Hawai‘i & Pacific SDG Leadership - Island models for local SDG action & Hawai‘i’s first Voluntary Local Review

Voices from the Pacific: “Accelerated Action Through Aloha/Talofa and Transformative Pathways in the Pacific”

Key Takeaways

Localization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has generated new levels of commitment to sustainable development with an emphasis on local partnerships, solutions and cultural values. This context is especially prevalent in island communities rooted in systems thinking and indigenous knowledge. The July 16th UN High-level Political Forum virtual side event highlighted Pacific Island leadership in achieving the UN SDGs and included a Hawai‘i Voluntary Local Review (VLR) Lab discussion on the Aloha+ Challenge which introduced the first statewide VLR in the U.S. The was co-hosted by the United Nations Association - USA, Hawai‘i Institute for Human Rights, Samoa National Human Rights Institution, University of New South Wales Diplomacy Training Program, and the Hawai‘i Green Growth Local2030 Hub.

The session was part one of a two part session highlighting “Voices from the Pacific.” Session one spotlighted voices from Hawai‘i, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Samoa and international partners

Hawai‘i Voluntary Local Review Lab

Hawai‘i’s statewide Voluntary Local Review takes stock of Hawai‘i’s progress on implementing the necessary changes needed to achieve a more sustainable and equitable future. This pioneer report will raise the bar for local SDG leadership across the U.S. and the world, as the first VLR submitted by a state level. The Voluntary Local Review presents a unique opportunity for local municipalities to be represented on a global platform committed to enacting change.

Hawai‘i’s VLR outlines statewide progress on the Aloha+ Challenge - Hawai‘i’s local framework to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, with the addition of recent impacts and potential long-term setbacks from COVID-19. The VLR provides an opportunity for Hawai‘i to reflect on its collective action, share bright spots and chart a way forward with actionable solutions rooted in island values and systems thinking. The VLR also recognizes the need for collective Pacific action to tackle and overcome shared obstacles.

Hawai‘i’s Aloha+ Challenge was launched in 2014 is a local framework that cuts across economic, social, and environmental priorities to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), inspired by the Micronesia Challenge, Caribbean Challenge, and other GLISPA commitments. The Aloha+ Challenge is led by the Hawai‘i governor, county mayors, and state legislature through concurrent resolution with statewide business and civil society partners. The Aloha+ Challenge enjoys unprecedented political support to achieve time-bound sustainability goals and indicators, which are measured through an open-data impact Dashboard. The Dashboard was developed through a multi-year stakeholder convening process to determine locally and culturally appropriate metrics and indicators. Hawai‘i’s VLR builds on six-years of benchmark data from the Aloha+ Dashboard.

Hawai‘i’s VLR is convened by the Hawai‘i Green Growth Local2030 Hub (HGG), a network comprised of state, county, private sector, and civil society partners and recognized United Nations Local2030 Hub that supports island-led SDG solutions. With the support of the Global Island Partnership, HGG formed in response to the 2011 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Honolulu to identify green growth priorities and an island sustainability commitment that could be a scalable model.

The Hawai‘i Voluntary Local Review (VLR) Lab included speakers from the State Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, City & County of Honolulu, County of Hawai‘i, Maui County, Kaua‘i County, Hawai‘i Human Rights Institute, Hawai‘i Green Growth Local2030 Hub, State Senator Kalani English, and a video message from U.S. Congressman Ed Case. Panelists included leadership from the United Nations Foundation, Office of the Mayor of Los Angeles, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Brookings Institution, and video messages from Pacific civil society.
Senator Kalani English shared about the State Legislature’s sustainability and climate actions, including the Senate’s use of the Aloha+ Challenge and SDGs as a framework for policy. The SDGs will be integrated into the 2024 13th Festival of the Pacific Arts hosted by Hawai’i.

Kalani Ka’ana’aana, Hawai’i Tourism Authority shared on COVID-19 tourism disruption and the opportunity for regenerative tourism focused on natural resources, Hawaiian culture, and community wellbeing. Hawai’i Tourism Authority has adopted the Aloha+ Challenge in their 2020-2025 strategic plan.

Josh Stanbro, City & County of Honolulu shared on the City’s Resilience Strategy, COVID-19 response, and action towards the Aloha+ SDGs through a progressive plastic ban, fossil fuel industry litigation, renewable energy and electric vehicle bills, and empty homes tax on second homeowners to support affordable housing.

Riley Saito, County of Hawai’i shared on the County’s production of a greenhouse gas inventory and it's focus on using the COVID-19 pandemic to build back better in mobility, food systems, supply chains, and sustainable tourism.

Makale’a Ane, County of Maui shared on Hawai’i’s indigenous and nature-based solutions to climate change including watershed programs and marine environmental restoration programs, lo’i (taro fields) and fishponds in Maui County. Several Hawai’i communities were awarded the UN Development Programme 2019 Equator Prize for their work.

Ben Sullivan, County of Kaua’i shared Kaua’i’s leadership on the 100% renewable energy with the county approaching about 65% renewable energy, and ways residents can take action at a household level through the Kaua’i Aloha+ Challenge. The County is addressing food security during the COVID-19 pandemic by connecting kupuna (seniors) directly with farmers with funding from the county.

Congressman Ed Case shared the importance of Hawai’i leading on local SDG implementation and accelerating island-led solutions against global challenges. Congressman noted that Hawai’i is America’s bridge to the Pacific and Asia and should play a dynamic role in engaging and leading on shared issues of sustainable development, particularly climate change as the single most important issue confronting the Pacific. The congressional Pacific Island Caucus addresses the region’s shared values, priorities and challenges, as well as the role of authorized funding to support civil society programs and public-private partnerships like the Hawai’i Green Growth Local2030 Hub that are providing models for collaboration in the region.

Global Voices
Kaycie Brown, United Nations Foundation provided opening remarks noting the importance of the SDGs as a framework for COVID-19 response, recovery and sustainability against the backdrop of the Decade of Action to 2030. Her remarks noted the key role of island SDG leadership such as through the Local2030 Islands Network as well as Hawai’i’s pioneering work on the VLR through the Aloha+ Dashboard as an international bright spot.

Erin Bromaghim, Los Angeles Mayor’s Office discussed LA’s first Voluntary Local Review and cutting edge SDG action framework, the role of public-private partnerships to increase impact, and opportunities to share and apply best practices such as from Hawai’i’s Aloha+ Dashboard.

Edgardo Bilsky, United Cities and Local Governments discussed subnational leadership on the SDGs and in response to the pandemic, with an increased focus on human wellbeing and poverty, promoting and developing policies to decrease emissions.

Caroline Fox, Sustainable Development Solutions Network discussed the role of local metrics to track progress toward the UN SDGs, and key resources including SDSN’s state, cities, and global SDG indices and the recently launched SDG Today real time data hub in collaboration with Esri.

Tony Pipa, Brookings Institution provided closing reflections on Hawai’i’s first state-level VLR through the Aloha+ Challenge with collaboration by multiple branches of government and business and civil society partners, and the significance of the Dashboard as a strong model worldwide. VLRs are an innovation turning into the global movement, and reflect the key processes of stakeholder engagement, measurement, learning and action. Lastly, his remarks noted the importance of regional and global cooperation by cities, states, and public-private partners to achieve the SDGs.

Pacific and Oceania Voices
University of New South Wales shared a video from Papua New Guinea discussing the Sustainable Development Goals and the protection of the country’s diverse indigenous communities. The video urged investments in the country to consider the culture and natural resources of indigenous lands that have been protected for thousands of years, and this message was echoed during a powerful video of the Sepik River.

Louchrisa Hussain, Citizens Constitutional Forum (CCF) in Fiji discussed the importance of providing local island communities with access to credible and timely information during COVID-19. Building solidarity networks across island communities amplifies transparency and strengthens timely decision making.

Brown Girl Woke After School Program in Samoa video performance at Road to UN Child Rights Conference (CRC) 2020; sharing island youth empowerment.

17 Voices for a New Future: Hawai’i Youth Videos of students from ‘Iolani School and Waipahu High School in collaboration with Hawai’i Institute for Human Rights.