

THE SHIMOKAWA METHOD FOR VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW (VLR)

A Blueprint to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals

SHIMOKAWA METHOD FOR VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

A 'Voluntary Local Review' (VLR) is a process whereby local and regional governments voluntarily carry out a review of progress being made in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. This review includes policies, programmes, data, institutional set-ups and stakeholder engagement mechanisms to implement the 2030 Agenda at the local level. The outcomes of the review are then developed into follow-up action plans. Inspired by the successful case of Shimokawa, a small town in the northern part of Japan, this handbook provides a hands-on, step-by-step method to conduct VLRs. Despite the town's relative isolation, small size and limited financial resources, Shimokawa took up the challenge of conducting rigorous monitoring, review and follow-up. Such limitations did not stop the residents of Shimokawa from setting out on an impressive transformative pathway, showing how local actions contribute to the global agenda.

This handbook is comprised of ten steps of a VLR. Each step highlights a critical aspect needed to successfully conduct a VLR. It also contains the VLR format for reference. The ten steps can take local and regional governments on a journey to transition to a more sustainable society. Readers may also notice that VLRs are a process whose components are often part of local administrations. Conducting a VLR provides a way to maximise synergies between existing resources while strengthening implementation of the SDGs. It also shows commitment to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. This handbook hopes to inspire regions, cities, towns and villages to work to achieve success with the SDGs.

BACKGROUND TO THIS PUBLICATION

Over the past two years, an increasing number of local and regional governments have conducted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and launched reports based on these results at various global forums. The first VLRs came out in 2018 at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), showcasing the efforts of four advanced cities¹ in implementing the SDGs: Kitakyushu City, Toyama City and Shimokawa Town in Japan, and New York City in the US. Subsequently, as of January 2020, more than ten cities have presented VLR reports, and more cities are committed to carrying out their own VLRs as they look toward HLPF in 2020.

There are a few guidelines or handbooks that cities can refer to when they try to implement, monitor, review and report on the status/progress of SDG actions (for example, “A Voluntary Local Review Handbook for Cities” by Carnegie Mellon University [Deiningner et al., 2019], and “Roadmap for Localising the SDGs” by Global Taskforce for Local and Regional Governments [Global Taskforce, 2016]), but no standard guidelines or methods for VLRs exist in the same way as there are for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), despite more cities starting to launch their own VLRs.

This *Shimokawa Method for VLR* has been produced to provide local government officials engaged in the SDGs at the local level with practical knowledge on

how to conduct a VLR based on the experience of Shimokawa Town.

What is a Voluntary Local Review?

A ‘Voluntary Local Review’ (VLR) is the process in which cities voluntarily review their progress against the SDGs and its means of implementation at the local level. It also involves developing a follow-up action plan to fill the gap. SDG actions at the city level are closely linked with other international commitments such as the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Reduction, and the Aichi Targets on biodiversity. In this way, the VLR also reviews local actions taken to achieve these international commitments.

In VLR, it is also important to examine the gaps between the current status and expected goals and targets and to develop a plan of follow-up actions to fill implementation gaps. In other words, A VLR is a helpful tool to diagnose the current status of and future prospects for local sustainability. In doing so, VLRs allow cities to better plan and implement policies, raise awareness and encourage public participation.

VLRs also enable cities to share experiences, challenges and lessons learnt, not only with local stakeholders but with a broader global audience. A VLR can increase the visibility of a city to the world and open the door to new international partnerships to help local sustainability projects.

VLRs can also amplify those voices from local communities that appear in a VNR, a reporting

A ‘Voluntary Local Review’ (VLR) is the process in which cities voluntarily review the progress against and develop a follow-up action plan for the SDGs at the local level.

¹ This publication refers to all types of sub-national government bodies as ‘city’ to avoid unnecessary lengthy descriptions and streamline explanations. Therefore, the

‘cities’ in this publication may indicate states, cities, municipalities, towns, districts, villages, or other forms of sub-national governing bodies.

framework for national governments on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. VNRs are part of the HLPF, a platform designated to review the progress in achieving the SDGs at the global level. While the VNRs are at the centre of the HLPF, some of the national processes used in developing the VNR report do not include cities' actions or views. The Global Taskforce for Local and Regional Governments—a coordinating body for all major coalitions and networks of LRGs—reported that, so far, only 42% of the VNRs have given active roles to local governments, despite the fact that over 60% of the SDGs are under local and regional authority (Global Taskforce, 2019, p13). In many cases, VLRs follow the same format as VNR, and this fact may increase local presence in VNR. Strengthening linkages between VLR and VNR can be a leveraging point for cities to call on the national government to respond to local needs and demands and have them reflected in national policy.

Why is the Shimokawa VLR a central focus?

Shimokawa Town is located in the northern part of Hokkaido Prefecture. Eighty-eight percent of the town area is covered by forests, and it is this natural capital that provides the people of the town with their livelihoods, creating a symbolic relationship with nature.

Shimokawa is one of the coldest places in Japan with winter temperatures that can go as low as -30°C , and the town is famous for its abundant forest (Figure 1).

The town is home to 3,400 residents. To address local problems that threaten the sustainability of the town such as depopulation, ageing, and slowing down of the local economy, Shimokawa took a backcasting



Figure 1 Abundant Forest in Shimokawa (credit: Shimokawa Town)

approach (see the Box A) and started various projects, including one of their most famous projects on the production of renewable energy using woody biomass. Renewable energy is used for energy for public utilities and housing and had reduced energy costs in the town and CO_2 emissions. The town has used the money gained through these efforts to reduce energy costs to support childcare.

In 2018, the Japanese Government recognised Shimokawa as one of 27 SDGs Future Cities². The SDGs Future Cities Programme is a national programme of selected cities with progressive sustainability commitments and activities. Even before its designation as a SDGs Future City, Shimokawa had already embarked on a path to localise the SDGs.

Why is Shimokawa's VLR a good example? Because it can teach other cities a few simple lessons: 1) the town came together seeking a vision of a better future for all based on the SDGs, giving ownership of the process to its community; 2) there are no insurmountable obstacles if the final goal is to build a better sustainable future because action starts with a mind-set; and 3) it is possible to conduct a VLR even when the municipal budget is small (its budget size in

² Twenty-seven local and regional government were selected as the SDG Future Cities in 2018, the first year of the SDGs Future City Programme. The programme is

designed to select about 30 cities as the SDGs Future Cities per year. At the end of 2019, the total number of the SDGs Future Cities is 60.

2014 was 1686th out of 1763 LRGs in Japan [Area Information Network, 2014]). Again, Shimokawa is a small town, with only 3,400 inhabitants, in a remote area of Japan's northern-most prefecture, and with few financial resources. Despite these adversities, the town took up the challenge of conducting its own VLR to contribute to a more sustainable future. Its limitations did not stop the town from igniting an impressive transformative process.

Introduction to readers

For many cities, conducting a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) might seem to be a daunting task. Yet, if a city is committed to using the transformative potential of the SDGs to guide its own action plans, it is essential to conduct a VLR. It is imperative for cities to conduct a thorough process to assess their progress towards sustainable development, understand the needs and priorities of their communities, identify gaps hindering progress, and to form partnerships with stakeholders to achieve goals.

The ten steps presented in this publication will help you conduct a VLR in an easy and comprehensive way. Each step intends to highlight a critical aspect needed in the process.

In the policy cycle, planning and implementation are clearly important. However, review (based on monitoring) and follow-up are perhaps the most explorative and creative element. Let's look at the definitions.

The review requires people involved in the process to think critically in an explorative way to determine necessary recommendations for improvements. Follow-up actions include development of appropriate, and often cost-effective, responses to those recommendations made in the review process.

With this in mind, this method walks the readers through the following [10 steps](#) as depicted on page 5.

1

REVIEW

A process in which stakeholders are engaged in examining the results of monitoring and discussing questions such as:

- Does the picture of progress represent reality?
- What are the underlying causes hindering or promoting the picture of progress?
- What are critical needs and opportunities for accelerating progress or implementing remedial action?
- What are the emerging issues?

2

FOLLOW-UP

At the core of effective follow-up is ensuring that there is a response to recommendations from the review processes. This component includes the formulation of responses to the findings of the review process including:

- Allocation of resources and identification of investment needs
- Adjustments in implementation plans
- Changes during implementation
- Follow-up may involve defining new indicators that should be tracked through monitoring.

BOX A: Backcasting Approach

The approach of 'backcasting' was the backbone of Shimokawa's VLR process.

Backcasting is a planning approach that sets a specific future outcome and then forecasts policies and programmes in reverse, connecting the specified future and the present state. The backcasting approach can be applied to a city without a local sustainability plan, and it is intended for use in any city.

It is recommended that readers should read through and identify potential hurdles before actually starting work. Good preparation helps to ensure a smooth process. At the same time, there will be many unanticipated challenges; therefore, the best approach is to prepare well, take actions, and think

about ways to address emerging challenges through actual practice.

This method highlights how VLRs translates the common languages of the SDGs into local actions, and vice versa, to showcase to the global communities how LRGs can contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda. This results in a type of bottom-up advocacy that demonstrates the essential roles of LRGs and their residents in achieving the SDGs. With VLRs, it is hoped that LRGs and supporting organisations can work together to call on national governments to make necessary policy changes, enabling LRGs to deliver inclusive, ambitious transformation for communities.

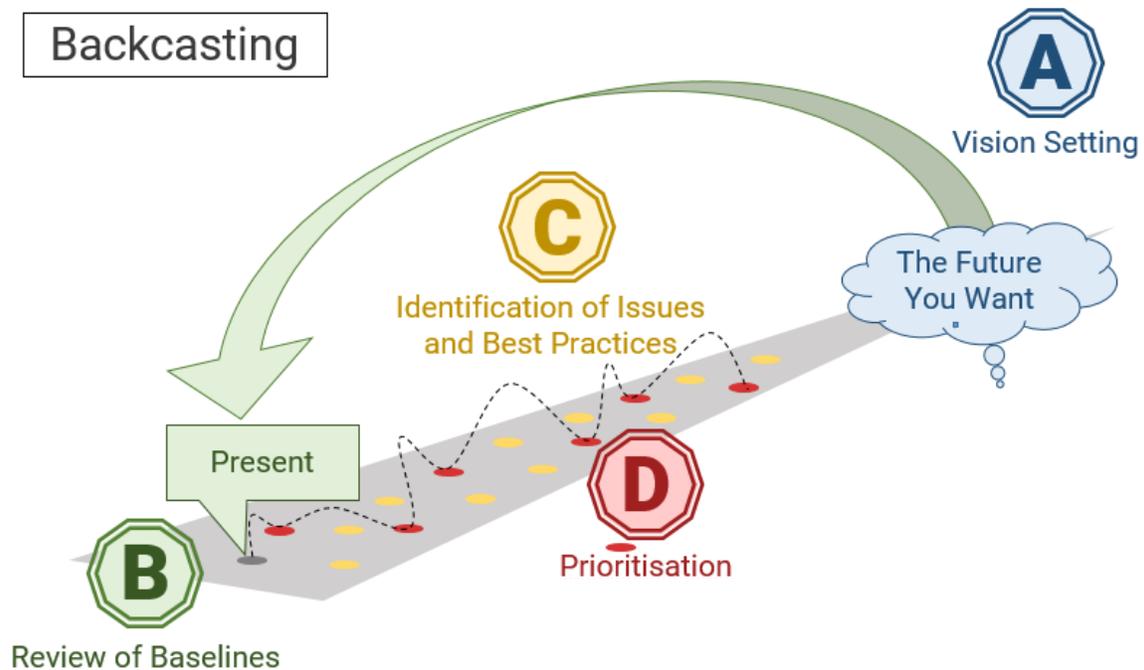


Figure 2. Image of Backcasting

The Shimokawa Method

– for Voluntary Local Review (VLR) –



- STEP 1: Preparatory Work and Awareness-Raising: getting ready to start your VLR journey.
- STEP 2: Establishing a Platform: bringing together key stakeholders willing to take action.
- STEP 3: Vision Setting: imagining your ideal state by 2030.
- STEP 4: Gathering Data: compiling all the necessary data to make an informed diagnosis and plan for action.
- STEP 5: Diagnosis: knowing where you currently stand, especially in relation to your future vision.
- STEP 6: Aligning with the SDGs: bringing the transformative potential of the SDGs to municipal policies.
- STEP 7: Plan for Action: planning how to achieve your vision.
- STEP 8: Tracking Progress: monitoring the evolution in your journey.
- STEP 9: Submit as a VLR Report: communicating that you are committed with the 2030 Agenda.
- STEP 10: Advocate and Communicate: spreading the word about your journey.



01

Preparatory Work

STEP 1 – PREPARATORY WORK AND AWARENESS-RAISING

WHY IS THIS STEP IMPORTANT?

Because first you will need to convince everyone to join you. VLR can provide opportunities to bring all segments of society together.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

Time to think in depth about why your city needs to implement the SDGs.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

An understanding of the vision, benefits, challenges, and opportunities to conduct the VLRs.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

This is the starting point of VLR. First, it is important to ask yourself why you need to implement the SDGs at local level and consider how the SDGs are relevant in your city context. Then you (or your team) will get to work on mobilising an entire community.

Below is a quote about Shimokawa’s commitment from Takeshi Minoshima, a member of staff in

Shimokawa who was in charge of the SDG strategy development at town hall.

In the case of Shimokawa, the following additional points were incorporated as values into the town’s plans to allow it to look into and integrate the SDGs into its local policies:

- 1) Taking a fresh look at the region through the lens of the 17 SDGs leads to new insights and discoveries of local issues.
- 2) Looking at the present state of the town through the lens of the future (ideals and visions) fosters solid municipal development through carefully considered action.
- 3) Partnering with a wide range of key players resolves social issues and creates new value.
- 4) Using the SDG framework allows Shimokawa to communicate its attractive qualities and future vision to a broad domestic and international audience, adding value to the town brand and increasing its presence, which in turn attracts new residents, visitors, companies, and investment.

As the quote and the points above indicate, Shimokawa took on the SDGs as a tool to bring additional values. In implementing the SDGs, the town is warning against superficial ‘SDG-washing’—pointing out the ways in which cities align with the SDGs without taking any substantial, transformative

“Shimokawa has set the goal of ‘realising a sustainable society’ as one of the basic principles in town planning since 2001. By maximising and optimising the use of forest resources, the town has actively taken an integrated approach to the three dimensions of sustainable development – economy, society, and the environment. We realised that the understanding laid in the 2030 Agenda has connections to what we believe in. That is why we are committed to the SDGs and creating synergies and partnerships, centred on the SDGs as a catalytic point of interactions with diverse partners. We also think that we can contribute to achieving the global sustainable agenda by sharing our best practices in Japan and internationally, framed against the SDGs, as the common language of universal challenges. (Takeshi Minoshima, a member of staff in Shimokawa Town)

actions. To avoid SDG-washing, it is very important to link the core values and principles of the SDGs to its own plans as Shimokawa did. It is useful to ponder what aspects of the SDGs resonate in your city and in the lives of the people there. As in the case of Shimokawa, their method of managing natural resources, such as forests, could be an entry point to explore.

Awareness-Raising of Local Stakeholders

Localising the SDGs and the VLR process requires collaboration and collective commitments, and for this, it is necessary to raise awareness about the SDGs in communities.

There are various ways to pursue this in wider awareness-raising campaigns, such as including the SDGs in public school curriculums, establishing local SDG awards, distributing posters throughout the city, and other such innovative ideas.

Shimokawa has conducted various awareness-raising campaigns related to the SDGs, such as lectures and workshops on the SDGs for local junior high school

students to help them understand its concepts and importance. Learning opportunities have also been provided to city council members on the SDGs. The town also welcomes students and youth from outside the town. For instance, Shimokawa has asked intern students to be specifically in charge of promoting the SDGs both within and outside of the town. The students organised events and prepared promotional materials to link life in town to the SDGs (Box B).

These are only a few examples, and a number of other city's cases can also be found online (for example, Global Taskforce [2016] Roadmap for Localizing The SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level gives a list of examples the city might consider applying)

The key here is to make the SDGs engaging for all local communities and foster convergence between the local culture and sustainability. This will lead to a strong understanding and willingness by communities to participate in the VLR, paving the way for a robust, inclusive process.



02 Establishing a Platform

STEP 2 – ESTABLISHING A PLATFORM

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because visions and action plans set in consensus are stronger and more inclusive, and yield substantial ownership among all stakeholders.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

A list of groups, associations, and/or communities who can be either or both solution providers and beneficiaries in implementing the SDGs.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

A mechanism in which stakeholders nourish their ownership of local SDG plans and action, transforming them into active implementers.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

Once you have added your own local colour to thoughts about the SDGs and started to raise awareness of the SDGs among communities, it is time to start looking into who should be involved in carrying out the VLR and preparing the local SDG action plan. In this step, you will develop a platform consisting of two coordination structures, which will be mandated to set the vision, design the local SDG plan, facilitate project implementation, collect community views, monitor and review progress, and then follow up on policies and programmes.

Whole-of-Government and Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Structures

Firstly, your city must set up a **Whole-of-Government Coordination Structure (WoGCS)** for the SDGs. This should be an entity within city hall that will be

responsible for the overall coordination of the VLR. This could be either an existing body/institution ('Hub-and-Spoke' model) or an inter-department arrangement such as coordination meeting or committee ('Working Group' model). In the Hub-

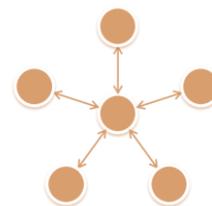


Figure 4. Image of 'hub-and-spoke'

and-Spoke model, one team is responsible for collecting data and communicating with others; in the Working Group model, each department engages in such a structure. The general recommendation is to have at least have one bureau or department working on coordinating plans and action on the SDGs. This is because it is easier to facilitate communication and data collection and to clarify who provides administrative services to SDG actions.

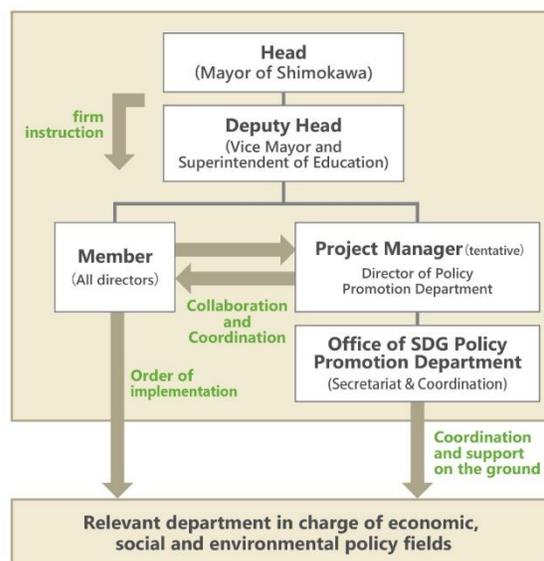


Figure 5. Shimokawa Town SDGs Promotion Headquarters (Shimokawa et al., 2018)

Whether there is a new or existing team taking care of this depends on the type of organisational structure and vision for the city. Some cities have included it within the planning, environmental, or internal affairs sections. International affairs should be the last option, as it does not have a mandate to implement the SDGs within the city. Otherwise, the coordinating body can

be set up in any department as long as it is combined with the Working Group model and ensures that all departments are involved in the VLR process.

In the case of Shimokawa, the town combined both the Hub-and-Spoke and Working Group models with the purpose of integrating the SDGs into all aspects of administration, instead of actions being implemented with a silo mentality.

The second structure is a Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Structure (MSCS). MSCS is a key driver of changes and actions. The scope of MSCS depends on the extent to which the city and stakeholders are ready to work together. In Shimokawa, the MSCS came up with the future vision for Shimokawa.

There are two key principles here. The first is that no one is simply either a solution provider or beneficiary. All groups provide useful contributions, even if they remain unseen. The second is that the MSCS works with groups not individuals. Selecting individuals to represent stakeholder groups hinders inclusiveness. Identifying appropriate facilitators for a particular

group helps with communication and consensus building among the MSCS and larger communities.

ONE CAVEAT! When local governments promote the participation of local stakeholders, they often use the 'business, civil society, and academia' formula when deciding who to be invited. However, this does not sufficiently encompass the idea of inclusivity in society. Civil society is diverse (Dodds, 2019) including women, children and youth, people with disabilities and other groups. The business sector can also vary from local Multi-National Company (MNC) branches, Micro-Small-and-Medium-Enterprises (MSMEs), cooperatives, and entrepreneurs. Perhaps, one way of deciding constituting members is to consider those who have interests or are marginalised in decision-making processes. Ultimately, the SDGs are about 'leaving no one behind'.

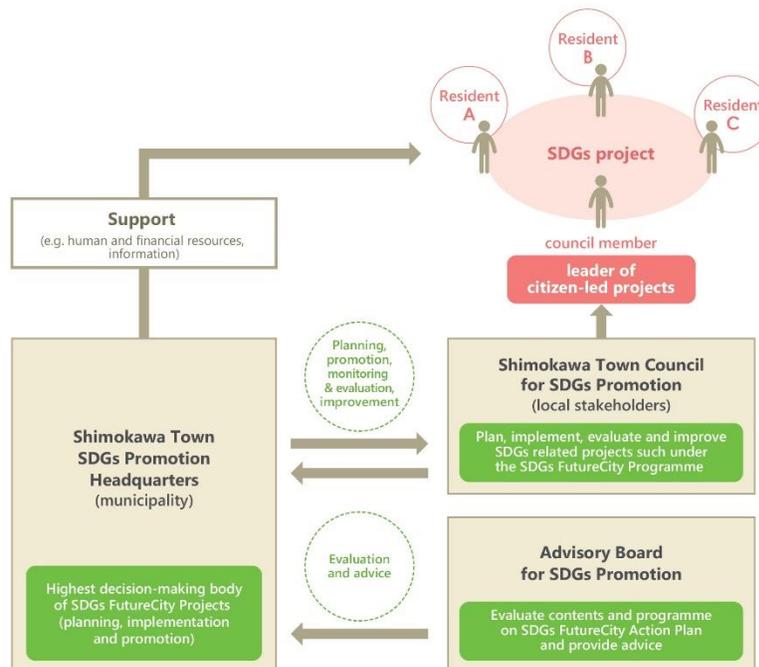


Figure 6. Institutional arrangement to promote SDGs in Shimokawa (Shimokawa et al., 2018)



03 Vision Setting

STEP 3 – VISION SETTING

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because before you start planning how you will get to a destination, you first need to decide the end point, i.e. where your city wants to be by 2030. People can take action on their own when they have an understanding of the vision.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

Residents who are actively engaged in local life and communities together with city hall staff. Over the course of envisioning your final destination, you may find more residents taking actions that contribute to the realisation of the vision.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

A vision of your city for 2030 that shows the ideal state you wish to achieve by then.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

You cannot plan for action or prioritise areas to tackle urgently without knowing your final destination. Vision setting is the process in which people search for the final destination, in other words, what it will be like to live in your city in 2030, and ultimately, those visions will become the basis of your future work on localising the SDGs.

First, you should decide where to go, and then plan how to get there. This is the perfect time for all to be bold. Imagine your ideal city in 2030: the place where you hope your children or grandchildren will grow up and live; in other words, the future you want. In 2030, will more people use sustainable energy options such as renewable energy? Will public transport services be

accessible to all? Will people live safely? Will your city be safe and clean? Will everyone enjoy their work?

Bring citizens together in the envisioning process to discuss and imagine what your ideal city will look like in 2030.

In Shimokawa's envisioning process, the SDGs Future City Subcommittee was created under the General Planning Council for the Comprehensive Plan of Shimokawa. It is not necessary for you to create a new body; instead, you can utilise the platform in Step 2. Shimokawa brought in a facilitator from outside the town to guide the sessions. The facilitator should be a person with good facilitation skills and basic knowledge on urban planning and the SDGs. You can invite other experts with knowledge on pertinent topics when delving deeper into a particular issue. In the case of Shimokawa, the subcommittee oversaw the entire VLR process; however, this process and how it is managed will vary on a case-by-case basis.

Envisioning process in Shimokawa

As a starting point, subcommittee members received information from the facilitator and outside experts on what the SDGs are and what they are trying to achieve. Then, the members discussed the 17 SDGs and their targets in the context of Shimokawa. The questions asked at this time are set out below:

- 1) What you want more of in your city by 2030?
- 2) What do you want less of/do not want in your city by 2030?
- 3) What do you absolutely want to see happen in 2030?

Although seemingly simple, these questions became the starting point for a wider discussion to identify the town's ideal state (vision) in 2030. In response to these questions, the members formulated and grouped responses, considering the linkage among the

answers (cause and effect), and reviewing the answers from the perspective of the 17 SDGs. Although the discussion was led by the core members of the subcommittee, the discussion should be open to anyone who wants to take part.

In this way, Shimokawa put forward its vision entitled 'The Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting People and Nature with the Future'. Shimokawa established seven goals as the Shimokawa Ideals, which became its own version of the SDGs or the Shimokawa Sustainable Development Goals (SSDGs) (Box C). These seven goals incorporate the spirit of the SDGs but are infused with the local flavour of Shimokawa, targeting specific issues that the town will need to confront by 2030.

Like Shimokawa, you can set up a committee (discussion group) or utilise the platform in Step 2 for the envisioning process. Depending on the availability of resources in your city, you may decide to send out questionnaires and/or have workshops with different groups of residents, either divided up by neighbourhoods or groups, such as women, youth, labour unions, academia, business owners, older persons, the LGBTQAI+ community, and others. The objective of such wider participation is to follow the spirit of the SDGs and leave no one behind.

Again, please be honest and bold in the envisioning process. The vision can be more than simply one big slogan. In setting up local goals, it might be necessary to come up with a new set of targets to achieve a better city by 2030. Whether making a new set or not, it is important to align it with the spirits of the 2030 Agenda and its ambitions embodied in the SDGs.

"As a starting point, the subcommittee members received information from the facilitator and outside experts on what the SDGs are and what they are trying to achieve. Then, the members discussed the 17 SDGs and their targets in the context of Shimokawa. The questions asked at this time set out below:"

- 1) What you want more of in your city by 2030?
- 2) What do you want less of/do not want in your city by 2030?
- 3) What do you absolutely want to see happen in 2030?

BOX C: Shimokawa Vision 2030:

The Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting people and nature with the future



Figure 7. Shimokawa 2030 Vision. Adopted from Shimokawa et al., 2018

Goal 1 A town where people come together to overcome challenges

Shimokawa is faithful to its true character, marked by the fortitude to face challenges and the tolerance to accept diversity among various people and viewpoints.

Goal 2 A town where no one is left behind

Shimokawa is a town where everyone belongs, has an opportunity to shine, and is free to express their full potential in a life that is healthy and meaningful.

Goal 3 A town that makes sustainable use of, and circulates its resources, including people, nature and finance

Shimokawa cyclically and sustainably uses its resources including people, natural resources (including its forests and water), financial and other assets; fosters ongoing growth in its forestry and other industries; and practices local production for local consumption in food, lumber, and energy for the purpose of fostering healthy independence and autonomy.

Goal 4 A town where everyone is considered like family

Shimokawa values human connection and strives to develop it through mutual consideration and support, ensuring that everyone can live in safety and in peace.

Goal 5 A town that treasures its cultural heritage and resources, and uses them to create new value

Shimokawa learns from its past and uses it to drive the future, protecting its historical treasures while creating new value.

Goal 6 A town that serves as an example for the rest of the world

By building on past successes and taking them to the next level, Shimokawa contributes to the creation of a decarbonised society (as outlined in the Paris Agreement) and the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 7 A town bringing smiles to children and happiness to future generations

Shimokawa is always mindful of its future generations and committed to the development of the region as a whole, ensuring that its children grow up healthy, happy and strong.



04 Gathering Data

STEP 4 – GATHERING DATA

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because data helps guide you to a better understanding of where you currently stand in comparison to the vision and will help you formulate appropriate policies to fill possible gaps. The data should be both qualitative and quantitative.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

Involvement of all departments in the local government and networks within and outside of city to explore what data has already been collected, is missing, and that can be collected.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

A whole list of available resources to present a picture of the city, which still needs to be reviewed in terms of its existence in reality, bias, etc.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

The next step is to understand the baseline and current situation in your city. Identifying data can be conducted in parallel with Step 3 (Vision Setting) since people may need relevant data sets in the envisioning process. This is similar to having a detailed check-up; even if you think you are healthy, a blood test may sometimes tell you that you are not. As such, data gives you a way to see points that you may not notice and offers a new picture of your city. First, identify what kinds of data are available as much as possible, regardless whether the data was collected by the city or other parties. It is desirable to gather as much data as possible, in both qualitative and quantitative forms, to ensure that the decision-making process is as detailed as possible. Be open to the use of qualitative

data, such as feedback, questionnaires, comments from communities, and other types of data. These are important inputs that reveal aspects that a quantitative data set may have neglected.

So what do you need to do? First, identify what data your city has. The first action could be to conduct hearings within the city hall about which department has what data. The following table may help you to collect information on the existing data. In some cases, data is collected for reporting for national statistics and local governments may not be allowed to use this information for their own purposes. Therefore, it is best to also check if the data is available to the city.

Name of Dept. / organisation	Data content and year	Data format	Availability to city

Table 1. An example of data matrix

Meanwhile, it is useful to get in touch with the members of **MSCS (a Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Structure)** and see if they are aware of any data (both public and private) that could contribute to the discussion. Often, many organisations publish different indicators and data that might be useful. This information may provide a different perspective from the one the city originally had.

In the case of Shimokawa, the town periodically implements a 'Survey on Residents' Perception of Town Development in Shimokawa', a questionnaire survey to collect feedback and ideas from people in the town. The last one feeding into Shimokawa's VLR dates back to 2017 and contained questions on happiness, lifestyle and wealth, with a response rate of

63.4% (1,735/2,735 of all eligible voters). The town also utilised an 'Input Output Table' showing the economic structure and relationships among different industrial sectors (see more at http://www.soumu.go.jp/english/dgpp_ss/data/io/outline.htm) by adjusting it for their township. They also utilise existing data collected for other projects and services, such as those related to taxation and energy production.

In addition, the members of the Shimokawa Future City Subcommittee went on to initiate dialogues and consultations with residents on their own. This type of organic feedback and qualitative data were fed back into the planning process. Interestingly, this was not mandated but voluntary. The members of the committee felt the need to speak to more people and decided to organise gatherings and town hall meetings, sometimes theme-specific (like women's empowerment), and received valuable feedback and ideas. This example is testimony to not be over-confident in our thinking that we know the reality of our city simply on the basis of statistical data. It is important to have a dynamic process to ensure that concerns at the ground level are included in the data gathering process.

Gathering data available is also a way to know what has not been collected. By understanding the amount and degree of data collected and the methodology used, deficiencies become clear. This will help you develop better monitoring mechanisms in Step 8 'Tracking Progress'. Therefore, we recommend that you take note of any findings in this process for future discussion.

A Tool to Understand the Linkage of the SDG targets

After gathering data, it is important for you to think how it should be utilised. It is also important to consider how data should be presented to facilitate communication with local people and relevant

stakeholders. Several organisations use a mix of visualisation tools to have better understanding of data. For example, the '**SDG Interlinkages Analysis & Visualisation Tool**' can help in the planning process by visualising interlinkage of different SDGs.

This tool was developed by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES). It identifies the causal relationship between relevant SDG targets on the basis of literature reviews and the agreed outcomes from relevant inter-governmental consultation processes on global indicators. It uses indicators with trackable data in line with the official indicators listed in the Global Indicator Framework for SDGs and other various data sources. Once the causal relations between targets have been identified, they are further quantified through the correlation of the time-series data for countries in Asia and Africa (27 countries in total). This is done through the network analysis techniques and enables a systematic analysis of the structure of the interlinkages network. This tool is also equipped with country-specific dashboards that indicate potential synergies and trade-offs between SDG targets.

This practical web tool can present users with visualised interlinkage and indicator-level data of different countries, so that users grasp synergies and trade-offs among the SDG targets and can develop policies that effectively utilise and/or avoid those. While this project was originally expected to support national SDG planning, priority setting, institutional arrangements and to enhance policy integration across the 17 SDG areas, it can also be used for cities.

BOX D: SDG Interlinkages Analysis & Visualisation Tool

Figure 8 is to show one of the example of the results obtained by the SDG Interlinkage Analysis & Visualisation Tool. It depicts the interlinkages among targets in the context of industrial transition.

1: Selection of the thematic targets (circled in green)

Only a limited number of targets may be closely linked while many are related more broadly. Hence, the first step was to identify the most relevant SDG targets in this regard. For instance, Target 9.4 on industrial retrofit and Target 9.5 on R&D for industrial sectors are identified as the most relevant within Goal 9 targets for industry transition for climate mitigation.

2: First-tier interactions (circled in blue)

The SDG Interlinkages Tool presents the direct causal relations between the SDG targets which are identified based on a comprehensive literature review related to specific goals or targets (see Zhou and Moinuddin, 2017). For instance, for Industry Transition, Target 7.3 on energy efficiency, Target 12.4 managing chemicals and waste, Target 12.5 on reducing waste

generation and Target 13.2 on climate mitigation (the blue circles in Figure 1) have been identified as the first-tier interactions with Targets 9.4 and 9.5, the thematic targets for Industry Transition.

3: Second-tier interactions (in the red square)

The second-tier interactions indicate the impacts of the first-tier interactions on other SDG targets. The identification of the second-tier interactions is also based on the SDG Interlinkages Tool and through internal consultation with IGES experts. For instance, for Industry Transition, the second-tier interactions include targets from social (Goals 2 and 11), environmental (Goals 6, 13, 14 and 15) and economic (Goals 8, 10 and 12) areas, indicating, in this case, that measures for Industry Transition will contribute to climate mitigation and therefore influence the three dimensions of sustainability.

More details can be found here: <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/pub/climate-sdg-industry-transition/en>

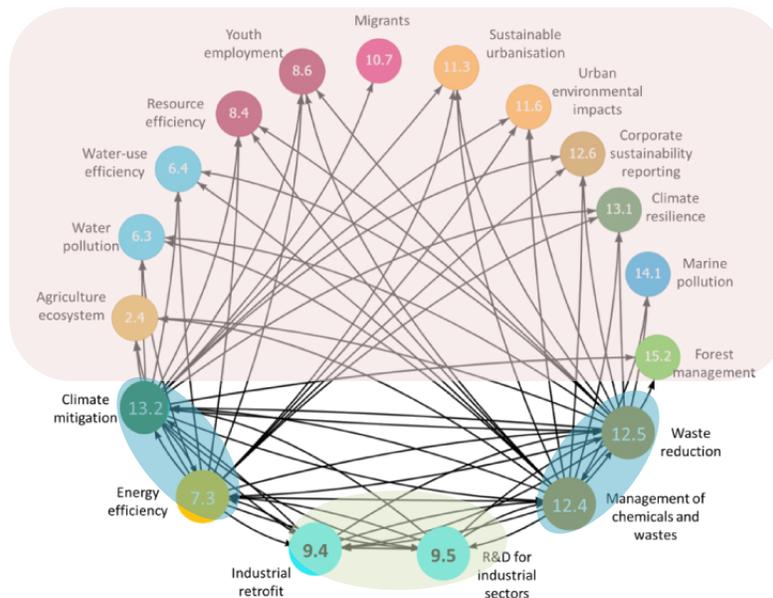


Figure 8. Structure of the infographics diagram with core SDG targets, first-tier nodes, and second-tier nodes

Source: Diagram generated using the SDG Interlinkages Analysis & Visualisation Tool (V3.0) (Zhou, et al., 2019) (as cited in Zusman *et al.*, 2019)



05 Diagnosis

STEP 5 – DIAGNOSIS

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because knowing where you stand and what is lacking will help to identify areas that you need take actions and prioritise to achieve your vision.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

All the data gathered in Step 4.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

To know in which SDGs you have already made significant inroads and in which aspects you are lagging behind. This is critical to align your policies with each SDG and to plan for action.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

All the hard work to gather data will pay off in this step. There are two distinct stages here. First, you will conduct a background check on your city. This will help you gain a better understanding of your history and present direction together with some basic information, such as climate, economic and demographic structures, or natural areas. Second, you will assess your current status. Altogether, the end result of this diagnosis will reveal gaps and priority areas. As a rule of thumb, you should keep in mind the 17 SDGs and their targets to facilitate the next steps.

Background Check

The background check is a desk study. You will reenounter the history of your city, analyse past trends in socioeconomic data, and gain an understanding of recent policy. The background needs to specify the main challenges facing your city. You should also pay attention to past problems and

how your city overcame them. By clarifying the development of your city from the past to the present, you will gain a wider perspective that pushes beyond the boundaries of the present, thereby creating a sound foundation upon which to build your future plan.

Shimokawa did a simple background placing the town in a historical context. This background included information on its climate, history, geography, and the main industries supporting its economy during the twentieth century. Moreover, this background also focused on Shimokawa's main challenges—in particular, depopulation and loss of vitality. The background includes, as well, the town's main policy initiative during the twentieth century, the 'Grand Design for Forestry Symbiosis'. The philosophy of the Grand Design will resonate with other aspects of how Shimokawa embraces the SDGs and its vision for the future.

Assessment of Current Situation

Once the background check is completed, you will concentrate on assessing the current situation based on what you have done in Steps 1 to 5. In this process, it is important for you to look for gaps in the current situation of your city and the ideal picture drawn in the vision of your city and/or the 17 SDGs. You will identify structural issues and the main liabilities that might hinder sustainable development in your city, as well as the main assets that have the potential to help you attain the SDGs.

Three recurring issues that Shimokawa identified in the town included rapid ageing, depopulating, and the need for economic revitalisation. All pose a serious threat to the future of the town. With these constraints, Shimokawa aims to use the transformative potential of the SDGs to beat its challenges and plan for a sustainable future.

Steps 1 to 5 provide a detailed picture of your city, namely, its current situation, existing trends and main challenges. More importantly, this acts as a signal for identifying the aspects you need to prioritise in aligning with the SDGs and for drafting future development plans.

The figure below depicts Shimokawa's understanding of its economy. The town sees cyclical forest management system at the core of its complex sustainability mechanism and places necessary importance on its diagnosis.

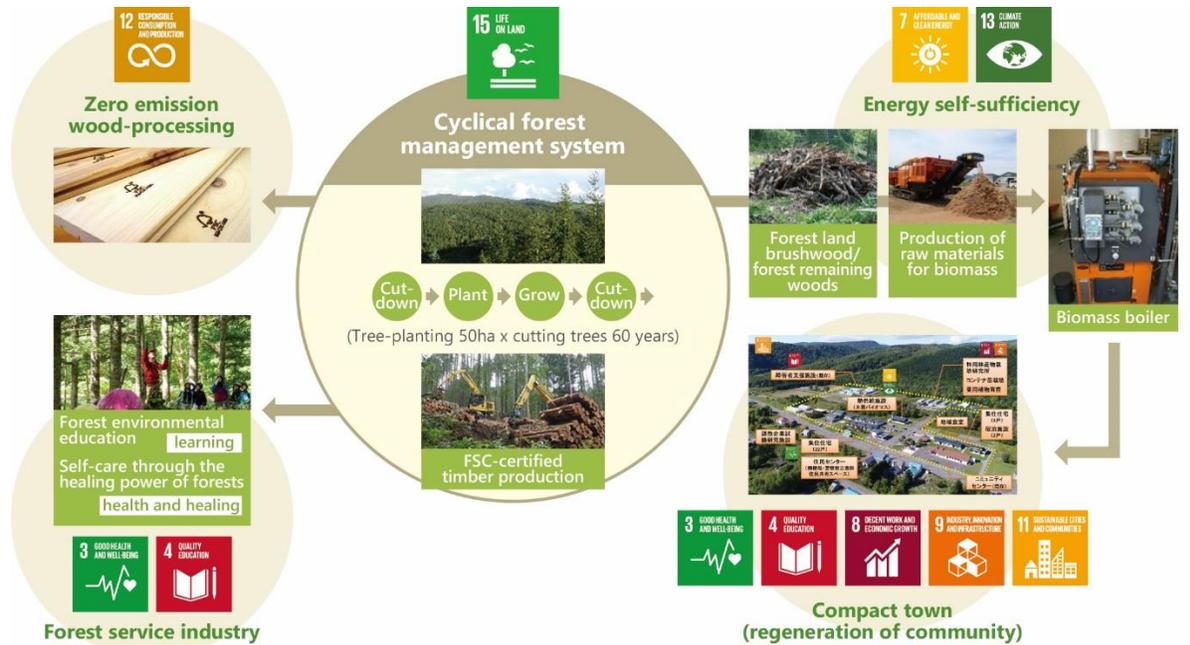


Figure 9. Integrated Approach of Three Dimensions of Sustainable Town Development in Shimokawa (Shimokawa et al., 2018)

STEP 6 – ALIGNING WITH THE SDGs

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because the SDGs cannot be achieved without having all municipal policies aligned with the SDGs.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

A compendium of all current policies of your city and a clear knowledge of the SDGs, their targets, and how they echo the vision set in Step 3.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

Integration of the spirit of the SDGs into the policies of your city.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

The SDGs put forward a holistic framework tackling all aspects of sustainable development. Although it might seem that this is too big a task for subnational governments, the truth is that looking through the lens of the SDGs can help cities envision new opportunities and improve the lives of their residents. By aligning municipal policies with the SDGs, cities can maximise their power to spark change. In Step 6 you will first map your current regulatory framework, linking policies to particular targets to then infuse your overall blueprint with the spirit of the SDGs.

Cities are dealing with a vast range of aspects of urban services, from land use planning, environmental conservation, waste management and disaster risk management, to childcare systems and other services. First, what you should do is to compile all policies and strategies (or at least key policies) and think where they might fit within the SDGs, looking for overlaps and loopholes. Some policies might address more than two targets while others are just related to one or even none. Either way, as you progress in this exercise, you will declutter your toolbox and identify those elements that need to be strengthened or are no longer helping you to reach your goal.

When you really dive into existing policies, you may need to reframe city plans. In Shimokawa, the town reformulated its highest-level municipal plan to fully align with the SDGs. The reformulated plan, the 'Sixth Comprehensive Plan in 2018', includes the Shimokawa Ideals, its vision for 2030 formulated in Step 2 as the goal and incorporating the philosophy of the SDGs. The SDGs will also be incorporated in other municipal sectoral strategies/policies when they are revised.

Through Step 6, you have infused a current blueprint of your city with the spirit of the SDGs. Incorporating the SDGs into a high-level policy as in the example by Shimokawa is important, but it is not necessary to start the process with a high-level policy. You can begin incorporation exercises in sectoral policies.

Incorporating the SDGs into the local policy framework also shows that the city is engaged with Agenda 2030. This exercise should help lay the foundations upon which to build your future vision and thanks to it, change will begin to accelerate.

Basic Objective	Measures / SDGs									
Utilise local resources to develop industry	Agriculture		■			■				
	Forestry and forest products industry				■	■		■	■	
	Prevention of damage from wild birds and animals					■				
	Commerce and industry					■		■		
	Development of tourist attractions					■		■		■
	Utilisation of local resources and creation of new industry					■		■	■	
	Employment and labour issues	■				■		■		
Cultivate a resident-led community	Local self-governance and local cooperation							■		■
Administer government and finances efficiently and effectively	Efficient, effective government administration								■	■
	Sound financial management								■	■
	Promotion of region-wide administration									■
Create a community where people are vibrant and in good health (community welfare and medical services)	Community health and welfare	■		■		■	■	■		■
	Health and medical services		■	■				■		
	Support for the elderly					■	■			■
	Parenting support	■	■	■		■	■			■
	Support for persons with disabilities					■	■	■		■

Table 2. Selected examples of Objectives and Measures of the Shimokawa Fifth Comprehensive Plan (FY2011 – 2018) against 17 SDGs
(Created by authors based on Shimokawa et al., 2018)

**07**

Plan for Action

STEP 7 – PLAN FOR ACTION

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because it helps you to prepare actions/projects with the necessary institutional mechanisms and tools.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

The analysis from Steps 5 and 6.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

To develop an action-based plan for the sustainable transition of your city in line with the SDGs and your city vision.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

Once you have diagnosed your city and aligned your policies with the SDGs, it is time to plan how you will reach your vision. There are two substantial tasks in this step. First, identify actions, especially those in light of the areas needing extra work to reach your vision. Second, prepare the appropriate institutional mechanisms to execute actions.

³ “By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.”

⁴ “Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7% gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries.”

By backcasting from the ideal city you wish to achieve, as explained in Step 3, you will have indicated the pathway to follow. The diagnosis performed in Step 5 should have revealed those areas in which your city is lagging behind—you might perform well in some goals and targets but maybe not so much in others. However, based on these two steps, you should further clarify the future course you will take, as well as the actions, institutional mechanisms and tools needed along the way.

Shimokawa used the three dimensions of sustainable development — social, economic, and environmental — to divide its main concerns. This structure will help the town achieve the Shimokawa Vision 2030. Within each realm, priorities are linked to particular SDGs targets. For example, the town seeks to boost its economy by transitioning to a circular model based on local assets. This covers among others, targets 2.3³, 8.1⁴, 8.3⁵, and 15.2⁶ of the SDGs. At the end of the visioning process, the SDGs Future City Subcommittee also discussed the projects and actions needed to realise the Shimokawa Vision 2030 and possible indicators to assess progress.

Once you have established the main goals and targets, you will need to set up institutional mechanisms to facilitate change. To bring the SDGs to local policymaking requires the joint effort of many people spread along different sections of local government;

⁵ “Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.”

⁶ By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.”

everybody needs to work together, avoiding gaps or overlapping strategies while bringing together all sectors of society.

When planning for action, Shimokawa thought about how to bring its entire administrative organisation together. This is a continuation of the initial platform created in Step 2 to mobilise public support. In this case, the platform enhanced its powers to be able to prepare and advocate for action. The town created three different bodies: 1) 'Shimokawa Town SDGs Promotion Headquarters', an organisation independent of the municipal government, 2) the 'Shimokawa Town Council for SDGs Promotion' engaging with stakeholders, and 3) the 'Advisory Board for SDGs Promotion', which externally evaluates and supports the town's journey. Thanks to this

structure, Shimokawa is able to plan, promote, monitor and evaluate its progress.

In conducting this step, your city should now have in place the institutional framework that will steer your work towards achieving all targets you have identified. This will become the blueprint to construct a bright and sustainable future for your city.

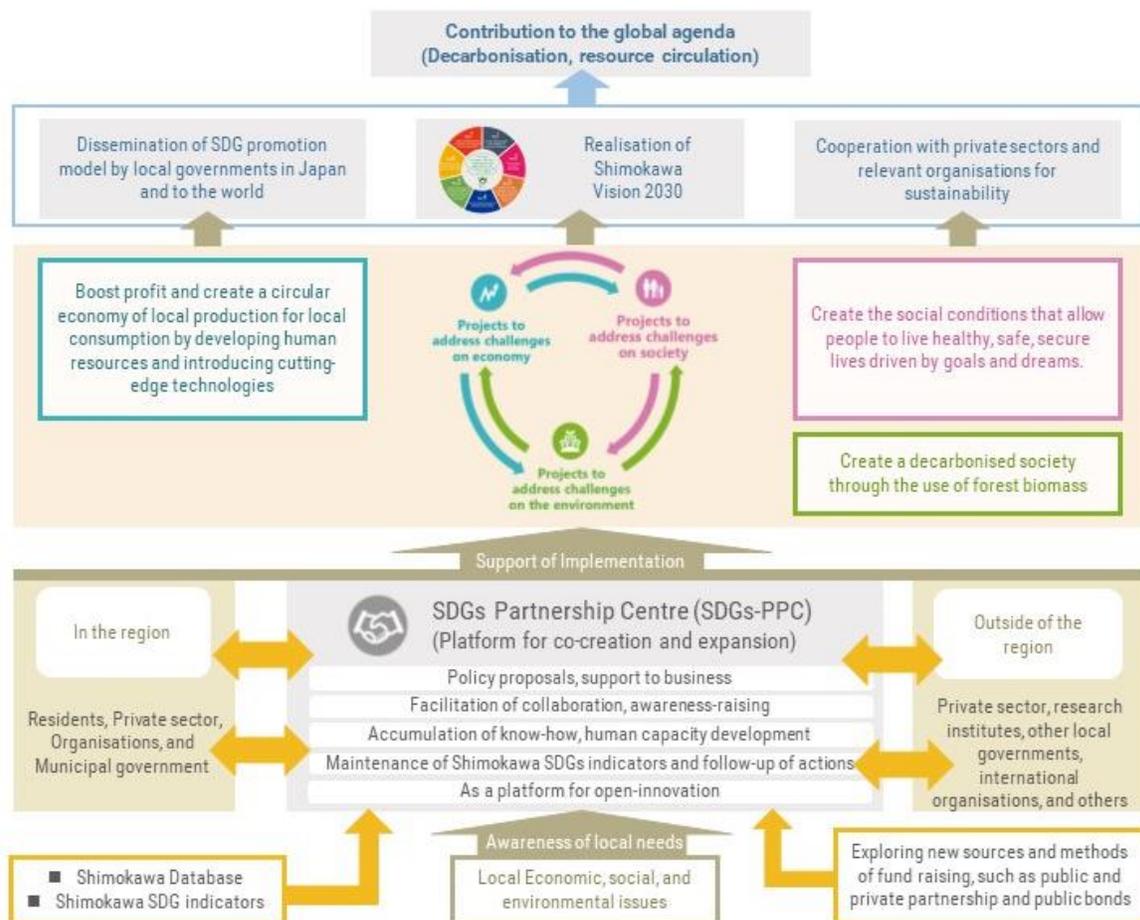


Figure 10. Projects planned to realise the Shimokawa Vision 2030 (adopted from Shimokawa et al., 2018)

**08**

Tracking Progress

STEP 8 – TRACKING PROGRESS

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Because it is necessary to periodically assess your progress to keep you on the right track.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

A collection with the main targets and objectives set up in your vision, and a clear understanding of what data you need to track progress.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

To be able to understand how well you are doing in localising the SDGs and identify what aspects require additional work.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

VLR can act as a trigger to start localising actions and help you realise where you stand. VLR is not a static, but dynamic process to help guide your city to a better state. Therefore, conducting VLR in your city is just the beginning. Establishing a monitoring structure to regularly track progress towards your vision and goals is paramount.

This step is similar to Step 5—diagnosis of your city—but pays special attention to a roadmap for the SDGs in your city. Here, you will monitor the progress focusing on your main targets and identify indicators, which will help ascertain the achievement. The year you carry out the first VLR for your city will serve as the baseline. From then onwards, your city needs to make sufficient institutional arrangements to allow for periodic reviews, including provisions to gather data, if needed.

Shimokawa is developing its own indicators to measure its progress against the SDGs. The town took inspiration from the framework proposed by the UN and adapted this to reflect the reality of subnational levels of government. In doing so, the town has acknowledged the distinct character of cities and their smaller scale, disregarding criteria whose inherent scale of action cannot be translated to the local level. The question of scale is very important here. Some publicly available data is aggregated at higher levels, and therefore, do not address conditions in municipal governments.

The development of the Shimokawa SDGs indicators is still ongoing. The current plan combines statistical data, which is ready available from national sources, with other datasets created by the town itself. Many of the SDG targets will be monitored based on residents' surveys or independent town surveys, such as in Target 2.4 Agricultural yield or Target 3.1 Percentage of people who feel that they and their families are healthy. To monitor all indicators, the town intends to create its own database to gauge trends and the effectiveness of implemented policies.

The important point here is to be aware that after concluding the VLR your work is far from done. You will need to assess the evolution of your plan and to what extent you are able to attain its objectives. As you go on, this process will reveal goals that are advancing faster than anticipated and others that may be underperforming. Hence, it is important to retrofit you plans and actions with the information obtained from periodical reviews.

BOX E: Shimokawa SDGs Indicators

“Shimokawa SDGs Indicators” is comprised of two set of indicators. The first set is ones that are common to all local and regional governments in Japan, which can be obtained such as national statistics and Comprehensive Assessment System for Built Environment Efficiency (CASBEE) City⁷. The second set is the locally set indicators that are unique to Shimokawa. This table shows the quick comparison between the SDGs and some of local original indicators.

GOALS	TARGETS	SHIMOKAWA INDICATORS
Goal 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere	Goal 1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable	A ratio of single-mother family household living under the poverty line (collected through the tax data)
Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	Goal 7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix	Energy self-sufficient rate by local heat supply system (%) Woody biomass supply amount (to the local woody biomass boiler)
Goal 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries	Goal 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status	Gini index
Goal 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	Goal 15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements	Area certified by FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)

Table 3. Shimokawa SDGs Indicators.

(This table was produced from information available in Shimokawa et al., 2018)

⁷ CASBEE is a method to evaluate and to rate the environmental performance and the built environment. It expanded scope to cover the urban sustainability. It was developed by a research committee within the Institute for Building Environment and Energy Conservation under the auspice of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT).



09

Submit as VLR

STEP 9 – SUBMIT AS a VLR REPORT

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

To create a VLR report of your city as a record of the process in an accountable and transparent way, and use the report to communicate with people.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

To document the results of reviews following a suggested format that can be modified to match your process and write-up.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

A VLR report, publication of a deliverable that can be shared locally and globally, as listed on the VLR World Map here: <https://iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr>

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

It is time to let the neighbouring cities, national governments, and the world know that your city is proactively pursuing the achievement of the SDGs.

Sharing your challenges, needs, opportunities and issues that cannot be addressed alone, as well as setting up a base for comparison with other cities require a common framework of language.

It is accessible and useful to look up, compare and examine implemented policies and programmes, as well as mechanisms of cities following a similar format. This helps develop comparisons among cities and between local and national efforts, as the format follows the one used by national governments. Of course, documenting the process and contents of the VLR is key to ensuring accountability and transparency. In short, **benefits of using a similar format for VLR reports** are:

1. **Readability**
2. **Comparability**
3. **Accountability**

Many cities, including Shimokawa, adopted the framework of VNRs as a guide and adjust it to express respective unique process. Table 4 shows the contents of the VLR Reporting Format that IGES has adjusted slightly from the VNRs. More details are described in the following pages. Do you need a concrete example? Check out the VLR-Lab here: <https://iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr>

INTRODUCTORY PART

1. Opening Statement	3. Introduction
2. Highlights	4. Methodology for the Process of Preparation of the Review

BUILDING BLOCKS

5. Ownership of the SDGs	9. Institutional Mechanisms
6. Incorporation of the SDGs in Local Frameworks and Consistency with the National SDG Framework	10. Structural Issues
7. Integration of the Three Dimensions	11. Progress on Goals and Targets
8. Leave No One Behind	12. Means of Implementation
	13. Conclusion and Next Steps

Table 4. A VLR Format Summary



Figure 11. A list of VLRs' front cover images. This image was produced from VLR reports available on the VLR Lab (<https://www.iges.or.jp/en/sdgs/vlr/index.html>)

VLR Reporting Format

(created by IGES by adjusting from the VNR Reporting Format)

1. Opening Statement:

With greetings from the head of the city (Governor, Mayor, etc.), the opening statement should set the tone for the report, including the main visions and commitments for the SDGs. The statement should be kept to one page and focus on the city's characteristics, such as its locality, challenges, vision and directions.

2. Highlights:

This section should include several pages highlighting the review process and the status of progress on the SDGs, as well as how the city has responded to the integrated and indivisible nature—meaning that it is impossible to divide or separate them—of the SDGs and to the principle of leaving no-one behind. In this section, touch upon your city's characteristics, including its history and current situation with relevant data, and reasons why the city is committed to the SDGs. This will provide the readers with background information to understand what is written in the VLR. Also beneficial in this section would be the inclusion of a few examples of best practices in response to the integration of the three dimensions, emerging issues, interlinkages, leaving no one behind and other relevant areas. The inclusion of some sectors where the city needs support and partnership to fulfil commitments would be valuable in searching for partners (finance, capacity, technology, etc.)

3. Introduction:

Five elements can be included in this section:

- 1) Characteristics of locality: Geographical features, historic background, social compositions, economy.
- 2) Local issues: Description of issues on sustainable development at the local level and/or sustainable urban development. It is also appropriate to talk about issues identified in the assessment related to economy, society, and the environment. This means what must change to accomplish the goals for the city by 2030. If the current masterplan does not fit with the 2030 vision, explains what the gaps are.
- 3) Local strengths: In building the sustainable society, what strengths does your community have? What should not change and be kept intact even after 2030? This can include human, financial, natural, and other important resources that can be maximised to create the sustainable society.
- 4) Responses to identified issues: How has your city responded to the above-mentioned local issues and what are the problems in existing responses?
- 5) Review process: While the review process can vary from city to city, it is important to note how the review has been conducted,

4. Methodology for the process of preparing the review:

This section is dedicated to outlining the methodology adopted for the review, including its process, timeframe, scope, depth and limitations. Information can include, for instance, how different stakeholders contributed to the VLR and whether and how the Whole-of-Government approach was used; which

and how institutions provided input, and what mechanisms were used to engage stakeholders. For the sake of accountability and transparency, this section should provide useful insights into the quality of engagement of all department, bureaus, sectors and stakeholders.

5. Ownership of the SDGs:

In achieving the SDGs, it is important that different stakeholders proactively take actions with or without collaborating with others. Therefore, this section could outline efforts put forth for all stakeholders, such as local parliamentarians, community associations, business sectors, cooperatives, SMEs, NGOs/NPOs, labour unions and schools, to inform them of and engage them in the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The review could address how different communities and groups, particularly women and young people, have been engaged. Two headings can be highlighted. Firstly, how does your city create an enabling environment for local stakeholders to take actions on SDGs, and two, what are the stakeholders' own initiatives?

6. Incorporation of the SDGs in local framework and coherence with the national SDGs framework:

This section describes how the city reflects the SDGs into its own local policies. This section can expand to include how local policies are also in line with and related to national frameworks and priorities, as often national policies have large implications. In the end, it is useful to address challenges within the city, gaps between local frameworks, national frameworks, and the SDGs, and what is required to address them if they cannot be tackled by the city.

Three perspectives below may be of help in thinking of potential content for this section.

Perspective 1: How does the existing local framework, policies and plans correspond to the SDGs?

Perspective 2: Are there any new or revised frameworks, strategies, and plans set up based on the VLR process? What are the major changes?

Perspective 3: How are national and local frameworks and/or policy directions for the SDGs linked? Alignment/misalignment, gaps and views on those gaps between national government guidelines for local governments to achieve the SDGs, if any, and the policies and actions of local governments.

7. Integration of three dimensions:

This section might discuss concrete actions, policies and frameworks that integrate the three dimensions of the sustainable development, which bring multi-/co-benefits to different goals and targets. Also, any actions to leverage linkages and avoid trade-offs between different goals and targets can be included. Moreover, it is ideal to mention not only cases, but also institutional frameworks and systems that integrate different concerns in order to create a built-in environment to constantly measure policies against society and the environment.

8. Leave no one behind:

Key, simple questions to ask include the identification of marginalised people and why they are marginalised (analysis and/or evidence). What obstacles exist that hinder them from enjoying the same well-beings as other people in society and what countermeasures are taken to address those issues? Are those measures effective? If so, why? Ways in which people are marginalised are context-specific and there is no one-size-fits-all scenario. However, often women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and the poor are marginalised and become

vulnerable. People with no access to social services and those living in disaster-prone areas are also considered to be vulnerable. It is important to include how they participate in decision-making processes, avail themselves of equal opportunities and become part of the local community. It is ideal to include quantitative targets if they exist and how targeted policies improve conditions.

9. Institutional mechanisms:

This section could provide descriptions of the city's institutional set up to implement and review the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. This section is essentially about a 'coordination structure' and 'multi-stakeholder platform' (see Step 2). Coordination structure may include setting up headquarters, establishing a bureau in charge, designating responsibility for advancing the implementation of the SDGs to a particular department, cross-units or bureau collaboration. It would be helpful to include to what extent those officers in charge have authority to act and the capacity of coordination, as mandates need to come with resources and competencies. Beyond the internal coordination mechanism, you may talk about how you coordinate and engage with stakeholders at all stages of the policy cycle (design, implementation, monitoring and review) through a multi-stakeholder platform. Moreover, ways in which your city can communicate local needs and priorities to the national governments and/or experiences in engaging the national SDGs platform, if any, can be noted, because this would provide useful insight into the actual engagement of cities in the Voluntary National Review.

10. Structural issues:

What are structural issues? As local governments have limited resources and legislative competencies, there

are many issues that they cannot solve alone. What structural issues exist in your city? For example, issues related to geographical locations and social structures. People are curious to know how a local government tries to overcome such challenges (e.g. partnership with other municipalities, subsidies from the national government, funding from international agencies, etc.) Structural issues can include a lack of natural resources, poor transportation infrastructure, distance from the centre of economic activities, dependence on monoculture and international markets, and others.

11. Progress on goals and targets:

To provide a detailed outcome of monitoring, cities are encouraged to provide some information on the progress and the status of all the SDGs. This can include both qualitative and quantitative data in addition to the outcome of diagnosis (Step 5). The review could indicate whether a baseline for the Goals and Targets has been defined and, if not, what the remaining obstacles to doing so are. Cities are encouraged to review all 17 SDGs; however, some could be addressed in more depth. Reviews could focus on current trends, successes, challenges, emerging issues and lessons learnt, and describe policies and programmes developed in response to these. The information in this section can help identify areas requiring advice and support from others. As many global indicators and some targets are not directly applicable to cities, it is advisable to check against the national indicators set, if they exist, and localised targets with locally set indicators. The rationale behind the selection of those targets and indicators would be useful for others in understanding the context. If cities are working on their second VLR, it would be desirable to include the progress made since the previous VLR.

12. Means of Implementation (Mol):

As listed in Agenda 2030, the Mol includes finance (mobilisation and execution), technology (R&D, innovation, all forms and types of knowledge), capacity development, data, and institutional instruments (partnership, community engagement, policy coherence, monitoring and evaluation). This can address difficulties faced in acquiring these resources and what additional support is needed. They should identify specific needs, as it can become a call for partnerships.

13. Conclusion and next steps:

This section should stipulate issues to be addressed and actions to be taken on a short-, mid-, and long-term basis. In addition, this section can include a vision and priorities for SDG implementation with key forward-looking messages. It is helpful to mention any lessons learnt through the VLR process itself. Moreover, it is ideal to expand on how the city arrived at the conclusions and next steps, such as background data, analysis, and logic in order to implement such a long-term vision. By doing so, this section will be truly meaningful and useful to others.

14. Annex:

Cities are encouraged to attach any supplemental documentation, such as data (national, proxy, localised, etc.), graphs and more details of institutional arrangement, best practices the city wishes to share in depth, as well as any contributions and comments from stakeholders.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Now, you can publish your VLR report here: <https://iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr>. To submit your VLR report, check the online form here: <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/projects/vlr/form>. Should you have any questions, please contact us at city-info@iges.or.jp.

**10****Advocate and Communicate****STEP 10 – ADVOCATE AND COMMUNICATE****WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

Because it is productive to communicate your city's commitments and actions and look for new partnerships, and advocate national and global policy changes to promote the SDGs in local communities.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

A correct narrative and understanding of why you need to engage in localising the national and global SDGs.

WHAT WILL YOU ACHIEVE?

Great exposure to a global audience and, if you succeed in advocacy, the needed change for your city/region to implement better policies.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

First and foremost, you should understand why communication and advocacy are part of the VLR process.

There are three aspects that are critical for VLR communication and advocacy. Communication and advocacy should, at least, target the following actors: national government, international decision-making bodies, and other stakeholders.

Firstly, it is a prerequisite to communicate with the national government, in particular within the VNR process. National legislation and regulations set the frameworks within which local and regional governments (LRGs) operate. These potentially incentivise or obstruct activities for sustainable development (such as fiscal policy, land development,

natural resource management, etc.) Challenges and opportunities identified in the VLR that cannot be addressed by the city should be communicated as local needs to the national level, which is looking for best practices on localising the SDGs.

In the case of Shimokawa, by applying for the national government's "SDGs Future City Programme" and being recognised as a "SDGs Future City", Shimokawa was nationally recognised as a leading town and receives funds to pursue the implementation of the SDGs.

Achieving the ambitious 2030 Agenda is a collective journey for the world. It is a process of peer-learning and review, so that best practices and lessons learnt will be shared widely, accelerating the implementation process further. Secondly, it is an international decision-making goal your city should aspire to. Joining the global network of LRGs and sharing local solutions to global challenges helps the constituency of LGRs to make the voices of cities heard in the global decision-making processes. Global advocacy for cities must be led and supported by cities. Your VLR would be an asset to this end.

These advocacy efforts are fundamental to any transformative changes that cities wish to make. Naturally, advocating local sustainability on both the national and global level increases the city's visibility. Shimokawa's efforts in the SDGs have been mentioned in various global arenas (for example, ICLEI <https://iclei.org/en/media/iclei-members-set-localization-milestone-first-to-report-sdg-progress-to-un>, Global Taskforce 2016, UCLG 2019). This can help cities increase inbound tourism, investments and residents. In the case of Shimokawa, many visitors come to study and observe the town from Japan and abroad (Shimokawa et al., 2018 p.41).

Globally, ESG investment, an investment considering not only quantitative financial information but also sustainability factors (environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors) reached USD 30,683 billion in 2018, 1.7 times higher than the USD 18.276 billion in 2014 (Global Sustainable Investment Alliance, 2018). A total of 2,177 institutions have signed the UN Principles of Responsible Investment by 2018. Even though there may be companies in your city that have not yet indicated an interest in this endeavour, they soon will be, as global companies are implementing sustainability policies within their supply chains. By actively showcasing the sustainability and resilience of your city, you can attract more businesses to come and invest within the sustainability paradigm.

In conclusion, advocacy and communication based on and with your VLR would likely require resources and commitments, but are certainly worth committing to. There are networks you can consider joining to support such efforts. Your city is not alone, and an increasing number of progressive cities are looking for more cities to collaborate together with them in achieving a sustainable city.

Networks to support your advocacy and communication:

UCLG - United Cities and Local Governments

United Cities and Local Governments is an umbrella international organisation for cities, local and regional governments, and municipal associations throughout the world that is concerned with representing and defending the interests of local governments on the world stage. For more information: <https://www.uclg.org/>.



ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, ICLEI influences sustainability policy and drives local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. ICLEI's members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability. For more information: <https://iclei.org/>.



Figure 12. Examples of Local and Regional Governments' networks

CONCLUSION

We are delighted to see that you have made it this far. However, this publication is meaningless unless you take action.

If you have followed all the steps listed above, you are already on the way to a better and more sustainable future. It is important to note that the steps should not be implemented one by one. Some of the steps are interlinked and can be done in parallel to complete or reinforce each step.

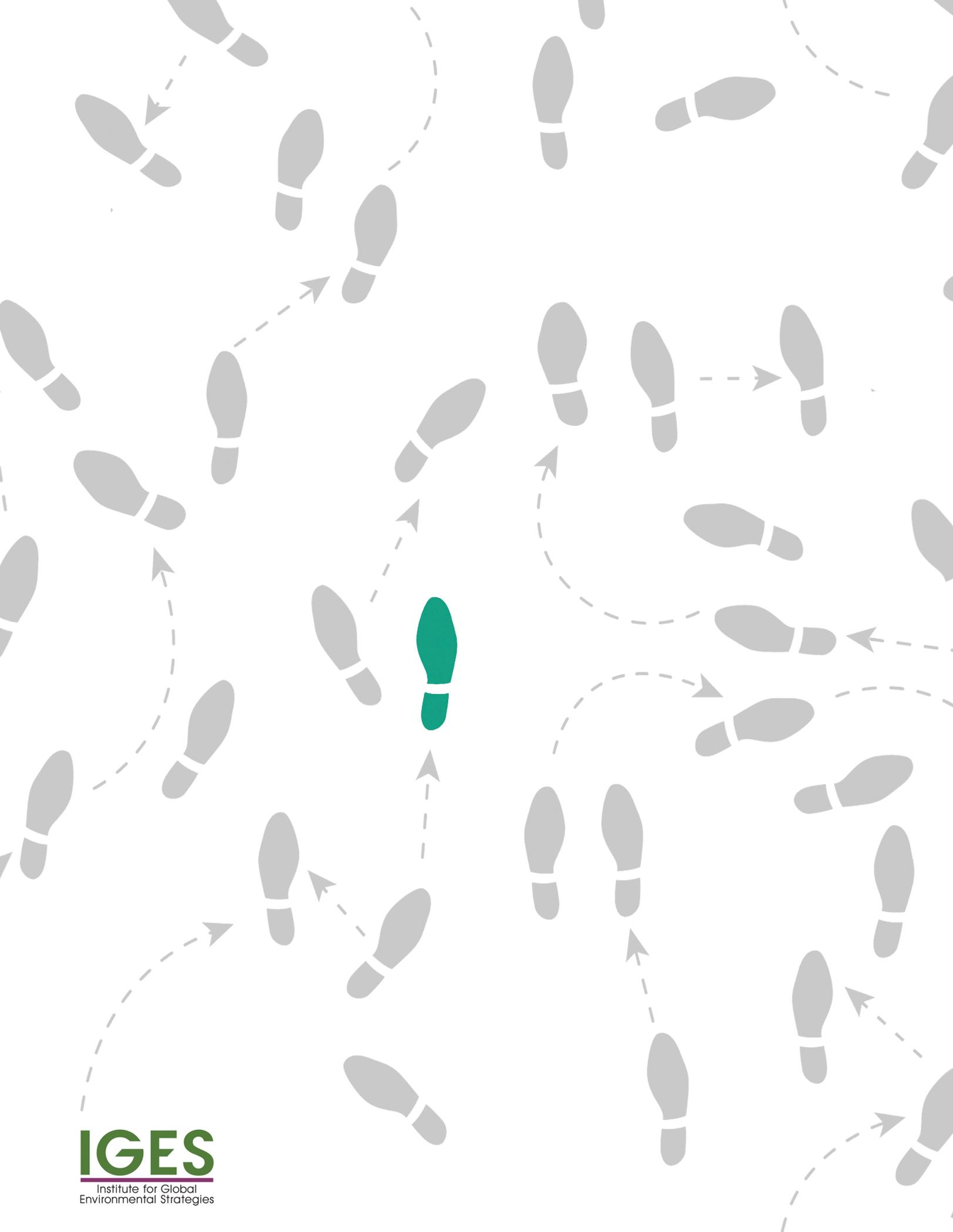
The SDGs and VLR will help your city become more sustainable. However, as we stated at the beginning, the VLR is not the end destination, but rather a milestone. Through the VLR, you will closely check where you are on the road to the vision of your city and consider what you need to do to further achieve

your vision. It is a type of comprehensive review of municipal policies from the viewpoint of sustainability using the SDGs as a guiding tool. Therefore, it is important to use the VLRs as a periodical exercise. For example, Bristol has announced that it would conduct the VLR every four years to make sure it is on track with its goals. Subsequent VLRs will review municipal policies and formulate appropriate responses. Allocating human, technological, or financial resources to the outcomes of monitoring and review is at the heart of effective follow up and review.

Your VLR shows the commitment of your city to the 2030 Agenda. Keep working to achieve it!

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