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Cities Without Slums

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Deutsches Institut für
Entwicklungspolitik



German Development
Institute



Local and Regional Governments in the Follow-up and Review of Global Sustainability Agendas

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To support implementation and ensure continuous attention to shared global challenges, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda outline processes for follow-up and review. While all three agendas recognise the central role of national governments in follow-up and review, the role of local and regional governments is most explicitly recognised in the New Urban Agenda.

However, more attention to urban issues and participation of local and regional governments in follow-up and review is crucial for the effective implementation of all three agendas. Governments at all levels, development agencies, UN agencies and other relevant actors should collaborate to ensure that local and regional implementation efforts are adequately monitored and reflected on in follow-up and review processes.

Appropriate mechanisms and processes are needed to ensure that any lessons learned lead to policy changes, new and strengthened implementation partnerships, and a renewed commitment to sustainable urban development.

Why we need a local and regional perspective in follow-up and review

The way cities and human settlements are designed, planned, built, financed and governed has far-reaching implications for a life of dignity for all people and for the sustainable future of our planet. Against this background, the international context for sustainable urban development has changed through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the New Urban Agenda.

Globally, cities are increasingly recognised as transformative development actors, and their relevance for the implementation of these global agendas is acknowledged. However, institutional and political changes reflecting this acknowledgement have been slow to materialise, and sustainable urban development is not yet the global priority that it should be.

To support implementation and ensure continuous attention to shared global challenges, all three agendas—the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda—outline processes for follow-up and review.¹ *Follow-up and review* is the process of discussing efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals, based on progress monitored through systematic data collection efforts and reported through various channels.

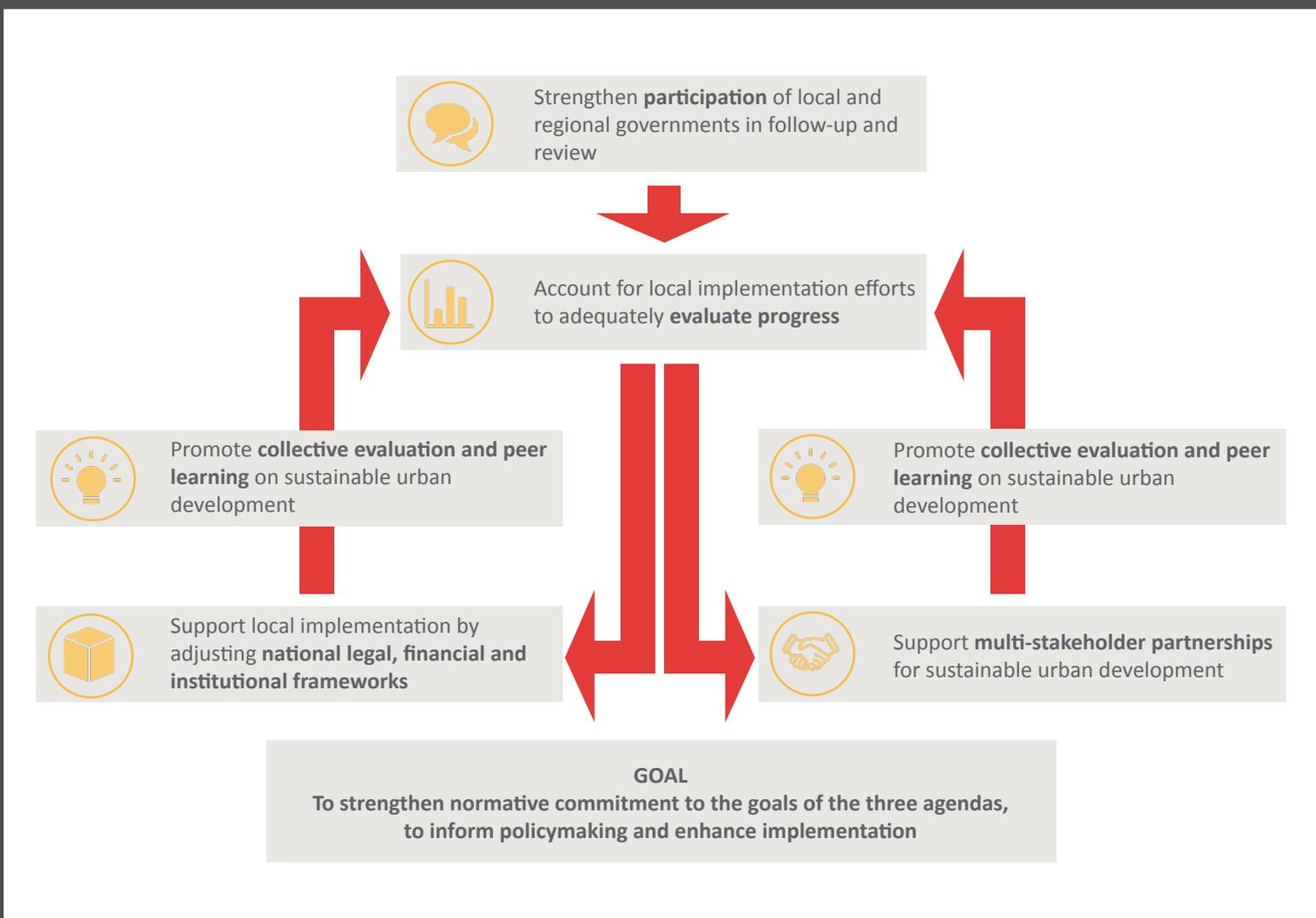
As of late, *follow-up* is also defined as a process where recommendations made, gaps identified, and amendments proposed during review are translated into concrete policy changes. Such changes should, in turn, be discussed in future review cycles to ensure an ongoing cycle of reflection.

While all three agendas recognise the central role of national governments in follow-up and review, the role of local and regional governments is most explicitly recognised in the New Urban Agenda. However, more attention to urban issues and participation of local and regional governments in follow-up and review are crucial to implementing all three agendas.

For example, improvements in national legal, institutional and financial frameworks that are implemented as a result of inclusive and evidence-based follow-up and review can help local and regional governments effectively exercise their powers. They can also enable local and regional governments to contribute to the achievement of national goals and targets.

¹ In the context of climate change, the terminology used is different, referring to “measurement, reporting and verification” (MRV) rather than follow-up and review.

Figure: Interconnected rationales for strengthening local and regional government in follow-up and review



Participation of local and regional governments

Against this background, participation by local and regional governments in follow-up and review at all levels must be strengthened. As important implementation actors, it is essential that their voices are heard, their implementation potential is fully enabled, and their data collection efforts feed into national and global assessments of progress and efforts to identify good practices. This is equally relevant for the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda.

While United Nations (UN) processes related to climate and sustainable development provide opportunities for the participation of local and regional governments, the opportunities for participation that do exist are not always used. For example, to date, participation by local and regional governments, local actors and global urban actors in the Thematic Reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) has been limited, despite the intended inclusiveness of this forum.

A lack of awareness of the relevance of the HLPF and/or lack of resources to engage in it are possible reasons. Urban issues are dispersed across multiple agendas, further dissipating urban expertise and possibly hindering the effective use of existing opportunities for participation. At the national level, research shows that few countries have strong, formalised platforms for involving local and regional governments in the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for the HLPF.

With respect to the Paris Agreement, references to urban issues in nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are limited. Hence, there is a risk that local and regional governments will play a limited role in reviews of NDC implementation. Opportunities for local and regional governments and their partners to participate in processes such as the Thematic Reviews at the HLPF and the global stocktake of the Paris Agreement are crucial. Local and regional governments should be encouraged to make use of existing opportunities to submit reports to relevant processes, such as the 2018 Talanoa Dialogue of the Paris Agreement.



Data on local and regional implementation

Efforts to harmonise the indicators and methodologies used to collect data on the activities of local and regional governments should be supported and scaled up. In the absence of adequate data on and accounting of local implementation efforts, there is a risk that the overall assessment of progress on the implementation of the global agendas misses a substantial part of the picture. Without such evaluation of local implementation efforts, their appropriateness, suitability for scaling up, etc. cannot be evaluated, and opportunities for learning from successful implementation efforts are stymied.

Existing initiatives to increase urban data availability and quality are highly fragmented and geographically uneven. For example, the many efforts to report and quantify local climate action are not always in a comparable format or using methods that allow for accurate agglomeration.

Consequently, there is a lack of consistent, reliable data on how (and how much) the local level is contributing to meeting national and international climate targets. For such data initiatives to have a more significant impact, collaboration with the national level is essential to ensure more widespread adoption of the same indicators and methodologies, and to ensure their coherence with national and global data protocols.



Enabling frameworks for local and regional governments

National governments must understand how national legal, institutional and financial frameworks influence action by local and regional governments in order to make evidence-based decisions on how to improve such frameworks. This is because different levels—or spheres—of government are mutually dependent on each other and their implementation actions can and must be mutually reinforcing. Thus, the policies, laws and initiatives put in place by national government may support—or obstruct—local and regional action.

A lack of finance, human resources and appropriate legal and institutional frameworks are key stumbling blocks that may inhibit more extensive local and regional climate action, and which national governments are in a position to shape to be more conducive for implementation.

By highlighting the current successes and future potential of local and regional action, follow-up and review can guide national governments in adjusting and / or scaling up support to local and regional governments. It is crucial that national governments institutionalise the engagement of local and regional governments in national policy design and revision processes. These processes need workflows with clear timelines and responsibilities, so that inputs from global follow-up and review processes can feed into the revision of relevant national policies in a timely manner.



Sharing lessons learned

The best data collection efforts and reports are of limited value if they are not embedded in processes of collective evaluation and opportunities for peer learning. The summative process of preparing and comparing progress in large scale reporting on global agendas acts as an opportunity for local and regional governments and their partners to come together for reflection, stimulating revision of practice.

Such efforts to support collective learning ensure that it is not just the global development community that discusses the challenges and opportunities of implementing global agendas, but also actors that can affect change at different levels.

Considering the different stakeholder groups that would benefit from learning initiatives—including, but not limited to, national governments, local and regional governments, traditional authorities and land managers, banks, the built environment professions, UN institutions, civil society organisations and philanthropies—it is likely that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to learning.

Regional follow-up and review, local and regional government networks and multi-stakeholder platforms are important for learning on urban issues and should be supported. For example, local and regional government networks have long and successful trajectories in enabling peer learning that could be expanded to further the implementation of the three agendas.

Regional follow-up and review processes, supported by the UN regional commissions, are a further opportunity for peer learning amongst UN member states and other stakeholders.



Follow-up and review as a catalyst for partnerships

Multi-stakeholder partnerships and other cooperative arrangements can support the implementation of global agendas. They can foster inclusiveness and mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources. During follow-up and review, implementation gaps may be identified, providing an incentive to establish or strengthen partnerships that address such shortcomings.

The many partnerships and other cooperative initiatives focusing on urban issues that have registered in the Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA), the Quito Implementation Platform, and the Partnerships for the SDGs registry suggest that much is already happening in this respect. However, it remains to be seen whether all partnerships have the resources to make substantial contributions to implementation. For instance, of the 70 initiatives registered on the Quito Implementation Platform, only 23 have more than USD 1 million in financial resources available to them.

Catalysing the development of high-quality partnerships will require efforts to learn from their successes and challenges. It also necessitates suitable accountability measures, as it is often difficult to ascertain whether such partnerships are making progress.

It is crucial that the activities of partnerships that self-register in the existing global registries/platforms are evaluated and encouraged to regularly submit progress reports to strengthen the evidence base on the contributions of partnerships to implementation.



Synergistic follow-up and review of global agendas

Strengthening synergies across the three agendas is important due to resource and time constraints and to ascertain that interconnections are adequately considered. At the same time, there is limited scope for adjusting the global follow-up and review architectures of the three agendas to more strongly emphasise synergies. It is possible to emphasise synergies in relevant reports, such as the quadrennial implementation report for the New Urban Agenda and the national reports prepared for the VNRs.

Local synergies and interlinkages—across the different agendas and across the SDGs—should also be emphasised during the Thematic Reviews at the HLPF. This should go beyond merely highlighting that a particular SDG is connected to other SDGs, towards identifying specific manners in which SDGs and/or agendas reinforce or undermine each other—and how this is relevant for policy design.

There are also opportunities to emphasise synergies at the local and regional level. It is particularly relevant that local governments can develop local implementation plans that identify how all three agendas can be localised in their jurisdictions, for example through local implementation plans and strategies. Such local commitments should from the onset include indicators as well as timeframes and responsibilities for follow-up and review, as better local policy decisions depend on a better evidence base and more sophisticated evaluation and reflection.

Read the report *Local and Regional Governments in the Follow-up and Review of Global Sustainability Agendas* online at www.citiesalliance.org

About the Cities Alliance

The Cities Alliance is the global partnership supporting cities to deliver sustainable development. We bring together organisations with different perspectives and expertise on city issues around common goals: well run, productive cities that provide opportunities for all residents. The Cities Alliance Secretariat is based in Brussels and is hosted by the United Nations Office for Projects Services (UNOPS).

The Cities Alliance JWP on Cities in the Global Agendas

The Cities Alliance Joint Work Programme (JWP) on Cities in the Global Agendas works to deepen the understanding, enable exchange, and increase the coherence of efforts towards the implementation of the new global development agendas in and with cities, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

The Cities Alliance recently launched jointly with the international think tank adelphi a report on the role of local and regional governments and their partners in the follow-up and review of global sustainability agendas through its JWP on Cities in the Global Agendas. The report provides recommendations for stronger involvement of local and regional government to monitor progress on the various global sustainability agendas in an integrated way.

The JWP leverages the knowledge and experiences of its broad membership consisting of the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ, chair of the JWP), the Ministry of Cities of Brazil, Ford Foundation, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom (DFID), the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH of Germany (GIZ), Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI), ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France (MEAE), Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Federal State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland (SECO), UN-Habitat, and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).



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