



LOCALISING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Local Government and Sustainable Development

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings have, ever since 1995 and the creation of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, CLGF, given high level recognition to the role of local government in helping to realise Commonwealth political and development goals. The 2013 *Commonwealth Charter* accordingly incorporates the 2005 *Aberdeen Agenda, the Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local Democracy and Good Governance*.^[1]

At the 2007 *Commonwealth Local Government Conference* held in Auckland, Professor Jeffrey Sachs highlighted the importance of local government in implementing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Subsequent years saw an increased focus on the key role of both local and regional (or State) government in sustainable development and climate change in particular, it being realised that national level strategies were insufficient on their own. In addition, there has been a new emphasis on the global impact of urbanisation and on cities as drivers of economic change.

This new focus has been termed the *territorial approach to sustainable development*, and many national governments have incorporated such a 'place-based' dimension in their developmental strategies.^[2] This has especially been the case in countries with a high degree of public sector decentralisation where local governments already hold significant competencies, including fiscal powers.

At the international level, too, the key role of local and regional government has been given formal recognition in the work of UN agencies such as UNDP, UNCDF and UN-Habitat. The adoption in 2015 of the UN *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, accompanied by 169 detailed targets and associated indicators, and other

recent global pacts (notably the *Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Addis Ababa Action Agenda for Financing for Development, New Urban Agenda*) have recognised that to be effective, SDG implementation, like that of the MDGs, has to be bottom-up, not top-down. This means deploying a 'cooperative multi-stakeholder approach' to sustainable development of which local and regional government is deemed a key partner. This is at the heart of what has become known internationally as the '*localisation of the SDGs*.'

The 2030 Agenda gives explicit recognition to local government and especially cities in *SDG 11-Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*. This SDG contains detailed targets in areas of direct local government competence such as housing, transport, urban air quality, waste management, public spaces, environmental planning and disaster risk reduction. However, all 17 SDG, not only SDG 11, have a sub-national dimension. The OECD has identified 105 of the 169 SDG targets as being highly relevant for local and regional government which means that many of these cannot be implemented effectively without localizing.^[3] In addition, many other SDG targets have a sub-national dimension.

Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has focused attention on local government responses to primary healthcare and public education and safety, which relate to SDG 3 on health. There is now growing discussion by the OECD and others on local government's role in post-Covid economic recovery and job creation (SDG 8) with a particular focus on climate action (SDG 13) and a green-led recovery.^[4]

Reporting on the Localising Process

Since 2016 UN Member States, including most Commonwealth countries, have presented *Voluntary National Reviews, VNRs* to the annual UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF), as recorded in the UN's VNR Synthesis Reports since

2016 and recent reports have a chapter on ‘Institutions for implementing the 2030 Agenda’ with sections on ‘coordinating mechanisms at multiple levels of government, including local government’.

The 2018 UN Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) provides practical advice on the reporting format and processes. Among the recommendations made is to ‘develop a stakeholder engagement plan’, also at ‘all levels of government’, including designation of a focal point for liaison with stakeholders. It addresses the role of local government, for example ‘How are all sectors and levels of government (local and subnational) being engaged in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?’ and ‘What actions have been undertaken by sub-national and local government to implement the SDGs?’

The Handbook specifically refers to consultation with ‘umbrella groups’ of stakeholders and notes the strategic role of national Local Government Associations or LGAs; it also references integration of SDGs into local sustainable development plans (citing the case of Jamaica). There is now a growing, but by no means universal, number of VNRs showing prior consultation with local government and engaging local government in follow-up activities, for example through the appropriate national SDG coordination mechanisms.

Driving SDG Localisation Forward

The key drivers of SDG localisation are cities, supported by local government associations, operating at national level, and international local government associations like CLGF in the Commonwealth and United Cities and Local Governments, UCLG, globally.

There are several core areas of activity involved in SDG localisation:

Awareness-raising about SDGs and sustainable development among the public is an important function. Many local governments engage with other local stakeholders such as civil society, local business and academia to inform their communities about the importance of sustainable development in a local context. This might entail putting data on council websites about which SDGs are important locally, producing specialised educational and other materials including for schools, and holding public events.

Seeking **SDG alignment at sub-national level** is another important activity. Here city administrations and other local governments seek to align their existing plans and targets to SDG

targets, for example SDG.11.1: *by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums*. It might also entail establishing new targets, but most would be covered by ongoing local government activities. This further involves having the SDGs endorsed by local politicians/parties; monitoring implementation of SDGs; and securing funding for SDG-related work.

Local SDG target-setting and monitoring SDG implementation is dependent on having adequate statistical **data at local level on SDGs**. This is often inadequate or only available at an aggregated national level. Having such local data compiled, as necessary in cooperation with local universities or national statistical offices, is therefore another important aspect of SDG localisation. Recently a growing number of cities and local governments across the world have developed their own ‘**Local Voluntary Reviews**’ on SDG implementation both for deployment at the local level and for presentation to the national government and the UN. One of the cities that has done this and is strongly engaged in SDG implementation is Bristol (UK).

Local government needs to **engage at national level on SDG implementation**, to ensure that national plans and budgets make adequate allowance for SDG localisation. There needs to be horizontal coordination among national, regional and local government on SDG implementation, as well as vertical coordination among ministries. Most governments have set up inter-ministerial committees or other forms of institutional coordination and it is important that sub-national government is represented on these.

Since 2015, substantial efforts have been devoted to developing and sharing policy and best practices on localising SDGs, accompanied by a plethora of toolkits, guides and roadmaps.[5] Country and sub-national guides on SDG implementation and their localisation have been developed in a number of countries, often through the initiative of the respective national LGA.

Localising SDGs in Selected Commonwealth Countries [6]

Ghana: Ghana is strongly decentralised with metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies as well as various sub-structures; The National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) is the responsible LGA. Under the District Assemblies’ Common Fund, not less than 10% of GDP is transferred to the Assemblies.

National SDG coordination is done through the National Development Planning Commission

(NDPC) and the SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee; the latter brings together key ministries/agencies and other stakeholders including CSOs. The SDGs are incorporated in the *National Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2018-2021) and the Long-Term National Development Plan (2018-2068)* alongside the AU Agenda 2063.

Annual progress reports are stipulated at national, sector and District level and a special report is produced every two years (starting 2017). NALAG has undertaken SDG awareness training for staff and its national executive council and organised nation-wide SDG sensitisation workshops. It is assisting the Assemblies in aligning SDG targets in their medium-term development plans, annual work plan and programmes.[7]

Rwanda: Rwanda has a strongly decentralised and participatory system of local government with 30 district councils (*akarere*) and three further tiers (sector, cell and village). The Rwandese Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA) is the national LGA; quarterly meetings are with the Prime Minister, ministers and provincial governors. In 2013/14 local government expenditure was 22.4% of total government expenditure.

At national level, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning is the national focal point for SDGs. SDGs are being integrated into the Government's Vision 2050, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) and the seven-year *National Strategy for Transformation*. In 2016/17, the Rwanda Government developed a roadmap for SDG localisation which involved integration of the SDGs into Sector Strategic Plans and the six-year District Development Strategies (DDSs).

There is ongoing engagement between RALGA and the Ministry on coordination of national policies and RALGA is represented on sector working groups (fiscal decentralisation, governance and decentralisation, urbanisation). RALGA has accordingly been able to engage on SDG policy, notably in relating Goals/ targets within the national plans/strategy and in the of monitoring SDGs. RALGA undertakes awareness-raising/training on SDGs and SDG localisation for its political leadership/staff/ members. It convenes high-level multi-stakeholder dialogues bringing together key local government decision-makers, senior Government representatives and other stakeholders.

RALGA supports its members in encouraging alignment of district development strategies (DDSs) with SDG targets through an assessed level of integration of SDG indicators under

existing DDSs 2017/18-2023/24. This has involved training programmes under a CLGF/EU programme in three pilot Districts and it has developed a SDG assessment tool through a factsheet template to monitor SDG implementation. It is planned to roll-out the results in all other Districts.[8]

South Africa: Local government has strong constitutional recognition and comprises urban metropolitan, district and local municipalities which have a further four sub-divisions. The role of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) is both legally recognised and enshrined in the constitution; here is also extensive provision for intergovernmental relations through the Presidential Coordination Council, the Local Government Budget Forum and a range of other fora including a mayoral forum at district level. In 2012/13 the local government share of national revenues was 8.8% and transfers are decided through the 'local government equitable share'.

The responsible national focal point for SDG is the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) which reports to the Presidency; practical monitoring and preparation of VNR reporting is done through Statistics South Africa, STATS-SA which comes under the DPME. STATS-SA has a number of specialised working groups on which SALGA is represented.

SALGA has noted that the National Development Plan, NDP, (to 2030), which also informs local government policies, is being aligned with the SDGs and their targets as is the *Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) 2014-2019*, for example in the water and sanitation sector. SALGA is consulted on the content of the various national plans and is currently participating in discussions relating to the next MTSF. In addition, the development plans at Provincial level are aligned with the NDP.

Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, SALGA has been raising awareness about SDGs among its political leadership and members. It has been seeking to relate the SALGA Strategic Framework 2017-2022, which is aligned to the overall NDP objectives, to the SDGs, as well as other global goals. SALGA has further sought to align the activities under political level working groups to specific SDGs.

A key statutory local instrument is the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) drawn up at municipal level which link to NDP/MTSF objectives. Individual municipalities, especially larger metros, have aligned their IDPs with the SDGs and undertaken SDG awareness-raising. For

example, eThekweni (Durban) is aligning its budget with the SDGs and has incorporated the SDGs into its masterclass programme.

Giving Institutional Recognition to SDG Localisation: The European Union

The European Union, EU, with its 27 member countries (including Commonwealth member countries, Cyprus and Malta) and its relationship with partners countries, notably Commonwealth countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, provides the most advanced instance of an institutionalisation of SDG localisation.

The EU approach involves a cooperative multi-level governance partnership with active collaboration between central, local and state/regional government. Underlying this concept is the principle of subsidiarity which places decisions at the most effective level and as close as possible to the citizens and is enshrined by EU law under the Lisbon Treaty (article 5). Subsidiarity has found strong expression in the practical instruments and policies of the EU, both domestically and in the area of development cooperation.

Following the 2016 European Commission Communication on the Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future, a *European multi-stakeholders Platform on the SDGs* with a *Subgroup on 'Delivering SDGs at local and regional level'* has been set up. This subgroup includes key local government stakeholders; it has argued for applying a territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs in the EU at all levels, including in respect to the policies of the European Commission. The European Parliament has also underlined the importance of a joined-up, multi-level governance approach to SDG implementation, including respect for the principle of subsidiarity and recognition of the role of regional and local government.

There is a close connection between implementation of SDGs domestically in European countries and at EU level and the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda in non-European partner countries through international development cooperation in line with SDG17 on global partnership for sustainable development. Most European bilateral development cooperation agencies, like those of France and Germany have integrated SDG implementation and support for local government into their ODA and related policies.

At the EU level, local and regional government are acknowledged as important partners for development cooperation. Of particular

importance is the formal recognition given to local government as a State actor and beneficiary of EU funds under the Articles 4 and 6 of the *ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement* in 2005, This Treaty has provided the basis for development cooperation, including aid, trade and investment between the EU and 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific states and is currently up for renewal for another 20 years.[9]

This recognition has been reinforced by a number of subsequent EU policy decision such as the 2013 European Commission *Communication on Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes* and by a growing EU focus on the territorial approach to international development policy. The role of local and regional government and of cities in the implementation of the SDGs was explicitly acknowledged in the *European Consensus on Development*, agreed by the EU in 2017.

An interesting example of SDG localisation is the *Development Initiative for Northern Uganda, DINU (2017-2022)* supported by the EU in partnership with UNCDF and the Uganda Local Government Association, ULGA and the Urban Authorities Association of Uganda, UAAU. The programme addresses three focal areas: governance, agriculture/nutrition and infrastructure in the context of promoting stability and sustainable development in 33 local districts. Governance support is focussed on public financial management, including localisation and tracking of SDGs among its specific aims.

The OECD has underlined the linkage between multi-level governance mechanisms and SDG application and development cooperation undertaken by local and regional government through Decentralised Development Co-operation (DDC). It estimates that US\$ 1.9 billion of development assistance in 2015 was accounted for by DDC, undertaken directly by local governments. It takes the view that '*a solid multi-stakeholder system is key to improve DDC effectiveness*' and that '*The 2030 Agenda is an ideal framework to mainstream sustainable development goals into local and regional policy-making, planning tools, investment strategies and decision-making*'. It further notes that '*cities and regions have a crucial role in attaining the SDGs*' and '*A territorial or place-based approach to SDGs provides a conceptual and operational framework to address the multi-sectoral, multi-actor and multi-level nature of the SDGs.*' [10]

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References

1. See <https://www.clgf.org.uk> for details; also CLGF 2018 *Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2017/18*: http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/County_profiles_with_individual_country_profiles_on_local_government_systems
2. <https://www.local2030.org> provides extensive information on SDG localisation; a comprehensive global survey is available by UCLG 2019 Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization (GOLD V) Localisation of the Global Agendas (co-author Dr Carl Wright)
3. OECD 2020 *A Territorial Approach to the SDGs*; also European Commission 2016 *Supporting decentralisation, local governance and local development through a territorial approach* (Tools & Methods Series no 23).
4. OECD 2020 *The Territorial impact of COVID-19*; OECD *COVID-19 and Cities: Impact, Lessons learned and recovery Strategies*; CCAP 2020 *Lessons from Covid-19: The Need for a Green-led Recovery* (www.caap.org.uk)
5. These include UCLG 2016 *The Sustainable Development Goals: What Local Governments need to know*; UCLG 2016/2017/2019 *Trainers' Guide on Localising the .* There is also an extensive and up-to-date bibliography under the UCLG Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralisation (GOLD) Reports and *Toolbox for Localising the SDGs*.
6. This section draws on extensively on the data presented in UCLG-CIB 2018 *Sustainable Development through Local Action: Sustainable Development Goals and Local Government Associations* (Dr Carl Wright) and country profiles contained in the 2018 Commonwealth Local Government Handbook (op cit).
7. CLGF 2018. *Achieving the SDGs through LED in Ghana*.
8. RALGA 2018. *Localising the SDGs (2016-2018) in Rwanda Action Plan and Results Framework*.
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10. OECD 2018. *Reshaping Decentralised Development Co-operation: The Key Role of Cities and Regions for the 2030 Agenda*.

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