

2019 (平成31) 年 3 月 8 日
横浜市立大学論叢
社会科学系列 第70卷 第2号

Explanatory Report

**Localization of SDGs:
Role of Local Governments**

Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewil and Hari Srinivas

Localization of SDGs: Role of Local Governments

Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi¹ and Hari Srinivas²

Abstract

This paper focuses on the recently promulgated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the global community under the auspices of the United Nations. It lays particular emphasis on the need for local action in order to achieve the SDGs, and the critical role that local governments will have to play to localize the SDGs. The paper presents a matrix that will enable stakeholders to understand the roles of actors at the local level.

1. Introduction

The post-World War II economic expansion eventually brought about what came to be known as the “Golden Age of Capitalism,” with strong economic growth, job creation and high income generation. High productivity growth from before the war continued after the war and until the early 1970s, with increased productivity, new products and services and new skills. This trend was pushed

1 Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific (UCLG ASPAC), Jakarta, Indonesia. Contact email – bernadia@uclg-aspac.org; bernadia.tjandradewi@gmail.com

2 Professor of Global Environmental Policy, Kwansai Gakuin University, Kobe, Japan. Contact email – hari.srinivas@kwansai.ac.jp

along by strong public policies of national governments that saw robust economic growth as a key to recovery and reconstruction from the devastation of the war.

Consequences of Industrialization

One consequence of the high economic growth after World War II was concurrent rapid urbanization processes throughout the world. This not only led to the growth of cities at rates much higher than the overall population growth, it also created a shift in urban lifestyles that shaped a wide range of demands for goods and services.

Cities became magnets for migration of large proportions of the population that looked at cities as means of economic advancement - not only a source for jobs and income, but also for improvement in their quality of lives and living opportunities (education, health, etc.).

Urbanization processes resulted not only in the growth of cities, but also in pushing people from rural areas to urban cities, resulting in drastic socio-economic and cultural changes in rural areas as well.

It is this combination of post-war industrialization, and the consequential urbanization processes that resulted in the creation of a new economic order, of globalized production and consumption of goods and services, that enabled war-ravaged countries to see rapid economic growth in the 40s and 50s. The overt and extensive focus on economic growth initially helped the countries expand and create a better quality of life for its citizens. But the industrialization processes, with increased need for new materials, chemicals and manufacturing techniques, also resulted in non-economic consequences that were initially not understood or were simply ignored. Effects of industrialization on society, on the daily living and the working conditions of ordinary people were not fully understood. Thus, industrialization and urbanization, while providing positive benefits on one hand, also increased dependence on natural resources, including, for example,

energy systems that depended on fossil fuels, further exacerbating emissions and pollution.

Of particular significance were the unanticipated impacts of industrialization and urbanization, resulting in pollution of air, water and land. With the overt focus on economic growth and industrial expansion, the environmental and social impacts were not given the priority they deserved. The eventual effect of these processes on human health and quality of life is what turned global thinking towards a more balanced approach to economic, but also social and environmental aspects of development.

2. Emergence of the SD concept

It is this realization of the unintended consequences of industrialization and urbanization that led to the emergence of the concept of sustainable development. Many environmental researchers credit the publication of a book by Rachel Carson, *The Silent Spring*, as a sort of starting point for the sustainability movement. The book was published in 1962 and it documented the adverse effects on the environment of the indiscriminate use of pesticides, one of the first to target the impacts of rampant economic growth on the environment.

The main theme of the book is the destruction of the delicate balance of nature by the wholesale use of insecticides. The author explains what balance in nature is, in the nature of the soil, of the earth's waters, and of the organisms of the earth, etc.

UN Report on "Our Common Future"

In 1982, the United Nations organized the UN Conference on Human Environment that took one of the first steps in understanding the interlinkages of humans and the impacts that we were having on the environment. The

resulting political discussion at the UN highlighted the need for a more balanced developmental agenda.

This momentum towards a “balance” in development agendas was maintained with the World Commission on Environment and Development, under the chairmanship of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, publishing in 1987, a report entitled “Our Common Future”. The report (United Nations, 1987) sought to address environmental issues and concerns firmly on the political agenda and aimed to discuss the environment and development as one single issue.

Over the decades since these reports were published, concern and political discussions at the UN and in other international fora have looked at the importance of balancing development agendas to cover not only economic issues, but also social and environmental issues.

The seminal turning point for the world community in this process was the organizing of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, (popularly known as the “Earth Summit”). At this summit, member states of the UN, for the first time, proposed the term “sustainable development” and created a working plan (the “Agenda 21”) to aim towards sustainability (United Nation, 1992).

The timeline since the Earth Summit in expanding the concept of sustainability has resulted in a broad acceptance of the term by different stakeholders, from governments and businesses, to civil society entities, universities, et al. Since this meeting, Earth Summits have been held every ten years, in 2002 (in Johannesburg) and 2012 (in Rio de Janeiro). Numerous other fora, revolving around concrete plans and agreements (called “multilateral environmental agreements,” particularly focusing on climate change, biodiversity and desertification) have been held worldwide on a number of themes and topics.

The Path to MDGs

The above brief background to the concept of sustainable development is important for us to appreciate the momentum that led to the world community, under the auspices of the UN, to develop the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Briefly, the MDGs were a set of eight development goals (United Nations, nd) proposed in 2000 during the Millennium Summit, that were to be achieved by member states of the UN before 2015. The eight goals are listed in Table 1 below.








<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger 2. To achieve universal primary education 3. To promote gender equality and empower women 4. To reduce child mortality 5. To improve maternal health 6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases 7. To ensure environmental sustainability 8. To develop a global partnership for development 	 <p>1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger</p>	 <p>2 Achieve Universal Primary Education</p>
	 <p>3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women</p>	 <p>4 Reduce Child Mortality</p>
	 <p>5 Improve Maternal Health</p>	 <p>6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Other Diseases</p>
	 <p>7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability</p>	 <p>8 Develop a Global Partnership for Development</p>

Table 1 : The Millennium Development Goals

Each of these goals had specific targets to be achieved, and a list of accompanying indicators that helped measure progress towards the targets.

Key MDG achievements:

- More than 1 billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty (since 1990)
- Child mortality dropped by more than half (since 1990)
- The number of out of school children has dropped by more than half (since 1990)
- HIV/AIDS infections fell by almost 40 percent (since 2000)

3. From MDGs to SDGs

In 2015, at the end of the implementation period of the MDGs, the world community came together once again to develop a new set of development goals, which were called the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs).

Unfortunately, there was much criticism about the development, implementation, and achievement of the MDGs. Stakeholders complained of a lack of proper systems for analysis of data for the MDGs, justification behind the goal’s objectives, and difficulty in measurement of the goals’ achievement. Funding for action to implement the MDGs remained a contentious factor.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda

Two years before the end of the period, in 2013, progress towards the goals was uneven. Some countries achieved many goals, while others were not on track to realize any. A UN conference in September 2010 reviewed progress to date and adopted a global plan to achieve the eight goals by their target date.

With the MDGs coming to an end in 2015, the world community came together once again to undertake a massive exercise to look at a number of developmental priorities. The process collectively came to be called the Post-2015 Development Agenda, covering a number of issues including sustainability, health, education, habitat, disaster relief, etc.

The discussions during 2013-2015 on the follow-up to the MDGs resulted in a number of key principles, including, for example, “Leave no one behind,” that put the concept of sustainability at the core of development. It also called for transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth, building peace and forging global partnerships. The result of the discussions formed the basis for the setting up of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. The Process of Developing the SDGs

In order to make the SDGs more inclusive and allow countries to develop a national position, and empower them to implement the SDGs, countries were encouraged to organize national consultations with broad stakeholder participation. Countries then reported on their national consultations to regional meetings where common positions were worked out, and presented to the global meetings.

At the global level, the consultations focus on eleven themes identified by the UN: inequalities, health, education, growth and employment, environmental sustainability, governance, conflict and fragility, population dynamics, hunger, food and nutrition security, energy, water.

This broad consultation process not only allowed for local consensus to be reflected in global agendas, it also helped address some of the criticisms that were raised with the MDGs. The resulting report from the consultations was called the “The World We Want” (UNDG, 2013), which was released in 2013.

Declaration of the SDGs

A key result of the Post-2015 discussions was the identification of four dimensions as part of a global vision for sustainable development: inclusive social development, environmental sustainability, inclusive economic development, and peace and security. These four dimensions eventually became the SDGs.

The historical transcendent of development of the concept of sustainability itself, of the MDGs, and of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, resulted in the 17 sustainable development goals³:



Figure 1 : The Official Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- Goal 1: No Poverty
- Goal 2: Zero Hunger
- Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being for people
- Goal 4: Quality Education

3 Details of each of the 17 goals, including their targets, indicators and their current status of implementation, can be seen on the SDGs Knowledge Platform - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1300>

- Goal 5: Gender Equality
- Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- Goal 13: Climate Action
- Goal 14: Life Below Water
- Goal 15: Life on Land
- Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

There are a total of 169 targets to be achieved for the 17 goals. Each target has between one and three indicators used to measure progress toward reaching the targets. In total, there are 304 indicators that will measure compliance by each country by 2030.

The SDGs are unique in that, unlike the MDGs, there was comprehensive consultation processes organized at the national, regional and global levels, resulting in local viewpoints to be reflected in the structure of the final goals, and facilitating empowerment and ownership of the goals by a broad coalition of partners.

This also resulted in a much broader adoption of, and commitment to, the goals throughout the development field, both due to the content of the goals reflecting ground realities, and due to the active participation of local stakeholders in its formation.

5. Localizing the SDGs

The Post-2015 Development Agenda discussions and the run-up to the formulation of the SDGs also highlighted engagement at the local level. A top priority throughout the discussions was the need to ensure that the SDGs were strongly grounded in local realities and capacities. To this end, several main principles were identified to support the successful implementation of the new development agenda: participation, inclusion, and the need for strengthened capacities and partnerships.

Think Global, Act Local

As the well-known idiom extolls, “Think Global, Act Local”, a number of dialogues on localizing the Post-2015 development agendas, particularly the SDGs, were organized by the UN and other international agencies, including the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Lessons learnt from the MDG processes showed the key role of local governments in defining and delivering the goals, and in communicating to local stakeholders and citizens.

A key outcome of the dialogues to localize the SDGs was highlighting the importance of local and regional governments as essential to promote inclusive sustainable development. Effective local governance was also identified to ensure the inclusion of a diversity of local stakeholders, thereby creating broad-based ownership, commitment and accountability at the local level. Ultimately, an integrated multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach was mentioned as critical to promote transformative agendas at the local level.

Definition of Localization

UCLG in its Strategic Priorities 2016-2030 defines the localization of the global agenda as taking into account sub-national contexts, challenges,

opportunities and governments in all the global agendas, from the setting of goals and targets, to implementation, monitoring and reporting. Localizing is not the parachuting of global goals into local contexts. Localizing is implementing local agendas in cities and territories to reach local and global goals. Localizing is a political process based on harnessing local opportunities, priorities and ideas (UCLG, 2015).

Importance of Local Governments

From the initiation stages of the SDGs, it was clear that localizing the SDGs was important to take into account subnational and local contexts in the achievement of the SDGs, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress. Localizing SDGs also means putting local areas and peoples’ priorities, needs and resources at the center of sustainable development. Discussions pointed to a need for sustained exchanges between the global, national and local levels to achieve the SDGs.

In the past, localization was mainly aimed at the implementation of goals at the local level, by sub-national actors, in particular by local and regional governments. But with the SDGs, this thinking has evolved by way of targets being developed in order to clearly show the linkages between the responsibilities of local and regional governments and the achievement of the SDGs. That is why the achievement of the SDGs depends, more than ever, on the ability of local and regional governments to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable development.

Local governments are policy makers and catalysts of change at the local level, and are best placed to link the global goals with local communities. Localizing SDGs is then a process to empower all local stakeholders, aimed at making sustainable development more responsive, and therefore, relevant to local

needs and aspirations. SDGs can be achieved only if local actors fully participate, not only in the implementation, but also in the agenda-setting and monitoring.

Need an Enabling Environment at the Local Level

Active local participation requires that public policies are not imposed upon local actors from the top, but that the whole policy chain is shared. All relevant actors must be involved in the decision-making process, through consultative and participative mechanisms, at the local and national levels.

Local governments require a conducive environment to perform well. A good enabling environment is a pre-requisite condition where devolution of powers and subsidiarity roles and responsibilities of local governments is clearly defined. Local governments must be given the responsibility and resource through vertical fiscal and institutional arrangements to allow them to generate revenue and raise capital to deliver services to their constituencies.

Capacity building and networking at the local level remains a critical priority to ensure the success of the SDGs. These need to be targeted at all local actors – local governments, businesses and industry groups and civil society entities. Capacities in data collection and analysis, decision-making and consensus development, awareness-raising among local actors need to be enhanced.

The strategic policies for localizing the SDGs need to focus on raising awareness on the guiding principles, targets and indicators of the SDGs. The strategies need to provide practical insight in implementing the SDGs, for example, monitoring the progress towards SDGs, local governance systems needed for SDGs implementation, financing etc.

Research carried out by UCLG ASPAC has identified that the enabling environment for urban governments operates at multiple levels of government. Streamlining administrative, technical and operational services between levels of governments is crucial to avoiding duplication, overlap and conflict between

governments and to enable concentration of public resources.

Initiatives such as the creation of a council of national governments and committees, integrated management information systems between levels of governments, and adoption and standardization of operation manuals for line agency officials at differing levels of government are ways in which the integration of multi-level enabling environments in support of sustainable development can be improved.

Strategies and policies that support monitoring and evaluation, technology transfer, human resource development, resource mobilization, and integration with national policies need to be developed and sustained at the local level.

Work done by UCLG ASPAC with local governments has not only demonstrated the importance of vertical coordination and interlinkages with national governments, but also the need for city-to-city cooperation in localizing SDGs. Much can be learnt and shared between cities within such cooperative networks that will strengthen and capacitate local governments for SDGs implementation.

Implementing the SDGs - Actors and Actions

There is significant danger in assuming that the 17 SDGs are separate issues that need to be dealt with separately, one by one. In fact, the SDGs are all interrelated and mutually reinforcing. This interconnectedness needs to be emphasized in capacity building exercises at the local level - where different actors bring different capacities to the table to implement the SDGs.

A key approach to achieve the SDGs objectives is to target actions that influence lifestyles of ordinary people and the everyday decisions that they take. It is after all, these small individual and daily decisions that cumulatively result in the global problems and consequences addressed by the SDGs.

Implementing the SDGs would require a range of stakeholders undertaking

different actions (based on their capacities and influences) to target people's lifestyles. Table 2 illustrates this point. It provides a matrix of actors and actions, with three local actors – (1) Local governments and Public Agencies, (2) Businesses and Industry Groups, and (3) Civil Society entities – needing to take three sets of actions – (1) local governance systems, laws and regulations, (2) education and awareness raising, and (3) technology systems and solutions.

		<i>Actions at the local level</i>		
		Governance – laws and regulations	Education and awareness raising	Technology systems and solutions
<i>Local stakeholders</i>	Local Governments and public agencies			
	Businesses and Industry Groups		<i>Specific actions for each city by specific actors</i>	
	Civil Society Entities			

Table 2 : The SDGs Local Actors/Actions Matrix

The primary responsibilities at the local level become clear from this matrix –

- local governments and public agencies are primarily responsible for laws and regulations
- businesses and industry groups are primarily responsible for designing and developing technology systems
- Civil society entities, including NGOs, Universities and research institutions, are primarily responsible for education and awareness raising among citizens and communities.

A collaborative partnership between all stakeholders at the local level will have to decide what actions need to be taken by which actor (in effect, filling in each of the cells in the above matrix). This will ensure that each stakeholder can bring to the table specific skills and knowledge that will be beneficial for implementing SDGs actions. The matrix will therefore help us understand the roles of different actors at the local level.

6. Conclusion

The localization of SDGs at local government levels is crucial for achieving the sustainable development agenda and SDGs by 2030. Developing a localized set of SDGs indicators is a necessary step in identifying what needs to be done at the local level. It is also critical for strengthening and monitoring the performance of policies and development programs.

In addition, localizing SDGs indicators and collecting data at the local level can help countries to provide accurate aggregated reporting on the 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This can help governments to monitor performance towards achieving the SDGs. National sets of indicators and a template can be developed to measure the enabling environment of cities and local governments, to complement the SDGs indicators. Cities can then apply these for collecting information to monitor the performance of the SDGs at the local level. The very success of implementing and achieving the SDGs will largely depend on the degree to which local governments and other local stakeholders work together in adopting and taking action at the local level, and how they understand their distinct position in implementing the SDGs. Much more attention needs to be given to lessons that are being learnt in localizing the SDGs, and in particular the role of local governments and other local actors in this process.

References

- Carson, Rachel (1962), *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- UCLG ASPAC, Cities Alliance, UNDP (2018). *City Enabling Environment Rating: Assessment of the Countries in Asia and the Pacific*. Jakarta, Indonesia.
Available at: <http://uclg-aspac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/UCLG-ASPAC-EECLG-rev.pdf>
- UCLG (2015). *The Sustainable Development Goals What Local Governments Need to Know*. Barcelona, Spain.
Available at: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_sdgs_what_localgov_need_to_know_0.pdf
- UCLG (2016). *Strategic Priorities 2016-2020 Co-creating Equality, Peace and Sustainability, Local and Regional Governments Get Ready to Deliver the Global Goals*. Barcelona, Spain.
Available at: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/strategic_priorities_2016-2022.pdf
- UCLG (2017). *National and Sub-National Governments on the Way Towards the Localization of the SDGs*. Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2017 HLPF.
Available at: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/localgov_report_localizationsdg_hlpf.pdf
- UNESCAP (2018). *Empowering cities to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda: Mobilizing municipal finance for sustainable infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region*. Bangkok, Thailand. Agenda Paper for the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Seventy-fourth session. Bangkok, 11–16 May 2018. Items 3 (d) of the provisional agenda. Review of issues

- pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: environment and development.
Available at: http://www.unescap.org/commission/74/document/E74_12E.pdf
- United Nations (1987), "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future" New York: The United Nations [Online version - <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>]
- UNDG (2013), "A Million Voices: The World We Want". New York: The United Nations Development Group.
[Online version - <http://www.worldwewant2030.org/>]
- United Nations (1992). *Agenda 21 : programme of action for sustainable development ; Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), 3-14 June 1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. New York, NY: United Nations Dept. of Public Information.
- United Nations (n.d.) Millennium Development Goals. New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations
[Available online - <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>]