

**MULTILEVEL  
GOVERNANCE  
FOR SDG  
LOCALIZATION**

## ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGS AND POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY THROUGH ENHANCED MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

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# Table of contents

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List of acronyms	5
Executive Summary	7
Foreword	11
<b>01.</b> Multilevel governance in the context of the 2030 Agenda	<b>12</b>
<b>02.</b> Objective and methodology	<b>15</b>
<b>03.</b> The MLG-SDG localization nexus	<b>17</b>
<b>04.</b> MLG in emergency settings	<b>21</b>
<b>05.</b> Analytical framework on MLG for SDG localization	<b>24</b>
<b>06.</b> Trends and practices on MLG for SDG localization	<b>30</b>
<b>07.</b> Qualifying elements and good practices from the case-studies	<b>65</b>
<b>08.</b> Lessons learnt and action-oriented recommendations	<b>69</b>
References	<b>78</b>

# List of acronyms

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**BMZ** • German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development  
**CoR** • European Committee of the Regions  
**CSO** • Civil Society Organization  
**GIZ** • German Agency for International Cooperation  
**HLPF** • High Level Political Forum  
**LRG** • Local and Regional Governments  
**LSE** • London School of Economics  
**MLG** • Multi-Level Governance  
**NGO** • Non-Governmental Organization  
**OECD** • Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  
**SDG** • Sustainable Development Goal  
**UCLG** • United Cities and Local Governments  
**UNDP** • United Nation Development Programme  
**UNEP** • UN Environment Programme  
**VLR** • Voluntary Local Review  
**VNR** • Voluntary National Review  
**VSR** • Voluntary Subnational Review

## Argentina

**CABA** • Autonomous City of Buenos Aires  
**CNCPS** • National Coordination Council for Social Policies  
**FAM** • Federation of Argentinian Municipalities  
**INEC** • National institute for Statistics and Census

## Philippines

**CBMS** • Community-Based Monitoring System  
**DILG** • Ministry of Interior's Department of Interior and Local Government  
**LCP** • League of Cities of the Philippines  
**LGU** • Local Government Unit  
**LMP** • League of Municipalities of the Philippines  
**LPP** • League of Provinces of the Philippines  
**MMDA** • Metropolitan Manila Development Authority  
**NEDA** • National Economic and Development Authority  
**NRC** • Metro Manila's National Capital Region  
**PDP** • Philippine Development Plan  
**PIP** • Public Investment Program  
**PSA** • Philippine Statistics Authority  
**RDC** • Regional Development Council  
**RDP** • Regional Development Plans  
**RM** • Results Matrices  
**SER** • Socio-Economic Report  
**SGLG** • Seal of Good Local Governance

## Ghana

**AMA** • Accra Metropolitan Assembly  
**GSS** • Ghana Statistical Service  
**HLMC** • High Level Ministerial Committee  
**ICC** • SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee  
**MPCU** • Metropolitan Planning Coordinating Unit  
**MTDP** • Medium-Term Development Plan  
**NDPC** • National Development Planning Commission  
**RCC** • Regional Coordinating Council  
**SEA** • Strategic Environmental Assessment

## Italy

**AICCRE** • Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions  
**ASviS** • Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development  
**CITE** • Inter-ministerial Committee for Ecological Transition  
**CNCS** • National Council on Development Cooperation  
**MAECI** • Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation  
**MiTE** • Ministry of Ecological Transition  
**NAP PCSD** • National Action Plan for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development  
**NSDS** • National Sustainable Development Strategy  
**PCSD** • Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development

## Jordan

**EDP** • Executive Development Programme  
**GAM** • Greater Amman Municipality  
**GIEP** • Government's Indicative Executive Programme  
**MOPIC** • Minister of Planning and International Cooperation

## Executive summary

### Multilevel governance and SDG localization

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** represents the main global framework addressing the critical challenges our world faces today in relation to People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace.

The **universal, integrated, and transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs requires governments to work across policy domains and governance levels, and to cooperate with a wide variety of stakeholders**. In particular, the **combination and coordination of mandates, resources, and capacities of several institutional and societal actors at different governance levels and across sectors constitute** a crucial enabling factor for sustainable development. Therefore, SDG planning, implementation, and monitoring processes are essentially grounded in a set of institutional arrangements that **allow the effective engagement of a multiplicity of politically independent, but otherwise interconnected actors in the different societal spheres and government levels**.

The concept of **multilevel governance** (henceforth, MLG) is used to describe this **form of conducting politics and making public policies**. This is particularly relevant for **SDG localization**, defined as the process of **transforming the SDGs into reality at the local level, in coherence with national frameworks and communities' priorities**. Indeed, adapting global and aspirational strategies

to local conditions and priorities requires an integrated territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs, which is critical to see them succeed holistically. This has key implications for the key role played by local and regional governments (LRGs) as drivers of effective localization processes, as well as in facilitating policy coherence across levels and sectors. Therefore, a territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs requires the adoption of integrated MLG mechanisms, as the basis for a more coordinated, inclusive, and coherent policy action.

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has clearly demonstrated the importance of coordinating policy interventions across governance levels and policy domains. It is today evident that, in emergency contexts, **effective multilevel governance demands the use and continuous adaptation of coordination mechanisms for specific emergency actions and responses**.

For these reasons, **UN-Habitat is devoting strong global efforts to explore multilevel governance dimensions and practices in order to provide practical recommendations to accelerate the localization of the SDGs within the Decade of Action**.

## Analytical framework

To analyse the **MLG-SDG localization nexus**, **this report proposes a framework** that aims to capture and connect: (i) the **key dimensions of MLG processes**, as emerging from the policy coherence and integration paradigms; (ii) the main **principles and conditions** under which these are turned into **specific practices**; and (iii) the resulting **outputs and outcomes**, in terms of improved capacities and functionalities for SDG localization.

The cornerstone of this framework are the three **dimensions of effective MLG systems: vertical integration, horizontal integration, stakeholder engagement** (UN, 2018). These dimensions reflect the main thrusts and orientations of the 2030 Agenda calling upon governments to ensure an effective implementation of the Goals. Namely: embedding the SDGs at multiple levels of governments; cutting across sectors and breaking silos to address the integrated nature of the SDGs; enabling inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making, implementation and review processes.

In these three MLG dimensions, specific **practices** are then realized across the different stages of the **policy cycle** – political commitment and institutional arrangements, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting. Within this cycle, **policy learning** is a never-ending and iterative process linking all stages and allowing adjustments and improvements.

This framework has been applied to **map, systematize and analyze the main evidence related to trends and practices of MLG for SDG localization** across the world, focusing in particular on the **illustrative experience**

**of five case-studies** (Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines) used as **'living labs'** in a learning-by-comparing approach.

## Evidence and lessons learnt

Globally, **MLG for SDG localization is making progress. Real-world practices on multi-level governance for SDG localization** are reaching a mature stage, being implemented and experienced in several countries and very different contexts across the world. The **2030 Agenda has provided a shared vision, and common language and framework to bring different governance levels and stakeholders together** in addressing societal challenges. This is reflected in **growing policy commitment** at all levels, **enhanced institutional frameworks**, and **stronger alignment of** national and subnational plans with the SDGs.

Nevertheless, there are still **limited examples of countries that have mainstreamed 'full' and effective vertical and horizontal integration across levels and policy domains**. The process is often affected by shifting commitments, different and complex intergovernmental relations, varying institutional and organizational capacities, incomplete decentralization and legal reform processes. The reality on the ground still marks **a gap in the full translation of formal institutional arrangements into effective MLG mechanisms and practices**, especially regarding financing and implementation. Moreover, with a few exceptions, institutional arrangements have still had **limited impact on power dynamics and asymmetries between different government levels**.

Reporting is where more progress can be observed in MLG, through **LRGs' involvement in the Voluntary National Review process and**

**thanks to an increasingly committed and dynamic community of practice on Voluntary Local Reviews and Voluntary Subnational Reviews**. However, the localization of SDG indicators is still a missing piece in most countries, making it very difficult to analyze localized SDG progress.

Similarly, notwithstanding the **strong efforts by LRGs' associations** both globally and in several countries, **LRGs are not yet adequately and systematically involved in the SDG planning, implementation and monitoring processes at the national level**.

Finally, there is a strong **need to engage multiple knowledge partners and actors in the definition of indicators for monitoring systems on MLG for SDG localization**. In particular, **quantitative and qualitative proxies of effective MLG systems** may be defined and introduced to assess improved functionalities for SDG localization.

## The way forward

All in all, findings confirm that **all development actors – foremost national, local, and regional governments – should place effective and inclusive multilevel governance at the heart of all their endeavours**. In this regard, based on findings, good practices, lessons learnt, and case-study review from this research, key action-oriented recommendations are highlighted.

On **vertical integration**, key recommendations include:

- Officially integrating LRGs into national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes on the 2030 Agenda, going beyond simple declarations of intent to ensure a clear commitment, enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

• Ensuring alignment and consistency among supranational, national and sub-national strategies, using the SDGs as a framework to align policy priorities, incentives, objectives across levels (within respect of subsidiarity principles and local autonomy), in order to avoid dispersion of efforts in the collective pursuit for sustainable development.

• Investing in the collection and elaboration of new and disaggregated data at local level and intensifying cooperation with the national statistical offices to expand the information base.

• Promoting enabling environments for subnational reporting, by connecting VLRs/VSRs and local governments to the VNR processes, overcoming institutional fragmentation in SDG reviews.

On **horizontal integration**, key recommendations include:

• Assigning the pivotal governance role to an inter-ministerial / inter-departmental body in a whole-of-government approach, in order to fully embrace an integrated notion of environmental, social and economic sustainability.

• Enhancing horizontal cooperation at the different levels of governance, including at the regional/provincial and local levels, through structured national mechanisms and/or initiatives led by LRGs' associations committed to SDG localization.

• Building capacity in public administrations to adequately address the principles and integrated nature of the SDGs, building civil servants' capacity to act through new, cross-disciplinary and experimental





approaches.

On **stakeholder engagement**, key recommendations include:

- Enabling a real participation by all societal actors to inform and influence sustainable development strategies in all phases (since the design to implementation and monitoring) by combining a wide array of participatory methods and tools.
- Enabling the use of reviews and monitoring reports by societal actors both for analysis, communication, and accountability on the progress of sustainable development strategies, and for influencing decision-making processes on new priority-setting, policies and budgeting.

To conclude, these guidance elements on multilevel governance can pave the way **and create a solid base to enhance societal**

**commitment, institution-building, and capacity-building for SDG implementation at all levels in the post-pandemic era.**

## Foreword



With less than 8 years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need radical change to rescue the 2030 Agenda. While the SDGs are global in their ambition, their achievement will depend on our ability to transform them into reality at local level, for our local communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected urban neighborhoods, communities, and groups in cities differently; recovering from its impacts requires a granular, localized understanding of each city and territory. Hence, the implementation of the SDGs and the recovery from the pandemic both highly depend on local leadership and local action.

A commitment to multilevel governance acknowledges that no sphere of government, and no actor, can drive progress alone. By empowering local and regional governments and local stakeholders, national governments will be able to enhance their implementation capacities to transform policies and strategies into action at local level. At the same time, by grounding national development and recovery strategies on communities' needs and priorities, governments will be able to better address the consequences of the pandemic, to better plan for long-term development and better deploy national resources.

Theory and practice have proved that inclusive multilevel cooperation is essential to adequately localize the SDGs, as it requires shared leadership and multistakeholder coordination, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies, and actions. Two lessons have emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) there are critical links between the achievement of the SDGs and the pandemic recovery; and (2) successful strategies on pandemic response

and recovery come from countries in which their national frameworks are facilitating multilevel coordination, policy coherence and (re)distribution of resources.

We find ourselves at a critical crossroad where we have the practical examples and the global knowledge to advance effective multilevel governance systems, but we need the political will to act and make it a widespread practice.

At UN-Habitat, we profoundly believe in the power of partnership, co-creation, and knowledge sharing. If we pull our resources and expertise together, across sectors and between spheres of governance, we will be able to successfully localize the SDGs and, with that, recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Multilevel Governance for SDG Localization sheds light on the potential of multilevel governance to localize the SDGs. It does so by analyzing the practices from five countries: Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and Philippines. This report represents a giant leap for the research and dissemination of practices on multilevel and multistakeholder coordination, to advance the SDGs.

I hope that this research will inspire and support both national and local governments throughout the world to strengthen cooperation for a successful implementation of the SDGs at all levels.

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# 01

## Multilevel governance in the context of the 2030 Agenda

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (UN, 2015) represents the main global framework addressing the critical challenges our world faces today in relation to People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets are **universal and relevant to all actors**.

It is clear that the SDGs will not be achieved by the actions of national governments alone. Equally, the effectiveness of strategies, policies, and to achieve the SDGs is not a matter of resources alone. Rather, policies need to be substantially shaped and resources optimally allocated and effectively used through **multi-level and multi-stakeholder implementation mechanisms**. This means widening the focus from 'government' processes – i.e., related to direct policies by public institutions – to 'governance' processes – i.e., related to the articulation of interests, behaviours, resources, and power among a wider group of public, private and social actors for the management of economic, social and environmental resources.

Governance is a key concept in the sustainable development debate, early defined by the World Bank (1992, p.1) as **the way in which power is exercised in the management of economic and social resources for development**. Indeed, the continuous interaction among authorities, institutions, organizations,

and citizens shapes economies and societies and their structural change. In other words, the ways societies engage in collective action (Ostrom, 1990) – which is not exclusively led by public authorities – determine strategies and actions at both national and local levels. This is fundamental to pursuing the SDGs in all territories and countries (Oxfam and ARCO, 2016).

The 2030 Agenda must rely on a set of principles of **effective governance for sustainable development** (UN ECOSOC, 2018). They represent the universal norms, values, and basic rules of the game through which decisions on the SDGs are managed in a manner that is **transparent, participatory, inclusive, accountable, and responsive**<sup>1</sup>. These principles are articulated into governance-related sub-goals in all SDGs, and SDG 16 includes a specific focus on effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions as an intrinsic component of sustainable development processes. These elements provide a powerful and unprecedented impetus for governments at all levels to devote specific attention to designing and implementing governance mechanisms that effectively support the implementation of universally-set objectives.

Within this setting, the **combination and coordination of resources, actions and capacities deriving from different governance levels, policy domains, and societal actors**



is a crucial enabling factor for sustainable development in its environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Therefore, the concept of **multilevel governance** (henceforth, MLG) is used to describe the **form of conducting politics and making public policies** stemming from the existence of "overarching, multilevel policy networks" (Marks et al., 1996) that replace the vertically hierarchical nation-state model (Noferini, 2010)<sup>2</sup>. In short, **MLG provides a new lens on policymaking processes and societal mobilization for the SDGs**.

**Three approaches** to MLG can be identified considering the way institutions work together across levels: hierarchical (top-down), based on rule of law; subsidiary & empowered (bottom-up), based on empowerment and incentives; real time (collaborative), based on collaboration and co-production (Meuleman, 2019 and 2021). Given the complexity of our societies and the interconnectedness of the global goals, the pursuit of the SDGs requires a combination of these approaches, complementing each other, to create an enabling environment for addressing the societal issues raised by the 2030 Agenda at all levels and by all actors.

This centrality of MLG and its conceptualization has been strongly supported and reinvigorated by the **leading role played by several UN agencies (primarily UN-Habitat, UNDP and UNEP), the OECD and the European Union, together with local and regional governments (LRGs) and their national, regional and global associations, as well as academia and research organizations**. In particular, these actors together led a vigorous debate on SDG localization and allowed it to gain momentum (Biggeri, 2021)

building on the capacities and knowledge of a wide international community of practice and knowledge.

**SDG localization** is defined by UN-Habitat (2022) as the process of **transforming the SDGs into reality at the local level, in coherence with the national frameworks and in line with communities' priorities**. It is now widely acknowledged that 65 per cent of SDG targets cannot be reached without proper engagement and coordination with LRGs (OECD, 2022). Therefore, localizing the SDGs means placing territories and communities at the centre of sustainable development, a two-way process where the local meets the national and the global, and vice-versa. To be successful, localization needs to be anchored on the principles of effective governance.

**MLG is an accelerator of SDG localization** because SDG implementation is essentially grounded in a set of **institutional and policy-making arrangements that engage a multiplicity of politically independent, but otherwise interconnected, societal actors (public, private, and social) at different levels** (Schmitter, 2004). These arrangements concern both vertical coordination among governments at various levels and horizontal coordination within and amongst governments (and their departments) at the same level, along with the interaction and coordination with and amongst non-State actors and stakeholders. In other words, these arrangements revolve around the transformative power of participatory governance, to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation for SDG implementation at local level.

<sup>1</sup> According to UNDP (2021), supporting effective governance involves accountability, transparency, inclusion and responsiveness, i.e., addressing what is done (institutions, laws, personnel), how it is done (participation, transparency, trust) and for whom it is done (people centred).

<sup>2</sup> In particular, Piattoni (2010) argues that the simultaneous activation of three dimensions of change have pushed away from the ideal-typical sovereign state towards poly-centric governance mechanisms (Skelcher, 2005): the emergence of new patterns of relations between different levels of government, through new centre-periphery relations within unitary states (devolution and federalism); the evolution of the trans-local and domestic-foreign institutional arrangements of international coordination and regulation shaping economic and social progress within local communities; the empowerment of a wider range of stakeholders and social groups within more open public processes of policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014).



This centrality of **MLG for SDG localization is even more relevant in the post COVID-19 era**. Indeed, there are substantive links between the achievement of the SDGs and recovering from the pandemic, and both have strong local dimensions. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the great importance of local action in both addressing the immediate health emergency and in designing a recovery process that is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient. Therefore, localizing the SDGs in the post COVID-19 era helps to frame priorities, to align levels of governance, to set targets and to monitor real progress towards sustainable development. All in all, localizing the SDGs offers a useful approach to frame the consequences of the pandemic through a people-centred and place-based perspective to Sustainable Human Development (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014).

To conclude, nowadays the requirements to enable SDG localization are even stronger: empowering local actors as stronger partners, providing them with access to adequate funding, improving subnational accountability mechanisms and performance incentives, developing better means to enhance national and subnational capacity (Smoke and Nixon, 2016). In other words, **working towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and advancing an inclusive and resilient recovery at all levels are conceived as two sides of the same coin**. For these reasons, effective MLG systems must urgently be put in place to enhance policy coherence and the effective delivery of the SDGs.

Relevant initiatives include, but are not limited to:

- the Local2030 Coalition (i.e., the UN wide initiative on localizing the SDGs under the secretariat of UN Habitat);
- the work of the Global Task Force of LRGs and UCLG since the early debate on the post-2015 agenda and their yearly LRGs' report to the HLPF entitled "Towards the Localization of the SDGs";
- the OECD framework for policy coherence, including its recommendations and guidance elements, along with the OECD Territorial Approach to the SDGs;
- the work of the Habitat III Policy Unit IV on urban governance, capacity and institutional development, led by LSE Cities and UCLG;
- the organization of the World Urban Forum (i.e., the main UN-led fora on urban and local development and the localization of the SDGs);
- the global debate and practices on Voluntary Local Reviews as a powerful accelerator of the localization of the SDGs and effective MLG, strongly supported by UN-Habitat and UCLG through technical assistance and guidelines;
- the creation of learning modules and tools on SDG localization by UNDP and other international partners;
- the UNDP Global Project "ART Initiative" fostering territorial partnerships for implementing the SDGs at local level;
- the research and advocacy role played by European LRGs' networks, such as Platforma and Eurocities;
- the Emergency Governance Initiative (EGI) led by UCLG, Metropolis and LSE Cities;
- the guides elaborated by UN-Habitat on MLG for effective urban climate action and to promote health equity;
- the initiatives of the EU Committee of the Regions on MLG and SDG implementation;
- the "City Playbook for Advancing the SDGs" as part of the Brookings SDG Leadership Cities community of practice.

# 02

## Objective and methodology

This report is part of **UN-Habitat's global effort to explore multilevel governance dimensions and practices** in order to provide practical recommendations to **accelerate the localization of the SDGs** within the Decade of Action.

The report specifically presents:

- i) an **analytical framework** on the nexus between the multiple principles, dimensions, and practices of MLG for SDG localization.
- ii) a snapshot of the **main recent trends in the core drivers and practice areas**, based on both the systematization of cutting-edge knowledge and information about good practices of MLG for SDG localization across the world, as well as new policy-based evidence from selected case-studies.
- iii) key **insights and operational implications** on how national and local governments can strengthen their multilevel cooperation for the SDGs through action-oriented recommendations on the core drivers of MLG systems throughout the different policy cycle stages. To get new evidence on MLG as an accelerator of SDG localization, the research process relies on the following steps.

First, the **analysis and update of the state-of-the-art about the MLG-SDG localization nexus**, through an extensive literature/ desk-based review of the current policy and academic debate, including relevant reports, guidelines and publications by international organizations and scholars.

Second, the **design of an appropriate analytical framework**, able to embrace the multiple

dimensions and complex relationships shaping MLG systems for SDG localization.

Third, the **systematization of international trends and good practices** – without any intention of being exhaustive – on MLG for SDG localization across the world, in order to get insights and evidence from a wide array of experiences in different settings and places.

Fourth, the analysis of 5 case-studies (Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines) to dig deeper into real-world practices, deriving practical implications from their experience as 'living labs' in line with a **multiple case-study** approach (Yin, 2017).

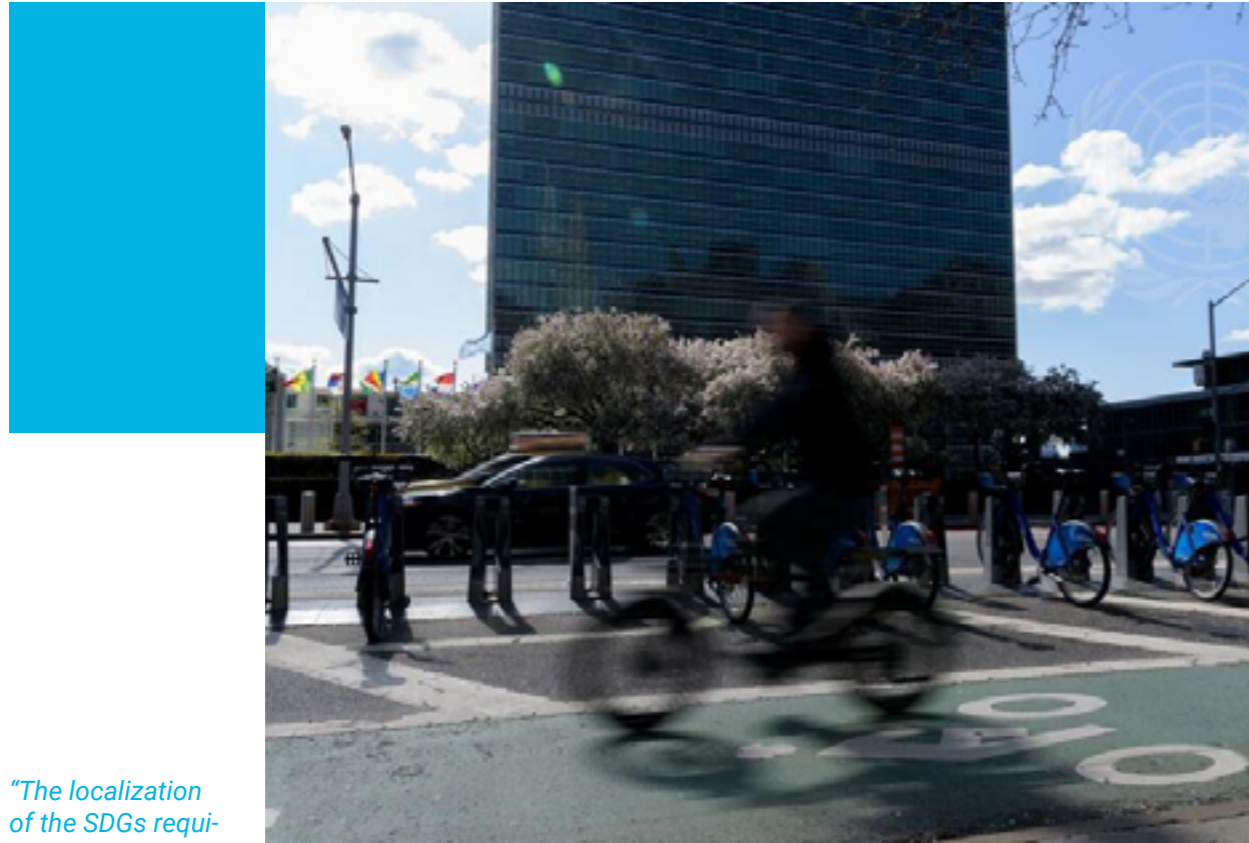
The selection of these countries was based on the following criteria: the illustrative quality of their MLG processes for SDG localization; potential for learning, follow-up and partnership building; information accessibility and availability of recent Voluntary National / Sub-national / Local Reviews; balance in terms of macro-regions, development level, and decentralization systems.

For each case-study, data collection was based on the combination of:

- i) **desk-based analysis of available reports** – e.g., Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), Voluntary Sub-national Reviews (VSRs), Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), yearly UCLG reports to the HLPF, OECD reports, etc. ;
- ii) **key informants interviews / focus group discussions** with the national coordination body for SDG implementation in the country;







*“The localization of the SDGs requires multilevel governance, shared leadership, and multi-stakeholder coordination, incorporating the 2030 Agenda into local and regional plans, policies and actions. Improved coordination mechanisms based on the principles of subsidiarity and the respect of local autonomy, as well as civil society participation, are critical to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and promote local innovation”.*

*Final statement of the High-Level Political Forum 2021*

a national association of local authorities active on SDG localization processes; at least one sub-national / local authority actively committed to SDG localization<sup>3</sup>.

Last, the generalization of lessons learnt and action-oriented guidance elements grounded on the analysis of trends, good practices and in-depth case-studies, in order to inform policymakers and other stakeholders in either designing or assessing their own MLG mechanisms and arrangements to pursue SDG localization<sup>4</sup>.

This combination of literature / policy debate review, systematization of good practices, and in-depth analysis of multiple case-studies

allows triangulating multiple sources of concepts, arguments, and information. Notwithstanding research limitations related to the limited global representativeness of selected practices and case-studies and the lack of quantitative analysis, the research design paves the way for providing updated frameworks and evidence on MLG as an accelerator of SDG localization.

In this way, this report contributes to the wider effort and process led by UN-Habitat to streamline a strategic framework on MLG to advance the implementation of the Global Goals at the local level.

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<sup>4</sup> This paves the way also for the translation of the research results in accessible and practical knowledge included in the online platform **“Multilevel governance - Accelerating the Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals”**.

# 03

## The MLG-SDG localization nexus

The **universal, integrated, and transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs requires governments to work across policy domains and governance levels, and to cooperate with a wide variety of stakeholders**. To appropriately reflect and address this complexity, the 2030 Agenda reserves a specific SDG (17) to partnerships and means of implementation – an important step ahead compared to the previous Millennium Development Goals and other global agendas.

In particular, the **global SDG indicator 17.14.1<sup>5</sup>** recognizes and gathers, under the concept of policy coherence for sustainable development, the key domains of effective MLG systems for the implementation of the SDGs:

- Institutionalization of political commitment;
- Long-term considerations in decision making;
- Inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral coordination;
- Participatory processes;
- Policy linkages;
- Alignment across governance levels;
- Monitoring and reporting for policy coherence;
- Financing for policy coherence.

Through the combination of these domains, policy coherence is critical to inform decision-making and manage overlaps and conflicts between potentially competing policy objectives for sustainable development. It embraces **whole-of-government<sup>6</sup>** and **whole-of-society<sup>7</sup>** approaches (as also officially stated in the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the 2022 HLPF), engaging the mandates, roles, and capacities of a wider set of levels and stakeholders. In its broader formulation, the concept of **policy coherence for sustainable development**, as re-elaborated by the OECD (2016), is therefore meant to:

- i) **ensure a common vision** and balanced approach to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development;
- ii) **enable and capitalize on policy inter-linkages**, including the identification of synergies and trade-offs between different SDGs and respective targets;
- iii) **aggregate action** at the local, national, regional, and global levels;
- iv) **analyse the root causes of common problems and challenges**, and to the wider impacts of policies that are designed to address them.

<sup>5</sup> The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), as designated ‘custodian’ agency for this indicator, has developed a composite framework for monitoring it based on these eight domains, even assuming the challenges and limitations in measuring policy coherence in a rigorous, outcome-focused way.

<sup>6</sup> It involves collaboration – through formal and/or informal networks – between the different public bodies / agencies that extends beyond their respective fields of competence and across portfolio boundaries, with a view to coordinating the design and implementation of their interventions providing the public with a combined / integrated response from a single body, in order to increase the effectiveness of those interventions in achieving of shared or complementary, interdependent goals.

<sup>7</sup> It extends the whole-of-government approach by moving beyond public authorities and engaging all relevant stakeholders (including individuals, families and communities, intergovernmental organizations, religious institutions, civil society, academia, the media, and the private sector), in order to ensure institutional coordination and coherence across the society.







The **deeply integrated nature** of the SDGs is the most prominent expression of their transformative potential and has crucial implications in steering effective implementation processes through MLG frameworks.

Secondly, as **SDGs are essentially aspirational**, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda relies on **“governance through goals”** (Grana-dos and Noferini, 2019) as a “comprehensive, inclusive, bottom-up, non-confrontational, country-driven and stakeholders-oriented approach”. The often-weak legal enforceability of targets requires the intervention of different mechanisms – at different levels and through different actors – to guarantee continuative policy support for SDG implementation.

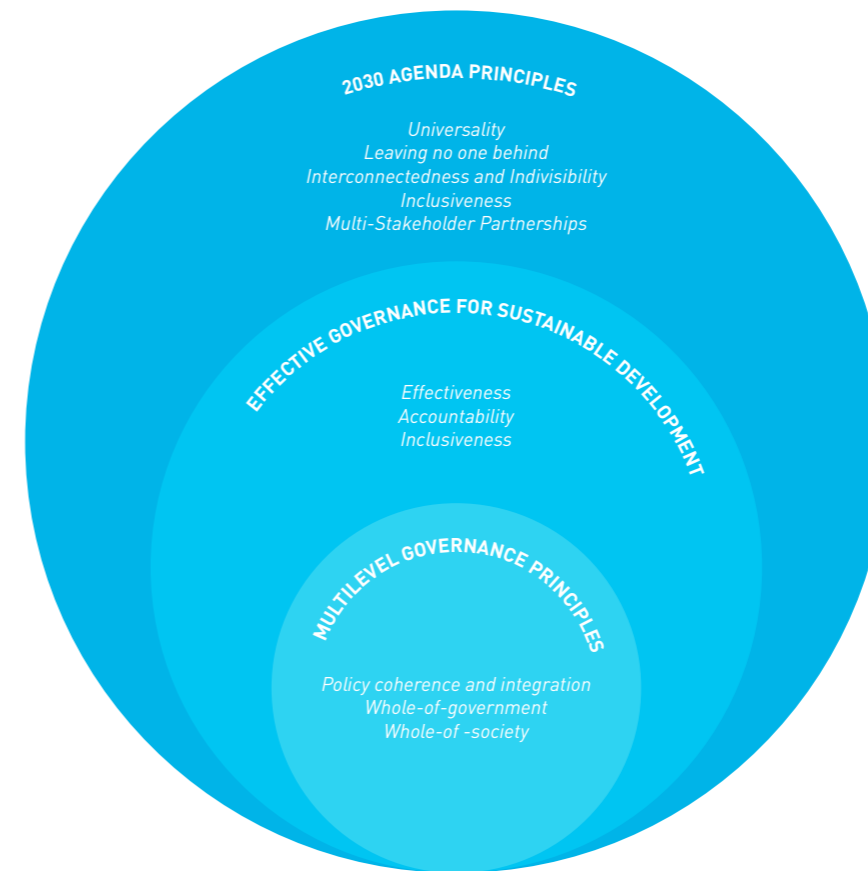
Thirdly, **the universally transformative nature** of the 2030 Agenda poses important challenges to implementation across government spheres. **Adapting global and aspirational strategies to local conditions and priorities** – that are inevitably heterogenous – requires a **territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs<sup>8</sup>**, which is critical to see them succeed holistically (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014; OECD, 2020 and 2022). This is due, in particular, to the key role played by LRGs as drivers of effective localization processes, as well as in facilitating policy coherence. Indeed, in many policy domains (e.g., education policy, health policy, innovation policy, industrial policy, environmental policy), the local scale can often be more appropriate to unpack the complexity of synergies and trade-offs between different dimensions (and thus involved actors and levels) of the SDGs. Therefore, **a bottom-up approach to the implementation of the SDGs** requires the adoption of integrated MLG mechanisms, combining different approaches (hierarchical, subsidiary & empowered, real time/collaborative) for a more coordinated, inclusive, and coherent policy action.

Therefore, a **‘policy integration’ approach** – adopted and applied in the World Public Sector Report (UN, 2018) – reflects the integrated and multidimensional nature of the SDG framework. Here, integration is intended to enlarge the policy space and broaden solutions to address complex and growingly interconnected challenges. This to be done through **policy processes that identify and enable linkages across scales, tiers, sectors, and between different stakeholders** for implementation at different levels.

Some **key defining features of the SDGs concur to make a strong case for the MLG-SDG localization nexus**.

Firstly, and most importantly, the **interdependence among sustainable development dimensions (i.e., the economic, social, and environmental)** has long been recognized and probably constitutes the most fundamental tenets of the sustainable development concept (Sachs, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> A territorial place-based approach considers territories as ‘living’ entities made-up of interconnected functions and relations. They incorporate sets of integrated and coordinated actions specifically designed to address the specificities of a particular city, region or locality, building on respective endogenous development potentials, and using a wide range of instruments and actions, including targeted investment in human capital, infrastructure, support for business development, research and innovation among others. Place-based policies stress the need to shift from a sectoral to multi-sector approach, from one-size fits all to context-sensitive interventions, and from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to policy making and implementation (OECD, 2019). The notion is therefore intrinsically connected to the SDG localization paradigm.



Source: Authors

Most above elements are entrenched in sets of **consistent and complementary principles that have been associated with the operationalization of a sustainable development paradigm**. They include in particular:

- the core, overarching principles that are assumed as transversal thrusts for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015).
- the principles of effective governance for sustainable development<sup>9</sup>, developed by the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration and approved by ECOSOC (UN ECOSOC, 2018), to help interested countries, on a voluntary basis, to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- the key principles informing the most commonly used approaches to MLG (UN, 2018).

These principles are directly embraced also by the **New Urban Agenda<sup>10</sup>** (UN, 2017), which provides an action-oriented framework to achieve the SDGs at local level. Indeed, the **New Urban Agenda** concurs to set relevant transversal principles for MLG, including **coordination and cooperation across levels, coherence between sectoral policy goals and measures, citizens’ participation, and the role of functional** (as opposed to merely administrative) territorial entities.

These combined elements<sup>11</sup> constitute a solid reference for making MLG an inherent feature of effective governance for SDG implementation and a key to trigger and harness the potential of locally-driven SDG processes. So far, based on this review, a few elements

<sup>9</sup> These principles include a further set of sub-principles, namely: Effectiveness includes competence, sound policymaking, collaboration; Accountability includes integrity, transparency, independent oversight; Inclusiveness includes leaving no one behind, non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, and intergenerational equity.

<sup>10</sup> It puts at the very center stage the role of urban governance for the development of sustainable and inclusive cities (Cruz et al., 2018; Rode et al., 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the principles are also linked to the long-established core principles for effective development cooperation (as set in the Paris Declaration in 2005, the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, and the Busan Partnership in 2011), which place attention to ownership, alignment and harmonization, as much as a focus on results, accountability, partnership for development, transparency and shared responsibility



have been outlined that qualify the potential of effective MLG as accelerator of SDG localization, and vice-versa. As opposed to a hierarchical interpretation of vertical integration through centrally-defined policy objectives, **MLG appears as a dynamic and open-ended process with both top-down and bottom-up interactions.** MLG hence does not assign exclusive policy competences or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any tier (Schmitter, 2004).

**Three approaches** to MLG can be identified considering the way institutions work together across levels: hierarchical (top-down), based on rule of law; subsidiary & empowered (bottom-up), based on empowerment and incentives; real time (collaborative), based on collaboration and co-production (Meuleman, 2019 and 2021). Given the complexity of our societies and the interconnectedness of the global goals, the pursuit of the SDGs requires a combination of these approaches, complementing each other. As such, MLG is thus built on particularly **context-sensitive and place-based patterns** that “rely on political agreements requiring, in turn, a particular set

of enabling conditions and a strong and shared commitment from all the actors involved” (Granados and Noferini, 2019).

Therefore, a **key challenge is to reconcile a wealth of (often spontaneous, dynamic and truly innovative) local processes with broader institutional arrangements at different government levels,** thus achieving properly integrated MLG systems. In this regard, the diffusion of integrated review and monitoring systems is a promising entry point. The booming **Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs)** (UN-Habitat and UCLG, 2020 and 2021; UCLG, 2022) constitute an outstanding good practice. Their potential in bridging local / subnational review processes with (as triggers of) enhanced policy coherence and integration mechanisms paves the way for the enhancement of effective MLG systems for SDG localization (Bilsky et al., 2021).

# 04

## MLG in emergency settings

The **analysis of MLG arrangements has several specific implications when applied to exceptional circumstances and conditions** (like the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, global climate change, and the energy crisis), which have led to an unprecedented global emergency setting threatening human security across the world (UNDP, 2022).

The COVID-19 emergency has severely impacted subnational efforts towards attaining the SDGs. At the same time, the SDGs provide an invaluable framework for ‘building back better’ channelling recovery efforts through a comprehensive, transformative framework for sustainable development. In turn, the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic have threatened the social, economic and governance structure of societies, requiring responses that ensure cohesion, alignment and synergies between different levels and sectors of intervention.

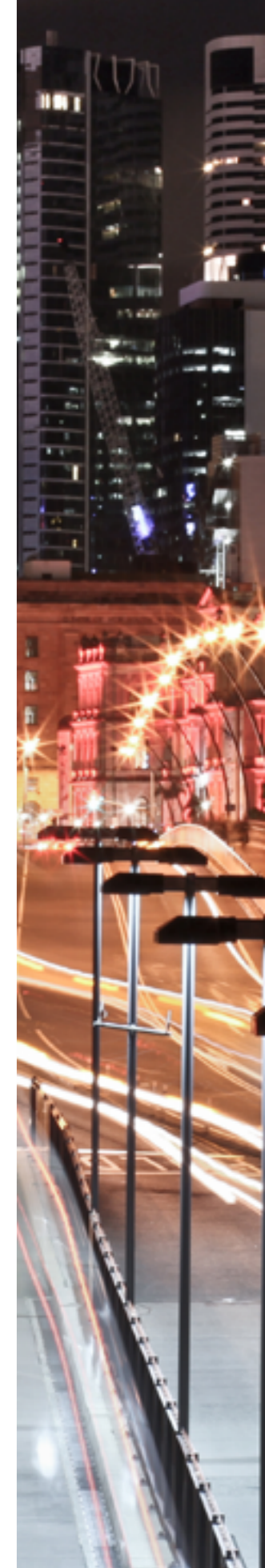
Subnational governments have shown to be uniquely placed to shape and deliver such holistic, integrated response to the pandemic, informed by the SDGs. However, no single level of government is likely to have the capacity to address complex emergencies alone and manage the range of tensions and trade-offs among policy areas that emergencies tend to exacerbate and multiply.

The **COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the importance of coordinating policy interventions across governance levels and policy domains.** Indeed, “horizontal and vertical integration are more necessary than ever for COVID-19 recovery and SDG implementation” (UNDESA, 2021).

At the start of and during the pandemic, many cities and regions were able to establish flexible and innovative governance mechanisms to support efforts by their national governments (UN-Habitat, 2021). Many countries put in place interdepartmental coordination mechanisms operating at different levels, from high-level coordination structures to

A survey conducted by UNU-IAS and UCLG-ASPAC in February 2021 with subnational governments mainly from Indonesia (33 per cent) and the Philippines (61 per cent) has shown that vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms across levels and among sectors are recognized to have a critical function in responding to the COVID-19 crisis (UCLG-ASPAC, 2021).

Still, in an EGI survey of 57 cities and regions conducted in July 2020, one of the most commonly cited administrative governance challenges in relation to the emergency response was the difficulty of working across tiers of government. Similarly, 71 per cent of the 300 European cities and regions surveyed by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the OECD said that lack of coordination with other levels of government, both vertical and horizontal, was one of the main challenges they experienced during the emergency (LSE Cities, 2021).







working level mechanisms, including thematic task forces and committees with representation from relevant agencies and various levels of government.

The recent experience with the COVID-19 response has confirmed that the **distribution of powers and coordination dynamics between different units of government are critical governance factors in complex emergency contexts** (LSE Cities et al., 2021). This is consistent with much longer climate emergency actions, and even more true and relevant in an era of global climate change effects and energy crisis.

However, **the general understanding of multilevel governance does not differentiate between governing under non-emergency or emergency mode**, despite tailored arrangements and practices play a particularly important role in the governance of complex emergencies.

The **joint initiative 'Emergency Governance for Cities and Regions'** by LSE Cities, UCLG and Metropolis provides an original conceptual and analytical framework and very crucial insights in this area. It highlights the following **key principles for effective multilevel emergency governance frameworks** (LSE Cities et al., 2021):

- the need for adaptive and agile responses and governance modes;
- the co-existence of two types of governance systems, with an executive command-centre performing a generalized governance role and specialized units addressing different elements of the response, as well as a 'hybrid' combination of prevalently hierarchical and network governance modes;

- the preference for a system and experimental approach, as opposed to sectoral perspectives, in which clusters and nexus approaches guide sectoral responses that are then re-aggregated as part of integrated responses by the coordinating institutions;
- the important driving and steering role of national governments, alongside the strong integration of local governments associations and city-networks within national responses.

In emergency contexts, **effective multilevel governance demands the use and continuous adaptation of coordination mechanisms for specific emergency actions and responses.**

On the one side, horizontal integration entails addressing critical policy trade-offs that emergencies have been forcing governments to deal with. For instance, this has concerned the relation between containment measures and the need to keep economies open during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as issues of environmental justice and intergenerational equity within the green transition.

On the other side, vertical integration is a key challenge. The fundamental debate is on respective advantages of

- re-centralization**, as the basis for rapid decisions and a more efficient use of resources, reducing overlapping and duplications, enabling economies of scale and ensuring policy coherence and a more effective allocation and sharing of competencies and skills across wider territories, but also a possible source of confusion as a result of the central enforcement of standardized and poorly tailored measures;



(ii) **decentralization**, as the basis for a better consideration of and adaptation to local needs that helps to counter the limitations of one-size-fits-all approaches of centralized systems, providing that enlarged mandates for emergency policies and service delivery are fully funded and competition between places and local governments is avoided.

The balance between the advantages of a more centrally coordinated approach and the need for flexibility in local responses is not homogeneously perceived, as it strongly depends on different national and local contexts and can fluctuate over time. **However, it is recognized that multilevel governance can be an alternative to either excessive recentralization or territorial fragmentation as part of emergency responses.**

In conclusion, the response of national and subnational governments to the impact of the pandemic and climate change have been showing that policy integration and coherence are and will be more needed than ever to implement the SDGs in the current emergency setting. Among the key questions for governments is how to preserve expanded policy and fiscal spaces to achieve the transformative vision associated with the SDG implementation, while continuing to manage recovery and resilience, and addressing the different trade-offs (and constraints) that emergency measures impose.

# 05

## Analytical framework on MLG for SDG localization

Local, subnational and national governments require further advancements in terms of conceptualization, analysis, evidence, and guidance to shape effective MLG systems to implement the SDGs.

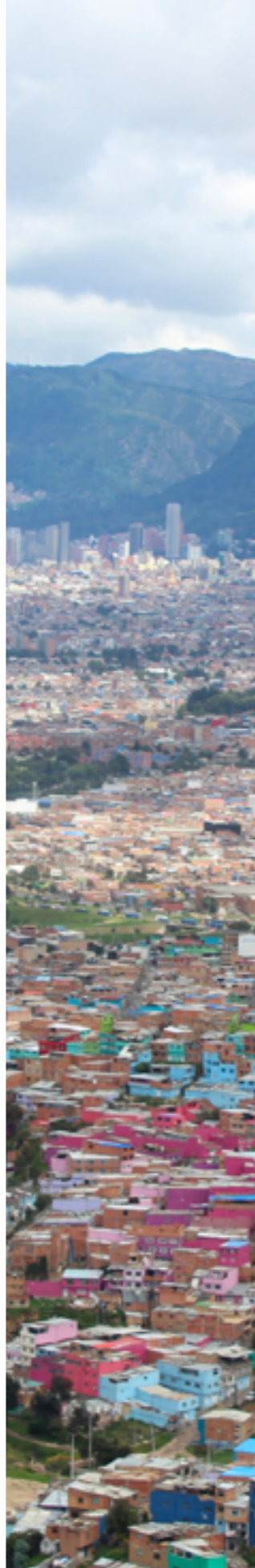
Different initiatives<sup>12</sup> have been launched in the past years to provide **conceptual (and to different extents operational) reference frameworks on MLG for SDG implementation**. Most often, they have been more specifically focused on the national level, but also embrace the key elements of articulation with other levels.

A review of the above frameworks (as well as of the current debate on SDG localization, policy coherence for sustainable development, and policy integration), converges on three **dimensions of effective MLG systems: vertical integration, horizontal integration, stakeholder engagement** (UN, 2018). These dimensions reflect the main thrusts and orientations of the 2030 Agenda calling upon governments to ensure an effective implementation of the Goals. Namely: embedding the SDGs at multiple levels of governments; cutting across sectors and breaking silos to address the integrated nature of the SDGs; enabling inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making, implementation and monitoring processes.

In other words, the core interrelated features of MLG systems enabling SDG localization are fully embraced by these three key dimensions, each being further specified by its main drivers, i.e., the concrete tools through which each dimension unfolds/materializes, and therefore contributes to channel its effects in terms of enhanced policy coherence and integration.

This structure constitutes the starting point for an **analytical framework on the MLG-SDG localization nexus**, whose ambition is to serve as basis for both analyzing and systematizing trends and practices, and deriving action-oriented recommendations.

For this twofold purpose, the proposed framework captures and connects: (i) the **key dimensions of MLG processes**, as emerging from the policy coherence and integration paradigms; (ii) the **principles and conditions** under which these are turned into **specific practices**; and (iii) the resulting **outputs and outcomes**, in terms of improved capacities and functionalities for SDG localization.



DIMENSION	DRIVERS
Vertical integration	<p><b>Structured mechanisms and arrangements for alignment and coordination of sustainable development strategies and policies across government levels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conducive national frameworks (e.g., legal, political, fiscal) due to common vision and strategic objectives, and high-level commitment.</li> <li>- Recognition of the key role of LRGs and identified place-based priorities.</li> <li>- Effective legal and regulatory instruments with structures for multilevel coordination.</li> <li>- Appropriate resources, capacities, and mandates to operationalize coordination in SDG planning, implementation, follow-up, monitoring, and review.</li> <li>- Collaboration among LRGs for enhancing local-national dialogue and for joint advocacy purposes towards national institutions and international organizations.</li> </ul>
Horizontal integration	<p><b>Structured mechanisms to enable inter-linkages across policy sectors and domains</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inter- and intra-institutional collaboration mechanisms to address the SDGs holistically and steer policy integration to capitalize on interlinkages and synergies across policy areas.</li> <li>- Reengineering of institutional architecture and inter-agency coordination to foster innovation towards a systemic approach, avoiding isolated efforts from single institutions and resistances in other parts of the system.</li> <li>- Collaboration across LRGs for peer-to-peer sharing, capacity-building, joint policies and services, etc.</li> </ul>
Stakeholder engagement	<p><b>Structured mechanisms to enable the full participation and cooperation among societal stakeholders in decision-making for SDG implementation at all levels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awareness, commitment, ownership, societal consensus on integrated visions and strategies.</li> <li>- Formalized participatory processes and mechanisms to shape priority-setting and implementation of sustainable development plans.</li> <li>- Synergies and complementarities through the active contribution of resources and knowledge, and the co-creation of solutions by different actors.</li> <li>- Information-sharing with the general public for transparency and accountability purposes.</li> </ul>

Source: Authors

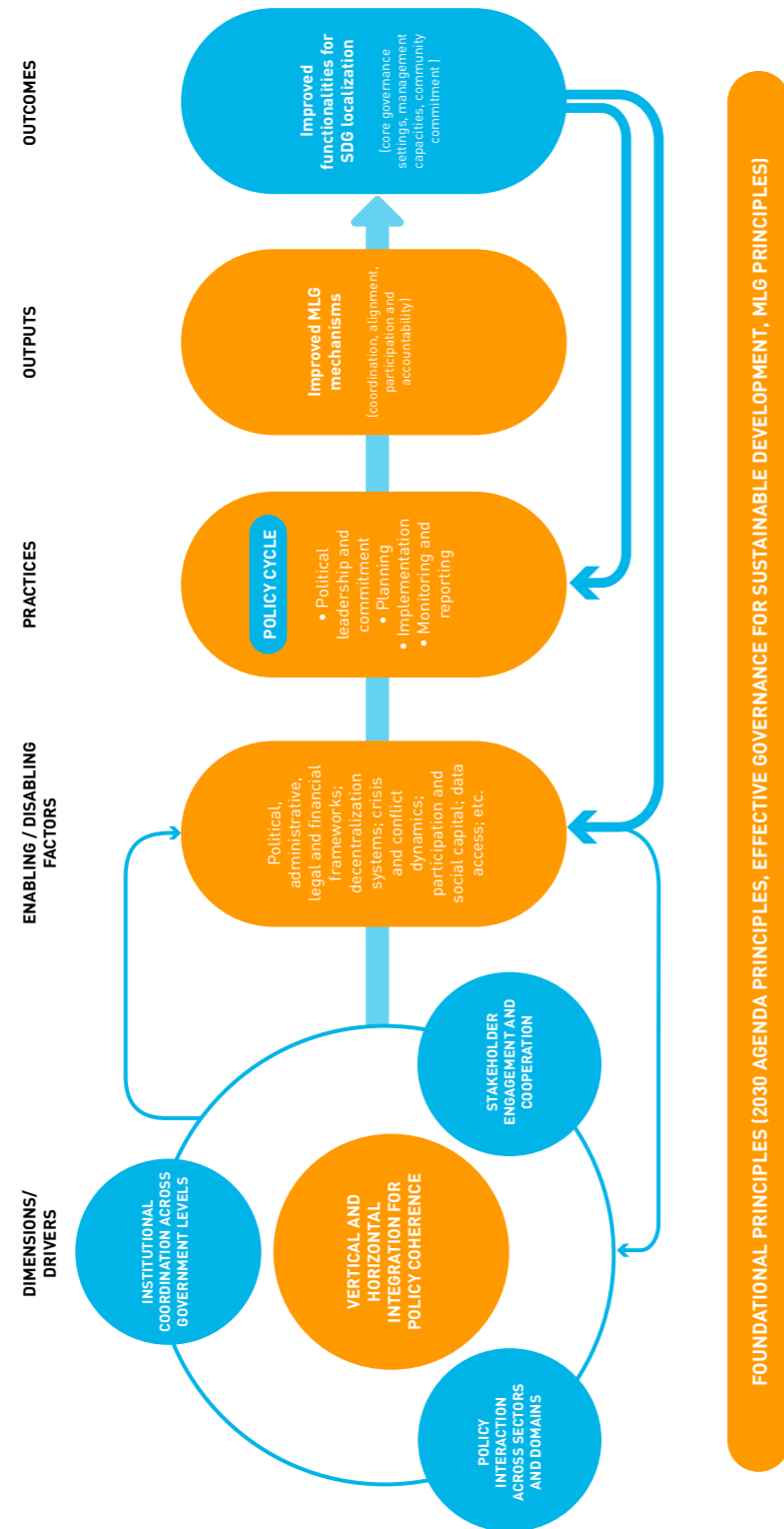
The following figure represents the key elements of the analytical framework and shows how they relate to each other, including:

- > PRINCIPLES: the **founding principles of MLG as accelerator for SDG localization**, including the core principles underpinning the 2030 Agenda and the New urban Agenda, the principles of effective governance for sustainable development, the MLG principles;
- > DIMENSIONS: the three **key dimensions** of MLG (vertical integration, horizontal integration, and stakeholder engagement) driving towards **policy coherence and integration**;

- > CONTEXTUAL FACTORS: the **enabling or disabling conditions** for effective MLG systems, including contextual and place-based factors related to legal, political and fiscal frameworks, overall distribution of political power, subsidiarity and decentralization systems, crisis and conflict dynamics, social capital, data frameworks, etc;
- > PRACTICES: the specific and **real-world practices** introduced and applied in the different stages of the **policy cycle** (political commitment and institutional arrangements, planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting);

<sup>12</sup> Most notably, they include: a methodological framework for SDG-indicator 17.14.1 on policy coherence as means for SDG implementation, by **UNEP**; a policy integration approach for the SDGs by the **World Public Sector Report** (UN, 2018); a new framework on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) by **OECD** (2016), followed by its comprehensive recommendation (OECD, 2019) and implementation guidance (OECD, 2021). Along the same lines, strong work is jointly done by **UN-Habitat and UCLG** (2020 and 2021) to enhance a global community of practice towards a consistent approach to VLRs and VSRs, through a common understanding of their function and relevance.





Source: Authors

> **OUTPUTS:** the intermediate **outputs** resulting from the practices, as **institutionalized MLG mechanisms** and structures to support policy coherence and integration;  
 > **OUTCOMES:** the **outcomes of enhanced MLG systems**, as improved legitimacy, capacities and functionalities of LRGs for SDG localization.

In other words, the core interrelated features of MLG systems enabling SDG localization are fully embraced by these three key dimensions, each being further specified by its main drivers, i.e., the concrete tools through which each dimension unfolds/materializes, and therefore contributes to channel its effects in

terms of enhanced policy coherence and integration.

It is important to clarify the **interpretation given to each policy cycle stage** in this analytical framework on MLG for SDG localization. Clearly, the policy cycle is not a linear sequence of separated phases, but rather an integrated/circular 'continuum', where **policy learning** is a never-ending and iterative process linking all stages and allowing potential improvements. For instance, local reporting exercises are found to influence the effectiveness of MLG until the level of political commitment and institutional arrangements.

Policy cycle stages within MLG systems for SDG localization

POLICY CYCLE STAGE	INTERPRETATION
<b>Political commitment and institutional arrangements</b>	<p>It refers to the existence of a clearly defined political leadership and consensus on the adoption of the SDGs as overarching framework for orienting the development policies, strategies and plans of a country / place.</p> <p>It includes mechanisms in place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- institutionalize the commitment towards policy coherence for sustainable development at the highest political level;</li> <li>- introduce concrete normative measures, policy directions and institutional arrangements for turning this vision into enforceable commitments at all levels and sectors;</li> <li>- formalize coordination, integration and synergies across governance levels, policy domains, and societal actors to enhance coherence across sustainable development related policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b>	<p>It refers to the processes associated with the incorporation of the SDGs into national and subnational strategies and plans – ranging from medium-long term sustainable development strategies (and related implementation and investment plans) at national, regional, provincial and local level, to sectoral policies and their sub-national declination.</p> <p>It includes mechanisms in place to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ensure that long-term considerations are integrated into decision-making, policy development and planning;</li> <li>- align priorities, policies and plans adopted at various levels of government;</li> <li>- systematically assess the cross-sectoral linkages and policy effects throughout the planning processes in the spirit of the integrated approach of the SDGs;</li> <li>- ensure that policies, plans, and strategies at the overarching/general, sectoral and local level are developed through participatory processes that involve relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul> <p>The extent to which SDGs targets and indicators are consistently embedded as connecting elements of plans at different levels and in different sectors serves as a proxy of vertical and horizontal policy coherence and integration.</p>



<p><b>Implementation</b></p>	<p>It refers to mechanisms aimed at ensuring consistent and effective implementation of adopted strategies, plans, and policies, with particular attention to capacity-building of LRGs and other stakeholders, and SDGs financing.</p> <p>It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building awareness, knowledge and capacities of the different actors involved in SDG implementation processes, including specific capacity-building tools as guidelines, training and peer-to-peer exchange;</li> <li>- mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of policies and/or programmes and projects through complementary functions, assignments, and resources from different actors at different levels;</li> <li>- mechanisms in place to promote the vertical and horizontal integration of SDG financing (both public and private) and their alignment with planning and monitoring processes at different levels;</li> <li>- the matching of fiscal arrangements with the assignment of policy mandates and functions for sustainable development to different levels of government;</li> <li>- the tracking of SDG related expenditures to mainstream and ensure the coherence of implemented strategies to the SDGs, reconcile sectoral objectives and foster policy integration, thus reflecting the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Monitoring and reporting</b></p>	<p>It refers to the crucial process of collecting and systematizing information and data for monitoring and reporting purposes on the implementation of policies, strategies and plans for SDGs at different levels.</p> <p>It includes mechanisms in place to systematically monitor and evaluate the effects of policies, strategies and plans on the various dimensions of sustainable development as well as cross-sectoral impacts, and to inform adaptive action.</p> <p>It is key to consider and recognize the importance and value added of broad-based participatory review and reporting processes – such as VNRs, VSRs, and VLRs – as a key building block of effective MLG systems for SDG localization, enhancing the awareness, ownership, commitment, transparency, and capacities of different actors and enabling synergies across scales.</p>

Source: Authors

All above elements are reflected and sequenced in the following **matrix**, which should serve as a reference for **mapping, systematizing and analyzing the main evidence related to trends and practices of MLG for SDG localization**, in response to these key questions:

> *What is currently done to implement structured, effective and coherent MLG systems? (i.e., main MLG practices)*

> *How do they translate into effective/improved functionalities for SDG localization? (i.e., main MLG outputs and outcomes)*

Applying this matrix as the **main analytical and interpretative** grid serves a twofold scope. First, it allows to systematizing evidence on MLG practices in a structured way, assigning them to the specific the blank cells (numbered i to xii) for the sake of clarity and comparability. Second, it allows to deriving general findings and organize policy insights and implications in the different policy stages for each dimension. In the future, it may also be translated into an evaluation matrix, providing a preliminary Theory of Change to assess the effectiveness of MLG mechanisms for SDG localization.

Analytical matrix on the MLG-SDG localization nexus

PRINCIPLES	DIMENSIONS	CONTEXTUAL FACTORS	PRACTICES				OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
Thrusts underlying the MLG-SDG localization nexus	Drivers of policy coherence and integration	Enabling/disabling conditions	Functional sequence of multilevel governance practices for SDG implementation within policy cycle				Institutionalized MLG mechanisms and structures for policy coherence and integration	Improved functionalities for SDG localization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core principles underpinning the 2030 Agenda</li> <li>• Principles of effective governance for sustainable development</li> <li>• MLG principles</li> <li>• New Urban Agenda principles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Vertical integration</b></p> <p><b>Institutional coordination across government levels</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political, administrative, legal and financial frameworks</li> <li>• Decentralization settings (functional assignments, institutional capacities)</li> <li>• Crisis and conflict dynamics</li> <li>• Participation and social capital</li> <li>• Availability and access to data</li> <li>• Capacity-building to reduce institutional/information gaps</li> </ul>	i	ii	iii	iv	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalization of political commitment for policy coherence</li> <li>• Alignment across governance levels and clear mandates and roles, joint and consistent planning processes)</li> <li>• Interministerial/departamental and cross-sectoral coordination</li> <li>• Formalised linkages across policy domains</li> <li>• Long-term financing to set/address priorities and reconcile policy objectives</li> <li>• Structured monitoring system and reviews for policy coherence / accountability across levels</li> <li>• Established participatory processes integrated to institutional (planning/ budgeting/ monitoring) frameworks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core governance settings/ functions</li> <li>• Management processes and capacities</li> <li>• Community awareness and commitment</li> <li>• Legitimacy and confidence in public institutions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Horizontal integration</b></p> <p><b>Policy interactions across sectors and domains</b></p>		v	vi	vii	viii			
<p><b>Stakeholder engagement</b></p> <p><b>Active participation and cooperation for common objectives</b></p>		ix	x	xi	xii			

Source: Authors

# 06

## Trends and practices on MLG for SDG localization

The **real-world practices on multilevel governance for SDG localization** are reaching a mature stage, being implemented and experienced in several countries across the world under different contextual conditions and factors.

Here, we systematize **evidence on main global trends**, highlighting a **wide range of practices** as exemplified in several high-level reports<sup>13</sup>, and then we complement it with the **experience of five case-studies** (Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines). These are used as transversal **'living labs'**<sup>14</sup>, selecting relevant and documented practices that represent illustrative concrete examples.

In the following pages, practices are organized according to cells *i* to *xii* of the analytical matrix, thus referring to each policy cycle stage respectively in the three key dimensions.

### Vertical Integration

*Structured mechanisms and arrangements for alignment and coordination of sustainable development strategies and policies across government levels*

#### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The SDGs are offering ample opportunities for local governments to strengthen their influence by **reshaping the local-national dialogue between different levels of government** (Bilsky et al., 2021). Consequently, across the world there is a growing attention and commitment for advancing vertical integration in SDG implementation at both national and local levels, fostering multilevel coordination and direct support to SDG localization processes. There are several examples of **spaces, mechanisms and institutional arrangements that enable multilevel policy dialogue and the effective engagement of LRGs in the national policy debate**, incorporating multiple levels of government into sustainable development steering bodies, and reproducing coordination and collaboration mechanisms at different levels of government (UCLG, 2021 and 2022; OECD, 2020 and 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Including, for instance, the yearly UCLG report to the HLPF "Towards the localization of the SDGs", OECD/UCLG (2019), OECD (2020 and 2022), OECD country profiles on PCSD, Pipa and Bouchet (2020 and 2022), the policy briefs on "Emergence of Governance for Cities and Regions" by LSE Cities, UCLG & Metropolis (2021), among others.

<sup>14</sup> For each country, a dedicated fiche / summary is available in the **online platform**, reporting the whole set of harmonized information and analysis in a unique brief document.



Several countries are introducing specific and innovative legal and regulatory instruments, establishing structures for coordination across tiers of government, or adapting institutions and bodies that preceded the 2030 Agenda, through a **dense coordination structure** that involves government bodies and institutions at multiple levels. In contrast, other cases of vertical integration work mostly from the bottom up, by engaging national institutions or agencies in subnational processes (UCLG, 2019).

**Japan** has structured different mechanisms to increase the national government support to LRGs. The Future Cities initiative is part of the second pillar of Japan's SDGs Action Plan 2018 and comprises 29 local governments. 10 of them have been selected as SDG Model Cities and are receiving financial support by the national government to implement their SDG strategies. The initiative also promotes the establishment of SDG local governance structures following the national "SDGs Promotion Headquarters" headed by the Prime Minister within the Cabinet Office (OECD, 2022).

Vertical integration can also be fostered to achieve specific goals, as in the case of **Colombia**, where nine Regional 'Nodes' on Climate Change (*Nodos Regionales de Cambio Climático*), created by presidential decree, promote coordination between the national and the regional levels on climate change matters – SDG#13 (UN-Habitat, 2022b). The difficulties of operating at various scales in climate action is demonstrated by the Nodes' performance, which has not entirely fulfilled this objective.

However, LRGs are not systematically engaged in the policy debate at the national level, and in key levers for implementation and monitoring. Only 28 per cent of the 70 countries that reported to the HLPF between 2016 and 2021 have engaged LRGs in national coordination mechanisms. For the rest, such an engagement is either weak (21 per cent) or inexistent (44 per cent), along with an additional 6 per cent with no elected LRGs / no information (UCLG, 2022).

In particular, this gap in vertical integration concerns the municipal/city level in several countries, where efforts to revitalise the dialogue between national and LRGs are limited to intermediate levels (e.g., regions/provinces), without reaching the very local level. For this reason, it can be important to better leverage the potential of such intermediate levels – as well as of associations of LRGs – as 'connectors' between national and local levels.

#### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

Vertical integration of strategic planning for the SDGs is a cornerstone of MLG and it is probably the policy stage showing the strongest advancements in terms of effective MLG systems. Indeed, several countries have started the process of **aligning national, subnational and local plans and budgets for the SDGs**, through **multilevel planning structures and mechanisms** that ensure consistency of strategies and plans, enabling authorities to work together in addressing commonly identified SDG challenges. It remains to be seen, however, how these structures work and whether they are sustained with appropriate resources, capacities and mandates (UN, 2018).

The GTF/UCLG 2022 survey shows that more and more LRGs are aligning their processes to the 2030 Agenda: 78 per cent of the respondents have aligned their plans and strategies, their budgets or their processes, or they have prioritized one or several SDGs in their work (UCLG, 2022).

In most cases, national governments drive the alignment process, while in others it is triggered and led by LRGs. Strategic direction from national (as well as supranational, as for instance in the EU) levels can be crucial to avoid a lock-in situation and smooth the articulation across levels. This provides a basis for more effective guidance, incentives and facilitation, yet leaving room for autonomy, as some LRGs still perceive SDGs more as an imposed burden without adequate resources than an opportunity to innovate and integrate their action across policy domains.

In **Benin**, the mobilization of LRGs and civil society made significant strides in the integration of the SDGs in national and local plans and in associating LRGs to localization efforts. LRGs were not only key participants in the development of a roadmap for the implementation of SDGs, but they were also represented through the Association of Communes of Benin in the Steering Committee for SDG Planning and Development, chaired by the Minister of State, and the Technical Steering Committee, chaired by the Directorate-General for Coordination and Monitoring of the SDGs (UCLG, 2020).

**Kenya** adopted a more top-down approach when in 2016 established the SDGs Coordinating Department within the National Treasury and Ministry of Devolution and Planning to serve as the national focal point. An SDGs liaison office was set up within the Secretariat of the Council of Governors to improve coordination between the two levels of government. The national government, in collaboration with the Council of Governors, has encouraged the creation of County SDGs Coordination Units to mirror the SDGs coordination Directorate at the national level and it has prepared county integrated development plans to guide the implementation of the SDGs by local authorities (UCLG, 2019).

However, the planning system is still weak in many countries, and a meaningful alignment of plans – in terms of tools, budget resources, prioritization of the SDGs, timing synchronization (also considering differing electoral cycles), monitoring systems and indicators – is still limited, with relevant gaps, especially at the intermediate and city levels.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

Approaches and tools to advance vertical integration in the implementation of the SDGs seem less frequent than at the planning stage. However, emerging practices show that countries that have strengthened **the linkages across levels of government in the planning process are also advancing SDG implementation**. Indeed, an increasing number of national governments support the localization of the SDGs in cities and regions, both through technical cooperation and financial support (OECD, 2022).

Conducive national frameworks are crucial for effective vertical integration and (as the basis for) the localization of the SDGs. Besides institutional leadership and coordination mechanisms, there is large evidence (OECD, 2022; UCLG, 2022) of **ad-hoc cooperation agreements, projects and initiatives across levels to tailor and channel support for effective localization processes**.

A critical issue related to implementation – on which there is no conclusive analysis and evidence – concerns **financing mechanisms**: in particular, the extent to which vertical integration and the consequent alignment of policies and plans is reflected in budgeting processes through the allocation of adequate resources for SDG localization at the local level, complementing the limited capacity of local finances.

In **Brazil**, cities can access specific funding for institutional strengthening programmes and investments in urban infrastructure. Brazilian states are also working on the identification of local, national and international partners that can expand the funding base to support municipalities in their localization efforts. In the state of Paraná, by November 2019, 16 out of 19 regional associations and 315 municipalities had engaged with the state to join a municipal capacity-building strategy. Since the beginning of the Social and Economic Development Council of Paraná's mandate in 2016, mayors have mobilized to ensure the involvement of municipalities (OECD, 2022). For example, the University of Majors project, presented by the Government of Paraná to mayors who are presidents of regional associations of municipalities in the State, seeks to deepen cooperation between the State and municipalities by fostering and accelerating systems for the local implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In **China**, the Ministry of Science and Technology and local governments collaborate to develop local variations for policies, to promote innovation and drive policy learning and change to achieve the SDGs. The SDG Pilot Zone Initiative allows local governments to pass new legislation, explore institutional reform, pilot

alternative public servants' performance evaluations and restructure public expenditure in line with the SDGs, facilitating vertical coordination, horizontal coordination and public participation (ASEAN and UNDP, 2019). A few insights can be highlighted here. First, intermediate governance layers – notably provinces and regions – play an important role in aligning policy priorities and catalyse support at the intersection of national and local levels. Second, the role of international organizations and global and regional associations of LRGs is equally critical in providing relevant support to LRGs as drivers of SDG localization processes. Third, collaboration and partnerships at subnational levels – including decentralized cooperation – is another important practice to align and operationalize support to SDG localization through peer-to-peer exchange across countries and territories. Fourth, multilevel structures for implementation, however, are not frequent yet, and more limited evidence is available about budgeting processes and tools across levels that enable the alignment and convergency of financial resources needed and devoted to localizing the SDGs (UCLG, 2021).

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

Vertical integration in terms of monitoring and reporting is another area showing relevant, but yet ambivalent, advancements.

Indeed, the progress made by the localization movement has also been reflected in **efforts to develop bottom-up monitoring and reporting initiatives**, with the increasing involvement of local stakeholders (Bilsky et al., 2021). Much before VLRs, many LRGs made important efforts to adapt SDG indicators and targets to local realities, and track progress through local reporting. This contributed to enhance localized SDG monitoring and evaluation systems, as the basis for **assessing the effectiveness and impact of local governance action, thus enabling policy learning, accountability and (potential) scale-up**. However, weaknesses or the absence of locally disaggregated indicators hinders these opportunities, making it often very difficult to analyze the progress made in the localization processes. This calls for further commitment and support in building adequate localized systems of indicators and data collection methods, through multilevel collaboration with national, supra-national and international organizations.

Reflecting and feeding the evolution of local reporting framework, the **VLR movement is booming** through a snowballing effect following some very first inspirational initiatives in the US, Japan and Spain. Over the past two years, the total number of VLRs worldwide has tripled – from approximately 40 VLRs in July 2020 to more than 150 in July 2022. In addition, more than 25 VSRs presented to the HLPF so far represent 165,000 LRGs and 1.25 billion inhabitants, showcasing the importance of subnational reporting to achieve the SDGs.

**VLRs/VSRs provide a tool for LRGs to periodically follow-up and review their progress in SDG implementation** (Pipa and Bouchet, 2020; OECD, 2021; Narang-Suri et al., 2021). The process of preparing them is as important as the final report (Pipa and Bouchet, 2020), and reinforces vertical coherence and complements SDG implementation at the national level. It appears crucial the role played by UN-Habitat, UCLG and several national governments to assist LRGs in preparing their VLRs, notwithstanding the high commitment from the bottom.

A clear positive evolution can be observed since 2016 with regards to the involvement of LRGs and their respective associations in national reporting processes and the production of VNRs. According to UCLG (2022), LRG involvement was medium to high in 32 per cent of countries that produced a VNR in 2016, compared to 48 per cent in 2022. However, progress is not linear, as there has been a decline in the number of countries that reported in 2019 and 2021, compared to previous years. Regional differences across the world are significant. From 2016 to 2022, LRG consultation and involvement in VNR processes have been most prevalent in Europe (62 per cent), followed by ASPAC and Africa (43 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively) and Latin America (32 per cent). This year, North America shows a higher rate of LRG participation than usual, reaching 40 per cent for the 2016-2022 period. In Eurasia and MEWA, LRG participation in the VNRs in the same period is still much more limited (UCLG, 2022).



Nevertheless, different examples can show various degrees of involvement of LRGs in national reporting. In **Indonesia**, SDG implementation and monitoring at the national level is coordinated by an SDG National Coordination Team, headed by the Ministry of Planning, a Steering Committee and various Working Groups with representatives from civil society. Even though LRGs do not participate in coordination mechanisms at the national level, but only at the provincial and local levels, in March 2021 LRGs were requested to offer a contribution to the VNR. The association of LRGs submitted their input at the end of April and their contribution was quoted in the VNR. In their 2021 VSR, amongst other measures, the association called for the integration of local government representatives into national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation and for them to participate in the definition, implementation, monitoring and assessment of national SDG strategies at all levels (UCLG, 2021).

**Mexico** offers a positive example of involvement of LRGs in national monitoring and reporting. For the submission of its third VNR in 2021, the dialogues and interactions between different governance levels have been frequent and fluid. Federated states and municipalities were systematically invited and involved in awareness-raising events and technical workshops organized by federal institutions, making the national movement for the achievement of the SDGs more and more animated. Furthermore, the federal government and the national association of LRGs, in collaboration with UCLG and GIZ, worked together on Mexico's VSR, whose contents contributed directly to the country's VNR, presented at the HLPF in 2022. Additionally, the development of the Mexican VLRs (Mexico City, Oaxaca, Yucatán and Ciudad Valle) highlighted the importance of a local approach to indicators, and the country has been able to seize the various engendered opportunities for cross-level collaboration (UCLG, 2021).

## Case studies



### ARGENTINA

#### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

On grounds of its previous role and experience with the Millennium Development Goals, the National Coordination Council for Social Policies (CNCPS) was designated in 2015 as the responsible national body linked to the Presidency coordinating the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. The council operates through an inter-ministerial and intersectoral approach based on the participation of the different relevant organisms from the national public administration.

The incorporation of the provinces in the SDG implementation process starts with ad-hoc cooperation agreements with the CNCPS that – at present – 22 out of 24 Argentinian provinces have signed, and the designation of an institution acting as focal point for SDGs adaptation or 'territorialization' process. In most cases, this corresponds to organisms that ensure transversal modernization and coordination functions.

For instance, the Province of Córdoba reports the signing of an agreement with the CNCPS (in 2017) to begin the process of adopting the 17 SDGs and their respective targets for its governmental management, in which the Ministry of Coordination is designated as Focal Point.

To ensure dialogue and enable vertical synergies with the provinces, in 2018 the CNCPS has established the Federal SDGs Network, which gathers the National Council and Provincial Focal points with the objective of facilitating the sharing of experiences, tools and practices thus lifting institutional capacities and mechanisms for interaction across national and provincial governments.

The articulation of the National level with Municipalities is more critical. According to the Federation of Argentinian Municipalities (FAM), the level of 'structural' engagement of local governments in dialogue with higher levels remains very limited, despite a general recognition by both National and Provincial governments of the importance of the local level in the implementation of the SDGs. The institutionalization of the 2030 Agenda in local governments mandates is pursued through ordinances that declare the integral and interdisciplinary approach associated to the SDGs a matter of municipal relevance. However, the cooperation with Municipalities appears mostly based on punctual support following the signature of individual technical cooperation agreements, and the participation in specific programs or initiatives. Between 2020 and 2022, Municipalities signed a total of 37 bilateral agreements and 18 tripartite agreements with

the National government and provinces. In the Province of Córdoba, the Province-Municipalities Table is the main arrangement to consolidate the dialogue between the Province and its 427 local governments, coordinating the main policies that respond to critical areas (such as housing, hunger, transportation, among others).

Anyway, a proper political and strategic articulation across the three levels of government, such to enable the homogenous diffusion and uptake of the SDGs in all local governments and in alignment with national and provincial strategies, remains a challenge across the country.

#### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

New political circumstances and a strong priority on social inclusion policies and 'people-centred' SDGs, alongside a restructuring of national public administration, led in 2020 to a process of re-alignment of SDG targets to national policies, following which 121 out of a total of 169 targets were adopted by the Argentinian government.

As a result of a streamlined system for the implementation of the SDGs at provincial level, most provinces have engaged and made progresses in implementing the 2030 Agenda by aligning their strategies, policies, budgeting and monitoring systems with the SDGs.

The Provincial government of Córdoba incorporates the SDG framework in the strategic planning of its public policies, and since 2016 has been aligning its policy actions to achieve the SDGs and their targets. In particular, it understands the centrality of the principle of leaving no one behind and it assigns priority to social justice to address inequalities and improve the lives of families. At the same time, it engages with local governments through voluntary cooperation agreements to support them in the localization of the SDGs. The Province of Córdoba is currently accompanying a group of municipalities in their territorialization process through the co-creation of local SDGs plans, based on an 'open-government' management model enabling cooperation with civil society organizations, academia and other territorial actors. This co-creation process in 2020-2021 culminated with the presentation of the Action Plan that is currently underway and will be carried out until 2023, in which the municipalities of Freyre, Alta Gracia, Vicuña Mackenna, San José de la Dormida and Córdoba are participating as pilot cases. More broadly, the vertical integration with municipalities spans most policy areas and includes the co-direction of sectoral programmes (e.g., the food, housing and health) through a structured coordination mechanism. There are reported limitations in the introduction of a vertically integrated policymaking and planning framework. The two federal mechanisms for dialogue and (both horizontal and vertical) coordination on public policies and SDGs – i.e., the National Interinstitutional Commission and the federal SDGs network – do not foresee the participation of municipalities through the FAM, nor provide a comprehensive focus on the alignment of national, provincial, and municipal agendas. The FAM in its 2022 VSR highlighted limited awareness at the municipal level and insufficient dialogue with the national mechanism in charge of coordinating SDG implementation, and only recently started developing a common agenda with the CNCPS. In the absence of a national strategic plan for SDGs localization and the consequent allocation of resources for implementing it at different levels, progress in the alignment and integration of SDGs in local governments agendas remains limited. The challenge in this sense remains the construction of a real framework for the integration and coordination of public policies and plans aligned to SDG implementation across levels, in which local governments actively participate through their representative associations.

#### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

The CNCPS has provided provinces and municipalities with technical support through an 'Adaptation Guide' including methodological suggestions on the utilization of the SDGs as a management and planning tool at the subnational level.

Following the signature of agreements with Provincial governments, the joint work of the CNCPS with Provincial focal points is focused on sensitization, capacity building sessions and collective dialogue for provincial officers. Municipalities also benefited from tools, workshops, and training sessions with the support of the CNCPS and respective Provincial governments, and local governments have also made notable progress in developing awareness-raising activities with their staff.

The Province of Córdoba realised awareness raising campaigns for youth and began a training programme on the SDGs in 427 municipalities. In addition, Córdoba articulates with municipal governments to solve strategic and priority issues through the co-management of the Province-Municipalities Table. The CNCPS is also facilitating the articulation with the global level and international cooperation in dialogue and synergy with provinces and municipalities. In cooperation with the EU, the CNCPS developed methodological tools to strengthen the institutional capacities of small municipalities, including the preparation of a practical guide for small local governments on the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda.

Supported tools also include a guide for municipalities on the elaboration of local voluntary reviews on SDGs.

In the framework of the Federal SDGs network, workshops were also realized to build awareness and capacities of public officers in budget alignment processes at national, provincial, and local level. In the Province of Córdoba, the full incorporation of the SDGs in the planning and budgeting process constitutes a basis for vertical integration and alignment with national policy priorities and related sectoral budgets allocations. In fact, the Province aligns its yearly Provincial Budget with the 2030 Agenda and with a gender perspective, using it as a management and administrative tool for the allocation of resources to achieve prioritized SDGs and targets.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

Argentina, by adhering to the 2030 Agenda, committed to global, regional and national monitoring of its implementation. Argentina has realised so far three VNR (2017, 2020, and 2022), and has prepared and presented two country reports (2018 and 2021).

The CNCPS is responsible for monitoring and assessing progress in the implementation of the SDGs, with the intervention and support of relevant areas of the national public administration, and in the framework of action of the National Interinstitutional Commission. The three core dimensions applied to frame SDGs implementation review and monitoring include indicators, strategies and programs, and mobilized resources.

The CNCPS invites provinces to participate in the SDGs Provinces Report (Informe ODS Provincias), which seeks to highlight annual progress on the adaptation of the SDGs in each territory, as done by seventeen provinces between 2017 and 2019. To ensure vertical articulation, provincial level reports are compiled and integrated in the preparation of the VNR. Moreover, in Argentina there are several and successful VLR experiences, such as in the cities of Buenos Aires, Lincoln, Villa Maria, and the Provinces of Córdoba and Santa Fe.

Furthermore, the FAM presented a VSR in 2022. However, although the VNRs indicate that consultation with local governments has taken place, the organizations representing local governments note that in some cases the consultation did not directly include them, reflecting the broader issue of poor communication and interaction between national and municipal level. A key recognized limitation – affecting both the potential for integrated planning and effective monitoring and review, is the lack of locally disaggregated data, which would require the promotion of synergies for the coordinated implementation of data management processes across levels.



## GHANA

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

To implement the 2030 Agenda, Ghana is relying on its decentralized planning system, which assigns functions to Ministries, Departments and Agencies at national level, and to local authorities (namely Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies - MMDAs) at sub-national level. As expression of strong political commitment for SDG implementation, all government bodies at different level are requested to ensure provisions on relevant aspects and dimensions of the SDGs, and consequently report.

National SDG coordination is done through the National Development Planning Commission at the apex, supported by 16 regional coordinating councils, aimed at linking the central government with the local level. Other coordination and leadership structures have been established to provide focused attention on the SDGs, build innovative partnerships and accountability mechanisms around their implementation and integrate lessons learnt into national development policies and plans. These consist of a High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC); a SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC), which includes selected institutions and a CSOs Platform on SDGs; a Technical Committee on the SDGs. Also, a SDGs **ii**

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

Advisory Unit has been established in the Office of the President. As expressed in the 2019 VNR, the government recognizes that strengthening local government capacity is an important action required to accelerate progress and to increase efficiency to achieve the SDGs.

The SDGs are integrated into the national development agenda. The Government's national development blueprint – An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (2017-2024) – reflects the SDGs, following a 3A approach: align, adopt where necessary, and adapt the SDGs and targets into the policy and results. To do so, the guidelines for preparing medium-term development plans require ministries, departments and agencies, as well as local authorities, to align their activities with SDGs. Ghana has taken advantage of its decentralized planning system to ensure better coordination of SDG implementation processes and to better integrate the agenda into its national and subnational levels of planning. In this regard, the national government decided to reinforce the regional and local coordinating councils to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination in the territories. Overall, substantial efforts have also been made to align local and regional strategies with the SDGs: local government organizations are required to follow guidelines laid down by the national government and to align their medium-term district development plans and activities with the SDGs. In particular, the policy objectives, strategies, and result matrix of the Medium-term National Development Frameworks (2018-2021 & 2022-2025), which are consistent with the SDGs, are translated into actions by metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies. For instance, the national LRGs' association (NALAG) made efforts to align district development plans with the national plan and the SDGs. Other relevant bodies for SDGs planning include the Ministerial Committee and the Implementation Coordination Committee (chaired by the NDPC), which also involve catalytic institutions and CSOs in the human rights, finance, environment areas.

At the city level, in Accra, the SDG targets (as well as the African development Agenda 2063) are integrated in the medium-term development plan by aligning them to the medium-term national development policy framework.

Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies so far aligned their plans with the SDGs by directly borrowing from the national agenda, as a result of limited governance spaces. However, in the new 2022-2025 planning period, appropriate guidelines advise local governments to develop strategies for each area of policy rather than merely selecting from the national policy.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

Ghana's national budget has been aligned with the SDGs, with budget tracking as a tool that helps track government allocations and expenditure on each SDG target. On this basis, financing mechanisms are being progressively adapted to support regional or local initiatives.

Building on the experience with the Millennium Development Goals, for which several gaps were identified in coordination and implementation, Ghana is now improving its planning, monitoring and implementation capacity at the local level through the recruitment of additional local government staff and the appointment of statisticians. These efforts have been further consolidated through training sessions organized by the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs). Similarly, NALAG has undertaken SDG training and awareness sessions for staff and its national executive council, and it also organized nationwide SDG sensitization workshops in all ten regions in 2017.

At the city level, in Accra, the SDGs are being financed primarily through the city's budget. Every budget line is mapped to the SDGs target as required by the budget preparation guidelines issues by the Ministry of Finance. This makes possible to track budgetary allocations and expenditures in relation to the SDGs.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

Ghana stands out for actively creating institutions and mechanisms for SDG review and implementation, as well as championing the SDGs ahead of presenting its first VNR to the 2019 HLPF following the preparation of a SDGs baseline report in 2018. A second VNR was presented at the HLPF in 2022, built on the methodology of the first one. Review processes were similarly coordinated by an Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) hosted by the National Development Planning Commission. A sub-committee from ICC led NDPC with the support of the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and including other key technical bodies was set up to guide the indicators' assessment and selection process. After a screening of initially identified indicators, a total of 102 indicators were reported on against a total of 66 in the first VNR. A rapid assessment was conducted to integrate relevant qualitative information in the review. The GSS also conducted a COVID-19 tracker survey in cooperation with UN Agencies to assess the socio-eco-



conomic impact of the pandemic on households, businesses, and local economies. Despite some improvements in the number of adopted indicators, access to reliable and timely data at the appropriate level of disaggregation remains a challenge. This requires further efforts in strengthening M&E systems and mechanisms to assess the impact of the SDGs particularly in areas associated to social indicators in relation to the leave no one behind principle. In 2020, the city of Accra released its VLR, which represents so far a unique experience in the country and one of the few VLRs in Africa. Accra's VLR exercise was conducted through a multi-level participatory process, including key central and local government agencies (NDPC, GSS, AMA management, heads of departments and units, and sub-metro representatives) and civil society groups and representatives. Local reviews constitute one of the best examples and drivers of exchange and cooperation across levels. The opportunity to support VLR processes was introduced by NDCP, who also provided formats to other local governments for reviews, opening the possibility of scaling up this procedure and producing their own report.



## ITALY

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

According to the law, the Presidency of the Council of Ministries oversees and coordinates the implementation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) with support from the Ministry of Ecological Transition (MiTE) for domestic aspects and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) for the external dimension.

Subnational engagement in the context of the strategy is enshrined in the national law: the Italian legislative framework recommends that regional and local authorities take part in the implementation of the strategy according to their specific institutional mandates and competencies and provides for their engagement in the formulation of the NSDS and its revisions.

The institutional arrangement formally also involves the State-Regions Conference (i.e., a collegiate body established in 1983 to foster cooperation and dialogue between the central government and the regions and autonomous provinces), which endorsed the NSDS in 2017 with the aim of promoting synergies between national, regional and local policies. In addition, the law assigns it a role in the three-year review of the NSDS.

MiTE is playing a crucial role in promoting the NSDS at local level through: a) the collaboration agreements with all regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan cities to support the design of their regional/metropolitan sustainable development strategies in line with the objectives of the NSDS; b) the two dialogue round-tables (one with Regions and autonomous provinces, and 1 with Metropolitan Cities), created to implement and review the NSDS together with subnational levels, as well as to provide opportunities for subnational governments to dialogue with the central administration on ideas, actions and evaluation methodologies; c) the EU-funded project CReAMO PA, established in 2018 for mainstreaming the SDGs and the NSDS into regional policies, thus establishing a permanent platform that provides spaces for dialogue on vertical coherence and to accompany activities funded by the collaboration agreements by peer learning, focussed assistance, workshops and public events. This process gradually and incrementally achieved the creation of a 'community of intentions' (a network of people, civil servants, and experts, based on collaboration, debate and dialogue, operating within the individual administrations involved) among all regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan cities, which conceived the support provided by MiTE as a crucial triggering and motivating factor to mainstream and localize the SDGs in their territories.

Yet, the very local level – i.e., provinces and municipalities – are not fully involved so far in the MGL system for a truly effective SDG localization process, notwithstanding the bottom-up proactive attitude of several municipalities and the key role played by associations of LRGs such as AICCRE and ANCI.

In the case of the Emilia-Romagna region, the approval of the regional strategy for sustainable development in 2021, along with the approval of the Bologna metropolitan strategy for sustainable development in 2022, have triggered a strong SDG localization process based on MLG mechanisms. A coordination

body with the regional association of municipalities and the regional union of provinces was recently set to define a tailored set of indicators (grounded in the national and regional strategies) to mainstream the SDGs in all municipalities.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

In December 2015, the Italian NSDS became law by formally updating article 152/2006 of the national environmental code, to be reviewed every three years. Since 2018, Italy decided to take the opportunity to include in the implementation and revision process of the NSDS – due by law – a strengthened and constructive dialogue on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development involving all relevant central, sub-national administrations, civil society and other stakeholders. As part of the NSDS, the Italian regions are required by law to adopt their own regional strategies for SD, to be coherent with the national one. Also, they have to guarantee the integrated monitoring of the objectives of the NSDS, which implies to contribute to its annual reporting. Moreover, all Italian regions, autonomous provinces, and metropolitan cities have been enabled – through funded collaboration agreements – and technically supported – through permanent capacity-building and peer-to-peer mechanisms – to design their own strategies for sustainable development. As a result of these initiatives to build capacity and maintain constant working relations with the MiTE, such multilevel planning mechanisms has been able to enhance vertical alignment and policy coherence for sustainable development, aligning regional/metropolitan plans and targets with national objectives organised around the five Ps of the 2030 Agenda, especially in the most advanced regions and metropolitan cities. So far, 12 regional strategies for sustainable development have been approved (8 are under definition/approval), and similarly 2 metropolitan strategies for sustainable development have been approved (12 are under definition/approval). In this way, they are integrating sustainable development in their programming and budgeting tools, using (directly or indirectly) the NSDS as a reference. Provinces and municipalities are activating sustainable development planning processes (by defining actions, targets and indicators) at a more voluntary and bottom-up basis, as presented in the Italian 2022 VSR.

In Emilia-Romagna, the collaboration agreements with both the regional and the metropolitan governments contributed to optimizing the synergies among strategies and plans, based on respective legislative and administrative competences. Current efforts are devoted to pushing and supporting municipalities in Emilia-Romagna to adopt – and adapt – regional targets in their own programming tools.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

At national level, the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) is responsible for the elaboration of the official economic policy documents – i.e., the National Reform Program and the Economics and Finance Document. MiTE and MEF are increasingly collaborating to link the former documents pertaining to the economic programming with the implementation of the NSDS. In terms of financing, the MiTE assigned national funds to the collaboration agreements supporting both the design of regional and metropolitan strategies for sustainable development and the implementation of pilot actions. These funds, despite the limited amounts, signalled a formal commitment by the national government to implement the NSDS at local level, along with endorsing regional and metropolitan efforts. In terms of capacities, MiTE played a crucial role in promoting the NSDS at local level through activities and workshops for capacity-building and by establishing a permanent platform for dialogue and exchange on policy coherence and SDG implementation among all regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan cities. This is contributing to mainstreaming the SDGs and the NSDS into regional and local policies and budgets, and it is paving the way to enhance linkages between the EU Cohesion Funds objectives and projects and the NSDS.

Overall, this approach is enhancing LRGs' awareness that commitment to the SDG implementation needs a longer timespan going well beyond political mandates. Nevertheless, financing the implementation of regional, metropolitan and local strategies remains a challenge for all Italian LRGs, especially for municipalities, in order to definitely move from awareness-raising and capacity-building to the achievement of SDG-related targets.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

Italy has invested considerable efforts in building statistical frameworks for evaluating sustainability and well-being. The National Institute of Statistics provides relevant indicators and improves their coverage and significance in identifying trends in SDG achievement. A detailed analysis of SDG indicators is published annually and the NSDS Annual Report is compiled every year by the MiTE.

Significant results have been achieved also in terms of SDG analysis at sub-national level. In particular, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) has created an interactive free access online database that allows users to consult Italy's national and regional progress towards achieving the SDGs. In addition, since 2020 ASviS publishes a yearly Territorial Report, which offers a detailed analysis of Italy's Regions, provinces and metropolitan cities, contributing to the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda in Italy. Similarly, AICCRE replicated and created the first Italian SDG portal for local indicators to monitor SDG implementation by over 100 municipalities in Italy at the end of 2020. Together with Eni Enrico Mattei Foundation, AICCRE also released the first Italian VSR in 2022 focusing on provincial and municipal governments that so far have not directly benefited from the financial and technical support provided by MiTE. It integrates qualitative and quantitative aspects to express the complexity, variety and heterogeneity of Italian local governments. In particular, it combines 48 quantitative indicators on 16 SDGs (though there are often no official indicators or statistical data at the very local level) with qualitative information on 31 local good practices by LRGs (such as SDG-related resolutions, budgets and policies), considering both large and small municipalities.

The 2022 VNR shows that localizing SDGs is one of Italy's core strategies to implement the 2030 Agenda, with a specific chapter giving visibility to LRGs' localization efforts. It fully describes the work of territories in declining the strategic objectives of the NSDS at local level and the relevant coordination mechanisms established between central and local administrations to support and strengthen the effectiveness of the implementation process. In other words, the VNR shows how the national government is attributing great importance to adopting an integrated territorial approach and an effective multilevel governance system. The VNR was planned as a collective year-long process involving main actors at national, regional and local levels (through VNR/VLR roundtables under the auspices of the NFSD) and relying on the participatory mechanisms set in place since 2018 to implement the national strategy for 2030 and the mid-term planning documents. Within this process, the MiTE strongly engaged with regions and metropolitan cities, but not adequately integrated provinces and municipalities and the VSR process was only partially considered, thus leaving a relevant gap open in the multilevel governance approach.

Finally, in 2021 the Metropolitan City of Florence has been a pioneer in Italy with the release of its VLR – the first in the country. Nevertheless, the 2022 VNR process led by MiTE triggered a wider engagement of regions and metropolitan cities in preparing their reviews, resulting in 12 full-fledged VLRs annexed to VNR to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation process in Italy.

All these efforts – enhanced statistical indicator system, territorial analyses (as by AICCRE and ASviS), synergic VNRs-VLRs – must be systematized towards a homogenous and permanent reporting system at all levels, including provinces and municipalities.



## JORDAN

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

To ensure efficient alignment, and to emphasize a commitment to all SDGs within national priorities, the Government has opted to ensure that no overlapping mechanisms are established anew, and that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda builds upon existing institutional frameworks. These have been further refined to allow for better harmonization, including: 1) Higher Steering Committee – headed by the Prime Minister's Office and involving relevant Ministers, the private sector and CSOs – to provide overall strategic guidance on policymaking for the implementation of the SDGs; 2) Higher National Committee for Sustainable Development – established in 2002 and headed by the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) with membership from ministries, the private sector, CSOs, and representatives of women, youth, Senate (upper house), House of Representatives (lower house), and local communities – to act as a reference for planning and roadmap for all national endeavours related to sustainable development; 3) Coordination Committee – headed by the Secretary General of MOPIC with membership from ministries, Government, and stakeholders – to provide supervision and management during the preparation of Executive Development Programmes, to ensure mainstreaming of the SDGs within implementation and M&E processes of national and local plans and to ensure inter-linkages between the sectoral task forces.

The involvement of elected municipalities and governorates councils in this Coordination Committee represents the main institutional arrangements to accelerate the mainstreaming of the SDGs at local levels. The governorates and the Greater Amman Municipality also participated in various task forces set up by the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development to review each SDG for the 2022 VNR, and then become permanent.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

In Jordan, the Executive Development Programmes (EDPs) are multi-year government development plans, developed through a participatory approach, to integrate and translate different national development and sectoral plans and strategies under the "Jordan 2025" into actionable and measurable development programmes through three- or four-year cycles. As part of the country's decentralization drive, the EDPs include also development programmes for each of the 12 governorates, translating national priorities at the sub-national level and taking into consideration their own sustainable development priorities and challenges. The Government's Indicative Executive Programme 2021-2024 (GIEP) – i.e., the last EDP and the current national development program – includes plans for projects and transformative programmes that will contribute to accelerating progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Local authorities, first of all Greater Amman Municipality, adopt thematic plans (e.g., the Climate Action Plan) inspired by national planning, by aligning institutional goals and actions and by adapting them to the context through strict collaboration. Moreover, representatives of municipalities and governorates councils take part to several national planning committees, as in the case of the national climate change committee.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

MOPIC, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and the General Budget Department, has linked capital expenditures to the EDP, thereby also ensuring that priority funding is allocated to the SDGs as an integral component of the EDP. The UNDP has supported the Higher National Steering Committee with a dedicated 'roadmap for the implementation of the SDGs with a 2030 time-horizon' to reinforce SDG related initiatives in planning at the national and sub-national levels, including awareness raising, mapping, mainstreaming, and financing development initiatives.

The 2022 VNR represented also the opportunity to release an Updated Jordan SDGs Implementation Roadmap, along with the preparation of the action plan for the roadmap through consultative meetings, to identify roles and responsibilities at all levels, and to ensure implementation, review and ongoing update. Jordan's Planning Law sets in place the general framework for planning, financing, implementing, monitoring and evaluation.

Localization has made significant progress due to local and regional governments' inclusion in national coordination mechanisms, the passing of the new decentralization law and placing the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development in charge of SDG localization.

Local authorities report that they face problems in implementing the actions outlined in the adopted plans due to limited technical, human, and financial capacities, requiring respectively new technological solutions, constant HR training, and budget sources to fully finance SDG-related plans.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation is in charge of reporting SDG progress and it is developing, in cooperation with the Performance Progress Unit at the Prime Ministry, a national monitoring system which will be used to monitor national and local programmes and plans. This system includes more than 600 indicators designed to be tracked by MOPIC through three-month progress reports and annual analytical reports.

Jordan's first VNR – submitted in 2017 – stressed the participation of both elected municipalities councils and appointed governorates councils to the reviewing process. In the process of drafting the 2022 VNR, in order to hold local consultations and engage entities at the local level across the Kingdom's governorates, a national workshop was organized involving the governorates and municipalities councils, among others.

Furthermore, Jordan Department of Statistics following the National Strategy for Development of Statistics 2018-2022 established the Jordan Development Portal (JDP), which represents an open-access centralized platform for economic, social, and environmental indicators. Most data are currently available only at the national level, while it is complicated for local authorities to obtain data at the local level, which negatively affects their ability to tailor policies and actions according to needs.



In early 2021, Amman Greater Municipality started the process for the development of its VLR – the first in the country – with the support of UN-Habitat, contributing also to strengthen the VLR movement in the Middle-East and West Asian Countries. The preparation of both the 2022 VNR and the VLR by Amman Greater Municipality required close coordination, ensuring coherence and complementarity between information, data and evidence notwithstanding some localizing traits based on Amman specific features. Other cities and municipalities have been also involved in the VNR elaboration process, but in a limited way with respect to Amman Greater Municipality, and the VNR only mentions a few experiences of local and regional governments.



## PHILIPPINES

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

A national executive order (Order No. 27, 2017) requested all government levels to implement the national development plan (PDP) that is aligned with the SDGs. The main national agencies involved in the elaboration of relevant policy instruments for SDG localization include: the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), which is responsible for the coordination of the SDG implementation strategy; the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), which supports SDG localization; the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which facilitates subnational and local processes and workshops to ensure alignment and coordination of indicators from the national to the local level.

NEDA's regional development offices are responsible for drafting and coordinating the regional development plans. Provincial governors usually chair the Regional Development Council, acting as the formal mechanism for coordination and multilevel governance on SDGs.

In addition, the NEDA, the Regional Development Councils, Planning Committees, and Sub-committees regularly convene to craft the plans and ensure that LRGs comply with the formulation of national/regional development plans and investment programmes (called PDP/RDP and PIP 2017-2022) and results matrices as a mandatory framework.

This constitutes a structured top-down system, but local governments aspiring to localize the SDGs in coordination with the national level still feel they do not receive adequate support. Considering the scope and complexity of the country decentralization framework, this leads to variable outcomes, depending on the level of government and related settings and capacities.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Planning

The SDGs are integrated into the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, complemented by national budget allocations through the Public Investment Programme, and monitored through the Socioeconomic Report SDG Annex. The national government's localization strategy continues to follow a prevalently top-down approach based on rather comprehensive sets of mandatory regulations, orientation and guidance tools and incentive measures. As a consequence, this can create dysfunctions in the homogenous allocation of attributions and resources at different levels, resulting detrimental to the establishment of effective vertically integrated coordination mechanisms. Provinces, for instance, have a much stronger autonomy and standing vis a vis national government, whilst cities and municipalities are more dependent from national or donors' support. This entails a 'double-track' in the delivery of services and programs, with risk of overlapping and duplications in the provision of the same service in the same localities.

The main mechanisms for SDG localization are the Regional Development Plans (RDP), which translate the national development plan into regional strategies and priorities. The RDPs, reflecting the alignment and integration of the PDP with the SDGs, serve as the implementation mechanism of the SDGs at the regional and local levels. Moreover, the Philippines adopted in 2018 its Guidelines for Localization and a 'result matrix' for LRGs, while the League of Cities of the Philippines (LCP) integrated the SDGs into its Strategic Plan for 2019-2022. However, although the country's national associations, and particularly the LCP and the League of Municipalities (LMP), are active in SDG localization, it is reported that many local government units are not fully aware of these processes and that technical and financial support needs to be improved to allow their actual alignment with SDG priorities.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

NEDA, DILG and the Philippines' Statistical Office developed assessment criteria to access funds for SDG implementation. In particular, different score cards systems have been used to evaluate progress, linking performances to access to specific funds. However, the alignment between the funds to support local governments' plans and the SDGs does not result fully clear for LRGs, which find it difficult, for instance, to access specific funds to support adaptation to climate change and resilience projects. Overall, the government seems to prioritise reporting mechanisms, but still devotes limited support and funding to new SDG priorities, with an over-reliance on regulatory approaches instead of promoting outreach, collaboration and capacity-building efforts between national and local governments.

The establishment of the 'Sustainable Development Goals and Ambisyon Natin 2040 Fund' entails the creation of SDG councils at the local level as means to access funding and technical assistance for anti-poverty programs, activities, and projects (PAPs). This should provide further support to local governments in realizing their long-term vision and transition into sustainable cities and communities. Under the said bill, the national government will thoroughly assess project proposals submitted by local governments to match the national agenda and approve funding support.

However, despite the introduction of these tools, at the city level, most interventions are still implemented with international cooperation funds and support from donor agencies, and less from the national government and agencies.

### VERTICAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

SDG data monitoring and evaluation is managed by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which has designed appropriate scorecards to evaluate whether development plans are aligned with the SDGs. This is complemented by the City Database Project led by the League of Cities of the Philippines to consolidate city data and show how cities are achieving the SDGs. The National Economic and Development Authority led the elaboration of the Philippine Development Plan Results Matrices (RM) to enable greater accountability from the government. The RM illustrate the results to be achieved in the medium term as well as indicators and means of verification per indicator, the baseline information, the annual and end-of-Plan targets for selected goals and outcomes. NEDA also included the SDG indicators in the RM to enhance monitoring of the country's efforts to achieve the SDGs.

An accompanying document to monitor the RM is the Socioeconomic Report (SER). It monitors, reports, and provides an overall assessment of the outputs, accomplishments, and recommendations of the PDP on an annual basis. In 2018, NEDA designed the SER to assess the contributions and alignment of the PDP to the global goals. In addition, its SDG Annex ensures that the policies and programs, activities, and projects indicated in the PDP contribute to the attainment of the SDGs. However, cities still underline the difficulties that they face in ensuring appropriate monitoring and evaluation of SDG implementation processes. Also for this reason, so far only one city – Naga – has started a VLR process, with the support of UNESCAP.

## Horizontal integration

*Structured mechanisms to enable inter-linkages across policy sectors and domains*

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The cross-cutting and integrated nature of the SDGs poses coordination challenges at each level and stage of the policy-making process, requiring governments to strengthen institutional and governance mechanisms for horizontal coordination between policy areas, sectors and departments at each tier (OECD, 2021). Having in place efficient mechanisms and processes for inter-ministerial / inter-departmental coordination at appropriate levels is essential to ensure an integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to address policy divergences and trade-offs.

Countries, regions and cities around the world are introducing **new or adapted institutional coordination frameworks to overcome policy silos and integrate SDGs transversally into central/sub-national structures and processes**. In this regard, four main categories of practices can be distinguished:

- strengthening the institutional and financial capacity of their Centres of Government – the body or group of bodies that report directly to the Head of Government and the Council of Ministries / Departments – to support SDG implementation (OECD, 2016);
- assigning the coordination responsibility to line ministries/departments with cross-cutting influence (e.g., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Finance), to lead the commitment towards sustainable development well beyond its original domain;
- creating ad hoc institutions (Committees, Councils, Working groups) – or use pre-existing ones – with a transversal mandate to coordinate sustainable development issues across sectors and policy domains;
- establishing informal working groups or networks that meet on a regular or ad hoc basis to discuss pressing issues.

For example, the Agenda Euskadi Basque Country 2030, adopted by the Autonomous Community of Euskadi (**Spain**), aligns the administration's governmental programme and related sectoral policies to the SDGs. It aims to provide a common platform to enhance coordination in public action among sectoral departments in the Basque government, among all the provinces and the representation of municipalities of the Basque country. The General Secretariat of the President's Office is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Agenda in the Basque Country, and the General Secretariat of Foreign Affairs to foster partnerships and exchange on ways forward for its implementation with other regions, countries, and international organizations (OECD, 2020).

Another interesting example from **Spain** concerns mechanisms for inter-municipal cooperation in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (AMB), made up of 36 municipalities. This is illustrative of how associative schemes optimize territorial management, the provision of services and the implementation of projects that go beyond their municipal boundaries, without decreasing political-administrative or jurisdictional autonomies (UN-Habitat, 2021).

The cities of Vantaa (Finland) and Bristol (**UK**) have been improving horizontal coordination to reinforce synergies between different policy and action areas while minimising trade-offs, by introducing inter-departmental activities, setting up coordination teams and committees under the mayor's office. They ensure political commitment by giving responsibility for specific SDGs to each member of the city council, favouring personal and shared accountability. These mechanisms also ensure that key departments engage in dialogue and coordinate with others (EUROCITIES, 2020).

However, in some cases, the above-mentioned mechanisms do not have the power nor the legal mandate to impose themselves and they usually face difficulty in getting their recommendations considered and accepted by all ministries / departments within national and local governments (Granados and Noferini, 2019).

An often-unbalanced relationship between deconcentrated and decentralized governance<sup>15</sup> is another crucial factor that inhibits effective horizontal coordination in terms of meaningful synergies, policy interactions, and trade-offs between policy areas and sectors. The prevalence of deconcentrated over (ineffective/incomplete) decentralized systems tends to induce a more vertical-top down and siloed approach to the detriment of truly integrated processes.

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning

Ensuring whole-of-government coordination is fundamental to identifying and mitigating divergences between sectoral priorities and policies, including external and domestic policies, and promoting mutually supporting actions across sectors and institutions.

Several national and local governments have devised **formal governance arrangements and informal working methods that support effective co-creation of sustainable development plans between ministries / departments** and between ministries and other public sector bodies under their aegis. This helps **break silo thinking** and serves as common reference for integrated approaches across broader governments' policy objectives. Here again, such high-level coordinating mechanisms to promote policy coherence for sustainable development and the integration of sustainable development across central agencies, line ministries, and other public institutions are either located within the Centre of Government or a lead line ministry/department as appropriate.

Moreover, several regions and cities are **piloting innovative governance models** to implement the SDGs holistically at/and across subnational levels in different administrative/decentralized settings. They are meant to both overcome policy silos through integrated policymaking and planning, and to promote inter-departmental dialogue and collaboration in the different stages of the process.

For example, in **Belgium**, the region of Flanders has set up innovative governance models to move away from a top-down and hierarchical structure of the public administration towards "transition spaces", managed by teams composed of transition managers from the public administration, responsible ministers and external stakeholders, including experts, private sector representatives and civil society. This system is based on transition management principles: system innovation, taking a long-term perspective, involving stakeholders through partnerships, engaging in co-creation and learning from experiments (OECD, 2020).

In the state of Paraná, **Brazil**, a Superintendence of Economic and Social Development was established and entrusted with the elaboration of a long-term sustainable development vision in line with the SDGs. The new superintendence is developing an overarching sustainable development plan that will integrate existing plans, initiatives, and forward-looking strategies and actions to advance the 2030 Agenda. In particular, it has been allowing to mainstream the SDGs in medium-term planning and budgeting tools, aligning the Paraná Plano Plurianual for 2020-23 and other tools for planning and budgeting with the SDGs (OECD, 2022).

**Uganda** transitioned from a strong sectoral planning model, in which each Ministry had its own decision-making process, to a program-oriented approach, using thematic areas as its primary focus. At the national level, the program working groups are headed by one ministry, although other ministries participate, and the outcomes are shared with local governments. According to the East Africa Local Governments Association, it is crucial to give local governments an equivalent structure built on a multisectoral program-oriented approach rather than a sectoral one.

<sup>15</sup> Deconcentration (i.e., administrative decentralization) refers to a transfer of decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. Political decentralization refers to the transfer of decision-making power to representative and downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local governments.



## HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

The governance and institutional architecture devoted to the implementation of strategies for sustainable development is surely a priority issue for all the countries, regions, and cities committed to the SDGs. Indeed, **a clear assignment of implementation responsibilities** – along with a structured interaction between local authorities, institutions, citizens, associations and enterprises – are essential ingredients to influence resource management for social, environmental, and economic change toward sustainable development (UNDG, 2014; GTF, 2016). **Making specific commitments in relation to initiatives and actions aimed at contributing to the SDGs** in a sustainable development strategy is a powerful enforcement mechanism. Explicitly outlining the actions that will be put in place to foster sustainable development makes the public institution implementing the strategy accountable for the actions it commits to (ARCO, 2020).

Most commonly, the decision-making power on planning and implementation is given to State/LRG Cabinets, Office of Prime Ministers / Governors or similar entities, while the coordination is given to the Inter-Ministerial/ Departmental Committees, Councils, and Working Groups, which work in close collaboration with all relevant ministries/departments under the presidency of a leading actor. Finally, the implementation and funding of the items included in the plans fall within the scope of responsibility of each specific minister and department concerned.

Several countries, regions and cities have applied '**SDG budgeting**' tools to advance cross-sectoral integration, setting priorities and reconciling policy objectives through aligned/pooled funding mechanisms and incentive mechanisms. Formalized financing mechanisms are also established as incentives for institutional coordination on specific purposes and urgent issues (e.g., climate change action). In **India**, the Tamil Nadu Urban Development Fund is a subnational pooled financing mechanism (SPFM) that allows local governments to jointly access loans, bonds, and other forms of finance. SPFM enable local governments that individually lack the credit history or financial scope to access finance to do so collectively (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Moreover, **capacity-building initiatives in public administrations for horizontal integration** are diffused, to increase knowledge and create new competences in aligning public strategies and programmes across policy domains with the principles and integrated nature of the SDGs (UN-Habitat, 2022). Staff incentives and horizontal mobility schemes are being promoted, alongside the promotion of digital technology skills and tools to enhance integration and innovative governance outcomes (e.g., enabling larger citizens' participation in policymaking and monitoring processes).

City networks and alliances can be powerful tools for cities to create synergies and attract funding opportunities: in **Mali**, the national Association of Municipalities, through an EU-funded programme launched in 2019, support the localization of the SDGs in 100 Malian municipalities, by assisting them in formulating participatory budgets at the local level and providing training sessions to local actors to facilitate the appropriation of SDGs (UCLG, 2019).

## HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

A whole-of-government approach underlying horizontal integration appears to be highly embedded into national, sub-national, and local monitoring practices, as they are set to break the policy silos by **involving several departments / ministries and public bodies and by reporting on multiple (or even all) SDGs**.

In this respect, it is critical to **map critical interactions and assess progress toward interrelated goals and targets** through integrated monitoring frameworks that enable cross-sectoral exchange and collaboration in developing relevant indicators, as well as in data production and collection to fill information gaps, build capacity at different levels and enable circular feedback loops along the policymaking-budgeting-evaluation cycle. Cities and regions are also pioneering different methods and tools (network analysis, matrix approaches) to analyse the interactions between SDG targets and existing policies in terms of both synergies and trade-offs (OECD, 2021).

Moreover, provisions/arrangements are being made to enable critical oversight functions on SDG alignment and integration for policy coherence by Parliaments and supreme audit institutions.

In **Germany**, the initiative SDG Indicators for Municipalities, by the association of German cities (Deutscher Städtetag) with several other partners, aims to develop appropriate indicators for the portrayal of the SDGs at municipal level and to provide access to the indicator parameters. The recently proposed 47 SDG indicators should be regarded as recommendations: individual municipalities decide voluntarily which indicators they want to use to depict or control sustainable development in a local context (UCLG, 2019).

In 2019, **Wales** issued "Wales and the Sustainable Development Goals", a Supplementary Report to the UK VNR. The report highlights the progress Wales has made in meeting the SDGs, articulating and translating the SDGs into the seven well-being goals established by the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015: a Prosperous Wales, a Resilient Wales, a Healthier Wales, a More Equal Wales, a Wales of Cohesive Communities, a Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language, a Globally Responsible Wales. This allows avoiding a sectoral analysis of each SDGs, embracing a more horizontally integrated approach to review progress.

GOOD PRACTICES

## Case studies



### ARGENTINA

#### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The CNCPS by decree of 2017 is required to use an inter-ministerial and cross-sectoral working method that promotes the participation of the competent bodies of the National Public Administration. The experience gained with the MDGs and the commitment to maintain and strengthen an integrated approach inherent to the SDGs, led to establishing a National Interinstitutional Commission for the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The commission is composed of political and technical representatives of different relevant national ministries and organisms – including the Head of Ministries' cabinet and the National Institute for Statistics and Census (INEC), under the orientation and supervision of the National Council. The different entities are involved in a transversal coordination mechanism out of any hierarchical relation, as the basis for achieving a genuinely collaborative intersectoral and integrated perspective. The Federal SDGs network, besides dialogue between provinces and national government, also enables horizontal cooperation linkages, for instance through peer bilateral relations for the exchange of experience and tools between provinces.

In the Province of Córdoba, the horizontal, multi-sector integration of policies and programs constitutes one of the key features of the SDGs 'adaptation' and localization strategy. The provincial government has set-up an Inter-ministerial SDGs roundtable, led by the Ministry of Coordination as the Provincial focal point for SDGs. The Roundtable raises awareness and fosters the implementation of the SDGs linking government programs to relevant SDG targets, and coordinating all the provincial departments (ministries, secretariats and agencies) that are working on prioritization and alignment of their activities to the SDG. The process is framed and supported through cooperation with the OECD, which allowed the province to become the first region in the Americas to take part in the SDGs territorialization pilot. Through its participation in the OECD pilot programme on the territorialization of the SDGs, the Province of Córdoba gains additional access to horizontal relations on a global scale exchanging on a peer-to-peer basis with other regional governments engaged in the initiative (Parana, Flanders). Additionally, the Centre Region, composed by the Argentinian provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe and Entre Rios, is one example of the inter-regional networks that Córdoba contribute to through regional projects and joint initiatives between peers. Also, the province is part of ZICOSUR and ATACALAR, two regional spaces where local governments from neighbour countries coordinate efforts to the development of the region.

#### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning

Over the past few years, the CNCPS ensured coordination with 20 ministries and the adaptation of the SDGs to national priorities through 6 thematic commissions (education, agriculture, housing and urban development, work and employment and social protection), under the National Interinstitutional Commission. The same approach for horizontal integration has been then translated into provincial and city plans. The Province of Córdoba has built a solid foundation to institutionalize the planning and implementation

of the SDGs at the government level in connection with its cross-cutting policy priority toward the promotion of social inclusion and justice. The holistic view of the 2030 Agenda is reflected in the alignment of the three priority axes of the provincial government action (sustainable economic growth, social justice and strengthened institutions) with the SDGs, which paves the way for localized SDG indicators. As the result of a transversal and participatory planning process, 42 SDGs targets were prioritized by the provincial government. The Province of Córdoba is currently working with the OCED to develop a strategy for further deepening the scope and horizontal integration of the SDGs with a transversal focus on the well-being and social inclusion of people. The institutionalization of horizontally integrated planning is reflected not only in the setting of priorities and targets for SDG localization, but in all public policy decision making and programming processes in the Province.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation**

In the Province of Córdoba, an 'open management' portal accounts for the strong intergovernmental articulation of the SDG implementation process and constitutes a key instrument to support its implementation. The portal provides, through open-data sets, structured and transparent information to citizens on the plans and initiatives of the Provincial government to implement the SDGs in the different public management areas. As part of the implementation process, the Provincial government in cooperation with the CNCPS assured the sensitization and capacity-building of all administrative offices in the different departments and branches. The provincial government has complemented the process of linking government policies and actions with the SDGs by fully aligning the provincial budget to the SDGs with a focus on equality and sustainability and a specific gender perspective.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting**

In the Province of Córdoba, linked to the Open Management Portal, a 'government management report' is prepared since 2016, in which all departments report in a unified document connecting respective plans and programs with related SDGs. The report constitutes an active transparency and dissemination tool for the monitoring of public policies accounting for horizontal policy integration. The strong policy priority of the Province on social inclusion and well-being has brought the government to develop a framework of multidimensional well-being indicators that serves also as a reference to monitor prioritized SDG targets. Given the integrated and holistic nature of the SDGs, the province has then developed a matrix of interconnectedness to identify and measure the synergies and trade-offs between the SDGs more directly focused on people's wellbeing. As part of a horizontally integrated process, the main departments in charge of data management – i.e., the general directorate of statistics and census and the directorate of applied studies – are fed with the information provided by the various provincial departments. The first VLR of the Province of Córdoba (2022) was the result of a process of an horizontal inter-ministerial coordination and a multi-stakeholder approach that allowed prioritizing, agreeing and sharing progress and challenges for the localization of the SDGs.



### **GHANA**

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements**

The High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC), made up of 15 ministers, provides strategic direction for the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 to ensure a 'whole-of government' approach to implementation, by actively engaging all sectors of government in a cross-sectoral and coordinated manner. The SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) is made up of representatives of 10 key ministries, departments and agencies, and the Office of the President, along with the SDG Philanthropy Platform, civil society organizations and the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council. The ICC is intended to streamline and strengthen cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning**

At the city level, in Accra, the preparation of the mid-term development plan is coordinated by the Metropolitan Planning Coordinating Unit (MPCU), which comprises the head of all the administration departments. This provides a platform for horizontal integration of the planning process, enhancing transversal collaboration and policy coherence, maximising synergies and limiting trade-offs across different departments' initiatives based on potential interlinkages among multiple SDGs. Following a broad-based participatory and cross-sectoral consultation process, suitable programmes and projects are then designed to address the development priorities reflected in adopted SDGs targets.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation**

SDGs are effectively mainstreamed into the country's development agenda and ensuing policies, plans and budgets at different levels. The coordination architecture – including horizontal/cross-sectorial articulation mechanisms – is highly reckoned and ensures a good degree of alignment and coherence of policies and plans for SDGs implementation.

Horizontally integrated processes ensure that budgets at different levels are aligned with SDG targets and indicators, which in turn allows to maximise synergies in the allocation and monitoring of resources for interlinked policy goals.

At both national and city levels, however, key challenges to effective implementation persist, concerning data availability and management; local capacities to design and implement multi-sectoral initiatives to leverage interlinkages among the SDGs; and a substantial financing gap.

This requires further development and consolidation of horizontally coordinated implementation systems and capacities, as well as their articulation across levels, with particular attention to the intermediate governance layer at the level of regions. Another key area for improvement concerns the assessment of local governments' capacities and results in key SDG localization areas, as basis for orienting and tailoring resource allocation. Performance-based grants are being piloted and should be complemented by the introduction of adapted sets of indicators to adequately reflect and monitor local governments' delivery in key areas.

With the support of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) has launched several projects to improve the capacity of local, provincial and district governments to adapt the SDGs to their local realities, focusing so far on four Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting**

At the city level, in Accra, relevant SDG indicators reflecting the multidimensional and integrated/cross-sectorial nature of the plan were also (where necessary) adapted to the local context and included in its monitoring and evaluation framework, to help track the progress of implementation and provide further evidence-based orientation to decision-making.

In accordance with the plan preparation guidelines issued by the NDPC, the Accra Municipal Assembly subjects its draft medium-term development plan to a Strategic Environmental Assessment, which serves as a valid reference to integrate the different dimensions of sustainable development in the planning process through a balanced integration of environmental management, socio-cultural, economic and institutional development issues.





## ITALY

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

In 2021, the newly established Inter-ministerial Committee for Ecological Transition (CITE) has been mandated to approve the NSDS revisions and oversee its implementation. As the CITE is chaired by the Prime Minister, and steered by the Minister for Ecological Transition, it illustrates the government's high-level commitment to the path to sustainable development. The Inter-ministerial Committee for Economic Programming and Sustainable Development, which is in charge of assessing sustainability of public investment, is also placed within the Presidency of the Council of Ministries. However, stronger efforts appear to be necessary over the next future to enhance inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaboration at national level towards SDG implementation and targets (as also recently endorsed by the Italian Court of Audit), by creating mechanisms to foster dialogue among sectoral national government bodies and break out of policy silos.

The same approach was quite successfully reflected in several regions and metropolitan cities, also because collaboration agreements promoted by MiTE pushed to create an inter-departmental coordination body. This allowed committing of the highest political leaders and most policy departments to SDG localization, linking their mandates (and performance evaluation) to the SDGs and going well beyond an environment-centred understanding of sustainable development. Indeed, as compared to national bodies, LRGs – including at foremost municipalities – appear to be naturally more inclined to an integrated approach to SDG localization, as the SDGs are even more strictly interrelated at the very local level.

Several sub-national administrations have established SD steering committees for drafting and implementing their strategies. In the Emilia-Romagna region, since 2017 the regional coordination body for sustainable development has been headed by the Cabinet of the President, involving over 40 directors / heads of departments along with relevant agencies (e.g., environmental agency, innovation agency). This approach has been allowing for systematizing past, current and future efforts on sustainable development by different sectors of the regional government, designing the regional strategy for sustainable development through an integrated and intersectoral perspective, and highlighting the highest political commitment to SDG localization.

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning

Italy recognizes policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) – SDG 17.14 – as a fundamental tool for achieving the principles of integration and transversality of the SDGs. In this regard, along with the revision of the NSDS, the National Action Plan for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (NAP PCSD) was elaborated as the main result of the project “Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development: mainstreaming SDGs in the Italian Decision Making” launched by MiTE in 2020 with the support of the European Commission (DG Reform) and the OECD. The mechanisms and tools proposed by the NAP represent coherence tools aiming at strengthening the system of institutional relations, vertical and horizontal, as well as multi-actor participation, by also launching a new path for integrated decision-making processes, addressing all its phases and promoting true circularity within the processes.

The case of Emilia-Romagna is illustrative of a similar approach at regional level, with the whole political mandate and regional development strategy fully inspired by – and aligned with – the 2030 Agenda (e.g., the Regional Economic and Financial Document is articulated following the SDGs). Moreover, the new Pact for Work and Climate truly embraces horizontal integration, committing all regional departments to policy coherence for its implementation.

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation

The institutions at central level that are formally entrusted with the implementation of sustainable development policies include: Ministry for the Economy and Finance, Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Interministerial Committee for Economic Planning and Sustainable Development, Department for European Policies and Department for Cohesion Policies, and MiTE. Similarly, the permanent platform between the Ministry of Ecological Transition and LRGs adopts an integrated approach, taking into account all different SD dimensions and policy sectors. This is reflected, for instance, in the collaboration agreements with each region, autonomous province and metropolitan city, which included (and funded) pilot actions supposed to have an inter-sectoral effect and impact on multiple dimensions of sustainable development.

The Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCIRE) is supporting LRGs to localize the SDGs through training (e.g., a National School on the 2030 Agenda for LRGs), platfor-

ms for exchange (e.g., Venice City Solutions 2030), and the AICCIRE Local4Action HUB, among others. For instance, it has organized training sessions on the SDGs involving more than 100 mayors, thus contributing to involve municipalities that are yet to be supported on SDG localization by national institutions. Taken together, the capacity-building activities (both by MiTE and by AICCIRE) strongly pushed towards an integrated implementation of the SDGs at the local level. Moreover, efforts have been devoted to promoting coherence between internal territorial approaches to the SDGs and Decentralized Development Cooperation activities. In particular, the territorial partnership model allows for best practices exchanges and peer-to-peer learning among subnational governments in developed and developing countries on the implementation of the SDGs.

In Emilia-Romagna, training activities for regional and local public officials are being devised to enhance horizontal integration in SDG-related policies.

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

The 2022 VNR process is a joint effort of MiTE and MAECI, conceived as a collective path involving the main institutional and societal actors leading the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Italy. Such a path is built on the work carried out starting from the 2017 VNR.

Along with localizing the SDGs and stakeholder engagement, the main thematic insights of the VNR include policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), thus attempting to describe the level of horizontal integration of the 2030 Agenda in the planning processes at the national level. In other words, the 2022 VNR represents an opportunity to give international visibility not only to the progress achieved, but also to the horizontal coordination mechanisms developed, as well as to strengthen the initiatives currently underway and planned for the coming years. Similarly, all 12 VLRs and reporting tools prepared by regions, autonomous provinces, and metropolitan cities and attached to the 2022 VNR provide information on their own inter-departmental / inter-sectoral coordination bodies.

Moreover, the Department for Cohesion Policies together with the Agency for Territorial Cohesion within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and MiTE started in 2018 a process of analysis and evaluation of the contribution of Cohesion Policy towards the NSDS for both the 2014-2020 results and the 2021-2027 expected outcomes. A matrix was designed to show the relations between the National Sustainability Objectives of the NSDS (with related indicators) and the Strategic policy objectives of the EU Cohesion Policy for 2021-2027 (including performance indicators). Systematising the interventions and indicators of the Cohesion Policy under NSDS objectives shows the potential integrated monitoring system using the NSDS as a reference to measure the sustainability of public policies.

Similarly, the National Action Plan on PCSD proposes the development of a Sustainability Dashboard that which combines a core set of statistical indicators – which has been set during the revision process of the NSDS – and performance indicators, cutting across the Italian policy formulation and evaluation system, in relation also to the EU Cohesion policy and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, among others.

The region of Sardinia developed an innovative approach to assess how local investment policies and programmes contribute to progress on all SDG targets. This SDG tool consists of weighted matrices that evaluate the direct and indirect contribution of each investment to the EU Cohesion Policy and 169 SDG targets. This type of sustainability tracking tool for investments assesses how spending is directed toward the SDGs and helps communicate with local actors on the sectors in which new investments will bring benefits for sustainable, inclusive and fair growth.



## JORDAN

### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The Higher Steering Committee – headed by the Prime Minister's Office – includes relevant Ministers (and when required, all the cabinet/council of ministers). Similarly, the National Higher National Committee for Sustainable Development – headed by the MOPIC – includes membership from relevant line ministries, Senate (upper house), House of Representatives (lower house), along with local communities. Since 2017, MOPIC works closely with all ministries and government institutions to align the SDGs with

sectoral policies, and it ensured that the most relevant SDG targets and indicators were selected and were linked to specific projects and budget allocations. At the local level, Greater Amman Municipality has a strong horizontal collaboration between different sectors in the municipality, based on several internal committees for each plans putting together different directorates. Indeed, actions under implementation are listed in each local plan highlighting intersectoral collaborations.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning**

Jordan attempted to develop strategies that fully reflect the multiple dimensions of development. Jordan has mainstreamed SDGs into sectoral strategies and action plans, such as Jordan's Green Growth National Action Plan 2021-2025, the National Social Protection Strategy 2019-2025, the National Food Security Strategy 2021-2030, and the National Strategy for Women in Jordan 2020-2025. In addition, several line ministries have formed technical working groups to review their sectoral and local plans and map them against the SDGs. Technical missions have also been conducted to support this process with relevant line ministries and the Department of Statistics, especially with regard to assessing the availability of indicators and identifying their categorization.

In the case of Amman Greater Municipality, three main strategies concur to pursue the SDGs at the local level: the Resilience strategy, approved in 2017; the Climate action plan, approved in 2019; and the Green City action plan, approved in 2021. They are strictly interrelated and fully aligned with national plans, thus contributing directly or indirectly to pursuing the SDGs.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation**

According to the 2022 VNR, implementation focus must be based on major strategic projects that will have a significant impact across sectors. The GIEP includes plans for projects and transformative programmes that will contribute to accelerating progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda. In addition, efforts must be directed towards strengthening the institutional structure and capacities required for achieving the SDGs, along with continuing to develop the national SDG database, to take into account sex, age and disability, while addressing duplication of efforts that might characterize the work undertaken in certain goals.

In Amman Greater Municipality, the Sustainable Development and Amman Resilience Unit follows-up the implementation of SDG-related plans and projects, trying to get funding and in collaboration with different sectors.

However, while inter-sectoral collaboration among institutions works well at higher levels and for planning stages, it is much more challenging at the technical level for implementation.

#### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting**

The 2022 VNR opted to report on all 17 SDGs – even as the HLPF focuses on specific ones – able to fully reflect the interlinkages and synergies across sustainable development dimensions and among goals. Moreover, key progress was highlighted across different goals that were worthwhile to showcase.

It should be noted that the methodology that was adopted in establishing the task forces of the Coordination Committee, ensuring representation of the Department of Statistics in each taskforce, and providing the task forces with the initial data available on the JDP, contributed indirectly to activating the eco-system, and enriching the JDP with accurate, sustainable and national data sources.

The data needed to steer policies correctly towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda are currently available to different ministries and other actors. However, it is complicated for local governments to access all the sources (still scattered between different entities) and thus dispose of the data, and thus it is still difficult to measure how their plans and strategies contribute to implementing the SDGs in an integrated manner.



## **PHILIPPINES**

### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Political commitment and institutional arrangements**

The Regional Development Council (RDC) is the highest planning and policy-making body at the regional level. Functioning as the counterpart of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board at the sub-national level, it is the primary institution that coordinates and sets the direction of all economic and social development efforts in regions. The regional body is composed of representatives from the provinces, the cities, and the representatives of agencies concerned with the SDGs.

The League of Cities (LCP), the League of Municipalities (LMP) and the League of Provinces of the Philippines (LPP) are the three associations of subnational governments in the Philippines, and they all have expressed their commitments to the SDGs, contributing to enhance horizontal integration within and between their respective members' governments.

In Naga, the Regional Development Council approved the creation of the Special Committee on the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure the attainment of the SDGs in the region by monitoring progress, reviewing SDG-related programs and policies, and submitting recommendations to address gaps in policies and programs. The council's technical working groups oversee the progress of the SDGs at the sectoral level and propose measures to address gaps in their attainment.

### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Planning**

At national level a sectoral, siloed approach to policymaking and planning still prevails. There is however a growing realization that integrated, area-based programs have a strong potential to address interlinkages and enhance collaboration among different levels and actors to achieve goals that transcend administrative and sectoral boundaries. This applies most notably in relation to environmental goals and related initiatives. For example, the Manila Bay Sustainable Development Master Plan, an inclusive master plan for the sustainable development of Manila Bay, focuses on Manila Bay and its immediate coastal zone, but also on the influence of the bay catchment area and its related administrative boundaries. It also considers the river systems contributing to discharge in the bay, bringing together different regions, provinces and municipalities, all sharing the same water basin.

Since the institutionalization of the provincial Results Matrices, cities and municipalities validate the provincial baseline and targets during the province-led dialogue and commitment setting. Provincial governors, municipal and city mayors, members of the local councils, and planning and development coordinators take part in the event, through which cities and municipalities are able to commit and align their plans, investment programs, and budget with the provincial targets.

### **HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Implementation**

The Public Investment Program 2017-2022 (PIP) accompanying the National Development Plan (PDP) is the primary medium-term investment instrument of the government containing the rolling list of priority programs, activities, and projects to be implemented by the government at all levels. These priority programs, activities, and projects are consistent with the long-term vision, SDG commitments, and targets provided in the PDP and its Results Matrices. Financial mechanisms for implementing the priority programs and projects are also indicated in the PIP, and can be activated through national government financing, or through partnership/s with the private sector as provided by the public-private partnership scheme. Financing can also come through official development assistance, which could either be in the form of grants and/or loans from development partners. This system, even though well-structured through a plurality of possible financing sources, can sometimes be an additional cause of duplication of efforts in the same area, due to a lack of coordination between different authorities and development partners.

A key driver of horizontal integration is intermunicipal cooperation, which allows local governments to work across jurisdictions to achieve complementarities and scale. Despite a prevailing top-down approach to SDGs localization by the national government, the associations of subnational governments are actively engaged in promoting horizontal coordination and cooperation between subnational governments' layers for the localization of the SDG.

Both the League of Cities and the League of Municipalities have been active in SDG localization through seminars, information sharing, conferences and workshops, building a reputation as drivers of SDG locali-

zation and membership empowerment, bridging local action and the fulfilment of global commitments on SDGs, as well as enabling the alignment and integration of international cooperation support. One additional example is the Metro Naga Development Council: a partnership between Naga and 16 neighbouring towns that tries to leverage their existing socio-economic relationships. The MNDC pools together the efforts and resources of local government units, the private sector and the national government agencies in the province focusing on projects and activities which address the immediate needs of the community and lay the groundwork for the long-term growth of the area.

#### HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION - Monitoring and reporting

The League of Cities of the Philippines, the official organization of all cities in the Philippines, has expressed its concrete commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its mission is to unite Philippine cities and capacitate leaders towards good local governance and sustainable development. As part of its activities to support SDGs localization in Philippines cities, the League has established a pilot program to capacitate cities in the conduct of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). The City Database Project, implemented from the beginning of 2018, is the League's flagship project and serves as a strategic entry point to collate and illustrate case studies of local best practices on SDG implementation in cities. The League developed an initial report on how cities are faring in the achievement of the SDGs, identifying matching priorities and showing how these were translated into different programs, activities, and projects, as well as enabling legislation frameworks.

## Stakeholder engagement

*Structured mechanisms to enable the full participation and cooperation among societal stakeholders in decision-making for SDG implementation at all levels*

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

Several countries, regions and cities have put forward multi-stakeholder partnerships in relation to the SDGs. Indeed, **engaging proactively with stakeholders and priority groups<sup>16</sup> in all phases of the policy cycle** helps to ensure a holistic perspective on sustainable development issues, enable the exchange of knowledge and expertise, give voice to diverse interests, identify potential trade-offs, raise public awareness and create ownership (OECD, 2021). Therefore, a coherent implementation of the SDGs requires mechanisms for dialogue and engagement whereby governments and key stakeholders can come together to identify challenges, set priorities, contribute to the development of laws and regulations, align policies and actions, and mobilise resources for sustainable development (Clark et al., 2019; OECD, 2021).

Besides citizens' awareness-raising campaigns, countries, regions and cities are engaging stakeholders in SDG implementation through diverse types of mechanisms that are mostly applied to the formulation and review of national/local SDG strategies and/or sectoral plans through a broad set of participatory tools. For this purpose, they are adapting existing institutions or creating new ones, for both dialogue and public scrutiny, as well as co-creation of public policies and services. There is no single blueprint, but rather a great variation in terms of the resulting engagement mechanisms. In all cases, interaction with representatives from civil society and priority groups, the private sector, academia, and individual citizens through formalized spaces and mechanisms (e.g., fora, councils) nurtures social creativity, active citizenship and collective empowerment (Frediani et al., 2019). In addition, it helps actors to navigate conflictual views and to generate trust in co-creation processes (UN, 2018).

The previously mentioned governance model of "transition spaces", currently in use in Flanders, **Belgium**, not only provides a model for horizontal integration, but also encourages and formalizes stakeholder engagement. In fact, experts, private sector representatives and civil society are part of the team that composes each transition space and engaged in co-creation processes with the transition managers from the public administration and the responsible ministers (OECD, 2020).

In many countries, youth engagement in the 2030 Agenda is formalized through youth councils. In **Norway**, youth councils have direct access to policymakers, to whom they can present their own proposals without any intermediary. In Viken, the youth council proposes solutions to help the county administration reach out to youth and inform them about the SDGs. In 2018, members of the Flemish Youth Council participated in the **Belgium** youth delegation (together with the Wallonia youth council) to the HLPF in New York, where they spoke about the involvement of the youth council in the VNR process. In **Iceland**, the Prime Minister's Office set up a youth council specifically for the SDGs in the Inter-Ministerial Working Group's work on the SDGs. Their statement to the government was published in the 2019 VNR of Iceland (OECD, 2020).

GOOD PRACTICES

<sup>16</sup> Paragraph 48 of the New Urban Agenda (UN, 2017) underlines the concept of participation by encouraging "collaborations among all relevant stakeholders, including local governments, the private sector and civil society, women, organizations representing youth, as well as those representing persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, professionals, academic institutions, trade unions, employers' organizations, migrant associations and cultural associations, in order to identify opportunities for urban economic development and identify and address existing and emerging challenges".



## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

A particularly relevant aspect in designing strategies in the transition towards sustainable development is linked to participatory mechanisms (Clark et al., 2019). Indeed, the localization of SDGs may take advantage of the proximity between subnational governments and local stakeholders, and simultaneously it may enhance their engagement and commitment to sustainable development (Granados and Noferini, 2019). Most countries are **involving multiple stakeholders in the process of identifying national and local priorities and developing strategies or action plans for SDG implementation**.

The normative value of participation, especially in the agenda setting and planning phase, is fundamental. However, not all the paths that led to the drafting of national and local plans can be considered fully participatory. There is an extreme variety of engagement mechanisms around sustainable development across countries, both at the systemic level in the overall course of SDG planning and in relation to sector issues. Institutional mechanisms and structures for engagement may involve different types of stakeholders (e.g., platforms for local businesses, youth councils), operate at various levels of government, and perform their functions at different stages of the policy cycle. Also, while some of these structures are directly led by governments, others are independently led by non-state actors. Some institutions have decision-making powers, while others serve as advisory bodies.

Theoretical arguments point to both benefits and drawbacks of engagement, but it is clear that the balance of costs and benefits can vary significantly, both across countries and sectors (UN, 2018). In this regard, promoting citizens' participation can be costly and time-consuming, as adopting inclusion tools could lead to challenges in the elaboration of the local strategy: participatory governance processes require much time to discuss the vast range of goals related to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In addition, many stakeholders do have expertise in their sectors but could lack the knowledge and expertise needed to identify multiple linkages between goals and targets in a balanced and integrated manner.

The City of Mannheim, **Germany**, offers a very good example of citizen participation in the formulation of its vision and the decision of the city's priorities. Mannheim has actively involved its population in framing the vision statement through a participatory approach that directly involved more than 2500 citizens in the 50 workshops that were carried out, while 10000 contributed via opinion polls. The vision subsequently served as the foundation for Mannheim's budget planning in March 2019 (OECD, 2020).

Since 2015, the city of New York, **USA**, elaborated the 'OneNYC' master plan, an ambitious and comprehensive sustainability agenda. The vision and priorities that makeup OneNYC 2050 were defined by engaging more than 16,000 citizens. Residents from every neighbourhood attended community forums, took public surveys, attended advisory boards and working group meetings, community meetings, and small group discussions with the aim of analysing what works – and what doesn't – in New York and what they want for the city in the future (ARCO, 2020).

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

Participation of all stakeholders and priority groups is key when it comes to SDGs implementation (Clark et al., 2019). Besides the overarching governance of the sustainable development strategies and the role of public authorities, central attention has to be devoted to **multi-actor responsibilities from a whole-of-society perspective**, as emphasized by the 2030 Agenda itself and the global debate on its implementation. Indeed, mobilization around specific local issues, which are perceived as closer to everyday life, can become an opportunity for citizens, businesses, and community-based organizations to join efforts and work together in formal and informal groups (Narang-Suri et al., 2021). Engaging with stakeholders to raise public awareness and mobilise support for sustainable development and government commitments, through campaigns, policy dialogue, capacity building, and information sharing, is equally important and diffused.

In this regard, the analysis of real-world practices span from those who generally highlight that organizations, groups, and individuals across all sectors had the opportunity to debate the issues, support and inform a collective manifesto, and should be involved and engaged in accelerating efforts, to those specifying more precisely the role and responsibilities of both leading and supporting organizations for each objective (ARCO, 2020). In other words, it is fundamental to explore to what extent the implementation of SDG strategies at all levels effectively embraces a whole-of-society approach, meaning that all social, economic, and cultural agents are active and responsible for achieving goals and targets, and more generally join forces together to realise the vision underlying each strategy.

The City of Kitakyushu, **Japan**, has a very long tradition of civil society engagement to move forward with the implementation of local policies and actions, dating back to the 1960s when a group of women's associations came together to demand stricter regulation for the city's heavy industries' pollution. Their action led to partnerships between the local government, civil society, and the industries that eventually helped to clean up the skies and the sea surrounding the city. Building up on this tradition, the city has currently set up a Kitakyushu City SDGs Council. The council, consisting of eight experts from environmental, economic, and social fields, is expected to provide advice on the actions and directions regarding the implementation of the SDGs through the engagement of various stakeholders. At the same time, the Kitakyushu SDG Club, where anyone in the city can participate, quickly gained over 800 members (OECD, 2020).

Similarly, the North-Rhine Westphalia state in **Germany** created the LAG21 association, an umbrella organization that functions as a universal and interdisciplinary intermediary for sustainability, offering different support for different players: it does not only include public actors, but also NGOs from the region. It is also closely linked to national ministries and other actors, such as the Federal-Länder working group, the council of sustainable development, the inter-ministerial working group, and cities through national networks (European Union, 2019).

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

**SDG monitoring frameworks and review processes** (VNRs/VSRs/VLRs) around the world are increasingly designed to be **inclusive** and provide for **multi-stakeholder participation** from local through to national level, **enhancing citizens' engagement and commitment to sustainable development and assessing collective efforts**.

Indeed, the possibility to express opinions and share information on SDG performances at the local level (nowadays also through data sharing and feedback mechanisms as part of a digital governance approach) is a learning experience for many individuals and one that empowers them to become active citizens in all aspects of their personal and social life. Engaging and empowering local communities (Clark et al., 2019) in monitoring systems, as well as in the elaboration of VNRs and VLRs, contributes to bringing local communities, minorities, and vulnerable groups closer to decision making, while contributing to making such civic engagement systemic (Narang-Suri et al., 2021). Moreover, including in the monitoring system also actions and initiatives implemented by actors and stakeholders in other sectors is an important practice, to avoid monitoring only public policies and keep the whole-of-society committed and accountable.

Good practices include civic engagement strategies that are proactive and well-thought-through, providing space for voice to priority groups and creating systemic conditions for participation through a continuous process, rather than in an ad-hoc/ one-off manner.

For example, **Colombia** has an open framework of cooperation between the National Department of Planning (Departamento Nacional de Planeación), civil society, and the municipalities involved in the civil society network “Cities How Are We Doing”. The capital Bogotá voluntarily joined this capacity-building process since its onset while working on its VLR, alongside Medellín and Manizales. By working on an improved approach to official SDG indicators, the priorities of civil society, non-governmental and cooperation actors have been included and aligned with the SDGs. Furthermore, the National Department of Planning and UNDP have developed an SDG Corporate Tracker to promote implementation analysis even in the private sector (UCLG, 2021).

In **Spain**, in the framework of the Barcelona Metropolitan Strategic Plan (Pla Estratègic Metropolità de Barcelona – PEMB) an initiative was launched to develop a set of indicators to measure the achievement of the SDGs in the municipalities of the Province of Barcelona, together with the Barcelona Provincial Council. A working group was created, bringing together different actors, including local governments, research centres, international institutions, third-sector organizations, and private companies, confronted through face-to-face and online sessions in a specific platform, to develop 109 indicators and local information systems in the territory within the framework of the SDGs. Additionally, 69 complementary indicators were suggested by local actors, although not required by the UN, since considered useful to measure the sustainable development of the territory (UCLG, 2019).

## Case studies



### ARGENTINA

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The CNCPS cooperates with the provinces through the Social Participation Forum for the territorial implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. The Forum serves as a national space for dialogue and participation of civil society actors in their different expressions and from different levels, and links them with provincial and municipal SDG focal points, representatives of the UN system, representatives of the legislative system, and the private sector, to inform policymaking and promote joint initiatives. The Forum elaborates a yearly action plan for contributing to the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

Social participation forums are also promoted at the subnational level. In 2021, more than 25 Forums were organized in the Province of Buenos Aires; others were organized in the Provinces of Chaco, Misiones and San Juan. The province of Córdoba integrates since 2018 the Córdoba SDGs Forum, a space promoted by the Córdoba Regional Faculty of the National Technological University to gather and promote dialogue between companies, non-profit organizations, governments and decision-makers. As an extension of the Córdoba SDGs Forum, a Latin America SDG network was formed in 2020 and includes today representatives from 14 countries in the region. The Province of Córdoba also established its Open Government Roundtable, composed of civil society organizations and representatives from academia, to contribute to its Open Management Portal.

Other federal initiatives aimed at promoting broad stakeholders’ engagement include the Global Pact Network and SDGs business area, which has a function to articulate with the business sector in promoting the SDGs as a reference for the management of companies.

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

In 2016, CSOs have been formally invited by the president of the CNCPS to join six thematic commissions active alongside the National Interinstitutional Commission. Similarly, Provinces work with actors from the private, not-for-profit, and academic sectors to provide a reality check on the priorities selected by the government and to assess the interconnectedness across social, economic and environmental SDGs in their territories. The Social Participation Forum elaborates a yearly action plan for contributing to the territorialization of 2030 Agenda at the local level. The stakeholders’ engagement process associated with multi-level governance for the territorialization of the SDGs led to the co-creation of a policy reform agenda, including different axis (e.g., a new economic/productive matrix).

In the Province of Córdoba, a thorough collaborative territorialization process takes place with the private

sector, academia, and civil society to inform the definition of priority goals and targets for SDGs implementation. A fully integrated and participatory multi-stakeholder process allows them to connect policy priorities and SDG clusters, identify and engage relevant actors and interest groups, align the provincial budget with target sets, and mobilise partners in support of the implementation of SDG-oriented policies. Furthermore, civil society representatives, government, academia, and the private sector developed a matrix that allows to identify synergies across the SDGs in the Province and to develop strategies to adapt the 2030 Agenda to the provincial context. Finally, Córdoba is advancing in another agreement with the OECD to implement 5 strategic axes and policy actions through the SDGs framework, with the engagement of the relevant provincial ministries and non-governmental actors, including the private sector, civil society and academia.

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

The relation and dialogue with the private sector are leading to concrete and ad-hoc measures to operationalize support and synergies, including for example the introduction of incentives for investments in renewable energies, the partnership between the provincial government and private companies in the training and placement of workers. The institutionalization of multistakeholder engagement is further reflected in the composition of different public agencies and organisms (like the Agency for innovation, the Agency for export promotion and business internationalization, the Agency for connectivity) that incorporate a mix of public and private actors alongside universities in their executive boards.

In the Province of Córdoba, a full-fledged multi-stakeholder process is run over a year to orient and inform the SDGs territorialization process. This entails working with representatives of the different interest groups (including institutions and implementing agencies, civil society, academia, and the private sector) to identify priorities, select and adapt targets, and activate synergies in the implementation of different initiatives and projects. The process includes information and sensitization sessions, workshops for structured dialogue in the different thematic areas, in parallel with and as input to the horizontal and intersectoral planning process. The Open Government Roundtable composed of civil society representatives and universities, complements the process and enhances transparency and accountability through the same principles of cross-sectoral integration and multi-actor participation. The Open Management Portal is considered a key communication tool to promote provincial activities on the 2030 Agenda and to engage with a wide range of territorial stakeholders and the public. Finally, Córdoba is advancing in another agreement with the OECD to implement 5 strategic axes and policy actions through the SDGs framework, with the engagement of the relevant provincial ministries and non-governmental actors, including the private sector, civil society and academia.

#### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

In the Province of Córdoba, the participatory planning process for the definition of SDGs policy priorities and targets are reflected through an open government approach in the reporting process. The different groups of actors consulted for the elaboration of the plans are equally involved through structured consultation mechanisms in the verification of activities and results in the different policy areas. The mentioned Open Management Portal constitutes valid support to organize and display the information for review in an accessible and transparent manner.

The Province of Córdoba released its first VLR in 2022. This report seeks to show the work of the Province for more than six years aimed at building a solid base of collaborative territorialization processes that would allow the institutionalisation of the 2030 Agenda at the governmental level, in collaboration with the private sector, academia and civil society. This voluntary report is the result of a process of an horizontal inter-ministerial coordination and a multi-stakeholder approach that allowed prioritizing, agreeing and sharing progress and challenges for the localization of the SDGs.



## GHANA

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

The SDGs Implementation Coordinating Committee is intended to streamline and strengthen cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, through the involvement of the SDG Philanthropy Platform and civil society organizations, among others.

The SDG Technical Committee is made up of the SDG focal persons of the MMDAs and representatives of civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Moreover, the Civil Society Organizations Platform on SDGs was set up to ensure coordination and partnerships on SDGs within the CSOs space. The Platform has a membership of more than 300 local and international CSOs clustered into 17 sub-platforms aligned to each of the 17 goals. There is also a youth-focus sub-platform addressing youth-related concerns across the goals.

CSOs are important focal points for an efficient stakeholder engagement: they enable stakeholder analysis and support, especially district-level CSO chapters, which are sub-platforms at the local level and work with grassroots groups, individuals, and districts.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

At the city level, the Accra Metropolitan Assembly prepares its medium-term development plan through an extended participatory and inclusive process that involves a wide range of stakeholders including traditional authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector, persons with disabilities and youth groups. This process followed the planning guidelines issued by the NDPC and it ensured local ownership before the plan was presented to the General Assembly for endorsement and approval.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

In Ghana, at different levels, policymaking, planning, and review and reporting processes are largely based on extensive multi-actor consultations and participatory processes. Yet, in relation to some key identified challenges in SDGs implementation, there is a recognized need (and opportunity) to strengthen and further structure strategic partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations. A stronger coordination system is necessary to trigger collaborative actions that in turn allow untapping investment opportunities for SDGs at both national and communities level, attracting financial resources and engaging capacities and technologies for innovative solutions. There is also a strong need and potential to enhance the engagement and collaboration with the private sector in the identification and joint implementation of strategic initiatives for SDGs.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

Both VNR in 2019 and 2022 were conducted through open, inclusive, and multi-stakeholder processes with the active participation of a wide range of state and non-state actors at both national and sub-national levels. The first round of mostly virtual consultations focused on the institutional framework and the review process, including the selection of indicators and a view of the mainstreaming of the SDGs into national development policies and frameworks. The second round of consultations allowed them to present the draft report to various stakeholders for their input and validation. This included all relevant ministries departments and agencies, members of parliament, as well as civil society organizations, traditional authorities, private sector and business groups, academia, youth and women groups, and development partners.

The extensive consultative process for the VNR elaboration provided an opportunity to leverage data from key stakeholders. Among others, a CSOs' platform on SDGs, as well as the UN system in Ghana provided technical support and relevant materials on the SDGs indicators. A case study template on innovative interventions was distributed to all consulted stakeholders.

To improve the data production and management system, following the first VNR, the Ghana Statistical Service conducted a review of data availability for SDG indicators production, resulting in the creation of a National Data Roadmap, to be implemented through a multi-stakeholder advisory committee.

At the city level, in Accra, the VLR was equally based on an extensive multi-stakeholder consultation process, including fishermen groups, traders, drivers, traditional authorities, persons with disabilities, and school children.



## ITALY

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

Since 2019, the National Forum for Sustainable Development (NFSD) has proven a powerful multi-stakeholder tool for dialogue with civil society organizations and other societal stakeholders. It is an open-membership forum ensuring stakeholders' and experts' active participation in decision-making processes on sustainable development in Italy. About 200 CSOs and other stakeholders are represented in the NFSD and the possibility to enrol remains open. The NFSD plays a key role in the NSDS implementation and in the three-year revision process (as per Article 3 of Law No. 221/2015). The 2022 NSDS and the NAP PCSD allowed the NFSD to become a stable and incremental platform of dialogue between institutions, civil society and non-state actors, as well as with the National Council on Development Cooperation (CNCS) to promote integration and coherence among the internal and external dimensions of the policies. The Forum is autonomously managed by its member organizations, who animate 6 Working Groups (that focus on thematic aspects directly related to the NSDS: Sustainability culture, People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Youth). Finally, the NFSD links with the territorial fora to contribute to the definition and implementation of a strategic vision shared at different levels of government, paving the way also for collaboration practices involving all different institutions, civil society, and non-State actors.

At the local level, stakeholder engagement has been even stronger, as local actors in Italy (such as NGOs, research centres and entrepreneurs) are used to advocate and participate in policy-making processes. Moreover, almost all regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan cities included actions for active territorial stakeholder engagement in their collaboration agreement with MiTE. In 15 regions and 4 metropolitan cities, local fora for sustainable development have been created, involving civil society organizations, private sector actors, universities and research centres, municipalities and their associations/unions. These led to a wide variety of practices (e.g., the Protocol for Sustainable Development in Lombardia and Veneto, the Centres on Sustainability Education in Liguria, and thematic working groups in Lazio). Even in contexts with a weaker tradition in terms of stakeholder engagement (e.g., in Messina and Reggio Calabria), a bottom-up movement led to the creation of a civic eco-system of local actors engaged in priority-setting for SDG localization.

In the case of the Emilia-Romagna region, the regional forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was set up to engage stakeholders and citizens to reach SDG targets, involving all active thematic forums across the region and widening it to new realities (e.g., the Youth Forum) as a dynamic and permanent platform for stakeholder engagement and policy dialogue. Moreover, in line with the regional law on participation, the regional government is assigning funds to municipalities to enable local participatory processes on the 2030 Agenda.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

The MiTE has constituted the NFSD as a space for dialogue and facilitates CSOs involvement in the decision-making process for the NSDS. In this way, the MiTE has been leading an extensive participatory process involving all relevant central, sub-national administrations, civil society, and other stakeholders to co-build the revised 2022 NSDS and an Action Plan for PCSD to be attached to the former. For instance, the NFSD elaborated a Position Paper to provide recommendations for the implementation of the revised NSDS in the coming years. CSOs, NGOs and private sector organizations are also involved by the CNCS through specific working groups from the point of view of the external application of the 2030 Agenda.

As part of such a stakeholder engagement mechanism, the National Conference for Sustainable Development 2022 represented the closing event of the review process of the National Sustainable Development Strategy and the moment to relaunch new and concrete projects with central administrations, territories, and civil society. It precedes the Coopera Conference organized by the system of development cooperation actors (CNCS and MAECI), being this concomitance the result of an important work of in-depth analysis and systematization of the internal and external dimension of the 2030 Agenda and marking a very important political step, as also recently recognized in the May Resolution of the CNCS.

In the case of the Emilia-Romagna region, already the approval of the Pact for Work and its subsequent Pact for Work and Climate were signed by a multitude of local stakeholders that shaped their design and formally committed their strategies, actions, and resources to their implementation. On the same line, the regional forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development involved local actors to design the regional strategy for sustainable development and organized participatory dissemination activities and awareness-raising campaigns.



### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

Stakeholders participating in the NFSD accompany the implementation of the NSDS in various ways. For instance, with a view to an integrated process aimed at strengthening the NFSD in its internal dimension (multistakeholder platform), a new pilot project was launched to promote the creation of a Forum working space on the ParteciPA open-source platform, in collaboration with the Department of Public Function of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. It fosters innovative forms of stakeholder engagement as practices of significant national interest in the framework of public participation for sustainable development. Such initiative is anchored within the Fifth National Action Plan for Open Government 2022-2023, in the broader framework of the Open Government Partnership at the national level.

Another relevant participatory practice is Venice City Solutions 2030 – promoted by AICCRE, in partnership with UN-Habitat, UNDP and others – which represents a living laboratory dedicated to localization strategy, focused especially on advocacy, knowledge production, and learning. It consists of a venue to develop and showcase innovative strategies; synthesize and capitalize on other Local4Action HUBs; propose tools to enhance local action to achieve the SDGs.

Local fora have been contributing to disseminating awareness and spurring local initiatives around the 2030 Agenda, making their implementing role more visible and keeping LRGs accountable.

In the case of Emilia-Romagna, about 40 public officials and civil servants involved in the regional coordination body for sustainable development are being trained on how to enable co-creation processes and contribute to consolidating a participatory community on sustainable development at the local level.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

Engagement and participation are one of the three thematic insights of the 2022 VNR, describing the work carried out and mechanisms set into place to ensure an open participatory process in implementing the SDGs at the national and local levels. Through the ad hoc drafting group, composed of stakeholders within the NFSD, non-State actors involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda contributed to the VNR with a position paper that describes the work done and provides recommendations for the steps ahead.

Moreover, a central pillar of this VNR is "Participation and promotion of a sustainability culture", which includes territorial fora for sustainable development as a relevant monitoring and accountability tool. These spaces for participation and dialogue are crucial for the implementation, follow up, and review of the 2030 Agenda at the local level, as they ensure a more comprehensive picture within the VNR/VLR processes, both in progress assessment and in designing the way forward.

For instance, the preparation of the VLR for the Metropolitan City of Florence was grounded on a strong participatory process, including interviews with 80 key informants related to the 5Ps; 5 Meetings with majors and civil servants of the 41 municipalities in the metropolitan area; online surveys to citizens and youth; 4 Thematic focus groups (Sustainability Labs) with 100 relevant stakeholders; 1 Focus group/event with more than 50 young citizens (Next Generation Lab); 20 video-spots on sustainability by local actors.



## JORDAN

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

Jordan's efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda are enabled by strong partnerships with the private sector, CSOs, academia and the international community. The MOPIC prepared a stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure the widest participation from all Major Groups and Organizations (MGOs) in the SDG implementation and VNR preparation. The Higher Steering Committee – headed by the Prime Minister's Office and in charge of endorsing long-term plans – includes not only relevant Ministers, but also private sector organizations and CSOs. Similarly, the National Higher National Committee for Sustainable Development – headed by the MOPIC – leads planning and roadmap processes involving private sector organizations, CSOs, and representatives of women and youth. This membership underscores the importance of civil

society participation in policymaking and brings policymakers closer to the needs of the most vulnerable. Upon the direction of the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development, 16 task forces have been established, with a membership that included all parties relevant to achieving the goals from ministries and government entities, the private sector, CSOs, UN organizations and other international institutions. Over the past years, there were over 130 entities involved as members of the task forces. In Greater Amman Municipality, community and stakeholder engagement represents a challenge. Despite having a public engagement plan with the municipal communication department, most citizens do not know the meaning of the SDGs and how they affect their lives.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

Jordan's Higher National Steering Committee provides overall strategic guidance for the implementation of the SDGs including consultations with stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement strategy to ensure the widest participation from all MGOs in the SDG implementation and VNR preparation proposes a variety of fora including taskforce meetings, workshops, focus groups, and debates as well as a number of outreach tools like printed materials, social media engagement, and others. The strategy also took into account challenges to the meaningful participation of all stakeholders, namely: difficulties reaching the most marginalized, the tendency to involve larger NGOs rather than smaller, community-based organizations and individuals and time constraints. Moreover, the first EDP for 2016-2019 was designed in partnership with all Major Groups and Organizations as essential partners in the development process, with the support of a coordination committee and 16 task forces, with representation from relevant public and private sector establishments, CSOs, academia, women and youth representatives. Similarly, the GIEP for 2021-2024 took into account the participation of the private sector and CSOs and the complementarity of their roles. However, there are still limited examples of Public-Private Partnerships at local level, to foster a strong engagement of the private sector in implementing and financing SDG-related actions.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

The EDP 2016-2019 covered 26 development sectors, and identifies the roles of 123 partners (public, private, CSOs, and others) in carrying out 2,126 projects. Moreover, NGOs and CSOs have been heavily engaged in strengthening ownership of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs following its adoption, through many awareness-raising workshops and consultations held around different themes to discuss their role. The task forces established during the drafting of the 2022 VNR enhanced the role of the private sector, CSOs, UN organizations and other international institutions to implement the 2030 Agenda in Jordan. In Greater Amman Municipality, during the preparation of the Green City Action Plan, a small pilot initiative of community engagement was conducted deploying several tools: an online survey to the general public, online sessions with directorates representatives; university students involved as Green Ambassadors, etc. Its success is very promising to tackle the challenge of community and stakeholder engagement that is often hampering implementation phases.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

To elaborate the 2022 VNR, MOPIC adopted a mechanism through which all relevant stakeholders were engaged and included in the drafting process. To this end, the 16 task forces were established, with a membership that included all parties relevant to achieving the goals including the private sector, CSOs, UN organizations, and other international institutions. Stakeholders were encouraged to review the SDG targets and indicators, in addition to their links with national and sectoral strategies, to determine the extent of achievement made and to compare them with the latest available data. Academia and representatives of local communities, unions and youth were included in the process. Moreover, in order to hold local consultations and engage entities at the local level across the Kingdom's governorates, a national workshop was organized, involving the governorates and municipalities councils, the heads of committees in Parliament, at both the House of Representatives and Senate, and representatives from academia and CSOs. Finally, in order to ensure discussions at the national level, a special platform was announced in order to allow civil society to present comments on the report. The task forces will be permanent to strengthen the capacity to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an ongoing manner.



## PHILIPPINES

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Political commitment and institutional arrangements

AmBisyon Natin 2040, outlines the country's long-term vision and collective aspiration of eradicating poverty and ensuring a strongly rooted, comfortable, and secure life for all Filipinos. AmBisyon Natin 2040 is the result of a long-term participatory and multi-stakeholders visioning processes, which led to strategic options articulated by citizens with the guidance of an Advisory Committee composed of government, private sector, academia, and civil society representatives. Furthermore, the NEDA Sub-Committee on the SDGs serves as a regular and institutionalized space for engagement among government, the private sector, civil society, academia, media, trade, and labour unions, among others. The committee also promotes pledging sessions where non-government and private sector organizations can materialize their commitment and identify specific areas where they can contribute.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Planning

The National Development Plan AmBisyon Natin 2040 was formulated in consultation with various government and civil society stakeholders. The process began in 2015 and involved more than 300 citizens, who participated in focus group discussions, and close to 10,000 who answered the national survey. The advisory committee that guided the formulation of the plan was composed of representatives from the government, academia, civil society, and the private sector.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Implementation

The League of Cities' strong partnerships with development organizations in the implementation of projects, all anchored on the principles of the New Urban Agenda, have enabled cities to further enhance efforts and strategies to address local urban development challenges, through the active engagement of a diversity of stakeholders. For example, the involvement of development organization significantly addresses the challenges in SDG implementation, particularly those linked to financial resource limitations. In the city of Naga, resulting from a long tradition of citizen awareness and participation, the institutionalization of stakeholder engagement processes is a source of pride and a good practice that served as the basis for replication in other cities. In 1996, the Naga City People's Council was established as a federation of civil society organizations. The structured partnership between the Council and the city government provides a fundamental basis for city level planning, its consistent alignment with the budgeting process, and the promotion of horizontal synergies in implementation. To date, Naga City People's Council is composed of 90 members classified into thirteen sectors namely: the Urban Poor, Youth and Children, Business, Labor, Senior Citizen, Women, Persons with Disabilities, Peasant, Transport, Barangay People's Council, Education, Civic, Professionals and Enthusiasts, and NGO sectors. The Board of Directors, which is the representative of the thirteen sectors, is the highest policymaking body of the council.

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT - Monitoring and reporting

In conducting the 2019 VNR, the Philippines undertook several consultation workshops to gain feedback from stakeholders and to engage and renew commitments for cooperation towards the achievement of the goals. Therefore, the VNR process was utilized as an opportunity to connect with different stakeholders representing different sectors and geographic regions. Moreover, the SDG Website aims to provide an online platform to engage different stakeholders on the SDGs and to serve as a tool for policy coordination.

Another relevant tool to localize the SDGs is the institutionalization of the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) at the local level. The CBMS is an organized poverty-profiling system to collect, process, and validate local disaggregated data for development planning and program implementation and monitoring at the community level, further filling in the data gaps at the national level. It complements the data of the PSA. Local governments implement it as input to their prioritization of poverty alleviation programs. As a monitoring tool, the CBMS can generate 39 SDG indicators. In addition, the CBMS further reinforces the local databases of local governments, thus providing the necessary local indicators.

Furthermore, some cities have advocated for a more transparent and participatory local budgeting process. Naga enacted the "People's Budget Ordinance of Naga City" to ensure that public funds are allocated and spent only for public purposes or use and are truly responsive to the needs of their constituents. The city then adopted the SDGs to serve not only as a measure of their annual performance, but also as a guide in their governance process and vision for local development. The Naga City People's Council, one of the most active stakeholders of the city, played a vital role in the adoption of the said budget ordinance.

# 07

## Qualifying elements and good practices from the case-studies

The in-depth analysis of MLG processes and mechanisms in Argentina, Ghana, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines has so far illustrated the relevance of their experiences as 'living labs' of MLG for SDG localization. In a **learning-by-comparing** approach, it appears necessary to summarize here the **main lessons learnt in terms of qualifying elements and good practices from each country**, paving the way for more general insights and lessons learnt in the next chapter.



## ARGENTINA

A national political commitment for SDG implementation – descending from a recently renewed transversal policy focus on social inclusion and people-centred development priorities – is reflected in the introduction of an inter-ministerial and intersectoral approach based on the participation of the different relevant organisms from the national public administration.

Vertical articulation and the introduction of a comprehensive governance framework for SDG localization is made operational, in particular, at the intermediate (i.e., provincial) level, where the incorporation of Provinces in the SDG implementation process starts with ad-hoc cooperation agreements with the national coordinating bodies.

Several provincial governments have built a solid foundation to institutionalize the planning and implementation of the SDGs in connection with its cross-cutting policy priority, as the basis for vertical integration and alignment with national policy priorities and sectoral budgets allocations. The horizontal, multi-sector integration of policies and programs constitutes one of the defining features of the SDG 'adaptation' and localization strategy. Moreover, a fully integrated and participatory multi-stakeholder territorialization process takes place with the private sector, academia and civil society to inform the definition of priority goals and targets for SDG implementation.

The articulation of the national level with municipalities is more critical. A 'structural' engagement of local governments in dialogue with higher levels remains limited, in the absence of a national strategic plan and a common agenda for SDG localization. Therefore, the key challenge remains the design of a fully vertically integrated policymaking and planning framework, enabling the alignment and articulation of public policies and resources for SDG implementation across levels, in which all LRGs can actively participate, also through their representative associations.

### Good practices for effective MLG systems

- Set-up of a formal multilevel governance arrangement for SDG localization with the leading role assigned to the most experienced institution previously responsible at national level for the Millennium Development Goals;
- Strong engagement and dense institutional infrastructure for SDG implementation at the intermediary level since the early adoption of the 2030 Agenda as a national framework, reflecting the Federal nature of the Argentinian state;
- Good capacity in terms of monitoring and assessing progress in the implementation of the SDGs thanks to both the leading role played by the national coordinating body and the proactive attitude of LRGs and their associations, with numerous voluntary reports drawn up and solid mechanisms to channel the wide and substantive engagement of a diversity of public, private, and civil society actors.







## GHANA

Ghana has taken advantage of its decentralized planning system to introduce a well-structured multilevel governance architecture in support to SDG localization. As expression of strong political commitment, all government bodies at different levels are requested to ensure provisions on relevant aspects and dimensions of the SDGs, and consequently report. The coordination architecture – including vertical and horizontal/cross-sectorial articulation mechanisms – is highly reckoned and ensures a good degree of alignment and coherence of policies, plans and budgets for the SDGs. Ghana equally stands out for actively creating institutions and mechanisms for SDG review and implementation, as well as championing the SDGs ahead of presenting its first VNR to the 2019 HLPF. In 2020, the city of Accra realised its VLR, representing so far a unique experience in the country and one of the few in Africa, through a participatory process engaging central and local governments' agencies and civil society organizations.

At both the national and city levels, however, key challenges to effective implementation persist, in relation to data availability and management; local capacities to design and implement multi-sectorial initiatives to leverage interlinkages among the SDGs; substantial financing gaps. This requires a further development and consolidation of horizontally coordinated implementation systems and capacities, as well as their articulation across levels, with particular attention to the intermediate governance layer.

### Good practices for effective MLG systems

- A thorough MLG structure reflecting the country's decentralization framework, through the establishment of different inter-ministerial, inter-departmental and inter-sectoral bodies at different levels, to ensure coordination of efforts towards SDG implementation;
- Set-up of a dedicated Platform (and sub-platforms) for engagement with Civil Society Organizations, acting also as focal points to interact with local governments and stakeholders.
- A 'pioneer' VLR process in the capital city constituting a blueprint for replication and the basis for a structured interaction between national and local institutions, and CSOs.
- Use of the VNR to assess data availability and to create a National Data Roadmap.



## ITALY

Effective inter-governmental coordination mechanisms for SDG planning and implementation across the country have been devised in Italy, building on the Italian Constitution and legislation that embrace the requirements of autonomy and decentralization. Subnational engagement, horizontal integration and stakeholder participation in the context of the National Sustainable Development Strategy are formally enshrined in the national law, which recommends and allows regional and local authorities, policy departments and societal actors at all levels to take part in the design, implementation and revision of the strategy according to their specific institutional mandates and competencies. This is further enhanced by the newly released National Action Plan for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, which aims at strengthening the system of institutional relations (vertical and horizontal), as well as multi-actor participation, by also launching a new path for integrated decision-making processes.

Moreover, vertical integration for SDG localization in Italy has been grounded on the creation of a 'community of intentions and practice' (a network of people, civil servants, and experts, based on collaboration, debate and dialogue, operating within the individual administrations involved) among all regions, autonomous provinces and metropolitan cities. The support provided by the Ministry of Ecological Transition (i.e., funding for planning processes and pilot actions, round-tables, and capacity-building activities) and associations of LRGs represents a crucial triggering and motivating factor to mainstream and localize the SDGs in their territories.



Yet, the very local level – i.e., provinces and municipalities – is not fully involved so far in the MGL system for SDG localization, notwithstanding the proactive attitude of several municipalities and local stakeholders. Moreover, financing the implementation of regional, metropolitan and local strategies remains a challenge for all Italian LRGs, in order to ultimately move from a prevailing focus on awareness-raising and capacity-building to the actual achievement of SDG-related targets.

### Good practices for effective MLG systems

- Set-up of a formal multilevel governance arrangement for SDG localization enshrined in the NSDS, giving full implementation to the national law.
- Combination of funding (for planning processes and pilot actions), capacity-building activities, statistical improvement and long-lasting participatory mechanisms to enable and support LRGs in SDG planning and implementation.
- Informal and day-by-day support activities to create and tie together a community of intentions, sharing knowledge, practice and ideas on SDG localization.
- Engagement in collaboration with supra-national and international organizations (e.g., the European Commission, the OECD, UN-Habitat) for the two-fold objective of improving multilevel governance mechanisms for SDG localization and engaging in peer-to-peer learning initiatives across the world.



## JORDAN

Jordan's governance framework for SDG localization is truly shaped by a series of decentralization reforms implemented in recent years, including the Municipalities Act, the Decentralization Act and the Local Administration Law. Building on these reforms, national and local authorities, policy departments and societal actors at all levels across the country are involved in the strategic design, planning, implementation and review of the national SDG localization strategy.

In particular, vertical integration for SDG localization in Jordan is enhanced by the involvement of elected municipalities and governorates councils in the Coordination Committee and in various task forces set up by the Higher National Committee on Sustainable Development.



Local authorities are prone to adopt thematic plans inspired by national planning, currently defined in the Government's Indicative Executive Programme 2021-2024, which follows the "Jordan 2025" strategy and the 2030 Agenda. This is complemented by inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms for horizontal integration, allowing all ministries and government institutions to align the SDGs with sectoral policies, along with the structural involvement of the private sector, CSOs, and representatives of women and youth (through dedicated task forces) in formal national mechanisms for SDG implementation, as well as in the VNR preparation process.

All in all, SDG localization has made significant progress due to local and regional governments' involvement in national coordination mechanisms, in line the new decentralization. However, relevant challenges remain for local authorities in implementing the actions outlined in the adopted plans, due to limited technical, human and financial capacities, thus requiring respectively new technological solutions, constant HR training, and additional budget sources to fully finance SDG-related plans.

#### ***Good practices for effective MLG systems***

- Set-up of a formally structured multilevel governance system for SDG localization that includes all institutional and non-institutional actors at national and local levels.
- Centrality of the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with a significant role in terms of horizontal integration (thus coordinating ministries and sectors), and stakeholder engagement.
- Strong linkages between Jordan SDG Implementation Roadmap and the official national development planning – i.e., currently the Government's Indicative Executive Programme 2021-2024 (GIEP) – that is reflected also at the local level.
- Good coordination between the national level and the capital city, mainly concerning vertical alignment of sustainable development plans and integrated approach to SDG implementation.



## PHILIPPINES

The MLG governance framework presiding to SDG localization processes in the Philippines consists of a very dense and structured system, including a comprehensive set of mandatory regulations, tools and incentive measures directed at orienting and guiding the action of local governments and its alignment with the national vision and policy priorities.

Considering the scope and complexity of the country decentralization framework, this leads to variable outcomes, depending on the level of government and related settings and capacities. This entails, in some cases, the overlapping and duplication of mandates in the same SDG-related areas, and often a limited LRGs' awareness and capacity to engage and align with SDG priorities.

In general terms, a top-down, 'normative' approach based on standard procedures and reporting mechanisms seems to prevail over a more open-ended and bottom-up approach. Nevertheless, intermunicipal cooperation in the country acts as a key driver for vertical and horizontal integration, allowing local governments to work across jurisdictions to achieve complementarities and scale through information flows, capacity-building, collaboration, and partnerships.

#### ***Good practices for effective MLG systems***

- Strong role and capacity of the national government in orienting and regulating SDG planning and implementation frameworks with ad-hoc provisions, mechanisms and tools.
- Strong commitment and proactive role of the main associations of local and regional governments in supporting their members' mobilisation and capacity for SDG localization.
- Provision of a formalized forum for periodic interaction between the public and business sectors, civil society, academia, the media, trade and labour unions, non-government and for-profit groups.
- Use of the VNR as a communication tool among stakeholders and to reaffirm commitments of the parties involved in SDG implementation processes.

# 08

## Lessons learnt and action-oriented recommendations

Combining the main qualifying elements for each case study with the systematization of a more comprehensive set of good practices worldwide makes it possible to offer some **preliminary conclusions on the relevance and effectiveness of MLG as accelerator of SDG localization processes.**

### ***Progress and gaps***

Globally, **MLG for SDG localization is making progress.** There is undoubtedly a growing recognition of the importance of enabling policy coherence and integration for more effective implementation and localization of the SDGs through enhanced MLG systems. The **2030 Agenda** has provided a **common language and base to bring different governance levels and stakeholders together** in a common framework. This translates into growing policy commitment and a wide array of practices in multiple related areas. **Institutional frameworks** are adapting to incorporate and consolidate these practices across governments level and different policy cycle stages. **Alignment of SDGs** with national and subnational plans is also making progress: the SDGs are contributing to revise national planning systems, as well as to revitalize local processes.

Nevertheless, there are still **limited examples of countries that have mainstreamed 'full'**

**and effective vertical and horizontal integration across levels and policy domains.** Further **advances are needed in terms of political commitment and harmonization of vision and practices at different levels.**

Effective MLG systems can be crucial drivers to enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of LRGs' action for SDG localization if the three dimensions (vertical integration, horizontal integration, stakeholder engagement) are properly connected as part of a system approach; and if local, regional, and national governments get much-needed support in terms of analytical frameworks, documented evidence, capacities, funding, and guidance.

The process is often affected by shifting commitments, different and complex inter-governmental relations, varying institutional and organizational capacities, incomplete decentralization and legal reform processes. The reality on the ground still marks **a gap in the full translation of formal institutional arrangements into effective MLG mechanisms and practices**, especially regarding implementation phases and financing processes. Moreover, while national governments are increasingly recognizing the role of LRGs for SDG implementation, this does not necessarily translate into multilevel spaces for dialogue and joint action.

The very relevance and political recognition of the SDGs (and the way they are embedded





in legal and institutional frameworks) varies considerably across countries and at different levels within countries. **Strategic frameworks and direction on SDGs at the national level are crucial for providing guidance, incentive, and harmonizing support to localization processes.** In some cases, a top-down approach seems to prevail as national institutions define binding frameworks and thorough guidance for LRGs, with limited consideration and articulation with their actual capacities and functions on the ground; in other cases, LRGs have elaborated their SDG strategies without a national framework to align with. In general terms, it seems important to introduce institutional arrangements and policy requirements that do not hamper the key principles of subsidiarity and local autonomy at the heart of effective SDG localization, thus limiting the risk that SDGs are perceived as externally imposed burdens without adequate resources.

The **gap in vertical integration concerns more the municipal level than intermediate levels.** This is particularly the case in federal and quasi-federal countries where, for example, SDGs are often contributing to strengthen pre-existent institutional mechanisms of dialogue /collaboration (or to create new mechanisms) between federal government and federated states, but with a more limited impact in the relations with lower tiers of governments. In this regard, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the **strong efforts by LRGs' associations to integrate their members in**

**national coordination, planning, monitoring, and review processes.** Anyway, with a few exceptions, institutional arrangements have still had **limited impact on the dynamics and asymmetries of powers between different government levels.**

Globally, issues related to implementation are even more critical. Most often, there are **no sufficient information on financing mechanisms**, the extent to which alignment processes are reflected in budgets at national and subnational levels and, even more crucially, if adequate financial support is mobilized to invest in the territories that are more in need. Local finances in both developed and emerging countries are not well equipped to support local investments thus fostering a solid localization process. This is an area where MLG systems clearly need to be strengthened, because SDGs cannot be achieved without adequate financing.

Reporting is where more progress can be observed in MLG, through **LRGs' involvement in the VNRs process and thanks to an increasing VLRs /VSRs community of practice.** However, the localization of indicators is still a missing piece in most countries, making it very difficult to analyze localized SDG progress. This is a critical dimension to boost a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

### Margins for improvement and scaling-up

In the current scenario, there are many SDG localization initiatives, and LRGs in many countries (also through their networks and associations) are leading innovative practices and solutions for the SDGs. Indeed, a wealth of **innovative and effective policy instruments are being piloted by cities and regions**, but they are not yet sufficiently embedded and harmonized at the national level. In other words, **these initiatives face the challenge of effectively connecting SDG action across levels of government.** The risk is that such wealth of SDG localization processes remains confined to the dimension of virtuous local exercises, with limited impact in addressing interconnected problems not only thematically but also in terms of scale and functional requirements (i.e., political mandates and resources). This leaves LRGs with **more autonomy in determining their SDG localization strategies, but it may expose them to a 'governance gap' that reflects their still limited representation in high-level fora and the inadequate degree of horizontal and vertical coordination between governance levels.** Similarly, it affects learning opportunities, across levels and among LRGs, **notwithstanding the crucial role played so far by national and international associations of LRGs to enable exchange, dialogue, and joint efforts.** All in all, despite considerable improvements, **LRGs are not yet adequately and systematically involved in the SDG planning, implementation and monitoring processes at the national level.**

Significant results are also being achieved in promoting integrated approaches to the 2030 Agenda at the national and local levels, but the SDGs are still prevalently approached the-

matically. This entails a **dominant focus on targets and financing and less on improving the functional arrangements** (e.g., alignment, the complementarity of attributions, and coordination) **between interrelated levels of governments** and between the mandates, capacities, and resources of different involved actors and institutions. In other words, the 'who does what (and how)' for achieving the global agenda in complex and multilevel governance settings is not yet entirely addressed. This leaves a **significant margin to enhance multiple synergies and the alignment between complementary processes and functions.** This was the case, for instance, of improved mechanisms for vertical and horizontal integration put in place in several countries to face the COVID-19 pandemic, being **multilevel emergency governance** nowadays fundamental to respond to health, environmental, social, and economic crises.

### Enabling factors for effective MLG processes

An important enabler of effective MLG processes is the **'institutional capital'** embedded in national and local governance systems, referring, in particular, to the tradition of dialogue and participation between different levels and actors. Indeed, where the capacity of dialogue is weak, the possibility of MLG systems to work is consequently limited; conversely, it is much stronger in contexts where there is a long-lasting tradition of dialogue and broad-based participation in policymaking processes.

Similarly, an important contextual factor is the nature and depth of decentralization. **The relation between decentralized and deconcentrated systems** entails issues of





hierarchy/control and different patterns of accountability between national parties, deconcentrated services/officers, and locally elected officials, including an often-reduced margin of manoeuvre for the latter. This is especially important as MLG is a dynamic and open-ended process that tends not to assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any level.

Three **most common scenarios** can be identified:

- a) in countries with a strong tradition of dialogue and well-established decentralization frameworks for LRGs' autonomy, MLG systems for SDG localization are potentially more effective and truly integrated;
- b) in countries where the process is driven by the central government through comprehensive strategies and densely regulated frameworks, a prevailing top-down approach leads to a strong national commitment but leaves several governance and implementation gaps;
- c) in countries with low commitment and guidance by national governments and with LRGs deploying limited capacities to take autonomous initiatives, very weak outcomes are associated with MLG for SDG localization.

It is also important to highlight **a recurrent gap between the formality of binding institutional arrangements, legal frameworks, and political resolutions, and the reality of MLG processes and informal relations in place.** This makes it difficult to analyse their effectiveness and impact in terms of improved functionalities for SDG localization. For instance, formal participation of LRGs in national planning and VNR processes may not lead to any real push for SDG localization, if their



engagement remains passive and their voice is not expressed or taken into consideration. Similarly, very advanced MLG frameworks may not have an impact if, in reality, their mechanisms are not made operational through a meaningful and proactive engagement of a multiplicity of actors at all levels. In particular, a key issue that is still difficult to measure, and probably needs deeper analysis, is **if the growing integration and alignment of planning processes at different levels with the SDGs is contributing to transform and make them more effective, participatory and iterative**, encouraging bottom-up approaches to enrich national strategies.

### **The need of monitoring systems on MLG for SDG localization**

Finally, there is a strong **need to engage multiple knowledge partners and actors in identifying sets of indicators to define stronger monitoring systems on MLG for SDG localization.** Indeed, while the measurement of SDG progress has been definitely advancing (despite relevant data gaps and issues), quantitative and qualitative proxies of effective MLG systems still need to be defined and introduced to assess improved functionalities for SDG localization. Building on the

analytical matrix provided in this report, such proxies may include, among others: LRGs' involvement/participation in VNRs processes (considering also the modalities and quality of such involvement) and in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation; the weight and relevance of SDG localization in national implementation strategies (including roadmaps, action plans, etc.); the extent and nature of LRGs efforts to integrate the SDGs in local plans; the number and quality of integrated policies and plans and the way in which they are aligned to SDG plans at other levels; the extent of national concrete support to subnational reporting mechanisms (VLRs and VSRs) and assistance to local alignment efforts with SDGs; the extent of organizational changes within public administrations to pursue the SDGs; the creation of ad-hoc SDG alliances at the local level and their impact on policy-making and implementation; SDG budgeting practices and SDG-related public procurement mechanisms; the introduction of locally-adapted indicators systems; the effectiveness of VLRs to foster the integration of the SDGs into local government strategies, objectives, and aspirations.

### **The way forward**

**All development actors – foremost national, local, and regional governments – should place effective and inclusive multilevel governance at the heart of all their endeavours.** In this regard, based on the findings and lessons learnt from this research and previous studies<sup>17</sup>, several action-oriented recommendations<sup>18</sup> can be provided for each dimension to **accelerate progress towards the localization of the SDGs and post-pandemic recovery through effective multilevel governance systems.**



<sup>17</sup> Among others ARCO (2020), Bilsky et al. (2021), Narang-Suri et al. (2021), OECD (2020 and 2022), UCLG (2022) and UN (2018).

<sup>18</sup> A few key action-oriented recommendations are highlighted due to their undeniable centrality and essentiality to enhance effective MLG systems for SDG localization.



VERTICAL INTEGRATION: Action-oriented recommendations	
<i>Political commitment and institutional arrangements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Officially integrating LRGs into national coordination mechanisms and reporting processes on the 2030 Agenda, going beyond simple declarations of intent to ensure a clear commitment alongside enforcement and accountability mechanisms.</b></li> <li>• Ensuring effective processes for appropriately engaging LRGs in areas where they have a role to promote coordinated actions and enhance coherence across levels of governments for sustainable development.</li> <li>• Formally adopting policy coherence for sustainable development as strategic framework at different levels of government and developing tools that support LRGs in applying it in their legal frameworks, plans and actions for localizing the SDGs.</li> </ul>
<i>Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ensuring alignment and consistency among supranational, national and sub-national strategies, using the SDGs as a framework to align policy priorities, incentives, objectives across levels (within respect of subsidiarity principles and local autonomy), in order to avoid dispersion of efforts in the collective pursuit for sustainable development.</b></li> <li>• Ensuring and demonstrating a strong and clear linkage between all local priorities, national objectives for sustainable development and the 17 SDGs, through adequate localization strategies / roadmaps within national plans and policies.</li> <li>• Enabling – and providing support to – lower levels (e.g., cities and towns) to translate national and sub-national strategies into tailored strategies for their places, including capacity-building and financing mechanisms.</li> <li>• Involving LRGs in the definition and update of strategies for a safe, equitable and sustainable recovery, as well as for climate change adaptation and resilience, enabling them to link the expanded local provision of public services to the SDGs.</li> </ul>
<i>Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring a strong political ownership of the strategies by the relevant government levels and public authorities, to certify an effective commitment to their implementation for the pursuit of the SDGs.</li> <li>• Developing capacity-building programmes across government levels on policy coherence for the implementation of the SDGs.</li> <li>• Facilitate multilevel dialogue around good practices and persistent challenges among LRGs.</li> <li>• Promoting the full alignment between SDG planning, fiscal and budgetary allocation mechanisms across levels, ensuring that adequate financial support is provided for priority SDG-related investments and services at the local level.</li> <li>• Working with sub-national levels of government to leverage public procurement for the SDGs.</li> </ul>
<i>Monitoring and reporting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursuing consistency with indicator frameworks developed at national, supranational and global level, along with ensuring the feasibility to apply the same framework also on lower levels, taking into account the frequent limited availability of territorially disaggregated data and statistics.</li> <li>• <b>Investing in the collection and elaboration of new and disaggregated data at local level and intensifying cooperation with the national statistical offices to expand the information base.</b></li> <li>• <b>Promoting enabling environments for subnational reporting, by connecting VLRs/VSRs and local governments to the VNR processes, overcoming institutional fragmentation in SDG reviews.</b></li> <li>• Promoting bottom-up, subnational reporting exercises by local governments, their associations and their communities, including updated indicators, implemented policies and results, and considering the opportunity to complement or translate them into Voluntary Local Reviews to be shared within the global community of actors committed to SDG localization.</li> </ul>

HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION: Action-oriented recommendations	
<i>Political commitment and institutional arrangements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using high-level coordinating mechanisms, whether located within the Centre of Government or at a lead line ministry / department as appropriate, to promote the integration of sustainable development across public agencies.</li> <li>• <b>Assigning the pivotal governance role to an inter-ministerial / inter-departmental body in a whole-of-government approach, in order to fully embrace an integrated notion of environmental, social and economic sustainability.</b></li> <li>• Communicating the existing mandate of the coordination body to all actors, coupling its mandate with the financial and human resources needed to do so effectively, and providing it with a clear mandate to anticipate and resolve policy divergences and tensions arising from diverging priorities and different sectoral interests related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.</li> <li>• Ensuring the involvement of the Government Office/Centre of Government in efforts to promote policy coherence across line ministries and other public institutions.</li> <li>• Creating an advisory council and/or a technical committee composed by experts and public officials by different departments, fields and sectors, to provide the coordination body with advanced knowledge and evidence from multiple sources.</li> <li>• Encouraging informal working methods to stimulate an open exchange of ideas between ministries / departments / public sector bodies leading to innovative thinking that can be conducive for addressing cross-cutting policy objectives and develop integrated solutions.</li> <li>• <b>Opening opportunities for, and enhancing, horizontal cooperation at the different levels of governance, including at the regional/provincial and local levels, through structured national mechanisms and/or initiatives led by LRGs' associations committed to SDG localization.</b></li> </ul>
<i>Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting an integrated diagnostic analysis on all dimensions / SDGs taking into account the linkages, impact, synergies and trade-offs among them, and guaranteeing its continuous use as baseline for future monitoring and progress reports.</li> <li>• Going beyond setting goals, priorities and targets, towards identifying specific actions / initiatives to be jointly realized also through sharing of budget resources, assigning responsibilities to lead agencies and other involved government sectors with respective timeframes for action.</li> </ul>
<i>Implementation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designing a clear, effective and transparent governance system and institutional architecture for implementing sustainable development strategies, enforcing both political and executive responsibilities.</li> <li>• <b>Building capacity in public administrations to adequately address the principles and integrated nature of the SDGs, building civil servants' capacity to act through new, cross-disciplinary and experimental approaches.</b></li> <li>• Adjusting management practices to an increasingly complex economic, social and environmental reality and employing human resources and capabilities in the most effective way.</li> <li>• Encouraging digital skills to strategically shape public governance outcomes towards integration and flexibility across policy domains in light of the SDGs.</li> <li>• Jointly looking for investments in policy areas that are interconnected under the responsibility of different departments, reducing internal competition and overlaps.</li> </ul>
<i>Monitoring and reporting</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anchoring the VLR process to the design of new long-term strategic plans based on territorial partnerships and cross-sectoral coordination for sustainable development.</li> <li>• Sharing and comparing baseline data, trends and performances across government sectors and places, creating also new indicators of policy coherence and jointly collecting data.</li> <li>• Combining official statistics with data and information from new sources (e.g., big data) that may allow obtaining new evidence on the dimensions of sustainable development.</li> </ul>

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: Action-oriented recommendations

<p><i>Political commitment and institutional arrangements</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring open and inclusive spaces for dialogue, participation and public scrutiny, by adopting appropriate mechanisms and tools to be transformed into systematic and permanent channels of consultation and exchange between communities and public administrations.</li> <li>• Promoting and facilitating stakeholders' access to capacity-building and information-sharing opportunities and resources, to build consensus on priorities for enhancing policy coherence for the SDGs.</li> <li>• Ensuring that the selection of stakeholders takes into account their capability to support objectives in terms of policy integration around specific SDGs.</li> <li>• Allowing the younger generations to effectively influence the policy process since visioning and priority setting, to mobilise support for structural reforms with long-term implications.</li> <li>• Assuring inclusivity of voiceless and marginal groups also through the involvement of locally embedded organizations and other actors that represent and bring the perspective of under-served constituencies.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Planning</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Enabling a real participation by all societal actors to inform and influence sustainable development strategies in all phases (since the design to implementation and monitoring) by combining a wide array of participatory methods and tools.</b></li> <li>• Involving a wide range of expert stakeholders (e.g., civil society organizations, public agencies, public utilities and services providers) to dig deeper in the diagnostic analysis for each SDG / field of action.</li> <li>• Through a participatory process, defining a societal vision able to simultaneously be place-based and globally-oriented, and identifying tailored objectives for sustainable development, in order for the whole society to understand their relevance and value and commit to related actions.</li> <li>• Incentivising stakeholder participation via digital platforms – and encouraging related digital skills – to re-use open government data and generate innovative solutions that can assist in achieving the SDGs.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Implementation</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifying the role, contribution and responsibility for each category of actor in all sectors in a whole-of-society perspective, adopting tailored mechanisms to keep them accountable.</li> <li>• Strengthening the capacity of stakeholders that may contribute to SDG integration and encourage them to work together and to form alliances or partnerships, in order to pool together knowledge, information, expertise and align their actions.</li> <li>• Promoting co-production, whereby citizens engage in partnerships with the government in the design and delivery of public services and initiatives, so that stakeholder engagement goes beyond information sharing and consultation.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Monitoring and reporting</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling participatory monitoring mechanisms to involve stakeholders and citizens also in the assessment of the collective efforts towards sustainable development, thus allowing national and local governments to understand the extent to which their policies were successful and improve them.</li> <li>• <b>Enabling the use of reviews and monitoring reports by societal actors both for analysis, communication, and accountability on the progress of the strategy, as well as for influencing decision-making processes on new priority-setting, policies and budgeting.</b></li> <li>• Including in the monitoring system actions and initiatives implemented by societal actors and stakeholders, to avoid assessing only public policies and keep the whole society committed and accountable.</li> </ul>



All in all, these MLG guidance elements can pave the way and create a solid base to enhance **societal commitment, institution-building, and capacity-building for SDG implementation at all levels in the post-pandemic era.**

In conclusion, this research has provided an **updated view of institutional frameworks and practices** promoted by national, regional, and local governments across the world to advance towards more effective MLG systems for SDG localization. Thanks to its **analytical framework** linking MLG dimensions, contextual factors, practices, outputs, and outcomes, it has contributed to opening a debate on the institutional and policy **recommendations** to ensure the progress of MLG in the framework of the SDG localization.

Nevertheless, it has also opened questions that will need further analysis on several dimensions. **Future global research** may be required to continue with the updated systematization of good practices of MLG mechanisms for SDG localization across the world; the analysis of a wider array of case-studies as living labs; the robust evaluation of relevant experiences through the design of an appropriate Theory of Change; the identification of a set of indicators to define a strong monitoring system on MLG for SDG localization (starting from the analytical proposed in this report).

Such promising avenues will contribute to providing local and national governments with cutting-edge knowledge and practical orientations on MLG to implement the SDGs, by **combining ideas, evidence and insights from global knowledge partners, countries, regions, and cities across the world.**

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The universal, integrated, and transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs requires governments to work across policy domains, actors, and governance levels. However, local and national governments still require further advancements in terms of conceptualization, frameworks, analysis, evidence, and guidance elements on MLG systems and mechanisms to implement the SDGs.

This research contributes to the wider effort and process led by UN-Habitat and the UN to streamline a strategic framework on MLG for SDG localization, paving the way for policy support through a set of tested tools and practices, incremental partnership-building, open knowledge platforms, and advocacy.

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