

“Trend of VLR in the world and the role of Japan”

Breakout session of “SDGs for Regional Revitalization Public-Private Partnership Platform” under Cabinet Office, Government of Japan

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Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues,

First of all, it is a pleasure to join this event remotely from New York and I would like to thank the organizers for their kind invitation.

It is clear that cities and regions can make a crucial contribution to the achievement of each and every Sustainable Development Goal,

and we at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs are extremely happy to see how cities and regions around the world have responded to this challenge.

However, cities and regions should not be seen as passive actors and mere implementers of the 2030 Agenda, but as key drivers for transformative change towards sustainable development, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cities can often be catalysts of innovation – pioneers in designing and testing new policies and initiatives to deliver better services and improve the living standards of all their communities.

And because of this, many other stakeholders, including national governments, can learn from their experiences in implementing the SDGs.

In the Political Declaration adopted at the 2019 SDG Summit, Member States of the United Nations reaffirmed the critical role of cities, local authorities and communities in implementing and realizing the SDGs and committed to empowering and supporting them in pursuing the 2030 Agenda.

As the Secretariat of the High-level political forum on sustainable development, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is delighted to see this pledge taking form also through increased attention to the subnational level at the HLPF, as was seen during this July’s session.

For example, the High-level Political Forum held an official session titled “Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation”.

The session had the great honor to benefit from the participation of Mr. Kuroiwa, distinguished Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture as one of the panelists.

During the Forum, our Department also organized the Third Local and Regional Governments Forum on the 2030 Agenda, together with Local 2030, UN-Habitat, UNDP and the Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments. The event brought together numerous distinguished Mayors and Governors, national government representatives, academics, and other stakeholders.

The participants discussed the ways in which cities are using the SDGs as a framework for building back better and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and their crucial contributions to the Decade of Action which calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to the biggest challenges confronting the world.

At the HLPF, we organized together with UN-Habitat, a VNR Lab on Multi-level governance and subnational reporting on VNRs and VLRs. This event showcased the linkages between the Voluntary National Reviews and the Voluntary Local Reviews and highlighted ways in which the dialogue between these processes can benefit all levels of governance.

Cities and regions were also represented in numerous other side events and other meetings.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is deeply committed to ensuring a robust monitoring and review of progress of SDG implementation. In this spirit, we are happy to see that the Voluntary Local Reviews conducted by cities and regions, modelled after the VNR reports, are picking up pace.

We believe that these reviews can provide great benefits for localization of the SDGs, for example on integrated policy-making and coordination, stakeholder engagement, identification of suitable means of implementation and enhanced data collection.

While both processes can bring great benefits in their own right, we are also keen to facilitate a dialogue between the VNRs and VLRs, since we think that these processes can enrich each other in unique ways. We are happy to see that more and more Member States are utilizing the findings of these sub-national reviews in their VNRs and including local and regional governments as partners in their review processes and SDG implementation at large.

In this regard, we have been very impressed by the Japanese collaboration at all levels of government on SDG implementation and the dedication of Japanese cities towards the VLRs.

Frontrunners such as the town of Shimokawa, cities of Kitakyushu, Toyama, and Hamamatsu serve as an inspiration for other cities around the world and can share their valuable lessons learnt from the review process. Colleagues from the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies have also contributed to the VLR movement with their high-quality analytical work and we have been very happy to collaborate with them on this topic.

The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs has from the start supported the Voluntary National Reviews and organized peer learning workshops for the countries participating in this process annually. We have noticed that the best experts in the process are those who have gone through the full cycle themselves or are preparing their reports.

This is why we held a similar event for our colleagues working at the subnational level in June on Voluntary Local Reviews. This workshop brought together cities and regions from around the world to discuss the ways in which a VLR process has benefitted their SDG implementation and to share lessons learned from the review. We were honored to have Japanese participants join this event and hope to share the invitation to future thematic workshops this fall with all interested cities and regions.

We look forward to seeing many more VLR reports produced by Japanese cities and regions. These processes can help cities and regions to review their SDG implementation and make changes to their policies and actions where needed. But they can also help us learn from each other around the world on what has worked and how to avoid the common pitfalls on our shared journey towards sustainable development.

Thank you.