

Joint Statement of Local Authorities to the 10th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development

Undoubtedly, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic has been a priority of most local governments in Asia and the Pacific. However, the vulnerabilities we face do not come alone and are often interlinked. Neither the climate crisis nor natural disasters will wait for us to overcome one from another. The need to address these challenges with a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach is imperative.

Sustainable development remains a crucial framework to recover better from the pandemic. COVID-19 had an impact on all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are currently off-track. Within this context, local governments have refocused our programmes and reallocated budgets to better address the needs of the people and the most vulnerable sectors of our communities.

Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) reveal that while the SDGs localisation progress vary among countries and local governments in the Asia-Pacific, there are similarities in the challenges faced by subnational governments. To date, there have been 4 VSRs produced by local government associations (Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, and Sri Lanka) and 39 VLRs produced by local governments in the region. The VSRs emulate the need for local level SDG targets and indicators that are in line with the national framework. Without localised indicators, assessing progress on the SDGs at the local level would remain a challenge. Engaging local government associations may facilitate the identification of local SDG targets and indicators. Alongside this, VLRs highlight the importance of SDG indicators that reflect local priorities and access to high quality and disaggregated data. Furthermore, there is a need to assist, through appropriate capacity building, local governments in Least Developed Countries especially in the Pacific to do their VLRs.

The lack of financial resources remains a challenge for local governments despite existing fiscal transfers from national government. Without a robust financing mechanism and investments to localise the SDGs, the agenda for sustainable development may not be realised. The lack of technical knowledge on the SDGs, including the availability of data and capacity to process SDG-related data, is also a concern noted in the VSRs and select VLRs. In addition, the internet constraints faced by Pacific Island States to connect and communicate on the VLRs is an issue.

Several local governments recognise the value of conducting a VLR and commit to follow up evaluations of their progress as part of their local development process. This presents an opportunity for strengthened ownership of the SDGs at the local level, and monitoring and evaluation across all levels of government through the synergies of the VSR and VLR with the Voluntary National Review.

The complexity of cities and local governments in the Asia-Pacific region and the challenges we face each day moving toward 2030 require accelerated action from all levels of government and all stakeholders. Local governments are helping each other through decentralised cooperation and we need national governments and the international community to provide an enabling environment that will let us be more effective in the essential work that we do. With our collective power, the power of we, we can build our common future.

Asia-Pacific Local Government Coordinating Body

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