

# Global Vision I Urban Action: New York City's Voluntary Local Review

<b>Region</b>	North America
<b>Award Scheme</b>	Guangzhou Award
<b>Sustainable Development Goals</b>	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

In July 2018, NYC became the first city in the world to report directly to the UN on local progress in achieving the SDGs by developing a VLR. The NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs (IA) modeled the VLR on the Voluntary National Review (VNR), which countries may submit to share SDG progress. The VLR is an initiative of GVUA. Since December 2015, IA has used the SDGs as a common language to share sustainability innovations and challenges with cities and countries worldwide.

## Background and Objective

Though the SDGs were agreed at the national level, cities are at the frontline of implementation. Residents feel and see the challenges addressed by SDGs daily, in their streets and communities. In April 2015, NYC committed to the principles of growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency through its groundbreaking OneNYC strategy which is a model for sustainable development at the local level. The consultative process to develop OneNYC, which began in late 2014, involved 71 New York City agencies, and included New York residents and businesses as well as an advisory board comprised of civic leaders, policy specialists, and community leaders. Progress reports are published annually and the strategy is updated every four years. Since December 2015, IA has demonstrated the links between OneNYC and the SDGs. Three years after OneNYC was launched, Mayor de Blasio announced record progress in creating the fairest big city in America, and we recognized that this was an opportunity to share activities our administration has undertaken to ensure progress towards the SDGs. Half of the world's population currently lives in cities; this percentage is expected to reach two-thirds by the year 2050. Cities are the frontline for challenges such as climate and inequality; cities are also hubs for innovative solutions developed through cross-sector partnerships. The VLR and related activities provide a practical tool for NYC to engage partners (cities, countries, and the UN) in meeting current challenges while increasing resiliency to meet those of the future. Our work is essential in sharing ways other cities and countries can promote equity, inclusion, and sustainability for the benefit of their citizens and eventually, people everywhere. The VLR was conceived, executed, and written by the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs in partnership with the Offices of Operations, and Climate Policy and Programs, and in consultation with other relevant NYC agencies. It was further shaped in consultation with SDG stakeholders including UN agencies, UN member states that have submitted VNRs, and city network representatives. Government and civil society experts involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the SDGs were also consulted. IA did not use additional funds to implement GVUA or to develop the VLR. We built activities that complement the work already outlined by OneNYC. Our office has one Strategic Relationships Manager who is also responsible for the GVUA program. NYC agency staff time is occasionally needed to conduct site visits, with the understanding that all participants benefit from these activities by discussing shared challenges and solutions.

## Actions and Implementation

Recognizing that cities around the world are also responding to the challenges laid out in the SDGs, NYC welcomes collaboration with those who are interested in mapping their local actions and reporting on them at the global level. The VLR will be most effective if other cities and subnational governments undertake similar reviews, and we are seeking opportunities to discuss the content, format, and process of our VLR and hear from others about enhancing overall SDG monitoring and reporting. While submitting reviews like the VLR happens once a year, implementation of the SDGs takes place every day. We hope that the VLR can serve as a catalyst to identify additional possibilities for engagement with cities and other stakeholders, and as a way to exchange best practices and to build momentum towards achieving all 17 SDGs by 2030.

## Outcomes and Impacts

NYC's VLR is a benchmark for New York's progress on the SDGs. It also provides an example of local initiatives being shared globally. We welcome engagement with cities and other SDGs stakeholders to strengthen these reporting mechanisms. By using the common language of the SDGs to discuss our shared successes and challenges, we hope people and governments around the world will work together to achieve all 17 SDGs by 2030. We use qualitative metrics to measure our progress, assessing our success in engaging with other cities and stakeholders on linking local strategies to the SDGs. Examples include: The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments committed to promoting VLRs. NYC is helping individual cities in the U.S., and worldwide to develop their versions VLRs. The UN Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, the UN Development Programme Administrator, the UN Habitat Executive Director, and numerous other high-level UN representatives have lauded the VLR NYC civil society groups invited IA to present our work and have requested closer cooperation. NYC agencies have requested more systematic engagement using the SDG framework. Advocacy groups like the UN Foundation have identified the VLR as a trend to watch. The VLR is a new tool that was developed by IA, modelled after VNRs but adapted to reflect the experience of cities. It is a presentation of existing NYC information in a format that is accessible to the UN community as well as other SDG stakeholders, in line with UN documents recognizing the key role of local governments in the implementation of the SDGs. NYC already tracks more than 1,000 indicators through a monitoring system that the NYC Mayor's Office of Operations has developed since the 1970s, and examples of the data that NYC collects. OneNYC is already recognized as groundbreaking. The VLR demonstrates our continued commitment to a just future for all New Yorkers, and to ensure the achievement of the SDGs globally. By sharing the review on local work toward the SDGs, IA also continues its advocacy for city perspectives at the UN. This includes our recent efforts to influence the recent global agreement on migration.

## **Initiative Contribution**

In April 2015, NYC committed to the principles of growth, equity, sustainability, and resiliency through its groundbreaking OneNYC strategy, a model for sustainable development at the local level. OneNYC includes commitments, milestones, and metrics; our administration publishes an annual progress report. When global leaders committed to the SDGs in September 2015, IA recognized the overlap with our local strategy, and established the GVUA program to use the SDGs as a framework to share best practices with partners in NYC and worldwide.

## **Innovative Initiative**

This initiative is revolutionary because cities have never intimately engaged with the UN on the SDGs. In addition to submitting the VLR to the UN, the IA Commissioner presented the findings during the formal plenary of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the session focused on the implementation of SDG 11. We organized site visits and other activities to complement the VLR in the lead-up to the HLPF, connecting our NYC colleagues with the international community to discuss in practical terms shared challenges and solutions using the SDG framework. Some cities do report on their local implementation of the SDGs as part of a national framework. However, the United States has thus far not expressed intent to submit a VNR, so NYC decided to submit a report directly to the UN to ensure we can join global discussions about issues that affect New Yorkers. This innovation is cross-cutting as it is relevant to policy at the local and global level. We can use it as a tool to engage with other cities and stakeholders on practical issues, and in policy arenas to demonstrate the critical role that cities place in achieving the SDGs. Since SDG commitments are made at the national level, not a city level, reporting on progress could potentially be seen as an unnecessary burden for NYC agencies who are tasked with providing services to New Yorkers, rather than engaging in global affairs. We avoid this by tapping into existing NYC efforts and demonstrating to NYC agencies the opportunity they have to share best practices while learning new techniques to improve their service delivery. Agencies are now approaching us to identify ways they can cooperate more systematically.

## **Resources devoted to delivery**

### **BASIC CITY DATA**

Population size: 8,620,000

Population growth rate (%): 0.70

Surface area (sq.km): 789.00

Population density (people/sq.km): 27,000.00

GDP per capita (USD): 64,579.00

Main source of prosperity: NYC has long been at the center of finance, food, fashion, and media, and in recent years, the City has also become a global hub for life sciences, urban manufacturing, and tech.