WHY Acting Local?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 goals offer the best framework to address the world’s most pressing development challenges.

With nearly 70% of the world’s population living in cities by 2050, the future of humanity is urban. As such, even if the current crises are global in nature, their unfolding and main impacts have significant local dimensions.

In most countries, local and regional governments are responsible for coordinating and delivering basic services, which are critical for ensuring local communities’ wellbeing and development. An OECD study noted that more than the 65% of the SDG targets are related to the work and mandate of local governments.

Due to their proximity and better understanding of local communities needs and aspirations, they are the best positioned to represent them at the national and international decision-making tables. Solutions and ideas to promote solidarity are brought together by local governments themselves.

As such, local and regional governments have been working to protect their communities even in the current complex times, trying to safeguard the most vulnerable, working to tackle inequalities, delivering gender-based responses, and making cities more inclusive.

What is more, local governments have been fostering systems of care in which an effective local public service delivery, which provides social safety nets and covers societal, is paramount, particularly when crises strike.

How we plan, build, and manage our cities and urban areas will determine the trajectory of the people and our planet. The global solutions we need to tackle today’s universal challenges can only be achieved with a more inclusive and robust multilateralism in which local communities have a say and local and regional governments are fully recognized as transformative actors.

- Local action and local leadership are critical to addressing the current global crises and to foster sustainable recovery and development.
- The success to address the current and future challenges and to redirect our world towards more sustainable paths will depend on the capacities of our local and regional governments.

WHAT is SDG localization?

SDG Localization refers to the process of transforming the SDGs into reality at the local level, in coherence with the national frameworks and strategies and in line with communities’ priorities. It is a two-way process where the local meets the national and the global, and vice-versa.

To be successful, localization needs to be anchored in the principles of inclusion, multistakeholder participation and multilevel governance. In addition to these principles, the New Urban Agenda should be understood and applied as a global action-oriented framework to localize the SDGs.
Lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) experience highlighted the centrality of localized action in achieving global sustainability. This was reflected in the 2030 Development Agenda which calls for:

- a strong local dimension and a focus on resilient, inclusive and safe cities (Goal 11)
- effective and transparent governments and public institutions, as key drivers for achieving the SDGs (Goal 16)
- multilevel governance, policy coherence and multistakeholder cooperation across sectors as key means of implementation (Goal 17).

With more and more local governments and communities driving action and innovation for the SDGs, the centrality of localization has also been increasingly recognized within international and UN-led processes on the SDGs:

- In 2020, the UN Secretary General launched the Decade of Action, a global call for action to spur global progress to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The Decade of Action identifies local action as one of the key levels of intervention to achieve the SDGs.
- The Secretary General’s Report on Our Common Agenda recognizes that “Cities, local authorities and specifically VLRs are key actors and processes to advance sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism”. This report is accompanied by the establishment of the Advisory Group of Local and Regional Authorities, facilitated by the UN Task Force on the Future of Cities, chaired by UN-Habitat with the aim of exploring ways for strengthening collaboration between the UN System and local and regional governments.
- The UN Secretary General Policy Paper on Covid-19 in an Urban World highlights the central role played by city authorities in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis and recommend supporting capacities and resources of local governments to address future crisis and boost the recovery process.
- As reflected in the outcome document of the Development Work Group, the Italian Presidency of the prioritized SDG Localization and intermediary cities as key focus of work. A new G20 Platform on SDG Localization hosted by OECD and UN-Habitat is planned to be launched by the end of October 2022.

- The Local2030 Coalition was launched during the 76th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2021. The Local 2030 Coalition is the UN-wide initiative to localize the SDGs within the Decade of Action. Hosted by UN-Habitat, the Coalition seeks to provide a platform to connect all stakeholders advancing on the local implementation of the SDGs.
HOW TO Localize the SDGs?

As the SDGs refer to all dimensions of environmental, economic, and social development, their localization implies transformative changes on many levels and do not necessarily follow a specific process.

Nevertheless, the past 7 years of implementation have showed that local and regional governments have started the process of localization by reviewing their strategic plans in light of the SDGs and in mainstreaming them across all their plans and actions. From strategic planning, the SDGs have hence been applied to all dimensions of local and regional governments’ work – from financing to public procurement, to health and education.

At the same time, through and thanks to the SDGs, significant progress is being made to address key challenges at the local level – i.e. the lack of data environments; the design of evidence-based policies and monitoring processes; national to local policy coherence; redistribution of adequate resources (human, technical and financial).

Local and regional governments worldwide are starting to mainstream the SDGs, confronting the current challenges, planning long-term developing strategies and aligning with the national governments through a multilevel governance perspective. In this way:

- The city of Mwanza, in Tanzania, and the city of Tampere, in Finland, are kickstarting a twinning project to cooperate in the production of Mwanza’s first Voluntary Local Review (VLR), perceiving it as an entry door to advance together towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and beyond. It aims to set example and inspire other local and regional governments worldwide to engage into the same process.
- The city of Saint Louis, in Senegal, has integrated the SDGs in its development plan and made progress in implementing SDGs 3, 4, 6 and 7 with projects related to roads, waste management, renewable energies and coastal protection.
- The Greater Municipality of Amman, Jordan, developed the first VLR of the region in 2022, reviewing SDG 3, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 17. It was developed through a participatory approach. The municipality was consulted in the Voluntary National Review process and has regular exchanges with the national government.
- The city of Bogota, Colombia, has made important advances on SDG 5, planning an inclusive city from a care-systems perspective. They advocate for a gender approach to urban planning and services provision, exemplified by its project: the care blocks.
- In the Philippines, the national government promotes a top-down localization strategy. Moreover, the three associations of subnational governments are actively involved in the localization of the SDGs and published a Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR).
UN-HABITAT APPROACH towards SDG Localization

In line with UN-Habitat’s Strategic Plan, UN-Habitat’s Executive Director identified SDG localization as one of the Agency’s four key priorities for 2022-23 along with adequate housing, cities and climate and post-crisis recovery.

As UN focal point to work with local and regional governments and the custodian of the New Urban Agenda, UN-Habitat has been at the forefront of SDG localization since the very endorsement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Agency’s work on localizing the SDGs is guided by a partnership-based territorial approach anchored in the principles of leaving no one and no place behind; multilevel governance, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

UN-Habitat’s corporative approach on SDG localization is anchored around four main components: Global Urban Monitoring Framework; Voluntary Local Review; SDG Cities Flagship Programme; Local 2030 Coalition.

Through this integrated approach, UN-Habitat has been providing support to national and local governments throughout all stages of the SDG localization process: from data innovation to strategic planning, to policy formulation, capacity development, high-impact projects’ development, monitoring, reporting and certifying exceptional achievements of cities towards the SDGs.

Technical support is combined with UN-Habitat’s work and leadership at the global level through initiatives such as the Local 2030 Coalition and the advocacy efforts in the context of the major international and UN-led fora.