

SDG localization baseline

How local-level actors are driving change
and advancing the achievement of the
2030 Agenda

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Efraim Hernández Orozco
Mario Cárdenas
Ivonne Lobos Alva
Angélica Guerra
Åsa Gerger Swartling
Juan Betancur
Somya Joshi
Kuntum Melati
Romanus Otieno Opiyo
Dayoon Kim
Leonie Pearson
Nhilce N. Esquivel
George Kabue Njoroge
Filippa Ek





Stockholm Environment Institute

Linnégatan 87D 115 23 Stockholm, Sweden

Tel: +46 8 30 80 44 www.sei.org

Author contact: Ivonne Lobos Alva

ivonne.lobos@sei.org

Layout: Richard Clay

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List of abbreviations

ASEAN:	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AICCRE:	Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities
C40:	C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group
EU:	European Union
GIZ:	German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH
IDB:	Inter-American Development Bank
LAC:	Latin America and the Caribbean
MENA:	Middle East and North Africa
M&E:	Monitoring and evaluation
NALAG:	National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana
NDC:	National Determined Contribution
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
NYC:	New York City
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RRING:	Responsible Research and Innovation Networked Globally
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SEI:	Stockholm Environment Institute
UCLG:	United Cities and Local Governments
UN:	United Nations
UNCDF:	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNDESA:	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNECA:	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCAP:	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
VLR:	Voluntary Local Review
VNR:	Voluntary National Review

Executive Summary

Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to the process of defining, implementing, and monitoring strategies at the local level to achieve global, national, and subnational sustainable development goals and targets.¹ The key question addressed by this baseline document is how SDG localization can be practically, efficiently, and effectively implemented in what remains of the Decade of Action. In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to deliver the promises of the SDGs by 2030.

In many ways, achieving the SDGs is directly linked to the capacity of local and regional governments to ensure access to basic services that underpin the quality of life. A predominant finding in the research conducted is how the current pandemic has set back parts of the progress made on the 2030 Agenda and made the delivery of services more difficult. Moreover, COVID-19 has demonstrated the crucial role local and regional governments play, taking powerful decisions in exceptional circumstances.

As we move forward, strategic decisions need to be carefully designed to determine the way cities and regions continue to respond to the pandemic around the world and how they plan to reconstruct and improve their communities. To inform these decisions and to help guide international organizations' support, this baseline has uncovered the important challenges and opportunities for the local implementation of the SDGs that relate to the broader themes of advocacy, action, and monitoring. In addition, this effort builds on the New Urban Agenda, which functions as an accelerator of the SDGs, being emphatic about making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Thus, it raises awareness of the need for and importance of generating localized actions at the local level. Similarly, it aims to prepare all urban stakeholders on the global level to better understand and apply the propositions for the localization of the SDGs and generate synergies with other agendas, such as the Paris Agreement and the National Determined Contributions (NDCs).

First, local actors in several countries are finding it difficult to engage in stages at the national, regional, and global levels where priority setting, programming, and funding are discussed and decided. For instance, the level of participation and engagement of local governments in the production of the national reviews has so far been limited. The role of local governments must be more active in including local priorities and top-down policies in SDG implementation. By advocating for integrated planning processes, local and regional governments can seize the opportunity to participate in the determination of national priorities and strategies, and institutional frameworks. Mechanisms must be designed that allow for regular interaction and meaningful engagement between local governments, community leaders, grassroots organizations, and the private sector.

Second, and as mentioned above, there is the danger that the SDGs may not be achieved by 2030, and the current pandemic has caused regression concerning some of the goals. Significant efforts need to be made to advance implementation in line with the Decade of Action. Specific opportunities lie in the development of innovative solutions to address the lack of political will and technical know-how and weak capacity. Especially important will be the structures to identify financial opportunities and access available financial resources.

Third, systemic interactions between targets must be considered for effective policy design and implementation. The existence of these interdependencies means that progress or hindrance in one target will affect every other SDG, leading to trade-offs (negative interactions) and synergies (positive interactions). These interlinkages are complex and context-dependent, and the methods to identify and model them vary significantly; however, the 2030 Agenda was developed as an “integrated and indivisible” whole, and any effort to achieve the SDGs at the local level must consider their systemic nature. Therefore, it is necessary to support the use of integrated methods in implementation instruments.

¹ The UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), 2015. Localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Finally, one key issue is the lack of benchmarking of the 2030 Agenda implementation. There is a need for reliable and evidence-based data at the local scale that can be used as a baseline to ascertain how much progress still needs to be made to achieve the goals. In this regard, mapping local socioeconomic and environmental indicators to SDGs themes is necessary. This entails the challenge of harmonizing various sources of heterogeneous and context-dependent data, which are often challenging to integrate and compare.

Key findings

A key barrier to effective localization is often found in weak institutions and systems of governance. While countries face different governance constraints at different stages of their development, the importance of responsive, inclusive, and accountable governance systems for SDG localization cannot be understated.

Serious gaps were found in the analysis of the 2030 Agenda interlinkages (synergies and trade-offs) and the policy coherence that is needed to address them. Even though integration is present as a narrative in the case studies, the research shows that the concept of integration is not being actively implemented within the context of the SDGs. Few cases have conducted such an analysis to inform planning, policy making, and monitoring.

More than one third into the implementation of SDGs, a significant number of case studies show that local policies have not been mapped or aligned with the 2030 Agenda. An enabling policy and institutional environment includes the adoption of laws and regulations to ensure policy coherence, cohesion, coordination, and cooperation among all the relevant stakeholders; however, this remains a serious gap.

In many cases, the coordination of SDG implementation is led mainly by the national government. The study also found low engagement of local governments in many case studies, highlighting the need for greater involvement in these processes throughout all governance levels. Therefore, it is necessary to continue improving the involvement of an ever-increasing number of sectors and actors, promoting the inclusion and empowerment of the most vulnerable groups in the agenda, as well as strengthening their participation in the follow-up, and monitoring beyond the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).

There is a need to strengthen and increase the participation of local actors in international forums. Local actors advocate for cities and localities to be included as relevant actors to implement the SDGs. Furthermore, there is a lack of training and exchange within the framework of different regional and global summits. Presently, this lack of participation can lead to the perception that only national/state achievements are shared, but not local ones. Sharing positive experiences in localizing the SDGs can promote a significant change in this perception.

Findings suggest that financial support for SDG localization is strategically linked to the local government's budget. Only a few cases show specific budget allocations for the SDGs; instead, local authorities map percentages of the traditional municipal budget to the Goals. Moreover, it was identified that public-private partnerships provide additional resources to support the SDGs, especially in the Global South. Therefore, one of the opportunities to avoid budget constraints is to build partnerships with non-public actors.

Actors face a lack of harmony and standardization of tracking, monitoring systems, and methods for assessing progress on the SDGs, which hinders comparability, especially when comparing in localities. Moreover, challenges appear when local actors attempt to define "local" as a purely jurisdictional category, as the movement of people, goods, and services increases interdependence between territories, and administrative boundaries for monitoring indicators are increasingly blurred. Finally, there are difficulties due to the lack of inclusion of communities living on the edges of cities and possible ways to integrate their needs into localization strategies.

1. Introduction and methodology

1.1 Introduction

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs initially involved global efforts emphasizing the implementation at the national level. However, the actions that have been carried out over the last five years have demonstrated that the achievement of sustainable development, “leaving no one behind”, depends on including and working with the local level, taking advantage of subnational processes that allow the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In this increasingly decisive process, entering the Decade of Action, and with less than ten years to reach the expected date of SDGs implementation, **local and regional governments play an essential role in achieving the proposed goals.** In this regard, many significant efforts reported in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) may well come from what local governments achieve. They open the door and strengthen governance systems at multiple levels, facilitating coherent, vertical, and horizontal integration. Therefore, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda depends on local practitioners, communities, and non-public actors to achieve concrete results at the subnational level. This is needed for the 2030 Agenda to be viable as a practical and pragmatic universal transformation where cities and regions must become increasingly involved.

Consequently, the Local2030 coalition emerged as a platform that opens the possibility of connecting local actors at the subnational, national, and international levels, supporting the SDGs on the ground.

However, despite the relevance and urgency of evaluating and assessing the status of the implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda subnationally, there are no concrete baseline evaluations that can determine the degree and level of integration of the SDGs in the governance schemes within local development plans and agendas.

It is precisely in this context where this baseline document becomes relevant. **This first-of-its-kind document presents a detailed, subnational analysis of the status and patterns that allow for assessing the state of SDG localization.** This document explains and outlines key entry points and practices that enable the local advancement of the 2030 Agenda. However, it must be said that the results presented here are based on a limited sample of case studies and that it is envisioned that the Local2030 coalition will continuously update this information and the results based on more comprehensive and broader studies at the local level. More details about the sample can be found in the methodology section.

Key findings indicate that more work is needed in harmonizing efforts and resources for critical SDG indicators at global, national, and subnational levels. It was also found **that local engagement and stakeholder inclusion in the SDGs are complex since subnational contexts differ considerably.** Therefore, the diagnosis, challenges, and potential solutions may also vary. Furthermore, local challenges were identified in relation to accessing and building partnerships that generate financing to achieve the SDGs. The multiplicity in policy coherence processes and local efforts within coordination endeavours and the exchange of good practices among stakeholders was also noted. These partnerships provide alternative ways for local and regional actors to participate in SDG localization efforts from a bottom-up perspective without duplicating efforts.

The current pandemic has put territories and communities worldwide under economic and social difficulties, directly impacting the subnational efforts to achieve the SDGs. Budgetary resources have had to be reallocated from various development sectors towards public health care and social protection. This reallocation of resources and priorities can undermine the progress in other SDGs.

Bringing the SDGs to the people is a global priority. However, efforts are needed to gain an understanding of how subnational actors articulate efforts to implement the SDGs, as well as

of which methods of monitoring, financing, and institutional delivery are shaping efficient and successful outcomes of localizing the SDGs at the local level.

For all these reasons, this baseline aims to categorize and scrutinize the processes (approaches, methods, and tools) implemented by subnational actors located in four geographic regions to identify the experiences of local actors in SDG localization efforts, to uncover the challenges, and to examine the decisive factors driving change.

This baseline document comprises three chapters to assess the localization of the SDGs at the local level in a comprehensive manner. The first chapter provides the introduction, concepts, and methodology. Additionally, the theoretical approach and key concepts are presented. **The second chapter** presents a crucial comparative overview based on trends, patterns, and lessons learned from the case study review. This chapter also provides identified capacities, gaps, and critical messages. **The third chapter** delves deeper into the regional results related to policy coherence, stakeholder participation in local SDG policy formulation, institutional development, and integrated approaches. In addition, it describes case study experiences in monitoring SDG efforts, financing, and international networks. **Finally, the main conclusions** are presented considering several emerging trends and processes at the subnational level for greater adoption of the SDGs locally.

1.2 Theoretical approach and key concepts

In this section, we present the main themes and discussions that emerged from the literature review on the localization of the SDGs. The baseline is structured around the concepts and premises described in this section.

It is widely recognized by intergovernmental organizations and governments around the world that achieving the SDGs requires the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda at the subnational level. Reports from the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and various UN agencies have highlighted this.^{2,3} These institutions recognize that the SDGs can unfold differently depending on the context, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will vary significantly from region to region; therefore, local action and subnational support are needed to achieve the Goals. Furthermore, considering the pledge of “leaving no one behind,” localizing the SDGs means considering the needs of local communities and the resources and capacities of subnational governments.

In this sense, international organizations have exerted significant effort in producing tools and guidelines for subnational governments to implement the SDGs according to their local realities and promote **policy coherence** (which refers to the consistency and integration between actions in different policies). For instance, the Local2030 platform has been created within the UN system to create capacity in subnational governments to enact the SDGs in the local context, producing a toolbox with suggested guidelines for the localization of the SDGs containing various documents and recommendations.⁴ In general terms, these resources have focused on supporting local governments in creating spaces of policy coherence throughout sectors and multi-level governance that engages different stakeholders, including the local communities, various levels of government, the private sector, and international organisms. In this regard, for the purpose of this baseline, **multi-level governance means taking into account the interests and perspectives of subnational actors, together with those of national and supranational stakeholders**, creating institutional arrangements, policy instruments, and partnerships in the process of implementing the SDGs at the subnational scale.

² Every year, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and UCLG produce a report in the context of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) titled Towards the Localization of the SDGs. The fourth report, which focuses on COVID-19 recovery, is available at: <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Informe%20HLPF-FINAL.pdf>

³ UN agencies, such as UN-Habitat, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), and UNDP, have been actively participating in the publication of toolkits for SDG implementation and monitoring at the subnational level (e.g., Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments; UN-Habitat; UNDP, 2016; UCLG; UN-Habitat, 2020).

⁴ Retrieved from <https://www.local2030.org/discover-tools>

Another focus of these guidelines has been on creating tools for local **monitoring** procedures, such as VLR guidelines (e.g., UCLG; UN-Habitat, 2020), and **local financing** (e.g., Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities (AICCCE), 2018). In the theme of monitoring, as it will be shown, the case studies include many different strategies for reporting the SDGs, which can fall under different conceptualizations of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) procedures. On the other hand, the matter of financing is dependent on the case study and how the authorities have implemented the 2030 Agenda, as some countries will allocate a specific budget to implement the SDGs, while others have adapted their traditional funding strategies and aligned them with the SDGs. In this sense, budgeting can mean acquiring extra resources for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda or adapting existing financing schemes to align them with the SDGs. In this regard, **we present funding and monitoring together** in the results, as they are deeply interconnected topics.

Finally, academic literature has also drawn attention to subnational SDG implementation. Authors acknowledge that the enactment of the 2030 Agenda will vary significantly based on local realities (Jiménez-Aceituno et al., 2020; Nilsson et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2015; Stephens et al., 2018). In this regard, **scientific publications have focused on discussing the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda**, emphasizing the importance of applying methods for the **analysis of interactions between the SDGs** to foster policy coherence. Authors argue that in the context of the 2030 Agenda, policy coherence means taking into account the interconnectedness of the SDGs in the design and implementation of strategies without treating individual Goals as independent silos (Nilsson & Weitz, 2019).

Integrating the institutional and scientific perspectives on SDG implementation described above, this baseline is structured around the main concepts identified in the literature: **policy coherence; multi-level governance; policy integration and interconnectedness; and monitoring and budgeting**. Finally, we will give special consideration to **international and regional engagement** as a separate topic since the case studies emphasize the importance of promoting cooperation and good practices, engaging actors from various levels of government and international organizations.

Accordingly, we designed a semi-structured interview questionnaire based on these themes to employ in 28⁵ case studies. The results of the interviews are the main input for the construction of this baseline. The methodological procedures for designing and analysing the questionnaire, as well as the case study selection and comparison, are described in the next section.

1.3 Methodological approach

a. Semi-structured interviews

To assess SDG implementation, we adopted a mixed-methods approach that involved **semi-structured interviews** and **case study analysis**. The questionnaire was designed according to the themes and discussions described in the previous section – multi-level governance, policy coherence, financing, and monitoring – in addition to various sub-themes, such as COVID-19. It is worth mentioning that the questionnaire was designed to allow respondents to give enough information so that additional themes and codes would emerge from the data (this may allow for the finding of new themes not discussed in the literature, which could aid local SDG implementation). The selection of interviewees was based on the following criteria:

- Local government representatives or members of sectorial institutions (such as the regional/urban planning and financing institutions) that actively participate in the implementation process.

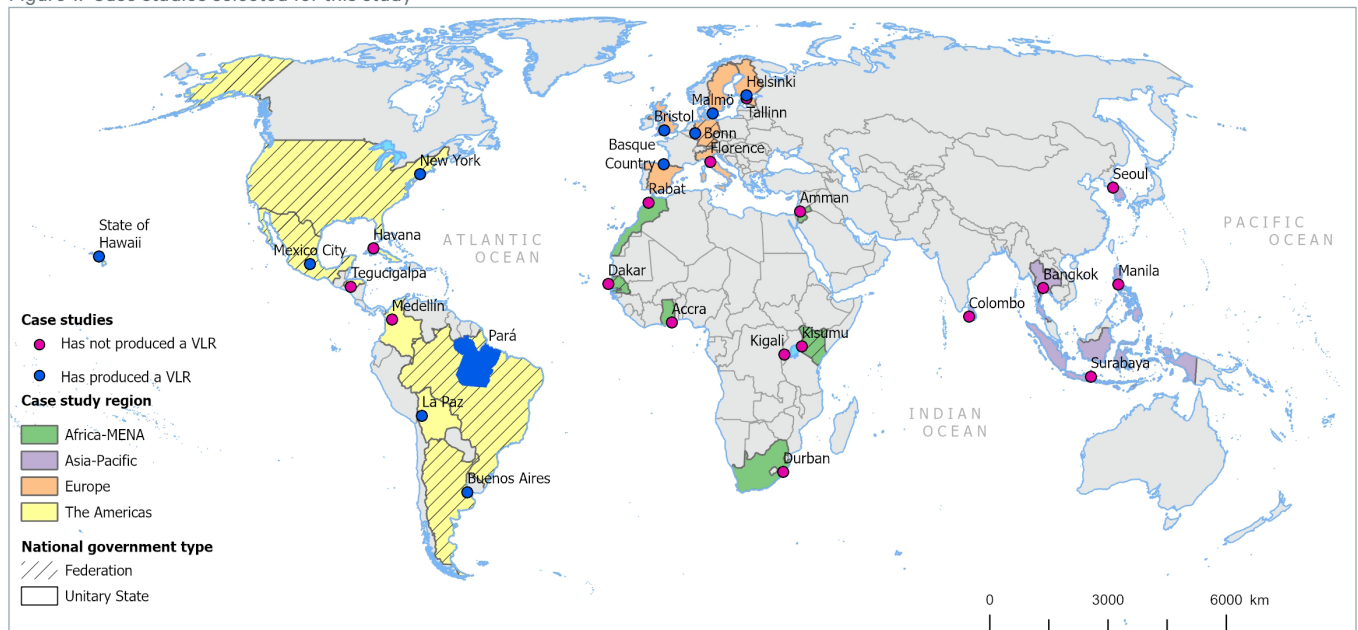
⁵ At the beginning of the project, 30 case studies were selected. However, Guangzhou, China, and Hawalli, Kuwait, were dropped due to the lack of information about these case studies online, as well as the difficulties in finding subnational actors to complete the questionnaire.

- Members of public–private partnerships that have been created or mobilized to implement the 2030 Agenda.
- Scientists and researchers with expertise in the implementation.
- Community members, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or civil society organizations involved in the implementation.
- International governmental institutions involved at the local level (such as the UN).
- Technicians or researchers studying the process of monitoring the SDGs.

Desk research was conducted to identify the relevant literature and reports available online to fill out some sections before conducting the interviews. The incomplete questionnaires were sent to the respondents to have an opportunity to revise the questions and add information as needed – most case studies added information before or after the interview – in addition to what was discussed during the interview.

b. Case studies and selection criteria

Figure 1. Case studies selected for this study



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.)

The case study analysis approach allows for understanding and dissecting singular governance elements in the institutional arrangements and processes identified through the baseline. In this regard, the case study selection aimed to have a wide representation of different subnational territories where the SDGs are implemented. The case studies included in this report were jointly selected by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and UN partners, and the selection was based on the criteria described below. Due to time constraints and difficulties in identifying contacts at the local level, adding further criteria and including more case studies to produce a more representative sample was unfeasible. Thus, this study is not representative of the global status of all countries and territories' progress regarding the SDGs. Further studies will need to be conducted by the Local2030 coalition's partners in order to thoroughly understand the local implementation of the SDGs.

For this study, we selected 28 case studies (Table 1), and the selection was based around these criteria:

- **Regional representation** – the cases were selected under consideration of a regional balance, i.e., North America, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Africa, Europe, and Asia-Pacific.
- **Country typology** – representing a broad diversity of different contexts (e.g., more/less decentralized, federal/unitary, developing/developed/least developed countries (LDC)/small island developing states (SIDS)/landlocked countries, etc.).
- **SDG champions** – this criterion was defined to identify cases of cities and regions that have presented a VNR and member states which have shown interest and leadership in the localization of the SDGs. Case studies with no VLR were also included to obtain a balanced picture and reflect the diversity of progress in the monitoring and localization of the SDGs.
- **Coverage of all the SDGs** – this principle refers to the ability to cover indicators under each of the SDGs, for instance, cities or regions on the coast to be able to include SDG 14 (life under water).
- **Countries with ongoing UN programs in place to support the localization of the SDGs** – the selection also prioritized, in a pragmatic manner, cases where UN Agencies are supporting the localization of the SDGs. In many cases, this facilitated the process of gathering the information/data and reaching key counterparts or public officials to conduct the interviews.
- **Climate change leadership** – this criterion was determined based on data from the UN's Global Climate Action Portal, from which case studies of cities and regions undertaking meaningful actions to address climate change, having defined climate change and climate adaptation, and driving urban action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and climate-related risks were selected.^{6,7}

6 <https://unfccc.int/news/number-of-global-cities-recognized-for-climate-leadership-doubles>

7 [https://climateinitiativesplatform.org/index.php/C40_Cities_Climate_Leadership_Group_\(C40\)](https://climateinitiativesplatform.org/index.php/C40_Cities_Climate_Leadership_Group_(C40))

Table 1. Case study selection for the SDG localization baseline

Region	Country	City/State	VLR	Coastal	Country typology
Europe	Spain	Basque Country	Yes	Yes	Unitary state/Developed
	Germany	Bonn	Yes	No	Federation/Developed
	UK	Bristol	Yes	No	Unitary state/Developed
	Finland	Helsinki	Yes	Yes	Unitary state/Developed
	Italy	Florence	No	No	Unitary state/Developed
	Sweden	Malmo	Yes	Yes	Unitary state/Developed
	Estonia	Tallinn	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developed
Africa-MENA	Ghana	Accra	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
	Jordan	Amman	No	No	Unitary state/Developing
	Senegal	Dakar	No	Yes	LDC/Unitary state
	South Africa	Durban	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
	Rwanda	Kigali	No	No	LDC/Unitary state
	Kenya	Kisumu	No	No	Federation/Developing
	Morocco	Rabat	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
Asia-Pacific	Thailand	Bangkok	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
	Sri Lanka	Colombo	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
	Philippines	Manila	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
	South Korea	Seoul	No	No	Unitary state/Developed
	Indonesia	Surabaya	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing
The Americas: North America and LAC	Argentina	Buenos Aires	Yes	Yes	Federation/Developing
	Cuba	Havana	No	Yes	Unitary state/Developing/Socialist/SIDS
	USA	Hawaii	Yes	Yes	Federation/Developed
	Bolivia	La Paz	Yes	No	Unitary state/Developing/Landlocked
	Colombia	Medellín	No	No	Unitary state/Developing
	Mexico	Mexico City	Yes	No	Federation/Developing
	USA	New York City	Yes	Yes	Federation/Developed
	Brazil	State of Pará	Yes	Yes	Federation/Developing
	Honduras	Tegucigalpa	No	No	Unitary state/Developing

2. Comparative findings

This chapter summarizes some of the main comparative trends observed in the research for this study. It uses examples from the case studies included to illustrate some of the themes addressed and analysed. In general, the results addressed here relate to policy, institutions and participation, monitoring, and gaps.

The results presented have a comparative and summarizing character; however, the following chapter and sections delve deeper into some of the findings and present regional trends.

2.1 Comparative findings and examples

a) The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

The current pandemic has created economic and social challenges for territories and communities around the world, which have a direct impact on the subnational efforts to achieve the SDGs. Virtually, **all the governments in the study have stated that there have been widespread economic losses resulting from the lockdown, which undermines the efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda**. The situation has prompted local governments to adapt and take critical decisions to protect their citizens and pave the way for a recovery.

Although the pandemic is still ongoing and it is difficult to measure its impact, cases in every region in this study have highlighted how people have become more vulnerable, especially the poor, through the disruption of basic services and economic loss. For instance, in **Accra**, there have been innumerable job losses and business closures, and schools with no online education for children from poor backgrounds have had to close. In **Seoul**, the local government has highlighted how digital inequality was revealed, as the disproportionate infrastructure of online networks during the pandemic further aggravated the struggles of the poor and vulnerable populations.

Another issue that affects SDG progress is that budgetary resources had to be reallocated from various development sectors toward public health care and social protection. In this regard, **every case study declared that it had been necessary to redirect public expenditure toward the public health system** (highlighting the importance of SDG 3 – good health and wellbeing), and redirect resources for subsidies for the most affected population and businesses – favouring SDGs 1 (no poverty), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reducing inequalities), and 11 (sustainable cities and communities). The reallocation of resources and priorities is not only a challenge but also **an opportunity to re-emphasize the importance of the SDGs** and create recovery strategies aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda. However, **most governments have not yet evaluated the impact of the pandemic on the SDGs**, and subnational territories do not know yet which SDGs were affected the most during the pandemic. In this sense, there is a lack of monitoring and community-engagement procedures that allow the identification of which SDGs have been most affected and need financing and support.

Nonetheless, some case studies have already implemented recovery measures. **The pandemic has prompted governments to obtain and redirect funds to create social security measures to help vulnerable citizens cope with the situation**. For instance, in the **Basque Country**, a new Fund of €10 million was created to help people at risk or in a situation of exclusion and child poverty, and wages have been guaranteed for people with disabilities. Another recovery measure has been directed at tackling unemployment by promoting green businesses that are aligned with the SDGs. For example, in the State of **Hawaii**, part of the state's COVID-19 response has involved promoting green growth projects aligned with its Aloha+ Challenge. This policy has the potential to create 9,300 jobs for an investment of US\$585 million.

Other case studies have begun to analyse the effect of the pandemic on various sectors. The city of **Buenos Aires** has created an observatory called Gender and Pandemics in the City,

which tracks many indicators related to the pandemic management and its differential impacts on women and men. Another example is in **Amman**, where UN-Women & The Jordanian National Commission for Women released the document *COVID-19 and Gender: Immediate Recommendations for Planning and Response in Jordan*,⁸ which invited public ministries and other governmental institutions to consider gender as a relevant analysis category for addressing the situation of the pandemic.

Despite the previous examples, **identifying the impact of the pandemic on SDG progress remains a significant gap**. This situation calls for the implementation of monitoring and evaluation procedures that allow subnational authorities to identify the SDGs that were most affected, and those can be used as accelerators during the recovery. In this regard, the recovery represents an opportunity to redirect development toward development strategies that are more aligned with the principles of sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda.

b. Policy coherence

Policy coherence is a narrative well appropriated by SDG stakeholders. However, it is necessary to fill the gaps between different levels of governance, mainly those that prevent local actors from implementing their own tailored SDG localization processes.

Across the board, **local actors are the protagonists of SDG localization efforts**. The challenge lies in navigating overlapping governance structures already in place. **To guarantee dialogue between UN System and subnational actors, UN country teams are key in playing a bridging role between SDG global language and SDG local practices**. This linking role might facilitate communication and dialogue between the UN agencies and communities.

c. Institutional arrangements and participation

Although institutional arrangements differ throughout the case studies, **local and regional governments have either enacted new institutions to deal with SDG-related aspects or opted for adapting pre-existing institutions**. Most cases follow the second trend, while **Kisumu** is a more representative example of the first one.

In terms of participation, some case studies offer examples of a bottom-up approach that systematically includes multiple actors' efforts towards achieving the SDGs. For instance, **New York City (NYC)** and **Bonn** have adopted a multi-stakeholder initiative in order to determine their indicators. **Bristol's** One City Plan governance model exclusively deals with the 2030 Agenda through extensive multi-stakeholder engagement, while **Helsinki's** SDG localization efforts are led by academia. **Mexico City, Surabaya, and Tallinn** are catching up to these cities and are intending on implementing similar approaches.

d. Inter-city groups and mutual learning

Groups of SDG stakeholders at the local level are noteworthy. European cities exchange ideas and practices (Eurocities). Non-regional networks are also in place, such as the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Champion Mayors for Social Inclusion, the Marrakesh Partnership Leadership Network, the Green Circular Cities Coalition (recycling), the Prevent Waste Alliance, Cities for Nature, the UN Economic Commission for Europe Trees in Cities Challenge, and the SDG Leadership Cities Network.

Interconnection of cities through networking and their efforts to achieve the SDGs through collective knowledge sharing are remarkable. However, it seems that some local actors are being

8 Retrieved in Arabic from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vVImT762BDWDBieJ4auvxMqMQhkh2N-7/view>

systematically left out due to weak local capacities (human, financial) to engage in the networks mentioned above. **Stronger efforts are needed to coordinate these groups and to allow for more inclusive participation.**

This also highlights the importance of subnational regional cooperation among states or departments. As local-level actors have difficulties participating in international forums, such as the High-Level Political Forum, intraregional level platforms are essential for expertise and knowledge sharing. This is exemplified by the State of **Pará** and the **Basque Country**, which have developed capacity-building mechanisms and shared good practices among local stakeholders in their respective regions. **Intraregional cooperation is an opportunity for SDG localization in territories with limited resources or other constraints to participating in international forums.**

e. Power relations

This is a very broad topic that is difficult to cover as a general trend. However, some aspects are worth mentioning. **The more concentrated the power in the central government, the less voice subnational actors have in SDG localization.** Consequently, the excessive centrality of the government in state performance that characterizes some countries in LAC affects how subnational actors adopt the SDGs locally. This trend is somewhat shared in Asia-Pacific, for example, in **Bangkok, Colombo, and Manila.**

A second aspect to highlight is **the use of regional associations and entities by local actors to gain engagement and participation in decision-making and funding.** For instance, Asia-Pacific cases denote a systematic effort of local actors, and their respective countries, to engage in and benefit from the ongoing process at the regional level, such as in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). European local actors adopted that practice a long time ago due to the supranational profile of the European Union (EU). In comparison, local African actors benefit from regional integration schemes and pre-existing networks and relations with donors.

f. SDG champions

Although not one case analysed can claim it has achieved the SDGs, while cases face varied challenges, some can claim to be SDG champions based on their progress compared to others. NYC leadership is undeniable in terms of local engagement, SDG diagnosis, and data analysis through a qualitative approach to implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and identification of the city challenges ahead. As a role model and an internationally well-connected city, NYC paves the way along with some European partners (e.g., Helsinki, Bonn, Bristol). Cases in LAC, Asia-Pacific and Africa-MENA that also merit recognition include **Durban, Kisumu, Medellín, La Paz, and Seoul.**

It is also worth mentioning that most African-MENA cities participate in different subregional integration processes. Furthermore, their local authorities include a pro-business profile to capitalize and connect SDG localization efforts with progress in investment and trade. **Amman's** active performance in the international arena is an outstanding example. International engagement and a pro-business profile are also noticeable in **Bangkok.**

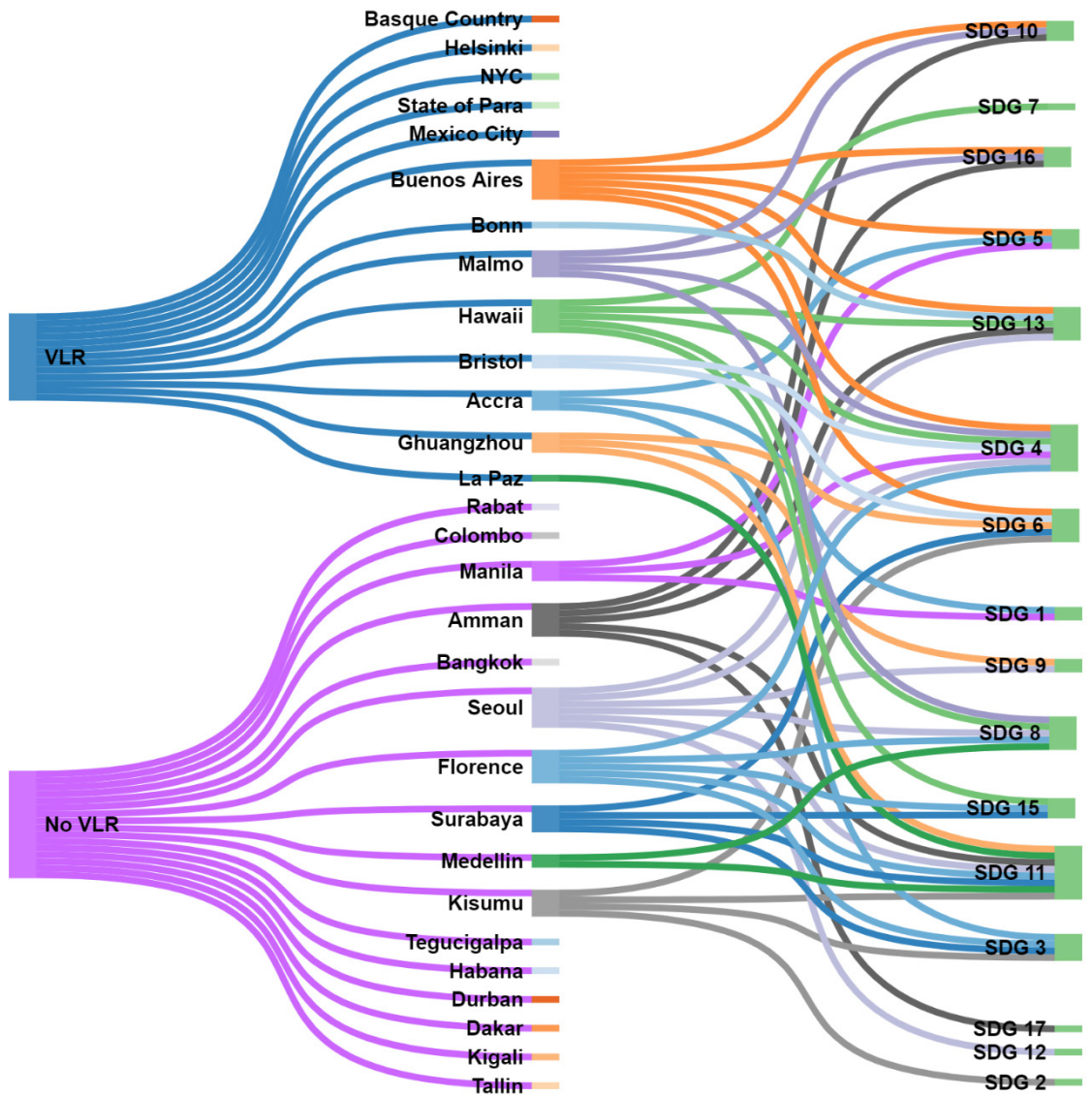
One aspect shared by these cities is their continued engagement in international forums and networks to share and further develop their implementation practices. They report that, in addition to the opportunity to meet funders, **they are grateful for the exchange of SDG knowledge (e.g., methodologies and monitoring tools) and the interaction with their peers from other countries.**

g. Coastal cities

The research included 18 coastal case studies among cities, municipalities, and regions to incorporate SDG 14 – life below water. The most significant number of coastal cases were in the LAC and Asia regions.

The overall results indicate that only three cases (Pará, Hawaii, and Accra) identified SDG 14 as one of the most critical SDGs to be met. Furthermore, Hawaii and Accra were the only cases that claimed to have made significant progress in implementing SDG 14. Conversely, Helsinki and the Basque Country openly stated that they have had made minor efforts in the localization and implementation of SDG 14 at the local level. In most of the cases reviewed, the information collected did not allow for a detailed response to this question. However, it should be noted that the consulted respondents responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level indicated that answering this type of question requires specific and in-depth analysis. Some cases reported a lack of prioritization in monitoring certain SDGs due to jurisdictional issues between different administrative bodies. Various levels (local, regional, and national) affect the follow-up and comparative assessments of progress on the SDGs. Moreover, in cases where monitoring guidelines and instructions come from higher administrative units than those of the case studies (e.g., federal states), there is a risk of first, losing uniformity in the reporting and implementation of the SDGs, and second, triggering additional costs for the local public treasury.

Figure 2. Case studies that have or have not submitted VLR and the SDGs reported to be achieving the most progress in each locality



Source: Own elaboration

h. Monitoring and reporting

The SDGs reported as most important at the local level are SDGs 3 (good health and wellbeing), 4 (quality education), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and 13 (climate action), mainly due to the strategies developed to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and global commitments for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The case studies reported that overall, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) is the one that has achieved the most progress at the local level. Likewise, other SDGs that show the most improvement are SDGs 3 (good health and wellbeing), 4 (quality education), 6 (clean water and sanitation), and 13 (climate action).

SDGs 1 (no poverty) and 2 (zero hunger) show minor improvement at the local level, followed by SDGs 5 (gender equality), 7 (affordable and clean energy), and 14 (life below water) affecting food security and the vulnerability of the poor due to ocean pollution.

Data collection and data availability pose a major challenge in tracking the SDGs, especially in Asia and LAC. Accessing data at the local level is challenging.

Regarding SDG synergies and trade-offs, interagency coordination is crucial to ensure the implementation does not overlap between different governance levels. It is assumed that by issuing national development plans aligned with the SDGs, national efforts will “trickle down” to local levels, where sectoral departments and agencies are instructed to integrate and align the SDGs with their sectoral planning. However, political factors, subnational actors’ capacity, and financial situation are variables to consider.

Manila provides an innovative design that allows for incorporating disaggregated data to determine the status and disparities among communities, households, and populations in meeting SDGs. The system also allows for identifying and assessing needs and prioritizing

Table 2. SDG progress by region

Asia-Pacific	Europe
<p>In addition to SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 4 (quality education), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Asian case studies consider SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) crucial for the region’s development.</p> <p>It is noteworthy that none of the Asian cases have selected or mentioned SDG 13 (climate action) as very relevant.</p> <p>The Asian region reported improvements in SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), and 11 (sustainable cities and communities).</p> <p>Asia has made minor progress on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).</p>	<p>Europe displays the same trend of prioritizing SDGs across the board, with Bonn being the only city in the study to identify SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) as one of the most significant SDGs. The Basque Country is the sole case that prioritizes SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).</p> <p>In addition to showing progress in areas such as climate change and sustainable cities, European cases have made progress in SDGs 4 (quality education), 6 (clean water and sanitation), and 8 (decent work and economic growth).</p> <p>The Basque Country indicated SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 2 (zero hunger) as the SDGs with minor advancement, while Malmö indicated SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) as the SDG with the least improvement.</p>
LAC and North America	Africa-MENA
<p>This is the only region that highlights the relevance of SDGs 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land), and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). The first two refer to essential dynamics for the State of Pará and Hawaii – given that the region experiences adverse effects in the equatorial zone due to ocean pollution (SDG 14 – life below water) – and a higher proportion of forest area in the total land area (SDG 15 – life on land) (Responsible Research and Innovation Networked Globally, RRING, 2020; UN, 2020). New York and Mexico City consider SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) relevant.</p> <p>The region’s case studies report substantial progress on SDGs related to city and wellbeing, climate action, and health. However, no case study reported significant progress on SDG 15 (life on land). LAC reported little progress in SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), and 5 (gender equality).</p>	<p>Only two cities in Africa-MENA consider it imperative to progress on SDG 5 (gender equality).</p> <p>Africa reported progress on SDGs 2 (zero hunger), 10 (reduced inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 13 (climate action), and 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions); however, African case studies vary significantly in progress reported.</p> <p>Amman shows progress in SDGs 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the goals), while Kisumu focuses on issues related to SDGs 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and wellbeing), and 6 (clean water and sanitation), only reporting progress on SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).</p>

program actions. **Hawaii** has a similar experience when developing its own set of indicators for achieving sustainability objectives in the Hawaii Green Growth Network, as well as through the identification of challenges according to the priorities set by the community.

Strengthening institutional capacity to address the gap in integrated policy planning and monitoring is needed to ensure the goals are fully achieved.

Only 40% of the case studies have submitted VLRs. While some cases track all 17 SDGs comprehensively, others report progress on selected prioritized SDGs for each VLR, making comparison difficult. In this context, it is particularly striking that half the VLRs submitted are from case studies located in North America and LAC, followed in quantity by Europe, Africa-MENA, and Asia.

2.2 Key gaps and drivers for the Decade of Action

Based on the findings described above, the main gaps and drivers for change in the Decade of Action are presented below.

These gaps can be grouped into three main areas: advocacy, action, and monitoring.

Advocacy: Local actors in the case studies express the need for support to access platforms that would facilitate their engagement at a national, regional, and global level, where priorities, programming, and funding are discussed and decided. For example, local governments' level of participation and engagement in producing the national reviews has been limited. Not detailing exactly how to accomplish the SDGs can create conflicts among actors and stakeholders who have different opinions, interests, resources, and mandates concerning how priorities should be set or resources should be allocated.

Action: There is a risk of delay in achieving or even a lack of achievement of the SDGs during the Decade of Action. Many local and regional governments are on the path to integrating the SDGs into their development plans and have created or modified their institutional arrangements. However, we face the danger of the SDGs not being achieved by 2030, and the current pandemic has caused regression concerning some of the goals. Significant efforts need to be made to remain capable of achieving the SDGs during the Decade of Action. In addition, the notion of political coherence in the 2030 Agenda also entails that systemic interactions between targets must be considered for effective policy design and implementation. Thus, there is a need to support integrated, tailor-made, and well-tested methods during implementation.

Monitoring: There is a need for reliable and evidence-based data at the local level that can be used as a baseline in order to know how much progress needs to be made to reach the goals. In this regard, mapping local socioeconomic and environmental indicators to SDGs themes is necessary, along with determining benchmarking mechanisms. This entails the challenge of harmonizing various sources of heterogeneous and context-dependent data.

In addition to these gaps, the following drivers for change have been identified as potentially playing a role in and having an influence on SDG localization moving forward:

- **COVID-19 pandemic recovery**

The current pandemic has highlighted the crucial role of local and regional governments in raising public awareness and maintaining essential public services. Going above and beyond, they have been responding rapidly to a quickly-changing reality and emergencies while ensuring the safety and protection of the local public officials who deliver services that assist people, especially the most vulnerable. These local actors need tailored support for their efforts to drive the localization of the SDGs.

- **Urban and peri-urban development is crucial to achieve the SDGs**

We are facing a turning point in the global strive for sustainable development, with cities being at the centre, as they are home to a growing majority of the world's population. The baseline case studies show that overall, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) is the goal that has seen the most progress at the local level and the goal that was prioritized for implementation in most cases.
- **We are falling behind in ensuring human wellbeing and ending hunger**

The importance of social protection systems to protect people's health, jobs, and income has been clearly demonstrated. As a result, many new social protection measures were introduced in 2020. The pandemic has prompted governments to obtain and redirect funds and to create social security measures to help vulnerable citizens cope with the situation. All of these efforts require a strong equality component to ensure we "leave no one behind".
- **Protecting the planet and building resilience both need a severe push**

Global and regional performance in SDG indicators that directly relate to environmental issues depicts an increase in downward trends. In local-level implementation and enactment, special attention needs to be paid to environment-related targets to avoid sacrificing ecosystems in the process of recovering from the pandemic.
- **Inclusive services delivery depends on local government capacity**

Achieving the SDGs is directly linked to the capacity of local and regional governments, as well as the resources available, to ensure populations' access to the basic service provisions that underpin quality of life, such as adequate housing, water, sanitation, education, food systems, mobility, and health.
- **Local economic development is constantly innovating**

Promising local initiatives show that there are strategies available to overcome the effects of the pandemic, but the speed of implementation needs to be significantly expedited. Examples include improving access to primary and social services, supporting local alternative economic models (the green and circular economies, sharing and social economies, the inclusion of the informal sector), boosting local food supply systems, fostering gender equality, protecting the young, and strengthening urban-rural linkages.
- **Capacity development remains crucial for SDG localization**

Strong and capable local governments play a fundamental role as the key drivers and enablers of sustainable and resilient local development. When discussing local governments' role in SDG localization, an important part of the debate is whether local governments have the required autonomy, competencies, resources, and capacity to monitor and achieve the SDGs effectively.

This chapter presented a summary of the comparative trends. The subsequent chapters delve deeper into these results and provide more examples of the findings from the case studies.

3. Diving deeper into the enabling environment for SDG localization – lessons from the different regions

In this chapter, the main findings from the desk research and the interviews are presented. Due to the number of case studies put forward in this study, organizing the information into different categories of cases is convenient. For this purpose, a regional focus was chosen. This categorization has the advantage of grouping the case studies into the regions defined by the SEI and the UN partners. Consequentially, it can facilitate action by the UN system in the different regional classifications and regional groups the UN uses. Moreover, a regional focus enables a systematic review of the case studies, as their characteristics are compared with other cases that are assumed to be similar, which facilitates classification and synthesis (Smith, 2014).

The thematic information regarding the subnational enactment of the SDGs in the case studies is further organized into 1) policy coherence with the SDGs, 2) multi-level governance, 3) policy integration: agenda interconnectedness and methodologies, 3) monitoring and budgeting, and 4) engagement of local-level actors in international forums and city-to-city partnerships. This categorization reflects the themes derived from the theoretical focus and the interview designed for this study.

3.1 European case studies

The integration of the SDGs into local development agendas is one of the most common practices shared by many subnational entities in the region. European subnational actors acknowledge the importance of keeping their policies on track and aligned with global goals and targets. This is often reflected in their VLRs or other reports, where different local development strategies are mapped and aligned with the SDGs. Regarding multi-level governance, the main finding is that **all the subnational implementation processes involve a wide range of stakeholders through participatory and engagement mechanisms that include** governmental, academic, and civil society actors at various levels (local, regional, national, and global).

Some case studies in the region show gaps in their analysis of the 2030 Agenda interconnectedness and the policy integration that is needed to address this. Even though policy coherence is present as a narrative in the case studies, the research shows that there is not a deep understanding of the concept within the context of the SDGs. Although fewer cases have conducted such an analysis, they are described and discussed.

Monitoring and financing actions for development at the local level are closely related to SDG localization efforts. Budgetary constraints diminish the capacity for local actors to monitor and evaluate the implementation of SDGs. Findings suggest that financial support for SDG localization is **strategically linked to the provincial government budget**. European cases have developed novel methods of financing. **Green bonds**, which have been applied since 2017 in **Malmö**, serve as a fixed-income instrument explicitly designed to support specific climate- or environment-related projects. **Green bonds promote sustainability by financing projects aimed at achieving energy efficiency, pollution prevention, and sustainable agriculture. Moreover, the region demonstrates leadership** to exchange locally-based experiences, and best practices on SDG local integration stand out among these endeavours, highlighting Bonn's experience as an international centre for sustainability, consistent with its participation and leadership in several regional networks.

Moreover, **all the European cases have accomplished the most progress in implementing indicator systems for compliance tracking of the SDGs**. This feature has enabled them to prepare more regular reports on the implementation and follow-up of the SDGs. **Therefore, one of the most essential and indispensable monitoring tools for local governments is the VLR, as it facilitates transparency, awareness, and institutional accountability.**

Table 3. Comparison between European case studies

Case study	Policy coherence	Multi-level governance	Policy integration	Monitoring	Financing	Engagement in international forums	City-to city partnerships
Basque country	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs ¹⁰	Yes	Host
Bonn	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
Bristol	NA	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
Helsinki	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
Florence	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	No VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
Malmö	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Yes	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
Tallin	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host

3.1.1 Policy coherence with the SDGs

The alignment of local development agendas with the SDGs is one of the most common practices shared by many subnational entities in the region. European subnational actors acknowledge the importance of keeping their policies on track and aligned with global goals and targets. This is often reflected in their VLRs or other reports, where different local development strategies are mapped and aligned with the SDGs. The emphasis on policy alignment with the SDGs is perhaps one of the most characteristic capacities in this region.

For instance, in the **Basque Country**, the *Agenda Euskadi Basque Country 2030* (Basque Country Government, n.d.-a) is a report in which the regional authorities link the different regional development plans to the SDGs. Regional authorities recognize this document as a policy alignment tool between government efforts and the SDGs. Similarly, the City of **Bonn** Council aims to systematically align municipal action with the SDGs and address all local action with a development element by aligning various policies with the SDGs, such as the *Bonn Sustainability Strategy*. The alignment of **Bonn's** policy instruments with the SDGs is consistent with its image as the “center of most of the UN's sustainability efforts” (City of Bonn, 2019). Similarly, the **Bristol** case study is consistent with the SDGs narrative; the city lists the different policy actions undertaken that influence each SDG in its VLR. Moreover, the *Bristol SDG Alliance* exemplifies the importance of integrating the SDGs for the local actors through local engagement (Fox & Macleod, 2019).

By signing the *Declaration of Cities Commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda*, the City of **Malmö** committed to developing a comprehensive and integrated Local 2030 Agenda. The primary focus has been to integrate the SDGs into the municipal steering and management systems using the weight of existing governance structures. In 2020, the 17 SDGs were recognized as the long-term orientation in the city's goal structure. In the Malmö Budget, the overall steering document of the City of **Malmö**, every prioritization is connected to one or several SDGs; this is based on whether the prioritization contributes directly or indirectly to the achievement of the concerned SDGs. Furthermore, **Malmö** has recently submitted its first VLR (Leander et al., 2021), where the various goals of the city administration are linked to the SDGs.

⁹ Meaning that within the core funding mechanisms and case study budgets, there is either a specific allocation for all or some SDGs, or that the budget is focused directly on meeting the SDGs

BOX 1. MALMÖ'S POLICY COHERENCE WITH THE SDGS

The strategy for SDG localization in the city of **Malmö** recognizes the need to deepen efforts for policy coherence with the SDGs throughout existing governance and management mechanisms in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Hence, the city relies on four equally essential development processes for localizing the SDGs:

- operational development
- planned communication and participation for learning and support
- knowledge enhancement for conscious decision-making
- innovative partnerships

In addition, the 2030 Agenda is taking shape in four city target areas: urban development and climate, education and employment, safety and participation, and good organization.

The strategy aims to provide the city with a basis for long-term sustainability planning and priority setting. Although this strategy has the city council as its main protagonist, it emphasizes the need for the inclusion of all the different social groups that have a function in implementing the Agenda at the local level. For instance, a strong focus is placed on the city's community-led initiatives, which promote the implementation of the Agenda with local and solid citizen ownership, targeting education, climate, sustainable city development, sustainable finance, and environmental conservation, among other areas.

In addition, **Malmö** evaluates local sustainability progress regularly. To this end, sustainability reports are generated every four years to overview the progress made on the 17 Global Goals. This report also contains an evaluation of the indicators for analysing progress and the contextualization of the SDGs, which links the different sectors of society involved in achieving the Agenda.

Likewise, **Helsinki's** public agenda alignment with the 2030 Agenda is tackled in the local strategy designed to be a carbon-free city (City of Helsinki, 2018). The methodology consisted of linking the Helsinki City Strategy and the Carbon-neutral Helsinki 2035 action plan with the SDGs to see how local policies connect with the 2030 Agenda (City of Helsinki, 2019).

In **Florence** and **Tallinn**, local authorities are currently performing localization efforts and constructing their VLRs. Both case studies expressed their aim to align their local development policies with the SDGs through the VLR. In **Florence**, the city is constructing the *Metropolitan Agenda for Sustainable Development*, a strategy inspired by the 2030 Agenda and aligned within the *National and Regional Strategies for Sustainable Development*.

3.1.2 Multi-level governance

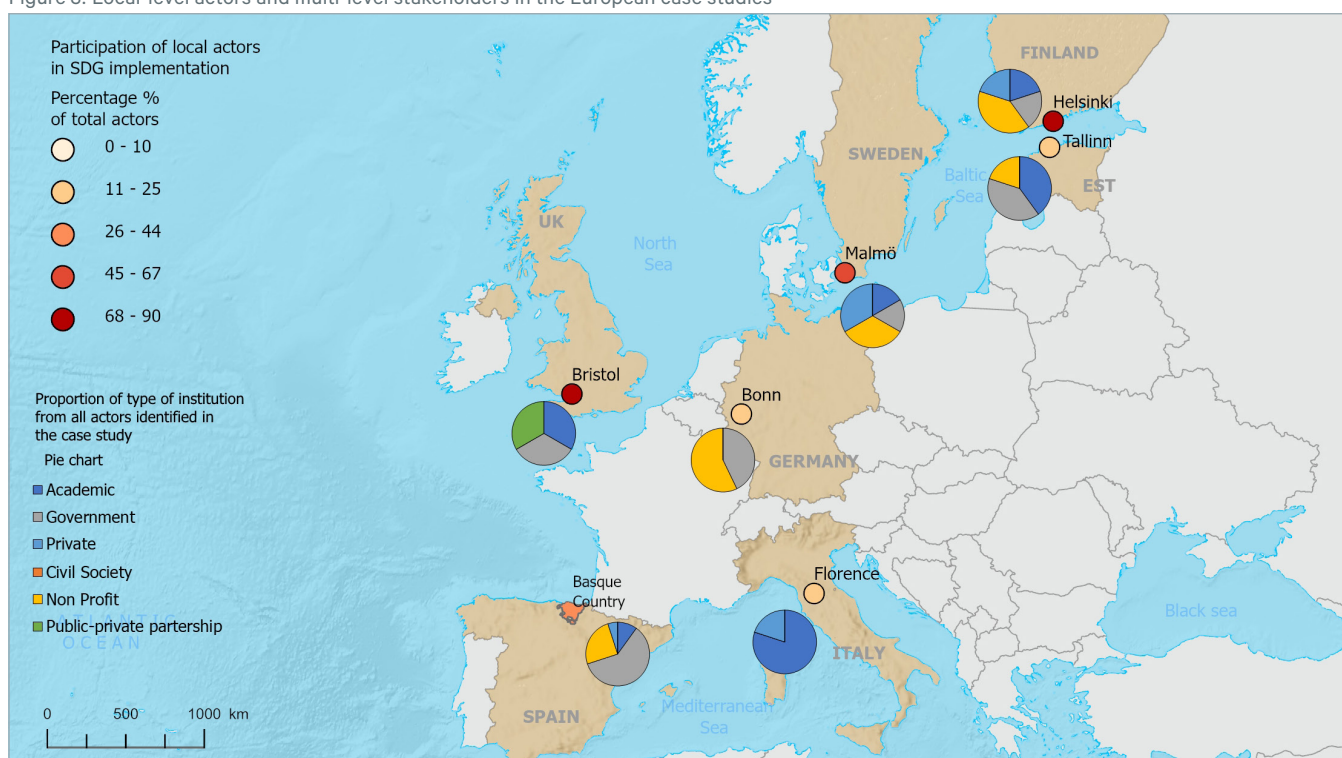
In the European case studies, the main finding is that **all the subnational implementation processes involve a wide range of stakeholders through participatory and engagement mechanisms that include** governmental, academic, and civil society actors at various levels (local, regional, national, and global).

The **Basque Country**, for instance, promotes regional interaction through cooperation platforms. Even though the public authority of the Basque government is central in its strategy, it engages regional actors through the Udalsarea 2030 (the Basque Network of Sustainable Municipalities), which is a platform of cooperation and funding for Basque municipalities on the promotion of the SDGs. Since adopting the 2030 Agenda, the **Basque Country's** authorities have engaged

predominantly with the local governance structure in place to update or modify the SDGs locally. Moreover, “coordination and collaborative governance” is included in the second priority of the *Basque Program of Priorities for the 2030 Agenda*. In other words, the governance structure of the **Basque Country** is strongly designed with multi-governance and regional reasoning.¹⁰

Similarly, **Bonn**’s localization process of the SDGs includes civic participation; the city has highlighted in the VLR the participation of citizens in city decision committees through the Advisory Council for Civic Participation and the participation portal *Bonn macht mit*, where citizens can access information on how they can influence municipal decisions. Moreover, **Bonn** leads a multi-stakeholder initiative to determine localized indicators with the potential of extending its bases to other cities in Germany (SDG Indicators for Municipalities).¹¹ This initiative aims to ensure that one or more indicators depict every sub-goal considered relevant for German communities.

Figure 3. Local-level actors and multi-level stakeholders in the European case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013)

In **Bristol**, the Bristol Green Capital Partnership, which includes over 1,000 organizations, has led the construction of the Bristol SDG Alliance, which was specifically created for the Agenda’s implementation and to raise awareness of the SDGs, focusing on its importance for the city’s sustainability and to monitor its progress. Moreover, the *One City Plan* is a policy exclusively created for the 2030 Agenda developed through extensive multi-stakeholder engagement. The policy articulates a vision for making **Bristol** a fair, healthy, and sustainable city for all structured around six core themes (Connectivity, Economy, Environment, Health and Wellbeing, Homes and Communities, and Learning and Skills).

¹⁰ Sustainable Energy Action Plan, Noise Pollution Plan, Sustainability Mobility Plan, Biodiversity Plan, Waste Plan, Responsible Public Procurement Plan, Housing Plan, Plan to Promote the Primary Sector, Cooperation Plan, Tourism Plan. Retrieved from: <https://www.ihobe.eus/publications/local-2030-agenda-how-to-address-sustainable-development-goals-from-local-level-practical-guide>

¹¹ The initiative has essentially performed a very thorough analysis of suitable indicators for German cities and works with municipalities to compile relevant indicators, define, or redefine them when necessary, and – to the greatest possible extent – provide access to the indicator parameters.

Similarly, **Florence's** local authorities involve different actors' technical and scientific support to design its upcoming VLR: academia (for instance, the University of Florence, Department of Economic Sciences and Management), a private consultant firm (Avventura Urbana), and UN-Habitat. The role of private actors throughout the crafting process of the **Florence** VLR is central.

Malmö's local authorities have consistently engaged in partnerships with private actors, including all companies owned by the city, academia, non-profit organizations, and private interlocutors, to integrate SDGs locally. An example of such partnerships is the Growth Commission for an Inclusive and Sustainable Malmö, with members from academia and the private sector to advise the city on inclusive and sustainable growth, which overlaps with the SDGs according to the VLR (Leander et al., 2021). Moreover, the city promotes public-private partnerships through mechanisms such as green bonds and social bonds for funding climate action projects. **Malmö** is also home to a Local2030 hub, the Malmö Local Ocean Action Hub, which focuses on capacity building and cooperation on coastal cities and ocean conservation.

Finally, **Tallinn** will be the lead city of the SDG in Cities project, a cooperation platform to advance SDG localization in cities around Europe. Local actors hope that this project will help link the *Tallinn 2035* policy with the SDGs and share their development strategy with other subnational entities around Europe.

The multi-level governance shown in the **European case studies highlights the importance of local involvement in executing the 2030 Agenda**. The presented case studies comprise a high degree of participation and coordination among subnational actors, which is necessary for SDG localization. In this regard, these case studies can be used as an example of multi-level governance for other subnational authorities. Communication and sharing of knowledge with European actors could be an opportunity for the Decade of Action.

3.1.3 Policy integration: agenda interconnectedness and methodologies

Some case studies in the region show gaps in their analysis of the 2030 Agenda interconnectedness and the policy coherence needed to address this. Even though policy coherence is present as a narrative in the case studies, the research shows that there is not a deep understanding of the concept of SDG interactions in the context of policy integration. This is exemplified by the *Reference Framework for Policy Coherence for Development in the Basque Country* (Basque Country Government, n.d.-b), in which it is stated that policy coherence is a "basic reference point" for governance in SDG implementation. However, the document defines policy coherence in terms of multi-level governance and cooperation between sectors, and not in terms of SDG interactions. This narrative was confirmed through the interview, where the subnational actors confirmed that their emphasis on policy coherence is in coordination frameworks, as illustrated by the priority of "coordination and collaborative governance" in the *Basque Program of Priorities for the 2030 Agenda*. The subnational actors interviewed for the **Basque Country** expressed knowledge about the interconnectedness of the Agenda and how there is a need to assess the interactions between the SDGs. However, they also stated that they have not yet put in place a mechanism that calculates the impacts of the progress of one goal or target on another.

Bristol also recognizes the SDGs as an interconnected agenda in its VLR (Fox & Macleod, 2019); however, neither its analysis nor its implementation account for SDG interactions. When implementing the 2030 Agenda, **Bristol's** authorities focused individually on the SDGs. Although no particular methodology is used to calculate SDG interactions, **Bristol's** authorities prioritize one SDG over the others through public consultation, weighting the highest score/prevalence within the sample group as an indicator of the local priority.¹² Similarly, **Helsinki** utilized methodologies to compare the city's public agenda with the SDGs; however, no methodology was employed to calculate the impact of one SDG on another.

¹² In the case of Bristol, SDG 3 (mental health) and SDG 10 (reducing inequalities) scored the highest.

On the other hand, some case studies' experiences contrast with the previous ones. **They have implemented methodologies to calculate SDG interactions and intend to use the analysis for prioritization purposes.** For instance, in the **Bonn** case study, subnational actors expressed that one of the motivations of the **City of Bonn's** SDG strategy is to use the SDGs to analyse policy interlinkages between the goals, identify synergies and gaps, and prevent trade-offs. The city has made a localized assessment of the 17 goals and translated them into 12 municipal fields of action that show the connections and interactions between the identified and agreed municipal fields of action in **Bonn** and the individual SDGs. The selection of prioritized thematic areas was based on an in-depth baseline with quantitative and qualitative data (concepts, masterplans, council decisions) and SWOT analysis. In this regard, in the VLR, it is possible to see how the various development actions in the city affect SDGs at the Goal level (positively, negatively, or neutral) (City of Bonn, 2019).

In **Malmö**, the prioritization of policies follows a four-development process methodology and an analysis of how different policy instruments impact each other at the local level.¹³ The city's authorities have also started looking into the interconnectedness of the SDGs and how the goals affect each other. In this regard, they expressed interest in a tool that will help with the mapping and how to calculate synergies and trade-offs. The city has participated in a workshop, organized by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions and the national government, to help develop a tool for the local level. It is also perceived relevant to consider prioritization of the SDGs, but this has not been done yet.

Finally, it was indicated in the interview that **Florence** expressed interest in including SDG interactions analysis in its implementation of the Agenda. The VLR will discuss the interconnectedness of the SDGs at the metropolitan level, and the *Metropolitan The 2030 Agenda* will identify priority objectives and targets able to pursue multiple SDGs at the same time.

3.1.4 Monitoring and budgeting

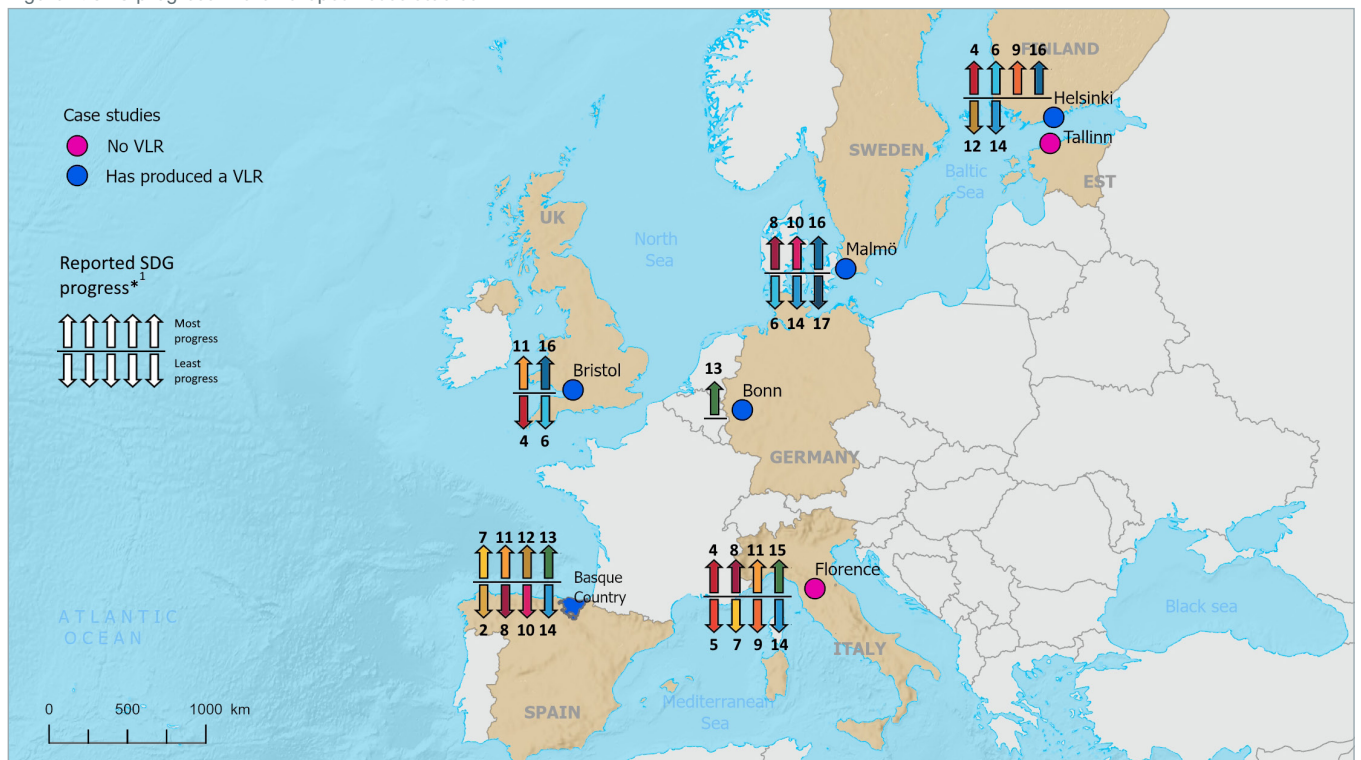
In terms of monitoring, the **Basque Country** has been making substantial progress in the implementation of the *Euskadi 2030 Agenda*, using the *Euskadi 2030 Gunea Practical Guide as a system of indicators of compliance with the SDG localization, serving as the basis for the annual regional monitoring and follow-up reports* (Basque Country Government, 2020). Currently, the **Basque Country**, in collaboration with Eustat, the General Secretariat for Social Transition, a system of indicators is being designed and developed to monitor compliance based on UN indicators and other relevant metrics that will complement the current monitoring system at the local level. Nonetheless, **one of the main challenges is the lack of harmony and standardization of monitoring methods and approaches to assess SDG progress at the local level within the Basque Country** and extrapolate it to the national level. Therefore, further research development has been suggested to identify possible solutions to monitoring methods by sharing knowledge and good practices with benchmarking in regions and their link to the national level.

A **focus on local development programs** characterizes **Bonn** in terms of budgeting and partnerships. Locally, financial support is strategically associated with specific prioritized SDGs (mobility, low-emission cities, climate adaptation and mitigation, education, research). However, due to this condition, funding is a constraint. A significant number of projects fully or partially funded by local authorities rely on a grant within a proposed funded project. In contrast, it is impossible to invest in other projects due to their higher costs.

Furthermore, **Bonn** recognizes that reporting and monitoring are essential tools despite financial constraints and has therefore submitted its VLR to report SDG implementation to increase

¹³ Operational development is a planned communication and participation model for learning and support, increased knowledge for conscious decisions, and innovative partnerships. Another method includes integrating the goals in a planning process (Smörkajen), as well as a gap analysis on the SDGs as part of producing a new Energy Strategy for the city, mapping the impact on other SDGs from ecological targets in the new Environment Program.

Figure 4. SDG progress in the European case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013) *1: The reported SDG progress was obtained from the desk study and the interviews. In this regard, not all of the case studies reported SDG progress. The represented goals appear in ascending order based on their SDG number and not on benchmarking values.

transparency, awareness, and institutional accountability. This effort is part of the Association of German Cities to identify a set of indicators suitable for mapping and monitoring SDG localization. Nonetheless, limited staff resources constitute a crucial challenge for monitoring and evaluating SDG progress at the local level.

Similarly, **Bristol** experiences **limitations in monitoring and evaluation of SDG localization processes due to financial constraints**. Public resources allocated for SDG implementation in Bristol are limited due to the UK-wide fiscal austerity program, resulting in significant cuts to core funding (Fox & Macleod, 2019). Nevertheless, Bristol Green Capital Partnership provides additional resources for the SDGs. Furthermore, other institutions support local implementation efforts, and while financial constraints persist, they do not impede local monitoring and evaluation procedures.

The production of **Bristol's** VLR enhanced the monitoring of the SDGs at the local level. The process of developing it embraced the opportunity to create awareness-raising spaces for **Bristol's** citizens and organizations through multiple consultations to publicize improvement in achieving the SDGs. In addition, the VLR provided the city with a tool to monitor both progress on the SDGs and the local priorities included in the One City Plan, serving as an accountability tool to monitor progress on local commitments. Thus, as a public document, the VLR served as a mechanism to consolidate an everyday discourse that can help local actors share experiences and learning with their counterparts in other cities in the UK and worldwide. Additionally, these processes helped identify that the main challenges **Bristol** faces regarding monitoring and evaluating relate to administrative aspects:

1. Defining “local” leads to jurisdictional reasoning.
2. Rural and urban areas (multiple towns and cities) are situated in geographical zones that belong to different jurisdictions.
3. The movement of people, goods, and services increases interdependence among localities.
4. The realities and experiences of communities living outside administrative borders are not necessarily well-reflected.

These complexities lead to divergent trends, data gaps, and potential inequalities. Furthermore, monitoring indicators are not necessarily the same for all contexts (e.g. wealthy vs poor) (Fox & Macleod, 2019). Regarding the most significant SDGs for the achievement of sustainable development in **Bristol**, SDGs 3 and 10 stand out. Following **Bonn** and **Bristol**, **Helsinki** recognizes the importance of issuing VLRs as an excellent example of monitoring, although not the only one. Local authorities are leading monitoring efforts through more far-reaching initiatives, such as the *Helsinki Carbon Neutrality Action Plan* and carbon footprint trackers (City of Helsinki, 2019).

The role of the VLR as a monitoring and follow-up instrument in **Florence** is relevant. This effort meant reporting 100 indicators constituting the baseline for the city’s *Metropolitan Strategic Plan* M&E system and linking policy instruments to the SDGs locally. However, the city recognizes that one of the main challenges in monitoring progress is the need for support and resources from the Ministry of the Environment to enable data collection and analysis to assess the achievement of the SDGs. Regarding financing, it was identified that while in most cases SDG localization measures are financed by the city government, there is strong involvement from public-private partnerships, which provide additional resources to support policies and projects aligned with the SDGs financially.

Malmö, through the VLR, has reported progress on nine relevant SDGs at the local level. The city also relies on other monitoring mechanisms based on municipal committees that enable municipal council dialogues, follow-up activities, targets, and the city’s financial situation, and the review of possible collective decisions and actions for city planning (Leander et al., 2021). Furthermore, the lack of data and the capacity to generate statistical information are the city’s main challenges in localizing the SDGs.

In terms of the financing process, the **City of Malmö** has linked its budget with the 2030 Agenda. The central funding mechanism is the budget of the **City of Malmö**, approved by the City Council. This budget is considered to be fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda so that the total annual funding is allotted to financing sustainable development and programs to achieve the SDGs locally. However, as yet, there is no analysis related to budget allocation by SDG. In addition, the national government contributes financial support to specific initiatives through application processes and one-time grants. The same applies to EU funding. Furthermore, it has been observed that many private funding initiatives contribute to the SDGs, which, over the past few years, have invested US\$820,3800. Finally, the **City of Malmö** has been issuing green bonds, which consist of a “green framework” specifying the environmental and climate-related criteria for the city’s investments that focuses primarily on reporting reductions in CO₂ emissions.

For **Tallinn**, efforts to monitor SDG progress at the local level are not available at this level of governance; however, at the national level, monitoring and evaluation are centralized through an online database that illustrates the objectives of the governance areas (*Tree of Truth*).¹⁴

¹⁴ Retrieved from: <https://tamm.stat.ee/>

BOX 2. SDG 14 MONITORING IN ALL CASE STUDIES

The overall results indicate that only three cases, **Pará**, **Hawaii**, and **Accra**, explicitly identified SDG 14 as one of the most critical SDGs to be met. However, **Hawaii** and **Accra** were the only cases that claimed to have made significant progress in implementing SDG 14. Conversely, **Helsinki** and the **Basque Country** openly stated that they have made minor efforts in the localization and implementation of SDG. In most cases reviewed, the information collected did not allow for a detailed response to these questions. It should be noted that the consulted respondents indicated that answering this type of question requires specific and in-depth analysis. They also stated that, in some cases, there is a lack of prioritization in the monitoring of certain SDGs due to jurisdictional issues between different administrative bodies at local, regional, and national levels that affect the follow-up and comparative assessments of progress on the SDGs. Moreover, in cases where monitoring guidelines and instructions come from higher administrative units than those of the case studies, for example, federal administrative units, there is a risk of first, losing uniformity in the reporting and implementation of the SDGs, and second, triggering additional costs for the local public treasury

3.1.5 Engagement of local-level actors in international forums and city-to-city partnerships

Bonn's initiative and cooperative efforts with other cities worldwide are part of its profile due to its involvement in implementing the SDGs. Thus, **Bonn**'s self-identification as an "international sustainability hub" (City of Bonn, 2019) is consistent with its participation and leadership in an international project led by the OECD (A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals) and in other international forums. Consequently, the city's eagerness to lead transnational initiatives and other subnational actors facilitates the dissemination of good practices globally. Similarly, **Helsinki** follows a related trend, as the city's engagement with international organizations is constantly promoted in leadership forums (such as the SDG Leadership Cities Network).

Regarding the experience of the **Basque Country**, it implements a global internationalization strategy through cooperation processes, in which the city's public and private actors engage equally to lead, develop, and implement government programs and an internationalization strategy together with crucial actors in charge of critical local social, economic, and cultural issues (Basque Country Government, 2021). In a similar trend, **Florence**'s engagement with international actors is facilitated through VLR discussions as part of the Interregional Cooperation event to implement the *New Urban Agenda*. Thus, the local knowledge currently being built is shared at the international level with key actors.¹⁵

The Swedish **City of Malmö** engages actively in different cross-border scenarios, such as the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the ICLEI, World Congress 2021–2022, the Brookings Institute, Eurocities, and Greater Copenhagen, which is a collaborative organization promoting growth and development in the most prominent Nordic metropolitan area, encompassing 4.4 million citizens in Southern Sweden and Eastern Denmark. **Malmö** is an active participant in the global context. For example, the city is one of the local UN 2030 hubs focused on capacity building for SDG 14 (Local Ocean Action Hub). In addition, the city has recently (May 2021) submitted its first VLR and, during this process, has been interested in sharing lessons and experiences from the city, as well as learning from others. Cooperating partners include UCLG, the ICLEI, and UN-Habitat. Finally, **Malmö** sets an excellent example of non-financial initiatives involving young

¹⁵ Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI); European cities (similar); European Metropolitan Cities Exchange; the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development; Joint Research Center.

people, political participation, education, civil society, NGO engagement, and fair trade.¹⁶ Likewise, **Florence's** non-financial support is provided at the regional level (Tuscan Regional Government) to implement the 2030 Agenda, and coordinate and facilitate activities, knowledge exchange, awareness-raising, and direct technical and capacity-building support to municipalities.

The European case studies illustrate how subnational actors can engage with institutions and platforms in the international arena, including the UN System. In this regard, these demonstrate the importance of international coordination and communication and exhibit an opportunity that could assist in the acceleration of the achievement of the SDGs.

3.2 Africa-MENA case studies

Africa-MENA case studies contrast with other regions, as **none of the studied cases has published a VLR**. However, **it was possible to observe that most cases have some level of policy alignment**, and they can be divided into two groups. The first group refers to case studies where SDG implementation is **not explicitly stated in local policy instruments**. Instead, the alignment with the 2030 Agenda is articulated in plans and strategies **formulated at the national level**. The **second group shows a higher level of alignment with the SDGs at the subnational level**.

The subnational entities in Africa-MENA show varying degrees of multi-stakeholder engagement. However, the research found that **the most significant aspect of SDG implementation in the region is that it is led by national actors in all the case studies**, with cities becoming the location of platforms and hubs for SDG cooperation with other national and international entities. While coordination led by national institutions and actors is not inappropriate for SDG implementation, the lack of involvement of regional and local stakeholders results in a gap in engaging communities to include the needs, priorities, and expectations of the local population. This also reduces the opportunities to participate in international platforms and forums. For these case studies and those that present a similar trend, **this is an opportunity for action and advocacy from UN institutions to engage with subnational actors and facilitate platforms and mechanisms that allow multi-level governance**.

Furthermore, as in other regions in this study, **the assessment of SDG interlinkages is one of the main gaps identified**, as most case studies have not yet performed an interactions analysis that allows subnational entities to calculate synergies and trade-offs.

The African case studies show a **marked limitation in the monitoring and follow-up of SDG progress**. However, several local efforts implement diagnostics for the assessment and status of monitoring operations at the local level. In addition, among **the main challenges in monitoring are inadequate coordination between national and subnational governments, a high political turnover, and therefore constantly shifting priorities in policy agendas**. Furthermore, in terms of finance, the region is characterized by openness in the participation in **public investment forums to attract potential investors from the public or private sector to provide funding to advance the SDGs**.

It is noteworthy that some cases engage in **different international events where cities and local governments can learn, promote, and present innovative approaches to SDG integration, potentially boosting the participation of governors in international networks**.

¹⁶ Green Student Council [Grönt elevråd] in collaboration with the City's Environmental Administration; young people training as ambassadors (climate, ocean: Havsambassadörerna/klimatambassadörer); civil society partnerships (Agreement Malmöandan); regional center of expertise on education for sustainable development (RCE Skåne); Fair Trade City Sverige; campaign for repairing instead of buying (Naturskyddsforeningen).

Table 4. Africa-MENA case studies comparison

Case study	Policy coherence	Multi-level governance	Policy integration	Monitoring	Financing	Engagement in international forums	City-to city partnerships
Accra	Aligned using local policy instruments.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	N/A	No	Host/participant
Amman	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	Participant
Dakar	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	N/A	No	N/A
Durban	Aligned using local policy instruments.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	Participant
Kigali	Aligned using local policy instruments.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	N/A
Kisumu	Aligned using local policy instruments.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	Host
Rabat	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	N/A

3.2.1 Policy alignment with the SDGs

Africa-MENA case studies contrast with those in other regions, as **none of the studied cases has published a VLR**, although some local authorities are in the process of developing one, such as **Accra** and **Rabat**. In this regard, it was challenging to determine policy alignment with the SDGs, as this is most often expressed through the VLR, as is the case in other regions.

However, **it was possible to observe that most cases have some level of policy alignment**, and they can be divided into two groups. The first group includes case studies where SDG implementation is **not explicitly stated in local policy instruments**. Instead, the alignment with the 2030 Agenda is articulated in plans and strategies **formulated at the national level**. This is the case in **Rabat, Dakar, and Amman**, where the alignment of development policies with the SDGs is expressed through the VNRs. This does not mean that these case studies are not aligned with the SDGs in any way; on the contrary, every development policy can virtually contribute to the SDGs. However, **the fact that local policies have not been mapped or aligned with the 2030 Agenda in the previous case studies represents a significant gap**. It limits the possibility of monitoring SDG progress and locally focalizing action where it is most needed.

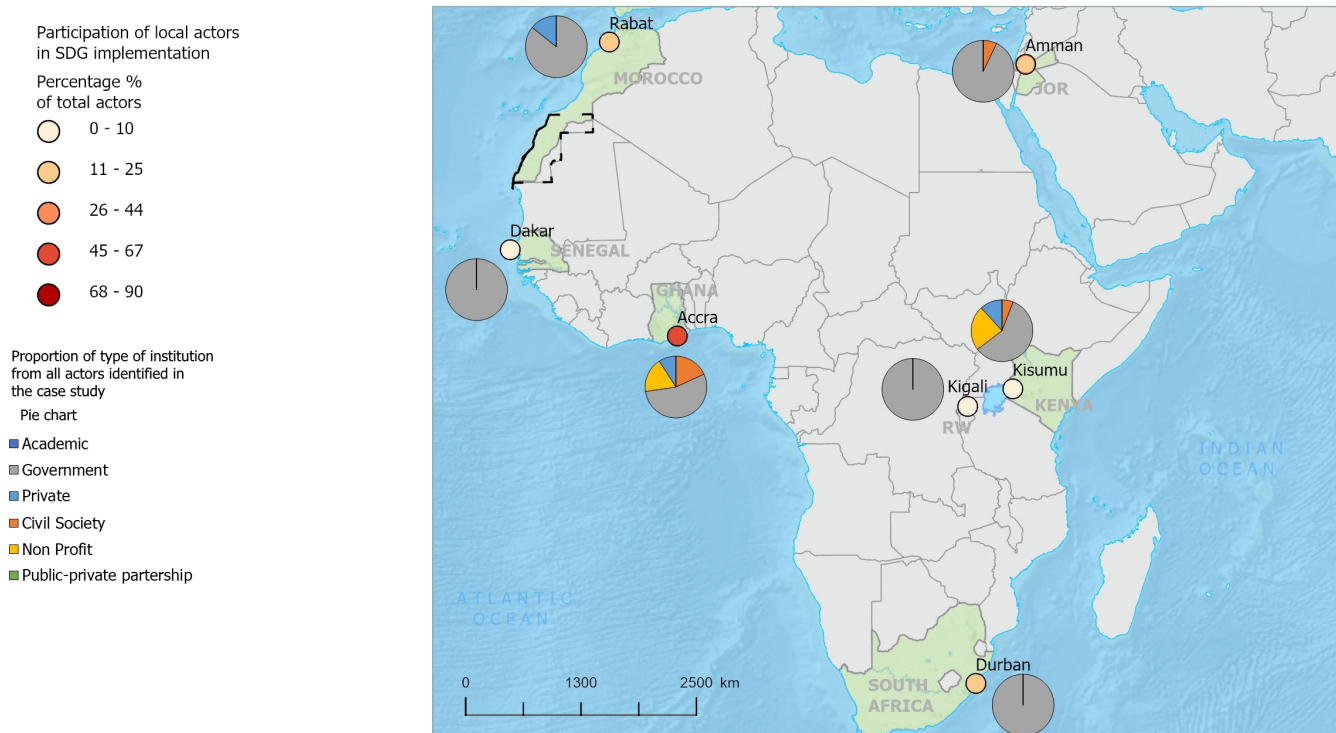
The **second group shows a higher level of alignment with the SDGs at the subnational level**. According to the Econsult Solutions Inc. (ESI) ThoughtLab think tank, **Accra** and **Kigali** are the only two African cities that have incorporated all 17 SDGs into their plans, with **Accra** being ahead in terms of overall progress (Esi ToughLab, 2021). However, this information was not confirmed. Other case studies are more transparent about their alignment with the SDGs. For instance, **Durban** has developed local policy instruments that explicitly mention the 2030 Agenda and link their local actions to the SDGs, such as the *eThekweni Municipality Integrated Development Plan and the Durban Climate Action Plan 2019*. In the latter plan, every action described is linked with the SDGs at the Goal level. Furthermore, **Durban** local agents use a bottom-up approach to analyse each city project's alignment with SDGs (eThekweni Municipality, 2021). Similarly, in **Kisumu**, the *Kisumu County integrated Development Plan II, 2018–2022* links each of Kisumu county's functions with the SDGs at the Goal level; it also describes how **Kisumu's** plan coordinates with the national strategy *Kenya Vision 2030*, where the national implementation of the Agenda is set out.

3.2.2 Multi-level governance

The subnational entities in Africa-MENA show varying degrees of multi-stakeholder engagement. However, the research found that **the most significant aspect of SDG implementation in the region is that it is led by national actors in all the case studies.** In some cases, cities become the location of platforms and hubs for SDG cooperation with other national and international entities.

Some case studies have created steering or coordination institutions and platforms at the national level, which mandate SDG implementation throughout sectors and in lower levels of government. For instance, **Kigali's** implementation efforts are mandated by Rwanda's national government, which has created a Steering Committee for the SDGs and advises other ministries and development sectors. Similarly, **Accra's** local agents are included in a sophisticated SDG governance structure led by national authorities. The country has created the High-level Ministerial Committee, the Multi-stakeholder Implementation Coordinating Committee, and the Technical Committee, which provide oversight, support, and coordination to implement the SDGs at the national level. In this sense, Ghana has adopted an inclusive and multi-stakeholder partnership approach to implementing the SDGs, backed by proper institutional arrangements and high-level political support. The National Development Planning Commission coordinated the national development policy framework with SDGs and other planning entities – Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, and Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies – required to align their existing medium-term plans with the SDGs. This has translated locally into a high level of support for the SDGs throughout governmental entities and private entities such as transport associations, businesses, and banks. Moreover, the city has joined the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) and its research program.¹⁷ Its implementation includes a significant range of local activities (such as SDG awareness, training, capacity building).

Figure 5. Local participation and multi-level stakeholders in the Africa-MENA case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013)

17 SDG implementation comes under NALAG's Research and Program Department.

Durban's experience in the SDG localization process is similar. The national government channels its participation through South Africa's planning and statistics departments.¹⁸ The Metropolitan Region is involved through its economic and investment promotion unit, while the city's International Convention Center is the only local actor involved in SDG localization efforts.¹⁹ **Durban** has also provided training for local authorities in SDG implementation. The training allowed for knowledge exchange regarding practices, methodologies, strategies, and tools associated with the SDGs' planning, alignment with local policy instruments, monitoring, and reporting. This led to collaboration between different stakeholders (local agents, elected officials, local and territorial managers) and international organizations (such as the European Commission), UN-System agencies (UNDP, UN-Habitat, and UNDESA), and local government associations (UCLG Africa et al., 2018).

In the **Kisumu** case study, SDG efforts are regulated by the Kenyan government through a national governance mandate, where the government has directed all ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as county governments, to align policy, planning, and budgeting, as well as monitoring systems and processes with the SDGs. For this purpose, the **Kisumu** County government has established an SDGs Coordination Unit headed by the director of planning at the county with representatives from all the county departments. It is also worth noting that **Kisumu** has made efforts to align its local policies with the national *Kenya Vision 2030*, denoting vertical coordination with the national government.

In MENA, **Amman** and **Rabat's** implementation processes are also led by national actors. **Amman's** implementation has been carried out mostly by Jordan's national ministries, coordinating with the Greater Amman Municipality government. In the **Rabat** case study, Morocco's national government has created a National Commission for Sustainable Development, the leading institution that acts as a coordination platform between government departments and ministries and non-governmental actors to mainstream the SDGs in the country (High Commission for Planning 2020, Morocco, 2020). It is also expected that each region in Morocco (including the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra Region) will have a regional SDG strategy. However, these plans are being formulated and are not yet published.

Finally, **Dakar** is one of the case studies in the region where a prominent actor behind the implementation of SDGs could not be identified. Rather, Senegal highlights national SDG progress through its VNR (Government of Senegal, 2018). This document states that the country's development agenda (*Emergent Senegal Plan*) is the main instrument guiding SDG action. However, the plan was created before the 2030 Agenda, and its actions and programs have not been altered since. **Dakar's** marginal role in terms of SDG localization is visible in the country's VNR.

3.2.3 Policy integration: agenda interconnectedness and methodologies

As in other regions in this study, **the assessment of SDG interlinkages is one of the main gaps identified**, as most case studies in Africa-MENA have not yet performed an interactions analysis that allows subnational entities to calculate synergies and trade-offs. However, some localities are worth highlighting.

Durban's experience regarding interconnectedness is noteworthy. Even though **Durban** lacks a VLR, local authorities balance the most important achievements in terms of SDG progress. The city was the focal point of an SDG project assessment session joined by local authorities (eThekweni Municipality) delivered by a partner consortium (Global Cities Programme & UN-Habitat, 2020) and funded by the UK Government. As a result, data management and information allow the municipality's agents to improve data collection, analysis, and management. **Durban's** results are based on a methodology that included participatory workshops to discuss recommendations for improving a project's alignment with the SDG targets, city context, and

¹⁸ Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Statistics South Africa.

¹⁹ Economic Development & Investment Promotion Unit: eThekweni.

goals. However, this methodology was not applied in policy coherence efforts for the city but rather in a specific project.²⁰

The **Kisumu** policy coherence efforts are also interesting. According to the research, the task is performed through **Kisumu's** integrated development plans, adopted in its annual planning instrument, and almost all the programs locally implemented. For example, urban housing programs (redevelopment) are linked to SDGs 1, 3, 11, and 13. In this program, trade-offs have been identified, and mitigation measures have been adopted. **Kisumu's** know-how in urban renewal and redevelopment and SDG interconnectedness includes capacity building on governance and strategic planning, strategic leadership, and direction on the city's growth. However, the methodology process is not clear.

In the **Amman** case, SDG interconnectedness has only been done at the national level through a participatory process among stakeholders (such as state agents and civil society). The exercise was SDG-oriented; a mapping process allowed the comprehension of the synergies between SDGs and the enactment of new policy instruments. As a result, Jordan's national priorities were established (citizens, society, business, and government) and translated into SDG language (people, planet, prosperity, peace and security, and partnerships). An SDG interconnectedness assessment is ongoing, with national authorities aiming to calculate SDG interactions in their national plans by establishing a team of nationally certified trainers who consider interconnectedness (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Jordan, 2017).

3.2.4 Monitoring and budgeting

Concerning monitoring experiences in **Africa-MENA**, the **Accra** local authorities' lessons in preparing their VLR prototype offer some insights into monitoring the SDGs. The city's previous local practice was to prepare reviews that addressed key social aspects. Currently, the local authorities are conducting a diagnostic assessment and another strategy of **Accra's** resilience in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), which will be linked to the implementation of the SDGs. Regrettably, NALAG has not been formally consulted on the inputs or invited to be part of the delegation. Nevertheless, it has participated in workshops and seminars to localize and realize the SDGs and targets.

Furthermore, the involvement of **Accra's** local authorities in seeking additional financing for the SDGs is noteworthy. The city has held investment forums with the aim of attracting potential local and international partners from the public and private sectors to financially support municipal authorities and exchange strategic information to promote investment to achieve the SDGs ("SDGs Country Financing Roadmap Roundtable Held," 2020). Similarly, central government authorities are leading the way in partnering with the Investment Partnership for Sustainable Development to implement the SDG Financing Roadmap project in the countries, an initiative it supports.

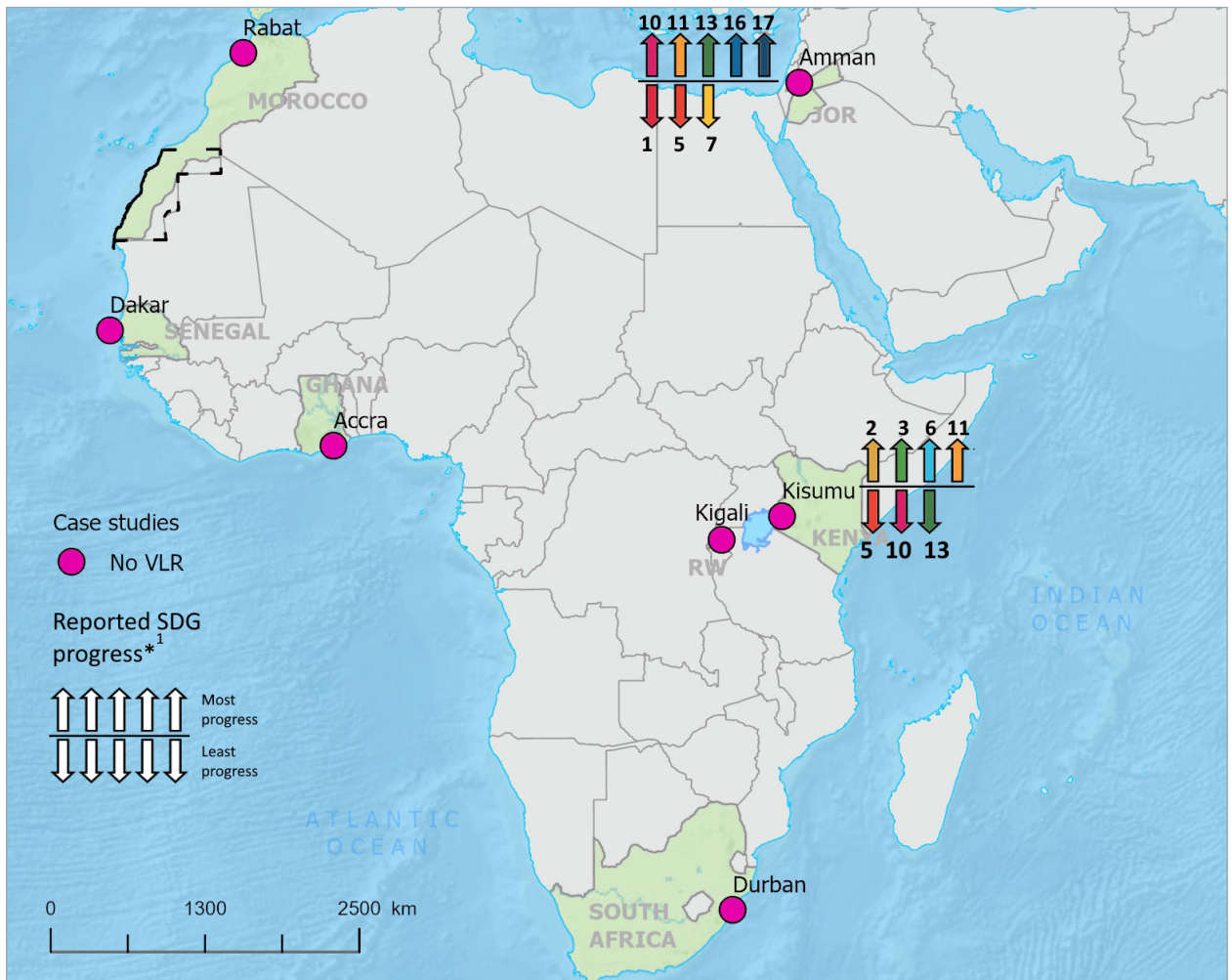
Kisumu's experience in SDG monitoring is directly linked to evaluation procedures at the national level and more specific locally-placed strategies (National Economic and Social Council of Kenya, 2007). However, several challenges have been identified that highlight the difficulties in implementing the SDGs at the local level. Some of the most prominent challenges are related to inadequate coordination between national and subnational governments; high political turnover, and therefore constantly shifting priorities in policy agendas; poor coordination among development partners; inadequate data, lack of methodology for data generation, and delay in updating some indicators; and low statistical capacity to process information. According to the research, monitoring challenges in **Kisumu's** experience include the lack of a coherent structure and timetable for collecting and providing information.

²⁰ The exercise focused on the Informal Settlements Information Management Solution (ISIMS) Project, which focuses on developing a data management and information management solution that will allow the eThekweni Municipality to improve how it collects, analyses, and manages data on informal settlements. Given that a large proportion (approximately 25%) of Durban's population lives in informal settlements, a key objective of the ISIMS Project is to help improve municipal decision-making and planning processes in the context of informal settlements in Durban.

Moreover, **Kisumu** is leading an initiative related to the participatory budgeting process. The County Budget and Economic Forum incorporates civil society organizations, NGOs, and citizens to raise awareness and prioritize resource allocation. In terms of local practices, local actors in **Kisumu** highlight the need to share knowledge gained in capacity building for actors to understand SDGs, planning, interrelated activities, and monitoring. Furthermore, **Kisumu** engages in and promotes national and international partnerships to allocate resources to achieve the SDGs.

Kisumu is involved in several blocks to gather financial resources to achieve the Goals. For example, associations have been generated at the local level with local stakeholders, such as the County government partnership with the Local Authorities Pension (LAP) Fund and the LAP Trust in urban renewal and redevelopment of old council houses to develop 10,000 new dwellings by 2022. At the international level, there is a collaboration between the private sector and the County government in the COVID-19 response fund to mitigate the expected spread of the pandemic and cushion vulnerable populations from the socioeconomic effects of the virus.

Figure 6. SDG progress in the Africa-MENA case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013)
 *1: The reported SDG progress was obtained from the desk study and the interviews. In this regard, not all the case studies reported SDG progress. The represented goals appear in ascending order based on their SDG number and not on benchmarking values.

Moreover, the European Investment Bank and the French Development Agency provided US\$79 million for Kisumu County to finance a drinking water and sanitation project. Finally, it was identified that while not formally partnering or collaborating with the County government, many private entities contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in various ways; for example, by creating jobs, reducing poverty (by meeting minimum wage requirements, thus contributing to a decent life for employees), paying taxes to generate revenue for the city, and maintaining environmental standards in their operations. Similarly, **Durban** promotes partnerships for SDG-related projects, including regional associations through the uMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership and Central KwaZulu-Natal Climate Change Compact (PwC, 2015).

Amman's monitoring and surveillance tools are both local and national. However, the Jordanian Department of Statistics prioritizes the latter. The city has a spatial database on the local level that is not for public use. In addition, there is an Urban Observatory that tracks SDG-aligned relevant indicators for city planning. It was found, however, that **Amman** lacks mechanisms to disseminate information and the analytical outputs it produces and requires better horizontal cross-sector communication. According to the research, **Amman's** main monitoring challenges concerning SDG progress consist of discrepancies in information, strategies, and communication mechanisms; lack of data analysts; lack of substantial support at the government staff level; and absence of an institutional structure in charge of the SDGs.

The **Kigali** budget does not allocate specific resources for the SDGs. Rather, financing for the SDGs is reported at the national level, with Rwanda's *National Transformation Strategy*. Notably, this current medium-term fiscal framework has buoyant revenues (growth, remittances) with the surplus covered by private sector borrowing (Gaspar et al., 2019). Therefore, Rwanda's main problem is financial challenges, and national authorities are mobilizing domestic resources and broadening the private-sector tax base (Bhowmick, 2019).

3.2.5 Engagement of local-level actors in international forums and city-to-city partnerships

The profile of the African case studies denotes a high level of interaction at the international level through city networks and broader African regional cooperation schemes. **Kisumu** hosts a pan-African event, *Africities Summit - United Cities and Local Governments of Africa*, which seeks to learn, promote, and present novel approaches for SDG integration. Similarly, **Amman** is aiming to exchange experiences and practices with other cities, thereby raising awareness of SDG aspects and their impact on transforming societies. In **Dakar**, the government recognizes the need to participate in international forums. For instance, **Dakar's** local authorities participated in a webinar organized by the Italian Embassy (Papsica, 2020). Also, they joined the International Partnership for Sustainable Development Goals to learn from different successful experiences globally in achieving the SDGs.

Similarly, **Durban** participates in C40, a project that connects city practitioners and local decision makers (majors) to combat climate change through thematic networks (mitigation, adaptation, sustainability) (eThekweni Municipality & C40 Cities, 2019). **Durban** is also part of the Poverty-Environment Partnership, a network of development agencies, international NGOs, and different agencies of the UN-System that facilitates South-South and South-North learning. Finally, **Accra's** city agents received UNECA's technical support to diagnose budget restraints and enhance municipal authorities' SDG implementation techniques linked with budget plans.

3.3 Asia-Pacific case studies

A weak alignment with the SDGs characterizes the case studies in the Asia-Pacific region.

Most case studies have not yet developed policy instruments that streamline the 2030 Agenda into the local development plans. **The alignment is often expressed at the national level through policy instruments and the countries' VNRs.**

The engagement of different actors in the SDG implementation process in this region's case studies shows contrasts. On the one hand, **some case studies are defined by strong alignment and cooperation with policies and actors in various levels of government**, including other subnational entities and international organisms (this is the case of **Seoul** and **Surabaya**). On the other hand, **the other case studies are more characterized by national-level actors' leadership and involvement**. While leadership from national actors for the subnational implementation of the Agenda is one of the characteristics of the region, it is essential to mention that **the lack of participation of regional and local stakeholders results in a gap** in engaging communities to include the needs, priorities, and expectations of the local population. Moreover, it also restricts subnational stakeholders' access to regional and international platforms of cooperation. Finally, as with the other regions in this study, **a lack of formal systemic analysis to calculate SDG interactions is one of the main gaps in the Asia-Pacific region.**

The case studies in the region are characterized by reliant monitoring and evaluation mechanisms aligned with national statistics systems. Moreover, none of the Asian case studies submitted a VLR. However, the lack of these monitoring tools has not hindered regional efforts to localize the SDGs and find new monitoring methods. For instance, **city agencies align national and local policies with the SDGs by interacting with provincial governments on localization efforts. The regional level monitors the performance of cities and municipalities while designing specific monitoring approaches.**

Nonetheless, **challenges persist, and they are primarily associated with designing new monitoring mechanisms, requiring greater coordination of government sectors, and providing sufficient resources to enable meaningful participatory processes.** In terms of monitoring, the region fosters partnerships with several international institutions through development projects to boost SDG localization.

Finally, the actors involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda indicate that, as far as the UN and Local2030 are concerned, **expert collaboration to share experiences is imperative** since, regardless of whether the city supports or participates in sharing positive and successful experiences on localization, deep cooperation with UN-Habitat, UNDESA and others is necessary, especially in developing VLRs

Table 5. Asia-Pacific case studies comparison

Case study	Policy coherence	Multi-level governance	Policy integration	Monitoring	Financing	Engagement in international forums	City-to city partnerships
Surabaya	Aligned using local policy instruments.	Multi-stakeholder approach.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	Yes	Host
Manila	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs.	Yes	Host
Seoul	Aligned using local policy instruments.	Multi-stakeholder approach.	Present	No VLR / no benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs.	N/A	Host
Colombo	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Present	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	No	Participant
Bangkok	Aligned at the national level only.	National level leadership.	Absent	No VLR / no benchmarking	Not aligned with the SDGs.	No	N/A

3.3.1 Policy coherence with the SDGs

Weak alignment with the SDGs characterizes the case studies in the Asia-Pacific region. **Most case studies have not yet developed policy instruments that integrate the 2030 Agenda into the local development actions.** The alignment is often expressed at the national level through policy instruments and the countries' VNRs. **The two exceptions in the region are Seoul and Surabaya,** which have developed or updated local development strategies to implement the SDGs.

Seoul is fully committed to the 2030 Agenda; policy instruments, such as Seoul-SDGs and the second phase of the *Basic Plan for Sustainable Development (2020–2024)*, align with the SDGs and articulate actions to achieve the Goals. Similarly, **Surabaya** has a *Regional Action Plan*, which was updated in 2019 with the 2030 Agenda considerations and is aligned with national-level policies.

On the other hand, **Colombo's** alignment with the SDGs is expressed at the national level through Sri Lanka's *National Sustainable Development Act*, which mandates the government to formulate and monitor the progress of the country's *Sustainable Development Policy and Strategy* in line with the 2030 Agenda (however, the publication of this strategy is pending). Manila's experience shows a similar situation, as the Philippines' *Development Plan 2017–2022* briefly mentions the 2030 Agenda, but the government actions are not streamlined using the SDG narrative yet. This is also the case in **Bangkok**, where the SDGs are only briefly mentioned in Thailand's *National Strategy 2018–2037*. Rather, these three case studies express SDG alignment through their VNRs (Government of Thailand, 2017; Government of the Philippines, 2019; Ministry of Sustainable Development Wildlife and Regional Development 2018, Sri Lanka, 2018).

3.3.2 Multi-level governance

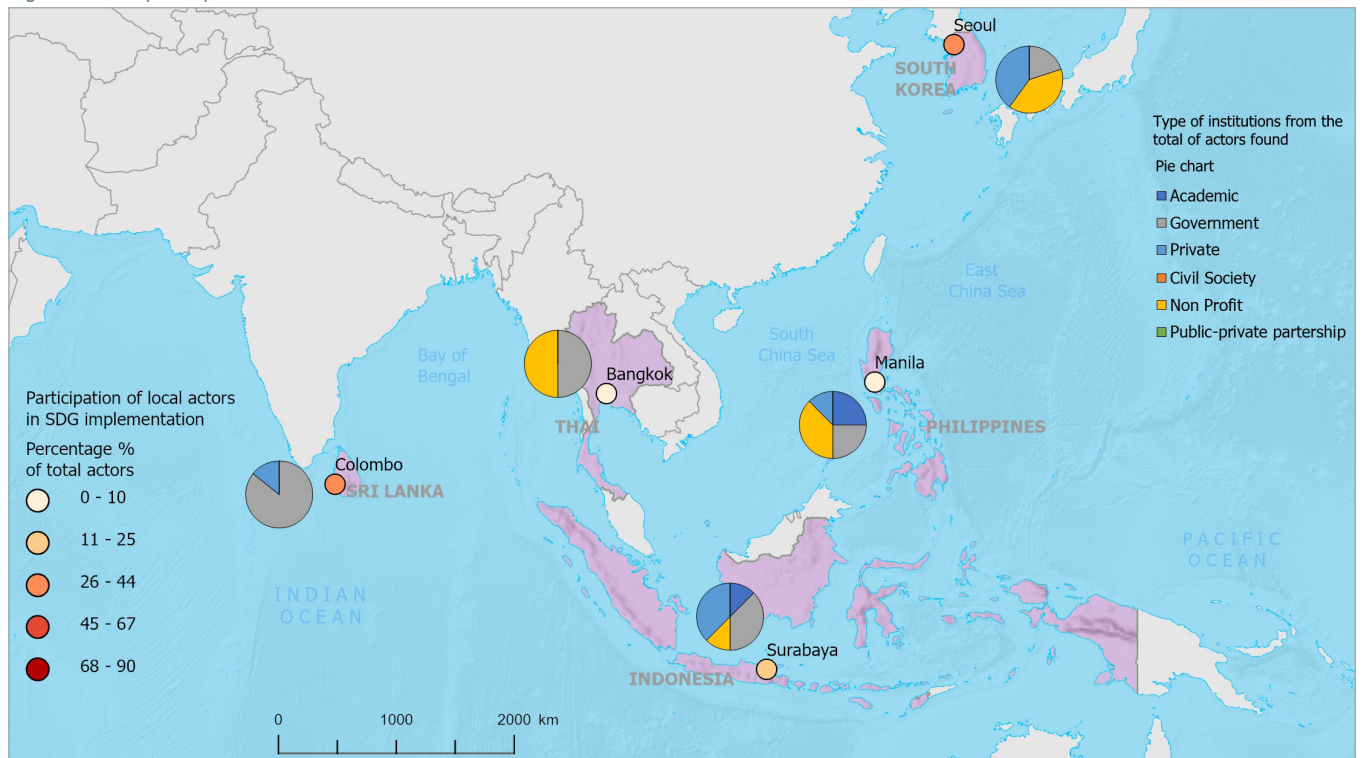
The engagement of different actors in the SDG implementation process in this region's case studies shows contrasts. On the one hand, **some case studies are defined by strong alignment and cooperation with policies and actors in various scales of involvement**, including other subnational entities and international organisms (this is the case of **Seoul** and **Surabaya**). On the other hand, **the other case studies are more characterized by national-level actors' leadership and involvement.**

For example, **Seoul's** local efforts for promoting SDG localization processes are characterized by engagement with other subnational entities in the city and by participation in national-level policies. Local initiatives by **Seoul's** metropolitan government have been considered for their potential to be mainstreamed into the national policies and actions. Aligning its activities with SDG 5 (gender equality), **Seoul** has established various policies and instruments to provide safer environments and infrastructure for female citizens, which are disseminated to other cities and municipalities. Based on the objective of building a 'Sharing Economy' aligned with SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), **Seoul** established a bylaw for a Sharing Economy that set a standard for other municipal governments. Furthermore, **Seoul's** SDG localization efforts include multi-stakeholder involvement, including non-profit, civil society, private sector, and international organisms, such as UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Korea. **Seoul** participates in exchanges between different countries by building global networks, such as the Urban SDG Knowledge Platform.²¹

Similarly, in **Surabaya**, there is a programmatic alignment between Indonesia's development vision set by the presidency (2015–2019) – known as "Nawacita" (nine visions) – and all policy instruments throughout sectors and lower levels of government (including regional action planning for the SDGs). The national government institutions involved in SDG-related activities include the National Development Planning Agency, the Association of Local Governance in Indonesia, and the National SDG Secretariat. However, the region also participates in collaboration forums with other localities in the country, such as the Association of Local Governance in Indonesia, and internationally, for instance, UCLG.

²¹ Retrieved from: <http://www.urbansdgplatform.org/about/intro.msc>

Figure 7. Local participation and multi-level stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013)

In contrast to the two previous case studies, **Colombo** acknowledges the significance of Sri Lanka's authorities in promoting local and provincial agents to prepare local strategies that are SDG-oriented through the country's national plan (*Sustainable Development Act, No 19 of 2017*). It mandates that every provincial council and all local authorities engage actively, collect data, report, and monitor (Ministry of Sustainable Development Wildlife and Regional Development, Sri Lanka, 2018).

Regarding **Manila**, SDG implementation also happens at the national level. In this sense, the Philippines' collective long-term vision philosophy is defined in the *AmBisyon Natin 2040* document. It describes the kind of life that people want to live and how they want the country to be by 2040: a life that is strongly rooted (*matatag*), comfortable (*maginhawa*), and secure (*panatag*) (Government of the Philippines, 2019).

Local SDG policies for **Bangkok** were not identified. However, for the construction of Thailand's VNR, different consultation platforms took place in **Bangkok** (Central region), Chiang Mai (Northern region), and Songkla (Southern region). Central government agents led a campaign to create ownership for the SDGs through a bottom-up participatory process (Government of Thailand, 2017).

3.3.3 Policy integration: agenda interconnectedness and methodologies

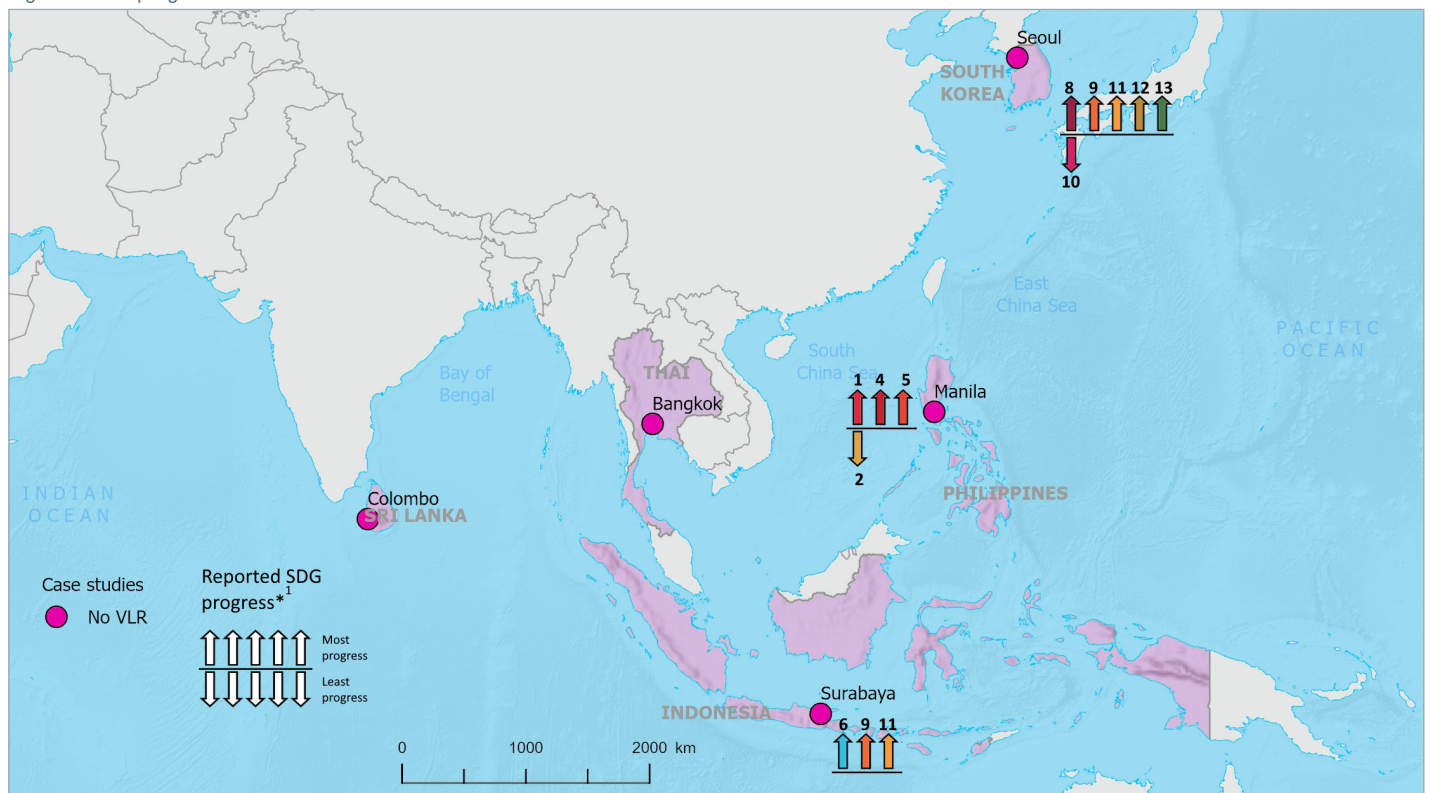
Like the other regions in the study, a lack of formal systematic analysis to calculate SDG interactions is one of the main gaps in the region. One of the two case studies that conducted an interactions analysis is **Seoul**, where the interconnectedness of the SDGs is considered in the Seoul-SDGs policy. Various targets under this policy instrument are intentionally devised to overlap. However, there is not a particular methodology behind it. The interconnectedness is the result of implementation goals and their respective project.

According to the **Colombo** case study, an interactions analysis was conducted (with the support of UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) at the national level for SDG 6 targets. Applying a systems thinking approach to the country's water and sanitation development led to the realization that implementation of SDG 6 targets requires collective commitments of 43 agencies under 24 government ministries. Furthermore, the outcomes of the systems model revealed the importance of strategically mobilizing resource capacities and ministerial policies recognizing the interconnectedness of the SDGs; for example, developing sustainable food production systems (SDG 2.4) would promote water-use efficiency in the agriculture sector (SDG 6.4). Simultaneously, improved water quality (SDG 6.3) would reduce marine pollution (SDGs 14.1 and 14.2) and strengthen water-related ecosystems (SDGs 6.6 and 15.1), cultivating more robust environmental integrity of Sri Lanka (Emmons, 2018). There are no SDG interaction analyses at the local level.

3.3.4 Monitoring and budgeting

Most of **Seoul's** SDG efforts are publicly funded by the Seoul Metropolitan Government. It is noteworthy that budgets for SDG localization often overlap with existing projects in the city, making them difficult to track. A total budget for SDG policy implementation efforts (excluding any other SDG-related activities) or project funding under the implementation targets is disbursed annually; however, this amount changes every year. The critical change is that the government has allocated a portion of the fund to support SDG implementation efforts at the district level, where district authorities can freely apply for funds for their projects, consultations, or any other event related to SDG implementation.

Figure 8. SDG progress in the Asia-Pacific case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013) *1: The reported SDG progress was obtained from the desk study and the interviews. In this regard, not all the case studies reported SDG progress. The represented goals appear in ascending order based on their SDG number and not on benchmarking values.

Moreover, national authorities in South Korea have not streamlined funding for SDG localization efforts (Government of the Republic of Korea, 2016). However, the central government has financially supported individual SDG targets under the Korea SDGs (K-SDG). Although this financial support may have reached local governments (such as the Seoul Metropolitan Government) in their efforts to achieve the SDGs, the research suggests that more explicit funding mechanisms allocated to SDG localization by the central government would be required.

Monitoring of **Seoul's** SDG localization efforts is not new. The follow-up procedures are compulsory to assess **Seoul's** SDG goals and targets biannually (Framework Ordinance). This framework allows for measuring the city's progress toward the 2020 and 2030 objectives through development projects (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2016). Moreover, the most recent *Seoul Basic Plan (2020–2024)* uses monitoring and evaluation mechanisms such as the public data portal, the Korean Statistical Information Service, and the Ministry of Environment's Data Portal. However, despite **Seoul's** monitoring efforts, challenges remain. For example, it was identified that the proposed new monitoring mechanisms would require fostering greater coordination of the city's departments and providing sufficient resources to enable meaningful participatory processes. On the other hand, since **Seoul's** monitoring system is based on the performance indicator of the projects – performed by the different departments – the most challenging aspects are coordination, data sharing, and strategic communication, and that other actors understand that SDG projects require specific results as performance indicators.

BOX 3. VLR AS MONITORING TOOLS IN ALL REGIONS

The inherent challenges in localizing and implementing the SDGs require attention and commitment, particularly strengthening SDG governance frameworks at the local level. The research findings show a lack of clarity in the ratification, monitoring, and accountability of local governments toward the localization of the SDGs. Only 11 of the 28 case studies have submitted VLRs as instruments to monitor and report progress toward sustaining transformative and inclusive action by local actors to achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, while some cities track all 17 SDGs comprehensively, other cities report progress on selected prioritized SDGs for each VLR, making comparison difficult. In this context, it is particularly striking that 6 of the 11 VLRs submitted are from case studies located in North America and LAC, followed by Europe with five cases with VLRs. Moreover, it is evident that all the case studies which have submitted VLRs derive from countries classified as SDG champions, which may indicate that national efforts to meet the SDGs have had a subnational impact.

Unlike Seoul, local authorities in **Colombo** do not allocate specific resources to SDG implementation, it is the Sri Lankan national authorities (Finance Commission) that allocate funds to subnational (provincial and local) actors (Ministry of Sustainable Development Wildlife and Regional Development, Sri Lanka, 2018). Regarding Sri Lanka's VNR, it is unclear how much is given to SDG implementation, especially at the local level. In terms of monitoring efforts, local authorities in Colombo do not play a significant role. Their engagement is driven by the national government's efforts to develop Sri Lanka's VNR. Consequently, data and indicators of SDG achievement are collected by the federal *Department of Census and Statistics*. **Colombo's** actors are not involved in local SDG monitoring procedures.

In terms of partnerships with private entities providing additional resources for the SDGs, **Colombo** partnered with several institutions to develop the World Bank-funded Colombo City Development Project. The GIZ 2030 Agenda Transformation Fund supported the

“Strengthening Private and Subnational Investment Mobilization in Sri Lanka for 2030 Agenda” project, among others, generating over US\$321 million to finance SDG-related projects.

Since **Colombo** does not have a VLR, challenges in terms of monitoring persist. Most of them are related to the lack of national government support for local participation, capacity-building mechanisms, and data generation, collection, and analysis. In addition, the lack of baseline data is also seen as a challenge for monitoring SDG progress. The research also suggests that the fundamental limitations are bureaucratic processes that ignore independent data on diverse and sensitive areas of sustainable development while lacking the capacity to collect such data themselves, as well as the lack of a systematic process to coordinate data from various public institutions for integrated statistical analysis.

In **Manila**, the lack of VLR as a monitoring tool has not constrained the city in finding ways to localize the SDGs and finding new monitoring methods. City agencies align national and local policies with the SDGs by interacting with regional governments on localization efforts. The regional level monitors the performance of cities and municipalities while designing convergent initiatives within their territorial competence (Government of the Philippines, 2018). These efforts consist of implementing the national data ecosystem by addressing data gaps to identify better requirements, a more comprehensive analysis, and the design of appropriate programs and targeted interventions. In addition, a community-based monitoring system provides disaggregated data to understand the status and disparities between communities, households, and populations in meeting the SDGs. Finally, **Manila’s** main monitoring challenges are the lack of or limited capacity to develop a processing unit that generates indicators automatically, data availability, disaggregated data, and capacity building of local actors.

3.3.5 Engagement of local-level actors in international forums and city-to-city partnerships

Surabaya’s international engagement in SDG localization efforts is advancing through city networks; for example, by hosting the Preparatory Committee (2016) as an opportunity to communicate the role of cities in Asia and the Pacific in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda (Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, 2016). Furthermore, **Surabaya** participated in international forums, such as the SDG Summit 2019, the World Habitat Day 2020, the UN Climate Action Summit 2019, and the Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on VLR launched in 2020 (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP, 2020).

Seoul’s agencies actively expand best practices associated with SDG localization efforts with different countries by building global networks. The exchange of best practices occurs through the National Sustainable Development Conference, CityNet partnerships, and forums for national governments (e.g., the Urban SDG Knowledge Platforms), wherein **Seoul’s** promising practices regarding SDG localization efforts are shared. Similarly, **Colombo’s** local authorities and Sri Lanka’s agencies lead its Stakeholder SDG Platform as a participatory learning experience of mutual exchange with the collaboration of the UNDP. **Colombo’s** international engagement is mainly guided through partnerships (such as The Open Government Partnership) and networks (the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development). In **Bangkok**, the local government engages mainly through global meetings led by Thai authorities, where the experiences and lessons learned in SDG implementation are shared. One of its most extensive efforts is to transform 17 districts to make them liveable and efficient (*Urban Regeneration and Conservation of Bangkok 250*).

3.4 The Americas: North America and LAC

The case studies in the Americas perhaps show the most variance in this study's policy alignment. All but two case studies (**Havana** and **Tegucigalpa**) have integrated the SDGs into their subnational policy context. However, the case studies that have adopted the SDG narrative locally have very different processes of aligning their public agendas to the SDGs, such as linking previous development strategies to the SDGs (**NYC, Hawaii, Mexico City, and La Paz**) or modifying policy tools and creating new ones (**Medellín** and **Buenos Aires**).

This region shows various levels of multi-level governance and stakeholder engagement. Case studies in the United States (**NYC** and **Hawaii**) **present a high degree of stakeholder engagement** (including the local community) during the design, implementation, and monitoring, but an absence of national government engagement. In contrast, **Mexico City, Medellín, La Paz, and Buenos Aires** have implemented the 2030 Agenda **through participation with various levels of government (including the national level) and stakeholder engagement** (including academia, NGOs, and international governing bodies). The **Havana** and **Tegucigalpa** case studies contrast with all the others in the region, as **the stakeholder engagement and implementation have occurred at the national level.**

As in other regions, one of the main gaps in these case studies is the lack of SDG interaction approaches to identify synergies and trade-offs. **Most cases in the region conduct participative processes to define priorities. However, few systematic analyses have been deployed.** Nonetheless, some case studies are worth highlighting, such as **NYC.**

The region shows promising progress in the SDG monitoring endeavour, **as most cases reviewed submitted VLRs. Most of the case studies have developed monitoring systems explicitly designed for the SDGs.** They consist of a dashboard encrypted in the urban management model that allows city actors to monitor efforts and projects to evaluate SDG compliance through a set of indicators.

Table 6. North America and LAC case studies comparison

Case study	Policy coherence	Multi-level governance	Policy integration	Monitoring	Financing	Engagement in international forums	City-to city partnerships
Buenos Aires	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Participant
Havana	Aligned at the national level only	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	No VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	No	NA
Hawaii	Aligned using only with local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
La Paz	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	NA	NA
Medellin	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	No VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	NA	NA
Mexico City	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	VLR / Benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Participant
New York City	Aligned using local policy instruments	Multi-stakeholder approach	Present	VLR / Benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Host
State of Pará	Aligned at the regional level only	Multi-stakeholder approach	Absent	No VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	Participant
Tegucigalpa	Aligned at the national level only	NA	NA	No VLR / No benchmarking	Aligned with the SDGs	Yes	NA

Furthermore, in some cases, **a goal-based monitoring system is implemented where all 17 SDGs are reviewed**, allowing subnational actors to identify the most critical SDGs and those where the most progress has been made. On the other hand, local authorities state that disseminating information on SDG progress is challenging due to **difficulties in accessing up-to-date data despite careful monitoring**.

Additionally, funding efforts differ significantly, **ranging from case studies where the budget developed is included in the priorities identified within the city's agenda**, which links the annual budget instruments to crucial policy instruments and ensures the city's goals and priorities contribute to the 2030 Agenda, **to case studies where a proportion of the budget is allocated annually to SDG-related issues**.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that sharing positive experiences in localizing the SDGs can promote a significant increase in the participation of local actors in global arenas, such as the HLPF or regional forums. Moreover, it would encourage local stakeholders to highlight the benefits of this type of engagement, fostering visibility to find partnerships with international financial institutions.

3.4.1 Policy coherence with the SDGs

The case studies in the Americas perhaps show the most variance in the policy alignment with the SDGs in this study. All but two case studies (**Havana** and **Tegucigalpa**) have integrated the SDGs into their subnational policy context. However, the case studies that have adopted the SDG narrative locally have very different processes for aligning their public agendas with the SDGs.

In this regard, **some cases have linked their sustainability policies to the SDGs, highlighting how their current strategies contribute directly to the 2030 Agenda** (such as **NYC** and the State of **Hawaii**). **NYC** authorities have recognized how the city's long-term sustainable development framework, the *OneNYC 2050 strategy*, overlaps with the SDGs. In this regard, **NYC's** VLR uses the 2030 Agenda to translate its local policies into the SDGs. Therefore, **New York's** local authorities' policy instruments contributing to the SDGs are continuously aligned with pre-existing policy instruments (NYC Government, 2019). Except for a city law (*Local Law 17, 2008*, which amended the *NYC Charter*) that demands the creation of a permanent sustainability office local agents align pre-existing policies and translate them into the SDG narrative. It is worth noting that the VLR creation process is under the direction of the Mayor's Office – following UN guidelines (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) – in constant consultation with SDG stakeholders.

Similarly, the **State of Hawaii** has promoted its state-wide *Aloha+ Challenge* as the strategy that aligns with and contributes to the SDGs in the five counties that constitute it (Hawaii Green Growth, 2020). The strategy was created in 2011, and it is directly connected with indigenous communities' values and their aim to achieve sustainable development. The state's authorities and the stakeholders involved in the initiative have identified six priorities for **Hawaii**: clean energy; local food; natural resource management; waste reduction; smart, sustainable communities; and green workforce and education. These six priorities have been linked to the SDGs they contribute to in the state's VLR and in its monitoring system, the Aloha Dashboard.²² The *Aloha+ Challenge* vision is constant and receives support throughout the state's five counties, spanning different government terms. **These two case studies are examples of subnational entities that have maintained their sustainability strategies since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, as they consider them as overlapping with and contributing to the SDGs**. It is worth noting that both case studies reported that these two strategies are long-term and have received support over different government terms and cycles.

²² Retrieved from <https://alohachallenge.hawaii.gov/>

In Latin America, the case studies of **Mexico City** and **La Paz** are similar to the previous two since these cities' governments have also linked their government programs to the SDGs using the VLR and other monitoring systems (Government of La Paz, 2018; Government of Mexico City, 2019), such as **Mexico City's** monitoring portal for the 2030 Agenda,²³ which has benchmarked progress on SDG targets using the monitoring of its government programs, linked to the SDGs. On the other hand, **La Paz's** authorities have highlighted how the local philosophy of *Buen Vivir* directly addresses the SDGs. The two case studies are comparable since the mapping involved technical assistance from different development sectors, and the linking of local policies to the SDGs was performed by adopting a participatory and methodological approach. However, these two Latin American cities contrast with their United States counterparts, as **the local strategies might not continue to be implemented after the government has completed its term**. This is highlighted by **Mexico City**, where subnational actors mentioned that they are currently producing a VLR and monitoring system using the newest government program's actions (which started in 2018, after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda), which will replace the previous mapping and benchmarking. Thus, **government action toward the SDGs in these two cities might not receive support and continuity spanning various political terms**.

The cities of **Buenos Aires** and **Medellín** contrast with the previous examples from LAC, as **they have all created new policy instruments (or modified existing ones) after subscribing to the 2030 Agenda to align their policies** with the SDGs. For instance, in the city of **Medellín**, policy instruments of planning enacted since 2016 (*Municipal Development Plans: 2016–2019; 2020–2023*) incorporate SDG-related aspects to adjust to the principle of “leaving no one behind” (Londoño et al., 2017). Moreover, the documents *Agenda Medellin 2030* and *COMPES 1* include methodological procedures for aligning local policies and indicators with the SDGs. On the other hand, **Buenos Aires** has carried out extensive mapping of its policies through the VLR, where it mentions its contribution to prioritized SDGs in the city. In addition, **Buenos Aires** has produced two sectoral policies that are aligned with the SDGs – *Buenos Aires's Climate Agenda* and the *Comprehensive Strategy for Gender Equality*; in this regard, **Buenos Aires** stands out in the region for integrating the SDGs into sectoral plans and the overarching government plans.

The **State of Pará** stands out in its alignment strategy. It has linked its public budget and the corresponding development actions to the SDGs, allowing for the monitoring of which SDGs are being financed in the region. The state has also produced a VLR, which shows that it inserts its state-wide development plan *Amazon Now* into the 2030 Agenda narrative (Government of Pará et al., 2020).

Finally, regarding the **Havana** case study, it is worth noting that Cuba's VNR proposes a mechanism of localization for the SDGs. The VNR describes that the *National Plan of Economic and Social Development 2030* (PNDES 2030) is the main policy instrument that aligns the country's development agenda with the SDGs (UNDP, 2020). The PNDES 2030, in turn, dictates the guidelines for the development of *Strategies for Provincial Development* and *Strategies for Municipal Development* – these two policy instruments are how subnational governments will localize the agenda. However, their development and alignment with the SDGs is a pending task for the country's government.

3.4.2 Multi-level governance

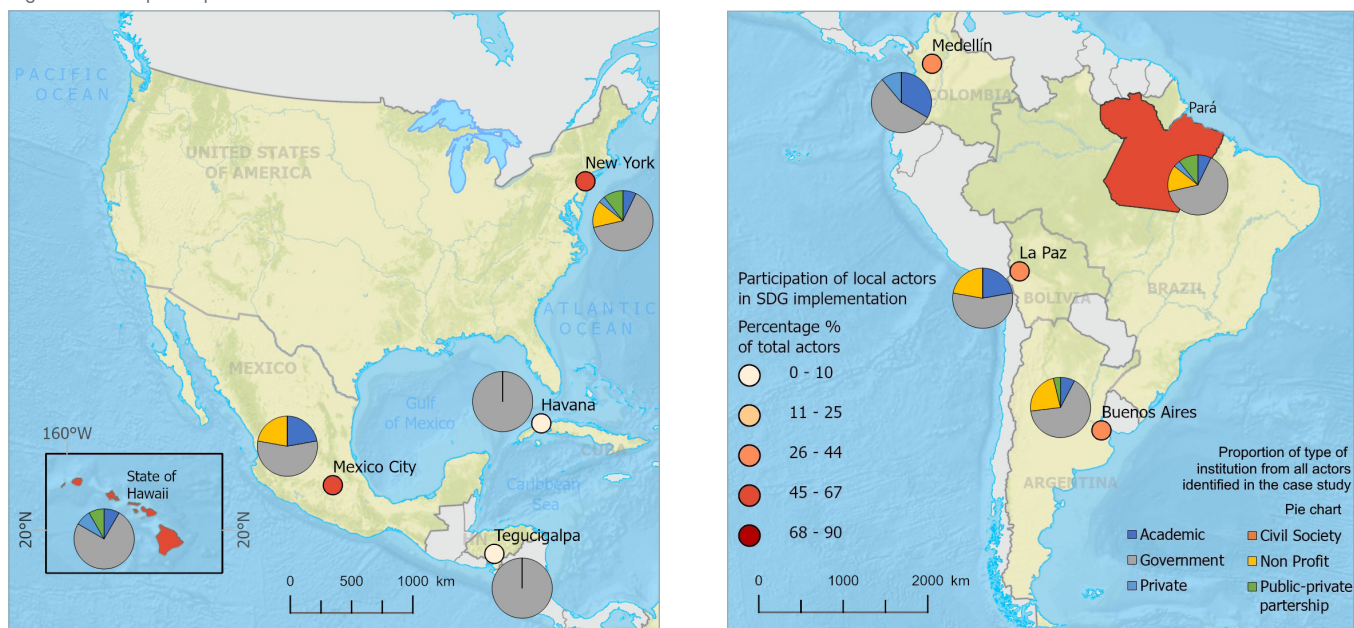
This region shows various levels of multi-level governance and stakeholder engagement.

Case studies in the United States (NYC and Hawaii) **present a high degree of stakeholder engagement, including the local community, in the design, implementation, and monitoring processes of the 2030 Agenda**. NYC's constant updating of the *OneNYC 2050* strategy is the output of multi-stakeholder engagement where community members are key actors. Their participation (more than 16,000 people) is facilitated in local scenarios (e.g., community forums,

²³ Retrieved from <http://www.monitoreo.cdmx.gob.mx/>

public surveys, team engagement, cultural events). Therefore, local New Yorkers lead SDG localization efforts on a community-based scenario, wherein policy instruments are locally crafted. The community-led methodology applied in NYC's SDG localization consists of constant interaction with the population through three identifiable steps: listening (OneNYC survey, 5-Borough Tour), testing, and creating.²⁴

Figure 9. Local participation and multi-level stakeholders in the Americas case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013)

On the other hand, in **Hawaii**, as part of its *Aloha+ Challenge*, there is a constant participative process among local stakeholders and communities to define the priority themes that would accelerate the state's development. This process has allowed the state to identify key actors in the achievement of sustainability in the state (such as the community-led initiatives that have been identified in the VLR) (Hawaii Green Growth, 2020). Engagement with local communities is constant during the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of the *Aloha+ Challenge* – the initiative has mapped diverse community-led initiatives that contribute to its goals. Furthermore, **Hawaii** has been consistently involved in capacity-building and cooperation platforms to achieve the SDGs with other insular territories in the United States and abroad (the Local2030 island network), other indigenous territories (the Navajo people), and other city networks in the United States. It is also worth noting that Hawaii is home to the Hawai'i Green Growth Hub, a Local2030 hub that is behind the design and monitoring of the *Aloha+ Challenge*.

Despite the solid local engagement in the previous two case studies, they both reported that **there has been a lack of support and leadership from the national government** in aligning policies between the federal government and subnational authorities. This is also the case in the **State of Pará**, where, according to the research, there is a strong local and regional engagement but weak participation from the national government. In this sense, as part of the formulation of the *2020–2023 Pluri-annual Plan*, a participatory process was carried out among state and local public experts and managers (governmental actors). Seventeen workshops were held at all the agencies in the executive branch after discussing the SDGs internally with their experts

²⁴ Listening activities brought together more than 14,000 New Yorkers and more than 2,400 actors (residents, small business owners, youths, seniors, and advocates) through small-group discussions. Testing is performed through the Advisory Board (39 members) and Regional Collaboration (26 senior officials) (New York, 2019). Its creation involved networking with partners, agents, and OneNYC Survey.

BOX 4. COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVES CONTRIBUTING TO THE ALOHA+ CHALLENGE

Hawaii has many local and public efforts and community-led initiatives that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. These initiatives are currently coordinated by Hawaii Green Growth and the Aloha+ Challenge, which are charged with coordinating local actors and stakeholders, including the government, private institutions, and civil society, to advance six priority areas of sustainable development in the state: 1) clean energy, 2) local food, 3) natural resource management, 4) waste reduction, 5) smart and sustainable communities, and 6) green workforce and education.

During the last three years, these community-led initiatives have gained regional relevance, improving and enabling a high level of participation in forums, cooperation spaces, and decision-making on sustainability issues in the state, which have determined the priorities of the Aloha+ Challenge. Therefore, the state's sustainability priorities are based on the preferences of the community.

Some of the main actions and areas addressed by the community-led initiatives include:

- organic food and sustainable agriculture
 - promotion of a healthy community through educational scholarship programs
 - better management and conservation of marine and fisheries areas
 - protection and restoration of land
 - waste reduction
-

and managers. Moreover, the state conducts state-wide capacity building for the municipalities in environmental policy and the SDGs, while also participating in cooperation platforms with other states in the country to share experiences of 2030 Agenda implementation. This regional cooperation is important for the achievement of the SDGs, as it facilitates expertise and knowledge sharing among subnational actors that do not always have the resources to participate in international forums or other platforms.

Nonetheless, subnational actors expressed that there is a lack of commitment from the federal government and even rejection of the 2030 Agenda in Brazil. In recent years, the decrease in federal resources, referring to existing public policies, has caused the fragmentation of programs/projects designed to tackle socioeconomic and environmental problems. As national policies become less comprehensive, the management capacity becomes less resolute in the face of the challenges of sustainable development.

In contrast to the case studies described above, **Mexico City, Medellín, La Paz, and Buenos Aires have implemented the 2030 Agenda through participation in various levels of government** (including the national level) **and stakeholder engagement** (including academia, NGOs, and international governing bodies).

According to the **Mexico City** case study, the national government created a 2030 Agenda National Council, which mandated the implementation of the SDGs in all the country's territories. This effort was translated regionally in the National Conference of Governors, in which **Mexico City** participates. Locally, all these institutionalization efforts materialized in creating the Council for the Monitoring of the 2030 Agenda in **Mexico City**, which led to the development of the

VLR and the city's monitoring system for the SDGs (Government of Mexico City, 2019). The city also partners with other actors within the international community to share their experiences in implementing the SDGs, such as the state councils in Mexico and UCLG in the international arena. The subnational actors also mentioned other partnerships that have provided capacity building to the city, specifically with the German GIZ.

Regarding **Medellín**, the Colombian national government recognizes that the SDGs require regional and local governments to build effective policy formulation processes that strengthen multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and multi-level collaboration (Mejía-Dugand & Pizano-Castillo, 2020). **Medellín** takes up this challenge and expresses its commitment through *COMPES document No. 1*, issued by the Municipal Council for Economic and Social Policy (COMPES): "the municipality of Medellín actively assumes the inclusion of the SDGs in the city's planning processes to achieve better levels of well-being, equity and sustainability" (Council of Medellín, 2020; Government of Medellín, 2020b; Mejía-Dugand & Pizano-Castillo, 2020). **Medellín's** know-how regarding SDG localization is regionally spread through the metropolitan area where the city is located (Aburra Valley). The metropolitan planning rules abide by the *Sustainable Future Management Plan (2020–2023)*.²⁵ This regional governance structure requires city meetings to coordinate SDG achievement with regional priorities.²⁶ Furthermore, **Medellín** is part of a network of Colombian cities implementing and monitoring the SDGs, the Red Colombiana de Ciudades Cómo Vamos (*Red Cómo Vamos*), where different Colombian cities share their SDG implementation experiences and good practices. All these coordination efforts imply capacity-building activities.

Buenos Aires's strategy for multi-stakeholder engagement is not specifically addressed in the VLR. However, local authorities and the national government have conducted various engagement efforts. The city has worked alongside the national government to develop a federal agenda for sustainable development. In 2017, **Buenos Aires** participated in the Meeting of subnational governments: Challenges for the adaptation of SDGs at a local level organized by the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies and UN Argentina.

Finally, the **Havana** and **Tegucigalpa** case studies **contrast with all the others in the region since the stakeholder engagement and governance have occurred mainly at the national level**. **Tegucigalpa's** local authorities' role is marginal. Due to excessive centralization of SDG-related aspects, the central government representatives gather local authorities to discuss previous SDG reports and plan the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, **Tegucigalpa's** actors have participated in regional workshops to address specific sectoral aspects (UNDP, 2017). In **Havana**, the implementation process of Cuba is still unfolding and in the early stages, and therefore a characterization of the local engagement for the SDGs could not be identified. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that **Havana** has been a significant centre for SDG coordination and policymaking in the country. The VNR shows how most of the country's coordination efforts have occurred in **Havana** (Government of Cuba, 2019). Most recently, on March 9th, 2021, the Cuba con Paso campaign was conducted in the capital, where the head of the Ministry of Economy and Planning reiterated the country's commitment to the SDGs, and stated that there are ongoing dialogues with provinces and municipalities to implement the Agenda (Figuereido & Lemus, 2021).

3.4.3 Policy integration: agenda interconnectedness and methodologies

Similar to other regions, one of the main gaps in these case studies is the lack of the use of SDG interaction approaches to identify synergies and trade-offs. **Most cases in the region conduct a participative process to define priorities. However, few systematic analyses have been deployed.** Nonetheless, some case studies are worth highlighting.

²⁵ The Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plan and the Quality-of-Life Survey to improve the metropolitan area's inhabitants' quality of life (Aburra Valley Metropolitan Government, 2020).

²⁶ Environmental protection, the strengthening of efforts for responsible production and industry and consumption, as well as the strengthening of the different social actors (SDGs 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 17), initiatives framed in the specific needs of the region (Aburra Valley Metropolitan Government, 2020).

NYC has identified synergies between the 2030 Agenda and the city strategy (NYC Government, 2019). According to the research, the city's local strategy includes analysis of interactions, trade-offs, gaps and ways to fill them by bringing individuals to the table. However, specific methodologies were not described. Unlike **NYC**, the **State of Hawaii** has not performed a formal interactions analysis.

Mexico City does not offer specific information about methodologies to tackle possible SDG interconnectedness. However, the subnational actors expressed that the city's authorities are constantly analysing how different government programs affect social inequality, urban sprawl, and conservation – taking into account possible synergies and trade-offs (however, no further information was provided in this regard). This is a similar process to that of **La Paz**, where local authorities lead a participatory process among civil society and experts to define local priorities and challenges to comply with the 2030 Agenda. According to the VLR, these work packages allow for highlighting SDG interconnectedness and synergies (Government of La Paz, 2018).

Pará's local authorities aim to integrate SDGs into cross-sectional programs; nonetheless, there are neither efforts to systematically interconnect SDGs nor a methodology to calculate how one goal or target may affect the outcome. However, state experience in identifying structural components associated with environmental management is described as affecting different lines of actions: “strategic, synergistic and complementary” (Government of Pará et al., 2020).²⁷ Regional authorities carried out this exercise by linking and contrasting SDGs with state programs that would eventually affect their compliance. However, these regional efforts might seem disconnected from the SDG National Commission²⁸ due to political reasons.

The research suggests that **Buenos Aires** and **Medellín** lack a methodology to analyse SDG interconnectedness. However, **Medellín** has conducted such an analysis at the regional level in the Department of Antioquia. The methodology adopted by provincial authorities, the SDG Synergies approach, consisted of a participatory process among local and expert stakeholders. This process allowed for verification of the interconnectedness (synergies and trade-offs) of the environmental SDGs and policy coherence.²⁹ As a result, it was possible to identify the most synergistic goals. Furthermore, the trade-offs identified were able to shed light on different target connections (Lobos et al., 2020).³⁰

3.4.4 Monitoring and budgeting

NYC's budget for implementing its SDG priorities is aligned with the city's budget plan while ensuring funding for OneNYC 2050 (NYC Government, 2019). As part of the implementation efforts, **NYC's** data collection and analysis of over 1,000 qualitative indicators have been monitored since the 1970s by a local institution (Mayor's Office of Operations). The city, therefore, has a robust technical capacity for the evaluation and ongoing updating of indicators.

NYC's experience confirms that issuing a VLR itself is a monitoring practice. It is worth noting that this approach is shared by cities in the Global South, such as **Buenos Aires**. Furthermore, although local Hawaiian actors did not address this aspect, the state policy instrument allows for verification of the process through indicators (Aloha+ Dashboard) (Hawaii Green Growth, 2020). Nonetheless, the Aloha Goals Scorecard is still incomplete, and specific challenges remain regarding monitoring local food production.

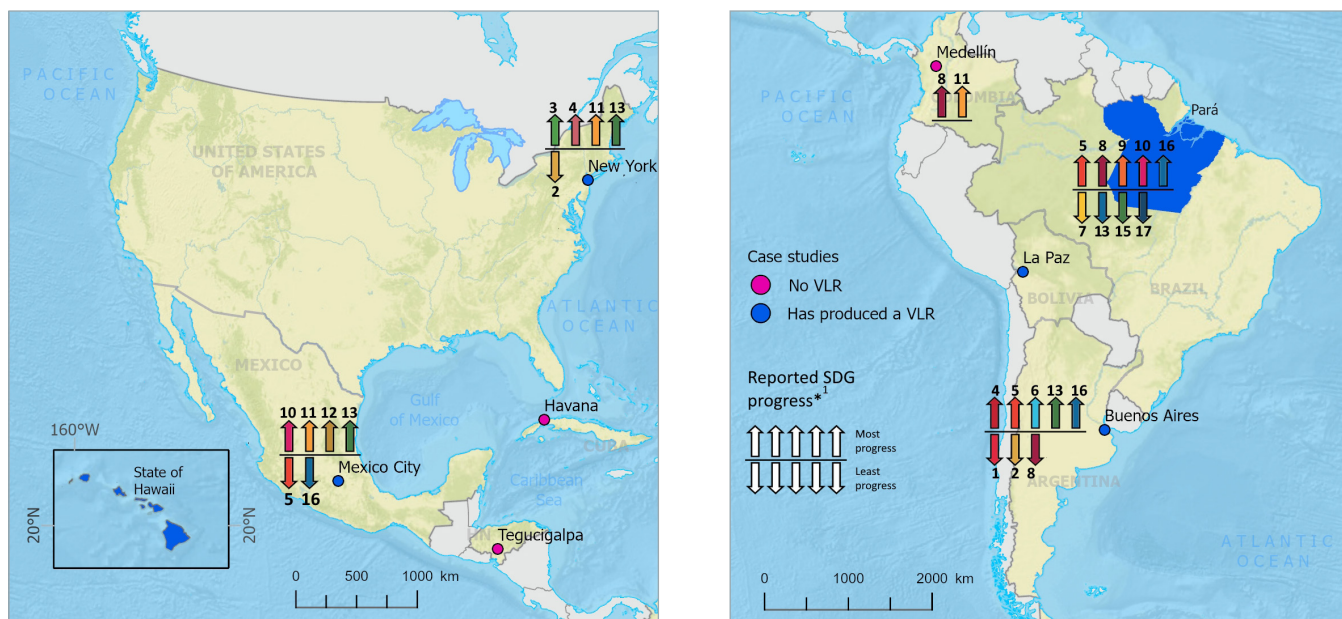
²⁷ For example, greenhouse gas emissions, financing, land-use, licensing, and key cross-cutting components (communication, infrastructure, information technology).

²⁸ The Brazilian SDG National Commission was created through Decree No. 8,892, of October 27th, 2016. NC-SDGs is composed of 16 representatives from federal, state, district, and municipal governments, and civil society.

²⁹ These approaches account for systematic thinking and how the advance in one or several SDG targets affects or promotes the implementation of other SDG targets.

³⁰ For example, energy production (7.2) versus availability of drinking water (6.1); development of the private sector and small and medium enterprises (8.3) versus quality of the environment and natural resources impact (15.1); conservation of terrestrial ecosystems (15.1) might delay progress on targets such as increasing the use of renewable energy (7.2) and economic growth (8.3).

Figure 10. SDG progress in the Americas case studies



Source: Own elaboration using vector data obtained from DIVA-GIS (2017) and Natural Earth (n.d.), and ESRI topographic and ocean basemaps (2011, 2013) *1: The reported SDG progress was obtained from the desk study and the interviews. In this regard, not all the case studies reported SDG progress. The represented goals appear in ascending order based on their SDG number and not on benchmarking values.

Among the LAC cases, **Mexico City** possesses the SDG monitoring system Monitoreo CDMX, an online platform that allows for tracking government-designed SDG-related indicators. In addition, the Monitoreo CDMX allows for benchmarking of progress at the Goal level, although the local authorities expect a new monitoring system to be provided by the new municipal administration. Nevertheless, **Mexico City** shows that a budget is allocated to priorities identified within the city program (sustainable transportation, health). Furthermore, extra resources for SDG monitoring come from a partnership with the GIZ.

BOX 5. MOST RELEVANT SDGS IN ALL CASES

In general terms, the SDGs reported as most important at the local level are SDGs 3, 4, 6, 10, 11, and 13, mainly due to the strategies developed to cope with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global commitments aimed at climate change mitigation and adaptation. At the regional level, in addition to SDGs 3, 4, and 11, the Asian case studies consider SDG 9 crucial for the region's development. However, it is noteworthy that none of the Asian cities have selected and considered SDG 13 as relevant. Europe displays the same trend of prioritizing SDGs across the board, with **Bonn** being the only city in the study to identify SDG 17 as one of the most significant SDGs. On the other hand, LAC is the only region that highlights the relevance of SDGs 14, 15, and 16. The first two refer to essential dynamics for the **State of Pará** and **Hawaii** given that the region experiences adverse effects in the equatorial zone due to ocean pollution (SDG 14) and a high proportion of forest area in the total land area (SDG 15) (RRING, 2020; UN, 2021), while **NYC** and **Mexico City** consider SDG 16 relevant. Finally, only two cities in Africa-MENA and LAC (**Mexico City** and **Amman**) consider it imperative to progress on SDG 5, whereas, in Europe, only the **Basque Country** prioritizes SDG 6

Conversely, the **Pará** case study lacks an explicitly designed monitoring system for the SDGs. However, some efforts from the national government report multi-annual data (2012–2017) in areas such as greenhouse gas emissions and sustainable cities (Cidades Sustentáveis) (Fapespa, 2020). **Pará**, following a similar trend to **NYC**, links the state’s annual budgeting instruments³¹ to crucial policy instruments and assures that state action, goals, and priorities contribute to the 2030 Agenda. The budget allocated for SDG implementation includes three government levels (municipal, state, and national) embodied in the medium-term state planning instrument. Furthermore, public and private partnerships with several regional and international development banks, international financial aid cooperation, and the *Fundo Amazônia* and private banking (green funds) provide additional financial resources to comply with the SDGs.

Buenos Aires’s monitoring system has been used since 2007. It consists of a scorecard (control panel) encrypted in the city management model (planning, monitoring, and accountability) that allows city agents to monitor goals and projects to assess SDG compliance through a set of indicators (Government of Buenos Aires, 2019). This result-based management exercise connects policy instruments and projects within the city to the SDGs. Moreover, **Buenos Aires** tracks specific indicators to all the SDGs while highlighting efforts to adjust its policy instruments to SDG 16 (targets 16.5; 16.10) (Government of Buenos Aires, 2020). Similarly, **La Paz’s** monitoring system follows a goal basis wherein all 17 SDGs are examined, allowing subnational actors to identify the most critical SDG and those with the most progress. As reported in its VLR, the city’s most significant improvement has been on SDG 11 (82%), SDG 2 (81%), and SDG 1 (73%). Furthermore, local authorities state that disseminating information regarding SDG progress is challenging due to difficulties in accessing updated data despite careful monitoring. Moreover, the adapted methodological strategy for localizing the 2030 Agenda in **La Paz** does not propose specific monitoring mechanisms to tackle the challenges mentioned above (Government of La Paz, 2018).

Tegucigalpa’s local agents have neither a protagonist role nor a marginal role in the SDG monitoring process. Therefore, the central government provides financial and logistical support, as well as monitoring, to all SDG-related aspects in the country.³²

BOX 6. SDGS WITH THE MOST AND MINOR PROGRESS IN ALL CASE STUDIES

The case studies reported that overall, SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) is the SDG that has achieved the most progress at the local level. Likewise, other SDGs that show the progress are SDGs 3, 4, 6, and 13. Africa-MENA reports progress on SDGs 2, 10, 11, 13, and 16; however, Africa-MENA case studies vary significantly. For instance, **Amman** shows improvement in SDGs 16 and 17, while **Kisumu** focuses on issues related to SDGs 2, 3, and 6, only reporting progress on SDG 11.

Europe has made steady progress in SDGs 4, 6, and 8. Asia reported improvements in SDGs 4, 6, 9, and 11. North America and LAC show progress on SDG 4, given the efforts to address the social and health crisis of COVID-19. In the local cases in LAC, the case studies report substantial progress on SDGs 11 and 13. However, none reported significant progress on SDG 15.

The main findings suggest that SDGs 1 and 2 show minor progress in most case studies, followed by SDGs 5, 7, and 14. In particular, the case studies in Asia have made minor progress on SDG 10. In Europe, the **Basque Country** indicated minor advancement on SDG 14 and SDG 2, while **Helsinki** indicated little improvement in SDGs 12 and 14. Finally, LAC reported little progress in SDGs 1, 2, and 5. Finally, it is critical to note that, although several case studies have coastal areas, none reported progress on SDG 14, besides the **State of Pará** and **Accra**.

³¹ Budgetary Guidelines Act and Annual Budgetary Law .

³² The National Agenda Commission; the Statistics System; the National Institute of Statistics; and the Permanent Household and Multipurpose Household Survey.

Medellín, on the other hand, has three levels of SDG monitoring systems: a local public policy (*Medellin Cómo Vamos*) facilitating the monitoring of social wellbeing in the city; an open data repository and visualization provider generated and published by different departments of the Mayor's Office (MEdata); and a survey that compares households' socioeconomic conditions facilitating the monitoring of the variables necessary to design and implement public policies (Quality-of-Life-Survey) (Government of Medellín, 2020a). Except for SDG 14, which does not apply to the city context, all the SDGs are locally monitored. In addition, in terms of financing, **Medellín** allocates a proportion of the city's annual budget to SDG-related issues (25.6%). Furthermore, the city aims to allocate 31.4% of the annual budget by 2030 to achieve the SDGs. Regarding public-private partnerships, Empresas Públicas de Medellín provided additional funding (US\$20,104,169) for SDG implementation in the city in 2019.

Finally, **Havana** does not have a local SDG monitoring system. All SDG monitoring is controlled by the national government through its SDG Laboratory. This interactive platform allows for monitoring and multidimensional analysis and alignment with the country's national development plan (UNDP, 2020).

3.4.5 Engagement of local-level actors in international forums and city-to-city partnerships

NYC's advocacy work is remarkable in engagement, participation, and highlighting good practices in localizing the SDGs. Since the first VLR was published, **NYC** has continued to engage with cities and other stakeholders to highlight the importance of cities' commitment to the SDGs. Some of these include collaborating with the Mayor of Helsinki to speak at the Social Good Summit and organizing side events at the Urban 20 Mayors' Summits in **Buenos Aires** and Tokyo. In addition, most subnational actors in the Americas benefit from non-reimbursable technical assistance focused on emerging cities in LAC through the Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program.

Furthermore, **NYC** is fully committed to providing technical assistance and support to other local governments. For example, **NYC's** Agenda Officers speak daily with local governments interested in localizing the SDGs and provide them with technical assistance in understanding how to map their SDG strategy and bridge the gap. Similar to **NYC's** case, the **Hawaiian** case study is enacting a role model for other US islands by sharing experiences in different forums (such as the Local 2030 Island Network, cooperation forums with the Navajo indigenous group, and participation in other US city networks).

BOX 7. SDG CHAMPIONS: NYC'S LEADERSHIP

NYC uses its status as a model city to share its successful experience in implementing and ensuring ownership of the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

In this endeavour, the city relies on translating its local plans and goals into SDG implementation. It also focuses its efforts on the ownership and localization of the 2030 Agenda at all levels, specifically focusing on involving civil society in the development of local actions that contribute to the fulfilment of the SDGs under a solid local basis.

In addition, it also strives to strengthen collaboration with other cities and other stakeholders in the facilitation of and commitment to the SDGs. These processes include creating and consolidating networks, events, and global city summits that promote good practice in localizing the Agenda and VLR experiences.

Furthermore, **NYC** is also committed to providing technical assistance and ongoing support. It generates channels of ongoing communication with other local governments interested in localizing the SDGs and provides them with technical assistance to help them understand how to map their strategy to the SDGs.

Mexico City self-identifies as a global city (Government of Mexico City, 2019). In this sense, the city engages with other actors within the country and internationally, such as state councils in Mexico and UCLG at the international level, to share its experiences in implementing the SDGs. **Mexico City** participates in partnerships that have provided capacity building, specifically with GIZ.

Pará promotes the 2030 Agenda articulation for establishing partnerships/networks, especially with some municipalities within the state. However, it is not yet possible to present the list of activities in addition to those carried out in partnership with the SDGs Brazil Network.

BOX 8. PARÁ AND BUENOS AIRES EXPERIENCES

Regional authorities in **Pará** stimulate the dissemination of good practices through webinars by strengthening public-private partnership initiatives on environmental aspects targeting regional actors and stakeholders in rural areas, including indigenous peoples and peasant communities regarding specific SDGs (2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17) (Government of Pará et al., 2020).

Buenos Aires seeks to consolidate its position as a disseminator of the 2030 Agenda throughout Argentina. Together with UN Argentina and the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies of Argentina, **Buenos Aires** organized meetings of subnational governments to build a federal agenda targeting localization efforts (Government of Buenos Aires, 2020). In addition, the city benefits from its membership in international forums (such as the G20) to build its leading role. Moreover, **Buenos Aires** is an active recipient of the UN System and continuously participates in transnational networks of cities and promotes the exchange of good practices related to the SDGs.

As for Central America and the Caribbean, local authorities in **Tegucigalpa** benefit from partnerships with external private actors through technical support on a wide range of topics (food security, water, cocoa) (Rikolto, 2020). In contrast, the city's participation in non-national settings is limited to the IDB program (*Emerging and Sustainable Cities Program*) and other research (IDB & NDF, 2015). Conversely, Cuba's international engagement is significant even though **Havana** does not actively participate in international forums regarding the localization of the SDGs, and the central authorities reached a deep understanding with the UNDP to monitor and visualize the national progress of the SDGs. The UNDP, Cuban institutions under the Ministry of Economic leadership, European cooperation agencies (Italy, Switzerland), and the Cuban representation in London led an inter-institutional understanding to assist the Cuban authorities in monitoring the SDGs (UNDP, 2020).

Table 7. Case studies regional comparison

Region	Implementation			Monitoring		Advocacy	
	Policy coherence	Multi-level governance	Policy integration	Monitoring	Financing ³³	Engagement in international forums	City-to city partnerships
Europe	85% Aligned using local policy instruments.	100% Multi-stakeholder approach.	57% Local policies not aligned with the SDGs.	85% VLR / no benchmarking	100% Aligned with the SDGs.	100% Yes	100% Host
	25% NA		43% Local policies aligned to the SDGs.	25% no VLR / no benchmarking			
Africa-MENA	57% Aligned using local policy instruments.	100% National level leadership.	100% Local policies not aligned with the SDGs	0% No VLR / no benchmarking	60% Not aligned with the SDGs.	28% No	50% Host
	43% Aligned at the national level only.						
Asia-Pacific	60% Aligned at the national level only	60% National level leadership.	60% Local policies not aligned with the SDGs.	100% No VLR / no benchmarking	60% Not aligned with the SDGs.	40% Yes	75% Host
	40% Aligned using local policy instruments.	40% Multi-stakeholder approach.	40% Local policies aligned to the SDGs.			60% No	
LAC and North America	66% Aligned using local policy instruments.	77% Multi-stakeholder approach.	50% local policies not aligned with the SDGs.	33% VLR / no benchmarking	100% Aligned with the SDGs	85% Yes	33% Participant
	11% Aligned using only with local policy instruments.	23% National level leadership.	50% Local policies aligned to the SDGs	22% VLR / benchmarking			
22% Aligned at the national level only.	45% No VLR / no benchmarking			45% NA			

³³ this means that within the core funding mechanisms and case study budgets, there is either a specific allocation for all or some SDGs, or that the budget is focused directly on meeting the SDGs

4. Conclusions

Almost two years into the Decade of Action, it is still imperative to boost efforts to achieve the SDGs at all levels, and even more so in the present circumstances, when the global COVID-19 pandemic is having an immeasurable impact on the social and economic fabric of our communities. All this implies the **need to use the SDGs as a guiding framework to continue to fight against the pandemic and to shape recovery efforts toward more sustainable societies.**

This baseline report constitutes the first effort of its kind by the Local2030 coalition to gain an understanding of the prevailing challenges for SDG localization around the world. This baseline will inform the work of the coalition from now until the 2030 deadline of the Decade of Action. It represents an important effort to take stock. Although it is not a systematic review of all localities worldwide, it presents important trends and opportunities to tailor the efforts of the Local2030 coalition and its partners moving forward. **It shows that not one city or region can claim it has achieved the SDGs, but while they face varied challenges, some cases can claim to be SDG champions based on their progress.** Champions have made important progress moving from mere commitment to the alignment of actions to incorporating the SDGs into their local development plans, policies, and territorial strategies.

Moreover, this baseline demonstrates some worrying trends vis-à-vis SDG localization that highlight the need to renew the commitment of actors at all levels to the Global Agendas (the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda). **Outreach and overall implementation are still limited, and their expansion needs to be accelerated.**

In terms of the current pandemic, although it is still ongoing, it is difficult to measure its impact. Cases in every region included in this study have revealed how people have become more vulnerable, especially the poor. The pandemic has put territories and communities worldwide under economic and social strain, directly impacting the subnational efforts to achieve the SDGs. Stakeholders in the study have expressed that **there have been widespread financial losses due to the lockdown, which undermines the steps to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Inequalities were amplified, and poor people were hit hardest.** Budgetary resources had to be reallocated from various development sectors toward public health care and social protection. This reallocation of resources and priorities can undermine the progress on other SDGs that are not related to measures implemented for the containment of and recovery from COVID-19. Despite the previous examples, **identifying the impact of the pandemic on SDG progress remains a significant gap.** This situation calls for the implementation of monitoring and evaluation procedures that allow subnational authorities to identify the SDGs that were most affected, and those can be used as accelerators during the recovery.

Moreover, monitoring and budgets are areas where trends are showing the need to take decisive actions. It is of great concern that the lack of calculation of synergies and trade-offs represents a missed opportunity to foster policy coherence and accelerate the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda at the subnational level. This is further aggravated by financial restraints, which are a worldwide obstacle that affects all local actors, regardless of whether they are in a high-income country or not. Such restrictions spill over into monitoring, with local actors, particularly from the Global South, highlighting financial restraints as a critical aspect of a lack of means for data collection. Harmonization and standardization of monitoring to assess progress on the SDGs have also been highlighted as an issue. In the context of this baseline, this led to a lack of comparability, especially in localities or counties.

In terms of engagement and participation, **the case studies demonstrate existing gaps in spaces available to local actors to engage at national and global levels.** First, local actors in several countries are finding it difficult to engage at national, regional, and global levels where priority setting, programming, and funding are discussed and decided. For instance, the level of participation and engagement of local governments in the production of the national reviews has

so far been limited. This shows the crucial need to avoid the shrinking of these spaces and to reinforce more inclusion and participation.

Opportunities moving forward

Several areas discussed in this document present opportunities for the Local2030 coalition to increase and improve support for SDG localization; however, its success will depend on coordinated actions and serious commitment by coalition partners, including the UN System. The following can be highlighted:

- Although the reallocation of resources and priorities due to the pandemic is a challenge, it is also **an opportunity to reemphasize the importance of the SDGs** and create recovery strategies aligned with the principles of the 2030 Agenda.
- To guarantee dialogue and cooperation between the UN System and subnational actors, **UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators are key in playing a bridging role between the global agenda and SDG local practices.**
- **Increasing the participation of local actors in international forums will increase the exchange of SDG knowledge (e.g., methodologies and monitoring tools) and the interaction with their peers from other countries.** Additionally, these are key spaces for local actors to make important connections with different types of funders.
- This baseline highlights the importance of localizing SDGs, of the integrated approach required for doing so, and for local actors to play a greater role in achieving sustainable development. Given the indivisibility and interlinked nature of the SDGs, where one goal cannot be achieved in isolation, **an integrated approach is essential for developing programs that cut throughout areas of government and of sustainable development.**
- Since there are so many different initiatives and local experiences, more efforts can be made to build and nurture **a support platform for local SDG implementation to exploit existing initiatives, alliances, and solutions for bottom-up SDG action.**

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Visit us

SEI Headquarters

Linnégatan 87D Box 24218
104 51 Stockholm Sweden
Tel: +46 8 30 80 44
info@sei.org

Måns Nilsson

Executive Director

SEI Africa

World Agroforestry Centre
United Nations Avenue
Gigiri P.O. Box 30677
Nairobi 00100 Kenya
Tel: +254 20 722 4886
info-Africa@sei.org

Philip Osano

Centre Director

SEI Asia

10th Floor, Kasem Uttayanin Building,
254 Chulalongkorn University,
Henri Dunant Road, Pathumwan, Bangkok,
10330 Thailand
Tel: +66 2 251 4415
info-Asia@sei.org

Niall O'Connor

Centre Director

SEI Tallinn

Arsenal Centre
Erika 14, 10416
Tallinn, Estonia
Tel: +372 6276 100
info-Tallinn@sei.org

Lauri Tammiste

Centre Director

SEI Oxford

Oxford Eco Centre, Roger House,
Osney Mead, Oxford,
OX2 0ES, UK
Tel: +44 1865 42 6316
info-Oxford@sei.org

Ruth Butterfield

Centre Director

SEI US

Main Office

11 Curtis Avenue
Somerville MA 02144-1224 USA
Tel: +1 617 627 3786
info-US@sei.org

Michael Lazarus

Centre Director

SEI US

Davis Office

400 F Street
Davis CA 95616 USA
Tel: +1 530 753 3035

SEI US

Seattle Office

1402 Third Avenue Suite 900
Seattle WA 98101 USA
Tel: +1 206 547 4000

SEI York

University of York
Heslington York
YO10 5DD UK
Tel: +44 1904 32 2897
info-York@sei.org

Sarah West

Centre Director

SEI Latin America

Calle 71 # 11-10
Oficina 801
Bogota Colombia
Tel: +57 1 6355319
info-LatinAmerica@sei.org

David Purkey

Centre Director