities and districts. In December 2019, the adoption of the Code of Decentralized Local and Regional Governments marked a turning point in implementing decentralization.

Only a minority of the LRGs were directly informed of the VNR's preparation (41% of the 73 LRGs that responded to the survey). An analysis by the National Participatory Development Programme states that most of the actions included in the 2017 municipal development plans (which are currently being revised) touch on one of the 17 SDGs. In urban municipalities, the actions prioritize SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13, while in rural municipalities, they prioritize SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 13. There are clear regional differences. At the local level, SDG monitoring is carried out by the municipal technical committees for the participatory

monitoring of public investment. At the regional level, monitoring is also carried out by the regional committees for the monitoring of the physical and financial execution of public investment, chaired by regional delegates from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Territorial Development. The capital city of Yaoundé published its first VLR in 2020.

To contribute to localizing the SDGs, the national government planned to raise the proportion of resources transferred to LRGs to at least 15% of its budget. However, transfers to LRGs have stagnated at 7.2% of the national budget in 2021 and 2022.

According to the survey, 61% of local officials consider that the SDG implementation process has contributed to fostering greater collaboration with the central government, as well as with NGOs through seminars and technical support. The allocation of special funds to combat COVID-19 has also contributed. The association United Municipalities and Cities of Cameroon (UCCC-CVUC) points to

five recommendations for localization: involve LRGs more in VNR preparation, improve access to information and raise awareness amongst LRGs on the SDGs, strengthen support from the national government and development partners, increase financial resources and upgrade legal mechanisms to accelerate the decentralization process.

Box 3.4

[CÔTE D'IVOIRE'S 2022 VSR](#)

The SDGs are integrated into Côte d'Ivoire's 2021-2025 National Development Plan. The Ministry of Planning and Development is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs in collaboration with the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development. The framework laws on decentralization date from 2002 and 2003 but mark the national government's strong political will to make local governments a lever for sustainable development. In addition to the country's 31 regions and 201 municipalities, there are 14 districts (12 were created by decree in 2021).

To disseminate the SDGs, as of 2016, the government had organized workshops, consultations and awareness-raising missions in all regions and districts. In 2022, a workshop was organized to promote ownership of the tools and principles for LRGs' preparation of VLRs, and regional consultations were held for the production of local reviews in the districts.

Among the main challenges faced by LRGs in supporting SDG localization, the Union of Cities and Municipalities of Côte d'Ivoire (UVICOCI) and the Assembly of Regions and Districts of Côte d'Ivoire (ARDCI) mention limited coordination between the different levels of government, insufficient human and financial resources and limited local awareness.

Nonetheless, nearly 77% of municipalities were involved in the 2022 VNR, compared to 20% in 2019. Overall, 65% of municipalities formally committed to implementing and monitoring the SDGs. In 14% of municipalities, institutional coordination is ensured by the highest decision-making level within the organization, and 30% of municipalities have integrated between 30% and 59% of the SDGs into their local plans. COVID-19 recovery efforts have prioritized health care and prevention, education, water and sanitation. The National Institute of Statistics aims to identify good practices in the collection and dissemination of SDG indicators through a national monitoring system providing regular and reliable data. Of the LRGs, 35% have their own mechanisms and/or indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

In view of the many SDG localization challenges, capacity building for the LRGs on the SDGs and their integration into the three-year local plans, as well as the institutionalization of regional mechanisms based on the National Development Plan and the VNR, prove necessary in order to actively involve the municipalities.

Box 3.5

ITALY'S 2022 VSR

Italy has three tiers of subnational governments: 20 regions, 107 provinces (including autonomous provinces, metropolitan cities and free municipal consortiums) and 7,904 municipalities. The Italian VSR first analyzes the National Sustainable Development Strategy, approved in 2017 by the national government, and the different strategies developed by the regional governments. The VSR focuses more on the municipal and supra-municipal contributions, for which there are no official indicators or statistical data, to all 17 SDGs. At the national level, the Ministry of Ecological Transition ensures coordination.

The national strategy (which is currently under review) resulted from an extensive participatory process including regional and local authorities. In 2019, the National Forum for Sustainable Development was created to ensure stakeholders' and experts' active participation in decision-making processes on the implementation of the national strategy. The Ministry of Ecological Transition activated specific financial and technical support for the design of regional and metropolitan strategies for sustainable development. Another project intends to support this ministry in defining a National Urban Agenda in line with the 2030 Agenda and the national SDG strategy.

The VSR focuses on provincial and municipal governments that do not benefit from this financial and technical support. It was produced through the joint work of the Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) and the Eni Enrico Mattei Foundation. The analysis integrates qualitative and quantitative aspects to express the complexity, variety and heterogeneity of Italian local governments. The qualitative analysis is based on identifying LRGs' good practices for each SDG, considering different types of municipalities (large and small).[4] For the quantitative analysis, 48 indicators have been studied and selected; they cover 16 out of 17 SDGs. In particular, 20 indicators are provided at the municipal level, 25 at the provincial level and three at the regional level for a five-year time period (2015-2019).

AICCRE has developed different tools to support the localization of the SDGs: the Global SDG Cities Portal, a global platform for SDG exchange called Venice City Solutions 2030, a National School on the 2030 Agenda for LRGs, the AICCRE Local4Action HUB and Port of the Future. The VSR illustrates 31 good practices (approximately 2 practices for each SDGs) developed by local governments across Italy. Recommendations proposed in the VSR include developing a concrete mechanism of financial support for municipalities, regardless of their size; organizing a data collection system at the local level; and defining official indicators at the city level.

Box 3.6

THE NETHERLANDS'S 2022 VSR

The Netherlands lacks a national SDG policy framework or strategy, constraining the effectiveness of decentralization. Municipalities use the SDGs as a policy framework in a wide variety of ways. Since 2016, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG), through its international unit, VNGi, has taken on a role of actively driving the localization process forward. Of the 344 municipalities, there are 119 "Global Goals municipalities", meaning that they have adopted the SDGs in their policy framework, albeit to differing degrees. Among the 12 provinces and 21 water authorities – the other two decentralized administrations – only a few use the SDGs as a general policy framework.

There is an imbalance in the implementation of the three sustainability pillars: people, planet and prosperity, in the country. Prosperity is often given more attention, but this has ecological and humanitarian costs and leads to unequal opportunities at the national level. In turn, unequal opportunities lead to inequalities in financial security, education, health and housing options, which have also been deepened by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2015, social policies have been decentralized to municipalities, but insufficient funding for municipalities undermines local approaches. Growing numbers of older persons and migrants from non-Western countries face a potential increase in inequalities. To improve climate action, the public needs to be effectively included in participatory policy-making, yet bottom-up climate action is often hindered by bureaucratic regulations.

Decentralized SDG analysis shows that there are significant regional divides and significant differences between different types of municipalities with respect to SDG localization. Therefore, local governments can face very different challenges. Regional areas with shrinking populations, such as the very north and very south regions of the Netherlands, face greater socio-economic challenges and require national coordination to confront them.

Although a large amount of data is gathered and maintained by national and decentralized administrations on various platforms, data usage for SDG monitoring is still limited. Only a few local governments have worked on data-based SDG monitoring. Recently, a Global Goals dashboard was launched, allowing all municipalities to monitor their SDG progress. A national evaluation shows that there is a need for a national approach and clear policy goals based on the SDGs. LRGs have encouraged the national government to set up an SDG strategy. As a policy framework with relevant subtargets for different scales of government, the SDG agenda can help set clear, ambitious, achievable and measurable goals. Applying such a framework to policy and budgeting processes would support SDG localization in the country.

Box 3.7

PAKISTAN'S 2022 VSR

In 2016, the national government adopted the SDGs as its own national development agenda. In 2018, the National Economic Council of Pakistan approved a National SDGs Framework. The Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives coordinates the SDGs' implementation. Despite national efforts, SDG awareness and knowledge of the VNR process at the local level are unsatisfactory.

Pakistan is a federal country with four provinces, 684 local governments (including metropolitan and municipal corporations, districts councils and authorities and subdistricts known as tehsils) and 11,685 unions and village councils at the submunicipal level. In 2010, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan recognized local governments as a third tier of government. However, local government elections have not been held regularly. Local governments have predominantly remained under the administrative control of non-elected administrators.

Local and provincial governments are highly dependent on vertical transfers from the provincial and federal governments, with low capacity to generate their own revenue sources. Although plans, policies and development budgets are aligned with the SDGs both at the federal and provincial levels, most provincial governments' inability to enact and implement adequate mechanisms for transferring resources to support district-level financial empowerment is hampering their efforts to align development plans and policies with local priorities.

The issue of capacity at the different tiers of local governments also extends to their ability to produce information on service delivery indicators. Local government representatives expressed concerns about the following: (a) the lack of political will at the provincial and national levels for reforms and administrative and financial autonomy of local governments; (b) insufficient financial and human resources available to local governments for implementing and localizing the SDGs; and (c) limited coordination across all tiers of governments, especially between local and provincial governments.

For local governments to become more involved in SDG localization, important legal and institutional reforms are required. For example, these may include:

- Boosting revenue transfers to LRGs and strengthening local capacities to generate revenue

- Improving planning approaches (e.g. feeding *tehsil*-level development plans into the provincial annual development plan)

- Implementing capacity-building initiatives to train local officials and elected authorities

- Enhancing support and multilevel coordination with the national government

- Creating key constitutional institutions responsible for administrative and fiscal collaboration between the federation and the federating units

- Revising tendering processes to encourage community-led project interventions, boost efforts to create awareness and support local stakeholders' participation

Box 3.8

THE PHILIPPINES'S 2022 VSR

AmBisyon Natin 2040, the long-term plan encapsulating the Filipino people's aspirations and vision in the coming 25 years, is divided into and reflected in mid-term national development plans that mainstream the SDGs. The three primary national government agencies – the National Economic and Development Authority, Department of the Interior and Local Government and Philippine Statistics Authority – are in charge of aligning development plans with the SDGs and coordinating these plans between the national and local level. They ensure that LRGs comply with the formulation of national/regional development plans and investment programmes (called "PDP/RDP" and "PIP 2017-2022") and results matrices.[5] In addition, the National Economic and Development Authority and the Department of the Interior organize regional workshops and direct provincial dialogues with cities and municipalities to commit and align their plans, investments, programmes and budgets with provincial targets.[6] The Department of the Interior, through the Seal of Good Local Governance award,[7] incentivizes LRGs that perform well and supports them with a grant for SDG initiatives.[8]

The three associations of subnational governments – the League of Cities (LCP), League of Municipalities (LMP) and League of Provinces of the Philippines (LPP) – have expressed their commitments to the SDGs. Since 2018, through its City Database Project, the League of Cities has collected information to illustrate cities' best practices in SDG implementation, followed by a series of SDG-specific surveys.[9] For example, for SDG 5, 91% of surveyed cities were able to localize gender and development programmes and policies. Cities (e.g. Valenzuela, Tagum, Mabalacat, Iloilo and Navotas) have also developed good practices for SDG 4 on education and prioritized climate change resilience, disaster response and life on land and below water (SDGs 11, 13, 14 and 15). Cities and municipalities in Negros Occidental collaborate to manage the contiguous wetlands to preserve the Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area. SDG 3 is integrated into the Bataan provincial government's health service delivery through the One Bataan Seal of Healthy Barangays, an initiative coordinating the health programmes of the city, municipalities and barangays. The recently institutionalized Community-Based Monitoring System, which monitors different dimensions of poverty, is crucial in generating local indicators and disaggregated data that can fill local data gaps on the SDGs.[10]

The first Filipino VSR documents local governments' critical role in advancing SDG localization. The findings aim to enable better coordination between the national government and local governments to achieve the national SDG targets, as documented in the case studies, VLRs and similar local SDG monitoring mechanisms.

Box 3.9

SRI LANKA'S 2022 VSR

In Sri Lanka, SDG implementation strategies initiated in 2016 were later discontinued due to a change in national government. Subsequently, the new government elected in August 2020 renewed the country's commitments (e.g. via the National Policy and Strategy on Sustainable Development). However, Sri Lanka is currently facing a deep economic, political and social crisis, undermining SDG implementation.

There are several mechanisms for coordination at the national level, including the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Development Coordination and Monitoring, Department of National Planning, and a parliamentary committee. Nevertheless, in practice, planning and implementation is fragmented. Guided by the legislative provisions of the Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act, the Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka released in October 2019 a government circular titled "Formulation of Sustainable Development Strategies", which directed the national and subnational tiers of government (provincial and local) to expedite the comprehensive implementation of the SDGs. Yet, no clear national

coordination mechanism exists to ensure the cohesive inclusion of all nine provincial governments and all 341 local government entities in the SDG implementation process. LRGs are represented by the Federation of Sri Lankan Local Governments Authorities (FSLGA).

At the initial stages, LRGs in Sri Lanka have gained significant awareness on the SDGs and received assistance from the provincial councils, in partnership with UN agencies and other external organizations, to incorporate the SDGs in their plans and budgets. However, these continue to be isolated efforts.

In 2022, a circular was issued by the national finance commission to provincial and local councils to formulate the budgets for 2022 and align them to the SDGs. In line with this, the VSR shows that 76% of local councils that responded to the survey (90 responses out of 341 local councils in total) are in the process of incorporating the SDGs into "the budget or any other policy statement, strategy, or plan formulated". Provincial councils have allocated

the highest budget to health, followed by infrastructure, waste disposal, water and sanitation. However, local authorities' revenue losses and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of human and financial resources, staff transfer issues and political instability have negatively impacted local authorities' enthusiasm to localize the SDGs. The survey indicated weak connections among the national, provincial and local levels, especially regarding policy formulation. The absence of quality local- and provincial-level SDG indicators to measure progress on the goals and targets do not facilitate this task.

Local councils need to be encouraged to contribute to the 2030 Agenda by improving their knowledge and skills, strengthening technical support, developing localized indicators and monitoring progress. This should be complemented by a national-level review of the legal and regulatory framework, without which it is highly unlikely that the different levels of government will be able to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Box 3.10

URUGUAY'S 2022 VSR

This year, Uruguay is presenting its fourth VNR. The national government's Planning and Budget Office coordinates monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, together with the Management and Evaluation Area, the National Institute of Statistics and the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation. Subnational governance is divided into 19 departmental governments and 125 municipalities.

The country's first VSR focused on analyzing the SDGs at the departmental government level. The report shows progress in the implementation of 11 SDGs in subnational governments. Although integrating the SDGs into departmental development plans or budgets is a challenge for most departmental governments, 60% of the subnational governments report progress in coordinating the SDGs internally. Local authorities recognize that the SDGs have targets directly or indirectly related to their day-to-day work. Local governments also emphasize the need for coordination between national and departmental governments on key issues to minimize the pandemic's effects and contribute to fulfilling the goals.

Several good practices stand out. Montevideo has been the first local government to prepare a VLR in 2020, prioritizing SDGs 5, 6, 10 and 11. It has also actively participated in international events and networks. The departmental government of San José has developed its budget in line with the SDGs and has included them in its staff and citizen training actions. The LGA, the Congress of Intendants (CI), has conducted a very well-received training in relation to the SDGs for all departmental governments in the country.

Notably, the VSR prepared by the Congress of Intendants raises the need to strengthen local-national coordination for SDG implementation in order to promote better SDG territorialization. It also proposes bolstering subnational governments' integration in national governance as related to designing, making decisions and implementing actions linked to the 2030 Agenda. Having appropriate legal and financial frameworks would also improve subnational governments' capacity to contribute to achieving the SDGs.

3.3.2 SUMMARY OF LRGs' ACTIONS IN COUNTRIES REPORTING THIS YEAR

Complementing the analysis of the ten VSRs presented this year,[11] the following subsection provides a region-by-region view of the efforts undertaken by LRGs and their associations in the countries presenting VNRs to the 2022 HLPF. The GTF/UCLG 2022 survey shows that more and more LRGs are aligning their processes to the 2030 Agenda: 78% of the respondents have aligned their plans and strategies, their budgets or their processes, or they have prioritized one or several SDGs in their work. However, the following pages also illustrate enormous contrasts across regions and countries with regard to driving SDG localization forward.

Africa

As underlined in UNECA's report to the 2022 African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, _2020 Africa Sustainable Development Report_, Africa has recorded progress on many of the 17 SDGs since 2000, but the current pace of progress is insufficient to achieve the goals by 2030. The localization process is also making steady progress, but its pace and scope is still slow and too limited. In most African countries, LRGs' awareness and mobilization, as well as their involvement in national consultations and coordination mechanisms, have advanced but need to be strengthened. Progress on SDG localization is more visible in countries with a more enabling environment

for local governments, particularly in Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Togo, followed by Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, the Gambia and Senegal.

Progress on localization and decentralization has been observed in the following reporting countries.

In **Botswana**, BALA adopted a strategy for SDG implementation and prepared a VSR (see Box 3.2). The association is active in awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives, in collaboration with the ministry responsible for local governance and international partners (e.g. collaborating for local economic development with the support of CLGF).

In **Cameroon**, UCCC-CVUC has prepared a VSR this year (see Box 3.3). An analysis of communal development plans from 2017 (currently under revision), drawn up by the National Participatory Development Programme, found that a majority of urban municipalities have prioritized SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13, while rural municipalities have prioritized SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 13. A second generation of local plans is being developed (e.g. in 11 municipalities of the East Region and Adamoua). Local leaders received training, and UCCC-CVUC developed guidelines on SDGs and local planning (2019). In 2020, Yaoundé became the first city in the country to develop a VLR.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, ARDCI and UVICOCI are presenting their own VSR (see Box 3.4). Although progress in aligning the SDGs with local plans is observed, only 32% of survey respondents (e.g. the municipalities

of Koumassi, Cocody, Bouaké, Yopougon, the District of Bas Sassandra and the Tonkpi region) have integrated between 30% and 60% of the SDGs into their plans. A pilot experience on localization is being implemented in the Gbêkê region by the national government and the UN. The main challenges identified during the regional consultations by local authorities for the VNR are the production of disaggregated statistical data, sustainable financing, capacity strengthening of local-level actors, accountability and monitoring. Furthermore, the LGAs are collaborating with the Ministry of Environment to integrate indicators on climate adaptation into local plans and budgets.

In **Eswatini**, LRGs and the Eswatini Local Government Association (ELGA) participate in regional consultations (not on a regular basis), together with the private sector, traditional leaders and local stakeholders. The country has two categories of local governments: 12 urban and 55 rural. Rural local governments have limited autonomy. Several local governments have embedded the SDGs into their local development plans (e.g. Manzini), but LRGs face important financial constraints. With the support of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, urban local governments have made progress in implementing local economic development policies (e.g. in Mbabane, Ezulwini, Matsapha, Manzini and Pigg's Peak).[12]

In **Ghana**, the 2022 VNR states that the policy objectives, strategies and results matrix of the

Medium-term National Development Policy Frameworks (2018-2021 and 2022-2025), which are consistent with the SDGs, are translated into actions by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. Financing mechanisms are being progressively adapted to support regional and local initiatives. A national data roadmap has been validated through a multistakeholder advisory committee. The National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) supports these alignment efforts through training and awareness sessions, in partnership with the regional coordinating councils. In 2020, the city of Accra released its VLR, including a set of indicators.

In **Mali**, progress towards achieving the SDGs has been hampered by the country's current political, security and health context. Nonetheless, the alignment of local development plans with the SDGs has begun. In 2021, 37% of local plans already integrated the SDGs, prioritizing the goals related to water management, health and education. A guide for integrating the SDGs into local plans was developed in 2020 and disseminated at national, regional and local levels. The 2022 VNR recognizes LRGs' role "to promote sustainable development throughout the national territory, taking into account the objectives of decentralization". Regional and local committees created by the national government (CROCSAD, CLOCSAD and CCOCSAD) participate in the prioritization and allocation of funds. The regions and cercles are less involved than municipalities in localization processes. Supported by international partners such as UNDP and the

European Union, the Association of Municipalities of Mali (AMM) has assisted 106 local councils and trained more than 4,000 local stakeholders on the SDGs. The LGA is also working with partners on the localization of indicators.[13]

Senegal is giving priority to the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda by aligning local plans with the SDGs. In 2020, a territorial development planning guide was drawn up to facilitate integrating the SDGs into territorial planning. For instance, the city of Saint Louis has integrated the SDGs in its development plan and made progress in implementing SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 7 with projects related to roads, waste management, renewable energies and coastal protection.[14]

In **Togo**, after 30 years, municipal elections were held in 2019, with 117 municipalities elected. Mobilized since 2016–2017, the Association of Municipalities of Togo (FCT) – with the support of international organizations such as the International Organisation of La Francophonie – has developed guidelines and trained the new local elected officers to integrate the SDGs in their local plans. So far, several municipalities (e.g. Ave 2, Doufelgou and Zia 2) have mainstreamed the SDGs and climate change actions in their plans. They also participate in international networks for climate change (e.g. the Global Covenant of Mayors) and develop projects related to reforestation, water management, women's empowerment and urban management, among others, despite budget constraints.

A second group of African countries has experienced slower progress in SDG localization and, overall, in creating an institutional environment for local governments.

In **Malawi**, the 2022 VNR views the renewal of many recently expired district development plans as an opportunity to ensure their alignment with national development plans and the SDGs, as well as with the country's 2063 Agenda.

In **Ethiopia**, the response of the Ethiopian Cities Association (ECA) to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey reflects a low level of awareness and involvement in the localization process. By contrast, regional governments are consulted and involved in federal sustainable development strategies.

In **the Gambia**, despite the national policy for decentralization (2015-2024), the eight elected local governments have weak capacities. In its response to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, the Gambia Association of Local Governments Authorities (GALGA) stressed that its members are committed to implementing the SDGs. This LGA chairs a steering committee on VLRs; provides training to its members in partnership with NGOs, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities and national institutions; and was active in facilitating support during the COVID-19 emergency. To support monitoring, it organizes quarterly monitoring tours to member councils in partnership with the Ministry of Planning and different stakeholders. It also led

a project named Localising SDGs: Improving the Livelihood of Vulnerable Women and Youth around the Senegambia Bridge.

Among the countries with unfavourable institutional frameworks, LRGs' role in localization efforts is more restricted.

In **Djibouti**, the last local elections took place in March 2022 (the fourth round of elections since the adoption of decentralization), but LRGs' capacities and resources remain limited. In **Equatorial Guinea**, there is no reference to LRGs' involvement in the SDGs. In **Eritrea**, the 56 subregions are placed under the authority of regional elected assemblies, but no local elections have been held. National budget transfers are unpredictable. **Gabon** has made progress in SDG implementation. Its VNR states that LRGs are key implementers of the SDGs through service delivery and producing disaggregated data. It also calls for a broader dissemination of the SDGs at local level and the revision of local plans to mainstream the SDGs. In **Lesotho**, the government calls to enhance local dissemination and to develop VLRs to precede VNRs. In **São Tomé and Príncipe,** provinces and districts' role in service delivery is bypassed by national agencies. The VNR of **Guinea-Bissau** calls for translating SDGs into local actions and reinforcing local capacities in terms of participatory planning and financing. In **Liberia**, multisectoral/regional planning working groups include the heads of government institutions' planning departments and county development committees. However, the survey response of the Association of Mayors and Local Government Authorities of Liberia (AMLOGAL) expressed no involvement in the preparation of the VNR nor in national coordination mechanisms. Both **Somalia** and **Sudan** have a federal structure experiencing structural political and economic instability. Many development projects have been discontinued as a result. Local administrations and assemblies are appointed, and the Sudanese VNR underlines very limited awareness of the SDGs at local levels (except in the 2017-2030 Khartoum State Plan).

Asia-Pacific

Progress towards the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 in the Asia-Pacific region was off track even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.[15] Among the countries reporting this year, the Philippines is the only one in the region making significant progress on localization. In the other countries, the institutional context is less favourable for local governments' active involvement. In particular, the critical context in Sri Lanka currently hinders any progress. In Tuvalu, as the VNR was still not published as of 29 June, there is no evidence about local councils' involvement in the SDG implementation process.

In the **Philippines**, the national government promotes a top-down localization strategy. Despite this, the three associations of subnational governments (LCP, LMP and LPP) are actively involved in the localization of the SDGs and published

a VSR (see Box 3.8). In 2022, more than 50% of the cities responding to the LCP's survey expressed high familiarity with the 17 SDGs and are actively participating in national advocacy campaigns on the SDGs. Nearly all of them (92%) have already aligned their local plans with different SDGs (e.g. Baguio, Makati, Tabaco, Iriga, Luzon, Naga, Visayas and Mindanao).[16] Overall, cities, municipalities and provinces have prioritized SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 4. For instance, the cities of Manila and Quezon distributed IT materials to students and teachers in public schools to accelerate online learning. Moreover, the number of LRGs adopting climate and disaster risk-informed plans has increased. Front-runner LRGs are developing the Community-Based Monitoring System, which is a national mechanism to monitor SDG outcomes at the local level, including the household level. As of April 2022, 13 out of 17 regions had also been monitoring the Core Regional SDG indicators. The city of Cauayan published a VLR in 2017, as did Naga City in 2022. However, findings from the VSR suggest that monitoring is particularly challenging for the majority of LRGs due to the unavailability of SDG-related data and information, as well as cities' lack of capacity to process already available local data.

In **Pakistan**, the national government has designated SDG support units at provincial and district levels. It considers localization a key strategy for accelerating SDG implementation. Following national requirements, provincial governments have aligned their plans and budgets with the

SDGs. Nevertheless, with few exceptions, districts' level of involvement in the SDG process is very weak. In general, local councils have limited capacities. Higher tiers of government (federal and provincial) exclude local governments from the planning process and the implementation phase. The Local Councils Association of the Sindh (LCAS), for example, considers that the SDGs are well-known by its members, but awareness actions remain limited (see Box 3.7).

In **Sri Lanka**, despite the profound social and political crisis, some progress is reported at the subnational level in SDG alignment, mainly due to the circular issued by the national finance commission to the provincial and local councils to formulate their 2022 budgets. A majority (83%) of the 90 local councils (out of 341) that responded to the survey conducted by the FSLGA for its VSR prepared their budgets in line with the SDGs. Additionally, 59% allocated funds, and 18% even made progress in the implementation of the SDGs. These local councils primarily focused on health care, infrastructure, waste disposal, water and sanitation, education, environmental protection and public spaces. However, these LRGs are still a minority overall, and SDG implementation remains limited (see Box 3.9). Since there are no indicators developed by the national government, local government authorities do not have a way to track progress. Few LRGs adopted indicators developed by the UN and other external agencies.

Eurasia

LRGs' involvement in the localization process in Eurasia is progressing slowly, following a top-down approach. This is in line with the governance culture of most countries in the region, where subnational governments depend on higher tiers of government.

In **Belarus**, subnational governments have representatives in the National Council for Sustainable Development, although the VNR provides no specific information in terms of the quality of their participation. Subnational governments are required to align their plans with the national strategy, which integrates the SDGs. For example, in 2020, the region of Mogilev adopted its Sustainable Development Strategy towards 2035. The national government launched the Smart Cities of Belarus project for the 2021-2025 period, as well as several wastewater treatment projects, a project to empower women's leadership and entrepreneurialism and another project called Healthy Cities and Towns.

In **Kazakhstan**, despite political unrest and protests during the past months, the VNR mentions that seminars were organized on the localization of the SDGs in several regions. Two cities' answers to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey reflect punctual contributions to the VNR. In three regions, UNDP conducted a Rapid Integrated Assessment to measure regional budget alignment with the SDGs (e.g. Plan of Kyzylorda 2021-2025).[17]

Europe

In Europe, war has radically changed the outlook for sustainable development in the region. According to a 2022 report published by Eurostat on SDG monitoring, countries of the region have made significant progress towards SDGs 1, 7, 8, 9 and 16; moderate progress towards SDGs 2, 3, 5, 11, 12, 13 and 14; and no additional progress towards SDGs 6 and 17. A slight movement away from the achievement of SDG 15 was observed.[18] Overall, important efforts are still needed and, in particular, the pace of the green transition must increase, as underlined by UNECE.[19] Europe is the region where localization processes are making the deepest and quickest progress.

In **Andorra**, LRGs participated in the VNR process. The VNR mentions several examples of SDG localization: Encamp trained company managers from a gender perspective (SDG 5), raised awareness amongst children on road safety (SDG 3) and promoted sustainable agriculture and cultural heritage through urban gardens (SDG 2). Escaldes-Engordany signed an agreement with UNICEF to become a Child Friendly City and offers several social advantages for children (SDG 1); Andorra la Vella is building 44 new apartments with nearly-zero energy facilities (SDG 11).

In **Greece**, the Association of Greek Regions (ENPE) highlights regional initiatives for protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, saving energy, reducing water waste and raising public awareness about environmental issues. The Central Union of Greek Municipalities (KEDE) submitted several priorities for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda to be supported by the Recovery Fund: green transformation; waste management; digital transformation for smart cities, including 5G Plug n' Play Cities; upgraded care; better infrastructure and resilience; support to entrepreneurial clusters; an intermunicipal social network; and the social integration of refugees and migrants. Municipalities are running several social and development programmes related to the localization agenda (e.g. the Help at Home programme, as well as support for Roma settlements, social housing in locations such as Athens and Thessaloniki, climate adaptation, renewable energies, urban sustainable mobility and accessibility, waste management and enhanced intercultural mediation services in 32 municipalities). The island of Skiathos submitted its first VLR in 2020.

In **Italy**, eleven regions and autonomous provinces have issued a regional or provincial sustainable development strategy aligned with the SDGs.[20] The Metropolitan City of Bologna published in 2021 its Agenda 2.0 for Sustainable Development. Eight other metropolitan cities are still working on their agendas for sustainable development.[21] Florence was the first city in Italy to publish a VLR in 2021, and 12 VLRs were annexed to the VNR this year.[22] Cities are very active in different areas through city networks (on issues such as climate change, the environment and food security). The State-Regions Conference facilitates the dialogue between the central government, the regions and autonomous provinces and the 14 metropolitan cities. Regional Forums for Sustainable Development are established in 16 regions. AICCRE also published a VSR this year and is supporting LRGs to localize the SDGs through training, platforms for exchange, innovation (e.g. Venice City Solutions 2030) and an SDG portal for local

indicators to monitor SDG implementation in over 100 municipalities (see Box 3.5). Similarly, since 2020, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development has published a yearly territorial report, which offers a detailed analysis of Italy's regions, provinces and metropolitan cities contributing to the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda.

In **Latvia**, the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments (LALRG) has held a number of seminars, webinars, videos and experience exchanges to raise awareness amongst its members and youth. A priority SDG has been SDG 13 on climate action. Municipalities and regions are making efforts to localize the SDGs.[23] The VNR mentions the progress of five municipalities – Daugavpils, Liepāja, Riga, Valmiera and Ventspils – and one region, Ogre. However, according to the LALRG and the VNR, "developing local sustainable development plans for balanced development of Latvia's regions" still needs to be achieved. In 2021, with the support of the Latvian Science Council, a data-based tool was developed to enable municipalities to plan, manage and track progress on sustainable development using indicators corresponding to their responsibilities. Moreover, Riga joined the Paris Climate Declaration, "Cities leading the way to climate neutrality", in 2021.

In **Luxembourg**, the national government developed an online tool (called Municipalities 2030) and guidelines for municipalities to track their efforts in implementing the SDGs. The municipality of Schifflange is an example of SDG localization. The Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities (SYVICOL) has been very active during the pandemic to support its 102 members. The majority of the municipalities participate in the Pact for Climate and, more recently, in the Pact for Nature.

In **Montenegro**, according to the VNR, "local self-governments implemented certain, mostly project-based, activities to localize the 2030 Agenda". However, increased ownership is needed, and implementation has to be stepped up at all levels of government, as the SDGs do not seem to be prioritized. In 2010, the municipality of Danilovgrad became the first LRG that established a local council for SDGs, and it also adopted a local strategy for sustainable development. It was followed by Podgorica in 2017, which is also the only municipality to have adopted a climate adaptation plan.

In **the Netherlands**, approximately a third of all Dutch municipalities (119 of 344) are Global Goals municipalities in 2022. Every year, on 25 September, local and provincial authorities, civil society, the SDG Netherland network, the UN Global Compact and the national government organize the SDG Action Day. In 2021, they convened 800 organizations. As described in Box 3.6, Dutch municipalities, provinces, and water boards are increasingly involved in SDG implementation, and they presented a joint VSR to contribute to the VNR. Energy and climate, sustainable urban development and health receive the most attention from LRGs. An online SDG dashboard was launched in 2022, which provides information to municipalities about their progress. Amsterdam and Utrecht have committed to preparing a VLR in 2022.

In **Switzerland**, the cantons created a Network on Sustainable Development. The majority have integrated the SDGs into their plans (e.g. Ticino), developed their own strategies (e.g. Fribourg, Geneva, Valais and Vaud), created a local government network for the SDGs (e.g. Saint Gall) or published a specific report on their progress (e.g. Argovia). Cities have also developed their sustainable development strategies (e.g. Bern, Fribourg, Lausanne, Luzern, Yverdon-les-Bains, Uster and Zurich) or programmes (e.g. Lugano). The city of Geneva, for example, chairs a network, Coord 21, with all the municipalities of the Romandy and Ticino region and developed a guide for SDG localization in cantons and municipalities. Both the Union of Swiss Towns and the Association of Swiss Municipalities implement actions to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. An annual forum, steered by the Federal Office for Spatial Development gathers representatives from regions, cities and municipalities. The last forum, held this year, analyzed the management of local sustainability strategies. Since 2005, the platform Circle Indicators ensures follow-up on the implementation of sustainable development indicators for cantons and cities in collaboration with the ARE and the Federal Statistical Office.[24]

Latin America and the Caribbean

ECLAC's fifth report on regional progress towards the 2030 Agenda underscores that, despite improvements in some indicators, progress towards 68% of the 111 evaluated targets is insufficient to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Even worse, progress has been reversed on almost a quarter of these targets (22%). The report acknowledges LRGs' efforts through VLRs (32 produced since 2017, with 14 in 2021-2022; see Section 3.4). However, the deterioration in the countries' economic and social conditions from 2020 to 2021, "the worst seen in over a century", weakens LRGs' efforts to localize and undermine an enabling context (e.g. in El Salvador).

In **Argentina**, during the past years, 21 provinces and the city of Buenos Aires signed an agreement on the 2030 Agenda with the national government. Regular workshops, forums and dialogues with the different provinces have been supported. The Federal SDGs Network, created in 2018, brings together SDG focal points from all the provinces and has shared reports on SDG implementation progress in 2017, 2019 and more recently in 2021. For municipalities, 56 agreements have been signed between 2020 and 2022, and there is an initiative to support VLRs. So far, three cities have developed VLRs, including Buenos Aires in 2021 (and a fourth is expected in 2022), as well as Villa María, San Justo and Santa Fe in 2022. The national government also initiated a programme to support 20 small municipalities in the localization of SDGs. The province of Córdoba began a training programme on the SDGs in 427 municipalities and, with the support of the OECD, developed a territorial report in 2021. To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities developed specific programmes for education and culture.[25] The city of Rosario integrated the SDGs in its Strategic Plan 2030 in 2018, in addition to adopting an Action Plan on Climate Change in 2020 and an Action Plan on Open Government to develop several tools to facilitate access to data, among other activities. This year, the FAM developed a VSR (see Box 3.1), in which it highlights limited awareness at the municipal level and insufficient dialogue with the national mechanism in charge of coordinating SDG implementation in the past.

In **El Salvador**, the localization agenda has been impacted by the national government's decision to recentralize municipal resources. In November 2021, two historical organizations in charge of distribution of funds and technical assistance to municipalities – the Salvadoran Institute for Municipal Development and the Social Investment Fund for Local Development – were dissolved, and a new Office for Municipal Works within the national government was created to manage local investments under the authority of the Ministry of Local Development. National transfers to municipalities were reduced, and 75% of these resources will now be managed by the new Office. The Corporation of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador (COMURES) is no longer operational. Despite these setbacks, the metropolitan authority of the capital city San Salvador, as part of a programme supported by the EU, has made progress in integrating the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, thanks to the adoption of the Strategic Plan towards 2030. The plan is supported by sectoral plans (on mobility, public space, risks, water resources and climate change) and by a monitoring system, which will be followed by the Observatory of the Metropolitan Area (currently being created).[26]

In **Uruguay**, the analysis conducted for the VSR prepared by the LGA, the Congress of Intendants, indicates that 60% of the 19 departments (the intermediate level of government) have made progress in SDG coordination (see Box 3.10). Local authorities of Montevideo, Canelones and San José have integrated the SDGs into their local plans (e.g. Canelones 2040) and into post-COVID recovery plans (e.g. Montevideo Plan ABC and its FY 2021-2025 budgets). Canelones is developing training sessions, actively participates in international exchanges and focuses on gender, structurally marginalized groups and economic development. Montevideo mentions programmes for education (e.g. *Andamos*) and gender equality (e.g. *Fortalecidas*, to promote women's entrepreneurship and fight gender-based violence).

In the 2016-2018 period, the national government of **Suriname** implemented an awareness campaign, Localizing the SDGs, with support from UNDP. This campaign aimed to share information and gather views of district authorities and local communities on their role in SDG implementation. The 2022 VNR recognizes annual district plans as "an effective mechanism for the government to pursue the commitment of leaving no one behind". However, it also states that "the effective implementation of a whole-of-society approach which includes the local communities in the remote rural and interior areas" is still a challenge, and "additional efforts will be needed to improve both institutional and human resources capacities, in particular in the districts".

Small island developing states face specific challenges in achieving the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda; the pandemic's impacts have magnified these challenges. SDG-related activities are implemented with little funding from the central governments, hindering progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

In **Jamaica** and **Dominica**, the Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica (ALGAJ) and the Dominica Association of Local Community Authorities (DALCA) responded to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey. They state they have contributed to their countries' VNRs and have held consultations with the national agencies in charge of SDG implementation. In Jamaica, the ALGAJ supported local authorities to hold meetings on the SDGs at the parish level with civil society. It also participated in a project founded by the CLGF and the EU to support parish development committees to develop local plans and indicators to follow up on the SDGs. In Dominica, DALCA said that it did not implement specific activities to disseminate the SDGs. However, it participated in the monitoring of shock-responsive social protection programmes (with the support of the UNDP country office and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Resilience) and in monitoring of and support to housing recovery "building back better" initiatives for climate adaptive communities. The association also continued its capacity-building initiatives for sustainable local economic development within communities. Both LGAs were active during the COVID-19 pandemic to support local authorities' actions. In **Grenada**, there are no elected LRGs, thus impeding SDG localization.

Middle East and West Asia

On the eve of the pandemic, countries in the MEWA region were not on track to achieve the SDGs, which made them ill-prepared to face the crisis.[27] Two countries are reporting this year from the Middle East.

In **Jordan**, the case of Greater Amman Municipality (concentrating more than 43% of the country's population) stands out. This LRG was consulted in the VNR process and has regular exchanges with the national government, as explained in Section 3.1. The involvement of other cities and municipalities is more limited, although the VNR confirms that "many Jordanian municipalities began to integrate the SDGs into their urban development initiatives". Initiatives led locally and highlighted by the VNR include the Rusaifa Ecological Park project in Zarqa Governorate (which seeks to rehabilitate the Phosphate Hills area into an ecological, sustainable, natural and vital area) and the Women and Girls Oasis, expanded in 18 community centres in 11 governorates to fight gender-based inequalities and violence.

In the **United Arab Emirates**, to ensure the alignment of federal and local development plans, the National Key Performance Indicators and their associated targets are cascaded to the strategic plans of all local government organizations.

3.4 LRG ACTION IN NON-REPORTING COUNTRIES

This subsection aims to give a brief overview of SDG localization processes in non-reporting countries to complete the view provided in the previous section. It showcases the efforts made by LGAs and LRGs, paying specific attention to the initiatives shared through the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, earlier reports and all the information collected in the Country Profiles on SDG localization (see Box 3.11). Furthermore, this subsection contributes to building a broader view of the global local movement towards the 2030 Agenda. Of the sample of 151 LRGs and LGAs from the 67 non-reporting countries that responded to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey this year, 45% considered that the SDGs are well-known in their organization and used as an important reference point in their strategies.[28]

As underscored in the previous section, LRGs' and LGAs' SDG awareness and localization efforts vary significantly across regions:

- **Europe** has a more advanced localization movement. Similar to last year, almost 70% of the 26 responding LGAs show a rather high level of SDG awareness, and 12% have published a VSR or a specific report on their progress towards SDG implementation.[29] Although 82% of the 23 LRGs that responded to the survey have developed a strategy or action plan, only 3% report having gone further and published a VLR or conducted another kind of reporting exercise.[30]

- **Latin America** is the second most-represented region, with 21 responses from LRGs and LGAs in 11 countries. Almost half of them state that the SDGs are well-known among their organizations (for LGAs, the proportion reaches 60%). This awareness is visible in strategies or reports on SDG localization published by 77% of the respondents in the region.

- Based on the 20 responses from **Africa**, representing 16 non-reporting countries, the SDGs are well-known and form part of local action in around 50% of LRGs and LGAs.[31] African LRGs in non-reporting countries show more commitment to the SDGs in their strategies this year, especially in Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda.

- In the **Asia-Pacific** region, the 16 responses (including from six LGAs) from nine non-reporting countries show a medium to high level of SDG awareness (88% of LRGs and LGAs).[32]

- Responses from the **Middle East and West Asia** and **Eurasia** regions, respectively, came mainly from Turkey (10 out of 15 responses) and the Russian Federation (14 out of 19 responses). Nonetheless, in MEWA, 40% of the surveyed LGAs and LRGs affirmed that the SDGs are well-known in their organization, and the s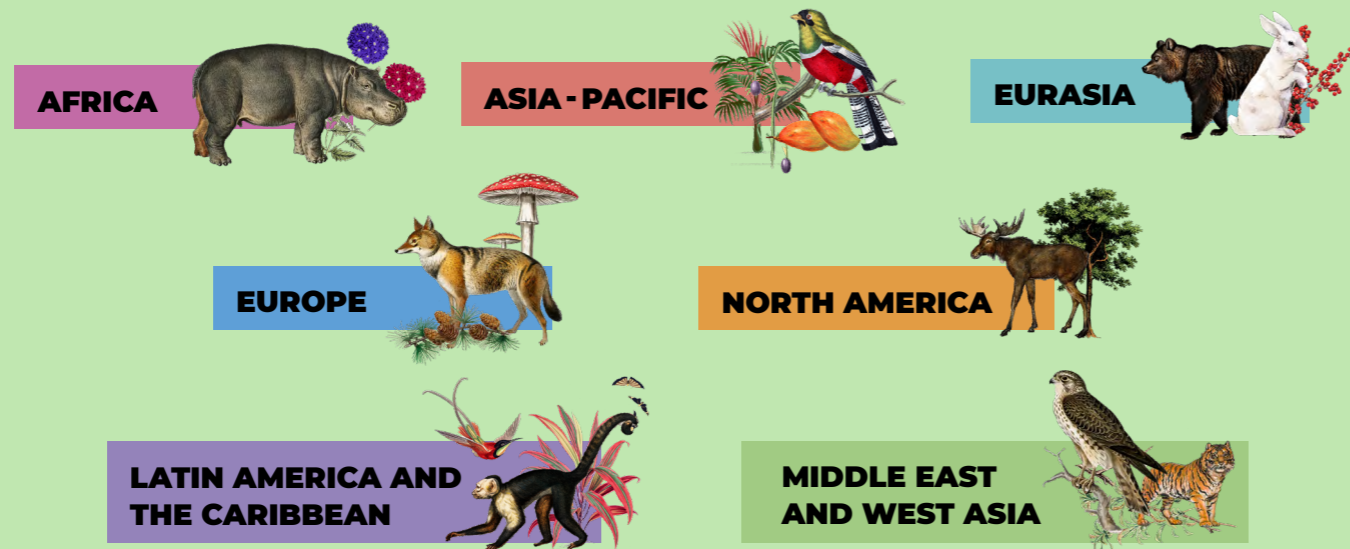ame percentage has translated this awareness into concrete commitments. In Eurasia, awareness of SDGs remains very limited, with 58% of respondents (including LGAs) not making any political statements or commitments in specific documents.[33]

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SD

Box 3.11

## COUNTRY PROFILES ON SDG LOCALIZATION

Part of this section on LRG action in non-reporting countries draws upon the newly published Country Profiles on SDG localization. These profiles present a brief analysis of each country's national strategies, coordination mechanisms and reporting processes related to the 2030 Agenda. Most importantly, they highlight the involvement and, in many cases, the leading role of LRGs towards the localization of the SDGs. These Country Profiles complement this report in an important way, as they complete the analysis for all the countries that have produced VNRs during the 2016-2021 period. They are organized by world region to allow the identification and monitoring of regional trends.

AFRICA

ASIA - PACIFIC

EURASIA

EUROPE

NORTH AMERICA

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

MIDDLE EAST AND WEST ASIA

3.4.1 AFRICA

In Africa, many national governments encourage LRGs to integrate the SDGs into their local development planning documents (such as in **Benin**, **Burundi**, **Cabo Verde**, **Nigeria**, **Rwanda**, **Sierra Leone**, **South Africa** and **Uganda**). Nonetheless, only a few countries have adopted national SDG strategies with localization approaches. For instance, **Cabo Verde** adopted a National Policy for Territorial Planning and Urban Development, designed in light of the New Urban Agenda, and 20 municipalities aligned their local plans with the SDGs. In certain countries, the national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation involve LRGs through different methods of consultation (**Benin**, **Burundi**, **Burkina Faso**, **Kenya**, **Mozambique**, **Rwanda** and **South Africa**). In other countries, LRG participation is moderate (**Chad**, **Niger**, **Uganda** and **Zimbabwe**) or rather limited (**Madagascar**, **Morocco**, **Nigeria**, **Sierra Leone**, **Tunisia** and **Zambia**). Finally, many African countries do not seem to involve LRGs in the existing SDG implementation mechanisms (**Algeria**, **Central African Republic**, **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, **Egypt**, **Guinea**, **Mauritius**, **Namibia** and the **United Republic of Tanzania**).

As shown in previous years, to raise awareness of SDG localization, many African LGAs communicate their own and their constituencies' actions during regular events.[34] For example, during the People's Dialogue Festival in March
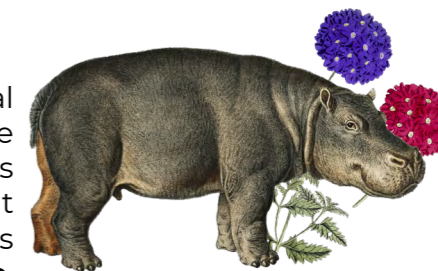
2022, Kenya's **Council of Governors (CoG)** provided a platform for citizens to debate with leaders, political parties and the private sector on SDG implementation. The CoG in Kenya has an SDG Unit, led by SDG focal persons, for mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda, tracking progress, setbacks and reporting in the counties. In collaboration with the national government, the CoG has also developed an SDG guidebook for county governments and a national SDGs acceleration strategy. The **CoG** has further supported counties in their COVID-19 recovery strategies. **The National Association of Municipalities of Guinea (ANCG)** has led awareness-raising actions, in particular during participatory processes to develop annual investment plans so that they integrate SDGs. The **Uganda Local Governments Association (ULGA)** is also particularly active in information dissemination, training and liaising with the national government and CSOs.

Furthermore, the **National Association of Municipalities of Benin (ANCB)** created a glossary of common SDG terms and developed a toolbox on SDG financing. The **Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA)** has emphasized the need to achieve the SDGs in its 2020-2025 Strategic

Plan. It has also established the Rwanda Network of Women in Local Government and adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy. Finally, it encourages inclusive decisions in secondary cities towards pro-poor urban planning. The **National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities (FNCT)** makes up part of a network of elected women that operates within the framework of programmes for the promotion of women's leadership; the FNCT is also part of an OECD project to fight violence against women.

With regard to local reporting, in 2021, the **FNCT** developed its first VSR to report on the progress made in SDG localization. The **Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA)** also developed the country's first VSR, which led to integrating SDG localization into the association's programming. Mozambique's VSR was prepared by the **National Association of Municipalities of Mozambique (ANAMM)**. In Benin, the ANCB published the country's VSR. Finally, the **CoG** and the **County Assemblies Forum (CAF)** jointly produced Kenya's 2020 VSR, and the CoG is currently supporting the production of VLRs in five counties. To date, in Africa, local governments from Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe have published 11 VLRs.[35]

3.4.2 ASIA-PACIFIC

In Asia-Pacific, some countries currently involve LRGs in their SDG implementation process by mainstreaming SDGs in local plans (**Indonesia**) or reports (**Malaysia**). Other countries allow LRGs' direct participation or their representation via an LGA in national coordination mechanisms; these include **Australia**, **India** (only for federated states), **Indonesia** (mainly provinces), **Japan** and **Nepal**. In other countries, LRGs and/or LGAs only take part in consultations (**Bangladesh**, **People's Republic of China**, **Kiribati**, **Mongolia**, **New Zealand** and, more recently, **Cambodia**) or participate occasionally (**Malaysia**, **Marshall Islands**, **Palau** and **Papua New Guinea**). Finally, participation from subnational governments remains very limited or even non-existent in many countries (**Bhutan**, **Fiji**, **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, the **Maldives**, **Samoa**, **Solomon Islands**, **Thailand**, **Timor-Leste**, **Vanuatu** and **Viet Nam**).

Many LRGs and LGAs in Asia-Pacific have worked with stakeholders such as NGOs, universities, the private sector and CSOs to raise awareness of the SDGs and highlight good practices.[36] Others support capacity building, training, advocacy and information-sharing campaigns on the SDGs.[37] For example, in 2019, **Jeju Special Self-Governing Provincial Council** and **Jeju Special Self-Governing Province** (Republic of Korea) organized a conference on implementing localized SDGs.

The **Association of Indonesian Municipalities (APEKSI)** collaborated with UCLG ASPAC between 2018 and mid-2021 to hold the Localize SDGs programme. This collaboration included training and seminars for local governments and the preparation of Indonesia's VSR in 2021. APEKSI is now preparing a programme to strengthen health services in cities and

regional finances. It is also working on a programme that will rate and benchmark LRGs' efforts in SDG localization. **Kuala Lumpur** (Malaysia) set up an SDG Centre in 2021 and is now preparing its SDG City Action roadmap so as to guide action and programmes towards the implementation of 2030 Agenda. The **Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal (ADCCN)** conducted a VSR in 2020, which facilitated its involvement in the national reporting process in that same year. Also, District Coordination Committees were particularly active in the District COVID Management Committee and in COVID-19 governance. The city of **New Taipei** has developed its own website on the SDGs. **Taipei City** has given priority to seven SDGs and reports remarkable progress in affordable energy, sustainable cities and climate action, including transforming landfills into green energy parks.

Overall, 28 Asian VLRs have been published to date. The VLRs of **Guangzhou**, **Kaohsiung**, **New Taipei**, **Penang**, **Shah Alam**, **Subang Jaya**, **Surabaya**, **Taichung**, **Taipei City**, **Tokyo**, **Yiwu**, **Yokohama** and **Yunlin County** were published in 2021. In 2022, **Melbourne** and **Naga** published their first VLRs, while **Jakarta** has committed to do so. Likewise, some municipalities such as **Dhulikhel**, **Singra**, **Nakhon Si Thammarat**, **Bhopal**, the province of **Jakarta**[38] and **Betio Town Council**, as well as the state of **Selangor** and the cities of **Kuala Lumpur**, **Putrajaya**, **Alor Gajah** and **Melaka**, have committed to publish their first VLR too.

3.4.3 EURASIA

The countries in Eurasia have rather top-down approaches to SDG implementation.[39] LRG participation is moderate in **Azerbaijan**; somewhat advanced in **Russia**; rather weak in **Armenia**, the **Kyrgyz Republic** and **Uzbekistan**; and non-existent for the moment in **Tajikistan**.

Several Russian LRGs have implemented projects or identified priorities related to the SDGs (**Kirov**, **Moscow**, **Perm**, **Volgograd**, **Vologda**, **Ulyanovsk** and **Yekaterinburg**, among others). For instance, the city of **Vologda** published in 2022 a roadmap to its 2030 strategic programme, Ecobologda 2030, which is aligned with the SDGs. A section on the SDGs has been included in the Investment Portal of the city of **Moscow**, which also worked on a VLR in 2021 (to be published). To raise awareness of the SDGs, the municipality of **Yerevan** (Armenia) has implemented initiatives within the framework of the EU Sustainable Energy Week events. **Bishkek** (Kyrgyz Republic) is working with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to create a smart and sustainable city profile.

3.4.4 EUROPE

In several countries, national strategies and institutional frameworks for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda provide for SDG localization, for example, in **Spain**, or acknowledge subnational governments, such as in **Iceland** and **Slovakia**. **Georgia** also stands out as its government has prioritized SDG implementation at the local level: it prepared an action plan for effective SDG localization in line with its decentralization strategy. LRGs participate (or are represented by their associations) in many countries' national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation, including in **Belgium** (planned for 2022), **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czech Republic**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Georgia**, **Germany**, **Iceland**, **Malta**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia** (although with a recent decline), **Slovenia**, **Spain** and **Sweden**. In a few other countries, LRG and/or LGA participation is moderate (**Austria**, **France** and **Lithuania**). At the other end of the spectrum, LRG participation is rather occasional (**Albania**, **Cyprus**, **Republic of Moldova** and **United Kingdom**) or very limited/non-existent (**Hungary**, **Liechtenstein**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Ukraine** and **San Marino**).

In 2021-2022, many European LRGs and LGAs have organized training workshops and

programmes to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda, usually with the support of their networks (e.g. Platforma).[40] For instance, **Cités Unies France (CUF)** has organized training sessions on decentralized cooperation and published concept notes on the subject to increase awareness. Other LRGs and LGAs cooperate with citizens, other municipalities, academic institutions, ministries and CSOs to prepare regional development strategies and SDG-related projects.[41] For example, the city of **Bonn** (Germany) organizes annually the SDG Days, bringing together various stakeholders from civil society, sciences and local businesses.

The **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)** provides individual support to its members to develop and implement their own SDG action plans. It is preparing a VSR for the HLPF's 2023 edition. The **National Association of the Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB)** is preparing a long-term strategy following priorities connected with the ecological and digital transition and the SDGs. In Serbia, the **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM)** participated and involved state actors in steering committees of international projects addressing the 2030 Agenda, in addition to integrating the SDGs in its 2022-2025 strategic plan. Regarding monitoring tools, the **Local Government Association (LGA)** of the UK has engaged this year with the Office for National Statistics and is using a local data platform to support areas in accessing data and work on localized reports. The **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)** also launched a taxonomy for indicators measuring the SDGs jointly with Statistics Norway in 2022. The **Icelandic Association of Local Authorities** provides a platform for cooperation between the national government and local governments on SDG localization, including a task force on SDG indicators for the local level, a platform for cooperation between municipalities, and a toolbox for SDG-aligned planning, implementation and monitoring.

The **Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA)** forms part of the 2021-2023 Strategic Management of SDGs in Cities network, which consists of Finland's six largest municipalities (**Helsinki**, **Espoo**, **Vantaa**, **Turku**, **Tampere** and **Oulu**). Through peer-to-peer learning, this network aims at improving and implementing cities' strategies for sustainable development, as well as promoting models and tools on strategic development. Likewise, the **Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP)** prepared country-wide monitoring reports and has established a network of local governments for the 2030 Agenda. Also in Spain, the **Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity (FAMSI)** took part in the Andalusian Local SDG Initiative with the support of UNDP, UN-Habitat and UCLG. In 2021, the **Basque Country** approved its 2030 Agenda Priorities Programme and Multilevel 2030 Agenda, in addition to establishing the Multiagent Forum for Social Transition and the 2030 Agenda. Through a framework agreement with the **Association of Basque Municipalities (EUDEL)**, it has guaranteed the publication of the Basque Municipalities' Contribution to the Basque Country's 2030 Agenda and defined 15 flagship municipal projects for the 2021-2024 period. This illustrates an important example of multilevel collaboration between the different government levels in the territories. In Sweden, as an outcome of the **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)'s** Öppna jämförelser (Open Comparisons) mapping initiative, the Kolada database enables municipalities to retrieve key indicator figures on sustainability progress, based on national statistics and other sources. Finally, as a result of the 2021 elections, the **Scottish Government** (United Kingdom) has announced that it will make SDGs legally binding for municipalities.

Turning to LRGs, in Spain, the **Barcelona Provincial Council** and the city of **Madrid** have respectively published in 2020 and 2021 a strategy for SDG localization. The city of **Barcelona** will launch its 2030 Agenda Awards in 2022. The city of **Sant Boi de Llobregat** has developed a scorecard based on the SDG indicators and adopted its own Urban Agenda directly linked to the SDGs. The city of **Harelbeke** (Belgium) has developed an SDG dashboard, which provides an overview of local data. In Finland, **Oulu** identified a set of indicators to monitor its goals; data collection was facilitated by open-source data

platforms such as the MayorsIndicators, a site making local-level indicators available to all Finnish cities. Like Oulu, five other cities (**Bratislava** in Slovakia, **Porto** in Portugal, **Reggio Emilia** in Italy, and **Seville** and **Valencia** in Spain) participated in the URBAN2030-II project carried out by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in 2020-2021, which aimed to develop SDG monitoring and reporting initiatives.[42]

Europe remains the most active region in terms of local reporting, with 59 VLRs published in Albania, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Among them, 15 European LRGs published a VLR in 2021: **Shkodra** (Albania); **Ghent** (Belgium); **Gladsaxe** (Denmark); **Helsinki** and **Vantaa** (Finland); **Stuttgart** (Germany); **Florence** (Italy); **Asker**, **Bergen** and the region of **Romsdal** (Norway); the **Basque Country** (Spain); **Helsingborg**, **Malmö**, **Stockholm** and **Uppsala** (Sweden); and **Scotland** (the UK). Also in 2021, three LGAs published a VSR, namely the **German Association of Towns and Municipalities (DSTGB)**, the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)** and the **Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)**.

Box 3.12
CEMR/PLATFORMA STUDY: *EUROPEAN TERRITORIES LOCALISE THE SDGs: MAKING THIS THE DECADE OF ACTION*

The 2022 annual report published by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and Platforma, *European Territories Localise the SDGs: Making This the Decade of Action*, analyzes the evolution of European subnational governments' efforts towards SDG localization this past year. This study is based on the responses of 37 LGAs and 18 LRGs from 28 countries to the 2022 CEMR/Platforma survey.

The recent invasion of Ukraine; the progressive, albeit fragile, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; and the climate emergency have underlined the essential role that LRGs are playing to support local populations and advance towards a just and sustainable transition in a way that builds back better and implements the 2030 Agenda.

The survey results have shown that European LRGs are enhancing multilevel coordination, raising awareness of the SDGs by communicating their importance to governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and integrating them into their local strategies. Some LRGs have adopted an overarching SDG framework to overcome silos

and benefit from a better and more collaborative work environment. Others have decided to focus on specific goals and targets. In any case, LRGs still lack sufficient human resources and support from national governments to implement their policies efficiently. Moreover, awareness sometimes remains limited among some LRGs and LGAs who do not consider the SDGs relevant enough to their daily work.

CEMR and Platforma encourage the European Commission to report more regularly on SDG progress. They also invite LGAs to produce VSRs as a tool to foster dialogue and multilevel coordination. LRGs should be able to defend their involvement in monitoring and reporting processes at the national and international levels, especially at the HLPF. In this way, they will be able to strengthen their partnerships and receive more funds and other resources.

Source: CEMR-CCRE and Platforma, "European Territories Localise the SDGs: Making This the Decade of Action," 2022.

3.4.5 LATIN AMERICA

As demonstrated by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),[43] the SDG localization movement continues to make progress in Latin America, but there are strong differences across countries. National plans for SDG implementation provide more opportunities for localization. In **Colombia**, the Strategy for the Implementation of the SDGs establishes an accompanying process for departments and municipalities with territorial kits to promote aligning local plans with the SDGs. In **Panama**, the Colmena Plan aims to implement the 2030 Agenda at the territorial level.[44] In **Costa Rica**, the national government and the UN have set up a technical group to support SDG localization efforts with a set of guidelines and an awards system. In **Guatemala**, the entity promoting the 2030 Agenda, the National Urban and Rural Development Council, is promoting SDG alignment in 300 local plans. In **Mexico**, a particular effort was made in 2021 to promote and support VLRs (with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation, GiZ).[45]

Going further in the coordination among levels of government to achieve the 2030 Agenda, LRGs (individually or represented by their associations) in several countries have been given the opportunity to participate in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation. This includes, recently, **Chile**, and in previous years, **Costa Rica** and **Honduras**. In other countries, LRG and LGA participation is more moderate, for instance, only taking place at a consultative level (**Colombia**, **Cuba**, **Dominican Republic**, **Ecuador** and **Guatemala**), occasionally (**Guyana**), or in a minor or non-existent way (**Belize**, **Bolivia**, **Nicaragua**, **Panama** and **Venezuela**). In **Mexico**, federated states participate in the national council, but municipalities are still not represented.[46]

Awareness-raising campaigns and events, workshops and training on the localization of the 2030 Agenda are reported in **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Dominican Republic**, **Honduras** and, to a lesser extent, in **Guatemala** and **Mexico**. For example, **São Paulo** (Brazil) signed in 2022 a commitment to celebrate the Virada ODS, an event that aims to attract new businesses and international partnerships to build a greener, smarter and more inclusive city. The **Federation of Free Municipalities of Peru (FEMULP)** organized virtual meetings on issues related to the SDGs with LRGs and NGOs from Latin America and Spain.

The **Association of Municipalities of Bolivia (AMB)** has signed an agreement with the governments of **Tarija**, **Potosí**, **Cobija** and **Trinidad** to implement the ODS Municipal project to map SDG localization within their municipalities. This project was initiated with the support of UCLG's Latin American section, FLACMA, and is also led in seven other Latin American countries. Also, since 2017, the AMB and UNDP have been developing the Territorialization of the SDGs project in pilot municipalities, in coordination with the national government. In Brazil, LGAs and LRGs are leading the SDG localization process. This year, the **National Confederation of Municipalities of Brazil (CNM)** is pushing forward and enhancing its training efforts for municipal officers. The national coordination mechanism for SDG implementation, in which LRGs had been represented, was dissolved in 2017. During the pandemic, the CNM joined forces with federated states to support communities without support from the federal government. The **Brazilian Association of Municipalities (ABM)** aims to continue its work on the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda. The **Brazilian National Front of Mayors (FNP)** has cooperated with several state governments to encourage mayors to sign a commitment to localize the SDGs. This process includes raising awareness among mayors and aligning local development plans to the SDGs, as well as proposing monitoring tools and the Sustainable Cities Programme methodology on local indicators. The Sustainable Cities Index for Brazil has been developed in partnership with the Instituto Cidades Sustentaveis with indicator data from 5,570 municipalities. Among these, 113
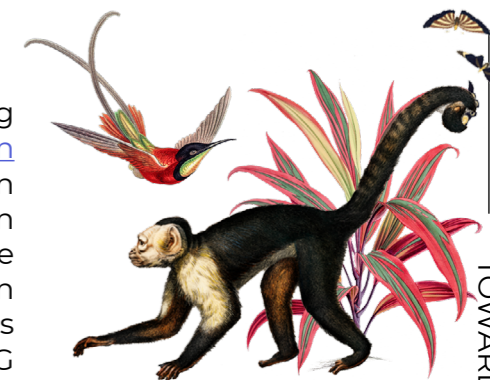
municipalities show a high level of progress (with most located in the South and Southeast, near the São Paulo region), and 1,566 show a moderate level.

Making major progress for LRG representation in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation, the **Chilean Association of Municipalities (AChM)** has been recently invited by the national government to be part of an institutional working group on the 2030 Agenda. It also assumed the presidency of the National Consultative Committee of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. The **Federation of Colombian Municipalities (FCM)** incorporated the SDGs into a roadmap that guides its action in municipalities for the 2020-2024 period. The **National Union of Local Governments (UNGL) of Costa Rica** promotes the implementation of the 2030 Agenda with special attention to socio-economic development, and it has been supporting LRGs to update their development plans. The **Association of Ecuadorian Municipalities (AME)** now provides an SDG compliance indicator management platform, the National Municipal Information System. The **Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE)** continues to play a leading role at the provincial level (see Box 3.13). Last year, the **Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic (FEDOMU)** defined its 2021-2030 Strategic Territorial Agenda, aligned with the SDGs.

Among LRGs, the city of **Lima** (Peru) has aligned its development plans with the SDGs, as have Mexico City (Mexico) and **Mixco** (Guatemala). The *prefeitura* **Francisco Morato** (Brazil) launched a strategy to incorporate the SDGs into its public policies, in coordination with the national government. Also in Brazil, in the city of **São Paulo**, the institutionalization of the 2030 Municipal Agenda is based on a dedicated legal framework established in 2018. In 2022, after a consultative process, the city adopted the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Municipal 2030 Agenda, with 655 prioritized actions for the 2021-2024 period. From 2017-2018, the government of the **Federal District (Brasília)** created a Working Group and a District Commission, and it recently adopted a long-term SDG localization strategy. The city of **São Leopoldo** (Brazil) created a Municipal Climate Change Observatory, participated in the Intermunicipal Committee for Strengthening Policies for Women and joined the Race to Zero campaign. Finally, **Jacareí** (Brazil) incorporated the SDGs into its school curriculum.

In Colombia, since last year, the city of **Bogotá** has updated various planning instruments and sectoral policies to incorporate the SDGs, with a focus on resilience.[47] The city's vision for 2035 aims to consolidate Bogotá's recovery as a reactivated and green city. The Resilient **Nariño** project (Colombia) resulted in training on and the implementation of a national strategy to reduce the risks of emergencies produced by violence, conflict and unintentional events of natural or anthropic origin. Likewise, Nariño's Food Sovereignty and Security Observatory constitutes a source of information for decision-

making and action. In Ecuador, to incorporate the SDGs into its new Plan for Development and Territorial Planning, the provincial government of Napo formed an institutional coordination body in 2019.[48] As part of the Ecuadorian Territory SDGs project, different spaces for provincial dialogue were created through participatory methodologies. **Cuenca**'s institutional coordination for SDGs has also positively evolved thanks to the Cuenca Local4Action HUB project facilitated by UCLG. Finally, **Oaxaca** (Mexico) has now expanded the indicators on its monitoring platform and aligned them to the SDGs.

Thirty-two VLRs have been published by Latin American LRGs.[49] Last year, **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) and **Mexico City** (Mexico) published their third VLRs, and the state of **Pará** and the city of **São Paulo** (Brazil) published their second VLRs. The state of **Mexico**, the regions of **Durango** and **Tabasco** and the cities of **Guadalajara** and **Mérida** (Mexico), as well as the municipality of **Lima** (Peru), have released their first reports. **Manizales**, **Bucaramanga**, **Bogotá** and **Medellín** (Colombia); **Federal District** (Brasília, Brazil) and **Cuenca** (Ecuador) have committed to presenting a VLR for the first time in 2022. The state of **Jalisco** (Mexico) has published three special reports on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.[50] With regard to the VSRs, the **National Federation of Municipalities of Mexico (FENAMM)** participated in preparing the Mexican VSR in 2021. **CONGOPE** has conducted VSRs in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Box 3.13
THE THIRD VSR PRESENTED BY CONGOPE, ECUADOR

This year, all 23 Ecuadorian provinces have incorporated the 2030 Agenda into their territorial planning, as compared to 17 last year. They have aligned the SDGs with the National Development Plan, adopting the 2030 Agenda as a strategic pillar in coordinating local and territorial planning processes with those at national and international levels. Provinces provided support to parish governments, and 39% of provinces have developed awareness-raising actions to implement the 2030 Agenda with stakeholders including CSOs, NGOs, international cooperation agencies, academia, participatory assemblies and other levels of governments.

Ecuadorian territories' post-pandemic economic recovery (SDGs 8 and 9), the improvement of the population's living conditions through food security and sovereignty (SDG 2), the environmental transition based on respect for the rights of nature (SDGs 11 and 12) and

climate change response (SDG 14) are the provinces' most prioritized objectives. With respect to monitoring progress, 83% of prefectures state that no effective national monitoring tools integrate the local and territorial level. Nonetheless, the provinces of **Carchi**, **Imbabura**, **Sucumbíos** and **Manabí** have made efforts to create data analysis platforms as part of local information systems. These efforts have drawn upon alliances with various stakeholders to gather information or, in the case of Manabí, a data production methodology developed in coordination with the United Nations system to determine a territorial prosperity index.

Source: CONGOPE, third Voluntary Subnational Review (2022)

3.4.6 MIDDLE EAST AND WEST ASIA

In the MEWA region, LRGs are represented in national coordination mechanisms in **Turkey** by their LGA. In the **State of Palestine**, the LGA has been invited to the national team dedicated to SDG 11 and to the technical committee that works on integrating the SDGs into local development and investment plans. LRG involvement is moderate in **Iraq**, but the national government has created a fund to encourage local-level SDG implementation. In the majority of the region's countries (e.g. **Bahrain**, **Kuwait**, **Lebanon** and **Saudi Arabia**), there is no evidence of any LRG involvement within national coordination mechanisms (nor of local administration in locations with no local self-government). In **Saudi Arabia**, the main strategy for SDG implementation, Vision 2030, refers to the local level, while the National Spatial Strategy 2030 integrates the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda and aims to support making Vision 2030 a reality at the regional and municipal levels.

LRGs and LGAs from the MEWA region, such as the **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA)** and the **Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU)** in Turkey, are developing training sessions and workshops, forming working groups, participating in events and translating publications in a multistakeholder approach. **APLA** developed its 2021-2025 Action Plan, which includes an SDG localization plan and SDG Portal. **United Cities Lebanon/Technical Office of Lebanese Cities (Cités Unies Liban/BTVL)** participated in the SOCLE project, which supports Lebanese cities in their environmental approach and the establishment of SDG-sensitive environmental units. The **Union of Dannieh Municipalities** (Lebanon) has recently created the Dannieh Sustainable Development Centre, which connects people from the region and provides community-based services using a participatory approach.

In Turkey, the **Marmara Municipalities Union (MMU)**, as well as the **Kütahya** and **Büyükçekmece** municipalities, recently revised their strategic plans and visions to integrate the SDGs. **Büyükçekmece** also [signed the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#), supported by the European Commission, in 2021. The **Union of Municipalities of Turkey (UMT)** launched a consultation process with all local governments for the UMT presidential vision paper to be adopted in 2022, within the framework of local development for a post-COVID world and SDG 11. It has partnered with the EU and the national government to support ["Town Twinning" actions](#) between EU and Turkish municipalities. This grant programme accelerated local-level SDG adaptation and implementation, based on collaboration. The association has also intensified its efforts regarding VLR processes, including launching various projects to help facilitate member municipalities' VLR preparation: indeed, VLRs are being drafted in **Fatih Municipality**, **İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality** and **Avcılar Municipality**. In 2021, [**İzmir**](#), [**Karatay**](#) and [**Sultanbeyli**](#) (Turkey) were the first MEWA municipalities to report on SDG localization through a VLR.

3.4.7 NORTH AMERICA

Among North American countries, **Canadian** LRGs are represented by their LGA at specific consultations. In 2022, the **Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)** has been involved in the national government's newsletter and webinar series on SDG implementation, including in sessions related to social inclusion, gender equality, economic development and sustainability.

In English-speaking countries of the Caribbean, LRG involvement is moderate (**Bahamas**, **Trinidad and Tobago**) or very limited/non-existent (**Antigua and Barbuda**, **Saint Lucia**). SDG localization is not mentioned in any of the national strategies for SDG implementation – although the **Bahamas**' Vision 2040 includes "good governance in local government" as a pillar of development. In total, in North America, 10 LRGs have published VLRs, including three last year: [**Kelowna**](#) city in British Columbia (Canada), and [**Los Angeles**](#) and [**Orlando**](#) (USA).
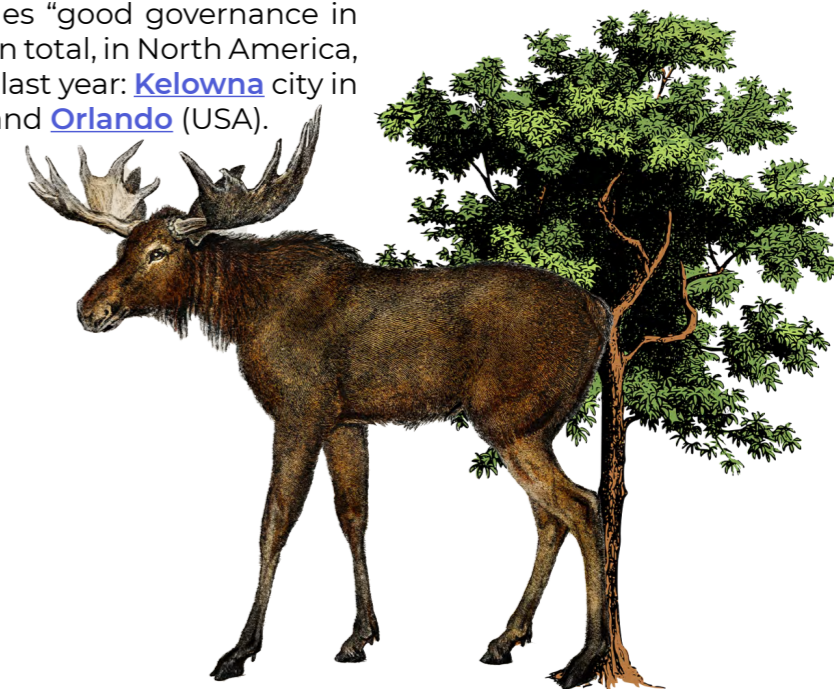
3.5 ACTIONS OF THE GLOBAL LRG NETWORKS

Year after year, the global LRG networks, coming together at the GTF, have increased their efforts to contribute from the bottom up to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Their activities range from raising awareness about the SDGs to supporting LRG members' projects both technically and financially and promoting peer-to-peer exchanges and networking, amongst many others. These are the cornerstone of a strengthened global community of LRGs and their partners, gathering together to achieve a fairer and more sustainable future, including a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that allows us all to build back better. The following pages summarize the main actions carried out by several of the 25 major global LRG networks in their quest to ensure that local action permeates all national and international debates and processes for sustainable development.

The **Assembly of European Regions** (AER) celebrated the Agenda 2030 Conference: Transforming Regions, Changing the World at the end of 2021, in which AER member regions, policymakers, civil society and partners – UCLG, Regions4, UNECE, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, UNDP and the European Commission – reaffirmed their shared commitment to deliver the 2030 Agenda, guaranteeing a sustainable and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by co-signing a manifesto.

In order to support the achievement of the SDGs through local action, the **International Association of Francophone Mayors** (AIMF in French) supports field projects led and implemented by cities in a variety of fields, such as climate, social and circular economy, water and sanitation, culture, education, gender equality and economic development. Around these multi-year projects, AIMF mobilizes a set of public and private partners. Each year, nearly 10 million EUR are invested to directly benefit the targeted populations. Projects to highlight from 2021 include support for community health with cities in Rwanda, structured sanitation programmes with cities in Cambodia and Cameroon, drinking water and sanitation projects with cities in Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania, projects for sustainable energy access with cities in Cameroon and the development of school infrastructure in Burkina Faso and Mali.

In 2021-2022, the **Commonwealth Local Government Forum** (CLGF) has worked actively to support its members at country, regional and global levels in their work towards achieving the SDGs. Since 2016, its regional offices in Southern Africa, West Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific have organized 24 regional events, focusing on raising awareness and sharing experiences related to localizing the SDGs; it has also contributed to developing SDG local monitoring systems in Rwanda, Ghana and Jamaica. Additionally, through

its Women in Local Government network, CLGF has been working on increasing women's political representation through advocacy, capacity building and networking among women politicians and prospective women candidates, with targeted projects in eight countries. It has supported the development and implementation of local economic development strategies and policies at the national and council levels in ten countries as a key entry point for addressing multiple SDGs. Good governance and citizen participation in decision-making has been the third pillar of CLGF's work.

The **ICLEI** network has continued supporting over 2,600 LRGs from more than 130 countries. These network members have issued climate emergency declarations, committed to ambitious climate action by 2030 and climate neutrality before 2050, accounted for and reported on climate action via the ICLEI-led Clearpath and HEAT+ softwares, practiced transparency and accountability by reporting at CDP-ICLEI Track, committed to living with nature, advanced on circular economy initiatives, procured sustainably and delivered sustainable mobility. Through CitiesWithNature, RegionsWithNature and the Edinburgh process, ICLEI played a key role in advancing LRGs' role in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, highly relevant for SDGs 14 and 15. Other key achievements have involved supporting the City of **Orlando** (USA) to prepare its VLR, organizing the annual Daring Cities Forum, promoting the Malmö Commitment that shapes a vision towards equitable and people-centred sustainable urban development, enhancing the work of Urban7 within the G7 process and embedding the concept of multilevel and cooperative action into the Glasgow Climate Pact.

In 2021-2022, the **Mayors Migration Council** (MMC) delivered three programmes to advance the SDGs for urban migrants and refugees. First, the MMC, UCLG and partners launched a Call to Local Action for Migrants and Refugees, providing a pathway for LRGs to show their action and make progress towards the Global Compact for Migration, Global Compact on Refugees and the SDGs. The partners issued a report titled *Localizing the Global Compacts*, which presents information to the UN about 70 LRG actions that realize the SDGs for migrants and refugees. Second, the MMC expanded the Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees, raising more than 4.5 million USD to support 20 cities and improve the lives of more than 20,000 migrants, displaced persons and marginalized people, in line with SDGs 10 and 17, among others. Third, the MMC and C40 launched a Global Mayors Action Agenda on Climate and Migration and hosted a 2021 HLPF side event to jointly advance SDGs 10 and 13.

As in previous years, **ORU Fogar** has organized, together with UNDP, its Regional Good Practice Award, which aims to highlight actions that contribute to one or several SDGs. It has also promoted the Let's Connect exercise: an exchange between members to overcome the social and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to continue pursuing the SDGs and strengthen development effectiveness. In September 2021, ORU Fogar actively participated in the Global Week #Act4SDGs campaign. Finally, ORU Fogar is facilitating the exchange of good practices on the achievement of SDG 5 among its members.

Regions4 has supported regional governments in designing recovery plans aligned with the 2030 Agenda and continued to catalyze regional leadership, showcasing best practices, advocating for increased recognition and channelling regions' voice into the main UN fora on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development. The Community of Practice – Regions4SDGs launched the brief report *Regions Voice in UN Reporting*, presenting several examples of regional progress reports and voluntary subnational reviews. Regions4 also contributes to the SDGs through its RegionsAdapt initiatives to help accelerate climate adaptation. In 2021, it became an official partner of the UN Climate Champions' Race to Resilience campaign and showcased at COP26 how regional governments have increased their ambitions on adaptation. The Regions for Biodiversity Learning Platform supports capacity building and cooperation on biodiversity issues. Regions4 is also a founding partner of RegionsWithNature to support subnational governments to enhance their territorial actions for nature in the new global biodiversity framework.

The SDGs approach is present in a wide range of resilience, holistic and thematic actions across the **Resilient Cities network**. For example, together with Mercociudades, the network has created the Resilience Academy and has developed the capacities of public officials from over 100 LRGs around the world towards resilient, sustainable and inclusive development. In partnership with the World Bank, the Cities on the Frontline knowledge sharing program has brought together LRGs, the private sector, international organizations, national governments and other stakeholders to discuss ways of building back better and more resilient. The Resilient Recovery Community of Practice fosters

LRG engagement in regional or thematic COVID-19 recovery communities. The network has also produced several reports on resilience actions, programmes and strategies that refer to and are linked to the SDGs approach, such as the _Digital solutions for Urban Resilience in Latin America. Case Studies_.

The **Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities** (UCCI in Spanish) has supported over 17 technical cooperation and peer-to-peer projects aligned with the SDGs, including a strategy on SDG monitoring and evaluation promoted by **São Paulo** (Brazil) in association with **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) and **Mexico City** (Mexico); the design of a financing plan to conserve natural areas in **Bogotá** (Colombia; SDGs 15 and 13); the promotion of mental health policies in UCCI cities (SDG 3); the promotion of **Lima** (Peru) as an intelligent tourist destination (SDGs 8 and 11); urban-level SDG compliance promoted by **Montevideo** (Uruguay); a project on Ibero-American women's visibility through urban art in **Brasília** (Brazil; SDG 5); a project on the circular economy as an innovative instrument to comply with SDGs 11, 12, 13 and 16 in **São Paulo**; and a research project on electric buses in UCCI cities in association with the International Association of Public Transport (SDGs 11 and 17).

Localizing the SDGs continues to be a pillar of the work of **UCLG** and its regional sections.

Advocacy, learning and research initiatives to fulfil the 2030 Agenda's goals are steady and increasing. UCLG and the CIB working group have put great efforts into facilitating ten VSRs this year through individual coaching, as well as collective peer exchange workshops. They published the _Guidelines for VSRs_ (in English, French and Spanish). The SDG Learning Modules are being extended and updated based on the incredible array of best practices and strategies that have been developed throughout these years. The self-paced SDG Massive and Open Online Courses (MOOCs), the Online Training of Trainers sessions on the SDGs and decentralized cooperation, and the third edition of the course on SDG localization with the Barcelona Provincial Council have demonstrated once again LRGs' steady commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

UCLG Africa supports a territorial approach to development by promoting the role of cities and territories as development actors. It also supports national associations of local governments in their dialogue with the State and other relevant actors in the definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of decentralization policy and the achievement of the SDGs. UCLG Africa has worked with UNECA and UN-Habitat to produce the _Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines_, which aim to encourage LRGs to measure and report on their actions for SDG localization, and to

contribute to the HLPF's work and the achievement of the African Union Agenda 2063. Additionally, it is now supporting the realization of several VLRs and VSRs (Botswana, Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire) in African countries. UCLG Africa contributes to building LRGs' capacities for SDG localization through decentralized cooperation and knowledge sharing projects.

In 2021, **UCLG ASPAC** moved forward towards strengthening the capacity of local governments and their associations to produce VLRs and VSRs in the Asia-Pacific region. In cooperation with international partners such as UN ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank, UCLG ASPAC facilitated the development of VLRs in **Surabaya** and **Jakarta** (Indonesia) and, with UCLG, helped the development of VSRs for Pakistan's, Sri Lanka's and the Philippines' associations. Peer-to-peer learning and training activities to keep promoting these crucial instruments are being planned for the near future in collaboration with UCLG World Secretariat.

In Europe, **CEMR** and **Platforma** continued implementing their international agendas within a multiannual strategy in which the 2030 Agenda is key. The organizations have focused on climate, gender equality, partnerships and awareness raising. First, they have lobbied within the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency for a solid Glasgow Climate Pact recognizing multilevel and cooperative action. Second, CEMR has supported UCLG Africa and

REFELA in the adoption of the African Charter for Local Gender Equality, and CEMR ensures the participation of European local elected women in international high-level meetings on gender equality, such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Third, Platforma contributed to adopting the Declaration of the Africa-Europe Forum of Local and Regional Governments together with AIMF, CLGF, UCLG and UCLG Africa, aiming for a renewed partnership of European/African mayors and subnational leaders. Finally, Platforma has continued co-developing training modules on the SDGs, resilience and decentralized cooperation, as well as supporting its members to broaden their capacities and opportunities.

UCLG Eurasia focuses its efforts on raising awareness of the SDGs and global agendas among the region's LRGs. UCLG Eurasia has organized several learning workshops held in May 2022 on local governments and the SDGs, in **Bishkek Municipality** (the Kyrgyz Republic) and for the Union of Local Self-Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. A third workshop was held in the **Republic of Sakha** (Russian Federation) for LRG representatives from the region (June 2021). Another workshop focused on urban resilience was held in Yakutsk as part of the Eurasia Local and Regional Governments Congress. UCLG Eurasia also issues the *Eurasia Local Governments* magazine on a quarterly basis, which is distributed among mayors of Eurasian cities and heads of international organizations. Topics of the articles

include Eurasian municipalities' current news and best practices related to the achievement of the SDGs and specific policy areas, and each edition is dedicated to a specific SDG and targets.

FLACMA, the Latin American Federation of Municipalities, which has the SDGs as a strategic priority, has continued promoting collaborations with national government agencies, specialized agencies, academic institutions and networks of cities in order to join efforts in data collection, monitoring and reporting for SDG localization. In particular, it has supported the development of several VSRs in the region (Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay). In addition, FLACMA has organized several workshops, webinars, forums and further training activities for LRG staffers, as well as facilitated the management and implementation of international cooperation projects related to SDG localization. Finally, the SDG Municipal Project led by FLACMA aims to establish a digital information system with indicators for the effective implementation of the 17 SDGs. This information will be freely accessible and will be updated periodically by municipal governments with the cooperation of young people from different countries.

In Latin America, **Mercociudades** has been developing, in partnership with universities and civil society organizations, awareness-raising activities and supporting SDG localization projects amongst its members with its regular focus on SDGs 5, 6, 10, 11 and 17. It also promotes the exchange of good

practices for the localization of the SDGs through two different platforms. The first is the City-University Cooperation Observatory, in partnership with the regional network of public universities, AUGM. The second is the City-City platform, Opportunities for Sustainable Development, which identifies and connects "supply" and "demand" for SDG localization from local governments. The fourth edition of the Mercociudades Resilience School, Inclusive and Creative Education for Urban Resilience, has been a space for sharing information and experiences. In this edition, the School emphasizes education (SDG 4) as a key aspect for building urban resilience.

In 2021, **UCLG-MEWA** coordinated the Middle East and West Asia region's first VLRs, developed by the Turkish cities of **Sultanbeyli** (Istanbul), **Izmir** and **Karatay** (Konya). Also, SDG Localization and Monitoring Training programmes were held for the department heads of **Kyrenia** (Cyprus) and **Fatih** municipalities (Turkey). By translating VLR and VSR guidelines prepared by UCLG, UN-Habitat and CIB into UCLG-MEWA's working languages, regional awareness of local reporting was raised. Through a new memorandum of understanding, UCLG-MEWA and UN-Habitat are promoting the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, in cooperation with UN ESCWA in **Amman** (Jordan) and **Agadir** (Morocco), where VLRs have been produced. Finally, UCLG-MEWA

cooperated with the UNDP Istanbul International Centre for Private Sector in Development in the Municipal Enterprises for Local Authorities training project, undertaken in Turkey and later in Palestine, Azerbaijan and Albania to strengthen the cooperation between municipalities and the private sector for sustainable development.

During this last year, **Metropolis** has contributed to the 2030 Agenda through the Metropolis Observatory, which makes visible the differential impact of policies on women and men through 38 indicators (23 of which are aligned with the SDG indicators) from 70 metropolitan spaces. In addition, the Urban Sustainability Exchange platform includes 434 urban cases aligned with the SDGs and brings together over 475 city makers working at different scales across the world to localize the 2030 Agenda. Through the Pilot Project program, Metropolis continues to support capacity development and knowledge exchange amongst more than 20 metropolises around the world on challenges related to urbanization and SDG implementation. The Metropolis Learning project has trained 882 persons representing 26 LRGs and partners on issues such as public space and housing, digitalization and innovation, urban renewal, governance and citizen engagement, metropolitan governance, sustainability and climate change.

3.6 CONCLUSION

As in previous years' reports, Section 3 analyzed the localization process from an institutional point of view. It uncovered very unequal trends by region. Nevertheless, progress has been observed in most countries, including in a growing group of cities and regions. In some countries, the localization movement has brought together a large number of LRGs, who have placed the SDGs at the heart of their daily actions. When national policies include localization strategies and direct support from national governments, progress is more far-reaching. For example, the LGAs of the Netherlands, where one-third of municipalities are already mobilizing for SDG localization, have called for a clear national SDG strategy and indicators to accelerate progress at the local level. In many developing countries, international assistance and partnerships are critical to enhance the localization movement.

In most countries, **LRGs' critical involvement in COVID-19 pandemic response in recent years has been widely recognized**. Such involvement has included actions to prevent contagion and support the survival of communities that are most vulnerable to the crisis's impacts. In some countries (e.g. Botswana), it is hoped that this local drive will contribute to reinforcing decentralization policies. However, LRGs' involvement in recovery packages is still not well-ensured.

A rapid review of the SDG localization processes across regions indicates uneven paces of progress. In **Europe**, LRGs and their networks continue to lead localization efforts worldwide. Significant progress can be observed in countries reporting this year, such as Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. These countries are part of a group of prominent LGAs and LRGs that have been leading SDG localization over the past years (including those in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Spain and Sweden). Beyond these cases, LRGs in almost all European countries are moving towards the localization of the SDGs.

In **Latin America**, the socio-economic and political context has slowed down progress on SDG localization. Of the countries reporting this year, several LRGs in Argentina and Uruguay continue to be at the forefront of and very engaged with SDG localization. Despite this, the LGAs in these two countries consider that localization efforts need a stronger push from national governments. In other countries, LRGs and LGAs continue to make progress. This is the case of Brazil, where the Cities Sustainable Index has been created, as well as the case of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico, where several LRGs and their networks are leading SDG localization. In some countries, localization efforts benefit from renewed national government support (such as in Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala). At the same time, adverse political reforms have hindered localization, as in El Salvador, where local budgets have been reduced.

In **Asia-Pacific**, the Philippines stands out among the countries reporting this year, while LRGs in Pakistan and Sri Lanka face important constraints that limit their engagement. Similar to other regions, LRGs in a few countries, such as Australia, the People's Republic of China, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, are leading localization efforts. In Indonesia and Malaysia, several provinces and cities demonstrate strong engagement following a push from national governments and support from international partners. In India and Bangladesh, the localization agenda is very central state-driven with a focus on federated states or districts, as well as big cities. More than 25 cities and regions have published VLRs since 2018, including the following in 2021-2022: **Jakarta**, **Kaohsiung**, **Melbourne**, **New Taipei**, **Penang**, **Surabaya**, **Taipei**, **Tokyo** and **Yokohama**.

In **Africa**, progress on localization has become more visible in Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Togo, which joined a group of countries in which LRGs and LGAs have been particularly active in previous years (Benin, Cabo Verde, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda). In Burkina Faso, Kenya and South Africa, large cities, regions, provinces and counties are increasingly mobilized, including several Kenyan counties and the cities of **Durban** and **Cape Town** (South Africa). Among the countries reporting this

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United Cities
and Local Governments

year, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, the Gambia and Senegal show progress at a slower pace.

Turning to **North America**, in Canada and the USA, cities, federal states and provinces are developing strong initiatives to localize the SDGs and the other global agendas. **New York**, **Los Angeles**, **Hawai'i**, **Orlando** and **Pittsburgh** (USA), as well as **Kelowna** and **Winnipeg** (Canada), have published their own VLRs. Thousands of cities and local leaders (e.g. governors, mayors, CEOs) are implementing climate and sustainable agendas. In the Caribbean small island states, Jamaica and Dominica show slow progress.

In **Eurasia**, over the past years, a few regions and cities of the Russian Federation have initiated efforts to integrate the SDGs in their local strategies (e.g. **Moscow**, **Kirov** and **Vologda**). In the majority of this region's countries, the localization process is progressing slowly, following a top-down approach. The impacts of current armed conflicts may hinder and revert the progress made in previous years.

Finally, in the **MEWA** region, Turkish cities and LGAs are making important efforts to disseminate the benefits of the 2030 Agenda and align local plans with the SDGs. In Palestine, despite the adverse situation, the LGA is supporting localization. In Jordan, the **Greater Amman Municipality** is particularly engaged and has produced a VLR. LRGs from other countries in the region have not provided information on their localization processes.

The number of VLRs continues to grow but at a slower pace than in previous years (from 84 in 2020 to 132 in 2022), while the number of VSRs has taken a leap forward this year, increasing coverage from 14 countries in 2021 to 24 countries in 2022. Indeed, the number of published VSR reports has increased to 26, as the provinces in Ecuador have developed their third VSR. European and Latin American cities continue to lead the publication of VLRs (representing 36% and 24%, respectively, of the total VLRs produced so far), but Asian LRGs are accelerating their efforts (comprising 21%), followed by African and North American cities.

Global and regional networks of LRGs, as members of the GTF, have made important efforts through several global and regional projects for SDG dissemination, training, advocacy, reporting and technical assistance. Many of these projects have focused on issues such as the climate, biodiversity, environmental action, resilience, local economic development and support to migrants.

Globally, **an unfavourable institutional environment for LRGs still hinders the expansion of the localization movement in many countries** in Africa, MEWA and Asia-Pacific, as previous sections have illustrated. Limited local autonomy also reduces the potential of localization efforts in Eurasia, Latin America and the Caribbean and some countries in Europe.

The involvement of LRGs in the national reporting process has made progress in 2022 compared with previous years. LRGs have been consulted in 48% of countries (compared to an average of 39% over the past 6 years on average). Europe and Africa are the regions where most progress has been observed (88% and 43%, respectively, compared to 61% and 38% during the period 2016-2021). In general, Europe is the region where the highest rates of LRG consultation have been registered over the past seven years, followed by North America, Africa and Latin America, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia and MEWA. In Latin America, participation decreased in 2021, and again in 2022 (from 39%, between 2016-2021, to 25% in 2022).

With regard to national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs, the latest figures also show progress. **LRGs have either been consulted by, or are associated with, national coordination mechanisms in 34% of countries (28% in the period 2016-2021).** Progress has been observed in Africa (29%) and in Europe (around 63%) and setbacks in Latin America.

Almost halfway to 2030, these trends show that the involvement of subnational governments as full actors in SDG implementation is still insufficient to ensure a whole-of-government approach in most regions, with Europe being an exception. Multilevel governance is at the core of SDG localization to develop effective institutions (SDG 16.6) and create a broader, stronger movement. In this regard, **the**

adoption of national localization strategies and LRGs' effective involvement throughout the entire SDG cycle (political commitment, strategy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting), as well as the quality of the relations between LRGs and their national governments, are decisive. Some countries have a consolidated tradition of regular consultations between the central government and subnational governments, leading to a collaborative approach (e.g. in the Netherlands and Greece). In others, vertical dialogue is sometimes very erratic and, overall, characterized by a top-down approach in which subnational governments are still considered "operational branches" for implementing national policies despite their legal existence as autonomous governments (e.g. in Pakistan). In some countries, the national government prioritizes dialogue only with specific levels of subnational governments, paying less attention to others. This is the case of Italy, which is putting a strong attention on policy coherence for sustainable development and has strengthened coordination mechanisms between the central administration, regions and metropolitan cities, but not so much with provinces and municipalities.

National policies can also be drafted and implemented by sectoral ministries with delegated agencies in the territories that overlap with local governments' responsibilities, leading to a fragmented approach to local governance and disempowered local governments (e.g. in Sri Lanka). Finally, there remain countries where local authorities are not elected as self-governments since the national government still appoints their heads (e.g. in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia). Consequently, and as LRGs in different countries have underscored, there is a critical need for more policy cohesion (SDG 17.14) and collaborative multilevel governance approaches that overcome siloed approaches and catalyze local initiatives to localize the SDGs.

Another important dimension of this debate about fragmentation is **the way national and local plans are coordinated**. Many countries promote a trickle-down approach to development planning. In this approach, national development plans that mainstream the SDGs have been adopted with limited involvement of LRGs, even sometimes marginalizing local administrations. Although these national plans are supposed to be followed by regional and local plans, this approach encroaches on local autonomy (e.g. as in Pakistan). Other countries have developed regional and provincial "result matrices" that are designed to serve as guidelines for local plans, but cities and municipalities are not fully equipped with resources and capacities to ensure coordination (e.g. in the Philippines).

In other cases, local proposals need to be approved by regional committees led by national government representatives (e.g. the Regional Committees for Monitoring the Physical and Financial Execution of Public Investment in Cameroon). Uneasy relationships between national and subnational governments produce planning and budgetary overlaps and gaps. Moreover, **many local governments in developing countries have very weak capacities to lead and implement local plans**. This hampers efforts to align development plans with local priorities for effective implementation.

Even so, **progress in aligning the SDGs with local plans has been observed in all regions**. In many cases, LRGs have adopted an overarching framework to overcome silos and create local impetus by involving local stakeholders (e.g. VLRs published in 2021-2022, such as those of **Buenos Aires**, **Cape**

Town, **Stuttgart**, and **New Taipei**). The **Basque Country** (Spain) has created a multilevel governance approach at the regional level that fosters vertical and horizontal cooperation among the region, the three provinces and the municipalities. However, local plans need to be translated into local budgets and actions if they are to generate an impact on the communities. Plans also need to be supported with adequate monitoring tools to ensure their effective implementation. In the Netherlands, for example, only 8% of the most active municipalities in terms of SDG localization have set specific SDG-related targets in the local budgets. In Argentina, only 11% of the municipalities that responded to their LGA's survey have mainstreamed the SDGs into their plans and aligned their budgets accordingly.

A related issue is the need for an integrated approach to comprehensive SDG implementation. The prioritization of a specific set of goals and targets in national and local plans, which can be observed in almost all countries, requires a deeper analysis. For example, in Cameroon, 93% of LRGs that have aligned their plans to the SDGs have chosen some goals over the others: SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7 and 13 are currently the priority. Adapting the SDGs to local priorities is a necessity. However, **failing to create synergies between the different SDGs – and thus not paying attention to trade-offs and applying a siloed approach to SDG implementation – can result in incoherent policies, which can have an adverse impact on development**. Again, in the Netherlands, the LGAs have identified a national imbalance that privileges prosperity targets to the detriment of ecological and humanitarian goals. This aggravates inequalities in education, health, and housing, as well as territorial inequalities between the northern and southern regions that face greater socio-economic challenges.

The weakness or absence of locally or nationally disaggregated indicators hinders assessing the impacts of LRGs' efforts, territorial inequalities and overall national development processes. Many examples outlined in this report point to strong local monitoring systems (e.g. in Italy, the Netherlands, Brazil and northern countries of Europe). Assessing SDG localization needs to be supported by adequate localized systems of indicators and data collection methods.

To summarize, effective multilevel and collaborative governance can contribute to adopting a more integrated approach to SDG localization. This is necessary to ensure that the different dimensions of sustainability are addressed well, that inequalities between regions, cities and towns are taken into consideration so as to leave no one and no territory behind, and that a multistakeholder approach is adopted at all levels.

In their reports and in their responses to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, the majority of LRGs and LGAs have pointed out the need to improve institutional coordination as a main opportunity to strengthen the localization movement. Multilevel governance is also a priority, to overcome LRGs' weak or insufficient involvement in national reporting and coordination mechanisms. LRGs have also identified limited data availability and disaggregated indicators and, in many cases, limited local capacities and resources as challenges to the process. In economically developing countries, LRGs ask for the revision of inadequate decentralization frameworks.

LRGs are resolutely calling upon national governments to develop strong localization strategies that involve the local sphere in their definition, implementation and review. They are calling for revisiting and strengthening national and local planning mechanisms for sustainable development, promoting a bottom-up approach that integrates local priorities in regional and national plans. A revised local financing system that facilitates LRGs' access to financial resources is critical to support local projects and investments in domains that are key for achieving SDGs at local levels. There is a need to join forces at all levels to launch campaigns to raise awareness on the SDGs, both among local institutions and local stakeholders, in order to strengthen partnerships and boost citizen participation in SDG localization.

#4. LOCALIZING THE SDGs UNDER REVIEW AT THE 2022 HLPF

In 2022, the HLPF will conduct an in-depth review of **SDG 4 on Quality Education**, **SDG 5 on Gender Equality**, **SDG 14 on Life Below Water**, **SDG 15 on Life on Land**, and **SDG 17 on Partnerships for the SDGs**.

In this third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, LRGs have contributed enormously to containing the virus and its devastating effects on people, their cities and territories. For example:

Many LRGs have strived to make home-schooling possible for everyone by offering support to children, teachers and parents (e.g. providing Internet connections, ICT devices, alternative radio- and TV-based learning modalities, new mobile teleservices and support for care work). All of these efforts aimed to mitigate the steadily growing learning crisis and its impact (particularly regarding mental health) on children and young people (**SDG 4**).

In view of the increase in domestic violence, LRGs have declared domestic violence services as essential; devised new ways of reaching survivors; and provided social services, shelter and psychological support to victims. They have offered food baskets, basic medical supplies and economic assistance such as cash grants, prepaid debit cards and small business loans (**SDG 5**).

Despite the pandemic's temporary environmental benefits, LRGs have had to provide economic and other forms of support to the high number of fishers and other professionals whose jobs in coastal tourism, education and shipping were abruptly disrupted due to lockdowns (**SDG 14**).

Amongst other efforts, LRGs have continued to support decarbonization, reduce biodiversity loss, address land degradation and mitigate climate change by pursuing reforestation, greening, circular economy approaches and other solutions (**SDG 15**).

These are only a sample of the manifold efforts that LRGs around the world have relentlessly pursued. However, despite their value in protecting populations from such an unprecedented global crisis, LRGs' initial short-term measures are in most cases running out of time or funds and/or exhausting their possibilities. For this reason, **LRGs worldwide have understood the COVID-19 pandemic as a critical turning point for fostering long-term transformational change and accelerating action towards a more inclusive and sustainable future.**

If the world is to build back better, LRGs will have to continue their remarkable efforts to improve and innovate in formal, informal and non-formal learning environments for all (**SDG 4**); foster gender-responsive local solutions that are feminist, inclusive and caring (**SDG 5**); sustainably develop and protect coastal areas, islands and marine ecosystems for human well-being (**SDG 14**); and advance the ecological transition with environmental justice in their territories (**SDG 15**). They must also do this in a way that fosters synergies with the other SDGs and enhances partnerships that involve both local and international public and private actors, as well as communities, in decision-making processes (**SDG 17**).

The following subsections offers a brief, but very updated, rich and forward-looking review of the **widespread efforts made by LRGs across all world regions to localize SDGs 4, 5, 14 and 15 in their territories.**

Each subsection finalizes with several policy recommendations for improving local performance and enhancing multilevel and multistakeholder collaboration for the achievement of these SDGs.

4.1 LOCALIZING SDG 4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

4.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Much analysis of progress towards the achievement of SDG 4 has been undertaken at the national level. In 2019, UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring team published the first comprehensive review of country-level progress and launched it at that year's High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).[1] Before and since then, a series of Global Education Monitoring reports have assessed key issues in relation to SDG 4.[2] Although these reports are based only on the responses of approximately one third of countries in the world, they suggest that SDG 4 targets will likely not be met by 2030. Oft quoted is UNESCO's analysis that:

> [O]n current trends, barely 6 in 10 young people will be completing secondary school by 2030, while in some regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, fewer students will be achieving minimum proficiency in reading at the end of primary school.[3]

It should be noted that a lack of data at the local level is a challenge for monitoring progress on SDG 4. One report focusing on just three SDG 4 indicators in OECD cities suggests that where data exist, few cities are close to achieving targets, and there are in-country inconsistencies in achievement from city to city.[4]

Despite the lack of data, it is widely recognized that localized solutions are required, especially in the challenge to reach socially excluded populations, namely people with low socio-economic status; racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities; people with disabilities; older people; migrants and refugees; nomadic people and people in remote areas; sexual and gender minorities; and people in areas of conflict or subject to the effects of climate change. Interventions must recognize that there is diversity of needs in any population and that intersecting inequalities add to heterogeneity within any population, contributing to further challenges. Even allowing for this added complexity, there are commonalities that are place-based, and tailoring efforts according to smaller scales of geography may enable developing more nuanced solutions.

In this context, it is also necessary to factor in the **scope of the responsibilities assigned to local and regional governments (LRGs) in educational policy-making, planning, management and funding, which are wide-ranging.** The devolution and sharing of responsibility are crucial elements in the achievement of SDG 4. Greater localization of decision-making processes

potentially provides a greater opportunity for communities to shape the provision of education services that are responsive to their needs. On average, based on 67 countries with available data (2015), education is LRGs' primary area of spending both as a share of GDP (2.6%) and as a share of the current expenditure (23.6%).[5] In many federal and quasi-federal countries (e.g. Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany and Spain), states, provinces and regions have been devolved powers to deliver education services. In other countries (e.g. Brazil, Denmark, Lithuania, Republic of Korea, Slovak Republic, Sweden and the UK), there are strong decentralization processes that transfer power concerning most schooling issues to local authorities. In some instances, these subnational administrations act as bridges between the centre and regions (e.g. in the prefectures in Japan). In other cases (e.g. France, Mali), whilst national ministries hold overall responsibility for the education system, specific responsibilities and associated funding are transferred to LRGs.

This section of the report assesses approaches that have been undertaken by LRGs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to actively ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4). Specifically, it provides examples of actions with regard to the seven targets of SDG 4, focusing on instances in which LRGs take a leading role in initiating and implementing change. Their actions may happen in tandem with higher levels of government or with one or more intergovernmental, non-governmental, civil society or private organizations. This section learns from – and builds on – the manifold international initiatives that focus on educational provision and learning in urban settings, such as the Educating Cities approach[6] and UNESCO's learning city model.[7] As will be seen throughout the section, **principles of good governance enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – such as strong political will and commitment; governance and participation of all stakeholders; mobilization and utilization of resources; multilevel coordination; horizontal cooperation; and policy mechanisms for mainstreaming, monitoring and reviewing – are key to ensure successful learning and educating cities.**

4.1.2 HOW ARE CITIES MOVING TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF SDG 4? INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN SDG 4 AND OTHER SDGs

Based on their devolved responsibilities, many cities in the world are taking a comprehensive approach to the SDGs and often go beyond the specific targets to ensure enhanced access to education across the life cycle. In addition, within the SDGs framework, LRGs have also promoted an enabling environment to support education objectives. This includes cities in all regions, including the cities of **Shimokawa** and **Kitakyushu** (Japan) in East Asia[8]; **New York**, **Orlando** and **Pittsburgh** (USA) in North America; **Madrid** (Spain), **Malmö** (Sweden) and **Strasbourg** (France) in Western Europe; and **Bogotá** (Colombia) and **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) in South America[9]. For example, the city of **Bristol** in the UK has mapped the SDGs onto its One City Plan and produced a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) to keep track of the progress made, including on SDG 4, and to foster a more appropriate context for SDG localization.[10]

The City of **Los Angeles** (USA) has also created an inventory of current SDG actions and collaborates with the unified local school district. The Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity, together with the Office of the City Council President and multiple service providers, have developed the Sepulveda Corridor Demonstration Project to facilitate permanent housing for migrant families in precarious situations, providing fundamental stability that underpins improved educational outcomes for migrant children.[11] This illustrates the link between target 4.1 (on free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education) and targets 1.2 (on reducing poverty by at least 50%),

10.2 (on promoting universal, social, economic and political inclusion) and 11.1 (on safe and affordable housing).

In **Río Cuarto** (Argentina), where 56% of the adult population has not completed primary schooling, the municipality has worked to improve the livelihoods and working conditions of families that collect recyclable materials for a living.[12] The outcomes touch upon a number of SDGs: an increase in school enrolment linked to a decrease in child labour in the city (SDGs 4 and 8), an increase in the volume of recycled materials (SDG 12), new entrepreneurial projects (SDG 8) and an overall improvement in socially marginalized groups' conditions and access to material goods and culture.

Developing educational strategies that reinforce and are reinforced by other SDGs is critical for ensuring a holistic approach where trade-offs are well-balanced and unintended results are mitigated. This is particularly important in contexts with low levels of decentralization (where LRGs' margin of manoeuvre is limited) and with tight budgets. For example, **in Sub-Saharan Africa, lack of access to water, toilets and sanitation facilities (SDG 6), both within the home and at school, alongside inadequate transport infrastructure (SDG 11) and unequal gender roles (SDG 5), are all critical factors for many girls to abandon school.** On a positive note, however, school canteens usually play an essential role in ensuring sufficient access to quality food for children. They thus become a lever to attract children to schools, particularly children from impoverished households, and contribute to both SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 4 (Quality Education).

4.1.3 LOCALIZING SDG 4, TARGET BY TARGET

Specific examples of LRGs initiating actions pertinent to the seven targets of SDG 4 can be found in all world regions. Of course, many actions touch upon more than one target. In this section, selected examples from across the globe illustrate how cities are approaching the targets. Their actions are informed by **intersecting inequalities that impinge on equal access to services generally and education specifically, as well as the social fragmentation of cities and the segregation of schooling.**[13]

Localizing SDG 4.1

There are multifarious challenges related to **free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (SDG target 4.1)** that are linked to the diverse populations LRGs serve. Social inequalities in education are very often distributed spatially across a country's centre, peripheries and rural hinterlands. This fragmentation exists in most countries irrespective of GDP. In cities in Bangladesh (**Dhaka** and **Khulna**), India (**Delhi** and **Madurai**) and Tanzania (**Dar es Salaam** and **Ifakara**), children in poorer neighbourhoods are less likely to have access to schools beyond the primary level and to attend schools that are well-resourced.[14] This leads to higher absenteeism and dropout rates. In regions as diverse as Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and North America, spatial segregation is closely associated not only with poverty but also with increasing levels of discrimination based on social class, race, ethnicity, caste, religion and language.[15]

These inequalities suggest the need for LRGs to **address fragmentation by developing integrated social neighbourhoods and bringing together children from different neighbourhoods and backgrounds in schools.**[16] The enrolment policies of **Flanders** (Belgium) are illustrative of a specific practice to address socio-economic segregation (see Box 4.1).

BOX 4.1
ENROLMENT POLICIES IN FLANDERS (BELGIUM)

Beginning in 2013, the enrolment policy for preschool, primary and lower secondary schools in some areas of Flanders changed from one of free choice to a "double quota" system. In this system, each school is compelled to reserve a proportion of places for disadvantaged students and another proportion for advantaged students in order to match the socio-economic make-up of the neighbourhood or community in which the school is located. If there are places remaining after all children of one group have been assigned a place, children from the other group may fill these reserved places. The policy sets out to achieve a more equitable distribution of students among schools, without altering the expression of family preferences. The application of this system in several cities in Flanders has shown positive effects on reducing the socio-economic segregation of students, while also maintaining the preferences of families in more than 90% of cases.[17]

Furthermore, the **neighbourhood is the most strategic space for territorializing community-based social action and for implementing a joint education and social protection strategy.**[18] For this reason, a **bottom-up, proximity- and community-based education approach** that goes beyond the boundaries of traditional schooling is critical. This includes, for example, teachers being more acquainted with the local reality and engaged with the community, families, neighbours and local actors participating more in the school's activities.

Amongst many examples related to **racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity** is the work in the small city of **New Brunswick** (New Jersey, USA), where the school district enrols close to 10,000 students from preschool to 12th grade. Close to two-thirds of students speak one of 23 languages aside from English as their primary language, with the predominant ethnic group being Hispanic (91%). This multicultural makeup is celebrated, and students who face English language barriers are offered dual language classes.[19]

One example of integrating **antiracist and decolonializing approaches** in the school curriculum, giving prominence to the contributions of historically marginalized groups, can be found in **Santos** (Brazil). The city offers training for the education community and citizens, and it has reorganized the school curriculum using a diversity and antiracism lens. Santos has also created urban routes to increase the visibility of different communities' contributions to Brazilian history and culture, and local education officials network with community actors to jointly foster political advocacy.[20]

SDG target 4.1 also encompasses **combatting early school dropout and incentivizing return; enriching the school curriculum; promoting healthy and safe learning environments; and involving local stakeholders in improving the quality of education.** Early school leaving has significant individual and societal consequences, such as a higher risk of unemployment, poverty, marginalization and social exclusion. Tackling the problem requires effectively breaking the cycle of deprivation and the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality in cities. **Viladecans** (Spain) focuses its efforts on preventing early school leaving by providing "a space for collaboration amongst public administration, schools,

companies and families in order to create innovative projects in the city's schools". [21] **Gondomar** (Portugal) aims to strengthen social inclusion and promote educational success through music education in schools that require priority intervention.[22] Across all Nordic countries, the Nordic Council of Ministers has recognized the worldwide phenomenon that too many children and young people are dropping out of school. In a scheme entitled "*Sambeidet*", it has devolved responsibility for implementing cross-sector actions for marginalized populations to municipal governments in Norway, Sweden, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland (including Åland) and Iceland. Within this collaboration, for example, the municipalities of **Espoo**, **Helsinki**, **Kauniainen**, **Kerava**, **Kirkkonummi** and **Vantaa** in Finland are prioritizing early action to prevent school dropout.

Localizing SDG 4.2

There are also many interventions related to **early childhood development (SDG target 4.2)**. For example, in France, during the 2013-2017 period there has been devolution of responsibility to cities for public preschool and primary education.[23] In this context, **Ivry-sur-Seine** and **Grigny** (France) are amongst the country's cities that have focused on early childhood education provision for children aged two to three from disadvantaged families, as a transition to primary school, in addition to supporting the further transition to lower secondary education for which *départements* are responsible. In order to facilitate marginalized families' access to early childhood education and care, the city of **Ljubljana** (Slovenia) has an income-based pricing policy, which includes free services for families with the lowest incomes.[24] Knowing that experiences in the first years of life significantly influence an individual's development and integration in society, **Medellín** (Colombia) launched the *Buen Comienzo* (Good Start) programme in 2006.[25] The Council coordinates the departments of social welfare, education, health and sports, and it fosters the comprehensive development of early infancy through caring, healthy and safe environments provided by families, significant adults and educational agents.

Localizing SDG 4.3

Equitable participation in post-secondary education, including university, in later life (SDG target 4.3) is a feature of education systems across the world. Stakeholder cooperation, including with LRGs, is important in increasing disadvantaged populations' access. In many countries, there are long-standing partnerships involving higher education institutions; national, regional and local governments; civil society; and employers, which aim to create opportunities for people with lower socio-economic status and people from ethnic and racial minorities. For example, many French municipalities have implemented "educational priority zones" based on criteria such as high percentages of migrants, underperforming students or low-income students. The aim of this initiative, which targets specific neighbourhoods or schools, is to improve educational results and offer special admissions programmes that enable people's access to higher education, among other goals.

LRGs are also important players in encouraging and incentivizing educational providers, often outside their direct control, to play a local role. For example, **Hume City Council** (Australia) developed the concept of the "multiversity", drawing upon a model first established by **Medway Council** (UK). This

city in Australia, which has one of the highest proportions of socio-economically disadvantaged citizens, attracted a range of universities and technical and vocational education and training colleges to offer their programmes in Hume's own local facilities and thus avoid having to develop new infrastructure.[26] The Prometheus Project in **Barcelona** (Spain) provides another example of a multistakeholder approach and the importance of raising awareness at the neighbourhood level.[27] In order to provide equal opportunities and to bridge the gap in access to higher education, the city of **Zagreb** (Croatia) provides scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students, Roma pupils, students from lower income families and students with special needs, among others.[28]

Localizing SDG 4.4

Specific LRG-supported initiatives related to **technical and vocational skills, employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (SDG target 4.4)** are commonplace. Recently, UNESCO published three relatively in-depth case studies of such initiatives in **Chengdu** (China), **Limerick** (Ireland) and **Turin** (Italy), alongside an examination of initiatives in seven other cities of various sizes: **Bahir Dar** (Ethiopia), **Bamiyan** (Afghanistan), **Cantarranas** (Honduras), **Mação** (Portugal), **Vitebsk** (Belarus), **Wyndham** (Australia) and **Živinice** (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Municipal authorities usually play a leading role in the development of entrepreneurship education, while "other institutions, such as schools, universities, community centres, training institutes, foundations and associations, support and complement these governmental initiatives".[29] Further examples related to this target are those of the cities of **Rosario** (Argentina), which offers training and mentoring to socially excluded groups through its School of Social Entrepreneurship,[30] and **Madrid** (Spain), which offers specialized care and socio-educational and pre-employment support for adolescents at risk.[31]

Localizing SDG 4.5

Initiatives to **eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable (SDG target 4.5)** are broad-ranging. A number of LRGs have implemented measures specifically focused on ensuring the right to education of women and girls and specific structurally marginalized populations, including migrants and refugees, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities.

Women and girls

Globally, 127 million girls of primary and secondary school age are out of school. Gender inequalities for girls and women in education are ubiquitous in most societies and are associated with a range of factors, including poverty, geographical isolation, minority status, disabilities, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence, stereotyping and traditional attitudes about women's status and roles.[32] Some cities have declared themselves as "feminist cities" and, amongst other initiatives, applied a care-oriented approach to coeducation by rethinking spaces in schools and town squares from a gender and equality perspective and involving children in the decision-making process.[33] **Barberà del Vallès** (Spain) has created a local pact between local education, social and business actors to incorporate gender equality into all spheres of action, including education.[34] Other cities highlight particular issues such as empowering women through training in leadership skills and gender issues (the School of Women Leaders in **Lincoln**, Argentina);[35] providing non-formal reproductive health education programmes for adolescent girls in secondary schools (in **Alexandria**, Egypt);[36] and stimulating girls' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, as well as entrepreneurship (the Codepillars Club in **Caguas**, Puerto Rico).[37]

Migrants and refugees

As the level of government that first receives migrants and refugees and must cover their most basic needs, a number of cities have initiatives related to migrants. For example, the city of **Hangzhou** (China) has developed a system in which migrants' children are integrated into the formal education system, whilst migrant workers can attend the Migrant College to receive specific support (in language and social integration) to achieve adult vocational high school qualifications and professional certificates.[38] **Glasgow** (UK) actively welcomes refugees and asylum seekers, whose educational needs are addressed in its Integrated Children's Services Plan.[39] The Council of Foreign Residents in **Toulouse** (France) and the Municipal Council of Immigrants in **São Paulo** (Brazil) both aim for the effective participation of migrants and refugees in the city's decision-making.[40]

Indigenous peoples

There are fundamental contradictions in relation to LRGs' role in their interactions with Indigenous peoples that are associated with the land rights of the original custodians of the land prior to colonial and post-colonial times, for example, in Australia and Canada. One of the most powerful learning activities in the city of **Victoria** (Canada) is linked to its community-wide reconciliation dialogues with the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.[41] Many cities throughout these countries also pursue programme-level activities to provide culturally appropriate services. One example is the city of **Townsville** (Australia): the city's Lifelong Learning Strategic Action Plan delivered through its library service has involved an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mentoring Programme, linked to goals within the city's Reconciliation Action Plan.[42]

People with disabilities

Many cities are working to foster the inclusion of people with disabilities by improving urban accessibility, as well as their participation in education, employment and social and political city life. The City of **Gothenburg** (Sweden), together with partners, has developed a comprehensive programme to build a city for all, with ten areas of action that include democratic participation; education; work and employment; moving around and using indoor and outdoor environments, and meaningful leisure. Cities have also taken action to adapt education and vocational training, facilitating people with disabilities' transitions to employment, for example, in **Vienna** (Austria)[43] and **Malargüe** (Argentina).[44] Other cities offer distinct examples

of actions, including those related to art (inclusive art workshops in **Santarém**, Portugal) and recreational activities (inclusive play areas for people with disabilities in the Parque de la Amistad in **Montevideo**, Uruguay).[45]

Localizing SDG 4.6

Historically, adult education is, to some extent, a lower priority for state support.[46] Hence, **ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG target 4.6)** has become a particular responsibility of LRGs. Many examples of their efforts to ensure literacy provision for both men and women can be found around the world, particularly in the Global South. In **Mexico City** (Mexico), the *Pilares* (Pillars) programme constitutes a comprehensive action strategy that seeks to strengthen the social fabric in the most marginalized communities through fair and equal access to education and culture. Comprehensive training courses provide meaningful, experiential and practical learning in the 250 *Pilares* centres so that people can complete their basic literacy, primary, secondary and/or higher education, among other activities.[47] An example of focusing on older adult learning can be found in the University of the Third Age programme supported by the city state of **Singapore**.[48]

Localizing SDG 4.7

Ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (SDG target 4.7) is the most all-encompassing target. It seeks to inculcate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in all citizens through education for citizenship and sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of peace and non-violence, and the contribution of culture and cultural diversity. LRGs have a critical role in raising awareness and motivating citizens to learn, as well as making knowledge and quality education accessible for all people during their life course. As mentioned above, **community education approaches are critical to meeting this and other SDGs targets.**

The City of **Geneva** (Switzerland) promotes active ageing and solidarity between generations through different intergenerational projects. The Atelier-Vie Kindergarten, opened in 2000, is the first intergenerational kindergarten in Geneva. In this space, children can discover the life cycle through activities such as reading, storytelling, theatre, poetry and dance, with an educational team that includes volunteer older people from retirement homes, senior

citizen associations and cultural centres.[49] In order to promote civic education, **Brussels** (Belgium) implements the *Stages civiques* (Civic Practicums). It offers secondary school students the chance to participate actively in their city by carrying out humanitarian activities at public or non-profit entities.[50] **Tampere** (Finland) also promotes values education and an atmosphere of positive relationships among school students: the council tackles bullying through a programme that focuses on prevention, intervention and monitoring, which includes tools for teachers, parents and in-classroom lessons.[51] In the same line, the city of **León** (Mexico) implements the Child Ambassadors for Prevention programme, in which primary students at schools in areas with high rates of violence and crime submit a plan to prevent and reduce violence in the school, and the winning projects are implemented.

A focus on **active citizen engagement, removing social prejudices and increasing intercultural contact** is illustrated in **Kigali** (Rwanda; see Box 4.2), which is linked to the idea that community members themselves have valuable knowledge that informs sustainable development and that LRGs can facilitate means for their voices to be heard.

BOX 4.2
KIGALI LITERACY CENTRES AND CITIZEN DIALOGUES

The city of Kigali has amplified initiatives stemming from national government by organizing various formal and informal community education activities, **including**:[52]

- ■ *Urubohero* (peer learning centres), dating from prior colonial times, where young girls and older adult women discuss ethics, values and skills;

- ■ *Akagoroba k'ababyeyi* for each *Umudugudu* (neighbourhood or subdivision), which are used for citizens' discussions around family issues such as delinquency and drugs;

- ■ *Itorero* schools and *Ingando* camps, which were established following the genocide as a civic education response to unity and reconciliation;

- ■ the *Imbuga* City Walk, a new city-centre, recreational and green space, established in 2021, designed to generate economic, health, social and educational benefits.

These examples show how educating and learning cities and regions have sought to create **comprehensive and joint educational service provision that, at a fundamental level, supports individual empowerment and social inclusion, economic development, cultural prosperity and sustainable development**.

In relation to peacebuilding, cities have a long tradition of citizen learning and city-to-city cooperation. The first global city organizations (IULA, created in 1913, and the World Organization of United Cities, created in 1957) aimed to support peace and twinning. They involved schools, local institutions and civil society organizations. Currently active LRG networks continue to strive for this goal, in what is called "city diplomacy".[53] Many projects around education in peacebuilding at the local level – for example, an initiative in **Acapulco** (Mexico)[54] and one in **Belfast** (UK) that is part of the Belfast PEACE IV Local Action Plan financed by the European Union[55] – focus on rebuilding positive relationships. The Change Your Mind, Build Peace programme of the city of **Manizales** (Colombia) has contributed to a significant drop in homicide rates and the dismantling of gangs by engaging young people to cocreate the initiative and by working with higher education institutions to provide alternative opportunities for young people who are member of gangs.[56]

4.1.4 LRGs' RESPONSES TO SUPPORT THE LOCALIZATION OF SDG 4 DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has had and will have far-reaching effects on all aspects of society. During the pandemic, more than 1.6 billion students worldwide have been affected by educational disruptions, which are amplified by deep-rooted issues of inequality and injustice, in particular in relation to primary and secondary education and in low- and middle-income countries.[57] Because children have been out of school, **a learning crisis has developed that may bring about "adverse consequences beyond interrupted learning, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities", declines in educational achievement and "potential negative developmental effects in children, adolescents, and adults".**[58]

Already disadvantaged children have faced greater challenges in accessing remote learning during the pandemic,[59] even in countries with some of the highest levels of broadband access, such as the Netherlands.[60] Other risks that have been accentuated by COVID-19 include domestic violence, mental health and income loss; these have not been equally distributed within society and have had an enormous impact on marginalized groups' education.[61]

With regard to the pandemic's economic impact on funding allocated to education, around 65% of national governments in low- and lower-middle-income countries and 35% in upper-middle- and high-income countries have reduced funding for education.[62] Local finances were also enormously affected by the crisis, with education being largely defunded.[63] Economic recovery will require decade-long efforts, particularly if LRGs are not included as critical actors in recovery packages. In order to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic and its profound, cross-sectoral impacts, a number of local innovations have either been led by or enacted through LRGs around the world.

Pedagogical adaptations and technological innovations

Novel pedagogical approaches to ensure against learning loss, particularly using digital approaches and concomitant support for teachers and parents, have become commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. These have often been accompanied by efforts to enhance information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in educational institutions and homes, for example, through the provision of mobile devices and training in their use by families, especially those with low digital literacy. For many cities, these pandemic response initiatives accelerated already existing plans, such as in **Espoo** (Finland).[64] Many LRGs have provided devices for home-based learning and online synchronous communication with teachers and classmates to some of the most disadvantaged children (e.g. in **Glasgow, UK**).[65]

However, virtual learning has highlighted the fact that **"digital divides exist in terms of access to technology and to freely available online resources, between the wealthy and the poor, and between the Global North and South".**[66] The pandemic has revealed that online or remote learning is out of reach for at least 500 million students globally.[67] These divides are further accentuated for learners with disabilities and those facing other pre-existing structural inequalities. For example, in Nepal, only 5% of children in the poorest households had access to and were able to use distance learning.[68] A response of the country's 2020 COVID-19 Education Cluster Contingency Plan was the devolution of primary education responsibilities from national

to local governments. However, because the central ministries in Nepal still hold responsibility for national educational and ICT policies, improved multilevel coordination is required.[69] In other cases, the educational use of public space was reinforced. Cities such as **Doodhpathri** (India) opted to offer outdoor lessons,[70] while others such as **Barcelona** (Spain) made public spaces (squares, parks and civic facilities) available for schools.[71]

Adaptations for socially excluded groups

In line with the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda, providing adaptation measures for populations that face structural discrimination (SDG target 4.5) has also been vital to mitigate particular aspects of exclusion experienced by ethnic and linguistic minorities, migrants and refugees, girls, older people and geographically isolated populations, amongst others. For example, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Metropolitan Municipality of **Lima** (Peru) adapted educational content and used digital means, radio and television to deliver it in ten minority languages, as part of the *Aprendo en casa* (I Learn at Home) national government programme to reach Indigenous peoples.[72]

Migrants and refugees are likely to have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic because of the instability of their living environments, and this is further accentuated for girls. Many LRGs have taken steps to mitigate this situation. For example, with support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the city of **Baalbek** (Lebanon) has delivered classes for Syrian refugees.

Concerning gender inequality, it is estimated that 11 million girls will not return to school due to COVID-19 school closures.[73] Furthermore, initial COVID-19 responses appear to have been developed "with little gender analysis and attention to inclusive approaches" (see Subsection 4.2 on SDG 5 for gender-responsive initiatives).[74]

Interventions beyond compulsory schooling (SDG target 4.6) have been a particular responsibility and focus of LRGs. In **Shanghai** (China), the city's Lifelong Learning Cloud project has included the needs of older people, and, recognizing issues of digital literacy, the city provided guidance on the use of technological devices. Furthermore, it also recognized the need for live interaction and moved its Live Online Classroom for Elderly Education from pre-recorded to synchronous delivery.[75] Other actions have included support for adult, lifelong and continuing education through direct learning provision and have drawn upon cities' artistic, cultural, spiritual and environmental assets (SDG target 4.7), including museums and galleries. Such initiatives are documented in cities such as **Gdynia** (Poland), **Glasgow** (UK) and **Puebla** (Mexico).[76] Beyond formal education, other services in cities have built upon existing contributions to informal learning during the pandemic, including libraries (as in **Wuhan**, China, and **Wyndham**, Australia) and recreational and sports services (as in **Milan**, Italy).[77]

LRGs have also advanced SDG 4 through other aspects of the services that they provide, notably in relation to health education, including mental health and the linked issue of combatting misinformation fomented by social media sources. Returning to school has not been easy for students and teachers, and, as part of the pedagogical curriculum, many local authorities offer spaces for emotional care and support to cope with

grieving and loss. Many cities have developed public education and public awareness campaigns, as exemplified in Asian cities including **Colombo** (Sri Lanka) and **Jakarta** (Indonesia).[78] Support for mental health was provided by LRGs in **Kashan** (Islamic Republic of Iran), **Rostov-on-Don** (Russia) through a local university,[79] **Mayo-Baléo** (Cameroon), **Osan** (Republic of Korea) and **Wuhan** (China), amongst others.[80] A variety of city-led campaigns have been set up to combat misinformation, including in **Athens** (Greece), **Kyiv** (Ukraine), **Philadelphia** (USA) and **Yangon** (Myanmar).[81] Smart city solutions, previously criticized as technological fixes,[82] have come into their own as enablers of access to pandemic-related knowledge in cities such as **Seoul** (Republic of Korea).[83]

4.1.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is clear evidence of LRGs' important role in achieving the SDG 4 targets and of their capacity to respond to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, in partnership with national governments, other agencies and communities. This section of the report has presented evidence from different cities and regions around the globe to illustrate specific measures, policies and initiatives put in place to enhance equal opportunities for all. The main takeaways are summarized below.

Proximity to communities and local stakeholders places local and regional governments in a privileged role to detect and respond to the different needs of citizens, particularly those who have been traditionally excluded, and contribute to education objectives in such a way that no one is left behind. LRGs have different roles in formal education, especially in early years, and typically are the main promoters of lifelong learning. Therefore, they play a key part in (a) improving the quality of educational service provision and teaching to respond to local demand; (b) increasing access to secondary education, technical and vocational education and training, and higher education for socially excluded groups; and (c) combatting early school dropout and incentivizing the return of learners who have left. Investing in educational attainment is key to overcoming inequalities. Consequently, education and social mix policies that aim to reduce school segregation of socially marginalized groups and foster inclusive exchanges and opportunities for all are needed.

With regard to the governance of educational systems, there is a need to develop multilevel partnerships for inclusive quality education. In most countries, responsibilities are shared among different levels of governments; sometimes this creates tensions between national, regional and local levels as well as inefficiencies. Beyond responding to gaps due to the inaction of other levels of government, LRGs' participation in the policy-making process would guarantee greater coherence and efficiency. The challenge is treating LRGs as allies in planning decentralized education policies that take into account both a comprehensive overview of national need and the nuance of regional and local knowledge. Increased efforts should also be taken to **improve measurement of LRGs' contribution to global educational goals**, with indicators disaggregated by population and by territory (ideally at the neighbourhood level) in order to keep track of the progress made and the challenges ahead. Obtaining these data would also facilitate the detection of needs and strengths and setting up tailor-made solutions.

The recovery of the learning deficit caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wiped out 20 years of learning gains,[84] will only occur if extraordinary efforts are made. This calls for increased cooperation between public sector actors, but also with private sector, civil society and other stakeholders linked to education.[85] Furthermore, **it will be key to ensure that education budgets are sufficient** to provide universal support to all schools and populations (particularly to those

in the most difficult situations), that they include investment in school infrastructure and that they are not affected by austerity measures.[86] In order to reinforce their already active role in education, LRGs must be included in funding discussions and resource-allocation processes.

Cities and regions can create improved learning environments, building on the synergies between the different SDGs. Meeting the objective of SDG 4 is a wide-ranging task for LRGs that crosses over into many other SDGs. The provision of adequate education requires responding to a number of fundamental needs that include water and sanitation (SDG 6), health (SDG 3), food (SDG 2) and transport, housing and other types of infrastructure, especially in cities (SDG 11). The lack of adequate infrastructure, such as water taps, toilets and sanitation facilities, is a major contributing factor to children, especially girls, dropping out of school; yet, in many countries, lack of resources and capacities negatively impact the provision of these basic facilities. Housing and transport, two areas for which LRGs are usually directly or indirectly responsible, are also broadly related to the educational success of societies. There is thus an urgent need to adopt a cross-sectoral approach to this issue and ensure stronger connections between policy-making processes for education and infrastructure. There is also a need to customize approaches to the particularities of neighbourhoods, especially in large socially and economically heterogeneous cities.

**LRGs can support innovation in education to be more resilient to future crises.** It is widely accepted that, at the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools and teachers were not pedagogically and technologically prepared for the demands for online, flexible learning. Relatively low-tech solutions therefore may be advisable in the short-term, whilst at the same time enhancing the capacities of teachers, improving access to ICT (and other aspects of infrastructure such as electricity) and tackling inequalities experienced by those who face the most structural discrimination, such as girls, children from rural areas and people with disabilities. In highly impoverished remote areas, even TV and radio may be inaccessible, and further alternatives have to be considered. Indeed, in anticipation of future crises, entities responsible for education, including LRGs, must develop strategies with an emphasis on flexible learning arrangements with quality assurance and a particular focus on marginalized populations. COVID-19 is not the first pandemic, and it will not be the last. However, this pandemic has generated lessons at the local level that can be capitalized upon in the future.

LRGs play a key role in lifelong learning and education for sustainable development, peace, citizenship and diversity. There have been many examples of actions initiated by cities with the objective of motivating all citizens to learn and of making knowledge and quality education accessible for all during the life course. Many LRGs have managed to continue these efforts or prompt them during the COVID-19 pandemic,[87] during which marginalized groups have been the most affected. There also have been many actions aimed at increasing intercultural and intergenerational education; at eliminating social prejudices and increasing levels of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, caste, religion, language and other circumstances and identities; and at promoting peace. These actions are critical now that the world is facing another period in history in which conflict is at the fore, with ongoing wars and crises in many areas of the world, and in which dialogue has become more needed than ever.

Participatory policy-making is crucial in order to ensure that lifelong educational programmes meet the needs and priorities of all citizens. Giving citizens' voice and involving them in decision-making processes generates civic engagement. This participation may also imply rethinking school governance itself and its relationship with the neighbourhood and the city. This includes consideration of what sorts of processes might be put in place, what local stakeholders need capacity building and what networks should be mobilized to improve the quality of education. Training active and engaged citizens from early ages is also a cornerstone of local development, social cohesion and equal opportunities.

Many of the instances of active citizenship and local engagement that have been promoted through innovative approaches to learning can be harnessed to foster improved responsiveness and resilience to future crises. This includes **city-to-city learning and cooperation** in order to transfer policies and practices, taking into account the cultural and political context of each territory.
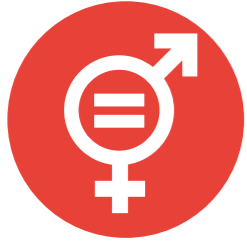
4.2 LOCALIZING SDG 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

4.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) calls for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. Across the globe, local and regional governments (LRGs) commit to and advance gender equality through diverse mechanisms. They join international networks, such as the Global Municipal Feminist Movement convened by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). They integrate a gender perspective into policy-making (e.g. through gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting), set targets for women's presence in public life and design programmes that address gender inequities in the built environment, culture, education, employment and entrepreneurship. They look to end violence against women and girls and to promote maternal, reproductive and sexual health. As such, fulfilling SDG 5 also contributes to achieving SDGs that look to end poverty and improve the well-being, livelihoods and resilience of all populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected women and girls, underscores the urgent need for concerted action on gender equality. Women and girls from structurally discriminated social groups have been the hardest hit, as their communities were already vulnerable to disaster and more burdened by emergency response and care.

Inequalities that existed before the pandemic have sharpened: for example, women and girls already occupied more economically precarious positions – such as making up a larger proportion of the informal workforce – and lockdowns and economic downturns only increased women and girls' marginalization. New inequalities also emerged during the pandemic (though they, too, originate with institutions' longstanding failure to integrate an inclusive gender perspective). For instance, personal protective equipment is less likely to fit women's bodies, leaving women – who comprise the majority of workers in care-related jobs, including frontline response – more exposed to contagion. Altogether, the pandemic has driven women from the workforce, pushed girls out of school and increased women's care burden while also increasing their exposure to gender-based violence. Even as economies recover, women are not returning to work.[88] According to the World Economic Forum, COVID-19 has set back progress on gender equality by an additional 36 years, meaning that it will now take an estimated 135.6 years to close the gender gap.[89]

These circumstances place two facts into stark relief. First, **neither a full pandemic recovery nor gender equality can be obtained without addressing the care crisis.** Building back better means overturning the patriarchal ideals that equate domestic work with women's work, thereby transforming this work from an unpaid private good into a remunerated public good. Second, the notion of care matters for the public sphere. I**n providing care as well as** *caring services*, **LRGs ensure that all residents do not just survive, but thrive, and that all communities do not just endure, but become resilient.** An inclusive and therefore caring and feminist approach calls governments' attention to residents' diversity and ensures that governments' efforts towards gender equality cut across other identities, including but not limited to race, class, level of education, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, language, disability and migrant status. Such an intersectional approach seeks to undo all forms of structural inequality and address the inequities faced by women and girls as well as by non-binary and transgender individuals.

To fully implement this more inclusive approach, much progress remains to be made. Where LRGs made serious commitments and steady progress before the pandemic, their work has continued. Where LRGs' gender equality efforts lagged behind, COVID-19 has presented them with a window of opportunity to set new agendas and make new strides towards advancing gender equality alongside a care-focused agenda. Action remains necessary. The initial emergency social protection schemes adopted by LRGs in the pandemic's early stages are ending, but women, girls and non-binary and transgender individuals continue to be subject to intersecting systems of marginalization.

4.2.2 PROGRESS ON SDG 5: A GLOBAL LOOK AT LRGS' EFFORT

Setting sights on gender equality

A variety of agenda-setting tools and commitment mechanisms exist to motivate and guide LRGs in advancing gender equality. Many create networks that link places across the globe. For example, Leadership Cities for Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals connects **Accra** (Ghana), **Durban** (South Africa), **Helsinki** (Finland) and **Mexico City** (Mexico), among other cities. Metropolis's Caring Cities initiative was launched in **Johannesburg** (South Africa) with participation from **São Paulo** (Brazil), **Barcelona** (Spain) and **Hyderabad** (India).[90] In 2017, **Mexico City** founded the Network of Latin American Rainbow Cities to link urban areas supporting the rights, dignity and integration of the LGBTQI+ community.[91]

LRGs also adopt charters, conventions and agendas that contain gender equality pledges and targets. These include the 2006 European Charter for Equality of Men and Women in Local Life, written by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions; the 2019 Manifesto on the Future of Equality: Beyond Beijing +25,

promoted by UCLG;[92] and the Local Authorities Charter for Gender Equality in Africa, led by UCLG Africa and REFELA (the Network of Locally Elected Women of Africa) and launched in May 2022. These commitment mechanisms bring international norms down to the local level, often pushing LRGs to innovate beyond their country's national-level actions. For example, the USA has yet to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but the Cities for CEDAW movement has persuaded nine cities in the country to adopt CEDAW principles via local ordinances.[93]

Commitments, pledges and targets generate mandates for policy-makers and provide residents, activists and civic organizations with ways to hold policy-makers accountable. They further allow public officials to hold themselves accountable. Through engaging with these and other initiatives, LRGs (a) adopt a feminist or gender perspective, which considers how policies and plans affect people of all genders; (b) practise inclusive, universal design; and/or (c) build institutions that incorporate the voices of women, people of diverse genders and other marginalized groups into decision-making.

Gender-responsive planning as feminist, inclusive and caring

Many LRGs make feminist or gender perspectives central to their planning. This gender mainstreaming often takes the form of gender action plans or gender equality plans, such as the Comprehensive Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality in **Tokyo** (Japan).[94] The 2021-2025 Multi-Annual Action Plan from the Association of **Palestinian** Local Authorities includes a Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan with resources and realistic targets, a Gender Technical Exchange Hub and the recruitment of a gender coordinator who will assist local authorities with implementation.[95] South Africa's 2015-2020 Gender Policy Framework for Local Government promoted and facilitated gender mainstreaming in all localities.[96] **Mexico City** (Mexico) has practised gender budgeting since 2007 and mandated dedicating 17.3% of its 2021 budget to programmes and activities focused on equity and social rights.[97] **Catbalogan** (the Philippines) recently included LGBTQI+ individuals in its revised municipal gender and development ordinance.[98] Other common practices include consultation mandates, as in **Taipei**, which requires that feminist and women's groups be consulted on all environmental and economic policies.[99]

Adopting a gender perspective intersects with inclusive, universal design and inclusive urban and territorial planning. Initiatives such as UN Women's Safe Cities (which now includes over 50 cities) and Cities Alliance's Cities for Women have addressed the male bias in pre-existing urban design.[100] From road construction projects that favour men's travel patterns to the construction of housing complexes without outdoor recreation areas, traditional urban planning approaches lack a gender perspective.[101] Cities such as **Cairo** (Egypt), **Rabat** (Morocco) and **Vienna** (Austria) have integrated gender considerations in the placement of parks, parking garages, housing developments, street lights, crosswalks, bike lanes and bus routes.[102] Famously, **Stockholm** and other Swedish cities adopted a "feminist snow removal policy", which prioritizes clearing sidewalks, bike paths and local access streets first, rather than highways and large surface streets. Since women are more likely than men to walk and use local public transit, feminist snow removal ensures that women can take children to school, visit the market and access their places of work.[103]

Importantly, **while cities may frame their initiatives in different terms – some might highlight universal design and inclusivity while others might highlight feminist perspectives – all these are *caring* approaches**: clearing sidewalks of snow first or improving street lighting benefits not only women but also people with disabilities and older people, among many others. LRGs use participatory processes to design and implement

Institution building for inclusion

LRGs also create institutions to elevate feminist and gendered perspectives. **The design of these institutions takes many different forms, from executive branch ministries to gender equality councils, committees and commissions that provide technical policy advice.** Mexico, Brazil and Argentina have executive branch secretariats (or ministries) for gender equality at the state/provincial and municipal levels. In addition, **São Paulo** (Brazil) has created Women's Citizenship Centres, through which women organize, learn about and defend their rights and oversee the city's efforts towards gender equality.[107] Turkish municipalities have created women's councils: independent and advisory civic agencies that provide opportunities for women to participate in local governance.[108] **Krakow** (Poland) created the Equality Council in 2019, which reviews municipal policies and holds agency heads accountable. This body considers equality across multiple dimensions, including gender and sexuality; notably, it operates in a context where the national government expresses hostility towards progressive gender norms and LGBTQI+ people, providing another example of how LRGs can safeguard the rights of diverse residents.[109]

Ending discrimination and adopting and strengthening gender equality initiatives

All these mechanisms support SDG 5's targets of ending discrimination against women and girls (5.1) and adopting and strengthening gender equality policies (5.c). Still, of the 127 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) examined, only 79 (62%) disaggregated data by gender, and just 67 (53%) mentioned specific policies, programmes or initiatives aimed at gender equality and/or women and girls.[110] Further, reports mainly compared women to men and reviewed programmes that only aim to equalize the status of women to that of men. Such data and efforts are critical, but non-binary and transgender individuals were rarely explicitly mentioned, and gender equality data and efforts are rarely placed in dialogue with other identities. Similar data gaps are noted in SDG reports at the national and world regional level.[111]

VLRs might not reflect the full panorama of LRGs' efforts on gender equality, however.

such policies.[104] In **Los Angeles** (USA), planners use journey mapping, shadowing members of marginalized groups as they access city services in order to help policy-makers identify and address inequities and gaps in access to care.[105] Many of these best practices are shared through international exchange and decentralized cooperation. For instance, associations of local officials in Sweden and **Flanders** (Belgium) support gender mainstreaming in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Benin, respectively.[106]

Silence around intersectionality does not necessarily mean that LRGs are not acting on gender equality and social inclusion. It is important to bring LRGs – especially governments in underrepresented and under-resourced world regions – into the conversation and to support their technical capacities for documentation, reporting and assessment. That said, **VLRs and other international and national reports reveal important efforts towards meeting SDG 5**.

The built environment

Many initiatives – such as universal design and feminist snow-clearing – address infrastructure, the built environment and cities' look and feel. **Mexico City** (Mexico) has prioritized women-headed households' access to new rainwater catchment systems, and **Montevideo** (Uruguay) has prioritized homeless women and women who have experienced domestic violence in housing.[112] **Subang Jaya** (Malaysia) added lactation rooms and parent-child/women's toilets to diverse public spaces.[113] **Helsingborg** (Sweden) has a special learn-to-bike programme for adult migrant women.[114] As part of Turkey's Women-Friendly Cities programme, **Izmir** organized an international equality cartoon contest and displayed the top 100 illustrations on city buses.[115] **Los Angeles** (USA) adopted a Women's Rights Historic Context Statement, which guides the preservation of places associated with women's rights struggles in the city.[116] **Montevideo** (Uruguay) renamed city streets after notable women.[117]

Culture

Changes to the built environment also reflect prioritized cultural values. Broader cultural changes – through programmes, initiatives, events and policies – will enable meaningful progress towards equality for all genders.[118] **Culture includes creativity, innovation and knowledge, but also prejudice, discrimination and exclusionary behaviour that must be overturned through transformative processes.** Across the globe, LRGs are working to increase women's presence and visibility in municipalities and territories, transforming deep-rooted gender norms. Programmes include initiatives framed around the Women's Right to the City and establishing new narratives and roles in schools, museums, city tours and creative engagements, such as the above-mentioned programmes in **Izmir**

(Turkey), **Los Angeles** (USA) and **Montevideo** (Uruguay). LRGs also support arts centres and community centres run by women, as in **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), **Jeonju** (Republic of Korea), **Xi'an** (China) and **Konya** (Turkey).

Education

LRGs have concentrated their efforts on education, with attention to girls from structurally discriminated groups. Giza (Egypt) created classes for under-resourced villages with Arabic-language instruction and mathematics; training in income-generating activities, such as sewing; and seminars about harmful social traditions, violence against women and the risks of early marriage.[119] **Busia County** (Kenya) developed a special programme to help pregnant girls return to school, narrowing the gap in boys' and girls' secondary school enrolment.[120] **Helsinki** (Finland) partnered with Google to bring the *#iamremarkable* coding workshops designed for young girls to city neighbourhoods with high proportions of immigrants and other marginalized groups.[121]

Employment and entrepreneurship

Most VLRs that report on gender equality programmes mention programmes that encourage women's employment and entrepreneurship.[122] Initiatives are wide-ranging. They include programmes and centres that offer workshops, mentorship and training for women in professional and business fields, as well as training, certification schemes and consulting services for businesses seeking to do better at hiring and promoting women. As employers, LRGs commit to non-discriminatory recruitment and to hiring women in traditionally male-dominated fields. **Turku** (Finland) even adopted resume-screening policies that remove information about applicants' gender, in an effort to eliminate unconscious bias.[123] Both **Scotland** (UK) and **Los Angeles** (USA) reported unique programmes to draw women into firefighting.[124]

LRGs also support women's entrepreneurship and women-led businesses through incubators, targeted funding schemes, training programmes and other initiatives. Grants, credit lines or loans with reduced interest rates are found from **Wallonia** (Belgium) and **Pará** (Brazil) to **Kwale County** (Kenya).[125] **Guadalajara** (Mexico) forms business incubators composed of three to five women entrepreneurs, who collectively receive seed funding alongside free legal and business advice.[126] Parallel efforts include changes to public

sector procurement systems that encourage or require LRGs to prioritize women-owned and women-operated businesses as well as businesses operating ethically and sustainably.[127]

Often, employment and entrepreneurship programmes are where LRGs most consistently attend to the intersections of gender and structurally discriminated identities. For example, specialized city services for job-seeking migrant women are found in **Bristol** (UK), **Uppsala** (Sweden) and **Florence** (Italy).[128] Some employment programmes in **Lima** (Peru) give priority to women migrants from Venezuela.[129] In **Taoyuan**, the Vocational Training Centre implements programmes for Indigenous women.[130] In **Pará** (Brazil), the Girandola Project assists women with restraining orders, women who have experienced trafficking, women with a substance abuse disorder and LGBTQI+ individuals to develop entrepreneurial skills and professional qualifications.[131] **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) offers women entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors access to a reduced interest rate credit line, and **São Paulo** (Brazil) prioritizes entrepreneurship workshops and mentoring programmes for low-income women.[132] Other examples involving women market traders are included in Box 4.3.

BOX 4.3

EMPOWERMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR WOMEN MARKET TRADERS

Local governments from the Global South have supported women market vendors and traders. In **Banjul** (the Gambia), the first woman mayor Rohey Malick Lowe created a microfinancing scheme to help homemakers become market traders.[133] Such measures increase women's financial independence and personal autonomy. Similarly, **Accra** (Ghana) devised programmes that help market women become familiar with basic financial management, the city's economic strategies and the processes for obtaining permits.[134] **Freetown** (Sierra Leone) provides free day care to market traders, most of whom are women.[135] **Taita Taveta County** (Kenya) worked with an international organization to trademark the style of baskets woven by local women and set up specialized access to sell these products in markets in Vietnam, Japan and Spain.[136] The Commonwealth Local Government Forum trained women market vendors in rural and urban Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.[137] And in **Victoria Falls** (Zimbabwe), over 700 women are selling wares in the Zhima markets, designated safe spaces that have low operating fees, low tax rates and organized support groups for women artisans.[138]

Valuing women's care work

SDG target 5.4 calls for valuing women's paid and unpaid domestic and care work. Yet **LRGs' support for women's employment and entrepreneurship often means helping women combine paid work and unpaid work, rather than encouraging men to share household responsibilities.**

The fact that municipalities and regions do offer social protection for pregnant women, women-headed households and women with young children remains an important first step. Municipalities worldwide give direct cash assistance and food aid to pregnant women and mothers of young children, in addition to offering subsidized childcare. **Barcelona** (Spain) has municipal babysitting services for single-parent woman-headed households, women who have experienced violence and families without community ties.[139] **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) created a "comprehensive care map" that uses geolocalization to help mobile phone users find the closest of 2,000 public care centres for children, older people and people with disabilities.[140] These are all caring services that place a monetary value on care work and transform care into a public good. Yet, they typically do not upset the gendered and sexual division of labour that makes women primarily responsible for care in the home.

A handful of LRGs are pushing more transformative approaches, however. Public awareness campaigns to encourage parents to share household labour are common, as in **Montevideo** (Uruguay), **Izmir** (Turkey) and **Madrid** (Spain).[141] Another common approach is coordinating and funding activities for fathers' groups, as in **Ghent** (Belgium), **Scotland** (UK) and **Helsingborg** (Sweden).[142] Such programmes shift gender norms about domestic work, but still treat this work as a private good.

Ensuring women's participation in decision-making

Presence in political office

SDG target 5.5 aims to achieve women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. Women lead many prominent global cities, and many localities have elected their first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or non-binary mayor. Still, glass ceilings remain firmly intact. Women represented just 20% of the world's mayors in 2018.[143] **The executive branch in much of the world remains dominated by men, especially men from countries' majority ethnic groups.**

Steadier gains have occurred in the legislative branch. As of January 2020, women comprised 36% of the world's local deliberative bodies – higher than the global average for women's representation in national parliaments.[144] Yet significant variation exists across global regions. In descending order, the proportion of women in local assemblies is as follows: Central and South Asia (41%), North America and Europe (35%), Oceania (32%), Sub-Saharan Africa (29%), East Asia/South-East Asia and Latin America (both at 25%) and West Asia and North Africa (18%).[145]

Nevertheless, regional averages obscure significant differences. Women's high representation in Central and Southern Asia is driven by India, for instance.[146] Similarly, 50% of municipal councillors in Nicaragua

are women, compared to 20% in Paraguay.[147] The urban/rural divide also matters: capital cities such as **Freetown** (Sierra Leone), **Djibouti City** (Djibouti), **Bucharest** (Romania), **Phnom Penh** (Cambodia) and **Bogotá** (Colombia) elect dramatically more women compared to these country's national average.[148] Intersectional data are not widely available, limiting knowledge about the diversity among women in local and regional deliberative bodies.

Positive action for women's access to decision-making

The past few decades have witnessed an emerging international consensus that positive action is required to accelerate women's access to decision-making. Many countries rely on statutory gender quotas to increase women's political representation. Typically, quota laws apply to both national and subnational elections. In Latin America, for instance, ten countries' national-level quota laws also apply to municipal councillors. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico and Peru require gender parity among parties' executive candidates for mayor and, where applicable, for governor.[149] For the 2021 elections, several Mexican states combined the federal gender parity requirement with quotas for other marginalized groups, including Indigenous peoples, LGBTQI+ individuals, Afro-Mexicans and people with disabilities. The quotas reflected an intersectional gender approach, as each structurally

discriminated group's quota needed to be filled with an equal number of men and women.

Where quotas apply to subnational elections, more women are elected compared to where quotas do not apply.[150] Absent statutory quotas, many LRGs set voluntary targets. The 2006 European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life – affirmed in 2016 by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – urges gender-balanced decision-making.[151] The 2007 Quito Consensus calls for Latin American and Caribbean governments to adopt affirmative action for gender parity at all levels.[152] LRGs also set their own targets, which often extend beyond the legislative body to all local councils or committees, as in **São Paulo** (Brazil), **Taipei**, **Scotland** (UK), **Kitakyushu** (Japan) and **Victoria** (Australia).[153] **California** (USA) requires all private sector companies doing business in the state to meet minimum requirements for the proportion of women directors (exact proportions depend on board size).[154]

Supporting, mentoring and training women leaders

Increasing women's representation is not enough. Ensuring that they also have effective power in decision-making requires changing cultural attitudes and eroding the patriarchal and misogynistic beliefs that view public and

political power as incompatible with women and their traditional roles. Progress also requires eliminating the institutional barriers to women's full participation in decision-making, such as practices that tokenize and isolate women leaders, especially those from structurally discriminated groups. Such efforts require working with men party leaders – who often act as gatekeepers to positions of leadership and power – as well as mentoring and supporting women leaders.[155]

LRGs tackle these barriers through programmes such as the UCLG's Global Municipal Feminist Movement.[156] **Women leaders play critical roles in local government, denouncing bad practices and devising policies and tools to confront them.** The women vice-governors of Peru formed a network to combat their marginalization.[157] In the neighbouring Plurinational State of Bolivia, the Association of Bolivian Women Local Councillors (ACOBOL) articulated the concept of "violence against women in politics" (VAWIP) and pushed Bolivia to adopt the world's first anti-VAWIP statute. Today, ACOBOL advocates for women councillors' safety, tracks data on cases of violence and provides legal accompaniment to women seeking justice.[158]

Capacity-building programmes for women aspirants, candidates and officials are another popular tool for challenging and eliminating barriers and for supporting grassroots and other marginalized women to seek office.[159] In Peru, **Lima**'s Commission for Women Adolescent

Leaders has sponsored workshops for over 70,000 girls, in which they discuss their experiences and articulate policy priorities.[160] The Federation of Canadian Municipalities funds leadership training programmes for women seeking local election in Benin, Cambodia, Colombia, Ghana, Peru, Sri Lanka and Zambia.[161] The Commonwealth Local Government Forum provides similar programmes in Eswatini, in collaboration with the Eswatini Local Government Association.[162] Comparable programmes are organized by local government associations in Dominica and the **Basque Country** (Spain).[163] The Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities partners with UN Women and the national gender ministry to place women university graduates as interns in local government.[164] Such programmes can have notable results. For example, Australia Aid helped place women in charge of community development projects in the autonomous region of **Bougainville** (Papua New Guinea). These women's leadership challenged ideas about women's "proper" roles, and many women were later elected as ward representatives. By 2018, half of Bougainville's wards had elected women, while no women held seats in Papua New Guinea's national parliament.[165]

Ending violence against women and girls

SDG target 5.2 calls for ending all violence against and exploitation of women and girls. **Many LRGs address violence against women and girls through right to the city initiatives; awareness-**

raising campaigns; specialized training for local officials, police and public security staff; and social services for survivors, including priority access to employment and housing.[166] LRGs also coordinate their responses across policy sectors and many create specialized bodies – such as observatories, committees or commissions – that gather data and guide multisectoral responses. **Durango** (Mexico) georeferences real-time data to identify high-risk zones and target awareness-raising campaigns and workshops to these areas.[167] **Bogotá** (Colombia) is concerned about fostering more caring masculinities (see Box 4.4).

BOX 4.4
SHIFTING TOWARDS MORE CARING MASCULINITIES

Local governments are increasingly recognizing that achieving gender equality requires shifting traditional, patriarchal notions of masculinity. **Bogotá** (Colombia) is targeting what Latin Americans refer to as *machismo:* norms that conceive masculinity as strength and dominance, rather than helpfulness and caring, and that leave men isolated and ill-equipped to manage their emotions through means other than violence. The *Línea Calma* (Calm Line) helpline[168] connects men to psychological support so they can navigate their emotions and enjoy healthier relationships. Similarly, the city council runs *Hombres al Cuidado* (Men in Care Work) trainings,[169] teaching men to recognize their equal share of responsibility in childcare and domestic chores. Such programmes seek to eliminate gender-based violence and reduce women's care work while encouraging more caring masculinities among men. In these ways, men can also feel supported, engage with the full spectrum of their emotions and act in solidarity with empowered women leaders.

Additional best practices include one-stop-shop models that combine legal support, psychological services and training on sexual health, reproductive rights and economic empowerment. Examples include the Module for Attention to Women in **Iztapalapa**, a Mexico City neighbourhood with high levels of precarity.[170] Specialized police stations and police forces (often solely or mostly staffed by women officers), as well as women's desks within police stations, are found across the globe.[171] Anti-violence services further include intersectional perspectives. In **Kelowna** (Canada), special partnerships between community groups and local police are rebuilding trust in the context of murdered and missing Indigenous women. This rebuilding includes implementing models of community-centred and trauma-informed policing, another example of an inclusive and caring approach.[172]

City governments also tackle violence against women in public spaces and on public transport. They pass ordinances and decrees preventing sexual harassment in public spaces, as in **Montevideo** (Uruguay) and **Quito** (Ecuador).[173] **New Delhi** (India) made transit free for women, simultaneously addressing diverse women's concerns about affordability while increasing the number of women riders and therefore women's perceptions of safety.[174] Across the globe, LRGs raise awareness about harassment on transit, conduct gender-sensitive transit audits, train bus and taxi drivers on anti-harassment measures and design digital reporting apps.[175] These efforts make transit accessible and safer for *all* residents, again capturing the overlap between advancing gender equality and building inclusive and caring places.

Ensuring access to reproductive rights and health

SDG target 5.6 calls upon governments to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Here, **LRGs report prioritizing maternal and infant health and women's cancers through building specialized hospitals and clinics, raising awareness about the importance of testing and screening and implementing home visits for pregnant and postpartum women.** Cities also subsidize women's healthcare, as in **Harare** (Zimbabwe), which distributes vouchers for maternal-child health services to households in the bottom 40% of the income distribution.[176]

How governments support contraception access and sexual health specifically is less clear. While contraception remains critical for women, girls and people of all genders

to make choices about their health and future and determine the number and spacing of possible children, the sensitivity of reproductive choice and menstruation in many cultures and religions contributes to silence and limited action.

LRGs in the Global North are most likely to report initiatives in these areas. Scotland (UK), for instance, ensures that information about long-acting reversible contraception methods is provided during all postpartum home visits.[177] **Addressing period poverty is another trend. Florence** (Italy) eliminated the tax on tampons in municipal pharmacies.[178] **Scotland**, **California** and **New York City** (USA) require that public schools, colleges and universities provide free sanitary products in restrooms for all genders.[179] Many European municipalities place free sanitary products in city buildings, such as recreation areas and libraries.[180]

4.2.3 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SDG 5: FROM CRISIS TO REBUILDING

The gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are well-known and far-reaching, and many stem from the same cause: **the persistent association between care work and women's work, coupled with the devaluing of this work both in the home and in society**. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean estimates that the proportion of time women spent on childcare and home-schooling increased by a greater proportion for women than for men, with a difference of 8.4 and 12.3 percentage points, respectively.[181] Fewer employment opportunities, alongside increased domestic chores and the need to home-school children, meant that women worldwide lost 800 billion USD in earnings in 2020; their employment numbers still have not recovered.[182] Women – especially women from marginalized social groups – are also disproportionately represented among frontline healthcare workers, such as nurses, counsellors and aides. Pandemic-driven insecurity and precarity throughout society have driven an uptick in gender-based violence, which has been termed the "shadow pandemic".[183] Against this backdrop, global data show that the pandemic increased anxiety and major depressive orders in the general population more among women than among men.[184]

Initial responses

In the pandemic's first months, LRGs provided extraordinary forms of emergency support and social protection, approaching inclusivity and care with diligence. They distributed pre-paid debit cards, food baskets and basic medical supplies; increased emergency shelter capacity for homeless people; continued constructing public housing; placed moratoriums on rent hikes and evictions; offered mortgage relief; instituted temporary pay increases for frontline workers; established small-business grant and loan programmes; developed guidebooks and apps to connect residents with services; designed creative ways to deliver school curricula via television, internet and radio; and created mobile and teleservices (such as mobile libraries or tele-counselling).[185] As vaccines became more available, LRGs ensured that vaccine campaigns were equitable and reached older people, people with disabilities, pregnant and postpartum women and migrants.[186]

Even when short-term relief did not explicitly target women, governments' emphasis on inclusive and caring services contributed to

gender equality, as women make up a significant proportion of single parents, older people, individuals experiencing food insecurity, homeless people, people with low or no literacy, digitally disconnected people and people living in poverty (see Box 4.5). **Further, many programmes were intentionally designed with gender equality in mind.** For example, LRGs experimented with boosting cash transfers for women-headed households (as in **Pará**, Brazil) and prioritized women and ethnic minority women as applicants for small-business loans (as in **Mexico City**, regions of Chile and the **London** borough of Hounslow).[187]

Box 4.5
GLOBAL CITIES IN PARTNERSHIP

Six mayors launched the City Hub and Network for Gender Equity, CHANGE, in November 2020: Yuriko Koike (**Tokyo**, Japan), Sadiq Khan (**London**, UK), Eric Garcetti (**Los Angeles**, USA), Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr (**Freetown**, Sierra Leone), Claudia Sheinbaum (**Mexico City**, Mexico) and Ada Colau (**Barcelona**, Spain). CHANGE was planned before the pandemic, but its mid-pandemic launch helped CHANGE tie its gender equality work to COVID-19 response and recovery.[188] The network's gender equity toolkit documents best practices, focusing on the city as an employer, innovator, provider and connector. Exemplary initiatives include gender budgeting in **Mexico City**, gender impact reports in **Barcelona** and human development with a gender lens in **Freetown**.[189] The network, now joined by **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) as a seventh member, meets monthly to review its progress and to develop new initiatives.[190] CHANGE also leads intersectional data-gathering efforts. It is preparing a "voluntary gender review" that assesses members' SDG 5 localization. Separately, Los Angeles is gathering qualitative and quantitative data to assess members' progress in four areas: economic opportunity, physical autonomy (including sexual health, reproductive rights and maternal mortality), local governance and the built environment.[191] This multisectoral approach again demonstrates how integrating gender equality ensures more inclusive and caring cities for all.

Faced with increasing rates of gender-based violence, states and local governments took a wide range of actions. National governments often failed to declare domestic violence services as essential, but many cities did, from **New York City** (USA) to **Abuja** (Nigeria).[192] Many built shelters, such as **Makeuni County** (Kenya), which opened a shelter with men's and women's wings even as the national government converted shelters into quarantine facilities.[193] LRGs devised new ways to reach survivors, such as awareness-raising campaigns (which often addressed survivors of all genders and sexualities), telephone hotlines, new mobile phone reporting apps and WhatsApp messaging to connect people experiencing violence to service providers. The territorial government of Yukon (Canada) – where about one-quarter of the population is Indigenous – provided free mobile phones and four months of free phone and internet service to 325 at-risk women.[194] **Vancouver** (Canada) provided mobile washrooms and free hygiene products, creating safe spaces where LGBTQI+ people, people who use substances, homeless people and sex workers could attend to personal care.[195] Lastly, LRGs increased cash assistance

and moved access to social services, cash grants and judicial proceedings online.[196]

Many LRGs also tackled the issue of women's care work. From **Beşiktaş** (Turkey) to **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), cities launched campaigns encouraging both parents to share housework and childcare responsibilities.[197] The **Basque Country** (Spain) allocated more than 38 million EUR to supporting care work and encouraging co-responsibility in parenting, which included extended parental leave for fathers and mothers and subsidies for carers of children, older people and other dependents.[198] The Basque Country's efforts stand out, as substantial investments are those best poised to have long-term effects. Indeed, **as the pandemic enters its third year, the severity of the care crisis has not lessened, and women continue to shoulder the burden. Many LRGs' initial responses were temporary and are now largely disappearing.** Local and regional leaders are playing critical roles in calling for a feminist, inclusive and caring COVID-19 recovery, but many lack resources to follow through.

Setting the agenda to build back better

LRGs know the pandemic offers an opportunity to "build back better" – to design societies and economies that are more inclusive, just and sustainable.[199] **Women leaders and UCLG have issued a call to action titled Women's Leadership for the Post COVID-19 Era. The call emphasizes recognizing women as political actors, designing policies that upend traditional gendered hierarchies, placing economic value on unpaid care work and ending violence against women.**[200] Similar calls have come from civil society organizations and women's commissions. For instance, in **Hawai'i** (USA), the State Commission on the Status of Women wrote the first feminist COVID-19 recovery plan in April 2020.[201] Over 70% of the Hawaiian population is non-White, including people with Indigenous, Pacific, South Asian and East Asian heritages. The plan – now adopted by four of the five Hawai'i county governments – takes an intersectional approach, outlining the need for investments in the care economy (as well as other sectors) in order to overturn the gendered and racialized hierarchies that make women of colour uniquely exposed to shocks and disasters.

International governmental and non-governmental organizations are likewise championing and providing technical support for a gender-transformative COVID-19 response. UN Women's Generation Equality has formed Action Coalitions – multistakeholder partnerships across governments, civil society and the private sector – which urge actions towards a feminist pandemic recovery.[202] UN Women further crafted its own Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice, in addition to partnering with Mexico to convene a Global Alliance for Care.[203] These plans prioritize economic justice; bodily autonomy, safety and sexual and reproductive health and rights; climate justice; technology and innovation; and feminist leadership. Lastly, UCLG, the UN Capital

Development Fund and UNDP transformed agendas into blueprints by writing the *COVID-19 Gender-Responsive Local Economic Recovery Handbook.*[204] The toolkit guides localities in integrating a gender perspective into policy-making and offers specific policy recommendations to protect women workers in the informal sector and end the care crisis.

Building back better through policy change

How are LRGs converting plans and blueprints into action? First, they are gathering more data. In **Los Angeles** (USA), the city's 2021 VLR introduced a new indicator: the proportion of families struggling to find childcare, disaggregated by income level.[205] Still, of 76 pandemic-era VLRs – meaning VLRs completed in 2020 or 2021 – only 17 (22%) acknowledged how the pandemic exacerbated existing gender inequalities.[206]

Second, **LRGs are earmarking economic recovery funds for women and facilitating women's labour force re-entry.**[207] **Subang Jaya** (Malaysia) helped connect women with a national COVID-19 recovery programme that incentivizes employers to hire people from structurally discriminated groups, including workers who have spent longer periods outside the workforce.[208] In another inclusive and caring approach, some wage increases are becoming permanent. For example, 21 states and several counties in the USA increased their minimum wages at the end of January 2022.[209] These measures boost the well-being of marginalized groups, especially women, who disproportionately hold minimum-wage jobs on the pandemic's frontlines (including in healthcare, emergency response, social services, schools, food service and domestic service).

Still, the focus on wages and returning to work – while caring and intersectional – remains largely unaccompanied by concrete action on domestic work. In **Bogotá** (Colombia) the District System of Care is one notable exception. This system will provide 30 services at the neighbourhood level, such as laundry, childcare, food banks and leisure spaces, therefore allowing women to transfer specific tasks to the municipality. Bogotá will also provide respite services to carers by building community centres that offer support and activities, such as yoga classes, and will send waged workers to homes to complete domestic chores.[210] The District System of Care accompanies a revised district-level development plan that focuses on women's employability and entrepreneurship.[211]

LRGs have also recognized that ending the shadow pandemic requires ending the sexual harassment of women in public as well as private spaces. **Cities across the globe have redoubled their efforts to ensure safe cities and safe and equitable public transit.**[212] These and other anti-gender-based violence policies will endure past the pandemic, such as the new law in **Maranhão** (Brazil) that requires residents of housing complexes to report cases of violence against women, children, teenagers and older people to

the police and the new anti-gender-based violence curriculum for schools in **Rio Grande do Sul** (Brazil).[213] These measures all support the dignity of diverse residents.

In summary, LRGs can only combat COVID-19's effects through feminist, inclusive and caring policies. Yet, in many cases, the removal of emergency social protection measures means losing the supportive approach that characterized initial pandemic responses. Support is largely disappearing despite persistent and even widening gender gaps: for example, women remain outside the formal and informal workforce; girls are returning to school at lower rates than boys; and women and girls have delayed routine medical and reproductive healthcare.[214] **LRGs have recognized the urgency of acting, but they cannot act alone.**[215]

4.2.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LRGs play critical roles in localizing SDG 5 and advancing gender equality through feminist, inclusive and caring practices. The trends and best practices highlighted in this report offer some conclusions and recommendations:

- ■ LRGs use **commitment mechanisms; international, national and regional networks; and shared best practices** to develop and implement diverse actions in support of gender equality.

- ■ Many LRGs do not integrate an **intersectional gender perspective** in their data gathering, planning and reporting. More support and guidance should be provided for LRGs seeking to improve their efforts.

- ■ Progress has been made to localize SDG 5, but **urgent action is required to reach all SDGs**, especially to (a) attain gender parity in decision-making; (b) place an economic value on care work and transform the ideas and practices that associate unpaid care work with women's work; and (c) promote sexual and reproductive health.

- ■ Supporting women's employment and entrepreneurship is a necessary but not sufficient condition for empowering women and transforming the gendered division of labour. **Cultural changes, shifts in masculinities and the promotion of women in leadership** are critical for equality.

- ■ Although LRGs have developed innovative policies to track, respond to and eliminate gender-based violence, such **violence remains an urgent problem**.

- ■ COVID-19 has unravelled gender equality gains, but **recovery strategies provide a window of opportunity to address inequality, precarity and marginalization**. To date, inclusive and caring emergency responses have not translated into long-term policy changes.

- ■ The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the urgency of **adopting transformative policies for remunerated care work and the provision of care work through public services** funded and managed by governments.

- ■ National governments and international governmental and non-governmental organizations can **strengthen the enabling environments that help LRGs** carry out their work. National governments can **provide frameworks** and funding for local and regional government actions.
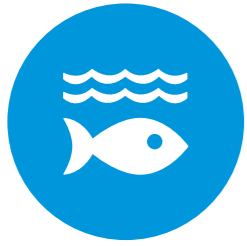
4.3 LOCALIZING SDG 14: CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.3.1 INTRODUCTION
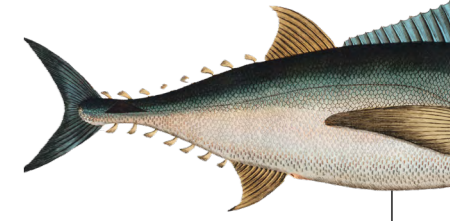
SDG 14 – Life Below Water – focuses on conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources, including coastal zones at the land-sea interface, for sustainable development. This goal draws attention to human interactions with these resources, especially in coastal cities and territories. Oceans, seas and coastal areas are subject to pollution, overexploitation and climate change impacts such as warming, coastal erosion, sea level rise, ocean acidification, deoxygenation and changes in marine and coastal biodiversity. These hazards have substantially damaged ecosystems across the globe and, in some cases, led to irreversible losses, compromising the services these ecosystems provide. The careful management of these global resources is essential to guarantee the planet's future – and that of our cities, as many of them are in coastal areas.

LRGs have a key role to play in approaching marine life, particularly with regard to the impact of urban growth and of solid and liquid waste discharges into coastal areas and the oceans.[216] After all, experts suggest that, by 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in marine waters.[217] The source of so much garbage is known: even if they are not coastal, our cities and territories – particularly due to

their disposal of waste and the discharge of sewage – deteriorate water resources such as rivers, whose final destination is the ocean. As the government level closest to the population, LRGs must transform the way their population uses and consumes natural resources, a theme that SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production – also addresses.

With so much attention focused on COVID-19, the UN has warned countries around the world about the dangers of losing sight of the SDGs.[218] Framed within SDG 14 efforts, raising the alarm about threats to marine ecosystems' sustainability is critical in light of the current situation:[219]

- About 680 million people live in coastal areas, and this figure is expected to increase to one billion by 2050.

- Many coastal cities may disappear from the map. As a result of global warming, sea levels have risen about 20 cm since 1880 and are projected to increase by another 30-122 cm by 2100.

- An estimated 40% of the world's oceans are highly affected by human activities, including pollution, depleted fisheries and loss of coastal habitats.

- Coastal waters are deteriorating due to pollution and eutrophication. Without targeted efforts, coastal eutrophication is expected to increase by 20% in large marine ecosystems by 2050.

- Marine fishing directly or indirectly employs more than 200 million people. However, fish catch levels are close to the oceans' production capacity, with 80 million tons of fish caught per year.

- Worldwide, the annual market value of marine and coastal resources and industries is 3 trillion USD, or about 5% of global GDP.

- The ocean is crucial for climate change mitigation as it absorbs more than 90% of excess heat from the climate system.

SDG 14 and its targets cover most of the anthropogenic pressures in coastal and marine environments (in particular, targets 14.1: Marine pollution; 14.3: Ocean acidification; and 14.4: Overfishing), as well as the necessary measures to mitigate those pressures and ensure sustainable development. This includes efforts in the coastal communities of small island developing states

(SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), which are particularly dependent on the oceans and thus especially experience negative socio-economic impacts (targets 14.2: Management, protection and restoration; 14.5: Conservation; 14.6: Fishing regulation; 14.7: SIDS and LDCs; 14.a: Scientific knowledge; 14.b: Small-scale fishing; and 14.c: International law).

Most of these targets cannot be measured in quantitative terms because data are still missing.[220] According to the OECD, among the outcome targets, only target 14.5 ("By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas") is quantifiable,[221] while targets 14.1, 14.2, 14.3 and 14.7 are partly or poorly quantifiable. In addition, target 14.5 is now recognized as insufficiently ambitious, with growing support for conserving at least 30% (instead of 10%) of coastal and marine areas by 2030 while recognizing and safeguarding Indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights to coastal resources.[222]

Oceans in general and SDG 14 in particular have a cross-cutting role in the 2030 Agenda, with SDG 14 interacting more or less strongly with all 16 other SDGs.[223] Therefore, this report section also addresses interactions with other SDGs (e.g. SDGs 4, 6, 11, 15 and 17).

In such a multidimensional context, the following section focuses on how LRGs have adopted policies, plans, incentives and strategies to protect the global commons. Specifically, LRGs are responsible for a series of actions that address at least five of the above-mentioned SDG 14 targets: 14.1 (Marine pollution), 14.2 (Management, protection and restoration), 14.5 (Conservation), 14.7 (SIDS and LDCs), and 14.b (Small-scale fishing). As the effects of human activities and urbanization transcend city boundaries, special attention will be paid to the policies implemented by regional governments, intermediary cities and small towns to apply territorial approaches to ecosystem conservation. Likewise, urban-ocean linkages are explored in more depth, with specific consideration of the direct and indirect water flows coming from urban centres that eventually end up in the ocean.

4.3.2 LOCALIZATION STATUS OF SDG 14: TRENDS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The importance of regional approaches to protecting oceans through human activities governance and management has been recognized for almost 50 years. In 1974, the Regional Seas Programme was launched. Since then, it has been implemented by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) or by independent entities in coastal and marine regions across the global ocean.[224] A recent assessment of this Regional Seas Programme stated that even though the overall programme has achieved significant impacts, including pollution prevention and coastal zone management, implementation varies greatly from region to region.[225] Among other reasons, this variation is due to limited stakeholder ownership, meaning the involvement of local governments and communities that, most of the time, are poorly aware of the corresponding Regional Sea Convention and its specific action plans.

Yet, many local initiatives exist, as evidenced by the Communities of Ocean Action launched in June 2017 at the UN Ocean Conference in New York.[226] As of late 2020, more than 1,600 Voluntary Commitments to advance SDG 14 have been registered.[227] Interestingly, an in-depth analysis of these commitments includes a discussion on their linkages with the Call for Action adopted by the Ocean Conference participants.[228] Besides highlighting the integrated nature of SDGs and their targets, and thus the need for involving all stakeholders including LRGs, the Call for Action additionally focuses on the impacts of climate change and the connection between SDG 14 and the Paris Agreement – a topic that is not as strongly reflected in the SDG 14 targets.

The uneven crafting of "integrated coastal zone management"

Since the Rio Summit of 1992, many countries have been implementing, in one way or another, integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) practices as a means to promote the sustainable use, development and protection of coastal environments and resources. With increasing climate change pressures, the policy and institutional relationship between ICZM and climate change adaptation is becoming increasingly strong.

As population growth and urbanization advance at an unabated speed, the way in which coastal cities and smaller secondary cities are managed becomes essential to the health of coastal and marine areas and, consequently, human health. While dealing with water quality (e.g. sewage treatment), waste management and biodiversity protection (e.g. marine protected areas or MPAs, locally managed marine areas), but also with construction, port activities and agriculture, among others,[229] municipal authorities are responsible for the provision of key municipal services which can support or undermine coastal and maritime activities – what are now called "blue economy" sectors (see also "Creating sustainable blue economies" below).

More specifically, ports are crucial not only to national GDP but also to their host cities' socio-economic development. Coastal areas, including cities, are key to the tourism sector in many countries. Fishing provides an important source of livelihood to fishers from coastal villages and cities and to people engaged in fish processing and value addition. **Increasingly, in the name of the blue economy, coastal cities are addressing service provision challenges alongside or as part of specific blue economy instruments such as ICZM and maritime spatial planning.**

Within politically and socially unstable contexts, the need for continued efforts is especially important. Sustained funding in developed countries contrasts with the current practice in many low-income countries, in which coastal management at all spatial scales tends to be designed and administered as short-term "projects". Especially among people in poverty who rely directly upon local resources for their livelihoods, stewardship practices are appealing as long as the required behaviour changes are perceived as fair and do not constrain people to the point that their quality of life is reduced rather than sustained or enhanced.[230] This suggests that local coastal management initiatives must be embedded at all scales and incrementally integrated into larger frameworks such as the UNEP Regional Seas Programme[231] or the Global Environment Facility's Large Marine Ecosystem Approach.[232]

COVID-19: Socio-economic losses versus environmental benefits

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore complex interconnections between humans and social-ecological systems, as well as health and coastal governance in an age of climate and global change.[233] Indeed, one of the biggest challenges in implementing SDG 14 is improving governance to enable the efficient implementation of integrated maritime policies, involving all stakeholders and government levels through vertical and horizontal coordination and cooperation. Overall, during COVID-19, local governments have innovated and

applied lessons from past disasters; however, their ability to undertake these efforts varies significantly depending on their capacities, including both human and fiscal resources.[234]

Significantly impacted local economic activities: Coastal tourism and small-scale fisheries

COVID-19 has abruptly impacted all dimensions of society, including coastal activities and their management. The time pressure and the unpredictable spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has required LRGs to take appropriate measures to reduce and avoid contagion risks. Fear of infection, as well as travel and meeting restrictions, has dramatically reduced the use and revenues of coastal areas, especially tourist beaches, resulting in severe impacts on local economies. In response, local governments have introduced measures based on coastal risk mapping. For example, in the province of **Taranto** (Italy),[235] in the two municipalities of **Maruggio** and **Torricella**, the entire coast was classified according to three COVID-19 risk levels: low, medium and high.[236]

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased incidence of poverty and food crises, especially in relation to agriculture and fisheries. For small-scale fishers, among others, the decrease in the price of fish led to restrictions on the catch per unit effort and, hence, restrictions for fishers themselves and their families. For example, in the Davao Gulf (Mindanao Island, Philippines), the

restricted access to fishing was found to result in an important setback for fishing operations by fishers and middlepersons given the low fish price and fish traders' reduced mobility.[237]

Efforts by national and local governments, social organizations and small-scale fishers themselves to bolster local food networks have also been observed,[238] with many reporting increases in local sales initiatives around the globe, such as short-circuits and direct sale schemes, internet selling, door-to-door deliveries and community-supported fisheries. **Local and national governments, development organizations, scientists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the small-scale fisheries sector and local communities need to come together to strengthen local aquatic food systems and push for long-term shifts in distribution channels, such as shortening supply chains.**

Environmental benefits

On a different note, due to COVID-19 mitigation measures, the overall reduction in human activities has positively impacted coastal and marine environments. A well-known example, covered heavily by the media, are the **Venice** canals (Italy), which have seen a spectacular improvement in water clarity due to the drastic reduction in water traffic and consequent stirring up of sediment. The improved water clarity and dramatic decrease in noise led to the reappearance of small fishes, crabs,

jellyfish and seaweeds within the canals. The same kind of observation has been made for open sea and port areas. In the case of Ecuador, surveys have shown that beach zones (sand and coastal water) at two very popular beaches and two port sites (**Galapagos**) notably improved during the period of confinement, with aquatic species including small pelagic fish, marine mammals, sharks and turtles reappearing.[239]

However, such observed positive environmental impacts have been temporary due to the quick resuming of human activities. Nevertheless, these quickly acquired positive impacts clearly demonstrate the benefits that could be obtained from efficient rules, regulations and governance regimes.[240] The reduction in contamination on beaches and in coastal waters has been seen globally where quarantine measures existed. For the first time in modern history, many coastlines have developed features of MPAs. Recovering from COVID-19 and its social, economic, health and environmental consequences should thus be seen as an opportunity to reshape tourism and coastal fisheries management plans in the framework of ICZM, including cultural awareness of environmental quality.

The case of SIDS and local communities' economies

Although the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic across SIDS has been less severe in terms of health recovery than in the rest of the world, these countries' economies appear to have experienced more severe repercussions compared to the economies of other marginalized countries such as LDCs.[241] SIDS' economies are largely ocean economies. They are based on exploiting marine resources (oil, gas and sand/coral reef material), as well as using coastal areas and oceans for tourism, education and shipping. These economies may also include new activities such as offshore wind, marine aquaculture and, possibly in the future, seabed mining for metals and minerals and marine biotechnology. Among these, the most prominent sectors are currently land- and sea-based tourism and fisheries.

Recovery packages should therefore focus more specifically on transforming the tourism sector. The current touristic practices are embedded in a form of mass tourism which generates large environmental impacts due to the overuse of already rare local resources (e.g. water) and waste generation (used waters, macro-wastes), putting coastal habitats (seagrasses, mangroves, coral reefs) under pressure. For instance, the OECD estimates that 85% of the Caribbean region's wastewater enters the ocean untreated due to lack of infrastructure.[242] To be efficient, existing or future strategies and plans for sustainable tourism that set clear targets and requirements such as those related to zoning, protected areas and environmental rules and regulations will have to be implemented through alliances between local and national governments and communities.
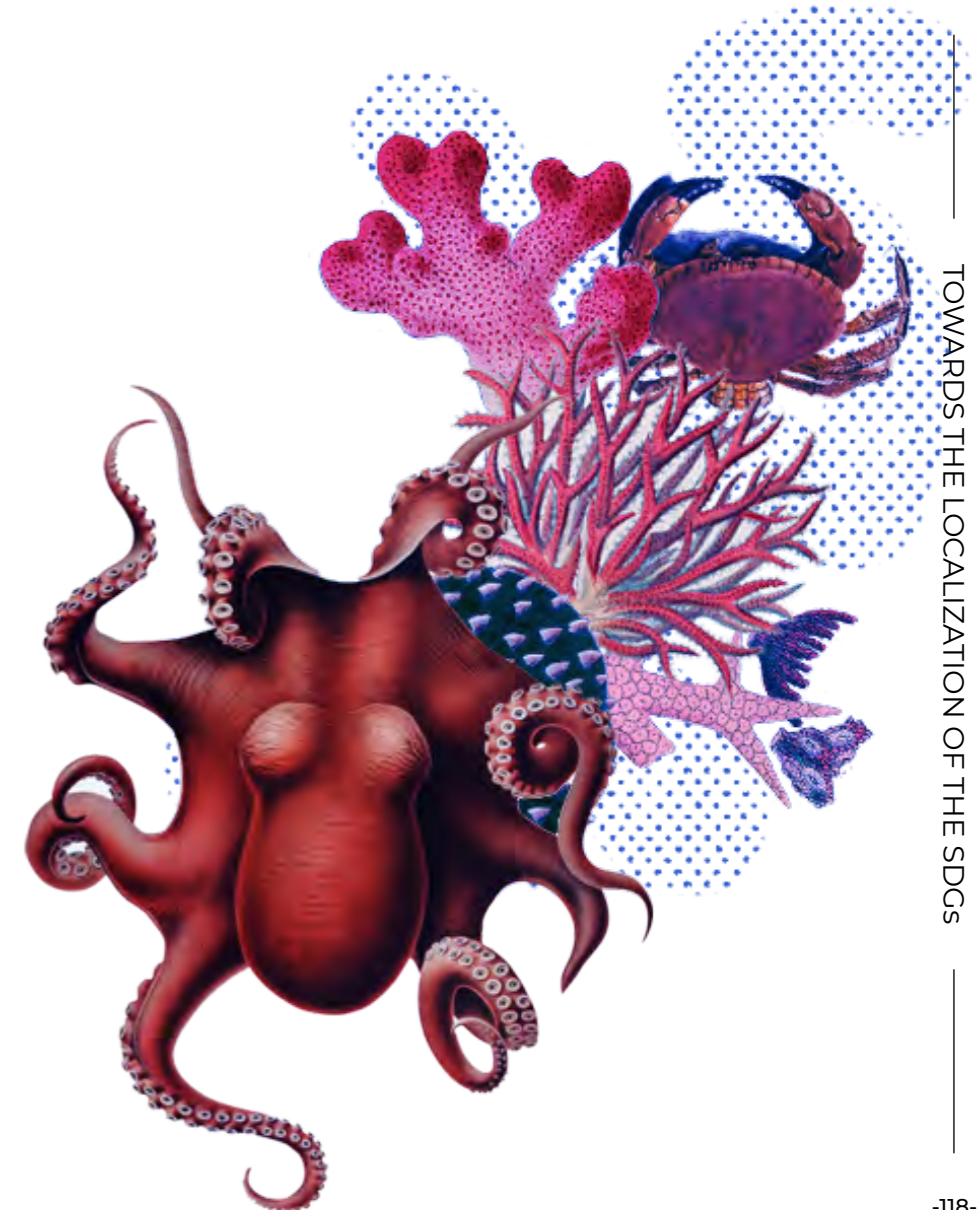
Protecting oceans and coasts and managing human activities that impact them is not just the responsibility of coastal towns and cities since any urban/industrial activity along the watershed can affect these areas. Therefore, the roles of LRGs, depending on their geographic and jurisdictional context, cover a large array of activities directed at achieving the SDG 14 targets.

Addressing coastal and marine pollution (SDG target 14.1)

Ocean sustainability is directly linked to sustainable water management (SDG 6). Preventing marine pollution contributes to improving water quality and vice versa. Oceans and seas are major sources of water in the hydrological cycle and therefore require integrated water management that addresses the multiplicity of stakeholders along the water basin. Among the many examples of local efforts in that direction, one of the most impressive is the case of the **Istanbul metropolitan municipality** (Turkey). Through its water enterprise ISKI, this municipality improved its water infrastructure, which includes 88 wastewater treatment plants (5.8 million m^3 capacity) and 21 potable water treatment plants (4.5 million m^3 capacity). This was done following the very comprehensive Water Investment Programme (2020-2023) to recycle and reuse wastewater.[243] Among other small-town initiatives, through its

actions to simultaneously limit wastewater input into the sea and reuse it for domestic purposes, the local government in **Les Sables-d'Olonne** (France) is developing a system to transform its wastewater into drinking water. The first drops are expected in 2024, but seaside resorts in Brittany and the Mediterranean (which have little or no groundwater and where water shortages could become very acute, especially in the South) are already eyeing the lessons of this project.[244]

About 65% of all megacities worldwide are located in coastal areas, which implies a direct relation between ocean sustainability and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). Coastal cities and urbanized areas are key hotspots for runoff, including plastic (macro and micro), into rivers and sewage networks. To raise awareness about the devastating impacts of everyday habits on the sea, The Sea Starts Here initiatives to improve waste recycling are being implemented in different LRGs in all regions, such as in **San José** and **Desamparados** (Costa Rica),[245] in **Chiclana** and the district of Sarrià-Sant Gervasi in **Barcelona** (Spain)[246] and in the municipalities of **Collioure**, **Saint-Malo** and **Rouen** (France)[247] amongst many others.

Addressing the systematic challenge of waste management is not just about coastal and marine pollution but also about creating valuable co-

benefits for cities in terms of climate, health, jobs and the environment. Besides encouraging individual cities' initiatives, the Resilient Cities Network, in partnership with Ocean Conservancy and the Circulate Initiative, launched the Urban Ocean programme in June 2020 at the World Economic Forum's Virtual Ocean Dialogues.[248] This programme brings together ocean advocates, technical experts and city leaders/administrators to develop comprehensive solutions that meet the needs and priorities of coastal urban communities. It started with a first cohort of four cities that are leading the way in the fight against river and ocean plastic pollution and/or in implementing circular economy approaches (mentor cities) and five cities located in geographies with high waste leakage rates that are committed to improving waste management as part of resilience-building efforts (learning cities).[249] The currently involved cities are **Cần Thơ** (Vietnam), **Melaka** (Malaysia), **Pune** and **Chennai** (India), **Semarang** (Indonesia), **Toyama** (Japan), **Christchurch** (New Zealand), **Panama City** (Panama), **Milan** (Italy), **Rotterdam** (the Netherlands) and **Vejle** (Denmark). There are three distinct delivery stages: (a) a gap assessment to analyze shortcomings and opportunities within the cities' respective waste management systems; (b) proposal design, which pairs learning cities with a network of five mentor cities selected for their experience and expertise in waste management;

and (c) an accelerator summit to help cities structure implementation and action plans for their project ideas (project finances, corporate partners, funders).[250]

Marine litter, and especially plastics, is a worldwide problem,[251] not only on the coast but in the middle and deep ocean as well. Hence, many local initiatives are being implemented, most often through local NGOs supported by local governments. Such is the case in **Vilanculos** (Mozambique), a small city located along the Indian Ocean.[252] In this city, a co-managed initiative established eco-points in the city, where plastic waste material is collected at cost by waste pickers, local residents and organizations. The material is sorted, processed and sent to recyclers within and outside Mozambique. In total, the initiative has enabled collecting six tons of waste material that has now been recycled. Consequently, the marine ecosystem has drastically improved due to the initiative's activities, including regular beach clean-up exercises by young people and waste pickers.

Adaptation to climate change coastal impacts (SDG target 14.2)

Nowadays, LRGs are particularly concerned with the development and implementation of effective adaptation measures as a response to sea level rise, flooding and coastal erosion, including the management and restoration of natural defences such as seagrasses, mangroves, coral reefs, tidal marshes and dunes.[253] More and more, LRGs consider risks, including climate change, as contributing to cumulative impacts and, as such, include them in their overall coastal management and adaptation plans. Strengthening the resilience of ocean and coastal ecosystems by reducing pollution (14.1), restoring these ecosystems' health (14.2), tackling ocean acidification (14.3), managing fish stocks sustainably (14.4, 14.6) and protecting coastal and marine areas and biodiversity (14.5) helps strengthen the overall resilience and adaptive capacity of coastal systems to climate change (13.1).

More specifically, as recalled in the IPCC's latest report of 2022:

> Responses to ongoing sea level rise and land subsidence in low-lying coastal cities and settlements and small islands include protection, accommodation, advance and planned relocation [...]. These responses are more effective when combined/or sequenced, planned well ahead, aligned with sociocultural values and development priorities, and underpinned by inclusive community engagement processes [...].[254]

Effectively, this means they must largely involve LRGs. Cities such as **Rotterdam** or **Amsterdam** (the Netherlands), for example, with several areas below sea level, are exchanging ideas with **Jakarta** (Indonesia), **Hồ Chí Minh City** (Vietnam), and **New York** and **New Orleans** (USA) to strengthen cities' resilience to the sea level rise and improve water management, as well as to innovate and find social and technical solutions.[255]

Coastal ecosystems provide a high number of valuable benefits to humans, including raw materials and food, coastal protection, erosion control, water purification, maintenance of fisheries, carbon sequestration, tourism, recreation, education and research. The global decline in estuarine and coastal ecosystems is affecting a number of critical benefits or ecosystem services. By 2025, nearly six billion people will live within 200 km of a coastline.[256] Population growth and climate change-related impacts such as sea level rise and storm surges are increasing coastal risks and degrading coastal ecosystems. People and nature are becoming increasingly vulnerable.

Only with healthy ecosystems can we enhance people's livelihoods, counteract climate change and stop biodiversity collapse. As one example of many existing initiatives, the port and city of **Bellingham County** (Washington State, USA) are engaged in a long-term process to redevelop about 96 ha of the Bellingham waterfront over the course of 50 years.[257] In 2018, a new park beach's design accounted for 73 cm of sea level rise. Other jurisdictions have recognized that future impacts of sea level rise on private septic and public wastewater systems

are relatively unknown and that vulnerability assessments should be carried out to better understand the threat to these systems.

Among the key elements of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement (which entered into force in 2016) are conserving and enhancing sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases (Art. 5) and establishing mechanisms to contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gases (Art. 6). These elements have strong synergistic links to targets 14.2 and 14.5 when considering the overlooked and enormous potential of coastal ecosystems as carbon sinks and the need to protect, conserve, restore and enhance this potential. There are many initiatives around the world in this regard, especially those on the replanting and conservation of seaweeds and mangroves in tropical areas. For instance, **Maharashtra State** (India), which has 720 km of coastline and 30,000 ha of mangroves, a third of which are in the metropolitan city of **Mumbai** and its suburbs, succeeded in increasing the mangrove cover of Maharashtra by 63% as of 2017.[258]
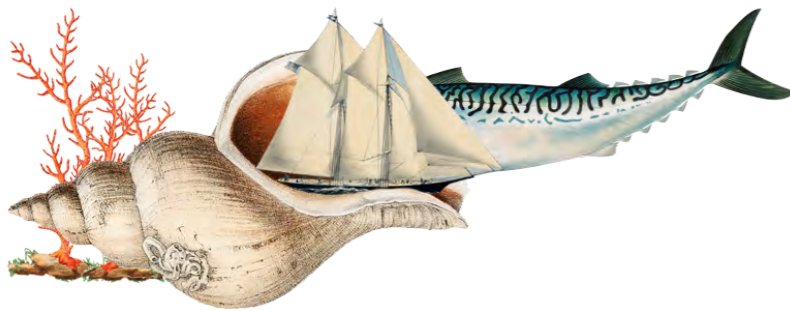
Advancing area-based management and protection tools for communities, ecosystems and the climate (SDG targets 14.2 and 14.5)

As seen above, healthy oceans and coasts help reduce vulnerability to climate hazards whilst they benefit small-scale fishers, improve coastal and maritime tourism revenue and increase potential for blue carbon markets.[259] ICZM and the protection of coastal ecosystems reinforce the achievement of various SDG 11 targets, including the safeguarding of coastal natural heritage (e.g. coastal wetlands). Therefore, strong local governments and urban institutions, as well as coherent policymaking and governance across administrative and jurisdictional boundaries, are essential for formulating integrated solutions and implementing them effectively.

As an example, the Barcelona Convention's Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (2011, a result of the UNEP Regional Seas Programme's efforts) sets governance objectives for countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, emphasizing collaborative approaches to acknowledge the role of local people and authorities in coastal management, including in wetlands such as the Camargue in southern France and the Gediz Delta in Turkey.[260]

The Camargue is one of the largest wetlands in the Mediterranean basin and is of international importance for waterbird breeding, staging and wintering.[261] The Natural Regional Park of the Camargue encompasses more than 80,000 ha

within the central delta, with about 15,000 ha set aside for restricted use. Long-term cultural values of this delta are reflected in the population's socio-economic activities, which include horticulture, agriculture, livestock production, hunting, fishing, tourism and salt production. The system of governance consists of tri-party management by a local mixed syndicate (composed of national and local governmental representatives, private businesses and civil society) and two local NGOs. The Camargue was previously characterized by large and influential private landowners; however, progressively more wetland area has been allocated to public ownership.

The Gediz Delta, adjacent to Izmir, is also among the most important wetlands of the Mediterranean region. The delta extends over 40,000 ha and includes a range of natural habitats. As in the Camargue, the delta is a Ramsar site and an "Important Bird Area". Significant socio-economic activities include salt production, fishing and agricultural production. The daily management of the reserve is undertaken by a governmental union formed by local municipalities. Hence, local governance approaches and existing local socio-cultural values are of the utmost importance for the success of any ICZM framework, such as the Mediterranean ICZM protocol.

Locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) are areas of nearshore waters that are collaboratively managed by resident communities with local government and partner organizations. They have developed in

many regions, particularly in LDCs and SIDS, such as in the South Pacific.[262] In this region, Melanesia and Polynesia have seen an impressive increase in the number of conservation and management areas over the last two decades. **The application of community-based coastal resource management with the support of local governments is the common thread. Traditional knowledge and resource ownership, combined with a local awareness of the need for immediate action in a fast-changing environment (climate change), are frequently the starting points for these co-management ventures.**

Fiji has shown an impressive rate of LMMA expansion supported by a national network of NGOs and local governments: more than 200 villages spread across the country's 14 provinces have established community-based management measures. The Cook Islands, like many of the Polynesian states, has a number of traditional forms of tapu known as "rahui" that have been maintained or reintroduced in combination with Western-like protected area systems. In 1999, Samoa set up a Village Fisheries Management Programme engaging a total of 85 sites or communities/local governments; 20 years later, some 40-50 are considered to be still active.

The potential of the Pacific Islands experience goes far beyond achieving international goals (the Convention on Biological Diversity) of "representative networks of marine protected areas"[263] (SDG target 14.5) but rather shows the importance of promoting at the local level an integrated coastal (or island) ecosystem-based management approach that addresses livelihood development (including fisheries and tourism) and conservation as a whole.[264] Rather than considering MPAs alone, these experiences show that watershed impacts, global impacts, generalized unsustainable marine resource use and increasing population and social pressures are threats that have a better chance of being mitigated through integrated and wide-ranging approaches based on co-management and extended through networks and linkages to other stakeholders and local authorities at various locations and scales.

Creating sustainable blue economies (SDG target 14.7)

While designating parts of marine and coastal areas for protection might constrain options for jobs and growth in some cases, it may help generate jobs and growth opportunities in others. **Tackling marine pollution by improving waste management and increasing recycling (of materials such as plastic, as seen above) can enable a shift to a circular economy, hence contributing to what many countries and organizations call nowadays the "blue economy". This represents a policy tool or means to drive economic growth and create jobs on the coast and at sea** (SDG targets 8.1 and 8.5). Focused on revitalizing the economy, the blue economy encompasses seaside tourism, fisheries, sand and mineral dredging, aquaculture, construction, transportation, shipbuilding and renewable energies, among other activities, all of direct interest to LRGs. Blue economy development in the framework of maritime spatial planning is part of a complex web of coastal and marine governance, including ICZM, MPAs and LMMAs, providing planning across several scales of government.

In the Western Indian Ocean, mainland African countries and SIDS are at varying stages of blue economy strategy development in the framework of maritime spatial planning, with Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa and Kenya currently being the most advanced. In Kenya, development of the Blue Economy Sector Plan (2018-2022), part of the broader Kenya Vision 2030, was led by the State Department for Fisheries, Aquaculture and the Blue Economy.[265] In that overall framework, maritime spatial plans are being created by coastal county governments with support from actors, including the World Wildlife Federation and the EU-funded Co Blue Programme,[266] and implemented through the regional economic bloc of coastal counties, Jumuiya Ya Kaunti za Pwani. Kenya has six MPAs and 24 LMMAs, including the **Mombasa** and **Malindi** marine reserves.[267] These MPAs are not only important to conserve marine ecosystems but also to provide valuable socio-economic benefits (entry fees for visitors, boat operators) for the cities to which they are adjacent.

Sustainable blue economies will have to integrate subnational and local biodiversity strategies

and Action Plans, which are increasingly being developed at state, provincial, territorial, local and city levels.[268] Among others, the current **North Ayrshire** Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2019-2031 (Scotland) brings together a variety of stakeholders, including government and statutory agencies, local authorities, farmers and landowners, voluntary conservation organizations, businesses, educators and local communities, to develop a coastal management vision including the establishment of a network of MPAs and a Local Environmental Records Centre for monitoring the plan's impacts and assessing whether priorities need to change over time.[269]

Boosting the blue economy requires the creation of strong alliances between regional and local governments, economic sectors, the scientific community and civil society.[270] In some regions, spaces have already been created to institutionalize the principle of co-management, in which all the stakeholders responsible for boosting the blue economy participate. This is the case of the region of **Catalonia** (Spain), where the creation of the Maritime Co-Management Committee was approved in 2021.[271] Among its other duties, this committee supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Catalonia, especially SDG 14 and other goals that may have an impact on the marine environment.[272]

Small-scale artisanal fishers' access to marine resources and markets (SDG target 14.b)

Small-scale fishers' access to marine resources and markets depends on the form of local governance (fishing rights) and involves the strengthening of capacity building and technical assistance provided to small-scale and artisanal fishers. Actions to enable and enhance their access address auction infrastructure facilities, traceability, certification and ecolabelling, as well as access to market-based instruments for fishing communities.

Small-scale fisheries support the livelihoods of many coastal communities around the world. However, these fisheries face growing threats such as overfishing, competition with industrial fleets, water pollution, destruction of fish habitats and an increasing human population and demand for land and food in coastal areas.[273] **For decades, co-management of small-scale fisheries has developed as a response to these threats and challenges, promoting the joint management of fisheries' resources by direct users, local governments and other actors**.[274] For example, the **Pandeglang Regency** Fishery Office (Indonesia) has the duty to carry out local government tasks in the field of fishery based on the principle of autonomy. These tasks include (a) sharing information on the impact of using a prohibited trawl on the sustainability of fish availability in the area; (b) establishing an exchange post of fishing equipment;

(c) conducting, together with the marine police, raids and arrests of fishing boats still using illegal fishing gear; and (d) providing assistance intended to increase the amount of fish caught to meet market needs, fishing gear and ship workshops, outboard motors for boats and fish processing equipment.[275] Another example is the island of **Hainan**, which has the largest sea area in China with 13 coastal cities (counties), a population of 414,000 fishers and an estimated 25,000 fishing vessels, of which 80% are small-scale fishing vessels (less than 12 metres long).[276] To tackle overexploitation, some local governments have implemented more stringent protection measures for fishery resources in addition to national regulations.

It is also worth mentioning that a global local government network promoting small-scale fisheries was launched on World Ocean Day in 2021.[277] The so-called "Coastal 500" aims to unite 500 mayors and local government leaders with a common pledge for ensuring food and economic security for coastal communities by sustainably managing coastal ocean water – more specifically, managing living resources through small-scale fishing. The launch event gathered more than 250 participants, including local leaders representing over 100 coastal municipalities from eight countries (Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Mozambique, Indonesia, Philippines, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia).

4.3.4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section has illustrated how LRGs have been working, sometimes in a very innovative way, for years on many targets related to SDG 14 and other interrelated SDGs. Yet, in order to make the monitoring and evaluation of SDG 14 (like many other SDGs) more accurate, there must be a much sharper focus on enhancing the roles and capacities of LRGs by strengthening awareness and providing more technical and financial support and resources to fulfil their critical responsibilities. In the domain of coast, seas and ocean, this support may come from countries themselves but also from well-established regional frameworks such as the UNEP Regional Seas Programme or the Global Environment Facility's Large Marine Ecosystem Approach,[278] in collaboration with the private sector and civil society.

In June 2020, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments made a statement on planetary urbanization and life below water in favour of an integrated localization of global agendas:

> We acknowledged the pertinence of our local and regional governments, especially intermediary cities and small towns, to a sustainable development model. In accordance with SDG 14 on Life Below Water, it is fundamental that we also stress the presence of 'urban-ocean' linkages.[279]

The goal for healthy and sustainable coasts, seas and oceans is a human and biodiversity right that requires human beings to "live in harmony with Nature".[280] This statement and the above developments clearly show that LRGs' policies for development, constrained by limited means, must take advantage of the close interactions of SDG 14 with the other SDGs to contribute efficiently to the 2030 Agenda. The following recommendations, far from being exhaustive, focus on the strongest interlinkages between SDG 14, its specific targets and other SDGs:

Avoid, reduce and compensate coastal and marine pollution in line with SDG target 14.1 and SDGs 6, 11, 12 and 15.

Sustainable production and consumption, sustainable management of natural resources, recycling and the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste are crucial to prevent coastal and marine pollution.

■ Develop integrated policies and action plans on used waters and marine litter, including plastics.

■ Promote circular economies and improve recycling (e.g. used waters, plastics) along the entire value chain, including streamlining the prevention of plastic into policies related to consumption and production.

Commit to the ecological transition, living in harmony with nature, to face climate change in line with SDG targets 14.2 and 14.7 and SDG 13.

Actions taken for promoting healthy marine and coastal systems will enable or even reinforce the development and integration of climate change measures into policies, planning and management.

■ Promote coastal ecosystems as blue carbon systems for climate change mitigation where appropriate.

■ Provide and sustain capacity building and support, especially for LDCs and SIDS, to develop and implement climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

■ Ensure the adequate sharing of information, data and technologies within and between LRG clusters and networks.

Collaborate with communities and stakeholders in co-creation processes to define common actions to protect coastal and marine ecosystems in line with SDG targets 14.2, 14.5 and 14.b and SDG 1.

The vulnerability of poor and marginalized coastal and island communities in LDCs and SIDS must be put at the centre of local political agendas as they are disproportionately exposed to and likely to

suffer the most from changes in the coastal and marine environments that directly and indirectly support their livelihoods. Protection, restoration and management of critical coastal and marine habitats are critical levers for improving their livelihoods and reducing risks related to extreme climate events. Territorial disparities in exposure to climate change disruptions are mainly a concern for small island and coastal communities, but also for coastal cities' urban areas and informal settlements in less developed regions.

- Raise local communities' awareness of the importance of sustainably using coastal and marine resources for their livelihoods and sustainable income.

- Encourage and sustain forms of collaboration with local communities, in particular for the co-management of small-scale fishing, from production to local distribution, including value retention (e.g. cold storage) and addition (processing sites and markets).

- Expand the use of traditional and new forms of LMMAs and MPAs as tools for sustainable coastal and marine governance/planning in, or near to, small but rapidly growing urban areas.

- Ensure that income from tourist-related activities filters down to local communities, rather than solely benefiting international operators.

Sustainably develop and protect coastal areas and islands to enhance human well-being whilst strengthening territorial cohesion and the land-sea continuum in line with SDG targets 14.2 and 14.7 and SDG 11.

Tackling coastal and marine pollution reinforces integrated urban and settlement planning and management, reducing the environmental impact of cities and small towns.

- Contribute to integrated coastal zone management and maritime spatial planning in coordination with urban planning, upstream catchment areas management and regional development policies.

- Build blue economy knowledge and planning capacity of local governments, i.e. maritime spatial planning capacity and marine knowledge.

- Ensure ecological connectivity between offshore and coastal ecosystems, including coastal urban ecosystems, while ensuring their structural integrity and proper functioning.

- Promote nature-based solutions to integrate coastal protection (defence), urban development and coastal and marine biodiversity.

- Identify and map critical blue economy infrastructure and prioritize climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures.

4.4 LOCALIZING SDG 15: PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND HALT BIODIVERSITY LOSS

4.4.1 INTRODUCTION

SDG 15 addresses the protection and conservation of terrestrial ecosystems, including sustainable forest management and the halting of desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss.[281] To date, global progress towards SDG 15 has been insufficient. Despite some advances in legislation and sustainable forest management, deforestation and land degradation continue at an alarming rate, progress to safeguard key biodiversity areas has stalled, biodiversity is declining faster than ever and financial investments are inadequate.[282] None of the five targets with a 2020 deadline were fully met.[283] Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the intrinsic connections between people and nature and how the intertwined and rapidly worsening climate, biodiversity and pollution crises threaten livelihoods, economies and the planet.

Environmental decline has severe consequences for human survival and well-being, adversely impacting the poorest and most marginalized communities. The achievement of SDG 15 is essential for ensuring safe and adequate water supplies, supporting food systems, mitigating climate change and securing sustainable livelihoods.

4.4.2 LRGs' ROLE IN ACHIEVING SDG 15

LRGs have an important role as the first level of governance to face local climate change impacts and biodiversity loss. Many territories are increasingly and disproportionately suffering the effects of environmental crises, such as water scarcity, crop failure, collapsing fisheries, floods, landslides, wildfires and heatwaves. LRGs are uniquely positioned for engaging local stakeholders, enforcing legislation, adapting policies to the local context, monitoring progress, enhancing public awareness and mediating access to ecosystem services, among other actions.

Local and regional social and economic well-being is directly linked to ecological health. Ecosystem services in urban and rural contexts contribute to human well-being and resilience. They ensure benefits such as clean air and water; food security; flood, fire and disease prevention; noise reduction; climate regulation; carbon sequestration and storage; renewable energy supply; recreation; and nature education.

LRGs' responsibilities and influence on land ecosystems vary across the world depending on the country's level of decentralization, economic status and rural/urban condition. A collective response grounded in common but differentiated responsibilities should be sought according to capacities and impacts on the environment.

Many LRGs are showing leadership in advancing SDG 15 through international engagement. The Edinburgh Process and Declaration on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) is a key milestone for LRGs.[284] Over 200 LRGs signed the declaration, which proposes an update to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)'s Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities for Biodiversity. The declaration

also calls upon Parties to the CBD to engage LRGs in delivering for nature over the next decade and to commit to ten transformative actions. This example underscores how LRGs have advocated for national governments to match their ambitions and implement a whole-of-government approach.

LRGs are demonstrating the power of acting locally, collaborating with stakeholders and facilitating the implementation of national policies. Below, this section discusses how LRGs are reducing deforestation, adopting sustainable forest management practices, innovating in green infrastructure, safeguarding protected areas and wildlife, reversing land degradation and mainstreaming biodiversity. Their approaches and achievements in ecosystem conservation feature in VLRs, VSRs and Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans. This section also explores how **LRGs are responding to the numerous challenges they face to protect terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity** by forming associations, coalitions and partnerships; accessing innovative financial schemes; strengthening institutional capacities; using information technology; integrating an equality lens in their policies; and pushing for a sustainable recovery. Finally, this section concludes and makes proposals to ensure LRGs' meaningful participation in the upcoming establishment and implementation of the GBF and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. **Working from the bottom up, LRGs can advance the ecological transition with environmental justice in their territories.**

4.4.3 LRGs' POLICY APPROACHES TO ADVANCE SDG 15

LRGs contribute to achieving SDG 15 through policy instruments and initiatives, including actions on conserving and sustainably managing forests, creating green infrastructure, protecting biodiversity, restoring land and mainstreaming ecosystem values.

Conserving, sustainably managing and restoring forests

About a third of the world's land area is covered by forests, and a third of the world's population closely depends on forest products and services.[285] Forests are home to 80% of terrestrial species[286] and capture and store carbon, mitigating climate change.[287] Despite their vital economic, social and environmental roles, forests are threatened worldwide. They are being lost at an alarming rate of ten million hectares yearly.[288] Halting forest loss and degradation and enhancing forest health through conservation, restoration and sustainable forest management are priorities for the well-being of all living things.

Reducing deforestation

To tackle deforestation and forest degradation in tropical countries, regional governments have established sustainable rural development policies that include supporting better agricultural practices, improving territorial planning, implementing forest monitoring, transforming commodity markets, providing alternative livelihoods, increasing law enforcement and reducing poverty in rural areas.[289]

From Latin America to Africa and South-East Asia, over 39 jurisdictions have developed commitments, strategies and action plans to preserve forests.[230] Success in reducing deforestation has been mixed, with nearly half of these jurisdictions reporting positive results, including **Huánuco**, **Loreto**, **San Martín** and **Ucayali** (Peru); **Aceh**, **Central Kalimantan**, **East Kalimantan** and **Papua** (Indonesia); **Caquetá** (Colombia); **Pastaza** (Ecuador); and some **Amazonian states** in Brazil.[291] Local governments have also played a role in these initiatives, with regional governments engaging them in decision-making and implementation. For example, in **Pará** (Brazil), the state-wide Green Municipalities Programme decentralized forest monitoring and law enforcement and strengthened local environmental agencies.[292]

Regional governments have also leveraged funding and support from national and international entities through REDD+, which is an international climate policy framework to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, foster sustainable forest management and enhance

carbon stocks.[293] In 2008, **California** and **Illinois** (USA); **Amapá**, **Pará**, **Mato Grosso**, **Amazonas** and **Acre** (Brazil); and **Aceh** and **Papua** (Indonesia) formed the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force to enhance jurisdictional approaches to protecting forests and reducing greenhouse gas emissions through REDD+. Since then, the Task Force has grown to include 39 member states and provinces covering over one-third of the world's forests.[294]

Regional governments are making commitments through international declarations and pledges to curb deforestation and restore forest ecosystems. The 2014 New York Declaration on Forests[295] includes 14 regional governments committed to ending forest loss by 2030 and restoring 350 million hectares of degraded landscapes and forestlands.[296] The 2014 Rio Branco Declaration, signed by 35 regional governments, commits to reducing deforestation.[297] Thirty-one subnational jurisdictions joined the Bonn Challenge, a global pledge to restore 150 million hectares of degraded and deforested landscapes by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030.[298]

Wildfire prevention, pest control and sustainable forest management. **Uncontrolled wildfire outbreaks cause loss and damage to human lives, property, infrastructure, wildlife, lands and ecosystems, and results in substantial economic costs, air and water pollution, health impacts and increased greenhouse gas emissions.[299] Climate change is expected to increase the frequency, severity and duration of wildfires.[300]**

Shifting the focus from suppression to prevention can significantly reduce wildfire prevalence, particularly if concerted action at all levels is promoted.[301] Strategies should include integrated fire management, fire-smart forest management and consideration of socio-cultural realities and ecological imperatives.[302] **LRGs can adopt risk mitigation and prevention measures, applying scientific and sound traditional knowledge, promoting a synergetic agenda for climate and forests and strengthening collaborative initiatives. For example, Idaho (USA) focused on cost-effective land use and forest management policies.[303]**

Pests are also posing threats to the health, sustainability and productivity of natural and planted forests. Outbreaks of forest insect pests damage about 35 million hectares of forests annually.[304] Higher temperatures, severe and extreme weather events and droughts make trees more vulnerable to pests and diseases. Increasing forest resilience requires coordination to ensure prevention, early action and sustainable forest management practices.[305] **Oregon** (USA), for example, applies least-risk and least-toxic integrated pest management strategies to ensure sustainable forest management across its 36 counties.[306]

Sustainable forest management is a nature-based solution that enhances employment, local livelihoods, biodiversity and productivity.[307] It promotes human well-being and reduces poverty by creating forestry jobs and supporting small-scale producers in rural areas. For instance, provinces and districts in Mongolia collaborate with the national government to improve the management of 460,000 hectares of forests, promote income-generating activities and enable marginalized people to participate in the economy.[308]

LRGs are using forests in a way and at a rate that maintains their regeneration capacity and their potential to fulfil ecological, economic and social functions.[309] Through protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, several LRGs are promoting sustainable forest management efforts, which are crucial for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.[310] For example, England's Community Forests is an environmental regeneration initiative led by a partnership of six county councils. It has established 13 community forests in and around the largest towns and cities, such as the North East Community Forest, transforming these locations by sustainably bringing together trees and people.[311]

Sustainable forest management is especially essential in mountain ecosystems, strengthening the landscape's resilience to drought and erosion. In **Honghe** (China), mountaintop forests supply water to the Hani ancestral rice terraces and conserve the soil, reducing erosion and protecting villages from landslides.[312]

Benefits of green infrastructure for people and nature

Green infrastructure comprises strategically planned natural and human-made systems that combine grey infrastructure with vegetation and water – often referred to as blue infrastructure – to provide ecosystem services that support human populations and biodiversity. **LRGs are building and strengthening green infrastructure by undertaking public works and supporting community-led and private sector initiatives.** Green infrastructure can take many forms, such as planting trees and wildflowers, making pavements permeable, harvesting rainwater, creating artificial wetlands and restoring waterways.

Growing urban forests

Increasing urban tree cover makes cities more sustainable and resilient to climate change. Tree canopies are effective at absorbing heat and reducing energy consumption needed for cooling, hence contributing to saving lives and cutting down carbon emissions during heatwaves. Urban forests collect stormwater, reduce runoff and help prevent flooding. They absorb carbon and reduce air pollution, while creating habitats for wildlife and improving people's physical and mental health.[313]

Across the globe, LRGs are growing urban forests. Through UNECE's Trees in Cities Challenge, approximately 11 million trees have been pledged worldwide.[314] **Chișinău** (Republic of Moldova) committed to planting 100,000 trees and has achieved over half of this target, including 60 different species.[315] Cities4Forests, a voluntary coalition that supports and encourages cities to invest in forests, has 73 members including **Fianarantsoa** (Madagascar), **Brussels** (Belgium), **Honolulu** (Hawai'i), **Kigali** (Rwanda) and **Quito** (Ecuador). It acts as an advocacy platform and knowledge hub, providing technical support and economic analysis services, while also facilitating investment and finance for urban greening programmes.[316]

There is a clear economic case for investing in urban forests. For instance, in **San Francisco** (USA), the city's urban forest has an estimated 669,000 trees, which offer hydrological, air quality and carbon storage benefits valued at 9.44 million USD yearly.[317] The city plans to plant an additional 30,000 trees by 2034.[318]

Investing in wetlands

Healthy wetland ecosystems regulate flooding and purify water,[319] providing a space for 40% of all species on Earth to breed or live.[320] Some LRGs are investing in large-scale public works that mimic wetland ecosystem functions to tackle urban problems. In **East Kolkata** (India), the network of partially human-made channels and ponds feeds 80% of the city's sewage into small cooperatively managed fish ponds that produce clean water, as well as fresh fish and vegetables. The wetland provides flood defence and supports local economies while processing about one billion litres of wastewater daily, saving the city around 60 million USD yearly. However, this wetland is under threat due to urban development and socio-economic shifts, with residents moving away from pursuing livelihoods in fisheries.[321] Similarly, sprawling urbanization and water rationalization are threatening the network of ponds and canals that were central to the agricultural and hydrological

system in **Kaohsiung**.[322] This East Asian city built a series of water retention ponds in an attempt to restore wetland habitats and reduce flooding. Now, it is creating new economic value by using these ponds for solar energy production.[323]

Large-scale, centrally planned projects are not always context-appropriate and can face community opposition. Bottom-up initiatives hold great potential for shaping solutions to meet local social and environmental demands. In **Kisumu** (Kenya), stakeholders gathered for a workshop to apply principles of incremental experimentation and explore low-cost nature-based solutions.[324]

Integrating green and blue networks

For green infrastructure to be effective, it needs to be connected. Tree and vegetation planting along roads and rivers and the creation of green path networks allow wildlife to travel across urban and rural landscapes. Cities such as **Helsinki** (Finland), **Ghent** (Belgium) and **Melbourne** (Australia) are increasing resilience by integrating ecosystem corridors into urban planning. Coastal areas such as **Kōchi** (Japan)[325] and **Rotterdam** (Netherlands)[326] are using green and blue infrastructure in flood protection as they adapt to severe storms and rising sea levels. Nearby forests support city life as a part of water provision infrastructure, such as in **São Paulo** (Brazil), where the Cantareira System is the primary water source for 22 million residents.[327] By promoting conservation and restoration in urban and adjacent rural areas, LRGs support ecosystem services essential to cities.

Green buildings

Incorporating vegetation and water into new and existing buildings can create interconnected habitats and reduce stormwater run-off, urban heat islands and air pollution.[328] In **Toronto** (Canada), the Green Roof bylaw requires all buildings with a footprint over 2,000 m² to allocate a percentage of available roof area to green roofing. The city offers grants through its Eco-Roof Incentive Programme to support green roof construction.[329] The vertical forest in **Milan** (Italy) is a sustainable residential complex with a vast densification of nature in balconies. An oasis amidst a dense urban area, it attracts birds, produces humidity and oxygen and absorbs carbon and dust particles.[330]

Equitable green infrastructure

Low-income and racialized neighbourhoods usually have less access to ecosystem services like those provided by urban forest cover.[331] Targeted actions such as the Greening Soweto project in **Johannesburg** (South Africa), which aims to plant 200,000 trees, attempt to address this inequality.[332]

However, as green infrastructure investments make neighbourhoods more attractive, resulting increases in house prices can displace the people the investments were designed to benefit. **Ensuring that green infrastructure investment does not lead to gentrification is a cross-sectoral challenge that requires local governments to strategize around housing and tenant protections, as well as equitable approaches to financing and employment policies.** In **California** (USA), the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy funded the *Greening in Place: Protecting Communities from Displacement* guide for local governments and community organizations to ensure that green infrastructure benefits everyone.[333]

Conserving and protecting biodiversity

Biodiversity loss is one of the triple planetary crises the world is facing, namely the climate crisis and the pollution crisis.[334] It must be addressed not only for the sake of species and ecosystems, but also to ensure the survival of human societies. Protected and conserved areas are cornerstones of biodiversity conservation.[335] Many LRGs manage, or contribute to managing, protected areas within their jurisdiction and are taking actions to protect urban wildlife and control invasive species.

Protected areas

Protected areas have achieved positive results in conserving species and establishing barriers to deforestation. There are 251,947 terrestrial protected areas globally,[336] and although 42% have been added since 2010,[337] the Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 commitment to conserving 17% of the world's land and inland water by 2020 was not achieved.

There is a plurality of governance and management models, varying considerably across the globe.[338] **LRGs can play an active role in national protected areas, ranging from collaboration to full administrative responsibility, or they can enact**

and administrate local and regional protected areas. For example, **Narok County** (Kenya) manages the Maasai Mara National Reserve, one of the most visited Kenyan national parks,[339] and **Victoria State** (Australia) administrates three Australian national parks within its jurisdiction in collaboration with **Melbourne's** public water utility company.[340] **Cape Town** (South Africa) designates, governs and manages more than 30 local protected areas subject to the relevant provincial and national regulations. Furthermore, LRGs in some countries manage a mix of national and LRG-protected areas, such as in the People's Republic of China, where provinces, counties and districts directly manage nature reserves, scenic spots and forest parks.[341] Additionally, LRGs can foster bottom-up approaches to nature conservation and implement participatory management mechanisms, such as the co-management experience of **Querétaro** (Mexico) with civil society, which combined economic development and biodiversity conservation.[342] LRGs' contributions to biodiversity conservation are proven to be as effective as national contributions. Local initiatives can benefit more from ecosystem services by deepening the cultural values and economic assets, as well as the healthy and educational advantages of green spaces for urban dwellers.[343]

Among the many challenges in conservation, it is important to address the intensification of urban development near protected areas. Projections forecast increased proximity between cities and protected areas by 2030, especially in developing countries, intensifying the likelihood of negative impacts such as increased poaching, illegal logging and harvesting, trampling or other damage to vegetation, more frequent and more severe wildfires, air and water pollution and the introduction of invasive species.[344] It is essential for LRGs to be equipped with effective management techniques, planning tools and financial resources to mitigate these impacts.

Prioritizing urban wildlife

LRGs increasingly recognize the importance of providing habitats for wildlife. Pollinator species have become a policy focus, given their troubling decline and the central role they play in supporting plant and animal life. In **Amsterdam** (Netherlands)[345] and **Helsingborg** (Sweden),[346] new and existing green spaces are being planted with indigenous wildflowers and grasses, replacing monocultures with beneficial species. As habitats span across jurisdictional boundaries, policies should encourage collaboration between local governments. In **South-East Wales** (UK), local governments are working together to create an approach to pollinator habitat management through the Nature Isn't Neat programme, which allows wild flowers to grow in parks, verges and other public lands.[347] Local governments are also directly providing private landowners and the public with resources to promote wildlife. **Ocean City** (USA) offers grants for planting pollinator species.[348] **Curridabat** (Costa

Rica) is innovating with its Sweet City Vision, which gives wildlife a greater voice by reframing non-human residents such as bees, bats and butterflies as citizens in their own right.[349]

Actions against invasive species. Invasive species are the second largest biodiversity threat after habitat loss. They cause the displacement of native species through predation or competition and can lead to the extinction of native species. Invasive species also have negative effects on forest, agricultural and aquaculture productivity. Infestations can devalue property and affect human health by increasing the risk of disease. In **Tierra del Fuego** (Argentina), the unintended spread of North American beavers changed the fluvial environment and destroyed riparian forest trees, with an estimated annual economic loss of 66 million USD, over 200 times the funds invested in the province in 2016 under the Forests Management Law. Eradication efforts are still ongoing and depend on cooperation at all levels of government.[350]

Preventing the introduction of and reducing invasive species are essential for ecological integrity. **Ontario** (Canada), **South Australia** (Australia) and **La Réunion** (France) have strategic plans in place to reduce the threats of invasive species.[351] LRGs play a key role in identifying and controlling invasive species and partnering with local communities, adjacent regions and academia to secure continued efforts. However, controlling and managing these invasive species is sometimes difficult and costly, requiring national and international support.

Halting and reversing land degradation and combating desertification

Land degradation is a human-induced process in which soils become unable to support the life that depends on them. Over 75% of land on Earth is substantially degraded,[352] affecting 3.2 billion people and costing 10% of global gross domestic product in loss of ecosystem services. In many cases, land degradation is the single largest driver of biodiversity loss.[353] Today, it is being caused by the expansion of crops and grazing land, unsustainable and intensive agricultural and forestry practices, extractive industries, urbanization and infrastructure development.[354] Climate change, especially droughts and extreme rainfall events, also drive this phenomenon.[355] In arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, land degradation leads to desertification.

SDG target 15.3 mirrors the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification goal to achieve a land degradation neutral world by 2030.[356] Regenerating soil is a slow process, and degradation is continuing at a rapid pace. LRGs must deal with the challenges that accompany land degradation: declining agricultural productivity, reduced water quality and availability, air pollution, altered fire regimes and increased risks of conflict, landslides and floods. Many LRGs are innovating and applying solutions that reduce and reverse land degradation in and beyond their jurisdictions.

Actions must be taken to maintain existing healthy land and restore degraded land. Land management strategies need to shift towards regenerative practices that increase biodiversity, soil health and productivity.[357] To do so, LRGs are incorporating land degradation into local development plans. A popular approach is to combine environmental bylaws with land use and urban plans.[358] This can help prevent and regulate developments that are likely to cause ecosystem degradation, as well as support creating protected areas and incentivizing or requiring land use strategies that will slow degradation and restore degraded land. For example, **Ústí** (Czech Republic) has been working with local governments to prevent development on greenfield sites, while also incentivizing development of brownfield sites and requiring that hazardous brownfield sites be remediated by the operator or landowner.[359]

Reforestation and revegetation initiatives are an important part of land restoration. At the edge of the Sahara Desert, in the Sahel region, the Great Green Wall Initiative is undertaking ambitious work to prevent and reverse desertification by promoting sustainable land use and reforested areas across 11 countries. In some of them, local governments are key implementers and decision-makers regarding natural resource management.[360] **Jigawa**, **Bauchi** and **Sokoto** (Nigeria) established shelterbelts by the Great Green Wall structures and launched tree planting and awareness-raising campaigns to fight desert encroachment and promote alternative economic activities such as non-timber forest

products. Such a decentralized approach fosters collaboration and partnerships.[361] **Conciliation between top-down planning and the aspirations of local communities, including small-scale farmers and pastoralists, must address the economic and social causes of land degradation, promoting livelihoods and landscape regeneration**.[362]

Regenerative agricultural practices are proving to be an effective nature-based solution. For example, agroforestry and soil and crop management increase yields, improve nutrition and enrich ecosystem health.[363] LRGs are leading the way in implementing regenerative and sustainable agriculture. **Boulder County** (USA) is using publicly owned common land to partner with local farmers and universities in studying techniques for boosting productivity, soil health and carbon sequestration.[364] **Rome** (Italy) piloted an urban and peri-urban agriculture project targeting marginalized communities that fought social exclusion and recovered brownfields. The practice was replicated in **Vilnius** (Lithuania), **Caen** (France), **Kraków** (Poland), **Thessaloniki** (Greece), **Loures** (Portugal) and **A Coruña** (Spain) under the URBACT programme.[365]

Mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem values across government and society

Integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into planning and implementation has the potential to contribute to cross-sectoral plans – from climate adaptation to poverty reduction – and sector-specific plans – from food security to clean water and sustainable energy. Up to two-thirds of biodiversity legislation is adopted and enacted at the local and regional level,[366] creating a necessary complement to national-level nature conservation and species protection. LRGs have been calling for biodiversity mainstreaming in the CBD and other international processes,[367] and they are implementing strategies to mainstream ecosystem values in economic and social development policies. Common instruments include territorial planning and intersectoral initiatives.

Territorial planning

The New Urban Agenda highlights the role of territorial planning mechanisms to achieve the SDGs.[368] **Territorial planning designed by LRGs links policy and practice for multiple land use purposes, balancing competing demands through adaptive and ecosystem-based systems and promoting urban and rural interdependent coexistence**.[369] For example, **Tlokweng** (Botswana) was facing tensions between preservation and development given the impacts of rapid urban growth on the loss of habitat, green space and agricultural land. Through a participatory process, the community chose a resilient growth development plan based on land use zones considering values of biodiversity and cultural heritage, health and food access and economic opportunity.[370]

Good territorial development requires strategies that approach the territory as a multifunctional and connected system. The **Council of Governors** in Kenya has supported counties to develop five-year County Integrated Development Plans that include the sustainable use of natural resources. Also, urban plans can feature public spaces offering an arena for social interaction and environmental sustainability. In **Chengdu** (China), the Tianfu Greenway is a planned city-ring ecology zone that will turn one-third of the usable urban land into green space, creating an ecological buffer and a destination for sightseeing, culture and sports.[371] LRGs are increasingly developing Subnational and Local Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans as a form of integrated planning, which supports the implementation of nature-based solutions.[372]

Intersectoral initiatives and bodies

Achieving sustainable development at local and regional scales requires cooperation among sectors to explore synergies, which can be project-based or institutionalized through permanent commissions and councils.

The successful mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem values is a long-term, incremental and sustained effort to internalize concepts and

share ownership.[373] A participatory process with meaningful stakeholder engagement is essential for mainstreaming and can include diverse perspectives within government, civil society and the private sector.

For example, Udalsarea 2030 is a network of different levels of public administration working in coordination for the sustainability of the **Basque Government**'s municipalities (Spain). It encourages co-responsibility and promotes an integral vision to develop planning and management methodologies. Gathering representatives from the regional government, 190 municipalities and public agencies in the fields of environment, water, energy and health, the network created guidelines, innovation calls for funding and international projects integrating environmental criteria in local-level sectoral policies.[374] In **Mexico City** (Mexico), the Law of Cultural, Natural and Biocultural Heritage contemplates citizen participation and inter-institutional mechanisms to guarantee co-management of heritage related to the promotion and conservation of "culturally created biodiversity".[375] In **Quebec** (Canada), the *Fondation de la faune du Québec* mobilizes local actors, fosters networking and provides financial or technical assistance to over 700 local organizations yearly that aim to implement conservation projects and develop wildlife habitats.[376]

4.4.4 CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

LRGs face challenges to implement the policy instruments and approaches described above. These challenges include having the means to finance the required shift towards more sustainable patterns of development, as well as cross-cutting issues such as addressing inequality, accessing knowledge, improving governance and accelerating systemic change.

Ensuring long-term, timely and sufficient funding

Half of the world's GDP (44 trillion USD) depends on nature and its services. Investing in nature can generate over 10 trillion USD in additional annual business opportunities and 395 million jobs by 2030.[377] Yet, the investment gap remains large. At current rates, there is a funding gap of 4.1 trillion USD to meet climate, biodiversity and land degradation targets by 2050. Indeed, forest-based solutions alone will require 203 billion USD in total annual expenditure.[378]

LRGs face significant challenges in accessing funding to move forward with environmental action, including a lack of expertise and financial autonomy. Finance from higher levels of government is the most common source of environmental funding but is often insufficient. In response, LRGs are forming coalitions to lobby governments for funding and exploring alternative sources.

National funding for LRGs

National public financing is a major source of financing for ecosystem conservation. Domestic governments provide an estimated 86% of the world's investment in nature-based solutions, with most funds being devoted to biodiversity and landscape protection.[379] As a result of declining fiscal balances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries are facing increased challenges to raise or maintain adequate national public funding allocated to SDG 15. Even when transfers are available, national earmarked funding can restrict LRGs' local discretion and autonomy in establishing their own priorities.

LRGs are advocating for strong financial packages and renewed fiscal models towards decentralization, as well as national funding for conducting and scaling up local experiments. Investments must be well-coordinated at the national, regional and local levels to successfully drive incentives, directly fund infrastructure and services and set the stage for sustainable access to borrowing and private finance.

Official development assistance (ODA)

ODA has played a significant role in supporting and leveraging resources for biodiversity and combating deforestation and desertification, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Some LRGs are ODA donors. **Flanders** (Belgium), for example, deployed 14 million EUR in environmental projects from 2020 to 2021.[380] However, this is not usually the case. Many LRGs face difficulties to borrow directly from national governments or financial institutions: their projects are often constrained by higher tiers of government or considered too small, too risky or not creditworthy enough.

The pandemic recovery offers an opportunity to reimagine international development cooperation. LRG access to borrowing should be facilitated and donors should prioritize alignment with conservation goals and increase grants, rather than loans.

Private investment

Various factors increase pressure on the private sector to shift business models and fund efforts to conserve ecosystems. LRGs can create enabling environments to encourage private investment, while also securing ownership to ensure project quality, transparency and accountability – for example, through local taxes or bonds, land value capture and non-financial incentives.[381] **Gothenburg** (Sweden), **Johannesburg** (South Africa) and **San Francisco** and **Asheville** (USA) are among the pioneers in issuing a Green City Bond.

LRG funding instruments

LRGs' effective financial empowerment and increased access to diverse sources of financing are instrumental for them to fulfil their SDG commitments. Despite the difficulties, many LRGs are implementing innovative taxation approaches, grants and payment for ecosystem services schemes to fund their biodiversity and conservation efforts. For instance, Lima (Peru) has implemented a water use fee – one example of the country's Compensation Mechanisms for Ecosystem Services – and uses the funds collected from users for the conservation and restoration of ecosystems that provide water for the city.[382]

Integrating Indigenous peoples, local communities, women and other structurally discriminated groups

In 2021, after decades of activists' efforts, the UN Human Rights Council recognized the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right.[383] Yet, more defenders than ever are being killed, threatened, criminalized and attacked while defending their land, livelihoods and ecosystems,[384] causing displacement, dispossession and other human rights violations.

Recognizing Indigenous peoples' rights and traditional knowledge

Indigenous peoples' roles in ecosystem integrity are crucial. At least a quarter of the world's land surface is owned, managed, used or occupied by Indigenous peoples,[385] including some of the most ecologically intact forests and biodiversity hotspots. Territories conserved by Indigenous peoples can be formally recognized in protected areas or fall under a variety of co-management systems on public and community-owned lands.

LRGs should support Indigenous-led conservation, incorporate Indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge in land management and bolster communal territorial rights, including rights related to Indigenous and community conserved areas – territories of life.[386] LRGs can protect cultural heritage, provide funding, ensure equitable participation and enable legislation. Examples such as the restitution of a 1,199-acre area to the Esselen Tribe in **California** (USA)[387] or the joint management of parks in partnership with Aboriginal peoples in **New South Wales** (UK) can be replicated and scaled up.[388]

Engaging and benefiting local communities

Protecting the natural environment is intrinsically linked to poverty reduction and social and economic development. Local communities play an integral role in all efforts to protect, restore and sustainably manage land ecosystems and biodiversity. LRGs can partner, sponsor and scale up initiatives developed by local communities – as in **Nagaland** (India),[389] **Yucatán** (Mexico)[390] and **Sultanbeyli** (Turkey).[391]

LRGs should protect and confer legitimacy to environmental defenders. **LRGs can identify pathways to empower local communities, promoting their voice and agency in environmental issues, and realize their right to information and participation, not only in implementation but also in decision-making.**

In **Makueni County** (Kenya), 377 village clusters take part in participatory budgeting processes to prepare action plans and receive funding for community-level interventions.[392]

Promoting gender equality

Women are disproportionately impacted by land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change due to their lack of access to land and natural resources.[393] LRGs are well-positioned to integrate gender considerations into various policy instruments. **With careful planning and intentional focus, LRGs' environmental projects have the potential to address gender inequalities by securing tenure rights for women and girls, including them in decision-making process, equitably engaging them in leadership roles and upturning deep-rooted gender norms.** The Global Feminist Municipal Movement empowers women and feminist leaders to be an integral part of developing solutions for challenges related to health, climate, the economy and human rights.[394]

Ending discrimination

Multiple forms of discrimination are present across the world, impacting racial and ethnic groups, women, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, people living in poverty and other structurally discriminated groups. Systemic discrimination is expressed in many forms of environmental policy, further exacerbating social

inequities. Environmentally harmful infrastructure and practices that cause toxic pollution are disproportionately located where disadvantaged populations live, causing greater rates of health problems.[395]

LRGs can prioritize actions that advance environmental justice by addressing intentional and unintentional discrimination, the unequal enforcement of environmental laws and the exclusion of minority groups from decision-making processes. Baltimore (USA) used zoning to ban new crude oil terminals. **Fulton County** (USA) enacted a broad environmental justice policy requiring health impacts on minority and low-income populations to be considered in land use planning.[396]

Enhancing access to technical knowledge and technology

LRGs often lack access to scientific and technical knowledge, tools and support that are required to track progress, identify barriers, make informed decisions and implement effective measures. This is a common challenge across urban and rural contexts and types of initiatives.

The importance of knowledge and technology

Technology and innovation hold the promise of providing solutions to many SDG challenges. They are also important to undo misconceptions about non-academic, local and traditional knowledge.[397]

Combining scientific monitoring, civil society oversight and traditional knowledge is critical for ecosystem restoration. In **Lima** (Peru), the city's water utility is investing in the ancient technology of *mamanteo* restoration, after a research team concluded that this hydrological technique is an inexpensive way to improve water management and is replicable in rural and urban areas of the country.[398]

Capacity building and available resources for LRGs

The challenge of insufficient capacity disproportionately affects small, rural and remote LRGs, as well as those in developing countries. Many LRGs have limited capacity to fund research, develop technology and hire specialists to provide technical advice. They may also simply lack affordable and reliable internet access.

LRG partnerships play a significant role in knowledge sharing and training. Technical alliances can connect LRGs with international organizations, national governments, foundations, research centres and LRG associations and networks. Initiatives and open knowledge platforms from organizations including the International Union for Conservation of Nature Urban Alliance, BiodiverCities, Cities with Nature, Regions with Nature, Regions for Biodiversity Learning Platform and the Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force stand out for their resources on nature conservation.[399] They target concrete actions on the ground and are based on

exchanges, in which North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation hold tremendous potential.

Improving governance

Governance to protect ecosystems needs to engage multiple levels of government and stakeholders across sectors in a coordinated manner, facilitating cooperation, trust and mutual learning, as well as greater inclusivity and justice. All 11 UN principles of effective governance for sustainable development are critical in achieving SDG 15. Nonetheless, their operationalization remains a challenge.[400] In particular, the principle of subsidiarity is essential for LRGs to be empowered and take the necessary measures to protect, conserve and manage terrestrial ecosystems. In the current GBF negotiations, LRGs are calling for a clear recognition of their role to ensure that the framework is politically relevant and vertically integrated and that governments at all levels feel responsible for its implementation.[401] Multilevel governance is key for integrating the various global agendas on the ground, shifting away from sectoral or siloed policies and ensuring territorial cohesion.

Accelerating action in a world in crisis

Addressing the root causes of ecosystem decline requires systemic change. In the face of the current global health, environmental and economic crises, some governments are exploring ways forward, while others are lagging behind.

Negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on SDG 15

The pandemic has highlighted how critical the health of ecosystems is for human well-being and sustainable development. The increase in zoonotic disease pandemics, such as COVID-19, is a consequence of ecosystem degradation, driven by unsustainable farming, wildlife exploitation, resource extraction and climate change.

Although a temporary economic slowdown has given nature a break, it poses serious threats to funding for ecosystem restoration as funds are being channelled towards health and humanitarian needs. During the pandemic, some governments limited monitoring and enforcement efforts, opened previously protected natural areas to extractive industries and reduced regulations on pollution. Action on plastic pollution has been delayed, and waste disposal increased with an estimated 3.4 billion facemasks discarded daily.

COVID-19 has negatively impacted sectors involved in funding ecosystem regeneration, such as eco-tourism and forestry.[402] In many cities, the asymmetric impacts of the pandemic magnified pre-existing inequalities in access to urban green spaces. Protecting the natural environment can prevent future outbreaks, but it is necessary to rethink policy choices on what kind of world our societies wish to rebuild.

Addressing the root causes of environmental degradation

Policy approaches to protect ecosystem services, such as protected areas, are necessary measures to mitigate the problem but fail to address the underlying causes of ecosystem decline. **Ecosystem decline is driven by unsustainable resource use, population growth, inequality and a flawed economic system. These issues are closely interrelated and must be systematically addressed in such a way that our current extractive paradigm is replaced by a regenerative future.** There is increasing social pressure to regulate markets, enhance corporate responsibility, strengthen wealth distribution mechanisms and decentralize power. Transformative change is a long-term process that requires collaborative actions and collective changes in thinking and behaviour.

Some initiatives around the world underscore increasing commitment to this transformative change aiming to build a more sustainable economic and social system. **Amsterdam** (Netherlands) is using the doughnut model and embracing a circular economy rooted in participatory dynamics.[403] **Copenhagen** (Denmark), **Brussels region** (Belgium), **Dunedin** (New Zealand) and **Nanaimo** (Canada) followed this example and are adopting policies based on regenerative and distributive dynamics within ecological boundaries.[404]

4.4.5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LRGs are a central part of the pathway towards sustainability. LRGs are raising ambitions and delivering commitments to conserving and restoring nature on the ground. They have committed to, adopted or implemented innovative policy instruments and initiatives to achieve SDG 15. Progress has been made in expanding protected areas, using forest resources sustainably, creating urban green spaces and infrastructure, restoring ecosystems' connectivity, protecting wildlife, adopting legislation to prevent and control invasive species, improving territorial planning, integrating biodiversity values into policies and systems and providing alternative livelihoods.

Despite inspiring examples and success stories, actions need to be strengthened and multiplied to put SDG 15 on track to be achieved by 2030. Key actions include the following:

- **Protect terrestrial ecosystems and promote nature-based solutions:** LRGs can focus on sustainable forest management, shift land management strategies towards regenerative practices and promote alternative economic activities.

- **Create and expand green areas and infrastructure:** LRGs should increase urban tree cover, create connected habitats for wildlife, link urban and rural landscapes, foster urban and peri-urban gardens and reconnect urban communities to nature.

- **Develop integrated strategies and plans:** LRGs should mainstream ecosystem values into planning and development processes, securing the ecological integrity of ecosystems, promoting a synergetic agenda for climate and biodiversity and addressing the challenge of urban sprawl near protected areas.

- **Foster partnerships with communities and stakeholders:** LRGs should encourage bottom-up approaches to nature conservation and implement participatory management mechanisms, prioritizing policies that advance environmental justice.

- **Commit to limiting the pressures on the natural environment and advancing the ecological transition:** LRGs can advocate for nature-positive development, circular economies and transformative approaches that catalyze a just and environmentally sustainable future.

National governments and the international community also play a key role in ensuring LRGs are equipped with effective tools and resources to unlock their potential:

- **National governments can engage LRGs in national recovery strategies;** create formal multilevel collaboration platforms; encourage decentralized governance of protected areas; integrate financing frameworks to support SDG localization; leverage funding and support to deforestation programmes; facilitate LRG access to diverse sources of financing; and promote access to knowledge and capacity building on the sustainable use of natural resources, particularly for small, rural and remote LRGs in the Global South.

- **Multilateral actors should align activities with conservation goals** to advance ecosystem services and biodiversity mainstreaming, encourage a move towards system transformations and strengthen LRGs' associations and networks.

- **The UN should foster participatory and inclusive mechanisms** such as the Edinburgh Process in the CBD framework, providing LRGs with an official voice in the discussion, development and decision-making.

As challenges are mounting, our actions must meet our ambitions. By implementing these recommendations, LRGs will be better positioned to embrace harmony with nature.

#5. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION: FINANCING THE SDGs

Basic public services, clean and resilient infrastructure and social protection are essential for achieving the SDGs, responding to the health crisis and leaving no one behind. In the majority of countries, these essentials are direct or shared responsibilities of LRGs. Their role in ensuring the continuity of these services was particularly evident during the COVID-19 crisis. In order to put sustainable and inclusive policies in place and contribute to the global agendas, LRGs need to be able to count on stable streams of revenue that are in line with their increasing responsibilities. However, current national and international financial frameworks do not reflect the importance of subnational government finance. Greater financial flows must be managed by LRGs, and especially those operating in developing countries, in order to meet their annual financial needs. **Financing climate measures alone would require an estimated 5 trillion USD.**[1] Following the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, humanity will need to bolster recovery as soon as possible if it is to achieve the SDGs. **A number of levers can be used to accelerate financing for SDG localization: addressing the failure of municipal finance markets; improving the potential offered by local taxation; making intergovernmental fiscal transfers more stable and transparent; and enhancing LRGs' technical and financial capacities to access a wider range of sources of finance**.

This section builds on the preliminary findings from the upcoming third edition of the flagship report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment.[2] It focuses on the lessons that we can learn, in retrospect, from two years of pandemic, based on the way in which LRGs were involved and financed in the response to the need to help their citizens and provide solutions to that crisis. The pandemic not only put national financial frameworks, multilevel governance and policy coherence to the test, but also LRG budgets and their capacity for investment; all of these are crucial building blocks for implementing the SDGs.

5.1 THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE: SUBNATIONAL FINANCE UNDER GREATER PRESSURE

During the pandemic crisis, containment measures, the closure of most businesses, and restrictions placed on services and activities had a great impact on the own-source revenue of public administrations, including those of LRGs. The impacts of these measures were felt more acutely by some governments than others, according to the composition and origins of their finances. For example, many municipalities in **the Netherlands** were affected by the fall of income from tourist taxes, while more than half of the local government authorities in **the Gambia** suffered a loss of income following the closure of weekly markets. **These losses of revenue were often exacerbated by the implementation of fiscal relief measures, many of which were imposed by the central government and not always offset by any form of compensation.** The Economic, Social and Humanitarian Support Plan of the **Côte d'Ivoire** gave taxpayers great flexibility for payments, which led to a decrease in local own-source revenue of an estimated 30% in 2020. Similarly, the 7.3% loss in revenue in 2020 of municipalities in **Luxembourg** can be explained by the cancellation, or postponement of income from municipal business tax, corporate income tax, commercial tax and wealth tax, resulting from the application of centrally-decided tax deferral measures. During the pandemic, local investment was sometimes regarded as luxury expenditure and subnational finances suffered adjustments to

alleviate the impact of the crisis. The strict measures imposed by the Internal Stability Pact in **Greece** also reduced previously high levels of subnational investment. Capital development work led by urban local authorities was brought to a halt in **Sri Lanka** so that they could dedicate resources to COVID-19-related spending, with restrictions on public spending later being aggravated by the country's socio-economic crisis.

Intergovernmental fiscal transfers also formed part of most countries' response to the crisis. **Due to the reprioritization of expenditure, within a context of reduced revenue, the pandemic affected the capacity of many actors to comply with their usual commitments regarding flows of finance and sometimes led to a reduction in intergovernmental fiscal transfers.** In the case of **Liberia**, annual transfers allocated to county administrations were cancelled for the 2020-21 financial year. In **El Salvador**, the deferral of transfers from the national fund for social and economic development resulted in a reduction in municipal expenditure of 12.3% in 2020, compared to 2019.

Conversely, other governments supported the crucial role of subnational governments in the fight against COVID-19 and channelled resources through them, especially in the case of targeted but discretionary transfers.[3] **By providing resources to LRGs, governments also acknowledged subnational fiscal health to be a necessary condition for national development.** For instance, Argentina's provinces ended the year 2020 with improved budgets due to them receiving 89% greater current transfers from their national government. In **Mali**, transfers to local authorities increased between 2020 and 2021, partly due to an unusually high implementation rate of transfer commitments from the central government. Other forms of support from the central government included fiscal flexibilization and debt relief, of the type received by municipalities and urban communities in **Cameroon** through the National Social Security Fund. In **Switzerland**, subsidies, in the form of capital transfers from the Confederation to the cantons and from the cantons to municipalities, increased, thus maintaining subnational debt at its pre-crisis level. In the **Philippines**, the Mandanas-Garcia ruling, which was adopted in 2020, is expected to increase the share of the national tax allotment destined to subnational governments to fund devolved services; the response to and recovery from the pandemic; and SDG localization. However, this is yet to be implemented.

The evolution of subnational finances following the outbreak of the pandemic has evidenced the importance of coordinating intergovernmental fiscal policies: the lack of such coordination can

largely hinder the possibilities for rapid action and recovery at subnational levels. Providing intergovernmental fiscal transfers should be factored in as a powerful way to promote national development, both during and outside crises.[4] **Anticipating and planning fiscal transfers under crisis situations would particularly help to develop more organized and efficient public responses to emergencies**. This would help subnational governments to react and act according to the resources available to them and would ultimately bring better quality services. The pandemic has revealed how the resources available to LRGs are, at least in part, dependent on emergency decisions taken by national governments. The stabilization and predictability of the concession of such grants and subsidies must therefore go beyond the usual budget laws and also consider emergency situations.

5.2 MANAGING THE HEALTH CRISIS: CENTRALIZED COORDINATION COMPLEMENTED BY INTERMEDIARY AND LOCAL BODIES

Subnational governments have been confronted by very particular modalities of multilevel governance which either impeded, allowed, or directed them to take a more or less active role in the management of the health crisis and, now, in the recovery process. In response to the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic by the World Health Organization, or shortly after the detection of the first cases in their respective countries, most central governments assumed responsibility for the management of the crisis and issued directives regarding restrictions on mobility, social distancing obligations and sanitary measures, which were expected to be followed by subnational institutions. In the majority of countries, **LRGs had a role to play in the implementation of policies and in applying the isolation measures announced by the central government, developing urgent measures to support the most vulnerable, and ensuring the continuity of public services**. The sharing of such tasks varied between the (re)centralization and decentralization of responsibilities, in different countries, and at different moments during the crisis. **The coordinating role played by deconcentrated administrations and/or LRG associations was crucial for ensuring that centrally managed crisis responses were thoroughly implemented across national territories.** Intermediary bodies and structures served to adapt measures to the local context, a requisite for successful implementation of national policies.

In addition to coordinating or implementing central government measures, a large number of subnational governments helped sustain the livelihoods of their inhabitants. LRGs made themselves responsible for emergency measures, pushing the limits of their resources and mandates. The pandemic stressed the relevance of LRGs as public partners working at the frontline of dealing with emergencies and being ready to help their communities. **The role given to LRGs in the management of the crisis highlights the recognition that they have achieved, but also reveals their fragile position in the framework of multilevel governance in their respective countries and regions.** It also helped unveil unexpected management styles which were exposed under emergency situations. Although the full-fledged inclusion of LRGs in national coordination and decision-making bodies was exceptional, the need to territorialize national policies and offer local solutions was evident in the majority of countries. Well-structured intergovernmental relations and the mobilization of all levels of government are essential components for an adequate crisis response.[5]

GLOBAL TASKFORCE
OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS

UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments

5.3 LONG-TERM PATHWAYS: INCIPIENT CONSIDERATION OF SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN RECOVERY PLANS

Recovery plans that unlocked unprecedented levels of public funding will have great implications in the coming years, especially with regard to the contribution of public action to achieving the SDGs. However, and as underlined by the *Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2022*, there is a "great finance divide" which has been aggravated by COVID-19. While the rate of post-pandemic economic recovery in developed countries points forward with greater investment, developing countries are facing the cost of financing their debts; this is forcing them to make cutbacks in development spending and is placing constraints on their ability to respond to further shocks.

Mobilizing subnational governments for local infrastructure investment and the improvement of public services is crucial for accelerating recovery from COVID-19 and for promoting sustainable development. As underlined by the ECLAC report on SDG progress in Latin America, "recovery policies should be based on a longer time horizon; if policy action simply reproduces existing supply and consumption patterns and perpetuates existing technology and production lags, the problems that have arisen in terms of the sustainability of the region's style of development will persist".[6] To engage in a more strategic and transformative

approach, ECLAC highlights such priorities as promoting: renewable energies, the restoration and upgrading of urban services (public transport, water and sanitation), the circular economy, and the digital and care economy, amongst other measures. The majority of these domains are related to LRG responsibilities. It is important to incorporate and mainstream the SDGs into all policy-making processes and planning and budgetary documents, as a fundamental compass for steering action. Indeed, **the sustained involvement of subnational governments in long-term development policy, going beyond punctual support measures, requires a review of top-down approaches to institutional coordination and improved policy coherence**.

The spaces that LRGs have been given for recovery strategies and long-term development plans, with the objective of restarting domestic demand and investment, are a key indicator of the level of success expected during this Decade of Action. Of 27 OECD countries surveyed that had recovery plans, fewer than half (12) explicitly mentioned the SDGs. This proportion was also limited in countries surveyed in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (two out of four), Sub-Saharan Africa (three out of five), East and South Asia (one out of nine) and Latin America (none out of four).[7] In the European Union (EU), the aim of the

Recovery and Resilience Facility designed within the framework of the NextGenerationEU programme (which has received 806.9 billion EUR in funding) is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic. It has been deployed through loans and grants to help Member States to undertake reforms and investment to face up to new challenges associated with: working towards green, digital transitions and decarbonized societies; improving social and territorial cohesion; and bolstering health care and economic and social resilience. However, **LRGs have not been consulted or involved in implementation in all EU countries**. Greek local government officials participated in the formulation of the Greece 2.0 National Recovery and Resilience Plan, and through the Antonis Tristis programme of 2020, municipalities are encouraged to fund local investment related to the green transition, digitalization, employment and social cohesion, and economic and institutional transformation policies, amongst others. In **Italy**, through the Recovery and Resilience Plan, efforts to recover from COVID-19 are aimed at building a more sustainable and resilient future. For this, the country has aligned short- and medium-term recovery measures with long-term overarching sustainable development objectives: sustainable mobility, more energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy sources (including

the circular economy and waste and water management) and the digital transition. To foster policy coherence, Italy has innovated a specific plan with a series of different tools, including a dedicated matrix, with fiches and indicators. These have been created to facilitate coordination, particularly between the country's central government, regions and metropolitan cities.[8]

Other countries, in other regions, are also aligning and promoting recovery plans and SDGs at different scales. One of the ten priorities in **Kazakhstan**'s National Development Plan: Kazakhstan 2050, which was last revised in 2020, is "balanced regional development", with the aim of aligning regional plans with national goals. Direct investment at the subnational level has already increased by 51%, between 2019 and 2020, due to the implementation of national plans for regional development. In the **Philippines**, the Program for Recovery with Equity and Solidarity included a whole-of-government approach and the country's infrastructure programme for 2016-2022 intends to devolve more responsibilities and to increase investment at the subnational level.[9] In September 2020, the Parliament of **Botswana** approved a government-developed Economic Recovery and Transformation Plan (worth 40 billion BWP) to help the national economy to recover

from the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and to build back better. The annual allocation for local councils is the prerogative of the country's central government, meaning that local governments cannot use them in projects of their choice unless authorized to do so by the central government. In Senegal, the decentralization process is embedded in the Emerging **Senegal** Plan and LRGs increased their direct capital investment by 70% from 2018 to 2019. **Many countries that are developing recovery plans have different expectations regarding the role that LRGs can play.** While in some cases, they are included as partners for investment strategies, in others the role that they could play in revitalization strategies has not been clearly defined.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS: JOINING FORCES FOR GREATER RESOURCE MOBILIZATION AND IMPROVED FINANCING OF RECOVERY SCHEMES

Within this complex context, **a wide range of actors who are keen to improve subnational government finances have joined forces through spaces such as: the Malaga Global Coalition for Municipal Finance**, which was created in 2018 by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV) and UCLG. Their main objective is to reshape the financial ecosystem and make it work for LRGs. Such discussions undertaken in international forums are subsequently taken to the national and regional levels in order to influence policies relating to mechanisms for financing local government initiatives.[10] Alternatives to promote the financing of a sustainable urban transition include: coaching sessions and the capacitation of the FMDV; the International Municipal Investment Fund – Technical Assistance Facility; the C40 Cities Finance Facility; the ICLEI-Transformative Actions Programme; the Cities and Climate Change in Sub-Saharan Africa of the French development agency, AFD; and the GCoM City Climate Finance Gap Fund. These initiatives provide technical support to LRGs with the drafting and consolidation of their sustainability-related projects in order to help them to be eligible for financing. **Intermediaries working within the financial ecosystem, such as subnational development banks, can also offer various financial instruments through which to channel funding to local projects and improve the capacity of subnational governments to manage**

projects. All these mechanisms are becoming more readily available and should be mobilized to improve the architecture of subnational financing.

The financial hardship experienced by LRGs over the past two years has certainly slowed down and hindered the localization of the SDGs, particularly in developing countries. However, the immediate, institutional and long-term responses of national governments have shown **that multilevel governance must continue to be promoted and strengthened for more resilient and collaborative responses to crises**. During the first stages of the pandemic, central governments usually took over the territorial management of the health crisis and assigned responsibilities to intermediary bodies for the localization of national policies. When this proved insufficient to meet citizens' needs, LRGs proposed their own measures for providing economic and social support, reflecting their key role in the provision of essential services. Under this strenuous situation, the evolution of finances highlighted the close relations between central and subnational levels of governments. With a longer-term perspective, the emergency pushed countries to unlock unprecedented financial resources through recovery packages and investment policies designed at the national level, which have only occasionally involved subnational governments. **It is critical for financing flows to be better aligned with promoting sustainable**

development and for local financial systems to be strengthened and to contribute to the mobilization of domestic resources, thereby improving access to long-term finances. As long-term investment pathways are decisive for achieving the SDGs, there is a crucial need to increase the presence of LRGs in the negotiation and implementation of these national plans. In the case of less developed countries from the economic point of view, official development assistance should be targeted to provide more investment in local public services and infrastructure and to accelerate SDG localization.

Investment in public services and local resilient infrastructure is a shared responsibility amongst the different levels of government. National governments must shape an enabling framework that subnational governments can use to meet their devolved responsibilities and the demands of their citizens and to provide further revenue for investment. The pandemic has revealed some areas that require attention in intergovernmental coordination and has clearly shown the need for additional funding sources, renewed models of multilevel governance, and integrated SDG planning mechanisms. Crises are expected to become more frequent in the future. LRGs and societies should therefore build up their resilience and find ways to keep on the road towards achieving the SDGs.

#6. CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

As of 2022, the international community and national governments are increasingly recognizing the key role that LRGs can and must play in achieving the 2030 Agenda and other global sustainability commitments. Nevertheless, this recognition varies unevenly across regions, and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, as well as the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement and, in general, global development agendas, still requires radical changes in our governance systems. Overall, achieving these global objectives requires making critical efforts to advance towards a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach capable of accelerating SDG implementation, renewing the social contract with communities and protecting our planet. In particular, municipalities, cities, districts, departments, provinces and regions need to accelerate their engagement and use the SDGs as an important reference framework to support their actions, as well as to spread the word to collectively overcome obstacles towards the 2030 Agenda. LRGs have the responsibility, as the level of government closest to populations, to step up to the magnitude of the challenges.

This year's report to the HLPF has provided an overview of LRGs' efforts to promote sustainable development despite the socio-economic difficulties and overlapping crises that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused. The recent evolution of LRGs' initiatives for SDG localization and reporting is proof that they are striving to maximize their use of resources and, at times, exceeding their competences. Nevertheless, this is not tenable and prevents the transformative potential of LRGs' initiatives from being realized. The analysis of the 2022 reporting countries' VNRs is also proof that, even if progress is observed, important efforts still have to be made to increase LRGs' involvement in national coordination mechanisms and in the development of national-level localization strategies. This will be critical to take their perspective, needs and proposals into account, resolutely empower them and scale up their efforts. There is an urgent need to accelerate SDG localization.

LRGs remain at the forefront of emergency response and pathways to recovery, whether related to health, climate or war

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in a critical situation, with setbacks reported in many sectors and countries across the world. Moreover, the ways in which this has happened are complex and interconnected with other complex emergencies, including climate change and protracted conflicts. However, with the support of local communities, and despite the forced reorientation of local priorities, frontrunning LRGs are using the 2030 Agenda as a framework to build back better and leave no one and no place behind. All LRGs should follow this example, as the crisis has shed light on how universal, safe and affordable local public service provision is at the heart of achieving the 2030 Agenda and of safeguarding our societies and future generations.

There are significant signs of progress. Awareness of the SDGs is growing among LRGs, partly due to the efforts of their networks. These networks work on awareness-raising actions, with campaigns and training being their most common actions across regions. Going further, many LRGs are already implementing policies that are directly or indirectly linked to the SDGs, and they are adopting multistakeholder approaches critical to leave no one behind. Yet, more efforts need to be made to convince LRGs of the relevance of integrating the 2030 Agenda within their guiding strategies and planning frameworks, in order to fully institutionalize SDG localization and mainstream all 17 SDGs throughout local policies and actions.

LRGs are acting to foster quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5) while also protecting life below water (SDG 14) and on land (SDG 15), all of this through partnerships for the goals (SDG 17)

The COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on education are vast and far-reaching. The pandemic has wiped out 20 years of learning gains and has led to a reversal in the achievement of SDG 4 that may only be rectified through wholehearted and concerted efforts that bring together all stakeholders and levels of government. In particular, because cities are places of innovation, they can contribute to a quality public learning environment and improve access to education.

This report provides an overview of how LRGs are enshrining SDG 4 in their visions for their territories' development. Some LRGs enrich school curricula and promote early childhood development (e.g. kindergarten), while other LRGs have taken action against segregation by broadening structurally marginalized populations' access to post-secondary education and strengthening technical and vocational skills for young adults. Several initiatives to address Indigenous people's needs can also be highlighted as LRGs foster racial, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Participatory policy-making and a social and educational approach that is territorialized and community-based are key to address fragmentation and the digital divide, especially at the neighbourhood level.

Overall, attaining SDG 4 requires comprehensive action because its achievement is intrinsically interconnected with that of other SDGs. For instance, some LRGs link education and access to food through school canteens, thus advancing SDG 2 while also reducing absenteeism and school dropout. Additionally, it is estimated that 11 million girls will not return to school after the COVID-19 closures, illustrating the necessity of coordinated action on SDGs 4 and 5. Overall, improving learning environments requires strengthening access to public services and infrastructure. LRGs have a privileged position to understand and respond to their populations' diverse educational needs. As this report notes, the intersecting discrimination that certain populations face – due to their gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, ability or other identity characteristics – call for localized educational solutions. LRGs play a critical role in fostering gender-responsive education and in enhancing inclusive citizenship by providing adaptation measures for populations that suffer from longstanding discrimination.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been glaringly gendered and have fuelled gender inequality, curbing progress towards SDG 5. Violence and harassment against women and girls have increased and remain a critical problem to be addressed in all societies. LRGs are particularly active in developing innovative mechanisms to reduce gender-based harassment in public space and transport, promote solidarity and assist women and children survivors of violence.

The persistent structural and intersecting inequalities that the pandemic has made more visible call for the adoption of a people-centred approach, reconsidering the notion of care, to truly build back better. Caring cities and territories particularly recognize the inequalities faced by women and other structurally discriminated groups, as well as the crucial need to empower them and support their agency. LRGs' initiatives include bringing about cultural changes by increasing women's and non-binary persons' presence and visibility in cities. LRGs are also creating institutions to elevate feminist and gender-sensitive perspectives and incorporate them into decision-making processes across policy sectors. Yet, regarding women's representation in local governments, the margin for improvement remains large. As of January 2020, women comprised 36% of the world's local deliberative bodies –although low, this is still a higher figure than the global average for women's representation in national parliaments.

The Feminist Municipal Movement advocates for putting care at the core of a new kind of politics, resolutely addressing inequalities by applying an equality lens and enabling feminist governance in which care and empathy orient LRGs' responses towards responding to communities' diverse needs and aspirations. This implies that LRGs should not only increase the participation of women, structurally discriminated groups and local feminist leaders in decision-making, but also create better institutions and policies to upend traditional socio-economic, gender-based and racial hierarchies. All in all, these

actions aim to foster structural cultural, societal and political changes for equality and democracy. This required shift also has to bring about more caring masculinities, which are crucial for ending violence against women, girls and non-binary people. We are at a turning point: recovery strategies and associated resources provide a window of opportunity to address inequalities, precarity and vulnerabilities and take action to collectively build a more just and sustainable future.

LRGs are also contributing to the protection of ecosystems, both on earth and below water. Their role and responsibilities have increased as the climate crisis becomes more acute and threatens livelihoods and biodiversity. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the intrinsic connections between people and nature, some LRGs are adopting care as an integral approach to development that goes beyond caring for humans only. Regarding SDG 14, front-runner LRGs are implementing actions to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas, marine resources and the life within them by reducing pollution, promoting circular economies, adopting integrated coastal zone management approaches and expanding marine protected areas. Initiatives have included protecting and restoring seaweed forests and mangroves in tropical areas, as well as wetland areas, because they are crucial for the survival of whole ecosystems, both marine and terrestrial. Moreover, the diminution of mass tourism during the lockdowns underlined this industry's negative impact on the environment.

In their recovery strategies, the most economically affected LRGs have taken action to sustainably transform their tourism sector to better protect local resources and guarantee decent livelihoods to people who depend on it.

With respect to SDG 15, LRGs are progressively more involved in managing protected areas, moving from merely collaborating with national governments to assuming full administrative responsibility for these areas. LRG networks are also active in reforestation and forest protection programmes in tropical areas and are on the front lines of wildfire prevention and sustainable forest management. They are actively implementing programmes to combat desertification and reverse land degradation. Engaging with communities, an increasing number of LRGs participate in global initiatives to reduce biodiversity loss. They also favour nature-based solutions, promote urban forests and foster urban wildlife through green infrastructure to prevent biodiversity decline, while facilitating local employment and overall benefits from ecosystem services.

Indeed, SDG localization processes require LRGs to approach the territory as

a multifunctional and connected system, in which humans cohabit with natural ecosystems. Thus, LRGs need to think together about human rights and the impact of human activities on nature. To do so, a first and crucial step is promoting innovation and knowledge exchanges by combining scientific monitoring, civil society oversight and traditional knowledge to mitigate deforestation, intensive agriculture and urbanization; to manage watersheds and coastal and marine pollution; to increase resilience to sea-level rise; and to prevent and adapt to the effects of climate change on territories. Ultimately, it is LRGs' political choice to drive forward more structural changes in economic models and production and consumption systems.

Overall, the pandemic and the urgent need to accelerate SDG implementation before 2030 highlight the importance of multilevel and multistakeholder cooperation. This involves cooperation between national governments and LRGs, as well as with non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, local communities, the private sector, development organizations, scientists and academia. The SDGs will not be achieved without coordinated efforts from all societal actors. Furthermore, strengthening global and local partnerships pushes for long-term shifts to respond to threats and challenges caused by overlapping emergencies and improves the resilience of our systems and societies to current and future crises.

Regional disparities in SDG localization persist

SDG implementation across the world's regions varies considerably. Differences in advancing towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda stem from national contexts of decentralization and LRGs' capacities. In some regions, such as Europe, subnational governments are making progress at a quicker pace, taking advantage of a long tradition of local self-governance. Significant progress is also observed this year in LRGs of reporting countries in Africa, while the situations in Latin America or in Asia-Pacific are more mixed.

The unequal involvement of LRGs in VNR preparation and in national coordination mechanisms across countries reflects disparities in national governments' acknowledgement of the critical role that LRGs can play. Despite improvements in Europe and Africa, LRGs' participation in VNR preparation processes remains limited globally, and LRGs tend to be only irregularly involved at a consultative level. Many national strategies for SDGs still do not include clear localization strategies. This report thus points out the urgent need for governments to improve institutional coordination. From LRGs' side, it is necessary to accelerate intermunicipal cooperation, support LGAs' crucial efforts and further engage in SDG reporting processes. At the same time, it will be essential to speak with one voice to national and international levels of governance and advocate for LRGs' involvement in coordinated and collaborative strategies for SDG implementation at all levels.

Recovery strategies may hold the key to accelerating the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and global sustainability commitments if they account for LRGs

More than two years after the initial COVID-19 outbreak, recovery processes are now taking root in many parts of the world. Emergency governance and short-term responses are now giving way to medium- or long-term strategies. Some national governments are seizing this opportunity to link their policies to their international commitments for sustainable development.

The analysis of the 44 reporting countries' VNRs has shown that countrywide visions and strategies for sustainable development are flourishing, with many of these strategies already integrating the SDGs. New national coordination mechanisms have been created to steer SDG implementation and monitor progress. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent emergency responses have raised a question about the most effective type of governance to prepare for future crises. Countries that were able to respond quickest and most effectively to the crisis had strong multilevel coordination mechanisms and integrated their LRGs in such mechanisms.

LRGs need more resources to drive forward recovery efforts and SDG localization: recovery packages from national to subnational levels of government have to be more generous

During the pandemic, national governments in different countries pushed LRGs to assume more responsibility and deliver more public services, without always ensuring the corresponding resources. LRGs had to ensure the continuity of public services provision during and after lockdowns while, in many cases, also being in charge of coordinating on-the-ground adaptation measures, such as vaccination campaigns, to ensure the resumption of economic activities. This new *de facto* distribution of power has reinforced accountability and people's trust in their local governments.

Yet, the deficits in LRG finances that have been incurred in the past two years have certainly slowed down or hindered SDG localization. Even though some governments implemented multilevel responses during the pandemic's outbreak, recovery packages and investment policies so far have not provided enough resources to fill the finance gaps created by LRGs' exceptional efforts during the crises, nor to provide for more long-term policies and strengthen SDG implementation. Additionally, recovery strategies and intergovernmental fiscal transfers have not yet devoted enough attention or resources to increasing LRGs' capacity to prepare for future crises. The call for the stabilization and predictability of these transfers, grants and subsidies must go beyond the usual budget laws and consider LRGs' vital role during emergency situations.

The acceleration of subnational reporting processes through VLRs and VSRs highlights the willingness of LRGs and their associations to advocate at the national and international level for greater involvement and multilevel governance

Both VLRs and VSRs are powerful and essential tools to reinforce LRGs' advocacy to strengthen the localization movement: these bottom-up SDG reporting efforts are political processes in themselves that have direct and indirect impacts on improving multilevel governance. However, there is still an urgent need to enhance or, in some regions, even create monitoring and reporting systems to gather robust local data in order to assess LRGs' progress on SDG localization. The indicators defined by the United Nations, as well as the national indicator systems in many countries, are generally not disaggregated to take into account local realities. As a result, they do not allow for tracking progress or the impact of various core local policies in the implementation of the SDGs. This lack of local indicators has also been preventing subnational governments from providing adequate place-based responses in planning and decision-making, as well as in resource allocation towards achieving the 2030 Agenda's localization.

Nonetheless, this past year, VLRs and VSRs have provided concrete proposals for involving LRGs in COVID-19 recovery strategies and packages, as well as emergency mechanisms for potential future crises, to create truly multilevel national (and international) coordination for SDG localization. Local, regional and national governments from countries that have reported to the HLPF since 2016

participate in sharing and expanding knowledge and monitoring of SDG localization progress across the world. These cross-fertilization processes need to be further encouraged and accelerated.

VNRs, VSRs and VLRs are complementary processes; opportunities should thus be taken from each process to nurture the others. Indeed, most VSRs were produced at the same time as VNRs to provide for direct synergies and contribute to completing national reports with the most updated local-level information. VSRs have entailed horizontal cooperation and the reinforcement of work dynamics between LRGs and their national associations.

In particular, this report has highlighted the essential role of LGAs in promoting dialogue between local governments, local partners and national authorities. Their efforts in reporting on SDG implementation have contributed to scaling up local action on the SDGs by helping local governments to become more actively involved in the localization process at all stages: in defining, implementing, monitoring and evaluating strategies and priorities.

Ultimately, acknowledging LRGs' active role and growing engagement remains critical to revitalize national institutional environments and a multilateral system to achieve sustainable development, in which decisions are locally-owned, people-centred and place-based to leave no and no place behind. These are necessary conditions to build back safer, more resilient, sustainable and just societies.

6.2 WAYS FORWARD

1. Systematize and improve LRGs' involvement in national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes, not only through consultation but also through regular participation and decision-making power for better multilevel governance

It is urgent for LRGs to have a clear role and voice in national decision-making processes related to their responsibilities in localizing the SDGs. Giving LRGs a seat at the table allows for national and global debates to actually reflect the needs and aspirations of local populations. LRGs are being increasingly consulted. Nevertheless, since 2016, less than 50% of the countries that have reported to the HLPF have consulted their LRGs during the VNR process, and less than one-third involve them in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation. As the level of government closest to the population, LRGs need to be more regularly and directly involved in the policy-making process and the definition of SDG localization strategies. Continuing to nurture multilevel dialogue and engagement is crucial. At the international level, fully incorporating LRGs' voices is key to ensure that the multilateral system remains fit for purpose to safeguard the future of our societies and our planet.

2. Align recovery strategies with the achievement of the global agendas to accelerate progress on SDG localization

LRGs and LGAs are increasingly prioritizing sustainable development and, consequently, the fulfilment of global commitments, aligning them with their agendas and resources. However, we have seen that recovery plans have yet to integrate SDGs to build back better and leave no one behind. It is thus critical to further strengthen complementary recovery and SDG localization efforts. Financial recovery packages should support equitable access to local public services to ensure the protection of human rights. National governments, as well as the international community, should leverage the traction of the global localization movement and learn from LRGs' commitments and experiences to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

3. Strengthen the capacities and resources of subnational governments to contribute to crisis mitigation, adaptation and recovery

The good progress achieved so far continues to be hindered by LRGs' insufficient resources. With few exceptions, recovery packages have not met LRGs' expectations for subnational finances, hence making it difficult to scale up their efforts and accelerate the advances made so far. Regional and local capacities should be strengthened, especially in marginalized areas and regions, to foster endogenous sustainable development and SDG implementation. This implies revamped intergovernmental fiscal architecture for more transparent and reliable transfers from national governments to LRGs. Local and regional plans should also be supported by allocated resources, adequate local capacities and power, as well as monitoring and benchmarking mechanisms. In addition, technical assistance and appropriate enabling environments for institutions are necessary to nurture the financial, political and administrative mechanisms that will enable more equality-enhancing practices from the bottom up and promote partnerships to mobilize a wider range of resources.

4. Accelerate the alignment of local plans with the 2030 Agenda and strengthen national planning systems, taking into account systemic inequalities in disadvantaged regions to leave no one behind

Well-functioning national and local planning systems are imperative for coordinating national and local efforts to achieve the SDGs and leave no one and no place behind. Progress has been observed in a number of countries where national and local development plans have been aligned with the SDGs. However, the linkages between national and local plans are not always articulated well. The most

commonly observed challenge is that further efforts and assistance are needed to ensure these plans are effectively implemented.

To accelerate SDG localization, a first and crucial step is to make sure planning mechanisms are adequately supported and monitored. This entails developing more participatory approaches, representing all social groups and ensuring place- and community-based solutions. Strengthened planning systems require adequate interaction and bidirectionality between national and regional/local planning mechanisms. This could propel sustainable urbanization, more balanced territorial development and ecologically and socially responsible ways of interacting with natural systems, while ensuring all voices are accounted for and represented in decision-making.

5. Establish feminism and care as pillars of a renewed approach to achieving the SDGs

The past two years have shown that adopting care as an overarching vision for planning and development has the potential to transform our societies and systems. If incorporated in policy decisions, a feminist perspective that puts care and human rights at the centre can be decisive for reaching those furthest behind, including women, older people and youth, racialized and migrant populations and people living and working informally.

Feminist and caring local policies indeed lay the foundation for an inclusive approach to respond to global crisis such as COVID-19, addressing inequalities and ultimately achieving the SDGs. Such an approach entails empowering women, non-binary people and individuals whose voices have traditionally not been represented in policy-making at local but also national levels. This includes adopting policies that grant social and political recognition to care work, in addition to placing more economic value on this work through public services, and in particular recognizing often-invisible and unpaid care workers.

#. NOTES

#1. INTRODUCTION

1 UN-ECOSOC, 'Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Report of the Secretary-General (E/2022/Xxx)', 2022,

2 UN-ECOSOC, 'Building Back Better from the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) While Advancing the Full Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (E/HLS /2022/57)', 2022.

3 Information obtained from OECD and UCLG, "Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Country Profiles" (to be published in 2022); OECD and UCLG, "2019 Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Country Profiles", SNG-WOFI (Paris, 2019); UCLG Africa and Cities Alliance, "Assessing the Institutional Environment of Local Governments in Africa", 2018; CLGF, "Country Profiles", Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2022; interviews with LRG and LGA representatives; Voluntary Subnational Reviews from LGAs in the reporting countries; local media and other sources.

4 Mali has been subject to recurring political and security crises since its independence, with the most recent dating back to August 2020.

5 OECD and UCLG, "2019 Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Key Findings", SNG-WOFI (Paris, 2019); and UCLG, "GOLD V: The Localization of the Global Agendas. How Local Action Is Transforming Territories and Communities" (Barcelona, 2019).

6 According to the CLGF's Grenada Country Profile, Grenada's Constitution states there should be a local government council on Carriacou and Petite Martinique. Although they have yet to be implemented since being outlined in 1995, plans to establish a county council were at an advanced stage as of 2018.

#. NOTES

#3. LOCAL ACTION FOR SDG LOCALIZATION ◄

1 In Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, there is no evidence of elected local governments. At the time of finalizing this report, on 29 June 2022, the VNRs of Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Jamaica, Pakistan, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Tuvalu and Uruguay were not yet published. For Dominica, the Gambia, Jamaica, Pakistan and Uruguay, we analyzed the answers to the GTF/UCLG survey. For the other four countries, as there was no other source of information (e.g. GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, VSRs or VLRs), LRGs' involvement in their VNR processes could not be assessed here.

2 These practices include the Climate Action Plan and Resilience Strategy, the Green Growth Programme, a safely managed sanitation services project, the bus rapid transit system and the development of family-friendly, car-free and accessible parks and other public spaces.

3 Interview with Chiara Barberis, City of Geneva, on 13 June 2022.

4 See local and regional authorities' good practices on the SDGs here and here.

5 Executive Order No. 27, series 2017, DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2019-189, Guidance on the preparation and/or updating of land use and development plans and investment programs. The alignment of provincial and local plans with the PDP is stipulated in the Local Government Code, Section 17: Basic Services and Facilities. Republic Act No. 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991.

6 DILG-NEDA JMC No.1, 18 November 2016. Provincial governors, municipal and city mayors, members of the local councils, and planning and development coordinators participate in these dialogues.

7 To institutionalize the SGLG, RA 11292 or the SGLG Act of 2019. Also see: DILG Memorandum Circular No. 2022-026. 2022 Seal of Good Local Governance: Pagkilala sa Katapatan at Kahusayan ng Pamahalaang Lokal and Assessment of the Performance Challenge Fund and the Seal of Good Local Governance: Perceptions from Municipalities.

8 In relation to the seal, a financial grant called the Performance Challenge Fund is also granted to award recipients. It can fund SDG-related initiatives.

9 A first analysis was launched in 2019: Capturing Philippine Cities Achieving SDGs through the LCP City Database Project, 2019 report.

10 See the Republic Act No. 1135. Community-Based Monitoring System Act. Data shall be collected every three years.

11 The Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE), not reporting to this edition of the HLPF, recently submitted its third VSR. See Section 3.4 for more information.

12 Information based on Eswatini's 2022 VNR; the LGA's response to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey; and an interview held with Gordon B. Mbuli, director of ELGA.

13 Response to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, complemented by an interview with Youssouf Diakite, executive director of AMM.

14 Response to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey.

15 UNESCAP, Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific, 17 January 2022, ESCAP/RFSD/202.

16 See here as well as several sectoral plans, including the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Makati Smart City Plan and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management.

17 See here (accessed 8 June 2022).

18 Statistical Office of the European Communities, *Sustainable Development in the European Union: Monitoring Report on Progress towards the SDGs in an EU Context : 2022 Edition*, 2022

19 Report of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the Economic Commission for Europe region on its sixth session, E/HLPF/2022/3/Add.3, 29 April 2022. "Available data shows that the region will achieve only 26 SDG targets by 2030, which represents a quarter of all the targets for which there is sufficient evidence. Income inequality is worsening in many countries and advances on nutrition and sustainable food supply have been insufficient…"

20 Abruzzo, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Piedmont, Sardinia, Tuscany, Veneto and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano.

21 Florence, Genoa, Messina, Milan, Reggio Calabria, Rome, Turin and Venice.

22 Regions of Abruzzo, Marche and Umbria; Region of Emilia Romagna and the Metropolitan City of Bologna; Region of Lazio; Region of Liguria; Region of Lombardy and Metropolitan City of Milan; Region of Piemonte and Metropolitan City of Torino; Region of Puglia and Metropolitan City of Bari; Autonomous Region of Sardinia; and the metropolitan cities of Genova, Messina, Reggio Calabria and Rome.

23 Response to the GTF/UCLG 2022 survey, complemented by an interview with Agita Kaupuza, Head of the Brussels Office of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments.

24 Sources: https://uniondesvilles.ch/fr; https://www.chgemeinden.ch/fr/index.php; interview with Chiara Barberis, Agenda 21, City of Geneva, 13 June 2022

25 See: Buenos Aires with its School First initiative and professional training, Lincoln with the Women's Leadership School, Rosario with Andamios, San Justo with Acompañar and Santa Fe with Learning at Home. Additional initiatives address food security (in Esteban Echeverria), integral caring approaches (in Santa Fe), the environment (in Santa Fe, including urban gardens and re-naturing), social housing (San Justo), neighbourhood upgrading (in Esteban Echeverria) and support to SMEs' circular economy (in Villa María).

26 Interview with Erlinda Minero, COAMSS, May 2022. On the legal reforms, see: here and here (accessed 11 June 2022).

27 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, "Annual SDG Review 2022" (United Nations, 2022).

28 For more details on this survey, see Section 2, "Methodology". It is assumed that survey respondents are the most motivated LRGs and LGAs and should have some level of knowledge of the SDGs. SDG awareness varies across regions: 55% in Europe, 48% in Latin America, 45% in Africa, 38% in the Asia-Pacific region, 40% in the Middle East and West Asia and 32% in Eurasia.

29 LGAs from Belgium, Norway and Sweden published a report last year.

30 LRGs responding from European non-reporting countries are from Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Sweden. Spanish respondents represent 12 out of the 23 answers within this group.

31 LGAs from Benin, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia and Zimbabwe; and LRGs from Angola, Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda.

32 The Associations of Sub-national Administration Councils in Cambodia, the All India Institute of Local Self Government, the Association of Indonesian Municipalities (APEKSI), the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN), the

Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal (ADCCN) and the association Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ).

33 No regional trend conclusions can be drawn for North America, as only one answer (from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, FCM) was received from non-reporting countries in the region.

34 The Association of Mayors of Major Cities of Madagascar (AMGVM) has created the "City's Up Madagascar" Days, dedicated to the development of capacity building and partnerships of Malagasy cities and the dissemination of world news on sustainable urban development. The National Federation of Tunisian Municipalities (FNCT) invites municipalities to share their experience during monthly webinars. Both the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) and the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) have communicated information on the SDGs to their membership.

35 To date, 11 VLRs have been developed in six African countries, representing 9% of the VLRs published worldwide. These VLRs have sometimes been developed with the support of international organizations (in particular, UNECA and UN-Habitat), including for the following locations: Accra (Ghana); Busia, Kwale, Marsabit and Taita Taveta (Kenya); Cape Town (South Africa); Harare and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe); Kitagwenda and Ngora District (Uganda); and Yaoundé (Cameroon).

36 Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ), Taipei City, Associations of Sub-national Administration Councils in Cambodia.

37 Such as the Association of Indonesian Municipalities (APEKSI) or Hamamatsu City (Japan).

38 Presentation of Jakarta Province's VLR by the Head of the Regional Development Planning Board, DKI Jakarta, during the 9th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development Side Event Proceedings (Side event "Bridging the Gap: Experience of Subnational Governments in Reporting and Monitoring SDGs Achievement", 28 March 2022). Jakarta Province's VLR considers the importance of multisectoral collaboration in handling the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the SDGs; its own process included the representation of the national government and of the Provincial Government Association of Indonesia (APPSI). Overall, in the province, different innovations implemented during the pandemic accelerated achieving SDG targets.

39 To involve LRGs in its SDG implementation process, Uzbekistan included the National Council for the Coordination of Local Self-Governments in the interagency Coordination Council in charge of the SDGs. However, no direct LRG participation has been observed so far.

40 These include the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) of Serbia, the Association of Municipalities and Towns of Slovenia (SOS), the

Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (ZELS) and Cités Unies France (CUF). Platforma has carried out several training sessions on SDGs and decentralized cooperation.

41 These include the association Danish Regions (DR), the Local Councils' Association (LCA) of Malta, the Association of Estonian Cities and Municipalities (AECM) and the Government of Catalonia (Spain).

42 The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission presented the second edition of its Handbook for VLRs at the World Urban Forum in Katowice, Poland, in June 2022. The first edition is available here and the second here.

43 CEPAL-ECLAC, "A Decade of Action for a Change of Era. Fifth Report on Regional Progress and Challenges in Relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean," 2022

44 Overall, although most countries in the region have not defined SDG localization strategies and mechanisms, some still provide an enabling environment for their LRGs to engage in SDG implementation and eventually promote greater ownership of the SDGs at the local level (such as in Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico and Panama).

45 CEPAL-ECLAC, "A Decade of Action for a Change of Era. Fifth Report on Regional Progress and

Challenges in Relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean," 131–32. In Mexico, a subcommittee for subnational governments was planned to be created in 2021.

46 In Paraguay, the VNR mentioned local authorities' participation, but the LGA has not confirmed their involvement. In Brazil, the National Commission on the SDGs included two representatives from the National Confederation of Municipalities of Brazil (CNM) and two representatives from the Brazilian Association of States Entities of Environment (ABEMA). However, the Bolsonaro administration eliminated the National Commission. So far, there are no clear coordination mechanisms for national-level SDG coordination.

47 See: District Decree No. 555 of December 29, 2021, "Por el cual se adopta la revisión general del Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial de Bogotá"; Agreement No. 761 of June 11, 2020 "Por Medio del cual se adopta el Plan De Desarrollo Económico, Social, Ambiental y de Obras Públicas del Distrito Capital 2020-2024", Semiannual SDG reports in the framework of the District Development Plan 2020-2024 "Un Nuevo Contrato Social y Ambiental de la Bogotá del Siglo XXI".

48 Composed of provincial and national institutions, as well as international partners, the new Provincial Planning Committee participated in workshops related to incorporating the SDGs into the provincial development plan.

49 "In recent months, this has been exemplified by growing interest among national governments in promoting VLRs and connecting them to the VNR process, as has occurred in Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala". See: CEPAL-ECLAC, "A Decade of Action for a Change of Era. Fifth Report on Regional Progress and Challenges in Relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean," 134.

50 The first one is the "Special Report on the Incorporation of the 2030 Agenda in the Municipalities of Jalisco during the 2018-2019 Period." The second one is the "Special Report on Successful Experiences of Monitoring and Implementation Bodies of the 2030 Agenda at National and International Level." Finally, the third one is the "Special Report: The Role of Public Human Rights Bodies in the Monitoring and Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Mexico."

#. NOTES

#4. LOCALIZING THE SDGs UNDER REVIEW AT THE 2022 HLPF

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2 Global Education Monitoring Report Team, "2020 Global Education Monitoring Report" (Paris, 2020), https://bit.ly/3ivOScX.

3 UNESCO, "Beyond Commitments 2019: How Countries Implement SDG 4," 3.

4 OECD, "A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals" (Paris, 2020), 122–23, https://bit.ly/3LXvqIJ.

5 OECD and UCLG, "2019 Report of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment – Key Findings," SNG-WOFI (Paris, 2019), 44–45, https://bit.ly/3prmV8X.

6 Sheila González Motos, Marina Canals Ramoneda, and Ma Ángeles Cabeza Santano, "From Reading the Charter to Constructing an Educating City" (Barcelona, 2019), https://bit.ly/3LVQSHy.

7 UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, "Key Features of Learning Cities," Introductory Note, 2022, https://bit.ly/38SNoIw.

8 Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, "Shimokawa Town the Sustainable Development Goals Report" (Kamiyamaguchi, 2018), https://bit.ly/3lUlVJe; Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, "Kitakyushu City the Sustainable Development Goals Report," 2018, https://bit.ly/3HhzxZ5.

9 City of Buenos Aires, "Reporte Local Voluntario:2021: Localización de La Agenda 2030 En La Ciudad de Buenos Aires" (Buenos Aires, 2021), https://bit.ly/3MVfFNi.

10 Bristol's analysis reflects the first UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report of 2016 and makes explicit the ways in which education is typically linked to each of the other SDGs. The city is a recipient of a UNESCO Learning City Award. This resonates with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's own mapping of Key Features of Learning Cities with SDG targets. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, "Learning Cities and the SDGs: A Guide to Action" (Paris, 2017), https://bit.ly/3NJK01d.

11 For a list of projects, see: City of Los Angeles, "Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goals," 2022, https://bit.ly/3sZoeio.

12 See: International Association of Educating Cities, "Urban Recylers Program," Educating Cities International Documents Databank, 2019, https://bit.ly/3Ne04Ic.

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14 Yulia Nesterova and Michele Schweisfurth, "Neighbourhood Effects on Children's Educational Opportunities," Policy Brief, 2021, https://bit.ly/3GpR9S8.

15 Wilbard J. Kombe et al., "The State of Inequalities in Sub-Saharan African and Asian Cities," GOLD VI Working Paper Series (Barcelona, 2022), https://bit.ly/3wVeMyT; Jaap Nieuwenhuis and Pieter Hooimeijer, "The Association between Neighbourhoods and Educational Achievement, a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 31, no. 2 (2016): 321–47.

16 Xavier Bonal et al., "Socio-Spatial Inequality and Local Educational Action in the Construction of Caring Cities," GOLD VI Working Paper Series (Barcelona, 2021). For more information and data on how social (and ethnic) segregation contributes to inequalities in education, see the example from Barcelona: Manel Riu and Roger Sanjaume, "La Segregació Invisible de Les Universitats Públiques," *El Crític*, 2021, https://bit.ly/3NFlJJN.

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18 Cantillon.

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