

## **The Sustainability Lab – Voluntary Local Review as a catalyst for Sustainable Development**

*This survey is compiled by Global Challenge (Global Utmaning, in Swedish) - a Swedish independent think tank that works for sustainable development.*

There is a growing interest among local and regional authorities in using Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) as a process to track progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on sub-national levels. Global Challenge would therefore like to investigate the interests of and conditions for, a collaboration between the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) stakeholders focusing on VLR as a catalyst for sustainable development.

Through this survey, we aim to gather inspiration and feedback on the design and function of a potential Sustainability Lab - a platform for shared knowledge transfer between stakeholders in the BSR and EaP Countries. Therefore, we invite you to share your needs, experiences, and interest in working together with peers to develop capacity on how to conduct a VLR process. With this survey, we would also like to identify stakeholders that would be interested in participating in the Sustainability Lab.

*Please note that the working language in the project will be English.*

### **The Baltic Sea Region and the Eastern Partnership**

So far, only a few cities and regions in the BSR have conducted VLR processes. At the same time, there is a growing interest among LRGs in the BSR and within the EaP to use VLR as a tool to accelerate local work with the global goals.

Against this background, Global Challenge wants to investigate the interest in establishing a "Sustainability Lab" - a shared platform for knowledge transfer between actors in the BSR and the EaP. The purpose of the platform is to promote interregional learning as a way to strengthen local and subnational actors - municipalities, regions and cities - to use VLR as a framework to review and improve the strategic planning as well as the sustainability and climate work.

### **What is VLR?**

The deadline of the 2030 Agenda is approaching, and in this decade of action, the UN urges actors on global, local, and individual level to accelerate their work to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). [Voluntary Local Reviews \(VLRs\)](#) have been identified as a potential vehicle to advance local action.

A VLR is an analysis of the implementation of the SDGs in a specific local context, and a way for LRGs to monitor, track and report their progress in localizing SDGs. By conducting a VLR process, local authorities can identify challenges, needs and opportunities which help them analyze the local priorities and focus on areas that require the most effort in the transition towards sustainable societies.

Combining carefully chosen indicators with a participatory process involving both citizens and stakeholders, VLR can be an efficient strategic planning tool. Involving citizens in the review process can make local governance more inclusive and liable. The VLR process also enables LRGs to share experiences, knowledge and lessons learned from their local sustainability work with other stakeholders which can foster partnerships and investment towards the achievement of the SDGs.

There is a growing global interest among local and regional governments to use VLRs to review and track their sustainability work. However, to this date, there exists no fixed formula nor working definition for VLRs. The lack of established methods, guides and experiences prevents actors from conducting VLRs. To solve the issue of the lack of know-how, there is a need for arenas where actors can share lessons learned, experiences and knowledge on how to evaluate the local work with the 2030 Agenda.

### **Purpose of the survey**

With the survey, we wish to examine the knowledge and interest amongst LRGs for using VLR as a framework to improve the local implementation of the SDGs in the BSR and the EaP countries. The purpose of the survey is also to investigate the interest for a transnational platform for knowledge and experience sharing to support the work. Please note that there will be opportunities for the respondents to elaborate on the answers in an interview.

### About Global Challenge

Global Challenge ("Global Utmaning", in Swedish) is a Sweden-based independent think tank. Through research, capacity building and knowledge exchange, we make fact-based contributions and present long-term solutions for an ecological, economic, and social shift enabling a sustainable and equitable future.