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PREPARING FOR A
VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW:
A HANDBOOK FOR
PACIFIC ISLAND LOCAL
AUTHORITIES



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and the Pacific, and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to First Nation elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the lands on which we occupy today were never ceded.

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ABOUT THE PACIFIC VLR HANDBOOK

The Voluntary Local Review (or VLR) is a globally-established process for assessing progress on sustainable development in a local area using the global framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, it can be much more than that.

The VLR can tell a story of how sustainable development action is being implemented in a local area. It can provide communities with an opportunity to showcase SDG successes on a global scale, and a chance to seek national or global support for further progress in recognition of the challenges that are exposed.

The VLR can also be viewed as the start of a journey where communities come together, share resources and knowledge and build partnerships focused on the common end goal of the wellbeing of people and planet, now and for the future.

Local and regional governments are significant agents of transformation. The VLR enables problems to be addressed at the level where they have the greatest effect – that is people's lives on the ground. It creates the foundation for long term engagement between people and their governments around sustainable development objectives.

This Handbook has been designed to support local authorities and other stakeholders in the Pacific Islands with building a case for undertaking a VLR. It can be used to assess the local opportunities and benefits of undertaking a VLR, identify and mobilise resources, and as a tool for engagement and advocacy to garner civic and political support.

To achieve this, the Handbook provides:

- A showcase of the benefits the VLR delivers in the context of Pacific Island nations for both local and national governments (Section 1)
- A high-level overview of the steps involved in undertaking a VLR and the resources and capabilities needed (Section 2)
- A summary of resources available (Annex A)

This Handbook is *not* a VLR 'how-to' guide. Rather, it aims to complement and provide a Pacific Islands lens on several broader and more generic global guidelines available for how to undertake a VLR, such as the Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews [Vol 1](#) and [Vol 2](#); the [Roadmap for Localising the SDGs](#); the [Africa Voluntary Local Review Guidelines](#); and the [Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines of Voluntary Local Reviews](#) which provides more regionally-relevant information.

The Handbook is particularly aimed at local planners and decision-makers, including:

- Elected representatives, mayors, CEOs, and other local authority executives
- National government representatives with sub-national portfolios
- Urban sustainability practitioners, advisors, and consultants
- Strategic and urban planners
- Community representatives
- Local sustainability advocates

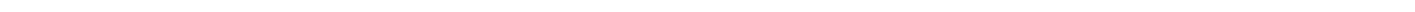
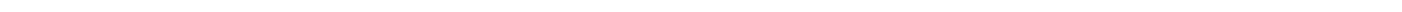


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An aerial photograph of a tropical island. The top half shows a vibrant blue coral reef with various shades of turquoise and deep blue, bordering a white sandy beach. Below the beach is a dense, lush green forest covering the island's interior. A thick layer of white mist or low clouds hangs over the forest, partially obscuring the lower part of the image. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

SECTION 1: THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND UNDERTAKING VLRS

THE 2030 AGENDA & THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2015, 193 world leaders adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – a shared blueprint to guide actions towards achieving more sustainable outcomes by 2030, in global partnership. The 2030 Agenda is a framework of 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with 169 targets and 231 indicators.

When the SDGs were adopted, it was agreed that progress on the SDGs would be reported on via the United Nations’ High Level Political Forum. Here, countries would present a review of progress, referred to as Voluntary National Reviews.

THE NEED FOR LOCALISED ACTION

While the SDGs are a global framework initially adopted by national governments, achieving the SDGs is strongly dependent on progress made at the subnational, regional and local level (Oosterhof, 2018). The local level is where problems of unsustainable development directly affect people’s lives and the environment, and it is where many solutions for better outcomes could be implemented. Estimates show at least 105 of the 169 SDG targets will not be achieved without active engagement of local authorities, including local governments and other sub-national governments (OECD, 2020; see also Figure 1).

Actioning the global goals at the local level is often referred to as localisation. While ‘SDG localisation’ is a catch-all term, it accommodates various perspectives and strategies, including localising targets and indicators for the purpose of measuring, monitoring and reporting progress, as well as engaging with the SDGs to guide, steer and manage social, political and administrative actions at the local level (Ningrum et al., 2023).



Figure 1: Locally-relevant SDG targets (adapted under Creative Commons CC BY-SA from Trundle et al. (2021), <http://doi.org/10.26188/16599293>).

THE VLR AS A PROCESS FOR LOCALISED ACTION

The Voluntary Local Review (VLR) is a localisation process that produces a tangible, public report on local progress towards the SDGs. It is designed to mirror the Voluntary National Reviews that UN member states use to report on national SDG progress to the UN High Level Political Forum.

The [VLR Declaration](#), launched by New York City in 2019, asks local and regional governments worldwide to formally commit to undertaking a VLR on their SDG progress, which would:

1. Identify how existing strategies and programs align with the global SDGs;
2. Provide at least one forum where stakeholders can come together to share local experiences, information, and lessons learned through using the SDG framework; and
3. Share the local SDG progress on a global scale during the UN High Level Political Forum.

To date, [close to](#) 200 VLRs have been conducted by towns, cities, states, or regions around the world. The City of Melbourne, Australia, was the first city in Oceania to complete a VLR, in 2022. Suva City, Fiji, is the first Pacific Island municipality to have embarked on the process, starting in 2023.

THE BENEFITS OF UNDERTAKING A VLR

VLRs can be undertaken for various reasons, but broadly speaking they serve three key objectives:

1. **Measuring sustainable development progress at the local level.** The information from this measurement can highlight strengths and celebrate success, while shedding light on areas where more work is needed to achieve improved outcomes, or areas where complete transformative action is required.
2. **Driving strategic planning for local development.** The process can provide evidence on local priorities for action, and link those priorities with a structured and globally-agreed framework to assist strategic decision making and resourcing.
3. **Fostering a consultative process as the basis of partnerships with the local community and other stakeholder groups.** Through a VLR process, authorities can engage in a constructive dialogue with local communities around local problems, needs and priorities, as well as potential strategies and solutions to address them.

Undertaking a VLR can provide a wide range of potential benefits to local authorities and their communities. These typically fall into two categories: benefits related to the product (i.e. the VLR report itself), and benefits related to the process of undertaking the VLR. Examples of both of these types of the outcomes are listed in Table 1.

However, these outcomes will not be achieved automatically – it is up to the decision makers to leverage the VLR process and the VLR report to achieve these outcomes and to effectively use the opportunity of the VLR to improve processes of strategic planning and governance in their relevant contexts.

Table 1: Summary of the potential benefits of undertaking a VLR.

Benefits related to the product, i.e. the VLR report	Benefits related to the process of undertaking a VLR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides evidence for long-term strategic planning and budgeting, as opposed to short-term reactive decision making. ▪ Provides an opportunity to bridge policy domains, consider interlinkages and coherent decision making through a balanced consideration of priorities and policy trade-offs. ▪ Progress towards local priorities is benchmarked using robust and comparable metrics. ▪ Challenges, successes, and lessons are shared more easily with other local authorities using the same framework. ▪ Provides evidence for aligning mandates, such as crisis management, resilience, and recovery plans. ▪ Identifies policy gaps and the need for improved measures or transformative change. ▪ Use of a recognisable framework supports investment decision-making by SDG global partner funders, such as UN, World Bank and bilateral donors. ▪ International attention and connection are gained through global VLR presentations. ▪ Provides data for national government monitoring and reporting of SDG progress, in reports such as VNRs, and Pacific Island SDG progress reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourages multi-level governance processes that support knowledge sharing and institutional cooperation to achieve more coherent policy planning and action. ▪ Offers opportunities to revamp governance structures for more integrated multilevel governments that exceed the VLR timeline. ▪ Facilitates cross-sectoral collaboration between government and civil society and the private sector, so shared issues can be addressed and resourced collectively. ▪ Highlights data gaps so that subnational and national bodies can work towards more inclusive data collection to more accurately gauge community level needs and challenges. ▪ Raises awareness of the SDGs across communities. ▪ Community consultation demonstrates proactive and responsive local governance. ▪ Community participation enables diverse perspectives to be heard, including youth and elders, and under-represented or hard-to-reach groups, ensuring No One is Left Behind. ▪ Participatory practices help to ensure lived experiences are placed at the centre of sustainable development decision-making. ▪ Local priorities, barriers and challenges are more clearly determined and understood. ▪ Broad consultation can lead to innovative, locally led solutions.



SECTION 2: THE VLR PROCESS

VLR OVERVIEW

A VLR report often covers the following items:

- Mapping policies and strategies against the SDGs
- Measuring progress on issues and outcomes against the SDGs using locally relevant indicators
- Identifying gaps where further improvement and progress is needed
- Suggesting solutions and strategies to address the gaps

There is no prescribed format for undertaking a VLR, and the scope and focus of the process can be adjusted to match the available resources and capacity, particularly as a starting point.

However, VLRs are generally developed in a way that simultaneously considers the social, environmental, and economic needs and challenges present in the local area. In other words, a VLR process should be appropriate and tailored for its local context and capacity.

The time it takes to undertake a VLR is largely dependent upon the scope of the review planned and the resources a local authority has ready access to. Most VLRs can be achieved within a timeframe of 6–12 months.

Broadly speaking, the VLR process has three phases: Preparing for the VLR, undertaking the VLR, and utilising the VLR outputs. The three phases will often run consecutively, however the operational steps within each phase can run either one after the other, or at the same time (see Figure 2). Stakeholder engagement is the foundation of a VLR process and needs to be actively pursued throughout the VLR process, and after the release of the VLR report. Continuing stakeholder engagement after the release of the report enables collaborative and cross-sectoral action on addressing the identified gaps and making further progress on the SDGs.

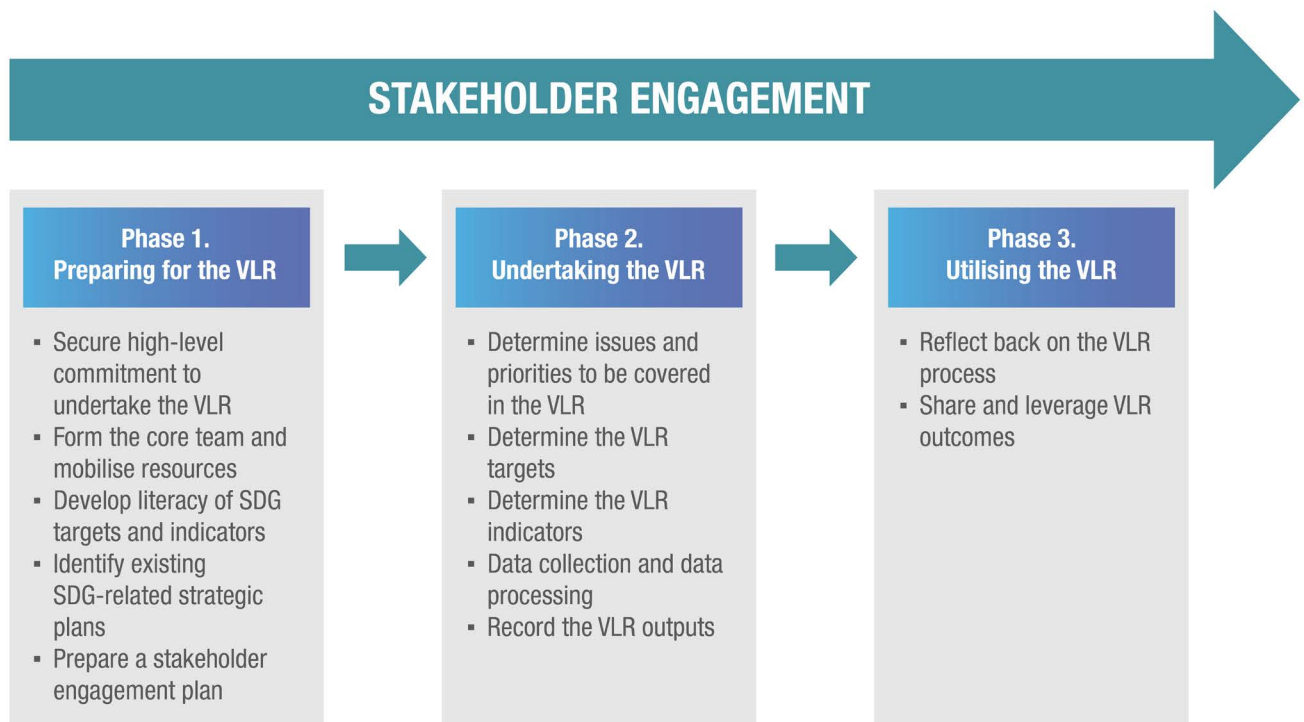


Figure 2: Summary of the VLR process.

FOUNDATION: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement and community consultation is an essential component of the VLR. It is important for decision-makers to engage in an inclusive, participatory and transparent *Talanoa*, to hear and identify the needs and priorities of the community so those priorities can be reflected in the VLR and in future development planning. Ensuring *No-One is Left Behind* is intrinsic to the 2030 Agenda. Consultation with people who are widely representative of the community, including people who have reduced social visibility and may be hard to reach will help keep the VLR inclusive and informed by diverse perspectives.

A successful VLR requires sharing knowledge, data and best practices between multiple stakeholders, including governing bodies, civil society, the private sector, NGOs and academia. A VLR has many moving parts and cannot be undertaken by a single team alone – rather it must be built and propelled through the championing and collaboration of local agencies and influential partners.

Stakeholder consultation can also reveal how organisational remits can cross over multiple SDGs, providing a deeper understanding of SDG interlinkages in terms of contributing factors and what solutions may be feasible. For example, one organisation may also be a source of data for multiple indicators across multiple targets and goals. Facilitating stakeholder engagement processes can also lead to accelerated solution seeking when organisations with shared problems align strategies and work together throughout the VLR process, as well as after the release of the VLR report.

PHASE 1. PREPARING FOR THE VLR

Secure high-level commitment to undertake the VLR

The VLR is *voluntary*. Therefore, rallying high-level political and institutional support within the local authority (e.g., a mayor, CEO, or national line ministry executive) is essential for securing resources and driving the VLR process forward, particularly in the early stages. Political endorsement also indicates local commitment to sustainable development action, which helps to encourage multi-sectoral interest and partnership, not just for producing the VLR, but also for acting upon the gaps identified through the VLR process.

Form the core team and mobilise resources

Resources needed to undertake the VLR need to be identified and mobilised across relevant portfolios of the local authority, by leveraging the high-level political commitment secured at the very early stage. Because the SDGs cover a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues, the VLR is commonly led by a core team with leadership capabilities, involving various offices and departments within the local authority, and able to work across portfolios. Ensuring the governance structure of the VLR process supports co-ownership (between the core team, stakeholders, and partners) and has clear chains of responsibility will help to foster inclusivity, project stewardship, and continued momentum.

It is also crucial to enlist VLR project champions among different groups of stakeholders, such as leaders within the faith and business communities, academia and civil organisations. Who has influence and access to broad networks in the local area? Who is respected and can help to facilitate support and action for the VLR process itself, as well as for actions needed to achieve the VLR outcomes afterwards?

Develop literacy of SDG targets and indicators

Building familiarity and understanding of the SDGs targets and indicators (SDG literacy) by the core team and key stakeholders is important for VLR preparation for three reasons:

- To assist with matching the VLR issues to relevant SDGs;
- To assist with fostering partnerships by focusing on common issues; and
- To drive better decision-making that focuses long-term outcomes.

Identify existing SDG-related strategic plans

The VLR should relate to and refer to existing policies, procedures, and practices affecting how the SDGs are implemented by the local authority. Therefore, it is important to identify and become familiar with strategies, policies, practices, and initiatives already in place or that any that are in the planning stage. These include both the authorities own decision-making documents, such as a town council's strategic plan, as well as strategic plans of other local, national or regional governments and organisations that influence SDG implementation within the local area.

Prepare a stakeholder engagement plan

Deciding on who to consult with, how to undertake engagement, and what to do with the outcomes of stakeholder engagement and community consultation is fundamental to shaping the VLR at various stages. This, however, can be a challenging process and is not always easy to do well. Enlisting stakeholder engagement specialists who will help to develop an engagement plan for effective and meaningful engagement with local, national, and regional stakeholders may be helpful. Set out the engagement plan well before you engage. See Annex B for stakeholder engagement suggestions, including how, when and with what outcome to engage.

PHASE 2. UNDERTAKING THE VLR

Undertaking the VLR starts with identifying the key issues to address and prioritising the SDGs and targets that align with those issues. This would then help to determine the indicators that best show progress against these key issues, considering what data may be required to produce those indicators and where it could be sourced.

Global best practice for VLRs recommends keeping the *goals* consistent with the global SDGs framework, to enable vertical scaling of action between local, national, and global levels. However, some of the SDG *targets* and *indicators* may need to be adjusted to work well at the local level.

Determine local SDG issues and priorities to be covered in the VLR

Early in the process your team will need to determine the scope of the VLR report, through understanding key issues and priorities you want your VLR to focus on. These can be identified through (a) the priority needs identified by stakeholders and community members, b) the priority areas highlighted by existing local policies, and/or (c) alignment with local authority strategic objectives. When done well, mapping these against the SDGs will identify both correlations and gaps with the SDGs, which can then inform planning for future sustainable development strategies.

Global best practice recommends VLRs address all 17 SDGs as it provides a comprehensive, multifaceted framing of sustainable subnational development needs, and engages a greater number of diverse actors during the VLR process. This approach, however, can be resource intensive, require a large input of data and can be unwieldy and complicated to manage for some local authorities. In several cases cities have conducted an initial VLR covering priority goals, before expanding to all 17 SDGs in future iterations.

A useful compromise is to reflect how key issues are interrelated and consider ways in which multiple SDGs can be addressed in interconnected ways. [This tool](#) by the Institute for Global Environmental Studies provides examples of the ways in which SDGs can interlink. In this approach, the VLR will be driven by specific priority issues that a local authority would like to address (issue-driven VLR), and will include all those SDGs that are interlinked to these issues.

Determine the VLR targets

Each global SDG goal has five or more *targets*. Targets are measurable, actionable objectives that specify what needs to change, to what extent, and in what time frame, in order to achieve their respective SDG.

Most of the global SDG targets have been designed to be measured and actioned at the national level. To ensure that the VLR includes targets that are relevant, actionable and achievable at the local level, the VLR process usually includes a target interrogation and adjustment activity.

In this activity, each SDG target is assessed and assigned to one of the following five decision categories (see Table 2 for examples):

1. **Keep the global target:** No change needed.
2. **Minor adjustments to the target:** Where small changes can improve local relevance.
3. **Major adjustments to the target:** Where the existing framing does not apply to the local context, but could be adjusted to be relevant.
4. **Exclude the target:** Where there is no way to adjust the time, scope, scale or subject of the target for local relevance without ultimately changing the original intent; or where there is no relevance to the local area, or the priorities of the community.
5. **Maintain the target as an advocacy action:** Where directly affecting change is outside of local authority jurisdiction, but the issue is an important priority locally, so the opportunity is taken to push for change in that space.

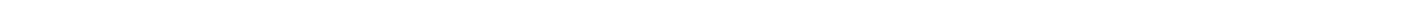


Table 2. Examples of SDGs and their targets and how they might be adjusted.

SDG	Example of original target	Example of adjusted VLR target
SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.	Target 3.6: By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents.	Adjust the timeframe from 2020 to 2030, and scale from global to local [Minor adjustment]
SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.	By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. [Keep the global target]
SDG 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.	Target 6.5: By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.	By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate. [Maintain target as advocacy action]
SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.	Target 12.3: By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains,	Amend to 'By 2030, halve the local food waste from households, food suppliers and food retailers that enters landfill'. [Major adjustment]
SDG 17: Partnership for the goals.	Target 17.3 Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources.	Exclude [exclude the target]

The following questions can be helpful for the adjustment of the targets. Consulting subject matter expertise when adjusting global targets for local relevance may also be helpful to strengthen target framing.

- Is the target activity/outcome specific enough, and is it measurable?
- Is the extent of the target suitable for the local area, or does it need scaling up or scaling down?
- Is the timeline of the target ambitious yet feasible, relative to the current progress and local capabilities that can be built up in that timeframe?

Determine the VLR indicators

Once a target has been determined, you will need one or more statistical indicators that enable measurement and reporting of progress towards achieving that target. See Table 3 for an example.

Select the VLR indicators by referring firstly to established frameworks, such as the official [UN global indicators](#), the [UN urban SDG indicators](#), and/or the [Pacific SDG Taskforce indicators](#). This would allow for comparability across different contexts.

Indicators must be able to measure progress on their VLR targets, therefore where a target has been adjusted for the localisation process, modifying indicators may also be required.

Localising indicators: If an indicator does need adapting to reflect a localised target, applying the following **SMURD** criteria will help modified indicators remain sound.

1. Ensure the information in the indicator description clearly **Specifies** what is being measured.
2. Ensure the indicator is **Measurable**, given what data is likely to be available or feasible to obtain.
3. Ensure the **Units** of measurement are clearly spelled out.
4. Ensure the indicator is significantly **Relevant** to the issue it needs to monitor.
5. Ensure the levels of **Disaggregation** have been carefully considered and are included in the description.

Where possible, select data with reasonable recency (5–10 years at most).

It is also suggested to keep the indicators to a manageable number, focusing on what is necessary for effective monitoring. Consider also creating multi-purpose indicators – where an indicator can be used to provide information against multiple targets. For example, a decrease in infant deaths (aged <12 months) could be used to inform the targets of (a) more health professionals, (b) better access to health services, and (c) improved access to good nutrition.

Table 3. Example of an SDG target and its indicators from the global SDG framework.

SDG Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Indicators:

5.5.1: Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments

5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions

Data collection and data processing

A significant value of a VLR report is in meaningful measurement of SDG progress – which is dependent upon the availability and access to reliable data.

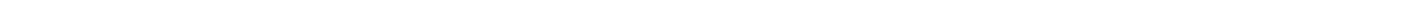
Many local, national and international government and non-government organisations collect relevant and timely data for Pacific Islands, and these are collated in Annex A of the Handbook.

However, indicator data availability, access to data, data sharing, data disaggregation (e.g. by sex, age, location, income, ethnicity, religion, etc.), and the recency of data are real challenges across the Pacific, particularly at the subnational level. There may also be insufficient resources to collect the required data. Potential approaches to overcoming these data challenges include:

- Investigating data proxies that are close to or are a reasonable reflection of an indicator.
- Generating estimates from survey and administrative data that has insufficient disaggregation details.
- Self-collecting qualitative and quantitative data to supplement official data sources. Narratives collected through community consultation processes can be useful sources of qualitative data that can complement insufficient quantitative data.
- Developing data-sharing agreements. Hesitancy in data sharing among organisations can be due to a lack of transparency on how the data will be used. This is an example of where stakeholder engagement as the foundation of a VLR process comes into play. When appropriate, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) stipulating the terms of data use and attribution of data ownership to facilitate trust in data sharing.
- Forming data-sharing collaborations with sector-based organisations, such as civic organisations, religious, cultural and familial groups, NGOs, charities and private enterprises at the local, national and global level that have local operations.
- Including indicators of targets that have local priority even where there is no existing data, and then advocating for future data collection for the key issue indicator/s.
- Advocating, where needed and practical, for more frequent data collection, adjustments to data measuring descriptors, and the addition of relevant disaggregation elements to better align with key issue indicators so that future data collection and analysis contributes to a more robust evidence base. Further information on Pacific Island-related data sources and resources, including links, can be found in Annex A.

Once data for the indicators has been collected, data analysis capabilities are needed in order to process, interpret, summarise and visualise this data into a meaningful and coherent story of SDG progress in the local community. While some local authorities will have ready access to data analysis expertise, many VLR processes commonly source this expertise externally.

In addition, it is valuable to supplement indicator data with narrative case studies on key initiatives underway that are contributing to the target.



Record the VLR outputs

A written report of the VLR process allows outcomes, experiences, and learnings to be shared with communities undertaking VLRs around the world, helping to accelerate global SDG implementation through peer learning. The VLR process generates a lot of new knowledge and valuable information – not all of which can be included in the report. The [Global Guiding Elements for VLR reporting](#) provides a good summary of what elements to include in the VLR. The story of the report, however, is open for each community to tell – in a way that represents the community's unique identity and their position as global stewards, while also best serving their future needs.

Options to consider include:

- Weaving the identity of the local area into the messaging, potentially through a story narrative, through aspects such as geography (position locally, regionally, nationally and within the Pacific); history (including the impact of colonisation, migration); and cultural, religious, and familial values, practices and wisdom (traditional and contemporary).
- Profiling the future the community envisions, including the ambitions and aspirations.
- Framing the report to best support next steps and future ambitions. For example, what information should be included to support an ambition of seeking national or global support for further sustainable development? How to support local-national policy alignment and coherence? How to advocate for national level policy action?

PHASE 3. UTILISING THE VLR

Reflect back on the VLR process

Reflecting on project experiences with the VLR team and stakeholders, for example through dedicated debrief sessions, is valuable for a range of reasons, including:

- Reflecting on engagements, partnership building, collaboration, and communication practices to plan improvements for future reviews and to utilise the new relationships for long-term cooperation.
- Determining if any targets, indicators and/or data sources need reviewing.
- Identifying if all important groups were represented in consultations and what could have been done better.
- Allowing for feedback on whether key messages were effectively communicated.

Share and leverage VLR outcomes

Integrating VLR SDG indicators into local planning and budgeting processes, and engaging with national governments to promote local-national policy integration, can help position communities for long-term beneficial developmental change. The following examples are ways in which VLR outcomes can be shared and leveraged to bring short and long-term benefits for the community.

Sharing key messages, experiences and lessons learned with funders and other local, national and international partners and stakeholders could happen through the distribution of the VLR report and providing dedicated channels for feedback. For example, [Solevaka](#) is an online platform designed to facilitate SDG knowledge exchange and connections between Pacific Island development professionals. Other regional forums include the [Pacific Urban Forum](#) and the [Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development](#). Global SDG forums include [HLPF](#) and the [World Urban Forum](#).

Finally, it is important to leverage the VLR report and its process beyond the release of the report itself, so that the VLR can continue to bring benefits to the local community after the VLR process has been completed. The outcomes/benefits from the VLR, as summarised in Table 1, could inspire strategic action for leveraging the VLR report and its process.

VLR CAPACITY REQUIREMENTS – A QUICK ACCESS GUIDE

To undertake a VLR, you will need:

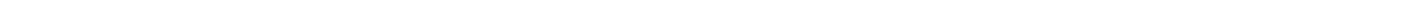
- A **commitment** by the local authority leadership to support, and ideally drive and resource, the VLR development process.
- Access to a city or town's **strategic planning documentation**. For example, a current Strategic Plan, and/or the suite of policy documents that are used for decision-making in relation to the urban area.
- Access to **stakeholder engagement specialists** to effectively engage with a range of local, national and regional stakeholders.
- **Technical expertise** in linking SDG targets and indicators to municipal policies and strategies, as well as to the local context. This expertise is commonly sourced externally. Internal expertise can be developed through training and partnerships; however, you will need to allocate additional time and resourcing.
- **Access to data** that measures indicators of local sustainable development status and progress, as well as capabilities to process, summarise and visualise this data.
- **Writing, visualising and editing** capabilities to compile the final VLR report.
- **Optional:** Access to national and subnational development decision-makers (*to align local-national policy and practice*), and reports (*for example, a VNR or VSR*).

Next Steps

Once you have made the decision to move forward with undertaking the VLR, use the information provided in this Handbook alongside UNESCAP's [Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews](#), which provides a clear, step-by-step "how to" guide.

Additional resources provided here include guidance documents on VLRs; Pacific Island data resources; and information on networks and organisations that are supporting update of VLRs in the region.

Finally, we wish you success in your sustainable development progress outcomes, Meitaki Maata, Vinaka, Fakaaue, Tangkiu, Fa'afetai lava, Fakafetai lahi lele, Malo 'Aupito, Fakafetai lasi, Tangkyu, thank you.



ANNEXES



ANNEX A. VLR RESOURCES FOR THE PACIFIC

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Regional and global guidelines on how to prepare a VLR

[Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews of SDG Implementation](#) (UNDESA, 2020)

[Asia-Pacific regional guidelines of voluntary local reviews](#) (UNESCAP, 2020)

[Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews Vol 1](#) (UN-Habitat, 2020)

[Guidelines for Voluntary Local Reviews Vol 2](#) (UN-Habitat, 2021)

[Roadmap for Localising the SDGs](#) (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Advancing sustainable development in the Pacific

[The Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific](#)

[Pacific SDG Taskforce Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development](#)

[The Pacific Community's Strategic Plan 2022-2031](#)

The Pacific Island Forum Reports on Pacific Sustainable Development [2018](#), [2020](#), [2022 Pacific SDGs Progress Wheels](#) (collaboration by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, The Pacific Community, and the Pacific SDG Partnership at UNDP), 2018

[UNESCAP's Advancing Pacific Priorities 2022](#)

[UNESCAP's SDG Progress in the Asia Pacific Region, 2022](#).

PACIFIC DATA RESOURCES

National and local data sources

National statistics offices (see Table A.1) collect data on a range of social, economic, education, population and housing indicators through national population and household surveys, such as Census and Household Income and Expenditure Surveys. Many of the datasets collected nationally are disaggregated at the municipality level. Additional datasets collected by other bodies, for example, transport and crime may also be accessible through national statistics offices.

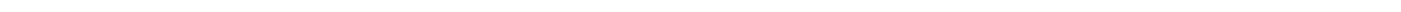


Table A.1: Links to National Statistics Offices of Pacific Island nations.

American Samoa	New Caledonia	Solomon Islands
Cook Islands	Niue	Timor-Leste
Fed States of Micronesia	Northern Mariana Islands	Tokelau
Fiji	Palau	Tonga
French Polynesia	Papua New Guinea	Tuvalu
Guam	Pitcairn Islands	Vanuatu
Kiribati	Republic of Marshall Islands	Wallis and Futuna
Nauru	Samoa	

Local government and organisations

Data collection may be undertaken by public service bodies, such as the Ministry of Lands, City Council, and utility organisations.

- For example, local waste management bodies may help to source data for *Indicator 11.6.1 “...municipal solid waste collected and managed in controlled facilities...”*

Public or private organisational annual reports

Data may be available through the annual reports of organisations who have remits aligned with particular sustainable development goals.

- For example, Accident Compensation or Disaster Management Commissions; Agriculture, Waterways, Industry, and/or Environmental Ministries
- Law enforcement and/or judicial reports for crime statistics

The **Statistics for Development Division (SDD)** of the Pacific Community collects, collates, analyses, and disseminates Pacific Island economic and social statistical data. Their resources include:

- Pacific development indicator database, [Pacific Data Hub](#), which has datasets by category, SDGs, and national minimum development indicators
- Mapping tool [PopGIS](#), customisable to assess indicators by regions for 14 Pacific Island countries
- Data by [Pacific Island country](#)
- Data by topic: [economy](#), [environment](#), [health](#), [industry](#), [population](#), and [social](#) indicators
- [Microdata library](#) containing metadata information

SDD also maintains the [Pacific Data Hub](#), which provides:

- [SDG data platform](#) showing SDG progress of the 16 Pacific Island members of the Pacific Island Forum
- Additional [data dashboards](#) for [maritime boundaries](#), [population](#), [disability](#), [education](#), [trade](#), [non-communicable disease incidence and risk reduction](#) (MANA), and [results achieved](#) against the Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2022-2031

Global data sources

[UNICEF multiple indicator cluster surveys \(MICS\)](#)

- Generates nationally aggregated data on the well-being of children and women, and covers the largest number of SDG indicators among the major international household survey programs
- [Pacific MICS data](#) receives technical support from the Pacific Community (SPC), and currently includes data on 14 Pacific Island countries: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, [Fiji](#), [Kiribati](#), Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, [Samoa](#), Solomon Islands, Tokelau, [Tonga](#), Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Accessing the data requires registration

[GHDx - Global Health Data Exchange](#)

- Catalogue of nationally aggregated global health-related data
- Currently providing data on 13 Pacific Island countries

Indicator sets

[Global indicator framework for the SDGs](#)

[Global Urban Monitoring Framework](#)

[Pacific SDG Taskforce indicator subset](#)

NETWORKS AND ORGANISATIONS

Pacific Urban Partnership

The [Pacific Urban Partnership](#) (PUP) works to accelerate the implementation of the Pacific New Urban Agenda to achieve the SDGs in the Pacific through a multi-stakeholder partnership. It organises the Pacific Urban Forum (PUF), to bring together a diversity of representatives from across national and local governments, policy makers, urban development practitioners and urban planners, civil society organizations, traditional leaders, local and international academia, private sector and development partners, among others. Its members include UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific (UNESCAP), Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF Pacific), ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI Oceania), Eastern Regional Organisation for Planning and Human Settlements (EAROPH), Home in Place, the Monash Sustainable Development Institute and the Melbourne Centre for Cities.

Local2030 Islands Network

The [Local2030 Islands Network](#) is an island-led peer-to-peer network devoted to advancing the SDGs through locally driven solutions. The Network provides opportunities for to share experiences, spread knowledge, raise ambition, promote solidarity, and identify and implement best practice solutions.

ANNEX B. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring *No-One is Left Behind* is intrinsic to the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, broad consultation with people who are widely representative of the community, including people who may be hard to reach, helps to keep the VLR an inclusive process. Table B.1 provides suggestions of stakeholders and groups to consult with, and Table B.2 provides an overview of the elements of a stakeholder engagement plan.

Table B.1. Examples of stakeholders and groups to include in a VLR stakeholder consultation.

Stakeholder groups	Community groups
Other public, government-led institutions	Women
Private business organisations	Youth
Academic institutions	Elders
Non-government organisations	Solo parents
Faith-based groups	People with insecure housing
Civil groups	People who live remotely
Media representatives	People with insecure income or work
	People with disabilities
	People of low socio-economic means
	People with diverse gender and sexual identities
	People with physical or mental health limitations
	Traditionally hard to reach people, such as people experiencing homelessness, or people impacted by social stigma.

Table B.2. The phases of stakeholder engagement.

Phase 1. Getting people aware and interested	
<p>Why?</p> <p>Providing information on the SDGs and the VLR process will raise awareness and generate interest.</p> <p>When?</p> <p>Recommended to start this in the early weeks of the VLR process but expect this to continue throughout and after the VLR has been completed.</p> <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will you raise SDG and VLR awareness? ▪ How will you generate VLR support and enthusiasm? 	<p>How?</p> <p>Conduct volunteer open home information sessions.</p> <p>Deliver church notices or announcements.</p> <p>Create fact sheets or newsletters.</p> <p>Distribute information through channels such as social media, websites, radio, or newspapers.</p> <p>Ask</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What else might work in your municipality? <p>Outcome Process</p> <p>Design the engagement processes so people feel safe, valued and heard.</p>
Phase 2. Getting people's views	
<p>Why?</p> <p>Speaking to a broad and diverse cross-section of people within the community will help to identify and prioritise local needs and unearth partnership opportunities.</p> <p>When?</p> <p>Recommended to start this at the beginning of the VLR process as it sets the tone and direction for what comes next.</p> <p>Ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How will you engage with different kinds of groups? ▪ How will you ensure diversity of perspectives are heard, particularly those traditionally marginalised, or vulnerable, or unheard? ▪ How will you access hard-to-reach community members? 	<p>How?</p> <p>Host at least one talanoa or public consultation forum to allow for broad-region engagement and capture diverse perspectives</p> <p>Consider also conducting focus groups or surveys. Web-based platform engagement may be useful, particularly in engaging with hard-to-reach groups</p> <p>Outcome Process</p> <p>Identify/agree on priority areas in which to focus the VLR</p> <p>Connect various sectors and actors</p> <p>Foster collaboration across sectors and stakeholders</p>

Phase 3. Action

Why?

To seek demonstrations of stakeholder buy-in, e.g., expertise and resource input, building of partnerships.

Recommendation – overlap with phase 2 and continue throughout the VLR process.

Ask:

- How will you ensure buy-in from all partners?
- How will you bring partners together to plan?
- How will you help foster locally driven solutions?
- How will you build ownership?

How?

Seek proposals/ recommendations/feedback for work to-do, work drafted, work completed

Hold workshops for information sharing and brainstorming

Use web-based platforms for inputting resources such as data or solution suggestions

Outcomes

Foster locally driven solutions

Build stewardship of the VLR and SDGs

Phase 4. Collaboration

Why?

To facilitating shared decision-making and foster project ownership.

Engagement to steer and secure collaboration will occur throughout the VLR process,

Ask:

- How will you frame the VLR within the municipality's broader strategic plan?
- How will you collectively determine goals and targets?
- How will you upskill staff/partners in collaboration skills?
- How will you share information on progress?
- How will you assign and ensure clear allocation of responsibilities and accountability chains?

How?

Organise joint planning sessions

Create standing (sub) committees or working groups

Design shared projects

Deliver capacity building workshops

Create guiding/advisory bodies

Outcomes

Collectively determine goals and targets

Establish strong partnerships for successful, long-term sustainable development outcomes



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