



## Representation of local and regional governments at the High-Level Political Forum 2025

### Local experts draw conclusions from their attendance at the Forum

As part of the Connective Cities learning process '[Sustainability Reporting and Voluntary Local Review](#)', local experts gathered online on 7 August 2025 to discuss the 'Representation of local and regional governments at the [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2025](#) (HLPF 2025)' and draw their conclusions. Nineteen people participated in the meeting to discuss the events and their personal learnings at the HLPF Forum, which took place in New York City from 14 to 23 July 2025.

From Germany, the cities of Bonn, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Enzkreis and Oldenburg were present, as well as the German Council for Sustainable Development. From the Global South, representatives from Lusaka, Local Government Association of Zambia, South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA), Cuenca and La Paz were in attendance. Anna Calvete Moreno (Head of Research) and Matteo Fabris (Research Officer) from [United Cities and Local Governments](#) (UCLG) presented their work as an international advocacy group in an introductory input and provided initial insights into the proceedings of the forum.

Matteo Fabris (UCLG) highlighted four benefits of participating in the forum: visibility and the opportunity to present oneself in exchange with other participants, the forum as a platform for advocacy, the establishment of (long-term) partnerships, and its use as a learning platform to get to know the local implementation of the Agenda 2030.

The HLPF 2025 focused on SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17, with 36 countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews. However, less than half of these national sustainability reports included local authorities as partners, highlighting the ongoing challenge of truly inclusive approaches to SDG implementation. In addition, cuts to the UN budget severely limited opportunities for side events, making it difficult to engage in low-threshold cooperation outside the official framework.

In terms of content, it was observed that the word 'localization' has now been adopted into the general vocabulary of influential figures and relevant decision-makers, which illustrates the growing awareness of the issue. Local governments are the 'beating heart' behind the success of this approach, according to Anna Moreno of UCLG. However, greater unity with national governments is needed, as they too often exclude local governments and their perspectives from important processes.

Afterwards, participants discussed successes, challenges and ideas, focusing on how local realities can be more effectively linked to international decision-making processes.



Regarding next year, when SDG 11 ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’ will be a focus topic, an incentive should be created to integrate local voices even more prominently and effectively into the agendas. Stefan Wagner from the city of Bonn emphasized the role of the respective national delegations and the need for clear guidance and guidelines for representatives of smaller cities and municipalities. It is important, according to Dr. Bettina Bunk, to find a common voice despite differing interests, for example in the form of coordinated statements and, ideally, in the form of early strategic planning.

The statement by Martin Tebogo Matlou from [South Africa Local Government Association](#) (SALGA) that there is more conversation about local governments than with them met with strong approval among the participants. Representatives of national governments dominate the dialogue instead of focusing on local representatives, who are usually more directly affected by challenges. Local governments and communities are currently treated more like stakeholders, even though they are the actual shareholders, as 65-70% of SDG measures are implemented at the local level.

In addition, many would welcome it if sustainability reporting in the form of Voluntary Local and Voluntary National Reviews were not only carried out on a voluntary basis, but in a next step, were made more binding and strategically embedded in the agendas of local and national governments. Martin Tebogo Matlou emphasized: ‘Poverty is not voluntary, climate shocks are not voluntary’, so sustainability reports should not be either.

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