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UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

LOCALIZING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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"The achievement of the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] depends, more than ever, on the ability of local and regional governments to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable territorial development."[1]

"Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"[2]

Introduction

The UN System and its partners have made development a cornerstone of their mission since the entity was founded in 1945.[3] By the year 2000, the UN created what were then known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a series of aspirational benchmarks to have been met by 2015, concerning advances in economic and human development over a variety of fields. Goals included ending extreme poverty, ensuring gender equality & women's empowerment, and increases in environmental stewardship.[4] While considerable progress was achieved, particularly in terms of reducing the number of people experiencing absolute poverty (often measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] per capita of less than $1.25/day, and/or facing imminent starvation) these gains were widely uneven. The lion's share of progress in reducing extreme poverty were achieved in two countries, the People's Republic of China and India. Progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals was mixed[5], and by 2015, the United Nations and its member-states decided to supplant this scheme with a new one: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[6]

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[1] Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational level", 2016, p. 7.

[2] United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals", 2015.

[3] Charter of the United Nations (1945), art. 55, sec. A.

[4] United Nations, "Background on the Millennium Development Goals," 2013, https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml.

[5] Martin Sandbu, "Critics questions success of UN's millennium development goals", *Financial Times*, September 15, 2015.

[6] Delegates may wish to review the latest report on the Sustainable Development Goals: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018",

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) largely overlap with the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): similar commitments to achieving gender equality, reducing HIV/AIDS transmission, eradicating hunger, and improving access to clean water are seen across both the MDGs and SDGs.[7] But one criticism of the original MDGs was the seemingly aloof approach of many UN and governmental officials in addressing the goals. Calls to increase local involvement and leadership in achieving the MDGs illustrated a growing recognition by the relevant development stakeholders that "sub-national governments and other local stakeholders who have fundamental roles in ensuring that the goals are achieved were largely left out of the dialogue and MDG discourse."[8]

Redressing these omissions or deficiencies from the original MDG negotiations as the UN works to achieve the SDGs requires inclusive and sustained multilateral dialogues and cooperation as well as the scaling up of the capacities and infrastructure of local communities. Emphasizing the needs of local communities will also spur international development partners to target their aid and investments towards the neediest populations, including women and girls, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, people with disabilities, immigrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and other marginalized populations. Ultimately, though, "by focusing attention on these most vulnerable populations, overall progress towards the MDGs and the overarching goals of improving development and eliminating poverty that were stated in the Millennium Declaration are more likely to be achieved and sustained"[9]; ensuring similar local foci is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Why is localization important?

To paraphrase the late Speaker of the House, Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, all development is local.[10] Building gleaming skyscrapers and new state-of-the-art cardiac and surgery units in the national capital all too frequently means nothing to marginalized populations, except perhaps for higher taxes. Local residents must realize direct benefits

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June 2018. The report may be found at:
https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2018/TheSustainableDevelopmentGoalsReport2018-EN.pdf

[7] Despite their similarities on a surface level, there are a variety of differences between the MDGs and their successors. MDGs were only meant to be carried out in lesser developed countries (LDCs), while the SDGs are for all countries to strive toward achieving. The SGDs also have a broader focus than the MDGs, allowing for more flexibility in how they are met, and have a greater emphasis on capacity building both in terms of governance and in financial support toward their implementation. For more information, consult a set of frequently asked questions about the SDGs, as written by the UNDP: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/.

[8] Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Going Local to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals: Stories from Eight Countries," 2009, p. 8.

[9] Theresa W. Gyorkos, Serene A. Joseph, & Martin Casapía, "Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals in a community of extreme poverty: local vs. national disparities in Peru," *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, Vol. 14, No. 6, June 2009, p. 651.

[10] O'Neill is credited with the aphorism "all politics is local."

from development projects and it is essential that these benefits not be restricted solely to local and/or national elites.

In implementing the SDGs, delegates can look back at some of the successes of localization efforts with the MDGs and use them as prototypes for forthcoming projects. Two pertinent examples of increased effectiveness of initiatives toward the MDGs because of greater engagement with local communities come from such divergent countries as Niger and Albania. For example, "in Niger, citizens were more committed to pay local taxes when resources were indeed spent on needs jointly identified and incorporated in the development plans. In Albania, revenues increased because of better public understanding of the services the local government provides."[11] Local communities must be entrusted with critical policy-making responsibilities and must subsequently be empowered so that they may not only formulate appropriate policies but then implement them.

Empowering local communities must become more than a convenient political mantra. National governments, regardless of the political rhetoric espoused during campaigns, are typically loath to relinquish control of public finances, although they often appear willing to devolve responsibilities to local communities. As the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and the UNDP noted, "inadequate transfer of financial resources from the national to local governments can undermine local governments' capacity and legitimacy and, as a consequence, make citizens reluctant to pay local taxes […] In the absence of appropriate fiscal transfers, and with limited opportunities for mobilizing funds locally, effectively implementing the MDGs at the local level remains a challenge."[12] National governments, international development agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and related civil society partners must not only be willing to direct financial resources to local communities but also improve the absorptive capacities of those local communities such that these financial resources fund sustainable development without causing rapid inflation. Furthermore, "local and regional governments should also work with central governments to improve their borrowing powers and to explore innovative forms of financing local government, including through partnerships with the private sector."[13]

Improving the equity of national-local financial transfers is a necessary condition for effective achievement of development goals but it is not sufficient in and of itself. Local communities must also participate as equal partners in prioritizing development needs; this is especially true in the case of isolated and/or marginalized communities that rarely factor into the national development calculus. The respective plights of these isolated and/or marginalized communities only serve to reinforce the foundational argument that national statistics obscure or elide at least as much as they illuminate or

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[11] Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),
    "Going Local to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals: Stories from Eight Countries,"
    2009, p. 21.
[12] Ibid., p. 15.
[13] Global Taskforce on Local and Regional Governments, "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs:
Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level", 2016, p. 20.

include. The frequent omission of rural communities from national development planning will be analyzed below. Equally important, though, is the need for inclusive urban development planning that acknowledges the increasing importance of small towns and the ever-expanding slums of many developing world cities. Even as the percentage of the global urban population living in slums declined between 2000 and 2014, the total number of people living in slums increased from 807 million to 883 million.[14]

In an increasingly urbanized world, effective progress towards achieving the SDGs requires the inclusion of civil society partners in a variety of urban environments, not strictly the national, and even district or regional, capitals. Furthermore, "SDG 11, on sustainable cities and human settlements, is the lynchpin of the localizing process."[15] Given the centrality of SDG 11 to localization, UNDP and relevant partners, including national and local governments, businesses, academics, and related civil society partners, must coordinate effectively with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT). Again, the international community may benefit from experiences from the previous efforts with the MDGs in learning what to do for current SDGs. Specifically examining the centrality of small towns in Ghana's development, George Owusu argued that "attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will depend to a large extent on how we can strengthen the prospects of local economic development and improve the living and working conditions of small towns."[16] Extrapolating Owusu's remarks in context to the contemporary Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), small towns serve as vital links between rural areas and urban centers; thus, developing the markets, government services, and health facilities needed to achieve the SDGs must become a top priority for the UNDP, national governments, and relevant civil society partners. Owusu concludes his examination of Ghanaian small towns with analysis that rings true for many developing countries:

> "These [regional development] roles include: market centres, which can link local producers to national and international markets and thus facilitate the improvement of rural production and incomes; centres for distribution of services, which can decrease costs and improve access due to the proximity of services for both small town residents and the rural hinterland population; and alternative zones of attraction for potential rural-urban migrants, thereby reducing migration pressure on the large towns and cities."[17]

Political discourse around the world emphasizes improved accountability of social institutions, particularly governments, to their respective populations. While the most hyperbolic verbiage about the isolation and incompetence of career politicians and bureaucrats is frequently reserved for political campaigns and advertising, it is abundantly clear that tens of millions of people around the world perceive their governments and public servants as being accountable only to multilateral organizations,

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[14] United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA), "The Sustainable Goals Development Report 2018", June 2018, p. 24.

[15] Global Taskforce on Local and Regional Governments, "Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level", 2016, p. 6.

[16] George Owusu, "The Role of Small Towns in Regional Development and Poverty Reduction in Ghana," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research,* Vol. 32, No. 2, June 2008, p. 454.

[17] Ibid., p. 468.

including international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group as well as regional development and commercial investment banks, transnational corporations, and increasingly unpopular hedge fund managers. Empowering local governments and related social institutions and maintaining inclusive multilateral development planning will reduce these negative perceptions of unaccountable politicians, bureaucrats, and corporate managers.

Getting the job done

Part of the difficulty in ensuring the success of the SDGs, though, comes from their inherently voluntary nature. The UN notes the goals are not legally binding, even despite some of them being enshrined in things like the Paris Climate Agreement of 2016, which is legally binding.[18,19] UNDP also notes the immense cost of fulfilling these goals, with conservative estimates upward of $1 trillion USD needed. To that end, collaboration between stakeholders — both at government & lower levels — is needed. Helping facilitate these conversations is the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), a yearly confab held for groups to come together and share best practices & learn from each other as they try to meet their goals.

Important to these discussions is the role large transnational corporations can play, given their ability to scale projects at rapid rates and, frankly, their financial capacity to act when pushed. One participant in the 2018 HLPF, which focused on sustainable development, was Unilever, a large company that produces a variety of household products. The company has worked with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the developing world to improve access to clean water and to provide proper sanitation systems to help meet Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation). Unilever and its partners have consulted with local authorities throughout the developing world to find out what their greatest needs are, and where they can provide the most assistance, in an effort to collaborate and cooperate.[20]

It is natural, in some ways, for developing countries to be at first inherently skeptical of the role large corporations like Unilever might want to play in solving some of the pressing questions concerning development: after all, examples of corporate "good governance" gone awry are various & sundry throughout history. However, cooperative works like these can be ways for real progress to come about and for companies to improve demonstrate their commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and burnish their images. Unilever's efforts in partnership with local groups to provide greater access to handwashing and modern sewage systems, for instance, have reduced transmission of communicable diseases in parts of the developing world.

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[18] United Nations Development Programme, "The Sustainable Development Agenda," https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/.

[19] —, "Climate change affects everyone," https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climatechange/.

[20] Paul Polman, " Scale and speed needed to make water, sanitation and hygiene a reality for all," 20 July 2018, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/07/scale-speed-needed-make-water-sanitation-hygiene-reality/.

Since the SDGs went into effect in late 2015, partnerships between UN System organs, outside funders, and local governments have already started to pay dividends. Some of the most highly successful endeavors involve ways to meet multiple goals at the same time. Take, for instance, a project called Rainergy: a high school student in Azerbaijan had an idea to harness electricity from rainwater and was given an initial grant by the national government to invest in her idea. She built a device, which captures fallen rain and then pumps it through a small turbine to generate small amounts of electricity.[21] The project helps meet a variety of SDGs, from Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy) to Goal 5 (women's empowerment) and Goal 12 (responsible consumption).[22] The project has received attention from other developing countries, who see Rainergy as a cost-effective way to provide lesser developed areas with a clean source of electricity.

Some local projects, though, can be done collectively, simply by asking local residents for their support & assistance. The French village of Langouët has become something of a poster child for sustainable development and shared governance: when its mayor decided he wanted to make the community more environmentally friendly, he and the village government simply asked residents to loan the government money for the infrastructure improvements, with interest. Residents were able to gain a sense of investment in the efforts both metaphorically and literally by helping foot the bill for projects that would also have a net benefit to their lives: the village has a shared electric car to cut down on private vehicle ownership, as well as a restaurant that is sourced with 100 percent locally grown ingredients.[23] There are some caveats with this project: France is a highly developed country, where residents are able to loan away large sums of money for these kinds of projects more readily. Langouët's successes may not be replicable in other parts of the world without outside financial assistance, but the village of 600 residents is a good starting place for other, similarly sized towns to look toward as they try to meet SDGs on a local level.

A further example of localized adaptation of different strategies comes in the form of e-governance. E-governance is a means through which government services and information can be delivered using technology. However, not every country or community has the same access to information technology, making the process of implementation more bespoke. Similarly, not every community *needs* the same kinds of elements of e-governance to make their citizens' lives more useful. That said, countries like Japan are sharing their experiences in using electronic sources for government alerts & for weather monitoring with countries like Lesotho, where drought conditions have made farming and other agricultural industries difficult.[24] The two countries are

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[21] Amina Nazarli, "Rainergy," United Nations Development Programme, 6 July 2018, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/07/rainergy/.

[22] United Nations Development Programme, Sustainable Development Goals, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/.

[23] Mathilde Golla, "Langouët, the 100% green little Gallic village," United Nations Development Programme, 6 July 2018, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/07/langouet-100-green-little-gallic-village/.

[24] United Nations Development Programme, "E-Governance: A powerful tool to combat, mitigate and sustainably manage disaster risks," 20 July 2018,

collaborating with the hopes of learning from each other in ways that can help their own governments in better preparing for disasters both before they strike, and in their aftermath.

Conclusion

Reaching the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has taken, and will continue to take, a lot of heavy lifting. The financial commitment necessary for all countries and localities to meet each of the 17 goals alone is staggering; the amount of cooperation required between various stakeholders, be they citizens, municipalities, state governments or NGOs, is immense. By learning, modifying, and implementing best practices from successful and even unsuccessful projects, local governments and their constituents are able to figure out what works best for them as they strive to achieve the SDGs. Only through a sense of buy-in from different communities and through a sense of true collaboration can these be met in an effective manner, both on time and under budget.

Guiding questions

How close is your country to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030? When was the last time that your country reported the relevant statistics and indicators for the SDGs?

Do your governments [local, regional, national] disaggregate these statistics and report them in terms of counties, districts, regions, villages or other administrative units? If your country does not regularly report the relevant SDG statistics and indicators, does it plan to do so in the next 2 years?

Do your governments [local, regional, national] measure and report progress towards the SDGs in terms of gender? Race/ethnicity? Socioeconomic status? Status of disability? If not, do your governments plan to do so in the near future?

How does your country handle development planning? Does your government regularly consult with local authorities and communities before implementing new development initiatives? Does your government directly incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals into its development and poverty reduction strategies?

What programs or initiatives may be most easily scaled up within your country or region to promote sustainable development and improve the odds of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030?

Which of the Sustainable Development Goals is your country most likely to achieve by 2030? Which of the goals will take your country the longest to meet, and why? How

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https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/07/e-governance-powerful-tool-combat-mitigate-sustainably-manage-disaster-risks/.

might progress towards this SDG be accelerated, while not impeding progress towards achieving other SDGs?

Resolutions:

United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/226 (A/RES/72/226), "Implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conferences on Human Settlements and on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)", December 20, 2017.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/222 (A/RES/72/222), "Education for sustainable development in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", December 20, 2017.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/142 (A/RES/72/142), "Promoting social integration through inclusion", December 19, 2017.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/299 (A/RES/70/299), "Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Global Level", July 29, 2016.

Most countries exceed safe levels of fine particulate matter (PM$_{2.5}$) pollution. Industry, transport, and household uses of solid fuels are among the sources.

Ambient air pollution, PM$_{2.5}$, annual mean exposure, 2016 (micrograms per cubic meter, µg/m^3)

SDG 11.6

- 0–10
- 10–25
- 25–35
- 35 and over
- No data

PM$_{2.5}$ particles are less than 2.5 microns in diameter and can penetrate deep into the respiratory tract.

WHO recommends that annual mean exposure to PM$_{2.5}$ pollution not exceed 10 micrograms per cubic meter.

PM$_{2.5}$ also comes from natural sources, for example windblown sand and dust in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mean exposure is based on population-weighted satellite measurements, calibrated to ground stations.

Source: van Donkelaar and others 2016. World Development Indicators (EN.ATM.PM25.MC.M3).

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Local and Regional Governments' FORUM

16 July 2018 - New York

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