LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS´ REPORT
TO THE 2024 HLPF
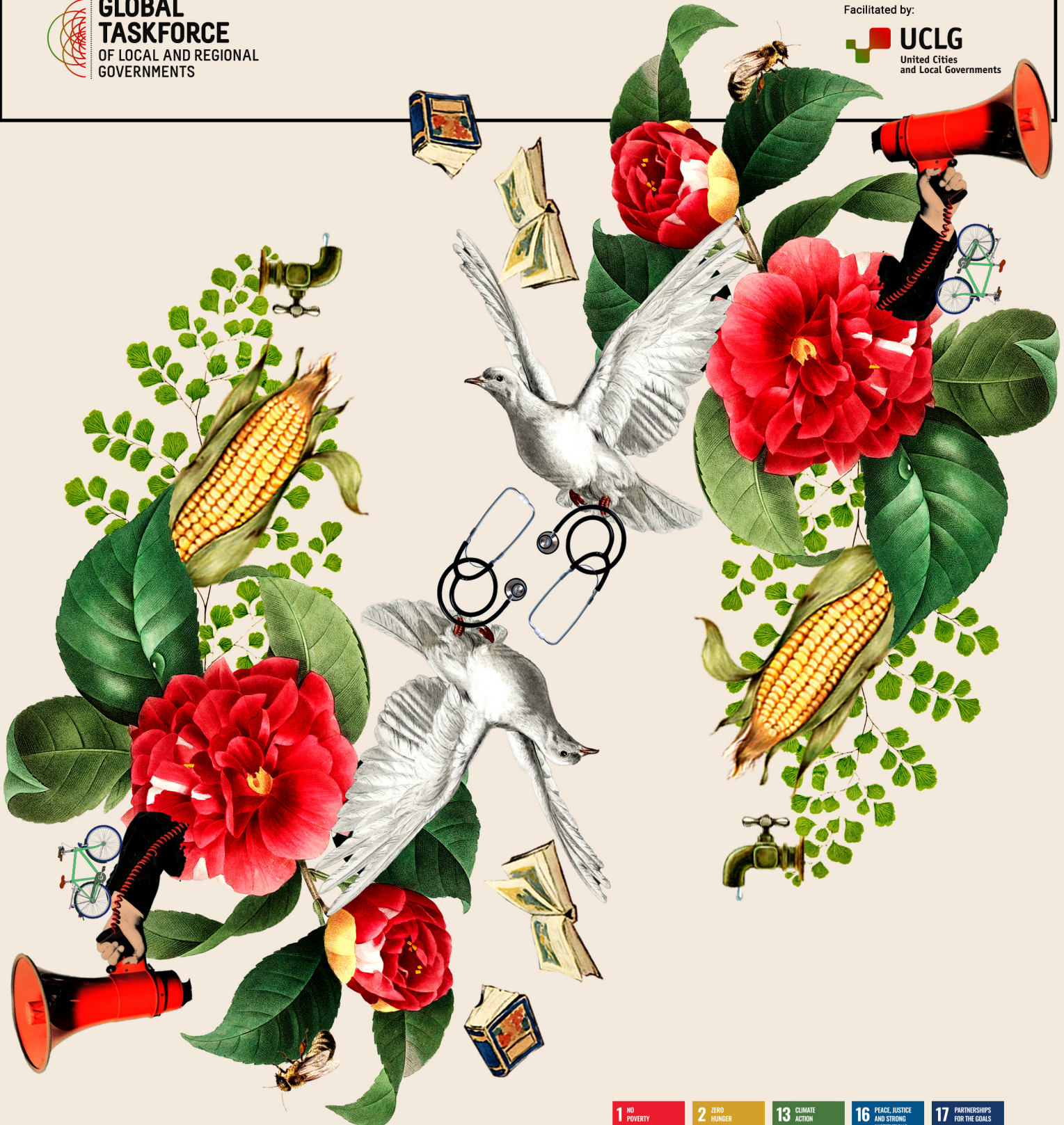
8th REPORT

TOWARDS THE LOCALIZATION OF THE SDGs

Local and regional governments driving equality, climate action and a new agenda for peace

GLOBAL TASKFORCE
OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL
GOVERNMENTS

Facilitated by:

UCLG
United Cities
and Local Governments

#HLPF2024
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A. ABBREVIATIONS

A

AACT: Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

ABM: Associação Brasileira de Municípios (Brazilian Association of Municipalities)

ACoR: Asociația Comunelor din România (Association of Communes of Romania)

AFCCRE: Association Française du Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe (French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

AFLRA: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

AICCRE: Associazione Italiana per il Consiglio dei Comuni e delle Regioni d'Europa (Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions)

AIMF: Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (International Association of Francophone Mayors)

AMB: Asociación de Municipalidades de Bolivia (Association of Municipalities of Bolivia)

AMHON: Asociación de Municipios de Honduras (Honduras Municipalities Association)

AMM: Association des Maires de la Mauritanie (Association of Mayors of Mauritania)

AMR: Association mauritanienne des régions (Mauritanian Regions Association)

AMR: Asociația Municipiilor din România (Romanian Municipalities Association)

ANAI: Asociación Nacional de Alcaldes e Intendentes (National Association of Mayors of Costa Rica)

ANMP: Associação Nacional de Municípios Portugueses (National Association of Portuguese Municipalities)

APLA: Association of Palestinian Local Authorities

ASPAC: Asia-Pacific

C

C40: C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

CDP: Carbon Disclosure Project

CEMR: Council of European Municipalities and Regions

CHAMP: Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships

CMA: Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

CO2: carbon dioxide

COFOG: Classification of the Functions of Government

CoG: Council of Governors of Kenya

CONGOPE: Consorcio de Gobiernos Autónomos Provinciales del Ecuador (Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador)

COP: United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change

COVID-19: coronavirus disease, originated by SARS-CoV-2 virus

CSO: civil society organization

CUF: Cités Unies France (United Cities France)

D

DLT: Deutscher Landkreistag (Association of German Cities)

DRR: disaster risk reduction

DST: Deutscher Städtetag (German County Association)

DStGB: Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund (German Association of Towns and Municipalities)

E

ESCAP: United Nations Economic and Social Com-

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mission for Asia and the Pacific

EU: European Union

F

FAMSI: Fondo Andaluz de Municipios para la Soli-daridad Internacional (Andalusian Fund of Munici-palities for International Solidarity)

FCM: Federación Colombiana de Municipios (Feder-ation of Colombian Municipalities)

FEMP: Federación Española de Municipios y Pro-vincias (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces)

FLACMA: Federación Latinoamericana de Ciu-dades, Municipios y Asociaciones de Gobiernos Locales (Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Latin America)

FNP: Frente Nacional de Prefeitas e Prefeitos (Na-tional Front of Mayors of Brazil)

FSLGA: Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities

G

GBV: gender-based violence

GDP: gross domestic product

GHG: greenhouse gas

GIZ: Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenar-beit (German Agency for International Cooperation)

GSDR: Global Sustainable Development Report

GTF: Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Gov-ernments

H

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum

I

ICLA: Infrastructure, Cities and Local Action

ICLEI: ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ID: identification document

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPO: Interprovinciaal Overleg (Association of Prov-inces of the Netherlands)

K

KS: Kommunesektorens organisasjon (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities)

L

LALRG: Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments

LATAM: Latin America and the Caribbean

LCA: Maltese Local Councils' Association

LGA: local government association

LRG: local and regional government

LGMA: Local Governments and Municipal Authori-ties Constituency

M

MCR: Making Cities Resilient

MEWA: Middle East and West Asia

MMU: Marmara Municipalities Union

MuAN: Municipal Association of Nepal

N

NALAG: National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia

NALAS: Network of Associations of Local Authori-ties, South-East Europe

NAP: National Adaptation Plan

NARMIN: National Association of Rural Municipali-ties in Nepal

NAZCA: Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action

NDC: Nationally Determined Contribution

New York University – CIC: The Center on Interna-tional Cooperation at New York University

NGO: non-governmental organization

NORAM: North America and the English and French speaking Caribbean region

O

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

A.

OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

P

PLIC: Platform on SDGs Localisation and Intermediary Cities

PPP: purchasing power parity

R

REFELA: Réseau des Femmes Elues Locales d'Afrique (Network of local elected Women of Africa)

REFELA-CAM: Réseau des femmes élues locales du Cameroun (Network of local elected Women of Cameroon)

S

SALGA: South African Local Government Association

SCTM: Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SMOCR: Svaz měst a obcí České republiky (Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic)

SNG-WOFI: World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Spending

SURGe: Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation

SYVICOL: Syndicat des Villes & Communes Luxembourgeoises (Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities)

U

UAAU: Urban Authorities Association of Ugand

UCCI: Unión de Ciudades Capitales Iberoamericanas (Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities)

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UFS Coalition: Coalition on Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Food Systems

UK: United Kingdom

ULGA: Uganda Local Government Association

UN: United Nations

UNHA: UN-Habitat Assembly

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNEA: UN Environment Assembly

UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNESCWA: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNGL: Unión Nacional de Gobiernos Locales (National Union of Local Governments of Costa Rica)

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

US/USA: United States of America

USD: US dollar (currency)

UVCW: Union des Villes et Communes de Wallonie (Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia)

UVICOCI: Union des Villes et Communes de Côte d'Ivoire (Union of Cities and Municipalities of Côte d'Ivoire)

V

VLR: Voluntary Local Review

VNG Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Association of Dutch Municipalities)

VNR: Voluntary National Review

VSR: Voluntary Subnational Review

VVP: Vereniging van de Vlaamse Provincies (Association of Flemish Provinces)

VVSG: Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities)

Z

ZMP: Związek Miast Polskich (Association of Polish Cities)

J.   JOINT STATEMENT TO THE 2024 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZED CONSTITUENCY OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

We, local and regional governments from across the globe, representing the populations of metropolises, peripheral cities, intermediary cities, regions, rural areas, and small municipalities, gather as an organized constituency convened by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments and facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), at the occasion of the twelfth session of the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2024 reiterate our support to co-create a sustainable territorial future through inclusive and effective multilateralism to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and deliver for future generations.

Local and regional governments (LRGs) define local policies and ensure universal and equitable access to public services that directly impact populations' capabilities to prosper and live fulfilling lives, and our cities and territories' sustainability. Being closest to communities, LRGs innovate public-community partnerships to redistribute prosperity opportunities, build trust, foster culture, educate and engage citizens on global sustainable development issues, and leverage proximity and local democracy to ensure the human rights of all, achieve equality, and advance a just ecological transition.

To achieve the 2030 Agenda and localize its implementation, addressing inequalities and their root causes is urgent. This requires a new social contract that works for all to leaving no one and no place behind. Local public services are essential in this regard, as key levers for the goals. With only six years remaining to achieve the goals set for 2030, it is crucial to acknowledge LRGs as indispensable partners and drivers of SDG localization at the global decision-making tables, promoting a new form of multilateralism. This implies recognizing and supporting LRGs through enhanced participation in policy-making, financial assistance and capacity development.

In light of the 2024 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), focusing on Goal 1, End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2, End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Goal 13, take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 16, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and Goal 17, strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, the constituency emphasizes the need for concerted efforts based on the principles of inclusion, solidarity and subsidiarity.

To fulfil these goals, the constituency is embarking on partnerships around the need to create meaningful impact at scale. Impact to advance equality and wellbeing for all, promote climate action, and build peaceful societies from our cities to the global level. At the 2024 HLPF, local and regional governments power high-impact partnerships to localize the SDGs in review. By building alliances with other spheres of government, civil society, academia, and the private sector, our self-organized constituency is strengthening political processes and developing concrete action that rescue the SDGs and meet the needs of present and future generations.

Reaffirming our commitment to achieving the universal development agendas, understanding that they need to be realized in unison through enhanced cooperation on critical challenges and gaps in global governance, we look forward to the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit as part of a same process towards a reinvigorated multilateral system in which all the global development agendas are acknowledged and implemented as one, involving all spheres of governance.

Caring for People: Addressing inequalities to end poverty and hunger, and localize SDGs 1 and 2

Advancing a new social contract centering human rights, equality and care

Although inequalities and poverty have been increasingly acknowledged as a global challenge shaped by structural conditions at multiple scales, coordinated actions at the local level are indispensable to tackle their territorial manifestations, as well as many of their underlying causes. Urban and territorial

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inequalities are widening, depriving vast sectors of the population of their basic rights and a decent standard of living, while creating collective risks and also social, economic and environmental obstacles to development. Addressing inequalities therefore requires collaboration at multiple scales, and the actions of local and regional governments are a key place to start.

Local and regional governments address inequalities in their territories by revitalizing rights-based public service provision with care as the basis of a new social contract. They ensure universal access to local public services; they foster local economies of care and equality by orienting local economic development towards equitable prosperity; they strengthen local resilience and climate justice to reduce the exposure of marginalized communities to climate-related extreme events and other socioeconomic shocks. Further, Human Rights Cities draw up strategies and implement initiatives that address poverty and inequalities by leveraging the power of cooperation, solidarity and social justice to encourage meaningful citizen participation. Caring cities and regions advance a feminist agenda that tackles gender-based inequalities and violence against women, disadvantaged groups, guarantees equal rights for all, enhances the youth and future generations, empowers local communities, and puts the wellbeing of people and planet as the highest priority. Caring cities and regions are those that deliver local public services as essential care services.

A next generation of public service provision is needed for the wellbeing of current and future generations, based around reinforced social protection systems, that protects care givers and where care services no longer fall on women, racialized persons and/or migrant persons, where accessibility is at the heart of rights-based policy-making and planning. A generation of public service provision that sees housing as a basic common good, beyond it being a commodity. Where access to the internet and technology for all is considered a baseline. Where mental health care and social counselling for people of all ages is available, and where the upskilling of people is prioritized to empower communities and foster human creativity.

We will protect and promote culture as an integral component of sustainable development, and we reaffirm the role of culture as an enabler of sustainable development and in enhancing efforts to accelerate the 2030 Agenda by providing people and communities with a strong sense of identity and social cohesion, and by contributing to more effective, inclusive, equitable and sustainable development policies and measures.

These local actions have been combined with efforts to coordinate multilevel governance, joint action and international solidarity to achieve the global agendas, understanding the importance of coordinated action to respond to the structural causes of inequalities and poverty.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Recognizing that the relationship between economic growth and equitable prosperity is not straightforward. Instead, it is conditioned by the extent to which economic growth fuels or counters poverty and inequalities.

● Highlighting the essential role and impact of the human rights-based, equality-driven, gender-responsive and care-centered approaches taken by local and regional governments to address poverty and inequalities and achieve SDG 1.

● Integrating local and regional governments in a structural and systematic way in all global decision- and policy-making processes related to poverty reduction and financing for development.

● Reinforcing the capacities of local governments to address inequalities, including by enhancing their technical skills, fostering local governance capacities, and strengthening multilevel frameworks for poverty reduction.

● We call for a global, multilevel and inclusive policy-making to advance a paradigm shift on development, economic growth, and prosperity: placing care at the center. We urge the UN system and Member States to recognize the role of local and regional governments as key actors to end poverty in all its forms and achieve inclusive, just and sustainable societies.

Ending hunger and malnutrition and ensuring food security and sovereignty

Food insecurity is a systemic issue exacerbated by territorial and socio-economic disparities, resource scarcity, and needs to be addressed through a whole of society and whole of government approach. Malnutrition in women impacts pregnancy outcomes and children's health thereby perpetuating food insecurity and vulnerability across generations. Too commonly does policy formulated to address food insecurity among the most vulnerable people fails to address the underlying issues of poverty and inequality, and food waste. Moreover, inadequate food and nutrition linked with human development and education, affect both growth and attention span leading to important negative effects on learning

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and school performance. Access to wholesome and nourishing food is a basic human right, essential for our health and prosperity. It is also closely linked to the concept of food sovereignty which underlines the importance that food has at the local level emphasizing its relationship with culture, heritage, agriculture and local economies.

LRGs have a crucial role in guaranteeing sustainable and inclusive access to nutrition, especially in today's complex world, whereby we face various global challenges such as widening inequalities, rising conflicts, and the climate emergency that directly impact our food systems. LRGs, through public service provision, public procurement, and their proximity to communities and civil society play an essential role in ending hunger and must be included within policy processes related to hunger and food security. Ending hunger and malnutrition therefore requires LRGs to be fully involved in food policy promoting sustainable food systems and supply chains rooted in proximity, and the strengthening of local public service provision and multilevel governance.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Recognizing the key role that local public service provision plays in protecting people and the planet and its key link to the implementation of SDG 2.

● Highlighting the link between hunger and malnutrition and poverty, and the multidimensional actions needed to address the inequalities structuring their root causes.

● Ensuring that policies that address the climate emergency also address inclusive and sustainable access to food and nutrition.

● We call to ensure that local public service provision is front and center in the road towards ending hunger, linking the actions of local and regional governments with actions led by communities to ensure hunger policy is multi-level and multi-actor.

Redefining health as a local and global common, at the core of local responses to population and development challenges

The climate crisis and global health emergencies have shown the vital role of local public service provision and local health and caring systems, and the importance that they play in protecting people and the planet. Local and regional governments reduce inequalities and poverty by focusing on population and development trends from an equality lens, prioritizing the health and wellbeing of all and equality

in human rights and dignity. This includes ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, and guaranteeing universal access to health care and family planning public services, based on the respect of all sexualities, choices and aspirations and reinforcing women's empowerment. By doing so, local and regional governments redefine health and care-related public services as local and global commons.

Local and regional governments are therefore leading the global localization movement of the universal agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Celebrating the 30-year anniversary of the latter this year, local and regional governments are renewing their commitment to responding to demographic diversity and population and urbanization challenges in their territories to transform them into opportunities for equality and a just ecological transition across the urban-rural continuum.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Recognizing that LRGs have critical mandates, responsibilities, and impact in designing and implementing sustainable and equitable responses to current and future demographic and urbanization trends, and leaving no one, and no place, behind.

● Strengthening multilevel governance aiming at ensuring health and human rights protection to everyone and especially to the most marginalized and already structurally disadvantaged groups of the population, including women and girls, youth and older persons, poor communities, and migrants and displaced persons.

● Moving towards a new paradigm on demography and ecology for the future: from the divide between society and nature, to sustainability with and for all living beings in our ecosystems.

Promoting accessibility as a human right to shape a diverse and equitable future for all

Accessibility is an internationally recognized human right and a transversal pillar for the inclusion and fundamental freedoms of all; particularly of older persons, persons with disabilities and disadvantaged groups. Mainstreaming accessibility and universal design as fundamental principles in public policies and programs benefits society as a whole by creating diverse, safe, innovative and user-friendly environments for everyone.

LRGs are committed to promoting accessibility as a

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human right and as a precondition to socioeconomic inclusion, by making the shift towards equitable public service provision shaped by diversity and dignity. This includes improving capacities to implement accessibility in our cities and territories, developing training and awareness-raising, and supporting the meaningful involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities and older persons in the design, implementation and monitoring of urban policies and programs across all sectors.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Promoting, monitoring, and evaluating the implementation of internationally recognized accessibility standards at the local level and in line with the principles of universal design and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ensuring disability-inclusive and age-responsive public policies and programs, in strategic partnership with LRGs,

Member States, civil society, academia and the private sector.

Protecting human mobility with human rights and peace as our horizon

Amidst a historic high of 114 million forcibly displaced individuals (one of every 73 people), cities emerge as sanctuaries, with 70% of the displaced seeking refuge within their bustling confines. Daunting challenges prevail - from the exclusion of migration from national orders and policy discourses and the new EU Pact on migration and asylum questionably forsaking asylum seekers', migrant and displaced persons' human rights and privacy. But amidst these trials, LRGs stand firm, committed to foster inclusive societies where migrants and refugees can cultivate agency and thrive. Recognized as indispensable partners in advancing the global compacts on migrants and refugees, they save lives, secure universal access to services, champion people-centered and inclusive approaches and foster balanced narratives on human mobility.

At the heart of this transformation lies the local and regional governments' prioritization of human rights of all individuals, regardless of administrative status and social constructs, woven intricately into the fabric of sustainable development. It is a clarion call for comprehensive and solidarity whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approaches. It is only by investing in local action and nurturing safe and regular pathways for all people on the move that we sow the seeds of a future founded on human rights, inclusivity, and dignity.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Increasing the recognition and augmenting the mandates of LRGs as critical territorial actors on global migration governance, including the localization of the global compacts on migrants and refugees.

● Involving LRGs in the discussions and collective responses to climate-induced human mobility and the provision of basic services to all people.

● Protecting and decriminalizing local and regional leaders that support a rights-based approach to human mobility, and the inclusion of migrants.

● Fostering safe, dignified, and regular pathways for all human mobility, through solidar-

ity whole-of-government and society efforts championing inclusive human rights-based approaches.

Caring for the Planet: bolstering multilevel governance to accelerate mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and localize SDG 13

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Powering local climate action with global impact: safeguarding a just and sustainable world for future generations

Although multilevel action has been acknowledged in the Glasgow Final Outcome Document, LRGs and their networks still do not have a seat at the Global Climate Table and multilevel action needs to be taken to the next level. There is a clear and urgent need to strengthen the collaboration among non-party stakeholders and to use robust climate diplomacy as a means to reach the SDGs, as well as to secure a stronger role for LRGs at the Global Climate Table. Furthermore, there must be multilevel approaches to loss and damages' cascading effects.

From the SDG Summit to the Summit for the Future, the acceleration of SDG 13 through localization needs to be further prioritized. LRGs must be recognized as part of the global response to climate change, with the urgent need to level up ambition and take transformative action to realize the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. LRGs need to be included in the design, decision-making, and implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as outlined by the Coalition for High Ambition Partnerships (CHAMP).

Furthermore, LRGs foster solidarity with future generations by shaping a new social contract anchored in human rights and trust, improving the management of critical global commons, and supporting the provision of public goods and services that deliver equitably and sustainably for all. They also promote the engagement of local communities in local climate action by raising awareness and educating their residents about global interconnections and sustainable lifestyles.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Strengthening climate emergency action through COP28 outcomes and support the SDG Rescue Plan.

● For Member States to endorse the CHAMP Initiative, to foster collaboration among spheres of government, ensuring active and substantive involvement of LRGs in shaping, executing,

overseeing, and assessing Nationally Determined Contributions, as well as in National Adaptation Plans, and climate action strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

● Including LRGs in the diagnostics and governance for loss and damage response.

● Advocating for the localization of finance for climate action and the systemic integration of the local and regional government constituency in multilevel governance strategies and global climate conversations and agreements.

● Integrating LRGs in long-term strategies, foresight and futures thinking to adequately assess and improve the impacts of current political decisions for future generations, and giving equal importance to adaptation and mitigation actions at the local level.

● Ensuring climate action is put at the heart of the SDG recovery plan, and generate multilevel measures to accelerate local action, through the involvement of local and regional governments in formulating the 2025 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to strengthen implementation coordination mechanisms.

Ensuring access to water and sanitation as a global human right

Ensuring access to clean water and sanitation is usually the responsibility of LRGs, and depends on effective local and multilevel governance, natural resource management and urban planning. With the multiple crises faced at local and regional levels, including climate change, drought, water scarcity, and lack of access to basic services, LRGs put the safeguard of water as a key priority for their population and territory. LRGs play a critical role in securing universal access to safe water supply and sanitation and must be included in water governance to ensure it is managed as a common good, protecting aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity and fostering care systems.

If water is to be seen as a right and as a local and global common, it is essential to overcome its commodification, ensuring that it is available to all. This implies addressing its provision, including the need to remunicipalize, deprivatize or enhance public management participatory governance, bringing commoning practices to the forefront. LRGs are best positioned to provide transparent, efficient and inclusive management of water and sanitation services and to create enabling environments for exchange and learning to empower their communities. Partic-

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ipatory policy-making is crucial in order to implement integrated management plans for equitable and sustainable use of water resources and to ensure that public policies promote water and sanitation as a human right.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

- Promoting an effective right to water and sanitation in the texts and regulations governing their areas of responsibility.

- Promoting all forms of inter-municipal, national and international cooperation, including multilevel governance and decentralized cooperation, to support emerging city hydro-diplomacy in line with the expectations of local communities.

- Giving priority to securing financial resources at local level in close coordination with international, national and basin levels.

- Encouraging community involvement and citizen participation, enabling local populations to contribute to decision-making and effective implementation of projects.

Caring for Government: Renewing multilateralism, protecting democracy, and fostering peace, to localize SDGs 16 and 17

Reshaping the international financial architecture

Achieving the SDGs requires revisiting the financial architecture, enabling LRGs to leverage various sources of finance, unlocking flexible and tailored revenue streams with the support of national governments, multilateral and subnational development banks, in order to increase resiliency to emergencies that are bound to become more frequent. Financial systems must be a better fit to local and regional government needs, as they are crucial public actors on which the achievement of SDGs largely depends and because they require the means to carry out their part of the responsibilities. While political and administrative decentralization being proposed in many countries across the world as making sense from a context-specific and tailored governance perspective, increased financial autonomy should also match the competences devolved to local governments.

Financing for development requires more than only technical and financial reforms. The large scale changes that the international financing system requires to respond to global challenges, for the people and for the planet implies a deep revision of governance models and their inherent values through

more inclusive and increased citizen participation in economy and financial decisions, diverse and innovative financing models and new financial mechanisms with multi-stakeholder partnerships that allow for boosted investments for social infrastructure, fomenting the universal and feminist perspectives of care in economic decisions and creating the environment for the local and regional government levels to meaningfully take part in global economic governance.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

- Aligning national strategies and financing frameworks with LRG competences and priorities and based on their crucial relevance to the achievement of SDGs.

- Committing to capacitating local elected officials through technical assistance and training to create a pool of public finance experts that can develop local finance resilience in the long run.

- Lifting financial and administrative barriers for LRGs to tap into a diversified pool of revenue sources including innovative financing sources such as land value capture and external sources of finance.

- Developing new financial mechanisms that give access to international financial instruments for LRGs.

- Promoting initiatives for transparent and accountable public finances to rebuild trust from citizens to governments, including through regional and world observatories on local government finances.

- Ensuring meaningful participation of local and regional governments in international fora around Financing for Development, and in particular the Financing for Development Conference in Spain 2025.

Fostering peace and local democracy

LRGs are one of the main foundations of any democratic society, as they have democratic mandates, represent the level of government closest to the population and are often able to provide a voice for those who are voiceless. LRGs play an essential role in addressing the systemic roots of violence and their manifestations, promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in our territories. They understand peace as a global public good that needs to be cared

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for among all spheres of government, developing a renewed social contract with civil society, young people and marginalized groups as part of peace-building strategies. Local democracy will need to be a pillar, promoting transparency, accountability, open governance and fighting against corruption.

Cities are the ideal space to tackle conflicts, polarization and the proliferation of fake news to restore trust and protect local and regional elected leaders form violence, in particular women elected officials. By investing in media literacy programs, fact-checking initiatives, open dialogues on social and digital platforms as well as citizen educational activities which include a global perspective. in order to debunk misinformation and promoting a more informed citizenry. LRGs can invest in a strong relationship with free and quality journalism, as well as review the way information is disseminated through social media and the impact of new technologies on the perception of information, as is the case with artificial intelligence.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Eradicating the violence of armed conflicts, which, in addition to direct physical and mental damage, worsens inequalities in many areas, including energy, food security and education.

● Promoting and protecting peace-building initiatives that are born from LRGs, channeling action to address and, when possible, anticipate conflicts that may arise in our streets and territories, to prevent them from turning into violence and thus enhance the belonging, creativity, and cultural thriving.

● Committing to involving women and girls in decision-making, as part of a renewed agenda for peace.

● Acknowledging LRGs initiatives related to SDG 4.7 as key drivers to achieve peace.

● Protecting local and regional elected representatives who face violence in the context of their political mandate.

Reinforcing local and regional monitoring and reporting initiatives

Monitoring and reporting initiatives led by LRGs foster transformative change in the governance of the SDGs, improving multilevel governance relations and local public policy-making and service provision. Enhanced recognition is required at the HLPF and beyond to leverage these processes to achieve the SDGs.

Since their inception around 2018, Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) have significantly reshaped reporting practices for the SDGs at all levels, including Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Recognized by the United Nations as "an essential tool to show progress and foster exchange on local implementation" of the SDGs, these voluntary initiatives from the bottom up have bolstered the importance of SDG localization in regional and international contexts.

Furthermore, VSRs and VLRs have supported LRGs and their associations in adopting comprehensive approaches to sustainable development through increased collaboration with their national governments and local stakeholders. They have contributed to dismantling institutional and policy barriers, improved data and monitoring mechanisms, and increased transparency and accountability, thus promoting evidence-based and inclusive policy-making.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● Promoting the production of VLRs and VSRs and facilitating their incorporation into local, national, and global policy frameworks.

● Advocating for inclusive whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to data production, collection and analysis as well as to local monitoring and reporting endeavors.

● We further call for enhanced involvement of local and regional governments and their associations in national reporting processes from the earliest stage of the process, on a regular and systematic way, in particular through VNRs, the promotion of the development of VLRs and VSRs and the full recognition of local and subnational monitoring and reporting processes in official HLPF deliberations

Renewing Multilateralism - Towards the UN Summit of the Future and the World Summit for Social Development

LRGs play pivotal roles in revitalizing and enhancing multilateralism. Redefining multilateralism and global financial structures starts with a grassroots approach, placing local and regional governments and communities at the forefront. These governments, as the closest sphere of government to people, amplify the voices of local communities in global dialogues, foster partnerships based on cooperation and solidarity, and advocate for institutional transformations to ensure equitable power distribution in global governance platforms.

Building capacity within the public sector and foster-

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ing multilevel governance are crucial for reinstating transparency, integrity, and accountability across all levels of governance. Addressing systemic sustainable development challenges necessitates collaborative governance at the territorial scale, requiring enhanced capacities among all stakeholders, institutional platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement. By prioritizing inclusivity and empowerment in decision-making processes, a more representative, inclusive, and efficient multilevel governance framework can be established, anchored in community-level institutional development and skill enhancement.

Ahead of the UN Summit of the Future, and in the framework of the Local and Regional Governments Advisory Group, our constituency has succeeded in getting the draft UN Pact for the Future to include an action that refers to the call we have been promoting.

The World Summit for Social Development, called by the UN Secretary General for 2025, aims to be a unique opportunity to hold a different form of global deliberation and to live up to the values, including trust and listening, that underpin the social contract.

For the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments together with its partnership ecosystem, the Summit of the Future and the World Social Summit will be crucial moments to galvanize a multistakeholder, multilevel coalition that delivers in the challenge of bringing about a global social agenda that puts reducing inequalities at the center of a renewed social contract.

Ahead of both milestones, we call for securing adequate representation in decision-making bodies for the local and regional government constituency, fortifying local finances and fiscal decentralization, and recognizing that LRGs are key actors with policy-making capabilities and have a government character.

The constituency gathered within the Global Taskforce calls for:

● In light of the UN Summit of the Future and its Pact for the Future, we call for the inclusion of the following call to action under its Chapter 5 on "Transforming global governance": "Launch intergovernmental consultations during the 79th session of the UN General Assembly to strengthen the engagement of local and regional authorities as a self-organized constituency in UN intergovernmental bodies and request the Secretary-General to provide recommendations on this matter by the end of 2024 for Member States consideration."

● We further urge and stand ready to promote the localization of the dispositions stemming from the New Agenda for Peace into the Pact for the Future, and of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

● For this, we call on promoting a structural partnership with the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Youth Affairs with the self-organized constituency of local and regional governments, ahead of the UN World Social Summit.

● Ahead of the UN World Social Summit, our organised constituency calls for a global social agenda that is driven by local public service provision to address some of the most pressing issues affecting our communities, our cities and our regions – from universal health coverage to adequate housing, from education for all to decent work and digital rights - and give momentum towards achieving the SDGs through a local SDG rescue plan.
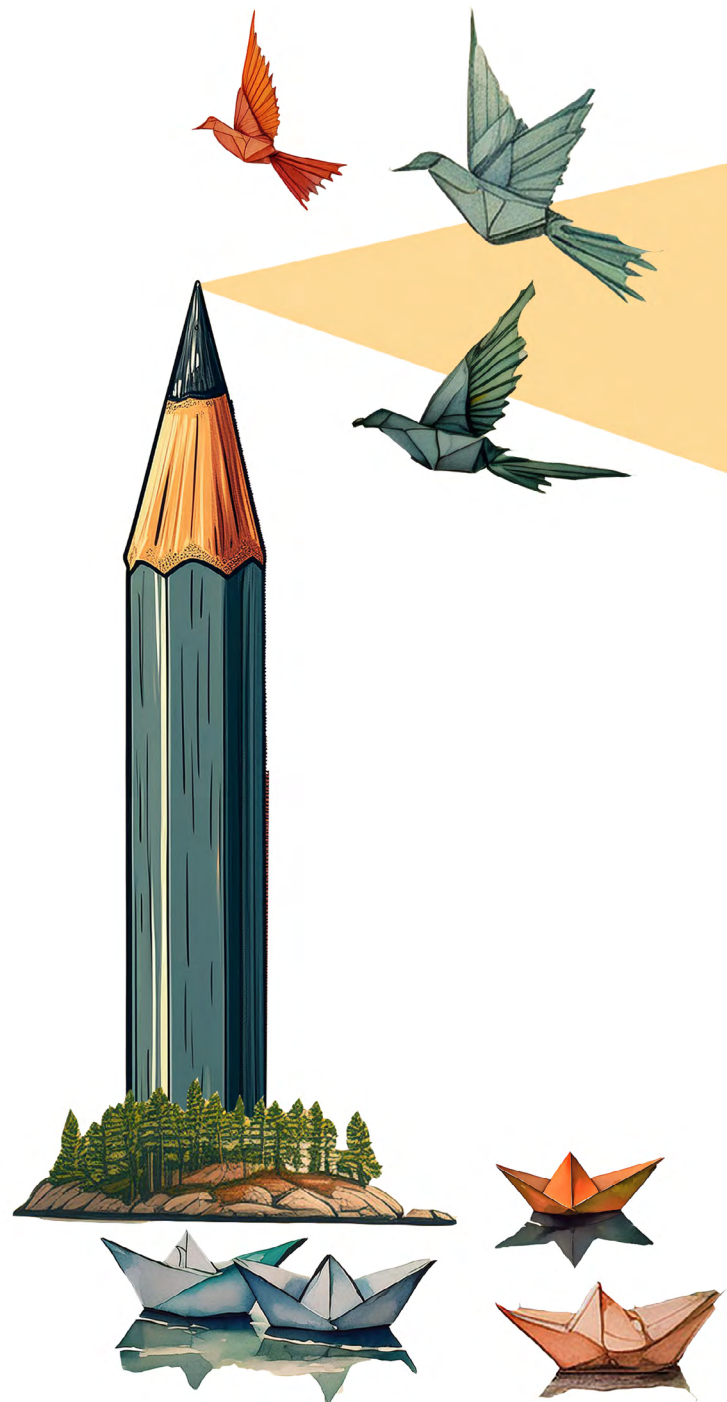
H. HIGHLIGHTS

SDG localization increasingly present in UN-led processes and reporting

2015:
The 2030 Agenda is adopted

2017:
First GTF's *Towards the localization of the SDGs* report
130 LED-led inspiring practices compiled

2018:
21 VLRs available

2019:
The first GSDR acknowledges urban and peri-urban development
as one of the six most promising entry points for achieving the desired transformations at the necessary scale and speed

2020:
88 VLRs and 6 VSRs available

2023:
The independent group of scientists in charge of the 2023 GSDR extend consultations with the organized constituency of LRGs
as part of the report drafting process

Recognition of LRG leadership, VLRs and VSRs

The SDG Summit Political Declaration recognizes the New Urban Agenda as a critical accelerator of the 2030 Agenda through localization
SDG localization and multi-level coordination are acknowledged as necessary to achieve the SDGs

The High-Impact Initiative on Localization is one of 12 High-Impact Initiatives, led by UN-system entities, that showcase select programmatic offerings and initiatives to support Member States' efforts towards just development transitions and SDG achievement

2024:
Eighth GTF's Towards the localization of the SDGs report
Over 4,000 LRG-led inspiring practices compiled

287 VLRs and 44 VSRs available

2022:
232 VLRs and 26 VSRs available

2030:
Deadline to achieve the SDGs

% of countries with LRGs' high and medium participation in VNR processes and in the national SDG coordination mechanisms

Legend: — VNR processes   — national SDG coordination mechanisms
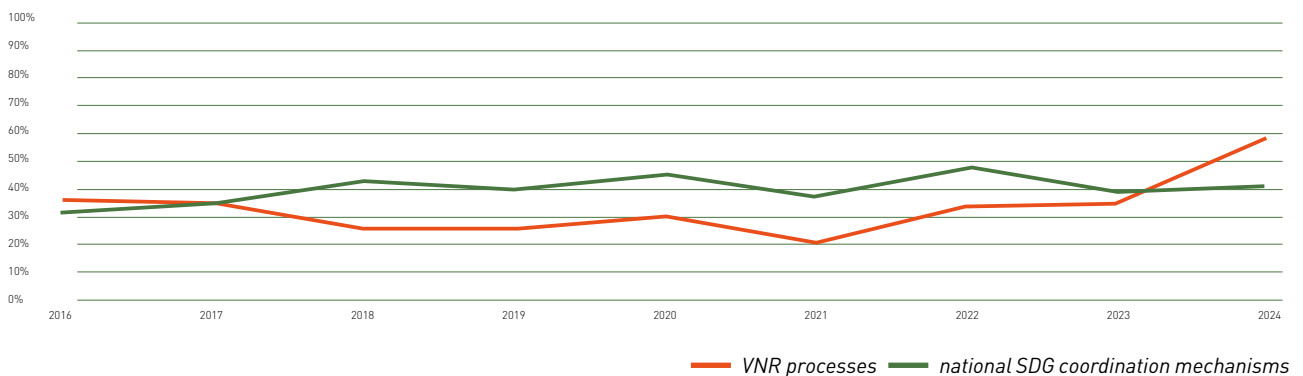
H. Cities', regions' and associations' best practices mentioned in the three papers

● PAPER 1   ● PAPER 2   ● PAPER 3
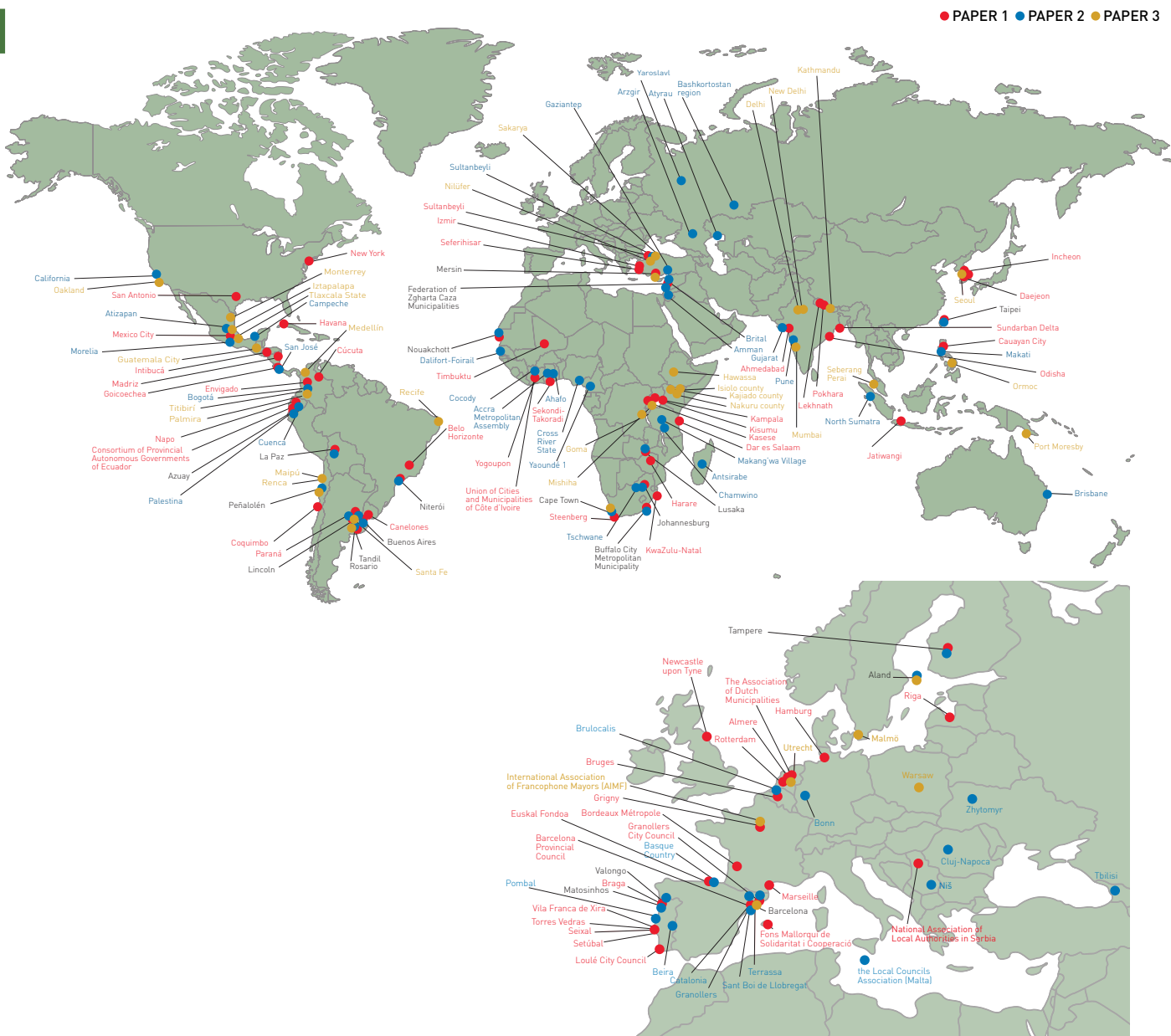
Ways forward for SDG localization

01 Eradicating poverty from the bottom-up through LRG-led sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions

02 Enhancing decentralization to empower LRGs and increase their participation in national strategies and coordination mechanisms for implementing the SDGs

03 Organizing LRGs' participation in national reporting processes and aiding LRGs in their reporting endeavors, especially VLRs and VSRs

04 Accelerating transformation through human rights-based and caring approaches

05 Fostering a renewed and networked multilateral system to ensure the representation of our communities and localizing the Pact for the Future

1.   INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 2024, numerous regions worldwide continue to grapple with formidable obstacles on their path towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations (UN) SDG Progress Chart 2023 revealed that among the measurable targets, only 15% are projected to be met by 2030. Nearly half (48%) of the assessable targets demonstrate significant deviations from the intended path. Finally, more than a third (37%) of these targets have shown no progress or have regressed below the 2015 baseline.

This year, the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is examining five SDGs: SDG 1 on eradicating poverty; SDG 2 on eliminating hunger; SDG 13 on climate action; SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

Globally, despite world leaders' vow to eliminate extreme poverty and the substantial strides made at the start of the new millennium, there has been a troubling reversal in progress towards reaching SDGs 1 and 2. From 2020 to 2023, economic shocks pushed an additional 165 million people in low- and lower-middle-income nations beneath the 3.65 USD per day poverty threshold. In 2020 alone, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the global crisis, with 93 million more individuals falling into extreme poverty across the globe. If current patterns continue, a concerning 575 million people, about 7% of the world's population, are expected to still be living in extreme poverty by 2030. Food security also remains a critical issue in several world regions, hampering populations' capacities to prosper sustainably.

In terms of reaching SDG 13, all global regions show concerning steps backwards. Advancements have been hindered, largely because of the convergence of several crises: the COVID-19 outbreak; escalating inflation and financial difficulties; global, ecological and economic troubles; and local and national upheavals, conflicts and calamities. Against this backdrop, attaining peaceful and just societies (SDG 16) remains a critical goal, and partnering to overcome this daunting scenario (SDG 17) stands out as a crucial endeavour for the upcoming years. All world regions are struggling to achieve the SDGs, although some SDGs remain more challenging than others, depending on the region.

This report shows how these SDGs are unquestionably connected and calls for the essential acknowledgement of the significant role of local and regional governments (LRGs) in addressing complex issues such as poverty, climate inaction and violence. Indeed, in his *2023 Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: towards a rescue plan for people and planet* report, the UN Secretary-General reminds us that localization, anchored in multilevel governance and multistakeholder collaboration, is essential for greater inclusion and sustainability. LRGs play a crucial role as 65% of SDG targets are tied to their work and mandates. They are vital in addressing social contract erosion and global crises.

This eighth edition of the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments's (GTF's) annual report, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, responds to the HLPF's theme for this year: "**Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions**." This report showcases how LRGs' localization efforts are contributing to achieving the SDGs under review by the HLPF this year: SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 13 (Climate Action), 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Critically, the report also addresses a key call from the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report. UN Secretary-General António Guterres' appointed scientists emphasized localization as a crucial entry point for SDG implementation. The Towards the localization of the SDGs report details specific ways localization can be pursued and is already being pursued, both as a means and an end to achieving a more just and sustainable future. Within this context, these expert scientists were consulted to identify synergies between global and localized research and policy proposals for sustainable development. Notably, the online session held on 20 March 2024 with three representatives from the GSDR scientific team marked significant progress in the *Towards the localization of the SDGs* yearly reports' production process. It was an initial contribution to reshaping multistakeholder dialogues for impactful research and policy outcomes, which will hopefully get stronger towards 2030 and beyond.

1.

BOX 1.1

LOCALIZATION

SDG localization encompasses the definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies by LRGs to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Localization is, therefore, the process of implementing the SDGs in different territories, taking into account their specific contexts from an inclusive perspective. The process for localizing the SDGs includes setting goals and determining targets and means of implementation, as well as using various indicators to track progress towards the realization of the goals.

Source: GTF and UCLG, *Towards the Localization of the SDGs: Sustainable and Resilient Recovery Driven by Cities and Territories* (Barcelona, 2021), https://bit.ly/3IWaTfE.

The report will highlight a wide range of localization efforts that are making essential contributions to achieving the SDGs under review this year. Beyond these concrete actions, **LRGs and local government associations (LGAs) demonstrate their commitment to SDG localization through their increasingly frequent subnational reporting initiatives, as well as growing influential global advocacy efforts by the international municipalist movement**.

Since 2018, 235 LRGs from all world regions have submitted a total of 295 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). Representing a total of 500 million people, these VLRs, together with Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), demonstrate LRGs' clear commitment to bolstering SDG localization from the ground up and providing national governments with the necessary localized data and information.

Between 2020 and 2024, LGAs from 38 countries have produced 44 VSRs, which analyze the state of SDG localization throughout a country. These reviews cover a total population of over 1.7 billion. The year 2024 has seen 7 new VSRs produced by LGAs in Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mauritania, South Africa, Nepal and the Nordic countries. The Nordic VSR marks the first-ever collaborative effort to produce a VSR, which involved LGAs from five countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland.

In contrast, and notwithstanding regional disparities, the pace of **LRGs' involvement in national reporting processes, including Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), and national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation has been too slow to achieve the SDGs.** In 2024, 59% of the countries producing a VNR reported medium to high levels of LRG involvement, and 55% have involved their LRGs in one way or another in their national coordination mechanisms. This, however, also means that half of

the world countries do not have permanent, consolidated structures and processes for LRG involvement in SDG achievement. Six years ahead of the 2030 deadline, broad acknowledgment and urgent action are needed to leverage the role of LRGs in accelerating sustainable development and addressing global challenges at the grassroots level.

A total of 37 countries committed to present their VNR at the 2024 HLPF. These reporting countries represent significant diversity in terms of both regions and models of governance. Most of the countries submitting a VNR are from Africa (15 countries), followed by Latin America (8 countries) and Asia-Pacific (6 countries). Table 1.1 offers a snapshot of the diverse subnational governance structures across the 37 reporting countries.

1.

Table 1.1 Local self-government in the countries reporting to the HLPF in 2024

Country	Type of state	Regional/state level	Intermediate level	Municipal level	Total LRGs
Armenia	Unitary	-	-	308	308
Austria	Federal	9	-	2,093	2,102
Azerbaijan	Unitary	1	-	1,606	1,607
Belize	Unitary	8	31	189	228
Brazil	Federal	27	-	5,570	5,597
Chad	Unitary	23	115	420	558
Colombia	Unitary	32	-	1,103	1,135
Congo (Republic of the)	Unitary	12	-	94	106
Costa Rica	Unitary	-	-	82	82
Ecuador	Unitary	-	24	221	245
Equatorial Guinea	Unitary	-	-	30	30
Eritrea	Unitary	-	-	56	56
Georgia	Unitary	3	-	64	67
Guinea	Unitary	-	-	362	362
Honduras	Unitary	-	-	298	298
Kenya	Unitary	47	-	59	106
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Unitary	18	148	8,507	8,673
Libya	Unitary	-	-	120	120
Mauritania	Unitary	13	-	219	232
Mauritius	Unitary	1	7	135	143
Mexico	Federal	32	-	2,481	2,513
Namibia	Unitary	14		57	71
Nepal	Federal	7	-	753	760
Oman	Unitary	-* *Oman is administratively divided into 11 governorates.	63	-	63
Palau	Unitary	16	-	-	16
Peru	Unitary	25	-	2,069	2,094
Samoa	Unitary	-	-	330	330
Sierra Leone	Unitary	-	-	22	22
Solomon Islands	Unitary	9	-	1	10
South Africa	Quasi-federal	9	-	257	266
South Sudan	Federal	32	-	83	115
Spain	Unitary	17	50	8,133	8,200
Syrian Arab Republic	Unitary	-* *The Syrian Arab Republic is administratively divided into 14 regional governorates.	-* *1,444 local administrative units, which are devolved	754* *Municipalities with elected councils	754
Uganda	Unitary	-	-	177	177
Vanuatu	Unitary	9	-	-	9
Yemen	Unitary	-* *Yemen is administratively divided into 22 governorates.	-* *Yemen is administratively divided into 333 districts.	2,210	2,565
Zimbabwe	Unitary	10	-	92	102

Source: prepared by the authors

As the table suggests, these countries have considerably diverse local contexts. Part of this diversity has to do with the levels of subnational government that exist in the different countries. Among the 37 reporting countries, 31 are unitary and 6 are federal or quasi-federal. Thirteen have a one-tier subnational government, 18 have two-tier subnational governments and only 6 have three-tier subnational governments. Countries' decentralization frameworks determine how these divisions translate into specific differences in LRGs' capacities and actions, and these frameworks are advancing in different directions and at different paces across world regions, as shown by the UCLG/OECD World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment (SNG-WOFI) country and territory profiles.

1.1   REPORT STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS

Following this introduction, Section 2 overviews the degree to which the institutional frameworks of this year's reporting countries facilitate or impede SDG localization. To do so, it analyzes LRGs' participation in each country's processes to produce its VNR. The section also examines LRGs' participation in SDG coordination mechanisms and national localization strategies, if these have been put in place. Section 2 finishes with a broad summary of the most recent SDG localization practices in the different world regions, which is complemented by an even more comprehensive external repository.

Section 3 contains three papers that, together, provide a comprehensive analysis of local actions key to achieving SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17, in connection with all other SDGs, undertaken by LRGs and their associations. Three perspectives – people, planet and government – will be used as entry points for the three papers. These entry points correspond to the SDGs under review and are linked with the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report's concept of "synergistic SDGs" (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 17). Given this report's focus on LRGs, all papers will place particular emphasis on SDG 11.

● **Paper 1 analyzes localization efforts to promote the eradication of poverty and hunger from a "people" approach.** It focuses on SDGs 1 and 2, along with connections to SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 11.

● **Paper 2 studies locally led climate action from a "planet" viewpoint.** It focuses on SDG 13, along with connections to SDGs 6, 7 and 11.

● **Paper 3 assesses ways to achieve peace, strong institutions and just societies and foster partnerships from a "government" perspective.** It focuses on SDGs 16 and 17, along with connections to SDGs 1 and 11.

Lastly, Section 4 offers a conclusion, emphasizing hurdles that need to be addressed and providing specific recommendations to expedite advancements in SDG localization efforts.

1.2   METHODOLOGY

This report primarily used surveys, interviews and secondary analysis as its data collection methods. In particular, the GTF/United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2024 Survey on SDG Localization served as the main source of data (see Box 1.2). It is complemented with relevant sources for each section.

BOX 1.2

RESPONSES TO THE GTF/UCLG 2024 SURVEY ON SDG LOCALIZATION

Since 2017, GTF/UCLG has annually distributed its survey on SDG localization to all member LRGs and their associations throughout the world. The survey compiles information about two main dimensions of SDG localization: (a) enabling environments for local action and (b) concrete actions being implemented by LRGs and LGAs to contribute to achieving the SDGs. In particular, the survey is tailored annually to collect data on actions related to the SDGs under review by the UN HLPF that year.

This year, GTF/UCLG received a total of 210 responses from around the world. These came from 70 different countries, 15 of which are reporting to the HLPF this year. Of the total responses, 55 correspond to LGAs (12 from reporting countries), 141 to LRGs (including from 6 reporting countries not covered by LGA responses) and 14 to other kinds of stakeholders. These stakeholders include regional and global networks of cities, such as the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI), the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS) and the International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF). They also include regional organizations (e.g. European Committee of the Regions) and research institutions, civil society organizations and private companies (from Afghanistan, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Pakistan and Tunisia).

Most LRG and national LGA responses came from Europe (30 countries), followed by Latin America (12 countries), Africa (10 countries), Asia-Pacific (7 countries), Eurasia (6 countries) and the Middle East and West Asia (4 countries).

Figure 1.1 LRGs' and LGAs' responses to the UCLG/GTF 2024 Survey and/or VSRs produced, and VNRs committed for 2024

■ LRGs' and LGAs' responses to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey and/or VSRs produced

☐ VNRs committed for 2024
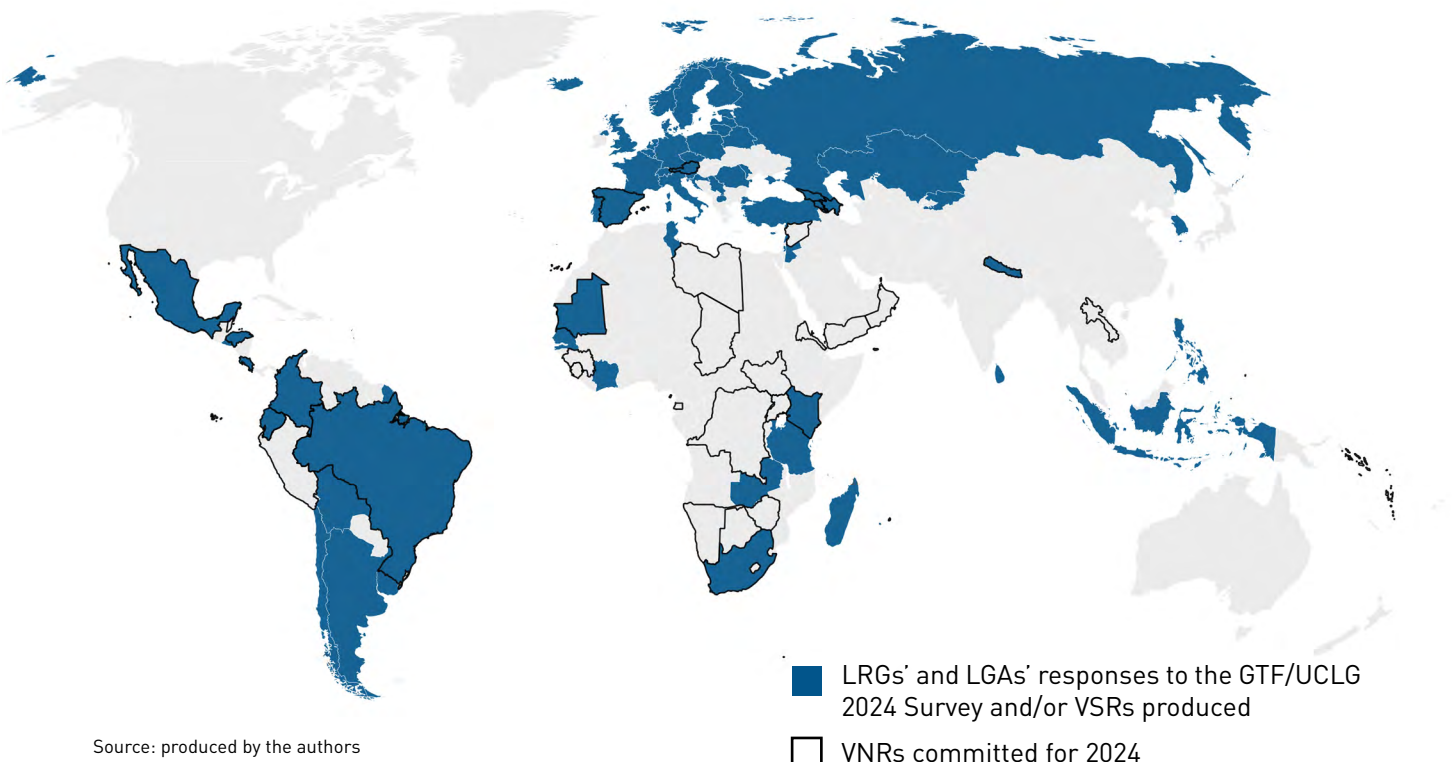
Source: produced by the authors

Section 2 contrasts the information compiled from the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey on SDG localization and specific interviews with the information available in the VNRs published by reporting countries, as well as the VLRs and VSRs published up until the time of writing. The UCLG country profiles on SDG localization serve as an additional reference for the comparative analysis, providing a consolidated account of decentralization frameworks in many countries (see Box 1.3). This analysis examines the key elements that make up LRGs' enabling environment, as perceived across levels of government. It analyzes side-by-side the national vision and the perception of national LGAs and of individual LRGs.

BOX 1.3

COUNTRY PROFILES ON SDG LOCALIZATION

The profiles offer both national and local details on countries that have submitted VNRs between 2016 and 2022. They include a concise overview of each country's strategies, coordination methods and reporting procedures concerning the 2030 Agenda. Additionally, they assess LRGs' participation and actions and identify progress and obstacles in aligning with the SDGs. These profiles share the present report's objective of acknowledging LRGs' significant contribution to SDG implementation.

Finally, the papers in Section 3 are also supported by data collected from the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey. Each paper has been drafted by a different institution, which has enabled different processes to engage LRGs, LGAs and key partners, such as the group of GSDR scientists, in the production of the papers and the data collection process.

2. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

2.1 STRENGTHENING OWNERSHIP: LRGs' PARTICIPATION IN VNR PREPARATION

From 2016 to 2024, 191 countries will have submitted a total of 367 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Of these, 348 VNRs have been analyzed for the different editions of the *Towards the Localization of the SDGs* report. In 2024 alone, 37 countries have pledged to present a VNR, of which 29 were available at the time of finalizing this section (28 June 2024) and are analyzed in this report.

The involvement of local and regional governments (LRGs) and their local government associations (LGAs) in national reporting processes has increased since 2016, as shown in Table 2.1.1. In 2024, 59% of the countries producing a VNR reported medium to high levels of LRG involvement, compared to the 40% on average observed from 2016 to 2023. Indeed, 2024 marks the first year in which over half of VNRs have included such strong LRG participation. This important step forward needs to be sustained and replicated, as the world will only achieve the SDGs by 2030 if all countries strengthen multilevel coordination and LRG inclusion in national monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Fewer VNRs had moderate LRG involvement this year than in previous years (10% in 2024 vs 21% in the 2016–2023 period). About one-third of the countries still do not involve LRGs substantially or at all (31% in 2024 and in the 2016–2023 period).

As in previous years, detailed regional analysis reveals significant differences in LRGs' involvement in VNR preparation. Asia-Pacific and Europe show the strongest LRG involvement: in 2024, all of the reporting countries engaged LRGs to a medium or high degree in VNR preparation, up from 29% in Asia-Pacific and 66% in Europe during the 2016–2023 period. In Latin America, five out of seven countries (71%, up from 40%) also belong to this group. One out of two countries in the Middle East and West Asia (up from two out of 23) and five out of 12 countries in Africa (42%, a slight increase from a historical 39%) have engaged LRGs to a medium or high degree. In Eurasia, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan have included LRGs in the VNR process in 2024.

Table 2.1.1 LRG participation in VNR preparation in 2024 and 2016–2023, by region

2024	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		Limited or no LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	*29*	*17*	*59%*	*3*	*10%*	*9*	*31%*	*0*	*0%*
Africa	12	5	42%	1	8%	6	50%	0	0%
Asia-Pacific	4	4	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Eurasia	2	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Europe	2	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Latin America	7	5	71%	1	14%	1	14%	0	0%
Middle East and West Asia	2	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	0	0%
North America	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

2.1

2016–2023 average	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		Limited or no LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	*319*	*129*	*40%*	*67*	*21%*	*99*	*31%*	*24*	*8%*
Africa	94	37	39%	22	23%	32	34%	3	3%
Asia-Pacific	58	17	29%	19	33%	13	22%	9	16%
Eurasia	14	2	14%	3	21%	7	50%	2	14%
Europe	74	49	66%	7	9%	17	23%	1	1%
Latin America	43	17	40%	12	28%	14	33%	0	0%
Middle East and West Asia	23	2	9%	4	17%	12	52%	5	22%
North America	13	5	38%	0	0%	4	31%	4	31%

Beyond the direct participation of LRGs and LGAs in national reporting processes, the way VNRs reference LRGs and SDG localization speaks clearly about the acknowledgement of their role. These references differ in both frequency and the extent to which they recognize LRGs' pivotal role in achieving the 2030 Agenda; they also indicate the use of a top-down or a bottom-up approach to SDG localization. For example, some VNRs include references to Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which demonstrates political commitment to collaborative action. Very often, this acknowledgement of local reporting initiatives is the first stepping stone for improved coordination and multilevel governance to support SDG localization. In some cases, VNRs include specific sections highlighting LRGs' contributions to SDG implementation or multilevel coordination efforts for the SDGs within their countries. In other cases, VNRs reference decentralization processes, quite often to mention that deepening them is a next step.

This subsection analyzes the situation in different countries according to their inclusion of LRGs in VNR processes (medium to high degree of involvement, moderate degree of involvement or limited/no involvement). This analysis is complemented by qualitative observations on how the different VNRs consider SDG localization and local action.

2.1.1 Countries with a medium to high degree of LRG involvement in the VNR process

This year, 59% of the countries that produced VNRs involved LRGs and LGAs to a medium or high de-gree in the reporting process. This level of involvement indicates that LGAs either had representatives actively participating in the national reporting unit throughout the VNR preparation process or contributed by drafting a section of the VNR. Additionally, this group includes countries that conducted regular working sessions or consultations with LRGs to discuss VNR content.

In six countries, LRGs and LGAs have been part of the national drafting team:

● In **Brazil**, the Executive Secretariat of the National Commission on SDG Implementation led VNR coordination. The Brazilian Association of Municipalities (ABM) and the National Front of Mayors of Brazil (FNP) were invited to join the National Commission. Two LRG consultation approaches were employed for the VNR. First, the National Planning Secretariat carried out an online survey among state governments to evaluate SDG incorporation into state-level public policy. It received 22 responses, which included data on SDG commissions or committees, budgets, specialized teams and integration of the SDGs with state planning and multiyear plans. At the municipal level, the ABM, the FNP and the federal government disseminated an online questionnaire to municipal administrations. The questionnaire explored the 2030 Agenda's integration into management plans and documents, knowledge and perceived relevance of the 2030 Agenda and main challenges faced. They received 91 responses, with 79 valid from 66 different cities. The findings demonstrated

2.1

that, among the respondents, most cities integrate the SDGs into their strategic and sectoral planning. The main challenges were staff capacity building and political awareness. Based on the survey responses, the LGAs curated 81 good SDG localization practices to showcase in the VNR's annex. They also participated in the VNR writing group as observers. The final VNR identified the most common challenges and next steps to achieve the SDGs, with an emphasis on the need to improve and expand financing structures and political engagement for sustainability.

Second, after some negotiations, the ABM provided direct support on matters regarding localization and territorialization, especially in the VNR sections on the institutional environment and the means of implementation. This support built on the main findings and recommendations from the ABM's VSR. However, according to the ABM, the final Brazilian VNR does not adequately reflect the perspectives and interests of cities and states, nor does it mention the VSR. Despite this LGA's efforts to provide technical support, relevant data and contributions to the text, the VNR remains predominantly focused on the federal level, with no disaggregated subnational data.

● In **Costa Rica**, the National Union of Local Governments (UNGL) and the National Association of Mayors (ANAI) contributed to the VNR as part of the SDG High-Level Council's Advisory Committee. They were also part of the Technical Secretariat-led drafting team, which included national ministries and other relevant stakeholders. This involvement marks great progress compared to the 2020 VNR. The 2024 VNR includes five pages dedicated to the national government's support for local SDG progress. It also has two pages dedicated to the UNGL's work, including policy recommendations for all levels of government. Nevertheless, and despite mentioning the six existing VLRs, the VNR fails to mention the second Costa Rican VSR.

● **Kenya** has adopted a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the VNR process. Thanks to the Council of Governors' (CoG's) inclusion in the Inter-Agency Technical Committee on the SDGs, the VNR includes several references to local action. Furthermore, its annex references the 17 new VLRs produced by counties (Kakamega, Vihiga, Elgeyo Marakwet, Bungoma, Kajiado, Narok, Taita Taveta, Homa Bay, West Pokot, Mombasa, Nyeri, Embu, Makueni, Baringo, Kilifi, Busia and Wajir). The VNR and VLR processes have been coordinated, also with CoG support, to ensure they mutually inform each other.

● In **Mauritania**, the Coordination Committee within the Steering Committee in charge of producing the VNR includes two municipal representatives and two regional representatives, up from only one local representative involved in the 2019 VNR preparation. Their involvement, together with bilateral meetings with the Mauritanian Association of Regions (AMR), led to LRGs' perspectives – including the summaries and recommendations of the AMR's VSR, the Nouakchott's VLR and Hodh Ech Chargui's VLR – being included in the VNR. Overall, this process has substantially improved the relationship between the national government and LRGs.

● In **Nepal**, the Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) and the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) are members of the VNR Preparation Taskforce led by the National Planning Commission. They have been actively engaged in planning meetings and other activities and in organizing provincial consultation events to collect LRG voices and experiences to be included in the report. In addition to having a general localized approach, the VNR includes a seven-page subsection on SDG localization, acknowledging the critical role it plays in accelerating transformation and achieving social justice. It mentions the existence of 16 VLRs and showcases Dhulikhel's forerunning experience.

● In **Palau**, the VNR process ensured the voices of LRGs, traditional leaders, civil society and the private sector were heard. The 15-person VNR Steering Committee, the ultimate decision-making body on VNR content and presentation, involved the Rubekul Belau (Council of Chiefs), the Mechesil Belau (Women of Palau) and Governors' Association, among others. The Governors' Association also serves on the Extended Secretariat in an advisory capacity.

In five other countries, LRGs and LGAs have participated in the VNR process by sharing written contributions, in the form of subnational reports (e.g. VLRs, VSRs) or other inputs considered by the VNR drafting team:

● In **Ecuador**, building on progress in 2020 when the VNR considered VSR findings, this is the first year that the national government has allowed the Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE) to draft content on its VSR work to be included in the VNR. This content comprised a seven-page chapter titled "Territorialization of the SDGs," which built on CONGOPE's five VSRs; Manabí's, Pichincha's and Imbabura's VLRs; and other bottom-up processes and projects. Thanks to national and local governments' efforts to align

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development plans to the SDGs and gather dis-aggregated data, the VNR offers a relevant picture of progress and gaps at the provincial level.

● In **Honduras**, according to the municipality of Intibucá's response to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey, this is the first year that LRGs have been allowed to send data, information and comments to the national government's Strategic Planning Secretariat, which leads VNR production. The VNR includes a whole chapter on territorialization (14 pages) as well as contents of the VLRs of Intibucá and San Nicolás, provided by the municipalities themselves.

● In **South Africa**, the National Planning Commission, tasked with drafting the VNR, invited the South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA) as well as LRGs such as Buffalo and Johannesburg to participate in different sessions and offer written contributions and key messages, which were taken into account by the commission. The VNR includes a subsection on SDG localization, although it does not explicitly mention SALGA's VSR. This inclusion represents a great step forward from the previous VNR, and it has been supported by United Nations (UN) agencies.

● In **Spain**, the national government has sought contributions from the regions and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) for the three VNRs it has published so far, and they have sent contributions each time. The current VNR devotes one chapter to regions' progress and challenges, based on a survey filled out by 13 of the 17 regions plus the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Another chapter focuses on municipalities' and provinces' progress and challenges, based on a survey completed by 84 LRGs from around the country. According to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey results, some particular LRGs have participated directly in the VNR process. For example, the Basque Country has been involved in all three VNRs to date. By contrast, the Barcelona Provincial Council, which participated intensely in the first Spanish VNR, was only consulted by FEMP this time but not by the national government itself.

● In **Syria**, the government made important changes to the institutional arrangements that affect the preparation of its first VNR. These included changes in the structure of the National Commission for Sustainable Development and of the team in charge of the VNR, which now includes representatives from civil society and the private sector. Governors steer the production of specific, territorialized reports by supervisory committees for the different gov-

ernorates, which have been taken into account in the VNR. Working groups for sustainable development were also created, and they included LRGs, private sector representatives, civil society and academics in these governorates.

A third group of countries is composed of those who have invited LRGs and LGAs to participate in meetings, conferences or workshops to debate the contents of the report:

● In **Austria**, LRGs participated in VNR production through the VNR Stakeholder Forum, which included federal ministries, provinces and the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT), along with other public and private stakeholders. The forum has convened three times since March 2023 to debate the approach and contents of the report, and stakeholders were invited to participate in additional thematic sessions and submit their best practices. The VNR dedicates six pages to LRGs.

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● In **Guinea**, LRGs and other stakeholders were invited to support the technical committee in charge of drafting the VNR, composed of the national government and UN representatives. Four regional consultations were organized to ensure regional representativeness, although the VNR does not specify how LRGs participated in them.

● In **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, provinces participated in two VNR preparation and consultation workshops, along with other stakeholders.

● In **Peru**, over 480 diverse stakeholders participated in VNR consultations, including multistakeholder workshops in seven regions: Cajamarca, Cusco, Huánuco, La Libertad, Loreto, Moquegua and Ucayali. Regional governments, which have a regional development plan in line with the National Development Strategic Plan 2050 and the SDGs, contributed their perspective to the discussions, as did some of their provinces: Cajamarca, Anta, Leoncio Prado, Huacaybamba, Trujillo, Putumayo, Mariscal Ramón Castilla, Mariscal Nieto and Atalaya. The VNR echoes the seven regions' plans and localization efforts along with those of the municipalities of Lima, Chimbote and Trujillo (who have each produced a VLR) in a one-pager and two annexes.

● In **Sierra Leone**, several awareness-raising events and consultations were held, in which some local councils and traditional authorities participated.

● In the **Solomon Islands**, provinces participated in the consultation meetings convened with more than 50 stakeholders from the government, State-owned enterprises, the private sector, civil society organizations and development partners. These meetings also served to review the national SDG strategy.

2.1.2 Countries with moderate LRG involvement in the VNR process

In 10% of the countries that presented a VNR in 2024, LRGs and LGAs had a moderate level of participation in the VNR process. In these instances, LRGs typically contributed through surveys or ad hoc consultations, though their input was not always sufficiently incorporated.

● In **Colombia**, the Colombian Association of Capital Cities (Asocapitales) participated in a national workshop organized in April 2024, while the Federation of Colombian Municipali-

ties (FCM) was only convened for one VNR-related meeting with the national government and civil society in late 2023. The VNR discusses territorialization, decentralization, improved data generation (only 35% of 147 national indicators with a territorial perspective have municipal-level data available) and training and funding for LRGs to improve local planning and implementation of public policies. However, it dedicates only one page to national actions to support territorialization. The report does not detail specific progress on the SDGs by the country's departments and municipalities.

● The participatory VNR process in **Mauritius** involved consultations on Rodrigues Island with different stakeholders, including representatives from the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. However, the VNR offers no information on the scope of the consultations or on how stakeholders' contributions were taken into account.

● In **Yemen**, the Ministry of International Planning and Cooperation steered SDG work, while a higher oversight committee supervised the VNR preparation process. Consultations were held with the governorates and other stakeholders, although no specific information is given regarding their goal and scope.

2.1.3 Countries with limited or no LRG involvement in the VNR process

Finally, in 31% of the countries reporting to the High-Level Political Forum this year, LRGs have had minimal/no involvement in the VNR process or no evidence is available.

● In **Armenia**, LRGs do not appear in the VNR as having been involved in the VNR drafting team or the national multistakeholder platforms for data gathering, follow-up and validation. The VNR does not include any kind of territorial perspective.

● In **Azerbaijan**, LRGs did not participate in the VNR process nor the SDG Dialogues series, which aim to promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to the SDGs.

● In **Belize**, there is no evidence of any local council involvement in the reporting process, and the VNR does not offer information on local progress.

● In **Chad**, LRGs have not participated in VNR production. No local progress is mentioned in the VNR, as localization is non-existent.

● In **Eritrea**, although the National SDGs Task-

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force organized awareness-raising, data and information-gathering and validation events with different stakeholders, no information is available on LRGs' participation in the VNR.

● In **Libya**, no information on LRG participation is available.

● In the **Republic of the Congo**, LRGs have not participated in preparing the VNR, and mentions of local progress are very scarce.

● In **Uganda**, the national government's SDG Secretariat within the Office of the Prime Minister spearheaded VNR preparation and development, overseen by a multi-institutional advisory committee comprising representatives from a cross-section of national ministries and agencies, Parliament, UN agencies, academia, civil society organizations and the private sector. Although preparatory documents state that chief administrative officers and clerks, the Uganda Local Governments' Association (ULGA) and the Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU) would be engaged through the existing organized groups of district and city planners, no information is available about LRG participation in the VNR process.

● The **Zimbabwean** VNR is not clear as to what extent LRGs have been included in the drafting process, although six VLRs (Bikita, Bulawayo, Zvishavane, Mutasa, Mutare and Murewa) were analyzed and their main messages summarized.

To conclude, this section has shown that LRGs and LGAs are increasingly involved in VNR production processes by their countries. Whether by allowing their local counterparts to produce or contribute to specific parts of the VNR, including their subnational reviews or referencing decentralization processes and local trends, circumstances and inspiring practices, national governments are strengthening their recognition of local efforts. Indeed, 2024 is the first year in which national governments have involved LRGs in over 50% of VNR processes.

Progress is, however, not steady over time nor homogeneous across regions and countries. The recognition of LRGs' role is often overshadowed by top-down and tokenistic approaches. The last cases analyzed in this subsection (countries with limited or no participation, a third of the VNRs analyzed) are particular cause for concern. While national governments are making efforts to produce VNRs through multistakeholder approaches – involving civil society, business, academia and other stakeholders – they do not always understand LRGs as part of these structures.

One critical issue is that the multistakeholder platforms established specifically for VNR production are typically dismantled once the VNR is completed. This is especially the case for the last group of countries that have limited or no LRG involvement. This practice has significant repercussions for the democratization of the 2030 Agenda's implementation as it undermines sustained, inclusive engagement with diverse stakeholders. Consequently, **the temporary nature of these platforms limits the long-term effectiveness and legitimacy of SDG localization efforts**. VNR platforms should be leveraged to establish or consolidate permanent SDG coordination mechanisms, as will be discussed in the next subsection.

2.2 LRG PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

This subsection highlights how the countries reporting to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) have embraced the 2030 Agenda and its localization as a blueprint for sustainable development. In particular, it presents a structured examination of how the reporting countries' strategies and coordination frameworks that have been established for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include local and regional governments (LRGs) as active contributors with a pivotal role in the realization of the SDGs. The subsection draws its information from the 29 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) published by the time this report's text was finalized (28 June 2024), as well as the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey responses submitted by LRGs and local government associations (LGAs) from these countries. The concrete selection of countries that commit to report each year largely influences regional and global figures.

This year's findings show that 55% of the countries reporting to the 2024 HLPF have involved their LRGs to some degree in their national coordination mechanisms, a slight increase from the 2016–2023 period, in which 51% of countries involved LRGs. More specifically, in 2024, 12 out of 29 countries (41%) have engaged LRGs as equal partners within a national coordination mechanism or through regular consultation (classified as "medium to high degree of LRG participation" in Table 2.2.1 below), compared to 30% in the 2016–2023 period. Four countries (14%) have fostered LRGs' participation in coordination mechanisms through ad hoc consultations but not as permanent members of the structure ("moderate degree of LRG participation"), compared to a historical 21%. Thirteen countries (45%) have not involved LRGs at all ("no LRG participation").

By region, Europe stands out: both reporting countries (100%) this year have had a medium to high degree of LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms. Europe is followed by Africa (with six out of 12 countries, or 50%) and Latin America (with three out of seven countries, or 43%). In Asia-Pacific, although all countries included LRGs in their VNR processes (see Section 2.1), only one out of four (25%) countries involved LRGs comprehensively in their national coordination mechanisms. At the other end of the spectrum, no reporting countries in Eurasia or the Middle East and West Asia included LRGs in their coordination structures.

Table 2.2.1 LRG participation in national coordination mechanisms in 2024 and 2016–2023, by region

2024	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		No LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	*29*	*12*	*41%*	*4*	*14%*	*13*	*45%*	*0*	*0%*
Africa	12	6	50%	0	0%	6	50%	0	0%
Asia-Pacific	4	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%	0	0%
Eurasia	2	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%
Europe	2	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Latin America	7	3	43%	2	29%	2	29%	0	0%
Middle East and West Asia	2	0	0%	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%
North America	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

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2016–2023 average	Total VNRs	Medium to high degree of LRG participation		Moderate degree of LRG participation		No LRG participation		No elected LRGs/no information	
Region	VNRs per region	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%	No. of VNRs	%
World	*319*	*96*	*30%*	*66*	*21%*	*133*	*42%*	*24*	*8%*
Africa	94	26	28%	20	21%	45	48%	3	3%
Asia-Pacific	58	11	19%	9	16%	29	50%	9	16%
Eurasia	14	1	7%	3	21%	8	57%	2	14%
Europe	74	43	58%	12	16%	18	24%	1	1%
Latin America	43	10	23%	18	42%	15	35%	0	0%
Middle East and West Asia	23	2	9%	2	9%	14	61%	5	22%
North America	13	3	23%	2	15%	4	31%	4	31%

The regional and country-by-country analysis below offers more detailed information about the progress made and the remaining gaps. The analysis also shows that some countries have developed national strategies for SDG implementation not only at the national but also at the subnational level.

In Africa, Kenya and South Africa present the highest level of involvement of LRGs in coordination mechanisms, followed by Mauritania, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe. There is no LRG involvement in Chad, Eritrea, Guinea, Libya, Mauritius or the Republic of Congo.

● In **Kenya**, the key development frameworks that have integrated the SDGs include the third and fourth medium-term plans to implement Kenya Vision 2030 at the national level and the second and third generation county integrated development plans at the subnational level. The country has a clear cooperation framework for the SDGs, as shared by the Council of Governors (CoG). To coordinate SDG implementation, the national government has established the SDGs Directorate within the National Treasury and the State Department for Economic Planning, while the CoG has established an SDGs Liaison Unit to coordinate mainstreaming, tracking and reporting on SDGs at the county level. The SDGs Directorate and the SDGs Liaison Unit cooperate vertically and are both included in the national Inter-Agency Technical Committee, which also includes umbrella organizations for civil society, the private sector, Parliament, media and academia. Vertical cooperation has been further enhanced through the appointment and training of SDG units and SDG champions in all 47 county governments, as well as through support to counties in preparing their Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to provide the linkage with national processes. This cooperation has ensured ownership at the subnational level through communication and awareness raising; domestication and localization of SDGs; and multistakeholder partnerships – for example, through the Maarifa Centre, which provides resources for LRGs, and the SDGs Kenya Forum.

● In **South Africa**, the National Development Plan 2030: "Our Future – Make It Work" has a 74% convergence with the SDGs. The National Planning Commission, in charge of monitoring progress, has been working to improve the coordination and coherence of provincial and local development plans with respect to the 2030 Agenda. Recently, it invited the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) to coordinate LRGs' role in SDG achievement. Together, they organized a first capacity-building workshop for LRGs in March 2023, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. This workshop contributed to developing a roadmap for SDG localization and the production of several VLRs. Although this first step has positively impacted cooperation across spheres of government, SALGA's Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) demonstrates that national SDG efforts have not yet succeeded in obtaining the necessary legislative action or

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updated resource allocation for LRGs to accelerate SDG action.

● In **Mauritania**, the national Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity 2016–2030 serves as the overall strategy for achieving the SDGs. Since 2022, it has been territorialized through the Regional Strategies for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity. To implement the national strategy, there is an Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee, chaired by the prime minister and including only national ministries, and a multistakeholder Enlarged Consultation Committee, which meets once a year and includes two representatives from the regions and two more from the Association of Mayors of Mauritania (AMM). This committee composition is a step forward since the last VNR in 2019, when reportedly only the president of the AMM participated in this committee after the decentralization process launched following a 2017 referendum. However, the Mauritanian VSR demonstrates that regional governments require greater support from their national counterparts to achieve the 2030 Agenda and deepen the decentralization agenda.

● **Sierra Leone** has two main SDG-related instruments: the new Medium-Term National Development Plan for 2024–2030 and the 2023 UN SDG Acceleration Roadmap for Sierra Leone, which prioritizes SDGs 1, 2 and 10. Local councils and traditional leaders participated in preparing the roadmap through nationwide consultations including diverse stakeholders. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, which coordinates 2030 Agenda implementation in Sierra Leone, ensures the integration of the medium-term plan and the SDGs into local council plans, and there is a comprehensive follow-up and review mechanism at both national and local levels, according to the VNR. The local development coordination committees across the country deepen the decentralization system for enhanced localization of the national development plan, the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063. They coordinate district-level activities undertaken by local councils across the 16 administrative districts of the country, supported by the standardized local council planning guidelines and template produced by the national government. The VLRs of Pujehun, Kambia and Bonthe districts, acknowledged in the VNR, resulted from collaboration between the concerned LRGs and the national government and have served as key awareness-raising tools for local populations.

● In **Uganda**, the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Uganda (2020/21–2024/25) is coordinated by the SDG Secretariat, guided by the SDG Implementation Steering Committee and the National SDG Taskforce, and executed through five multistakeholder technical working groups. The roadmap is aligned with the third National Development Plan (Vision 2040, which is 95% aligned with the SDGs, an improvement from 70% in the second plan) and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025. The taskforce and the working groups include representatives from the Ministry of Local Government but not from specific LRGs.

Since 2019, the country has adopted a collaborative and multistakeholder approach to roll out the 2030 Agenda at the LRG level. The SDG Secretariat, Uganda Local Governments' Association (ULGA), Urban Authorities Association of Uganda (UAAU) and the Uganda National NGO Forum have jointly undertaken advocacy engagements that have engaged all actors at the LRG level. The SDG focal persons in each LRG liaise with the SDG Secretariat and SDG technical working groups to implement the 2030 Agenda locally in their day-to-day activities. In addition, three annual regional SDG forums and the SDG Joint Initiative have been organized to ensure the engagement of LRGs and other stakeholders in SDG implementation. The SDG Secretariat has also drafted guidelines for localizing the 2030 Agenda in Uganda and supported 15 district governments in conducting VLRs. LRGs are involved in the achievement of the Third Plan for National Statistical Development – a national framework for improving data, monitoring and accountability in Uganda.

● In **Zimbabwe**, the Office of the President and Cabinet mandated the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare to coordinate the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the African Union Agenda 2063. The ministry receives inputs from LRGs along with other stakeholders to steer the country's Vision 2030, but the regularity of the meetings, type of inputs and breadth of contributions is unknown.

● In **Chad**, the provincial, departmental and local action and monitoring committees that were established several years ago by the national government are not functional, which has hindered coordination and SDG localization. The VNR identifies accelerating decentralization and SDG localization as urgent tasks for the near future.

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● **Eritrea** has a set of sectoral laws, policies and plans aligned with the SDGs but does not have one particular strategy or plan to guide clear action towards the SDGs. In addition, Eritrea has no national coordination mechanism for SDG implementation. LRGs seem to have been absent from both processes.

● In **Guinea**, LRGs' contribution to the SDGs is based on their ad hoc participation in specific projects and programmes, with no evidence of any involvement in the national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation. These mechanisms are composed of national government ministries and entities as well as international cooperation agencies. One of the VNR's recommendations is to reinforce LRGs' planning, participatory management and gender budgeting capacities.

● The Ministry of Planning in **Libya** is responsible for coordinating efforts to prepare the VNR, with support from the Commission on Sustainable Development. LRGs do not seem to participate in this commission.

● In **Mauritius**, the multistakeholder National Steering Committee on the SDGs does not involve LRGs. Furthermore, LRGs are not explicitly mentioned as key actors in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan adopted in 2023.

● In the **Republic of the Congo**, LRGs do not seem to participate in implementing the National Development Plan 2022–2026. Despite the legal framework for decentralization, only two out of 12 departments have aligned their local development plans to the SDGs, with UNDP support, and one is in process. The VNR identifies localization, including increased funding for LRGs, as a next step to take.

In Asia-Pacific, Nepal has the most advanced and inclusive coordination system, which includes LRGs as equal partners. The Solomon Islands comes in second, while no LRG participation is registered in Lao People's Democratic Republic or Palau.

● In **Nepal**, although in a top-down manner and still in the first stages of deployment in some areas, the Nepalese government has supported SDG localization for several years now. Actions include developing the SDG Localization Resource Book, the Local Level Plan Formulation Guideline and the Planning and Monitoring Guidelines tailored for provincial SDGs. The government has also provided capacity-building activities and support for SDG planning and budgeting. These efforts promote comprehensive and inclusive progress towards the goals.

The National Planning Commission and the Implementation Coordination and Monitoring Committee are the principal bodies overseeing SDG implementation and monitoring, guided by the National Steering Committee and supported by seven thematic committees. The chief ministers of the seven provinces and the chairpersons of the three associations – the Association of District Coordination Committees of Nepal (ADCCN), the Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) and the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) – are integral members of the National Steering Committee. They participate in regular consultations with this committee but hold no decision-making power. LRGs are also represented on the Implementation Coordination and Monitoring Committee. At the provincial level, the SDG Steering Committee, chaired by the chief minister, and the SDG Coordinating Committee, managed by the vice president of the Provincial Planning Commission, steer and oversee the coordination of SDG efforts. District coordination committees and local-level SDG implementation committees monitor subnational development initiatives.

● The **Solomon Islands**' National Development Strategy 2016–2035 is translated into sectoral, provincial and ministerial strategic plans aligned with the SDGs, although no specific information is given as to what extent LRGs support the national SDG coordination led by the Ministry of National Planning and Development Coordination. The government used the VNR process as an opportunity to review the national strategy through diverse consultations, which included provincial governments. According to the VNR, decentralization is underway and the Provincial Governance Strengthening Programme and Provincial Capacity Development Fund are initiatives to strengthen all provincial

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governments through the deployment of specialized personnel and funding support.

● In the **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, the VNR states that the country's SDG roadmap, supervised by the National Steering Committee chaired by the prime minister, has clearly identified the roles and responsibilities of all ministries and provinces. However, it provides no information regarding LRGs' involvement in defining the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan or in the SDG coordination mechanisms. The VNR identifies enhancing financial and capacity-building support to LRGs to integrate sustainability criteria and agenda into their work as a next step, along with involving them in SDG monitoring and building capacities for enhanced participation mechanisms in local policy-making.

● **Palau** has embraced the 2030 Agenda at the highest political level and is using the National SDG Framework to improve implementation, monitoring and reporting on national priorities. However, and despite its inclusive VNR, it is not clear if the SDG Coordinating Unit created before the 2019 VNR still leads SDG action; if LRGs participate in it; or if the structure created for the monitoring, evaluation and drafting of the VNR is also tasked with planning and implementing. Concerning next steps, the VNR envisages strengthening the Local2030 Islands Network, through which island leaders and experts from across jurisdictions meet to develop and share innovative homegrown solutions. In particular, it aims for this network to foster stronger engagement at subnational levels to create a core data set for monitoring SDG progress by states and creatively displaying this data for stakeholders.

In Eurasia, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan take a territorialized approach to SDG coordination and strategy – a situation mirrored by the VNR production process.

● In **Armenia**, the Armenia Transformation Strategy 2050 and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for Armenia (2021–2025) are critical components of the national SDG strategy. The National Council on the SDGs, headed by the prime minister, includes representatives from ministries, national agencies and NGOs. Vested with advisory functions, it ensures the coordination and monitoring of the SDGs. There is no evidence of any LRG participation in the National Council on the SDGs or in the implementation of the strategies.

● Despite efforts to integrate the SDGs into national, regional and local plans and budgets, according to the VNR, **Azerbaijan**'s LRGs are not part of the implementation of the national strategic documents led by the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development. They are also excluded from the relevant secretariat and thematic groups.

In Europe, both the Austrian and Spanish governments have traditionally involved LRGs in the coordination of SDG action. However, they do not do it at the highest level but through specific multilevel governance mechanisms.

● In **Austria**, several mechanisms ensure LRGs' contribution to national SDG implementation. The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (AACT) is invited on an ad hoc basis to the Interministerial Working Group on the 2030 Agenda, the leading mechanism for SDG implementation. Although infrequently convened, the 2030 Agenda Conference and Thematic Forums also support SDG coordination. The Sustainability Coordinators' Conference involving the federal provinces and the federal government has recently discussed ways of expanding the scope for action with regard to the vertical and horizontal anchoring of the 2030 Agenda – a need broadly recognized by the national government in its 2024 VNR. A first step will be to invite the chair of the Conference to the regular meetings of the Interministerial Working Group on the 2030 Agenda.

● In **Spain**, LRGs are not included in the main SDG coordination mechanism, which is only composed of national government ministries. The 2030 Agenda Sectoral Conference, created under the Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in 2021, is the highest interterritorial coordination mechanism. It comprises the national government, all regional governments, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. However, this conference is convened infrequently.

Interestingly, coordination mechanisms are emerging at the regional scale. In the Basque Country, in addition to convening a vertical multilevel forum (including the Basque Government, the provincial councils, the association of municipalities and the three provincial capitals), a Multiagent Forum for Social Transition and the 2030 Agenda has also been created to include representatives from the private sector, academia and organized civil society. Similarly, the Catalonia 2030 Alliance is led by the regional government. Provinces, municipalities and rep-

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resentatives from civil society, the private sector and universities participate in it.

In Latin America, the Brazilian, Costa Rican and Honduran national coordination mechanisms broadly foster LRG participation as full members. On the contrary, Colombia and Ecuador show limited LRG involvement, and no participation is identified in Belize and Peru.

● In **Brazil**, varying degrees of coordination in SDG implementation have been witnessed. The focal point of these shifts has primarily been at the federal level, where the 2030 Agenda holds significant influence. Over the past six years, there has been a noticeable absence of vertical cooperation between the national government, LRGs and LGAs, particularly as the National Commission for the SDGs was disbanded in 2019. In 2023, a change occurred with the establishment of a new coordination body: the National Commission for SDG Implementation. Reactivated by the federal government, this commission has brought together institutions representing various sectors in Brazil, including the Brazilian Association of Municipalities (ABM), the National Front of Mayors of Brazil (FNP) and two other institutions representing the state level, to engage in discussions.

Among these institutions, the ABM and the FNP have been prominently recognized as key players in addressing the SDGs in collaboration with LRGs across Brazil. The National Commission for SDG Implementation comprises 64 representatives, with equal representation from civil society and government entities. While LGAs are part of civil society in Brazil, under the mandate of the National Commission, they represent the federal government. Therefore, any resolutions or proposals put forth by the federal government under the National Commission require coordination and approval from both federal entities and LGAs. The SDGs are also addressed by other multilevel bodies such as the Thematic Chamber on the SDGs and Climate Change, created at the request of the ABM.

Since last year, there has been a notable shift in recognition by the federal government, which has acknowledged that progress in SDG implementation is unattainable without the active involvement of LGAs and LRGs. This acknowledgement stems from the understanding that in the absence of federal government involvement, these institutions have been at the forefront of localizing the SDGs in Brazil. Consequently, there has been a notable increase in collaboration among LRGs, facilitated and coordinated by associations such as ABM.

One of the VNR's next steps is to enhance SDG territorialization. To do so, the government will focus on strengthening state and municipal initiatives, including commitment to the 2030 Agenda in the debates on the 2024 municipal elections; strengthening and encouraging social movement networks in the territories; carrying out territorialization actions in line with the actions of Institutional Relations Secretariat of the national Presidency; and holding the National SDG Conference in 2025.

● In **Costa Rica**, recent developments have accelerated SDG implementation, such as the development of the SDG Acceleration Plan, "Costa Rica 2030: Making Progress Towards a Sustainable Future" and the 2030 National SDG Target Strategy. The National Association of Mayors (ANAI) and the National Union of Local Governments (UNGL) signed the revitalized National Pact for the SDGs, which places human rights and SDG localization at the core. These LGAs are also part of the Advisory Committee of the High-Level Council of the SDGs, whose composition was reviewed in 2023, together with other public and private stakeholders. With support from UNDP, the national government supports LRGs in their quest to localize the SDGs through the Programa Cantones Promotores de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Among other actions, this programme has supported training staffers, aligning plans in dozens of LRGs and producing VLRs in six municipalities: Puriscal, Atenas, Escazú, Sarchí, Belén and Goicoechea. Coordination mechanisms at the canton and district levels have also been established.

● In **Honduras**, the Strategic Planning Secretariat created in 2022 has the support of the National Commission for the 2030 Agenda for the SDGs to steer implementation of the National 2030 Agenda. The Honduras Municipalities Association (AMHON) is part of this commission together with the national Finance Secretariat, the International Relations Secretariat, the Upper Education Council and the Honduran Private Sector Council. Representatives from workers' and peasants' organizations and civil society organizations also participate. Each of these institutions also has one representative in the Technical Committee for Sustainable Development, which supports the commission's functioning. According to the VNR, technical assistance has been provided to LRGs to link municipal development plans and the Municipal Investment Plan with the 2030 Agenda National Implementation Strategy.

● In **Colombia**, territorialization of SDG action was one of the first priorities included in CON-

2.2

PES Document 3918, the national strategy for SDG implementation. LRGs participate in a multistakeholder platform led by the national government, although the VNR offers no information regarding this platform's effective functioning. Instead, in a top-down manner, national authorities offer guidelines and support for LRGs to align their policies, plans and projects to the SDGs.

● In **Ecuador**, the 2023 elections led to the adoption of the New Ecuador Development Plan 2024–2025, which is 94% aligned with the SDGs. The National Planning Secretariat leads SDG-related work, and a National Decentralized Council for Participatory Planning presided over by the president of Ecuador was set up to adopt the national development plans and assess VNR progress. Out of 17 council members, four representatives come from LRGs. Despite this institutional framework, provinces and some municipalities have reported through the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey that they have only responded to one-off demands and workshops from the national government regarding the SDGs. Interaction has taken place mainly through the Technical Planning Secretariat and has been of a technical, not political, nature. Despite progress, the Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador (CONGOPE) states that more strategic and stable multilevel coordination and joint work are needed.

● In **Peru**, the Peru Vision 2050 and the Strategic Plan for National Development 2050 are long-term strategies aligned to the SDGs. They are supported by other critical instruments such as the National Policy on Development and Social Inclusion 2030. The focal point for 2030 Agenda coordination is the National Centre for Strategic Planning, which works together with the National Statistics Institute, in charge of steering the national SDG indicator system. The VNR provides no information regarding LRG participation in the adoption of these strategic documents or in any national coordination mechanism. According to the VNR, Peru has a top-down approach to the SDGs, in which regions and municipalities need to adapt their development plans to the national one. Despite the considerable gap in updating local-level strategic plans, more so than regional plans, a progressive increase has been observed. The development and implementation of new national policies on decentralization and territorial development is underway.

Finally, in the Middle East and West Asia, Syria includes LRGs to a very limited degree in national SDG coordination mechanisms, and Yemen's VNR offers no information.

● In **Syria**, the National Commission for Sustainable Development now includes representatives from civil society and the private sector, but not LRGs directly. The new supervisory committees at the governorate level contribute to the territorialization of the 2030 Agenda in the country and prepare regular reports.

● In **Yemen**, no information is available regarding LRG participation in coordination mechanisms.

The VNRs presented at the 2024 HLPF highlight national governments' increasing commitment to the SDGs. As of 2024, over half of the countries involve LRGs in coordinating actions to some degree. This trend emphasizes LRGs' essential role in achieving sustainable development through localized implementation and tailored solutions. Many reports also identify SDG localization and decentralization as essential levers for achieving the SDGs or as upcoming priorities. Six years ahead of the globally agreed deadline, whether these efforts have been implemented or remain pending, it is crucial to acknowledge LRGs as critical actors, innovators and decision-makers. Only by doing so can we address complex development challenges and ensure no one is left behind on the path to sustainable development.

2.3   LRG ACTIONS FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

In recent years, the world has veered off course in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The gap between affluent and impoverished nations is widening once more, reversing a two-decade trend of inequality reduction and posing a significant threat to global human development. Despite these challenging trends and insufficient institutional support for SDG localization at national and international levels, as evidenced in earlier subsections, local and regional governments (LRGs) and their local government associations (LGAs) have once again showcased their dedication to achieving the SDGs.

This subsection presents an overview of the efforts made by LRGs and LGAs across various global regions towards the localization of the SDGs. First, it demonstrates in numbers how bottom-up reporting efforts (including Voluntary Local Reviews, or VLRs, and Voluntary Subnational Reviews, or VSRs) are increasing at a steady pace in all world regions. Second, the subsection offers an overview of SDG localization in countries where VSRs have been produced: specifically, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mauritania, Nepal and South Africa, along with the Nordic countries.

The subsection then delves into the local initiatives within each global region, focusing on countries reporting to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). This examination is supplemented by additional endeavours by LGAs and LRGs in countries that have not submitted a Voluntary National Review (VNR) this year. The analysis primarily draws upon responses to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey, along with insights gleaned from the latest VLRs, VSRs and VNRs

2.3.1 Perspectives from VSRs and VLRs

VLRs and VSRs are bottom-up reporting efforts led by LRGs and LGAs, respectively, from all over the world. Since their appearance shortly after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, they have significantly transformed reporting practices around the SDGs across all levels, including VNRs. VLRs and VSRs have been recognized by the United Nations (UN) as "an essential tool to show progress and foster exchange on local implementation" of the SDGs. They have played a meaningful role in emphasizing the crucial importance of SDG localization in regional and international contexts.

The 2023 report by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies on the state of VLRs notes:

"Well-developed VLRs can help localise the SDGs, promote multilevel governance, enhance accountability and transparency, facilitate innovation and experimentation, and contribute to policy learning and diffusion [...] They can] inform decision-making in the face of ongoing challenges to better adapt policies to changing contexts."

To date, 295 VLRs have been produced by 235 LRGs worldwide, covering a population of 500 million people. 104 VLRs have been produced in Europe, followed by 90 in Latin America, 57 in Asia-Pacific, 24 in Africa, 11 in North America and 9 in the Middle East and West Asia region.

Figure 2.3.1 Number of VLRs and VSRs per region
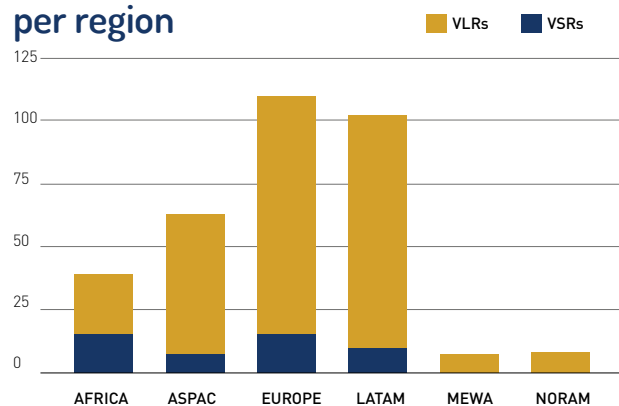
Turning to VSRs, UCLG's recent insights note has demonstrated positive impact at two levels: internally and externally. Internally, VSRs have fostered a new collaborative governance culture without institutional and policy silos, strengthening institutions' priorities, structures, knowledge and processes. Externally, they have helped LGAs consolidate whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to sustainable development, with improved multilevel coordination and greater recognition within VNR processes.

Between 2020 and 2023, 37 VSRs were published in 33 countries. In 2024, 7 individual VSRs have been developed, and the countries of 6 of them are reporting to the HLPF this year. A new, territorial approach has also appeared: the first-ever Nordic VSR was published, covering Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In total, these VSRs represent around 170.000 LRGs and 1.75 billion inhabitants around the world. The following boxes summarize the seven 2024 VSRs.

2.3

BOX 2.3.1

BRAZIL'S VSR

At the federal level, Brazil's SDG implementation has experienced numerous up and downs, with periods of virtual abandonment. However, cities and regions, alongside civil society, have taken up the role of planning, implementing and monitoring the 2030 Agenda at the local level.

The **Brazilian Association of Municipalities** (ABM) proudly supports cities to improve their public governance by applying the SDGs as a cross-cutting, overarching planning mechanism. Accordingly, it embarked on the VSR production journey to share the story, successes and challenges of LRGs in Brazil as they define what the SDGs mean for their local reality. ABM's 2024 VSR used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on a survey followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews with elected officials and technical staff. This approach allowed ABM to explore the country-level localization landscape (via the survey) and examine city-level complexities (via interviews).

Brazil faces several hindrances regarding LRGs' participation in SDG planning, implementation and monitoring processes. The National Commission for the SDGs was officially revoked in December 2019 by a presidential decree and was only reinstated in 2023. Since its reinstatement, LRGs have been resuming their role as key actors in the 2030 Agenda, especially via the LGAs that represent them at the federal level. However, municipalities still perceive federal institutions as mostly absent and unaware of their local contexts. They often call for a clear national SDG implementation strategy in which technical assistance, funding mechanisms and political support play a central part.

Despite the lack of federal support mechanisms, cities that have localized the SDGs have all stated that the 2030 Agenda has allowed them to plan effectively and improve their local management. However, stark contrasts persist across regions and cities of different sizes. Larger cities, especially in the southeast region, often have greater technical expertise and access to funding than small and medium-sized municipalities, especially those in the northeast and north regions.

Many challenges lie ahead. Pivotally, SDG implementation requires enhancing technical and institutional capabilities at the local level, as most of Brazil's 5,660 municipalities have limited capabilities to localize the 2030 Agenda. However, improving technical capacity requires political support, which should be strengthened at both the city and federal policy level. Brazil's office of the president and ministries should be more vocal about the SDGs so that LRGs are encouraged to take part in the agenda. Finally, efforts should be made to maintain an enabling institutional and political environment for SDG implementation in the country, improving awareness of and engagement with the 2030 Agenda at all levels and in all regions.

2.3

BOX 2.3.2

COSTA RICA'S VSR

In its second VSR, the **National Union of Local Governments** (UNGL), as the legitimate representative of Costa Rica's municipal governments, highlights LRGs' efforts to implement the SDGs. In parallel, UNGL aims to develop a roadmap for current and future decision-makers that would guide strategic territorial actions, guaranteeing sustainable development through local vision and, fundamentally, leaving no one behind.

To develop the VSR, UNGL disseminated a questionnaire among elected LRG leaders for the current constitutional term (2024–2028), enabling local voices to assess the status of short-, medium- and long-term SDG implementation at the subnational level in Costa Rica.

The institutional environment in Costa Rica has facilitated very coordinated SDG governance, with constant communication and teamwork among all stakeholders involved in implementing the SDGs.

Notably, the leadership of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy's SDG Technical Secretariat has created settings for experience exchange and teamwork.

In Costa Rica, stakeholders have used SDG 17 to strengthen SDG implementation, creating opportunities for LRGs to share their experiences. Such exchanges have facilitated access to information by LRGs that have not achieved the desired level of implementation.

Efforts to make progress in Costa Rica have drawn more on an empirical, rather than theoretical, form of decision-making. LRGs have localized the SDGs based on their territorial experiences, but there is still a need for a roadmap broad enough to serve the entire municipal sector.

Decision-makers have demonstrated their great willingness; however, finite resources mean that authorities have to prioritize objectives. Similarly, although certain pre-SDG implementation indicators for measuring progress exist, specific indicators to measure the efforts made by LRGs must still be developed.

2.3

BOX 2.3.3

ECUADOR'S VSR

Year after year, the **Consortium of Autonomous Provincial Governments of Ecuador** (CONGOPE) highlights regional governments' contribution to localizing the SDGs in their territories. As national and local strategies for SDG localization have evolved, so has each VSR's purpose:

● The 2020 VSR aimed at integrating the SDGs into territorial planning and fostering capacity building and strategic partnerships.

● The 2021 VSR focused on overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic's challenges, while improving intergovernmental coordination and strengthening local information systems.

● The 2022 VSR emphasized resilience strategies, green infrastructure and social inclusion.

● The 2023 VSR centred on coordination with civil society and offered a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the steps taken towards achieving the SDGs.

● The 2024 VSR, the fifth produced by CONGOPE, offers a comprehensive impact assessment and lists the strategic adjustments needed based on lessons learned over the five years.

In Ecuador, the National Planning Secretariat establishes that territorial development plans (*planes de desarrollo y ordenamiento territorial*) must be aligned with the SDGs. Accordingly, the national statistics institute prioritized tracking progress on the SDGs to incorporate them into territorial planning and address pending challenges. In the country's provinces and regions, political authorities and technical experts have demonstrated great commitment in defining SDG-aligned investment programmes and projects under their territorial development plans.

To support these efforts, CONGOPE holds an information workshop every year for its members on the importance of measuring progress on SDG localization. One of the objectives is to motivate provinces, both politically and technically, to prepare VLRs. In 2024, for example, **Imbabura** and **Pichincha** have developed their first VLRs, which guide their provinces' strategies for localizing the 2030 Agenda, and **Manabí** has developed its second VLR. The dissemination of an annual online survey to collect data and good practices that are critical to monitor progress in localizing the SDGs has proved to be a useful tool in this effort, both for CONGOPE and for provinces and unions. CONGOPE uses the information provided by each province to produce its VSR.

Ecuador, through its National Planning Secretariat and with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has presented three VNRs to the UN. CONGOPE has highlighted the need to make visible the work carried out by provincial, cantonal and parish governments. In this year's VNR, the national government allowed CONGOPE to include two pages on its VSR-related work.

However, historically, effective coordination and joint work have presented challenges. In Ecuador, as in other countries, the main challenge is for the national government to understand that real coordination with LRGs, the private sector, the public sector and citizens is required to make important progress on the SDGs. To enhance localization efforts, international cooperation can seek mechanisms to channel more resources to LRGs.

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BOX 2.3.4

MAURITANIA'S VSR

The **Mauritanian Association of Regions** (AMR) embarked on the VSR process to demonstrate its unwavering commitment to the 2030 Agenda, encourage its members to take ownership of the SDGs, effectively advocate for resource mobilization in benefit of the regions and obtain greater support from the national government. Another equally important objective was to contribute to strengthening the leadership of Mauritania's regions on the national scene and their international influence.

The AMR sent a survey to regional leaders, which was particularly helpful in supporting awareness-raising and data collection processes. The survey covered all aspects of SDG implementation, and top LRG officials provided comprehensive and relevant responses.

The initiative to produce a VSR report was well received by the national authorities in charge of producing the VNR, who indicated their willingness to integrate the VSR into the national report and to exchange views throughout the process. The VSR, the first of its kind in Mauritania, contributes to SDG localization and commits the State to greater consideration of LRGs' role in the 2030 Agenda.

Overall, SDG localization remains weak in Mauritania, and LRGs have limited financial, material and human resources. Until now, only the central government has been expected to implement SDG strategies and action plans, without conferring even rudimentary roles to LRGs. With the VSR, the situation seems to be changing this year, and awareness of local contributions is growing gradually.

The major challenges in localizing the SDGs in Mauritania are the need for better access to information and greater awareness in the regions, greater financial and technical support from the central government and an increase in resources commensurate with LRGs' legally granted responsibilities.

The VSR provides two main recommendations to improve SDG localization:

- Create a thematic SDG commission within the AMR to streamline SDG work within the LGA and with its members.

- Strongly advocate for resources equivalent to up to 25% of State expenditure to be transferred to LRGs, as provided for in the National Decentralization Strategy.

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BOX 2.3.5

NEPAL'S VSR

The **Municipal Association of Nepal's** (MuAN's) 2024 VSR aims to share experiences, provide an update on SDG implementation status, identify challenges and make recommendations to accelerate progress. MuAN also seeks to inform the VNR scheduled for 2024 by the government of Nepal and assist in integrating the SDGs into provincial and local development plans, aligning them with local priorities and contextualizing targets and indicators. Finally, MuAN seeks to raise awareness among LRGs for SDG-related data management, analysis and reporting.

Provincial SDG consultation workshops with LRGs were the most helpful methodological aspect of the VSR process, as they provided a first-ever interactive setting for LRGs to share their experiences and challenges and discuss SDG localization and implementation. The workshops also heightened LRGs' awareness and understanding of the importance of SDG-related data management and reporting, as well as LRGs' integration of the SDGs into their planning, programming and budgeting processes.

Nepal has an enabling institutional environment, especially since the 14th Periodic Plan integrated the SDGs into national development priorities. A comprehensive SDG roadmap (2016–2030), needs assessments, financing strategies, SDG coding resource book and localization guidelines have been established, supported by robust institutional frameworks and with the National Planning Commission as the lead monitoring agency. The VSR has been instrumental in further improving a conducive institutional environment by enhancing awareness, sharing experiences and information on implementation status and making recommendations, thereby catalyzing SDG localization and implementation at subnational levels.

Accelerating SDG localization in Nepal requires facing several multifaceted challenges, including a lack of awareness of the SDGs and their localization, limited financial resources and insufficient staff capacity. For SDG 6 especially, the country must address waste management complexities, issues regarding safe drinking water, faecal sludge management hurdles, unplanned urbanization and climate change threats.

The VSR's recommendations for SDG localization, which can be extrapolated to the whole country, draw upon two provincial consultations with LRGs and key informant interviews with provincial government agencies. They include the following:

- Promote nationwide capacity building programmes on the SDGs and their localization.

- Improve waste management planning and enhance water quality monitoring.

- Develop inclusive water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives and targeted programmes.

- Ensure adequate resource allocation at all government levels.

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BOX 2.3.6

SOUTH AFRICA'S VSR

The **South African Local Government Association** (SALGA) aims to accelerate SDG localization by producing a VSR and supporting LRGs to produce VLRs. To date, the published reviews have demonstrated political commitment, encouraging leaders to prioritize SDG implementation and creating a more conducive institutional environment for SDG localization in South Africa.

The 2024 VSR calls for enhancing municipalities' capacity to plan, implement and monitor SDG progress. It identifies areas for improvement, with a plan to take steps in the coming months to act on them. The VSR has also been a starting point for new collaborative efforts and joint decision-making among government levels. It has served as a platform for municipalities to share their successes, challenges and best practices and to strengthen partnerships by facilitating the participation of marginalized groups and stakeholders. All of this has contributed to enhancing LRGs' accountability and transparency in SDG implementation.

The methodology used to prepare the VSR has helped steer SALGA's work in this direction. Among other actions, in the last six months, the association has conducted internal and municipal surveys and workshops for selected municipalities. It has engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including 13 LRGs, civil society organizations (e.g. African Monitor), the national statistics institute, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, UNDP, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and GIZ. SALGA has also conducted six workshops in four provinces to help build capacity to collect and analyze data, encouraged peer review and feedback among municipalities, and provided technical support and guidance to municipalities.

The VSR has contributed to monitoring progress on the SDGs in the country's different provinces. **Eastern Cape**, **Gauteng**, **KwaZulu-Natal** and **Western Cape** have made the most progress, while **Limpopo** and **North West** have made moderate progress. Due to their limited progress, **Free State**, **Mpumalanga** and **Northern Cape** require increased support. Municipalities such as **Cape Town** and **eThekwini** have implemented noteworthy water conservation and sanitation projects (SDG 6), while **Gauteng**'s Read to Lead programme aims to improve literacy rates (SDG 4). Cities such as **Johannesburg**, **Tshwane**, **Cape Town** and **eThekwini** are implementing urban renewal and sustainable development projects (SDG 11).

The VSR process has identified several challenges to SDG localization, including the need for comprehensive data collection, analysis and validation, as well as for reliable data from various sources. Further challenges include buy-in and commitment from multiple stakeholders, LRGs, civil society and private sector entities to implement recommended actions; limited human, financial and technical resources; inadequate institutional capacity and support; limited private sector investment; and climate change impacts on LRG resources and infrastructure.

In light of these challenges, SALGA has issued several recommendations for future steps at all levels:

● Assess local governance structures, service delivery effectiveness, financial management, community engagement and sustainability practices.

● Strengthen the work with Statistics South Africa, as part of interinstitutional and cross-level mechanisms, for different levels of government to exchange data, practices and techniques on SDG implementation.

● Share municipalities' on-the-ground SDG implementation experiences.

● Award municipalities that are progressing and reporting on the SDGs.

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BOX 2.3.7

THE NORDIC VSR

The 2024 Nordic VSR is the first cross-national report of its kind in the world. It was jointly developed by the Nordic LGAs and Nordregio, a Nordic research institution, with funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers. The report aims to highlight Nordic municipalities' SDG localization efforts, progress and obstacles in their work on the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, by sharing what Nordic LRGs have learned on their way to create more inclusive and sustainable communities, it seeks to inspire more local-level SDG action worldwide and possibly foster new collaborations across borders.

This VSR is based on a survey sent to municipalities in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden in 2023. The survey data were complemented by interviews with representatives from the Nordic LGAs regarding the strengths and weaknesses of national support to the local level, as well as LGAs' role in building competence and promoting municipal cooperation. The VSR also includes independent messages from the Nordic Youth Network for Sustainable Development and the Nordic Civil Society Network. Finally, the VSR's authoring institutions compiled inspiring examples of local initiatives related to the 2030 Agenda via a digital toolbox. Some of these examples are featured in the report.

Strong local self-governance in the Nordic countries provides an effective basis for supporting local-level implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Although none of the countries have specific State funding allocated to municipalities or LGAs for implementing the

SDGs, national support generally involves including LGAs and municipalities in various national forums along with coordination and consultation processes. The Nordic VSR however, indicates signs of SDG fatigue. Despite these countries' longstanding commitment to sustainable development, recent years have seen a noticeable decline in the visibility of the 2030 Agenda in national-level policies in some of the region's countries.

The Nordic countries regularly come out on top in global SDG rankings. Nonetheless, they also face challenges with different dimensions of sustainability, with particular lags in SDG 12 and SDG 13 implementation. In the VSR, local authorities identify the following key obstacles:

- Lack of capacity to work on the 2030 Agenda

- Lack of support at the national level

- Lack of political prioritization

- Lack of methods and tools

The Nordic VSR ends with a list of recommendations based on lessons learned. In particular, national-level actors should acknowledge the country's commitment to the SDGs, support local-level action to achieve sustainability goals and provide funding for effective national programmes that support local-level SDG implementation. Complementing these efforts, LRGs should develop their own local sustainability goals, foster cross-party consensus for sustained commitment to the local goals and anchor the SDGs in their municipalities' administrative management.

2.3

2.3.2 Summary of LRGs' actions

In addition to the LGAs producing a VSR this year, other LGAs and LRGs from reporting and non-reporting countries worldwide remain steadfast in their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. Drawing upon the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey results and additional resources, this subsection presents a region-specific examination of their main endeavours. While certain trends can be identified, notable disparities exist across regions and countries. Analysis of the 196 survey responses shared by LRGs and LGAs reveals that:

● **Over 80% of respondents state that their institutions have made moderate to strong progress** in strengthening their knowledge around the 2030 Agenda. Of these, over half affirm they use the SDGs as an important reference point in their local strategies.

● **87% of respondents have made important progress on designing an SDG-aligned strategy or action plan.** Half of them have also worked thoroughly to implement and monitor these instruments or have even made updates to expand their objectives.

● **Over 60% of respondents have raised awareness** about the SDGs among the population and local stakeholders through communications, conferences, events, joint statements, festivals, awards, SDG champions or trainings, and also **60% have implemented concrete programmes and projects** aligned with the SDGs.

Figure 2.3.2 Most popular actions by responding LRGs/LGAs (out of 196 responses)

GTF/UCLG 2024 SURVEY RESPONSES
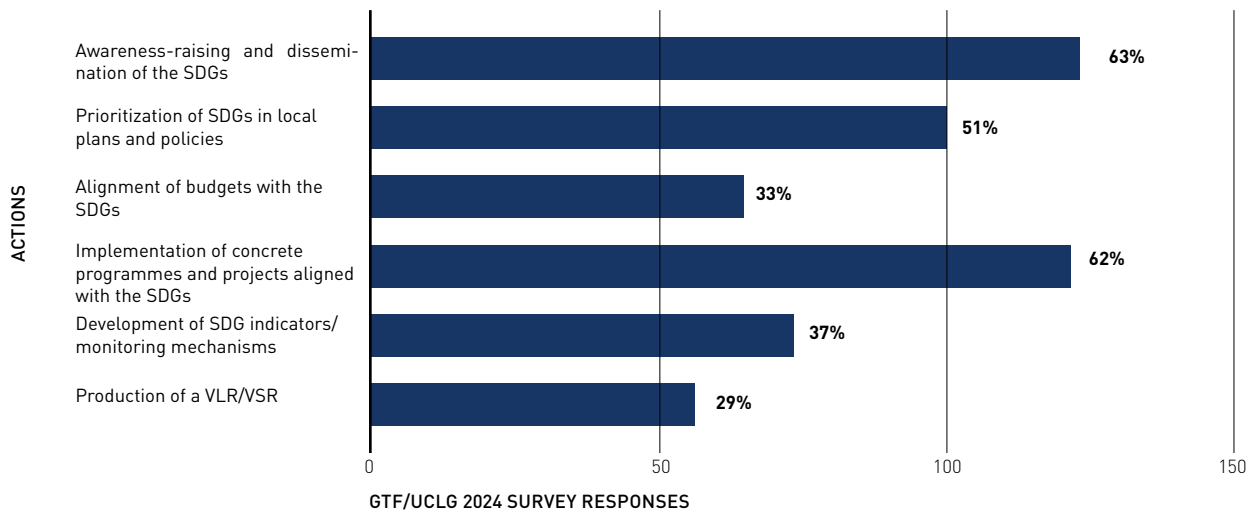
Although knowledge of the 2030 Agenda is increasing across all world regions, many LRGs still find it challenging to localize the SDGs within the constraints of their institutional environments. Respondents primarily emphasize the need for national government support and guidance, which is not always available or constant. The lack of sound multilevel governance schemes and mechanisms to track progress poses a significant challenge, making it difficult for LRGs to undertake specific actions due to the general lack of human, technical and financial resources. Data availability is a major concern at both local and national levels. Despite positive steps, LRGs face difficulties in tackling the 2030 Agenda as an integrated, holistic set of goals and targets, hampering local-level and long-term progress.

To a much lesser extent, survey responses also highlight some resistance at different government levels or difficulties working with the 2030 Agenda. For example, governments may prioritize other global frameworks as entry points to their commitment and work, such as the human rights framework, or they may prioritize efforts to tackle particularly complex emergencies regarding the climate, water or housing. There is still a need to raise awareness among different stakeholders and population groups, and survey respondents perceive digitalization as a lever to reach out to a broader target audience.

As pointed out by many respondents, **localizing the 2030 Agenda offers many opportunities**:

● Placing the SDGs high on LRGs' and LGAs' agendas, with buy-in from political leadership, has been critical for sustained action.

● Partnerships and decentralized cooperation are essential to enrich and share experiences to achieve the 2030 Agenda as well as foster transparency and trust among stakeholders.

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● Creating links between the 2030 Agenda and existing policy processes facilitates raising awareness around how the SDGs serve as a guiding framework, not a burden, with added value regarding structure and content.

● Ongoing innovation, learning and adaptation are necessary to address constantly evolving challenges and achieve greater progress towards the SDGs.

BOX 2.3.8

LOCALIZED SDG PRACTICES

The following subsections summarize the practices highlighted by respondents to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey and other sources. We invite you to review the complete and comprehensive list of the practices shared by LRGs and LGAs here.

Africa

In Africa, decentralization levels vary widely. Despite facing some of the highest rates of urbanization globally, African cities still lack uniform decentralization. As a result, they often do not have sufficient authority to foster sustainable and integrated strategies to tackle key challenges such as poverty and informality.

According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa's 2024 sustainable development report, achieving the SDGs and effectively executing the second 10-year implementation plan of Agenda 2063 requires investment in initiatives that empower impoverished communities. Such initiatives include generating quality employment; improving access to health care, education, water and sanitation; and providing resilient social protection systems. These investments should prioritize climate resilience, incorporate conflict sensitivity and be supported by good governance, robust macroeconomic principles and the use of suitable technology to bolster productivity and ensure long-term sustainability.

Over half of the 2024 reporting countries in Africa are among the 30 most fragile states in the world according to the 2023 Fragile State Index: South Sudan places 3rd; Chad, 9th; Guinea, 14th; Zimbabwe, 16th; Libya, 17th; Eritrea, 19th; Uganda, 26th; and Republic of the Congo, 28th. Their high levels of fragility hinder efforts to achieve the SDGs, particularly at the local level. Nevertheless, LRGs and LRGs have made numerous efforts for SDG localization.

In Mauritania, in addition to the **AMR**'s first VSR, the capital city of **Nouakchott** and the region of Hodh Ech Chargui have produced their first VLRs.

In Kenya, 23 LRGs are producing their first VLRs in collaboration with civil society actors. **Mombasa** has worked with its youth population and UN-Habitat to implement the City Scan Data Tool, a statistical and spatial data collection project linked to the Global Urban Monitoring Framework. The tool aims to highlight socio-economic developments, territorial inequalities and access to facilities, and the information collected is then used to inform development priorities, identify challenges and propose interventions for achieving the SDGs. **Nakuru**'s VLR has evolved into a VLR dashboard, which enables local staff on a VLR task force to continuously update and monitor the report. In a second phase, the city plans to allow citizens to comment on SDG progress, validate data and provide the government with feedback on areas for improvement; this initiative has been dubbed "real-time public participation."

The **Council of Governors** (CoG) in Kenya, together with the national-level Inter-Agency Technical Working Committee on the SDGs, has been organizing annual SDG awards to recognize various public and private institutions that have undertaken exemplary SDG implementation initiatives. The awards are given during an annual national forum to facilitate policy dialogue and commitment among various stakeholders. At the People Dialogue Festival – a multistakeholder platform for fostering active civic engagement, a culture of dialogue and critical thinking on a range of governance, social and economic issues – the "SDG Village" initiative aims to accelerate SDG implementation. The CoG has been coordinating the participation of county governments in the festival and showcasing their actions. The CoG has also documented best practice by counties in SDG implementation through its Maarifa Centre platform and coordinated peer learning between counties. Appointing and training county SDG champions in all 47 counties helped link such efforts to national processes.

In South Africa, municipalities are aligning their integrated development plans with the SDGs by using a standardized set of targets and indicators. In addition to producing a VSR, **SALGA** partnered with the national government, UNDP, civil society organizations and other actors to help produce at least 9 VLRs in the country and mainstream the SDGs into local plans and budgets. It is also collaborating with Statistics South Africa to improve data collection and analysis to track SDG progress, engaging with a number of public and private stakeholders and leveraging technology to address SDG challenges, such as digital solutions for infrastructure and waste management. As part of Brookings' SDG Leadership Cities Network, **Durban** adopted a multisectoral and multistakeholder approach to building a functional, inclusive and collaborative data ecosystem. This ecosystem has allowed the city to develop a clear

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roadmap towards producing its first VLR. **Buffalo** started its SDG-related work in July 2023. The city set up core and steering committees; started communication, training, awareness-raising and advocacy programmes at different levels; collected and analyzed timely, accurate and disaggregated data on SDG implementation; and launched a participatory VLR process. Translating the SDGs-related campaigns into isiXhosa supported predominantly Indigenous-language speakers to identify with the SDGs.

Some interesting practices can also be identified in African countries not reporting to the HLPF this year. In **Antsirabe** (Madagascar), municipal technical staff members have participated in several national and international conferences and workshops to become acquainted with the SDGs. As a result, the municipality has aligned its projects with the 2030 Agenda. In Morocco, with the support of UN-Habitat, **Agadir**'s first VLR (the first to be produced in North Africa) assesses progress on SDGs 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 17. It reflects on the ambitious objectives set for 2022–2027: to transform Agadir into a smart, resilient and sustainable city and improve its citizens' quality of life. The city's strategic plan (2017–2022) also served as a foundation for municipal data collection during the VLR process. This effort reflected a commitment to unified and coordinated urban development strategies, in addition to building on other strategic frameworks such as the 2020–2024 Urban Development Programme and the 2016–2023 Urban Mobility Plan.

In Tanzania, the decentralized cooperation project on SDG localization between **Mwanza** and Tampere (Finland) continues to grow after Mwanza's publication of its first VLR last year. This bold initiative under the Finland-UN-Habitat Strategic Partnership for the SDGs has steered the path towards broader SDG localization in Tanzania. In Tunisia, **Ennour** has produced its first VLR to streamline urban development and provide the national government with local spatial analysis, data and information. This effort was supported by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), as well as UN-Habitat's Regional Office for Arab States and the Tunisia country office. The VLR examines SDG 11 in detail, in addition to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13 and 15. Emphasizing the principle of leaving no one behind, it focuses on marginalized communities: older people, youth, people with disabilities, migrants and women.

BOX 2.3.9

LUSAKA'S INTEGRAL APPROACH TO THE SDGs

In Zambia, **Lusaka** has organized several community workshops, conferences and SDG-themed events, collaborating with local influencers as SDG champions and disseminating information materials to raise awareness on SDGs among the local population. The city has also integrated the SDGs into local development plans and policies, which has included holding consultations to identify key SDGs relevant to the community and establishing partnerships with local businesses.

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Asia-Pacific

In its 2024 report, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) suggests that the region will not achieve all 17 SDGs until 2062. Indeed, it is on track to achieve only one-third of the required progress by 2030. Asia-Pacific is still facing the harsh consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, ongoing internal and external crises and conflicts have contributed to stagnation, inflation, food and commodity price volatility and a constrained financial environment. While progress on all SDGs has been slow, SDG 13 has regressed to pre-2015 levels. By types of territories, small island developing States stand out as the most in need of support. Efforts need to be redoubled to address the inequalities faced by marginalized groups, including women, girls, rural populations and the urban poor, who remain excluded from educational and employment opportunities. As the region endeavours to narrow these disparities, the ESCAP report recommends enhancing access to digital resources, reinforcing employment data accuracy and emphasizing the use of disaggregated data for tracking progress on the 2030 Agenda.

In Nepal, **Koshi Province** is working with the Institute of Local Governance Studies to produce SDG-aligned standard operating procedures for local governments. This effort complements the second VSR prepared by **MuAN**. Furthermore, the **National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal** (NARMIN) has been actively engaged in SDG-related events at the Nepal People's Forum on Sustainable Development. Data on LRGs' actions in Lao People's Democratic Republic, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are not available.

LRGs from countries such as India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka continue to take the lead in SDG localization. In India, the government of **Madhya Pradesh** has established an interdepartmental SDG cell, embedded in the state's planning commission for reviewing and monitoring the state's SDG progress. District-level SDG cells also review and monitor progress on local SDG implementation. The state capital, **Bhopal**, published its first VLR in 2023 to "establish vertical convergence of national, sub-national and local efforts towards SDG implementation and initiate a dialogue between inter-governmental agencies" as well as with local stakeholders. In Indonesia, **Semarang** adopted a regional action plan aligned with the SDGs, which includes a set of targets and indicators to monitor progress. **Nusantara**, Indonesia's new capital city, will launch its first VLR at the 2024 HLPF.

Japan's capital city, **Tokyo**, published its second VLR in 2023, aligned with *Future Tokyo: Tokyo's Long-Term Strategy*. The Tokyo SDGs Portal offers information about the SDGs and showcases initiatives by the Tokyo metropolitan government and municipalities to build momentum and change the behaviour of Tokyo residents. In Malaysia, **Sepang**'s first VLR tracks progress on SDGs 1, 8, 9, 11 and 12 to identify the city's progress towards being a clean, green, smart and sustainable city characterized by advancement, prosperity and wellbeing.

In the Philippines, **Makati** is developing a localized SDG module for the city and aligning its annual investment projects with the different SDG targets to monitor progress. Over 30 VLRs have been produced on Taiwanese islands: in 2023, these included **Taipei**'s third VLR; **Changhua County**'s, **Lienchiang County**'s, **Taichung City**'s and **Tainan City**'s second VLRs; and **Hsinchu City**'s first VLR. As a continuation of its 2022 VSR, the **Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities** (FSLGA), in partnership with the provincial commissioner of local governments, started an awareness programme to train officers on all local councils to effectively prepare SDG-aligned budgets.

UCLG Asia-Pacific has continued to organize, together with ESCAP, UN-Habitat and other institutions, the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy. This academy invites newly elected or appointed city mayors and governors in the region to participate in an annual fellowship and build their capacities to develop and implement sustainable urban solutions in their communities, in support of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.

Eurasia

The Eurasia region has faced significant challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, an energy crisis and escalating inflation. As highlighted in previous reports by the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), progress towards the SDGs was already sluggish within the region prior to these crises. Multidimensional poverty remains prevalent, with over half of the countries with available data in the UNECE region reporting levels exceeding 20%, and another half presenting moderate or severe food insecurity in adults. In Azerbaijan, for example, women's wages in 2021 were, on average, only 64.8% of men's wages. In Armenia, child-specific material deprivation among rural children was 50% higher than among their urban counterparts in 2017.

Although LRGs in Armenia and Azerbaijan, countries reporting to the 2024 HLPF, are advancing slowly in their SDG localization quests, their peers in countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Russia have noteworthy experiences to share. In Kyrgyzstan, the city of **Osh** recently approved its new city development programme, which integrates SDG indicators. In 2023,

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UCLG Eurasia organized learning seminars on localizing the SDGs for staffers of the cities of **Dushanbe** and **Khujand** (Tajikistan); the city of **Kyzyl**, the city of **Ulan-Ude** and the municipalities of the **Republic of Tyva** (Russia); and the Citizens' Representative Khural of **Ulaanbaatar** (Mongolia).

In Russia, the government of the **Voronezh** region, together with Sberbank, organized the "Chernozemye" Territorial Sustainable Development Summit in November 2023. The summit focused on developing a sustainable development model for the Central Black Earth macroregion, as well as sharing experiences and best practices for businesses and territories. The main topics discussed included territorial development, sustainable tourism and responsible business, in addition to tools for developing a comfortable urban environment and the concept of a cyclical city. In June 2023, the government of the **Rostov** region signed a cooperation agreement with the national rating agency to ensure its contribution to sustainable development and facilitate regional companies' compliance with the SDGs and environmental, social and governance criteria. In the first "Eurasia Cities and Global Trends" retreat, organized by **UCLG Eurasia** jointly with the municipality of **Kazan**, training sessions included "The SDGs and Local Governments: VLRs" and "International Climate Agendas: The Development of Local Climate Plans."

Europe

SDG progress in Europe has stalled since 2020, according to the recent *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2023/24* by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. In particular, little progress has been made on social targets related to access to and quality of services for all, as well as poverty and material deprivation. The European Union will not achieve a third of the SDG targets by 2030, although large territorial disparities exist. The June 2024 election results present an opportunity for European Union institutions and European countries, territories and cities to strategically commit to and act upon the SDGs for the coming decades, beyond 2030. Important efforts include strengthening local governance, doubling down efforts to agree upon a new social contract, achieving net-zero emissions and minimizing international spillovers.

Despite this situation, Europe has long been at the forefront of SDG localization efforts, with strong and widespread commitment in most countries in the region. Indeed, the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey results indicate that 85% of respondents have a medium to high level of knowledge of the 2030 Agenda, while 73% have adopted or even updated a specific SDG strategy or action plan.

In Austria, the **Austrian Association of Cities and Towns** (AACT) has been active in raising awareness through brochures, tools and events. This LGA has implemented concrete programmes and projects aligned with the SDGs, such as the SDG Labs and networking and knowledge exchange activities organized around the Kommunale Nachhaltigkeit platform. In Georgia, the **National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia** (NALAG) has delivered SDG training to municipalities, with GIZ providing more specific support to 17 of them. **Tbilisi** is producing its first VLR with support from UN-Habitat.

Spain has made a great effort to monitor SDG achievement. The **Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces** (FEMP) has published the *Guidelines on Indicators for Monitoring the 2030 Agenda at the Local Level* to help LRGs build and manage an indicator system. The guidelines include proposed minimum and supplementary indicators and guidance on producing a VLR. This work complements FEMP's longstanding efforts to strengthen its members' institutional capacities around the SDGs, particularly through the Network of Local Entities for the 2030 Agenda. In parallel to its training sessions and materials, the **Andalusian Fund of Municipalities for International Solidarity** (FAMSI) has produced a set of indicator guidelines for municipalities in Andalusia and elsewhere. In the **Basque Country**, the region, provinces and municipalities have produced an indicator system that includes over 300 in-

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dicators and offers data at the different government levels (including 70 municipal-level indicators). This system has helped the government to produce its seventh VLR and lay the foundation for the renewed "Now 2030" commitment to the SDGs.

The government of **Catalonia** has two indicator sets: one aligned to the European Union indicators and one aligned to the UN indicators for the region. They are in line with Catalonia's action plan and work to integrate the SDGs into various strategies, sectoral plans, budgets and regulations. These indicator sets have also been critical for the LRG to produce its first VLR. **Sant Boi de Llobregat** uses the IDDIGO indicator set, which identifies progress on SDG localization in all provincial capitals, autonomous cities and other cities in Spain. The **Barcelona Provincial Council**'s Visor 2030 system supports the territory's municipalities to monitor progress around the 2030 Agenda, and its guidelines for VLRs help municipalities conduct VLRs. In addition to these monitoring efforts, since 2020, the council has continuously expanded opportunities for training on SDG localization: among others, it has offered 54 learning courses that reached 954 staff members from 105 municipalities of the province. Furthermore, five editions of the online course produced with UCLG have reached hundreds of people from all world regions.

As part of its Urban Agenda, **Terrassa** has been working with civil society organizations to promote their role in SDG achievement. Similarly, **Manresa** created the Manresa Citizen Alliance for Sustainability to support designing, implementing and monitoring the Manresa 2030 Urban Agenda. The city has also focused on its SDG communication strategy inside and outside of the council and on enhancing municipal staff's acquaintance with the SDGs, their governance and need for cross-sectoral action. In line with its "Sustainable Bilbao: 2030 Agenda and SDGs" action plan, adopted in 2023, **Bilbao** has aligned its general and strategic plans to the SDGs. Through its "Committed to the 2030 Agenda" campaign, the solidarity and cooperation fund **Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació** has launched the BiblioFons initiative to facilitate access to literature on cooperation, solidarity and SDGs to children, youth and adults.

Beyond the activities in the reporting countries above, Europe has been leading SDG localization efforts around the world. In Belgium, the three LGAs representing cities (the **Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities**, or VVSG; the **Union of Cities and Municipalities of Wallonia**, or UVCW; and Brulocalis) co-organized the "Sustainable City Challenges" workshop to share challenges, best practices and ways forward to achieve the 2030 Agenda at the local level. In Flanders, **VVSG** celebrated the sixth edition of the Sustainable Municipality Week and has published a publication to inspire other LGAs. It has also produced a new memorandum for the regional/federal and European elections in June 2024, which reinforces the SDGs as a guiding framework for the election and post-election period. Its SDG Index is a comprehensive list of local SDG indicators. It has been updated and now forms the basis for the new version of the SDG Monitor for cities and municipalities. With a dataset of more than 200 indicators, the monitor provides valuable information for Flemish cities and municipalities, which are currently working hard on producing their local context analyses (for which VVSG has produced an inspiration guide) and policy proposals in the 2024 election year. Indeed, many efforts have been made to monitor SDG achievement: two other examples are the SDG dashboard by **Harelbeke**, **Zwevegem**, **Kuurne** and **Deerlijk**, and the Provinces in Numbers SDG dashboard. The VSR produced in 2023 by the **Association of Flemish Provinces** (VVP) and VVSG has supported the provinces to launch SDG-aligned monitoring processes. In 2023, **Ghent** produced its fourth consecutive VLR since 2020. **Lommel** and **Sint-Niklaas** have focused their efforts on raising awareness of the SDGs: the latter organized and funded communications, events, festivals, awards, SDG champions and training for citizens and local stakeholders.

The **Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic** (SMOCR) has continued to foster sustainable development among its strategic priorities and supports municipalities' capacities through conferences and trainings. In Finland, the **Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities** (AFLRA) coordinates the network project Strategic Management of SDGs in Cities, which involves six of Finland's largest cities: **Helsinki**, **Espoo**, **Tampere**, **Vantaa**, **Oulu** and **Turku**. The project supports the cities to localize the SDGs and bring about a change in the thinking and operating culture required for achieving a sustainable transformation, with a focus on the next council term. In 2016, **Åland** aligned its "Everyone Can Flourish" sustainable development strategy to the SDGs thanks to the support of the Bärkraft.ax network and the Development and Sustainability Council. It will measure progress through the Human Flourishing Index, analyzed in the region's first VLR, which provides a comprehensive update on its progress.

In France, the **French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions** (AFCCRE) and **Cités Unies France** (CUF) continue to integrate the SDGs in their decentralized cooperation and education for development projects. In Germany, VLRs are booming, with new reports available from large cities such as **Hamburg**, middle-sized cities such as

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Freiburg and Rottenburg am Neckar, small towns such as Bad Köstritz and intermediary levels of government such as the Fürstenfeldbruck district. In the latter case, the district updated its mission statement in 2022 to align its policies and administration with the SDGs. It also joined the Club of the 2030 Agenda Municipalities to reinforce its commitment to sustainable development, and its first VLR focuses on involving civil society to address local sustainability challenges.

Likewise, the SDG Portal has been updated with support from three German LGAs: **Association of German Cities** (DLT), **German Association of Towns and Municipalities** (DStGb) and **German County Association** (DST). The portal offers additional features to support SDG implementation and monitoring, such as a good practice repository, recommended courses of action in tackling individual challenges and reporting functionalities. It was replicated in Italy, where indicators are currently available at the regional, provincial and metropolitan levels. The Venice chapter of the **Italian Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions** (AICCRE) is contributing to this effort. The LGA continues to raise awareness among the population, for example, through the two-month exhibition Venice City Care Pavilion, organized in 2023 together with UNDP and the Italian government. It consisted of a video showing what the SDGs represent in cities' daily life, starting with the city of Venice and connecting with experiences worldwide.

BOX 2.3.10

ANNUAL REPORT ON SDG LOCALIZATION IN EUROPE BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES AND REGIONS (CEMR) AND PLATFORMA

In Europe, as in other territories, LRGs are best placed to take on today's large-scale challenges and their impacts on cities and territories, including climate, biodiversity and health crises as well as wars. They are strategically positioned to lead the necessary sustainable and multidimensional transitions. Yet, implementing these changes requires broader and more effective coordination, stronger commitments, sufficient resources at both national and European levels and regular dialogue in the spirit of collaboration.

CEMR and Platforma will convene at the 2024 HLPF to present their annual progress report on SDG localization, *European Territories Localise the SDGs: The Time for Impact is Running Out!*. These organizations also aim to influence the Summit of the Future's discussions and outcomes. Besides highlighting the crucial role of decentralized cooperation and multistakeholder partnerships, this year's report emphasizes the need and tools for more urgent action on SDG implementation at all levels of governance – especially considering only 15% of the SDGs are on track. As the world takes an in-depth look at SDG 17, CEMR and Platforma aim for this year's HLPF to strengthen acknowledgement of LRGs' comprehensive work to cope with the impacts of global crises and policies, as well as of further support LRGs may offer.

The **Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments** (LALRG) and the town of **Balvi** organized a learning session around the SDGs for managers, teachers and students at the Rekava secondary school as part of the European Days of Local Solidarity, with support from Platforma. The **Syndicate of Luxembourg Towns and Municipalities** (SYVICOL) offered training around SDG localization for the political leaders elected after the June 2023 municipal elections. The Maltese **Local Councils' Association** (LCA) has taken the SDG framework to improve its citizens' quality of life through three pillars: sustainable mobility, urban greenery and open urban spaces.

In the Netherlands, the **Association of Dutch Municipalities** (VNG) supports its municipalities to implement the SDGs in their work by compiling best practices, organizing annual meetings and knowledge exchange, publishing SDG-related guidelines, advocating to the Dutch government, supporting SDG alignment in policies and projects and develop-

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ing the Where Does Your Municipality Stand? portal. This portal allows municipalities to review their progress on each SDG and compare it to the national average. **Utrecht** has its own monitoring system and dashboard, which compiles existing SDG-related indicators and tracks progress. The **Association of Provinces of the Netherlands** (IPO) fostered knowledge exchange on the SDGs with SDG Netherlands.

The **Network of Associations of Local Authorities, South-East Europe** (NALAS) has advanced social inclusion and socio-cultural participation in the region. In particular, it has promoted the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, some countries in the region still do not consider the SDGs to be national priorities. This is the case in Moldova: according to the **Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova**, the SDGs continue to be seen as a burden, particularly in the country's critical economic situation. In addition to its VSR and joint Nordic VSR, the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS) has continued raising awareness on SDG localization through its Sustainability Fridays (open webinars to discuss bottom-up SDG implementation), e-learning tools, integration of the SDGs in its strategic planning, fostering of solutions with businesses and employee organizations, national and international advocacy efforts and enhanced monitoring efforts with Statistics Norway. The **Association of Polish Cities** (ZMP) has created the Local Development Monitor and the Monitoring System of Local Public Services Quality; many of their indicators support ZMP to track SDG implementation.

In Portugal, the **National Association of Portuguese Municipalities** (ANMP) set up a working group on the SDGs that continues to grow (with over 80 members currently). The group contributes to dialogue and sharing experiences and solutions around the 2030 Agenda, and it now has subgroups of municipalities focused on training, communication, funding, VLRs and SDG Labs. The CESOP Local Sustainable Territories Network and the ODSlocal network continue to support municipalities in their SDG monitoring efforts. The network includes cities and towns such as **Lagoa**, **Loulé** (which is preparing its first VLR), **Loures**, **Matosinhos** (which published a 2023 VLR), **Pombal**, **Seixal**, **Setúbal**, **Torres Vedras** (which published a 2024 VLR), **Valongo**, **Viana do Castelo** and **Vila Franca de Xira**. **Braga** has created a new indicator system, adapting elements from existing sets such as UN-Habitat's Global Urban Monitoring Framework and the European Commission's *Handbook for SDG Voluntary Local Reviews*. This system's success lies in its ability to capture not only progress towards the SDGs but also local resilience and equity. Its participatory approach throughout the whole process has enhanced its comprehensiveness, adequacy and legitimacy. Many of the municipalities

mentioned are fostering awareness-raising strategies with citizens (especially children and youth as a critical population group) and local stakeholders.

In Romania, the **Romanian Municipalities Association** (AMR) and the **Association of Communes of Romania** (ACoR) developed the country's 2023 VSR. This review demonstrated a need for further efforts in the country, as more than half of Romania's municipalities and communes are not fully acquainted with the SDG framework and only 20% have a strategic plan aligned to the SDGs.

In Serbia, the **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities** (SCTM) has worked hand in hand with the national government to foster local planning that includes the SDGs and to disseminate the nationally led SDG indicator dataset. In the case of SDG indicator 11.3.2 ("proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operates regularly and democratically"), the SCTM played a critical role in methodology development and data collection. Together with the national government and the city of **Niš**, it also organized the second National Urban Forum. SDG localization was the main topic, and one session was devoted to the connection between VNRs and VLRs. **Niš** achieved a significant milestone by establishing a dedicated monitoring unit within the city administration. With support from UN-Habitat, it has produced a VLR. This participatory effort was coupled by awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the local population. Based on this experience, 10 more Serbian cities will receive training on SDG localization by UN-Habitat, which is working with the national planning inspection department to mainstream SDGs within national and local planning in the whole country.

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BOX 2.3.11

TIERP'S FIRST VLR

Tierp, a rural municipality in Uppsala County (Sweden), has a special governance model in which the budget provides for all municipal operations to work towards the SDGs. Sustainability analyses are carried out prior to political decisions, and the SDGs form the basis for collaboration with civil society and other actors. The municipality's goal is to increase the pace of progress towards more sustainable development, not only locally but also globally.

In autumn 2023, the municipality received a request to conduct a VLR to share its model and increase commitment to the SDGs locally. The VLR's development involved a large number of actors, including managers, employees, civil society and the business community, who shared good practices, obstacles and new ideas. Tierp hopes to inspire others by showing that a small rural municipality can lead the way towards sustainability through innovative governance and by highlighting the power and commitment that exists around the municipality.

Geneva (Switzerland) is also preparing a VLR to be published at the end of 2024. In Ukraine, **Lviv**'s first VLR tracks its SDG localization strategy, which integrates global and national objectives into the city's strategic agenda. This effort entails emphasizing sustainable economic development, strengthening the local economy, promoting innovation and ensuring inclusive social policies that support all community members, especially marginalized and displaced people.

In the United Kingdom, the **Local Government Association of England and Wales** has continued its SDG-related work based on the motion passed in 2019 and drawing upon the 2020 guide for LRGs. **Kent**, **York** and **Leeds** have mapped their priorities against the SDGs; the **London** Sustainable Development Commission is monitoring progress; and **Newcastle upon Tyne**, **Bristol**, **Liverpool** and **Canterbury** have strengthened their strategic partnerships and grassroots engagement for the SDGs. In **Bradford**, a commitment to wellbeing and response to the climate emergency is sharpening the district's and council's focus on the SDGs. In **Scotland**, the Scottish government is working to translate the SDGs into public policy through a Wellbeing and Sustainable Development Bill.

Finally, in the Nordic countries, a 2023–2024 pilot project built upon the positive experience from **Strängnäs** (Sweden) in testing the SDG Impact Assessment Tool in existing processes and projects. The tool was extended to other municipalities: **Botkyrka**, **Kungälv** and **Tjörn** (Sweden) and **Korsholm** (Finland). They have also received guidance from the Northern Europe secretariat of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, as well as peer-to-peer learning with the other participating municipalities.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean projects that the region is on track to achieve only 22% of SDG targets by 2030. This slow progress stems from a confluence of adverse factors, such as sluggish economic growth and a significant prevalence of low-quality employment, resulting in a decline in societal wellbeing and material advancement, amongst other factors. Transitioning towards a model that prioritizes locally driven, inclusive and sustainable development is imperative. This effort entails revitalizing the role of the State and democratically allocating new responsibilities to development stakeholders – especially LRGs, which have demonstrated their leadership in SDG implementation.

Several practices by LRGs in countries reporting to this year's HLPF are worth mentioning. In Brazil, since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the **Brazilian Association of Municipalities** (ABM) has organized workshops, webinars and other in-person and online trainings for city staff regarding the 2030 Agenda or specific SDGs. A successful example was the EU-funded Partnership for Sustainable Development project, which involved local training and awareness-raising activities. One thousand local staff members participated in the training, which took place across every region of Brazil. **Niterói**'s Municipal Guide for Sustainable Development aims to engage and call to action municipal employees in monitoring the SDGs at the local level. The municipality's main policies and monitoring frameworks take the SDGs into account. **São Paulo**'s Virada SDGs awareness-raising campaign gathered 11,000 people in 2023 and many more online. **Francisco Morato** published its first VLR in 2023 as a next step in the municipality's quest to achieve the SDGs, which has included training and awareness-raising activities as well as the creation of a municipal committee and adoption of new laws, participatory pluriannual plans and other actions. In Colombia, the **Colombian Federation of Municipalities** (FCM) is supporting its LRG members to align their upcoming 2024–2027 strategic plans to the SDGs.

Ecuadorian provinces are very active when it comes to sustainable development. **Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas** has worked on different projects with com-

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munity representatives. **Azuay** has raised awareness and offered training to different stakeholders. T**ungurahua** has received SDG awards thanks to its community-based "Minga por el Planeta" project on environmental conservation. **Santa Elena**, **Carchi** and **Pastaza** have aligned their plans and projects to the SDGs. In a coordinated effort with CONGOPE and the National Planning Secretariat, Manabí, Imbabura and Pichincha have reviewed their progress through VLRs. Indeed, after its first VLR in 2023, **Manabí** province, a UCLG Local4Action Hub, has produced a second VLR that analyzes the province's SDG progress since 2019 as well as a methodology with which it aims to inspire other provinces and LRGs around the world - such as those of Imbabura and Pichincha, who have already used it. Centring its UNESCO Global Geopark recognition, **Imbabura province**'s VLR demonstrates that the territory's development plan primarily targets SDGs 16 (47%), 13 (28%), and 17 (23%). Projections indicate that over 80% of the SDGs will be achieved in the province by 2030. **Pichincha** province's VLR shows that 75% of the SDGs will be achieved through projects focused on mobility, local economic development (including the social and solidarity economy), health, irrigation, and the preservation of the Chocó Andino Biosphere Reserve. Regarding cantons, **Ambato**, **Colimes**, **Durán**, **Huamboya**, **Lago Agrio**, **Manta**, **Piñas**, **San Francisco de Milagro**, **San Miguel de Ibarra** and **San Vicente** have aligned their territorial development plans and other planning instruments and projects to the SDGs. **Mira** and **Santa Lucía** have emphasized their work with other Ecuadorian subnational governments, the national government and international organizations to localize the 2030 Agenda. In total, 47% of Ecuadorian provinces and municipalities responding to the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey have a medium to strong level of familiarity and knowledge of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, 70% have adopted or even updated an SDG strategy or action plan, a product of Ecuadorian legislation requiring territorial plans to be aligned to the SDGs.

In Costa Rica, **Goicoechea** is producing its second VLR in 2024. This work is coupled by awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for staff members and other stakeholders, as well as alignment of planning instruments to the SDGs. To develop its first VLR, **Intibucá** (Honduras) has organized awareness-raising and consultation sessions with more than 30 actors from civil society, the central government, international cooperation and private companies, who have joined forces for greater sustainability.

BOX 2.3.12

MEXICO CITY, TIZAYUCA AND PUEBLA STATE ADVANCE THE SDGs IN THEIR TERRITORIES

In Mexico, **Mexico City** has continued to align its plans and projects to the SDGs, including those in the cultural domain. **Tizayuca** has been working on the SDGs since 2020, when the municipality created a municipal SDG coordination team. Tizayuca implemented regulations for the 2030 Agenda in 2022 in line with the 2020–2024 Municipal Development Plan, raised awareness among the population, created a dedicated SDG portal, adopted several SDG-aligned indicators and produced its first VLR in 2023. The state of **Puebla**'s first VLR aims to strengthen government work, focusing on implementing medium- and long-term policies and actions that contribute to sustainable development and to reducing inequalities.

Beyond the local actions in this year's reporting countries, in Argentina, **Tandil** has focused on raising awareness among the population and local stakeholders through a multisectoral working group (which includes members of the private sector, trade unions, academia and public and cooperative banks) and other activities. Its VLR has been key to these efforts. In 2023, **Rosario** launched an awareness-raising project with 730 secondary school students based on a role play game called "The Sustainable Leader." In this game, students identified existing problems in their municipality, developed an "empathy map" around one particular SDG and created a collective "sustainable agenda" with proposed actions and targets around the 2030 Agenda. Several local plans have been aligned to the SDGs, such as the Reconstruction Plan and the Climate Action Plan. **Buenos Aires** has produced five VLRs, which have allowed the city to systematize strategic management priorities and continued accountability under a global language and framework.

In Bolivia, the **Association of Municipalities of Bolivia** (AMB) has promoted several initiatives, such as the SDG Territorialization Project with UNDP on comprehensive, multilevel and multisectoral SDG planning. The municipal SDG programme, supported by the Federation of Cities, Municipalities and Local Government Associations (FLACMA) and Fundación Arnaiz, is digitally mapping SDGs against the municipal realities of **Cobija**, **Trinidad**, **Potosí**, **Tarija** and **Sucre**. **La Paz** has aligned its strategic and sectoral planning instruments to the SDGs, allowing the city to prioritize specific actions around supporting children and adolescents' development and school-

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ing, strengthening the municipality's agroecological market, creating a sound post-pandemic strategy and tackling gender-based violence.

Canelones (Uruguay) has presented its first VLR. Focused on SDGs 2, 5, 8, 11, 12 and 13, the VLR aims to understand how the department's public policies contribute to the SDGs in line with its strategic plan. Canelones, together with **Paysandú** and **Rocha**, contributed to the *Guide for Departmental Governments: Strengthening Human Rights and Sustainable Development in Local Actions* produced by OHCHR's South America Regional Office.

The **Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities** (UCCI) has launched its MapeODS initiative, which draws on a mapping and compilation of 22 innovative local experiences from **Bogotá**, **Buenos Aires**, **Mexico City**, **La Paz**, **Montevideo** and **São Paulo**. The initiative sets forth a comparative analysis to inspire further solutions for the Ibero-American region to effectively accelerate the localization of the 2030 Agenda around the three core areas of UCLG's Pact for the Future: people, planet and government. In an initiative led by **Montevideo**, UCCI has also raised awareness and monitored SDG localization together with the abovementioned cities and **Barcelona**. It created collective learning mechanisms to monitor the 2030 Agenda, as well as instruments to raise awareness among LRG staff through the exchange of experiences, training and knowledge management.

Middle East and West Asia

According to UNESCWA, at the current pace, the Arab region requires an estimated additional period of 60 years to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Despite rising awareness and commitment to the SDGs, the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened longstanding regional instabilities and conflicts, hampered development efforts, increased poverty, burdened health systems, exacerbated the cost-of-living and debt crisis and halted data production crucial to monitoring development progress and policy impact. Turning commitments into action is urgently needed, as are increased funding and data collection to make it happen.

Due to their highly centralized structure and ongoing conflicts, establishing the level of SDG localization in the three countries reporting to the 2024 HLPF (Oman, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) is highly complex. As two of the five most fragile states in the world, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen have been omitted from the UNESCWA analysis due to the lack of recent data, making it difficult to reliably identify their progress towards the 2030 targets.

Focusing on local action by other countries in the region, Jordan, Palestine and Türkiye have made noteworthy progress. In Jordan, the **Greater Amman Municipality** has continued its SDG work after publishing its 2022 VLR. In particular, it has made efforts to make the city more resilient regarding the SDG prioritized in the report: 3, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 17. In Palestine, the **Association of Palestinian Local Authorities** (APLA) has launched a broad range of awareness-raising campaigns about the SDGs both on site (such as the "SDGs Day: Go Local" campaign) and on social media platforms. These campaigns are compiled on APLA's SDG platform to raise citizens' and LRGs' awareness of the SDGs. The association has also continued to enhance its international partnerships across the world to build its members' capacities, strengthen its own structure (which now has an SDG task force and an SDG localization coordinator) and take steps to monitor progress. All these actions will continue to be strengthened as part of the new SDG localization plan adopted in September 2023, currently in progress despite the violence the territory and its population are experiencing. Finally, APLA has prepared a report on the impacts of the war on Gaza on the 2030 Agenda, which contrasts pre-war progress on each SDG to the current situation.

In Türkiye, the **Marmara Municipalities Union** (MMU) has established Mentor, an experience-sharing and exchange programme to improve intermunicipal cooperation and LRG staff capacities. Eleven of the meetings have focused on SDG localization and VLRs. The programme also includes one VLR session at the yearly Marmara Urban Forum organized for a wide range of stakeholders. **Sultanbeyli** produced its first VLR in 2021, just like Karatay, and they have become sister cities to jointly improve their SDG-related activities. **Karatay** published a second VLR in 2023 and, in addition to that, the city has mentored other municipalities such as Selçuklu and Amman on the production of VLRs. Sultanbeyli has produced a VLR monitoring study, which aims to update, monitor and report on the local development goals and indicators determined by its 2021 VLR. The study was conducted with five different thematic commissions that included representatives from local institutions as well as six researchers with diverse backgrounds. Based on this study, the municipality will define action plans and project ideas for 2030 through interinstitutional cooperation and update the VLR's targets and indicators. **Fatih** has produced its first VLR, and **Irbid**'s VLR is in the making. The Balikesir SDG Cities Hub is a joint project that engages Turkish cities in the SDG Cities initiative. The hub will bring together municipalities, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders to collectively drive sustainable development.

Other countries in the region have a limited, piecemeal approach to SDG localization, with occasional positive experiences such as **Al Madinah**'s (Saudi Arabia) first VLR published in 2023.

Following the example of the Asia-Pacific Mayors Academy, the **Arab Mayors Academy** has been activated by UCLG Middle East and West Asia, UN-ESCWA and UN-Habitat. The academy provides a space for mayors to share knowledge, and it targets leadership skills and local development knowledge. So far, 158 mayors have indicated their interest in taking part, and final participant selection will take gender parity criteria into account.

North America and the Caribbean

No country from the North America and the Caribbean region is reporting to the 2024 HLPF. Among non-reporting countries, interesting practices can be found in US cities such as **Los Angeles**, which is continuously improving its SDG monitoring system with new data. **Pittsburgh** has established a Sustainability and Resilience Division, Office of Equity and Gender Equity Commission, all of which work with city departments to promote the SDGs. **Hawai'i**'s second VLR pulls from the Aloha+ Challenge Dashboard data, which includes 37 targets and more than 280 indicators. The VLR is informed by and responds to the priorities of Hawai'i's communities and stakeholders from all four counties, in which youth play a crucial role in driving the state's sustainability efforts.
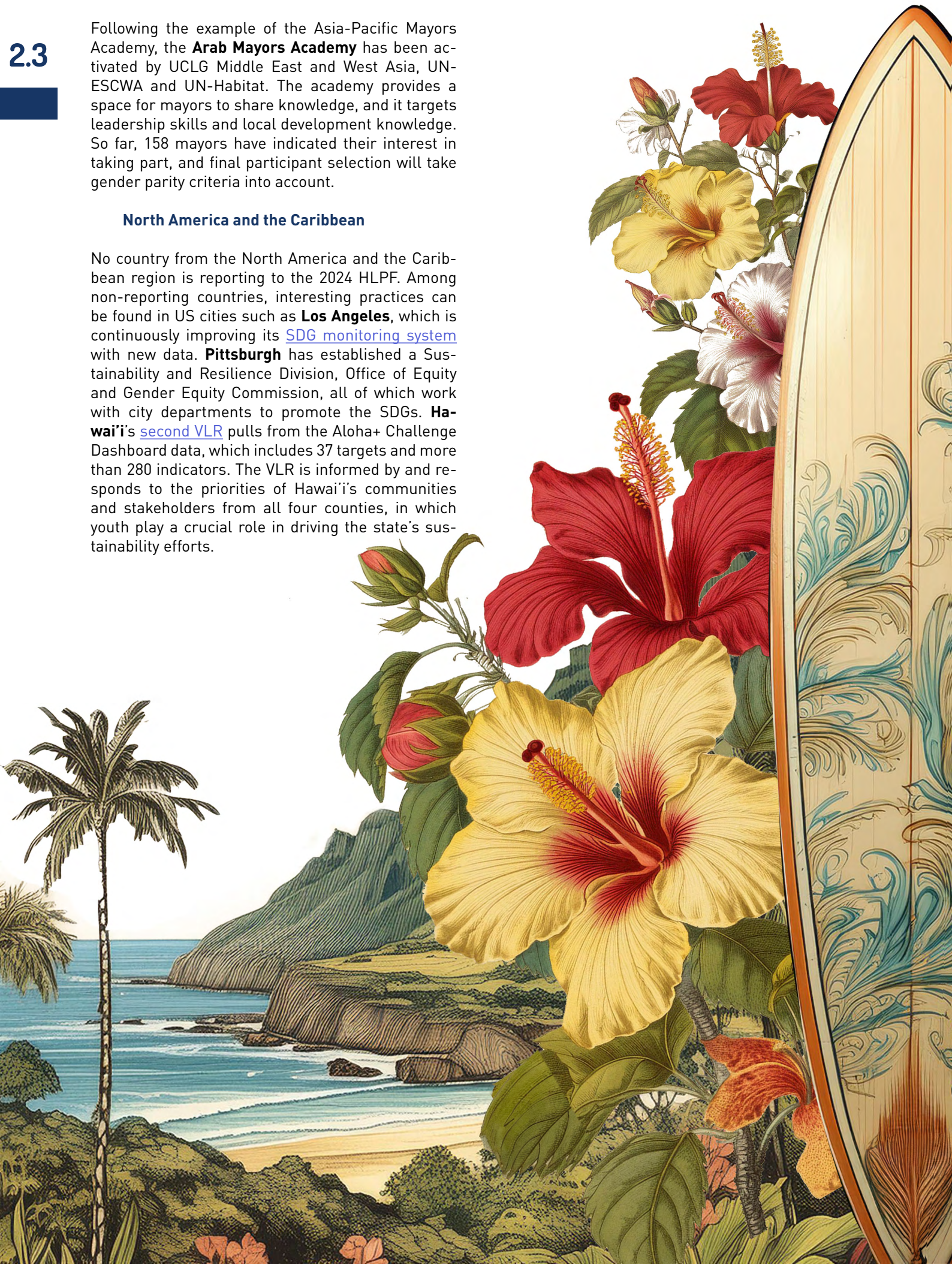
3.   LOCALIZATION EFFORTS TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND THE PLANET, IMPROVE GOVERNMENT AND ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR ALL

At the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, our progress as an international community is far off track. Despite relatively steady improvement through 2020, the world is now seeing stagnation and even regression on many Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets. Projections show that the world will not achieve the SDGs by 2030. As urbanization continues at an exponential rate and the multilateral system requires increasing recognition and involvement of bottom-up solutions, the 2030 Agenda emerges as both a challenging and indispensable blueprint for humanity.

Despite pre-pandemic progress, the [2023 Global Sustainable Development Report](#) (GSDR) underscores a distressing trend across numerous SDGs from 2020 to 2023. Recent crises have disrupted progress on ending extreme poverty (indicator 1.1.1), while other targets, such as achieving food security (indicator 2.1.2) and reducing global greenhouse gas emissions (indicator 13.2.2), continue to regress. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lingers; it has slowed, disrupted or reversed progress across the SDGs; exacerbated existing inequalities; and contributed to the highest level of State-based armed conflicts since 1945.

With 1.2 billion people living in multidimensional poverty in 2022 (including many deprivations linked to housing, sanitation, drinking water, school attendance and child mortality), urgent action is imperative. Indeed, the GSDR signals that up to 205 million individuals face acute food insecurity. Global warming poses an imminent threat, risking destabilization of the climate system. Unprecedented natural disasters have damaged crucial agricultural production areas, fisheries, forests and ecosystems that people across the world rely on. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) underscores the necessity of fostering peaceful, inclusive societies with access to justice and effective, accountable institutions. Yet, current geopolitical conflicts have put attaining this SDG, which plays an enabling role for achieving other SDGs, at stake. While partnerships, research and capacity building at different levels are being strengthened, foreign aid and other resources are strained and still far from the 0.7% target needed to support investments in longer-term sustainable development.

The global community requires swift and profound transformation as we journey towards 2030. **Local and regional governments (LRGs), whether by explicitly using the SDG framework or not, have exhibited unwavering dedication, ambition and ingenuity in driving this crucial agenda forward.** Their proximity to communities empowers them to customize policies and services according to the unique needs and aspirations of their populations, particularly in vital sectors such as education, health care, housing and food security, which prove instrumental in alleviating poverty (SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 2: Zero Hunger). By integrating bold climate actions into their policies and planning, LRGs are enhancing resilience and advocating for harmony with nature, alongside efforts to promote social and transboundary justice (SDG 13: Climate Action). Utilizing city diplomacy and localized initiatives, they play a crucial role in advancing peace and curbing urban violence, while also facilitating access to justice. They cultivate robust, accountable and transparent institutions by bolstering egalitarian, inclusive and participatory governance structures; reducing corruption; and ensuring widespread availability of accurate and trustworthy information (SDG 16). Undoubtedly, LRGs execute all these visions and actions by harnessing multilevel and multistakeholder partnerships, aiming to contribute more effectively to shared objectives (SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals).

This section assesses the SDGs highlighted in this year's High-Level Political Forum (SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17). Drawing from discussions and research findings, which frequently emphasized national and global progress and hurdles, it digs deeper into local-level impacts, localized challenges and opportunities. Moreover, it sheds light on innovative and forward-looking policy and practice shifts and interventions led by LRGs, together with local stakeholders, which have proved to accelerate these transformations from the grassroots level upward. This section offers multiple policy recommendations to harness local innovations and transform the current negative trajectories, driving us towards the creation of profoundly sustainable, equitable and inclusive cities and territories.

The three papers featured in this section offer a comprehensive and harmonized perspective on

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LRGs' approaches to advancing the specific SDGs under assessment, as well as other closely aligned SDGs:

● **Paper 1**, written from a "people" entry point, aims to analyze localization efforts focused on SDGs 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (Zero Hunger) and, in connection, SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being, 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

● **Paper 2**, written from a "planet" entry point, assesses localization efforts focused on SDG 13 (Climate Action) and, in connection, SDGs 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

● **Paper 3**, written from a "government" entry point, studies localization efforts focused on SDGs 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and, in connection, SDGs 1 (No Poverty) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

The three papers are rooted in comprehensive secondary research. They leverage strategic partnerships within the Global Taskforce (GTF) and its partners in an effort to strengthen the shared visions upon which the analyses and proposals are based. Coordinated by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) World Secretariat, Paper 1 has been drafted by this secretariat's research team in collaboration with its other teams. Paper 2 is a collaboration between ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability and UCLG, and Paper 3 has been produced in partnership with the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies at the Center on International Cooperation at New York University, and the Peace in Our Cities initiative. The papers leverage insights, experiences and policies gleaned from cities, regions, local government associations, networks within the GTF and collaborative partners, including inputs from a team of researchers commissioned to craft the GSDR. This wealth of knowledge has been garnered from various avenues, mainly the GTF/UCLG 2024 Survey, written consultations and interactive online sessions.
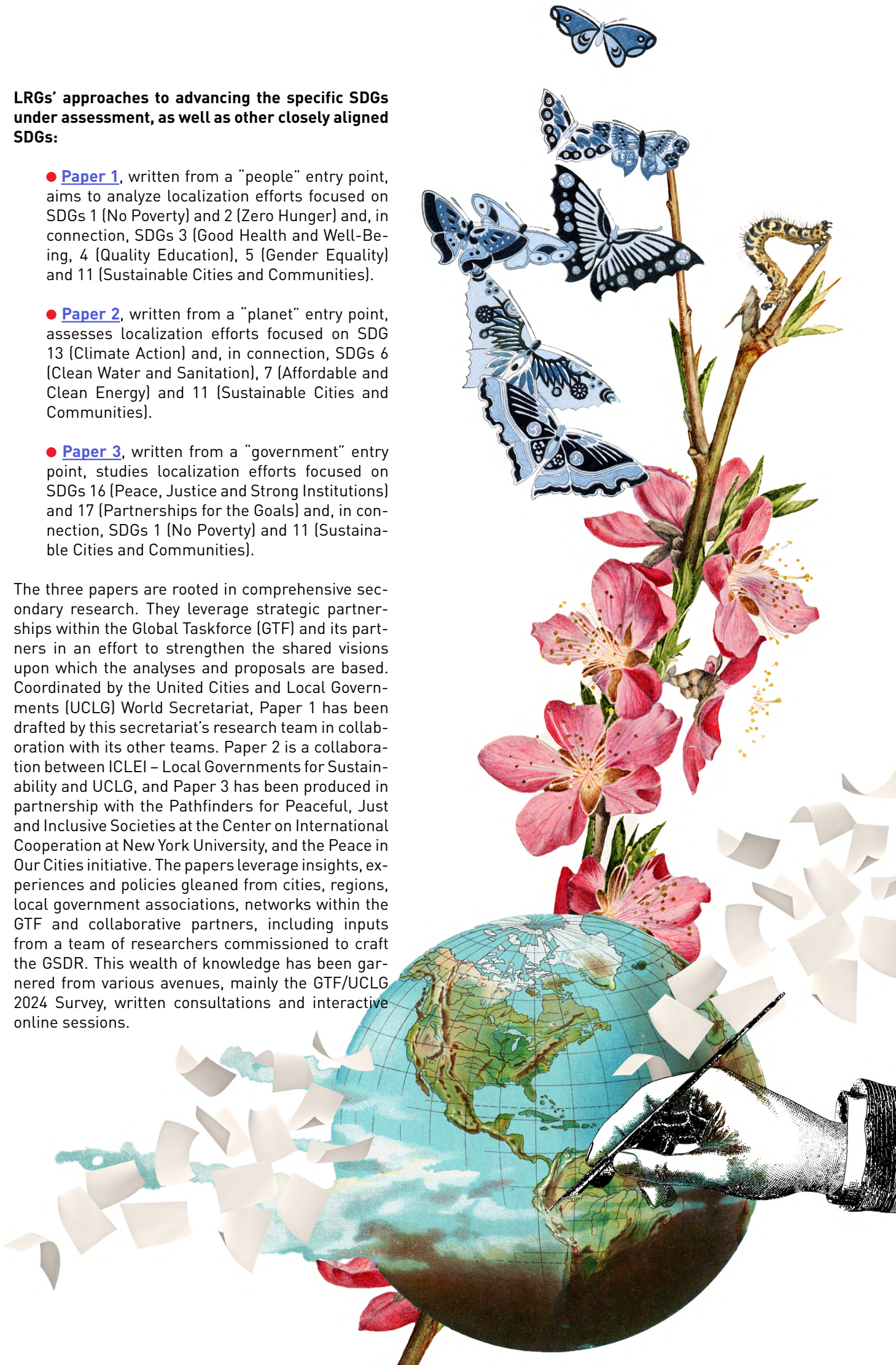
3.1

3.1.1 Introduction

Poverty and hunger are among the most pressing and pervasive challenges confronting humanity today. Perpetuated by the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and power, they interact with complex emergencies such as climate change and violent conflicts to challenge the future of our societies.

This paper begins by outlining key trends around poverty and hunger. **While such discussions often centre on broader global perspectives, delving into the localized manifestations and implications of poverty and hunger is imperative.** Therefore, the paper touches upon three dimensions that shape local realities regarding poverty: community composition, the spatial distribution of poverty and the effect of decentralization frameworks on local and regional governments' (LRGs') capacities to promote local prosperity.

Following this, the paper sheds further light on the concrete actions that LRGs, in collaboration with local stakeholders, are undertaking to combat poverty and hunger. **As the level of government positioned closest to communities, LRGs possess a better understanding of the unique challenges faced by their communities. This proximity enables them to tailor policies and services, especially in key areas such as education, health care and housing, which play a pivotal role in poverty reduction.** The paper synthesizes local actions into three distinct pathways, underscoring their significance for achieving not only Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (Zero Hunger) but also SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Finally, the paper examines the challenges encountered by LRGs in promoting these pathways. Emphasizing the critical importance of overcoming them to achieve the SDGs, it stresses the need to foster resilience and innovation at the local level to overcome

barriers and advance towards a more equitable and hunger-free world.

3.1.2 Poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon with complex links to sustainable development

In 2000, the United Nations committed to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by adopting Millennium Development Goal 1. At the 2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, world leaders approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which expanded the scope of this goal to ending poverty in all forms by 2030. Among other targets, the resulting SDG 1 focuses on reducing the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line, considering factors such as sex, age, employment status and location (indicator 1.1.1).

SDG 1 also emphasizes the importance of adopting a multidimensional approach to poverty reduction (indicator 1.2.2) by gauging the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty across various dimensions, as defined by national criteria (indicator 1.2.2). The Multidimensional Poverty Index was thus developed to measure several types of deprivations beyond just income, using health, education and living standard indicators to provide a comprehensive view of poverty. Despite this, poverty-related SDGs continue to place greater emphasis on economic factors and the role of the State, while paying less attention to political, social, experiential and spatial dimensions.[1]

Understanding poverty requires looking beyond just income and economic resources. Notably, poverty and hunger are strongly connected. Indeed, many countries define poverty thresholds based on the assumption that being poor is being hungry. Despite progress, hunger remains a significant global issue as both a cause and consequence of poverty. This situation emphasizes the need to ensure food security and sovereignty for everyone, everywhere.[2]

In 2023, approximately 1.1 billion people were living in multidimensional poverty, with half (566 million) being children under 18[3] and 8.1% (94 million) being aged 60 or older in 2022.[4] Poverty stems from and reproduces inequalities across diverse dimensions of life, including politics, economy, society and culture. **Beyond material deficiencies, poverty also gives rise to rights deprivations in critical domains such as education, housing, health and mental wellbeing.** As stated by Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate in economics, poverty has consequences on human beings' "capability" to fully realize their potential.[5]

Indeed, poverty manifests in various forms, including time poverty. People in time poverty cannot re-

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duce the number of hours they work without either worsening their household's multidimensional poverty or causing monetary poverty, leaving them with no leisure time.[6] This notion of poverty translates into "lower well-being, physical health and productivity" for individuals but is often disregarded by policies or measurements.[7] These deprivations, coupled with existing barriers to access essential infrastructure and services, expose people in poverty to discrimination in many dimensions of life.[8] Intergenerational transmission of poverty and deeply entrenched societal inequalities add fuel to the challenges already facing the world today.[9] **Furthermore, although 30% of income inequality may stem from inequalities within households, especially disadvantaging women and girls, household-level measurements may mask this phenomenon.**[10]

Economic growth does not automatically reduce poverty. Poverty reduction depends on the extent to which economic growth fuels or counters inequalities, in line with political choices. Moreover, not all population groups equally enjoy reductions in poverty brought about by economic growth. Indeed, wealthier population groups typically capture the benefits of economic growth. It is currently estimated that the richest 10% of the global population earns 52% of global income.[11] The emphasis on GDP as the main indicator of economic growth conceals profound distributional variances influenced by geography, gender, class, race and ethnicity.

It is imperative to address poverty through a lens encompassing reproductive and care work, ecology and reciprocity, and move away from mass accumulation and extractivism.[12] As the definition of a "good life" depends on context and relationships, initiatives to enhance wellbeing for individuals must be tailored to their specific context.[13]

Regarding the lowest-income populations, Nobel laureates Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee note that no single solution works for everyone and that relying solely on theory is not enough.[14] Experts now underline the importance of shifting away from universal methods, highlighting local initiatives' ability to provide better and customized solutions to poverty compared to big projects. **Solutions must be tailored to each specific case within territories and communities, and the participatory dimension of these context-based approaches often serves as an early indicator of success.**

3.1.3 Empowering LRGs to address poverty's localized impacts

Poverty manifests itself differently according to the territories and the bodies that people inhabit. LRGs, as the level of government closest to populations, thus face unique challenges when it comes to **addressing poverty in their communities.** This section examines three dimensions that condition LRGs' strides forward: the composition of local communities, the spatial distribution of poverty, and LRGs' own resources and capacities as defined by their national decentralization framework.

Community composition: The need for fine-grained, intersectional approaches to address poverty from the bottom up

When inequalities intersect, individuals belonging to multiple disadvantaged groups experience amplified impacts. For instance, a girl who is from an ethnic minority and lives in poverty will face heightened barriers to decent employment. **Recognizing these intersecting inequalities is crucial for understanding how poverty effectively unfolds within local communities.**

Children are vastly overrepresented among the world's poorest people. Children make up approximately one-third of the population in developing countries and over half of the population living in extreme poverty (333 million).[15] Poor children usually live in households where no family members have finished primary education. When children grow into economically disadvantaged adults and become parents, the cycle of poverty persists in the next generation. Effectively tackling the intergenerational transmission of poverty is crucial for successful poverty reduction. **Any efforts to address poverty that neglect the specific challenges of child poverty are inherently inadequate.**[16]

Among people in multidimensional poverty, women are overrepresented among those with educational deprivations. Women and girls in households grappling with multidimensional poverty are also more susceptible to violence, a phenomenon connected to the instability of their living circumstances and their restricted financial autonomy. Indeed, 30% of global inequality is hidden by household-level poverty measurement, concealing the realities of women, children and people with disabilities.[17] According to Claudia Goldin, a Nobel Prize recipient, the earnings gap between women and men who have the same degree and job position largely arises with the birth of a first child, which is linked to the unequal allocation of time devoted to unpaid care work within a couple.[18]

Poverty is a major threat to the wellbeing of older persons: growing older entails a significant added risk of falling into or remaining in poverty. In the later stages of life, individuals often decrease their working hours due to health concerns or retirement decisions. When they choose or are compelled to continue working, many receive low wages. In many countries, the lack of robust social protection sys-

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tems with broad coverage means that older people's assets and savings, if they exist, are typically insufficient to guarantee a secure income until the end of their lives. Within this category, older women are at much greater risk of experiencing poverty than older men, notably due to the frequent occurrence of shorter and more interrupted careers due to childbirth and child-rearing.[19]

Approximately 1.3 billion people, constituting 16% of the world's population, live with disabilities.[20] **While disabilities may cause poverty due to the high cost of accessible transport, assistive devices, rehabilitation and home adaptation, poverty may also contribute to the development of disabilities due to malnutrition, poor health care or dangerous living conditions.** Importantly, disabilities encompass mental health and can be invisible. Addressing disability-related poverty presents a substantial inclusivity challenge, as disabilities intersect with various inequalities such as age, gender, ethnicity and religion. It also involves issues related to access to health services and infrastructure. A major dimension of disability-related poverty is access to economic and social rights and opportunities. Limited access to these undermines the chances for people with disabilities to avoid or alleviate poverty. One necessary approach is to promote local strategies that address inclusivity challenges in the workplace and in public life at large.

Individuals may also be excluded from economic and social opportunities due to discrimination based on their ethnicity, race, caste, religion, language, gender identity or sexual orientation. When these aspects of identity intersect with disadvantaged geographical locations and economic classes, people face more difficult poverty-related impacts.

Spatial distribution of poverty across subnational scales: Impacts at the neighbourhood, city, intercity and regional levels

Addressing global poverty requires understanding regional disparities. Among the 1.1 billion poor individuals, half live in Sub-Saharan Africa (5,349 million) and over a third in South Asia (389 million). Notably, within 110 countries, 84% of people in poverty live in rural areas.[21] Research also shows that "people living in remote rural areas are more likely to be poor and their poverty is more likely to be long-duration, multidimensional and intersecting with other drivers of exclusion."[22]

Cities tend to be more prosperous but more unequal. As they often have higher standards of living, cities normally exhibit a lower relative incidence of poverty compared to rural regions. However, because of their scale, they tend to concentrate a greater share of the absolute number of people in poverty in a country.

The relationship between cities and their urban peripheries is also important to understand. Poorer populations may tend to live either in city centres, as is the case in some Latin American or African cities, or in peripheral cities, as is the case in other Latin American and African cities as well as European or Asian cities. Critically, poverty is often unequally distributed within cities. In that regard, understanding the neighbourhood scale plays an important role.

Urbanization plays a critical part in the consolidation of this spatial distribution of poverty. Through the global economy, cities and territories are connected with global processes of wealth generation and distribution, resulting in higher poverty in places with economic activities that yield low incomes and with low-to-no employment-related social protections.[23] Rapid urbanization makes planning difficult, which leads to poorly structured urban spaces and an increase in poverty and inequalities. These dynamics particularly affect African and Asian cities. Yet, the relationship between urbanization and inequality is not straightforward: measures to restrict urbanization may even exacerbate inequalities, as was the case in South Africa's apartheid era or Brazil's favelas.[24]

In sum, poverty is driven and shaped by the unique urban forms of each city and region, which are, in turn, shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, socio-cultural and ecological factors as well as historical influences. These intertwined dynamics operate at multiple levels, contributing to diverse manifestations of urban inequalities.

Differences in LRGs' capacities to contribute to SDGs 1 and 2 based on their decentralization frameworks

As Section 3 will show, LRGs are already advancing different pathways that contribute to achieving SDGs 1 and 2 from the local level. However, **LRGs have**

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significantly varied capacities to implement such local actions, and these differences in capacity stem from the decentralization frameworks under which LRGs operate. These frameworks allocate mandated responsibilities across levels of govern-ment, which include national governments and dif-ferent levels of subnational governments (see Table 3.1.1).[25] **Understanding these differences is critical for accurately gauging the transformative potential of local actions and contextualizing challenges.**

Table 3.1.1 General distribution of responsibilities across subnational government levels

Municipal level	Intermediate level	Regional level
Broad responsibilities, such as: • General clause of competence • Potential additional allocations per the law	**Specialized and more limited responsibilities of supramunicipal interest**	**Heterogeneous responsibilities depending on the country (in particular, federal vs. unitary)**
Community services, such as: • Education (nursery schools, pre-elementary and primary education) • Urban planning and management • Local utility networks (water, sewerage, waste, electricity) • Local roads and public transport in cities • Social affairs (support for families, children, older people or people with disabilities; poverty-related assistance; social benefits) • Primary and preventive health care • Recreation (sports) and culture • Public order and safety (municipal police, fire brigade) • Local economic development, tourism and trade fairs • Environment (green areas) • Social housing • Administrative and permit services	**Assistance for small municipalities** **Any specific responsibilities delegated by the regions and central government** **Responsibilities determined by the functional level and geographic area, such as:** • Secondary or specialized education • Supramunicipal social and youth welfare • Secondary hospitals • Waste collection and treatment • Secondary roads and public transport • Environment	**Services of regional interest, such as:** • Secondary/higher education and professional training • Spatial planning • Regional economic development and innovation • Health (secondary care and hospitals) • Social affairs (employment services, training, inclusion, support to special groups) • Regional roads and public transport • Culture, heritage and tourism • Environmental protection • Social housing • Public order and safety (regional police, civil protection) • Local government supervision (in federal countries)

Source: OECD-UCLG, 2022 Synthesis Report: World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment

Certain government functions play a decisive role in achieving SDGs 1 and 2, directly but also indi-rectly through SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 11. In particular, investments in economic affairs, environmental pro-tection, housing and community amenities, health, recreation and culture, religion, education and social protection all play critical roles in alleviating pover-ty and improving food security.[26] Table 3.1.2 outlines the concrete tasks that fall under these categories.

Table 3.1.2. LRG responsibilities per the Classification of the Functions of Government (COFOG) categories most related to SDGs 1 and 2

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COFOG category	LRG responsibilities for the selected COFOG categories	
Economic affairs	• Road and highway networks and facilities (national, regional, local) • Parking • Railway networks and facilities (national, regional, local) • Airports (international, national, local) • Ports (sea and fishing, inland waterways) • Public transport (roads, railways, tramways) • Special transport services (e.g. student transport)	• Employment policies/services • Support to local enterprises and entrepreneurship • Agriculture, rural development and irrigation • Telecommunications/IT • Manufacturing, construction and mining • Tourism • Commerce • Energy (e.g. electricity, gas)
Environmental protection	• Parks and green areas • Nature preservation • Noise and vibration control • Air pollution	• Soil and groundwater protection • Climate protection • Waste management (collection, treatment and disposal) • Sewerage (wastewater management) • Street cleaning
Housing and community amenities	• Drinking water distribution • Public lighting • Urban heating	• Housing (subsidies, construction/renovation, management) • Urban and land use planning • Urbanism
Health	• Pharmaceutical and medical products • General and specialized medical services and paramedical services (e.g. dental care) • Primary health care (medical centres)	• Hospital services (general and specialist) • Preventive health care • Public health services
Recreation, culture and religion	• Sports and recreation • Libraries • Museums • Cultural activities (e.g. theatres, exhibition halls, zoos, botanical gardens)	• Cultural heritage/monuments • Media/broadcasting and publishing services • Religious affairs
Education	• Pre-primary education • Primary education • Secondary education	• Higher education (universities, other tertiary education institutions) • Vocational education/training and special education • Research and development
Social protection	• Social care for children and youth • Support services for families • Support services for older people • Support services for people with disabilities • Benefits and policies to address social exclusion/poverty	• Support services for migrants • Integration of foreigners • Social welfare centres • Housing subsidies/benefits • Unemployment subsidies/benefits

Source: OECD-UCLG, 2022 Synthesis Report: World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment

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Analyzing real LRG spending on each of these government functions supports understanding the extent to which national frameworks enable local actions for addressing poverty and hunger. This subsection analyzes this issue from two entry points. First, it provides an overview of the regional trends, identifying what proportion of total government investment in each category corresponds to LRGs' expenditure. Second, it identifies LRGs' absolute expenditure within these categories. Looking at these data together makes it possible to understand LRGs' weight in a given region regarding government investments linked to achieving SDGs 1 and

2, as well as LRGs' capacities in their own terms. In some cases, LRGs may represent a high proportion of total government expenditure in a given sector, but in absolute terms, they may manage very little money – or the opposite.[27]

By world region, Figure 3.1.1 shows the average share of total government expenditure made by LRGs in key government functions related to SDGs 1 and 2. Figure 3.1.2 quantifies the average regional LRG expenditure in each of these categories as US dollars (USD) converted with purchasing power parity (PPP) rates.[28]

Figure 3.1.1. Average share of LRG expenditure over total government expenditure in government functions key to SDGs 1 and 2, by region

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Economic affairs" (incl. transport) over total government expenditure

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Environmental protection" over total government expenditure

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Housing and community amenities" over total government expenditure

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Health" over total government expenditure

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Recreation, culture and religion" over total government expenditure

Average % of LRG expenditure in "Education" over total government expenditure

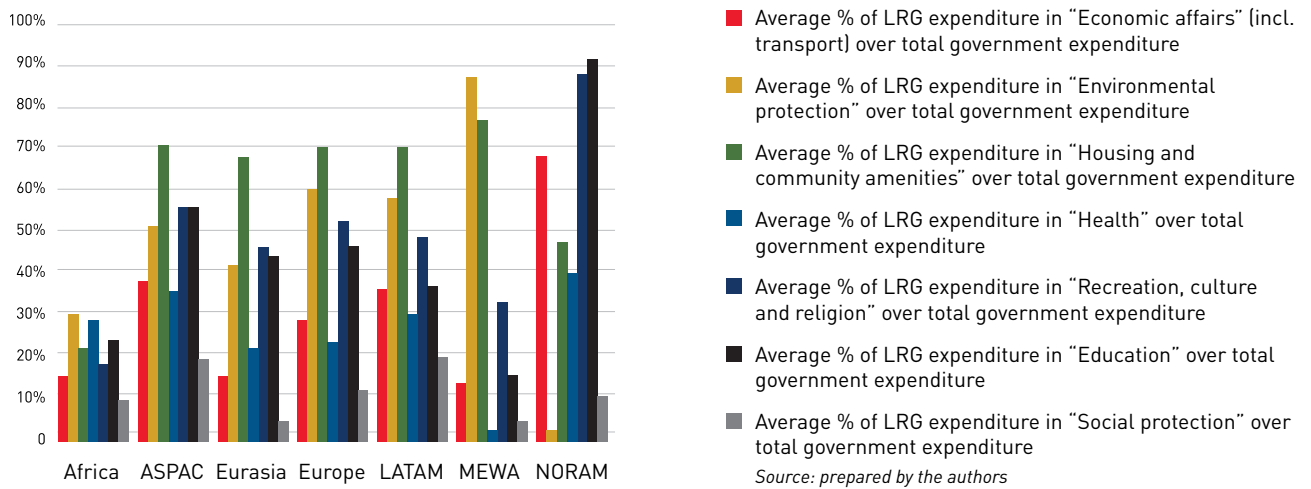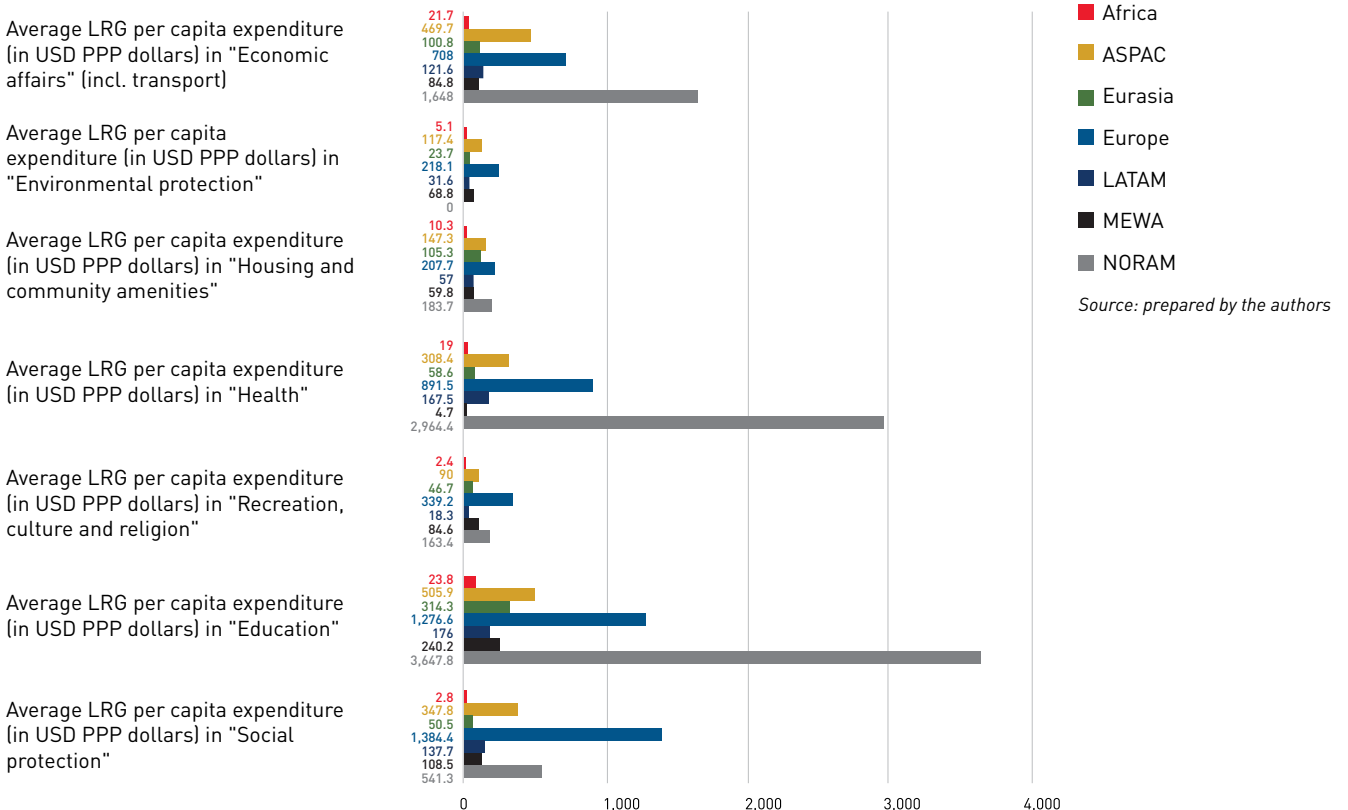Average % of LRG expenditure in "Social protection" over total government expenditure

Source: prepared by the authors

Figure 3.1.2. Average LRG expenditure (in PPP USD) in government functions key to SDGs 1 and 2, by region

Source: prepared by the authors

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These figures illustrate important contrasts across regions and key government functions that are worth examining to situate LRGs' capacities to contribute to SDGs 1 and 2 as well as SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 11.

In general, housing and community amenities is the government function in which LRG expenditure constitutes the largest proportion of total government expenditure. Globally, on average, LRG expenditure makes up 59% of total government expenditure in this category. Asia-Pacific (ASPAC) has the highest proportion: LRGs account for 70.7% of total government expenditure, equivalent to 147.3 PPP USD per capita, showcasing their significant role in providing housing and improving community infrastructure. In Europe and Latin America (LATAM), LRG expenditure also represents a substantial share of total government expenditure on housing and community amenities, constituting 71.6% (207.7 PPP USD per capita) and 54% (57 PPP USD per capita), respectively. These data reflect LRGs' focus on enhancing living standards and urban development, as well as regional differences in spending capacity.

On average across all world regions, recreation, culture and religion is the second government category in which LRGs play a heavy role, representing 49.7% of total government expenditure. Yet, in this case, regional differences in absolute expenditure are noteworthy. At 90.3%, LRGs' share of total government expenditure is highest in North America (NORAM) and equates to 163.4 PPP USD per capita.[29] In ASPAC, LRGs also make a substantial contribution to recreation, culture and religion, accounting for 57.1% of total government expenditure and 90 PPP USD per capita. Europe follows with 53.1%, indicating LRGs' strong role in supporting recreational and cultural initiatives, with an equivalent of 339.2 PPP USD per capita. LRGs' share of total government expenditure in this category is lowest in Africa, at 17.6%, which totals 2.4 PPP USD per capita in absolute terms.

Environmental protection ranks third in the proportion of overall government investment made by LRGs: across all world regions, LRGs' share averages 47.3%, suggesting LRGs' strong role in environmental conservation and sustainability. The Middle East and West Asia (MEWA) region stands out, with LRGs accounting for 88% of total government expenditure on environmental protection, which translates to 68.8 PPP USD per capita. LRGs play a crucial role in environmental sustainability efforts in the region, although regional sustainability efforts need to be strengthened altogether. In Europe, LRG expenditure on environmental protection represents 61.3% of total government spending and 218.1 PPP USD per capita. Meanwhile, LRGs also make an important contribution in LATAM and ASPAC, making

up 58% (31.6 PPP USD per capita) and 51.9% (117.4 PPP USD per capita), respectively, of total government expenditure allocated to this category. In Africa, LRG expenditure represents 30.3% (5 PPP USD per capita). No data for NORAM is available.

Worldwide, the average LRG share of total government expenditure on education is 45%, reflecting LRGs' significant role in providing educational services and promoting human development. NORAM has the highest proportion: LRGs constitute 92.1% of total government spending (3,647.8 PPP USD per capita).[30] In ASPAC, LRGs make a significant contribution to education investment, with their share of total government investment standing at 56.9%, equivalent to 505.9 PPP USD per capita. In Europe, this proportion is 46.1% (1,276.6 PPP USD per capita). For other world regions, the proportion is consistently high: 44.7% in Eurasia (314.3 PPP USD per capita), 36.7% in LATAM (176 PPP USD per capita) and 24.3% in Africa (23.8 PPP USD per capita). It is lowest in MEWA, where the percentage of LRG expenditure with respect to total government expenditure stands at 14.7% (240 PPP USD per capita).

Regarding economic affairs (including transport), LRGs account for 30.6% of total government expenditure globally, suggesting their strong role in steering both economic and urban development. LRGs have the greatest capacity to shape economic policies and infrastructure development in NORAM, where they account for 68.4% of total government expenditure, equivalent to 1,648 PPP USD per capita.[31][32] ASPAC follows with 38.7% (469.7 PPP USD per capita), showcasing LRGs' substantial contribution to economic activities and infrastructure projects in the region. In Europe and LATAM, a significant portion of total government expenditure in economic affairs corresponds to LRG expenditure, at 28.8% (708 PPP USD per capita) and 36.2% (121.6 PPP USD per capita), respectively, reflecting LRGs' importance in driving economic growth and development despite a stark difference in LRGs' absolute expenditure capacities between the two regions.

Across world regions, LRGs make up 25.8% of total government expenditure on health. However, two regions deviate significantly from this average: NORAM and MEWA. In NORAM, the average LRG share of total government expenditure on health equals 40% (2,964.4 PPP USD per capita).[33] LRG expenditure in ASPAC and Europe also represents a considerable proportion, with 35.8% (308.4 PPP USD per capita) and 24% (891.5 PPP USD per capita), respectively, reflecting LRGs' importance in health care delivery and public health initiatives. In MEWA, LRGs play a limited role: they represent only 0.5% of total government investment in health.

Globally, LRGs contribute a significantly low share

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of total government expenditure on social protection: 11%.** The percentage is highest for ASPAC and LATAM, at 19.3% (374.8 PPP USD per capita) and 19.7% (137.7 PPP USD per capita), respectively. In Europe, LRGs' proportion of total government expenditures on social protection constitutes 11.8%, equivalent to 1,384.4 PPP USD per capita.

3.1.4 LRGs' efforts to localize SDGs 1 and 2 through SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 11: Local pathways to addressing poverty and hunger

LRGs play a key role in tackling the complex impacts of poverty, engaging across multiple areas that intersect with the SDGs. By grouping LRGs' actions into pathways, the analysis in this section shows that trajectories of change can go beyond policy silos and take different shapes according to the local context.[34] These pathways encompass different kinds of experiences and aim to inspire efforts by LRGs in different territories by demonstrating the different shapes the three pathways can take. This range of experiences includes policies, strategies and programmes that are often undertaken by LRGs in collaboration with their local communities and that cut across SDGs.

The following section explores three pathways that LRGs are advancing to address poverty and hunger:

● **Fostering and maintaining universal access to fair and inclusive local public services:** LRGs are at the forefront of ensuring that essential services are accessible to all, fostering a more equitable society. In addition to SDGs 1 and 2, their efforts to do so advance SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

● **Strengthening local economies of care and equality by directing local economic development towards equitable prosperity:** LRGs are actively working to create an environment that promotes economic growth while addressing social disparities, directly impacting SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

● **Fostering local resilience and climate justice to reduce poor and marginalized communities' exposure to extreme climate-related events and other shocks:** this pathway intersects with various SDGs related to local food autonomy (SDG 2: Zero Hunger) and changing patterns of production and consumption (SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production). Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of including heritage and culture in LRGs' climate plans and policies. Overall, it addresses the question of

inequality and poverty (SDGs 1 and 10), advocating for sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) through actions for SDGs 15 (Life on Land) and 13 (Climate Action).

Ensuring universal access to local public services to promote equality and prosperity

LRGs are often directly responsible for providing various local public services. As such, they play a crucial role in making these services accessible to all populations to prevent and reduce poverty locally. Moreover, LRGs frequently go beyond their assigned responsibilities to address poverty through local action. In practice, this means expanding the range of local public services for which an LRG takes responsibility, including "new essential services," and innovating in how these services are managed – which usually also reinforces local democracy. Consequently, this subsection will outline experiences related to LRG-mandated competences and beyond. It will centre human rights and culturally sensitive approaches in service delivery, food security, health, water, sanitation, energy and housing as levers to shape a service-based pathway to addressing poverty locally.

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Migrant status significantly contributes to inequalities. Without citizenship, individuals are denied access to public services, including fundamental necessities such as having a postal address. An increasing number of LRGs are working along the lines of "human rights cities" and advancing policies and strategies towards universalizing access to local citizenship. For instance, in **Barcelona** (Spain), the Municipal Immigration Council allows migrants and their associations to participate in local policy-making. One city policy, the *Política d'empadronament actiu*, builds upon the local government's autonomy to manage the local registry of city residents to proactively register migrant populations – especially those without regularized migratory status.[35] Similarly, in **Montréal** (Canada), the Access Without Fear Policy aims to reassure individuals without regularized immigration status that they can use police services safely with a city-issued proof of identity and residence card, without risking being reported, detained or deported. Having the opportunity to participate in local life and decision-making processes allows marginalized communities to share their experiences and information about what can improve their conditions. The Pledge of **Zurich** (Switzerland) aims to improve access to municipal and private services such as banking and health insurance for all.[36]

Increasing access to water and sanitation is a powerful way to address poverty. Accessible, affordable and adapted water provision systems, sanitation and waste management remove a considerable burden for poor populations. The *Cosecha de Lluvia* programme in **Mexico City** (Mexico) has made the city a global leader in rainwater harvesting, with 62,700 systems installed as of October 2023. This sustainable solution provides water autonomy to households, benefitting poor communities and women who typically manage water resources while also increasing the city's resilience to impacts of climate change.[37] In **Paraná** (Argentina), water basin committees were created as territorial units for citizen-government coordination. They have helped share local knowledge and increase transparency on the levels of water, its quality, and flood- and erosion-related risks. Citizens are empowered and can act to protect and better manage resources in an equitable way that does not undermine the poor.[38]

In **Dar es Salaam** (Tanzania), simplified sewerage systems provide access to affordable sanitation for marginalized communities living in informal settlements, thus improving their health conditions and reducing conflicts and costs.[39] In **Kampala** (Uganda), the Weyonje app has enabled mapping pit latrines by using geographical information systems, which eases managing and emptying them. The app has fostered a culture of cleanliness and improved access to sanitation for the urban poor.[40]

Some LRGs are also promoting mental health and wellbeing by enhancing communal living spaces and innovative services that actively seek to reach all populations. The Accessible Life Park in **Mersin** (Türkiye) is a communal space for social interaction with a swimming pool, green areas, meeting rooms, workshops, recreational zones, dance floor and relaxation spots. Free for people with disabilities of all ages, it offers psychologists' support to enhance children's mobility, communication and interpersonal skills. After COVID-19, **Daejeon** (Republic of Korea) introduced the Mind TalkTalk Bus. The bus offers mental health services, and it makes discussing mental health and seeking help more accessible for individuals who face stigmatization or time and location constraints.[41] **Matosinhos** (Portugal) established "Ativa'mente": a communication campaign and events geared towards enhancing mental health literacy, diminishing the stigma surrounding mental illness and advocating for healthy lifestyles.

Local initiatives also support health and the provision of care in the early stages of life. **Sultanbeyli** (Türkiye) formulated the Home Visiting-Based Family Guidance programme to support children's development in their first three years by working with families through home visits. This initiative aims to promote healthy nutrition, maternal wellbeing and mother-child bonding while improving child-care knowledge and skills. In the same vein, in **Tandil** (Argentina), the *Tenemos Infancia en Tandil* project focuses on children's food security and wellbeing. The project ensures newborns have access to nutrition, hygiene, stimulating educational materials and initial check-ups at community health centres. Free daily park meals are prepared in summer for children and young people of **Tampere** (Finland), connecting professionals working in the area with children and youth. Some children rely on park meals for nutrition in the summer when school meals are unavailable.

Likewise, initiatives that leverage the potential of education as a key lever to address poverty locally are worth spotlighting. Directly connecting education and health, the Growing Up Healthy project in **Rotterdam** (the Netherlands) introduced a family coach to establish connections between families, health care professionals and schools and teach them about health.[42] The **Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality** (South Africa) established the Mayoral Bursary Fund, which offers scholarships to students aged 14–35 from underprivileged backgrounds. Specifically, this fund provides scholarships in areas such as engineering and finance, in which people from lower-income backgrounds are underrepresented. It covers tuition, books, meals and accommodation. **Goicoechea** (Costa Rica) developed educational opportunities for marginalized individuals, with scholarships and support services. The local

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government promoted social inclusion through gender equality programmes, social justice initiatives, capacity-building workshops and improved local administration.

The cost of energy can be a significant burden on households experiencing poverty, as they often have to allocate a disproportionate share of their income to meet basic energy needs. Mitigating the impact of energy expenses, while promoting access to cleaner sources of energy for all, is crucial for achieving more equitable and sustainable development. In **Hamburg** (Germany), MySMARTLife implemented eco-friendly solutions that actively engaged citizens in producing green energy and creating environmentally sustainable spaces, putting them at the centre of the project.[43] Biogas was introduced to marginalized communities in **Saint-Louis** (Senegal), using safeguarded mangroves. Multiple actors, including local authorities, came together to create green jobs, increase incomes and promote renewable energy sources.[44] The **Barcelona Provincial Council** (Spain) offers energy audits and support services for households in energy poverty to improve efficiency, lower costs and train users on energy-efficient habits.

Ensuring adequate access to housing for all populations is a critical lever for LRGs to reduce poverty as a precondition for accessing other basic public services and, thus, ensuring the fulfilment of different human rights. Decentralized housing-related competences tend to be very limited, despite the critical need to localize the housing agenda. Yet, in practice, LRGs utilize various policy and planning tools to engage with housing and land markets. Notably, LRG responses to protect housing rights include actions to prevent forced evictions and discrimination, regulation of land and housing markets and the establishment of frameworks to safeguard various forms of land tenure.[45]

In **Grigny** (France), the local government has initiated legal actions against property owners who rent out deteriorating properties on a per-room basis to multiple families, aggravating issues of over-occupancy. Twenty-five convictions have been secured since 2011, ensuring justice for tenants and strengthening marginalized residents' trust in local government. A law for social and urban integration of popular neighbourhoods in the city of **Buenos Aires** (Argentina) aims to reduce economic and social disparities by fostering community development and respecting the unique identities of each neighbourhood. The city has undertaken extensive infrastructure and service projects benefitting 131,400 residents across several disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Addressing homelessness is imperative for countering poverty at the local level. Matosinhos (Portugal) has implemented comprehensive emergency measures to address homelessness locally. The municipality also launched a campaign in 2023 to raise awareness and provide information on available resources for individuals experiencing homelessness. **Newcastle upon Tyne** (UK) has partnered with civil society groups to prevent homelessness, focusing on early intervention and support for those at risk. In 2017, the city adopted the Homelessness Reduction Act, demonstrating its commitment to proactive solutions.[46] In **Marseille** (France), the Plan Against Poverty aims to improve care for people experiencing homelessness. It does so by enhancing emergency services through community collaboration, establishing an observatory on social precarity and diversifying food distribution methods. Moreover, the plan offers shower and storage services regionwide and educates social workers to improve outreach and access to rights for those in need.

LRGs often support community-led housing strategies, crucial for poverty reduction among informal settlements. A notable example is Dzivarasekwa Extension in **Harare** (Zimbabwe), part of the Harare Slum Upgrading Project led by the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, Dialogue on Shelter for the Homeless Trust, and the City of Harare.[47] In India, **Odisha**'s Housing & Urban Development Department partnered with the Odisha Liveable Habitat Mission to launch the Jaga mission. It is the country's largest slum titling programme, offering land rights, access to public housing subsidies and basic services. The programme's decentralized governance involves partnerships with local associations to oversee and sustain settlement improvements, and it emphasizes community participation by providing fair wages for local residents employed to conduct upgrading work.[48]

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Strengthening local economies of care and equality by directing local economic development towards equitable prosperity

LRGs assume a central role in strengthening local economies of care and equality by fostering equitable prosperity through various means. Equitable prosperity entails decent work, secure livelihoods, access to quality basic services and a healthy environment. It also includes food security and the right to participate in local and political decision-making. Importantly, prosperity is contextual, meaning that it is intrinsically linked to cultures. Populations must have the right to define elements of prosperity according to their own terms, as part of their right to political participation. LRGs are pulling different levers to direct local economies towards equitable prosperity. These include centring care, ensuring universal access to high-quality and lifelong education, supporting local economic development and promoting financial inclusion and the right to prosper for all, including through acknowledging and supporting commoning strategies related to informal economic activities.

Centring care as a guiding principle for promoting local economic development and sustainable prosperity requires revisiting social protection, which must be rethought to ensure inclusion. Health, dignity and respect must be placed at the heart of social protection policies. The Social Network Programme of **Torres Vedras** (Portugal) is designed to enhance coordination and collaboration among social entities, aiming to combat poverty and exclusion. It strives to address specific family challenges in the municipality, providing services, facilities and social protection measures for all citizens. The **Association of Dutch Municipalities** (VNG, the Netherlands) organized a social security conference in the country, which resulted in endorsing a declaration for social security that addresses the challenges faced by low-income individuals in accessing necessary support.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** (Spain) has implemented the Social Impact Debit Card, a prepaid card by local authorities that assists eligible families to access fresh food and other basic products. It prevents stigma, promotes integration and allows beneficiaries to choose food options at local establishments, reducing reliance on food distribution centres and social marginalization. **Valongo**'s (Portugal) *Viver em Saúde* project fosters the health and wellbeing of individuals living in social housing in Valongo through health assessments, dietary consultations, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and dental care.

The **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities** (Serbia) supports local-level inclusion of Roma people through the Support to Sustainable Community-Based Social Services initiative. The programme aids LRGs in improving social services for marginalized communities, including the Roma population, through technical and financial support. **Johannesburg** (South Africa) established the Expanded Social Package programme to help qualifying marginalized households access benefits encompassing free access to basic services such as rates, refuse, water, sewerage and electricity. The Citizen's Store in **Seixal** (Portugal) brings together the public and private sectors to provide 37 services in one shared location. The project aims to improve communication between citizens, companies and government authorities, bridging the gap between public services and communities in the Seixal municipality and Setúbal district.

The **Grodno City Executive Committee** (Belarus) provides social services and care for older citizens and people with disabilities. In **Atyrau** (Kazakhstan), cash assistance includes both unconditional and conditional support for low-income families with and without family members with disabilities. A social contract is formed between service recipients and career centres to promote employment. The provincial government of **Azuay** (Ecuador) developed the Caravans for Life programme to support human development through inclusion, social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, with specific attention to marginalized groups in order to reduce social gaps in the region.

LRGs are strategically positioned to leverage synergies between education and employment. Indeed, many LRGs are supporting social inclusion through local economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and vocational training initiatives. In **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), the *Nosotras Conectadas* programme offers online vocational courses for women professionals – including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and beneficiaries of international protection. The **Union of Cities and Municipalities of Côte d'Ivoire** (UVICOCI, Côte d'Ivoire) developed the Municipal Partnerships for Innovation in Local Economic Development to empower marginalized groups, including women and young people in poverty, through capacity building and strategic planning, thus supporting local economic development. **Intibucá** (Honduras) focuses on enhancing economic abilities for women, children, adolescents and youth through entrepreneurship in selected value chains and technical training. The municipality's citizen participation structures and the Citizen Transparency Commission promote compliance with these policies and accountability. **Komsomolsk-on-Amur** (Russian Federation) provides free training for mothers during parental leave, addressing territorial and economic disparities by covering travel and accommodation expenses for training away from home through the Mothers Learn for Free initiative.[49]

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The Inclusive Economy Programme in **Braga** (Portugal) focuses on reducing poverty by supporting entrepreneurship and providing financial resources and training to youth, women and people with disabilities, in partnership with local organizations. In **Lusaka** (Zambia), the Empower for Progress (E4P) project aims to eradicate poverty through a comprehensive approach within the local community. The project provides skills training, microfinance support and community development projects to empower individuals and families to break the cycle of poverty. Collaboration with local stakeholders ensures sustainable solutions and inclusive development for marginalized communities. In **Taipei**, the city's employment service led a project for working-age individuals from middle-class or low-income families. Last year, this initiative assisted 2,265 individuals in their job search endeavours, resulting in 2,067 people (91%) being hired. The **Federation of Zgharta Caza Municipalities** (Lebanon) provided cash for work and training to help impoverished individuals develop technical skills for potential employment related to sewing, soapmaking, woodworking and fabric manufacturing. It supported building networks, leading to positive economic impacts and increased awareness of the significance of working together.

LRGs can play a decisive role in fostering protection of the commons and commoning strategies

as crucial means for individuals in poverty to meet their basic needs and live a dignified life. Commoning strategies are one way that populations aim to meet their needs in innovative ways. These strategies can take different forms, and some of them relate to undertaking economic activities in the public space that have traditionally been deemed informal activities. LRGs' support of these strategies can lead to innovative public–community partnerships that change local public service provision and improve community trust.[50] It can also support overcoming historical barriers to quality and universal access to local public services. In **Lima** (Peru), through a long negotiation process, Ordinance 1787 on street vending was co-developed with street vendors to integrate them into the formal economy. Proactively engaging with these vendors created stable and legitimate opportunities for unemployed and informal workers, fostering more inclusive and sustainable economic growth. A similar case took place in **Ahmedabad** (India). Following conflicts, the municipality collaborated with a committee of vendors to design the new Bhadra Fort Market and negotiate a process for resettlement.[52]

Commoning strategies can also lead LRGs to support innovations in financial inclusion, which can have major impacts on poverty reduction. For instance, by facilitating access to housing (a major investment), LRGs can play a critical role in supporting organized communities' access to finance. In **Lekhnath** (Nepal), support from LRGs legitimized and expanded a project led by poor populations, primarily women who came together in savings groups. With local government support, women's groups accessed loans from commercial banks to build houses, earning banks' trust due to their 100% repayment rates. In a similar vein, the municipality of **Pokhara** (Nepal) helped women in informal settlements who were involved in savings groups to access land at a price well below the market rate.[53]

Shortening supply chains, particularly food supply chains, is one key lever LRGs can activate to promote more sustainable, pro-poor and food-secure local economic systems. The municipality of **Setúbal** (Portugal) set up the Amoreiras Urban Gardens to promote ecological, social and economic connections among residents through sustainable agricultural practices. These gardens support diverse horticultural activities to meet urban populations' needs and improve their quality of life. In **Belo Horizonte** (Brazil), the Urban Agroforestry project aims to re-green deteriorated areas by planting native trees and supporting nine community production units. The project works to encourage family-based agriculture and contributes to ensuring food security for local communities.[54] The *La Mimosa* initiative led by the **Granollers** City Council (Spain), along with the Red Cross and the La Magrana Vallesana coopera-

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tive, provides marginalized families with healthy and nutritious products while fostering social connections through participation in the cooperative. The Social Canteen project of **Vila Franca de Xira** (Portugal) provides daily meals to the municipality's most marginalized inhabitants. It values local and existing resources, engaging seven non-profit organizations as part of the Emergency Food Programme.

In **Niterói** (Brazil), the local government's Jorge Amado Popular Restaurant has served over 2.72 million meals since its remunicipalization, offering an affordable option for both Niterói's residents and those from neighbouring municipalities. The establishment ensures a balanced diet at a minimal cost. Due to its success, an additional unit – the Carolina Maria de Jesús Popular Restaurant – was launched in 2023. **Tandil** (Argentina) established neighbourhood food markets to promote local products; support small businesses; and provide affordable, high-quality food options to residents, including marginalized individuals. Multiple urban and peri-urban agriculture projects have been implemented in **Nouakchott** (Mauritania). The projects provide fully equipped agricultural plots to disadvantaged individuals at no cost, thanks to funding from the Nouakchott region and its global collaborators. Participants can engage in activities that generate income and support achieving food self-sufficiency. Such initiatives are relevant to popularize access to healthy products while supporting the local food economy and biodiversity conservation.

Intermediary cities provide an opportunity to craft ambitious local economic policies and rethink the link between the rural and the urban. Envigado (Colombia) designed the Local System of Protected Areas to safeguard key ecosystems and engage the community in biodiversity conservation through activities such as art workshops, nature walks and school lectures. This initiative has increased awareness and ownership of the local environment.[55] To protect and bolster the livelihoods and self-sustainability of its rural population, the district of **Napo** (Ecuador) has supported the commercialization of local products by creating the brand NAPU MARKA, which appears on all made-in-Napo products. Producers receive training to improve crop quality and marketing skills, facilitating knowledge transfer and commercial success. *Canelones Te Alimenta* by the departmental government of **Canelones** (Uruguay) aims to synchronize the food system in real time and support local procurement by promoting small- and medium-scale producers. It focuses on sustainable practices while marketing reuse and enhancement of agri-food systems, adopting a forward-looking approach by fostering innovation in agri-food systems within small and intermediate cities. It also promotes efficient and circular supply chains through family farming, supporting cooperatives and unions.

Locally planned and managed economic development is more likely to capitalize on the unique strengths and resources of a community and its territory. Job creation in the cultural sector is an avenue for LRGs to combat poverty and vulnerability. An increasing number of LRGs are leveraging local heritage to boost employment in the cultural sector, especially for marginalized populations, and make it prosper beyond its territorial limits. In **Yopougon** (Côte d'Ivoire), the Strategic Plan to Promote Cultural Potential combines cultural development with urban renewal to generate business and income for youth through local resources. This plan has improved cultural variety, urban growth and job creation, in addition to reducing poverty and unemployment, by formalizing work in the cultural sector.[56] **Jatiwangi**'s (Indonesia) cultural policy uses terracotta to promote economic growth, preserve Indigenous culture and boost tourism. The creation of the Art Factory supports the local economy by involving various actors such as artists, organizations, professionals, academia and international funds.[57]

In fact, integrating culture into local economic and resilience strategies can ground equality and improve livelihoods while reinforcing protection from future shocks. The establishment of a music platform in the community of **Steenberg** (South Africa) showcases the impact of cultural activities and knowledge generation on marginalized communities' awareness and empowerment in climate resilience and environmental responsibility.[58] In **San Antonio** (USA), the Climate Equity Screening Tool ensures marginalized communities play a key role in preserving culture and addressing climate consequences.[59] **Timbuktu** (Mali) promoted a comprehensive cultural approach to tackle economic, health and education challenges, engaging citizens and organizations in decisions to renovate traditional houses using local techniques. This initiative revitalized heritage sectors, boosting income and restoring cohesion after violence. The project also benefitted poor families and promoted intergenerational masonry skills exchange.[60]

LRGs can also leverage culture as an instrument to promote a different approach to prosperity altogether, moving away from individualism and competitiveness. In **Coquimbo** (Chile), micro-neighbourhood workshops emphasize cultural diversity as a valuable resource for inclusive societies, building trust among residents and addressing social issues through collaboration.[61] Apart Together, in **Cúcuta** (Colombia), challenged the idea of borders during the migration crisis by using art to focus on peace and cultural diversity.[62] To sensitize its citizens about coexistence and peace, **Incheon** (Republic of Korea) produced a documentary on its sister cities. This documentary showcased the life of a multicultural Korean-Mexican family to display historical places,

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monuments and the value of cultural exchange to build harmonious and welcoming societies.[63] **Euskal Fondoa** (Spain) backed the new programming of the *Cultura entre las manos* project in **Havana** (Cuba), which provides accessible services and technological aids to deaf individuals, their families and friends.

LRGs also work through local economic development agencies to connect the public and private sectors and boost local economic networks, job growth and small businesses. In South Africa, such agencies focus on agricultural initiatives, such as the National School Nutrition Programme and the Radical Agrarian Socio-Economic Transformation programme, which drive local economic development in **KwaZulu-Natal**.[64]

Fostering local resilience and climate justice to reduce marginalized communities' exposure to extreme climate-related events and other socio-economic shocks

In pursuit of local resilience and climate justice, it is imperative for LRGs to address the interconnected issues of climate and social justice. This pathway delves into various facets of local action, encompassing innovative models of redistribution, resilient city planning, food sovereignty, waste management and the transformative power of culture and knowledge. LRG competences such as urban planning, cultural promotion and waste management play a pivotal role in implementing effective strategies.

Decentralized cooperation proves to be an effective avenue for strengthening actions that link climate and social justice. The Songpa Solar Nanum Power Plants in **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) were developed using a unique business and technology model to promote renewable energy, environmental sustainability and energy welfare. They allocate 25% of profits to cash grants for low-income households and support sustainable energy projects in developing countries.[65] Hurricanes, climate change and COVID-19 severely affected the department of **Madriz** (Nicaragua), leading to shortages among the rural population, decreased food consumption and higher costs for basic items. In response, a project by the **Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació** (Spain) provided critical food items for 800 families in dry corridor communities to improve food security between April and June 2022.

Future-oriented and inclusive planning positions LRGs to build resilient and climate-adaptive cities for their inhabitants. After the 2016 earthquake, the city of **Portoviejo** (Ecuador) made efforts to rebuild in a resilient way and adapt to climate change impacts. It built a large park in the middle of the city and designed an integrated network of green and public areas to mitigate flood risks.[66] **Cauayan City** (the Philippines) established resettlement zones for the pre-evacuation and relocation of at-risk families and developed two intelligent systems for disaster resilience and pre-emptive evacuation plans for flood disasters.[67] The Adaptur project in **Mexico City** (Mexico) seeks to engage the private sector and its resources to support and fund climate adaptation measures. It has formulated manuals to assess the significance of ecosystem protection in investment analyses.[68]

To build cities for the future, LRGs can activate future-oriented, pro-poor planning processes that shape future development in a sustainable, inclusive and resilient manner. The Peynircioglu Stream Ecological Restoration project in **Izmir** (Türkiye) improves living standards, environmental awareness

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of flooding risks and environmental conservation by enriching local biodiversity and recognizing that nature and human life are intertwined.[69] **Kasese** (Uganda) succeeded in increasing community involvement in disaster risk prevention planning and decision-making. It has enhanced understanding and expertise in disaster management, in addition to shifting attitudes towards protecting the environment.[70] **Kisumu**, Kenya's third-largest city, faces rapid urbanization and development challenges. Through a partnership with Slum Dwellers International Kenya, it conducted a participatory vulnerability mapping and climate risk assessment in five informal settlements, identifying at-risk areas and populations. The results were shared with the community for climate action and planning.[71] The smart governance system introduced by **Sekondi-Takoradi** (Ghana) aims to improve transparency and speed up the acquisition of development permits for effective management and risk-informed development. By enhancing permit processing, establishing a working group and engaging with the community, the city increased compliance with building regulations and encouraged investment in protected areas.[72]

Food production and distribution have large environmental and social impacts that are critical for local resilience. Residents of Rijksstraatweg and Metaal Kathedraal in **Utrecht** (the Netherlands) collaborated with the municipality to create a concept for a food forest in the new Rijnvliet district. The edible residential neighbourhood features plants chosen to benefit the environment, with a focus on cultivating edible plants and trees. On 28 November 2014, Autonomous Municipal Law No. 105 was enacted in **La Paz** (Bolivia) to establish regulations for healthy food production, distribution, marketing, control and consumption within the municipality's jurisdiction. A proxy indicator based on households' experience from the 2018 Municipal SDG Survey was used to measure food insecurity prevalence in La Paz households. **Valongo** (Portugal) guarantees access to fresh, high-quality and fairly priced produce through the Basket of the Week initiative, a component of the larger The Market project. The municipality collaborates with the Cooperative of Local Agricultural Producers to support the local economy and promote environmental sustainability.

In **Johannesburg** (South Africa), 11,117 food gardens were created between 2022 and 2023 throughout seven regions. The programme allowed beneficiaries to secure food parcels, create their own gardens and increase self-sufficiency. Collaboration with the private sector also led to the creation of 130 agro-processors to enhance the agricultural value chain. The **Consortium of Provincial Autonomous Governments of Ecuador** (CONGOPE, Ecuador) launched the Future of Food project to create sustainable food systems, impacting 189,000 house-

holds and benefitting producers and consumers in different areas. With eight projects focusing on social, economic and environmental aspects, the initiative targets poverty reduction for rural families and income enhancement for urban and rural households by 2030.

Achieving food sovereignty implies changing production and consumption patterns – a mission LRGs can promote and support. For example, an initiative in **New York** (USA) to promote plant-based food in hospitals and schools aims to reduce carbon emissions from food purchases.[73] In **Ghent** (Belgium), the growth of small-scale peri-urban agriculture has allowed the city to reduce the length of food supply chains and its reliance on large food supermarkets.[74] The municipality of **Lincoln** (Argentina) created the Buy Local Programme to showcase and promote local goods on supermarket shelves. Local businesses receive State support for product development, marketing and branding to boost sales and recognition.

Culture and knowledge can be leveraged for sustainable use of endogenous natural resources and traditional food practices for food safety and healthy eating. Some LRGs' initiatives have shown how the use of local cultural practices can restore sources of income and benefit the planet as well as the health of the local population. In villages in the **Sundarban Delta** (India), cultural heritage skills are utilized to address climate change impacts and enhance women's livelihood resilience by revitalizing the Shola craft tradition.[75] Women's collectives have built more sustainable and green means of living by avoiding relying on polluting materials. Similarly, the Seed Swap Festival in **Seferihisar** (Türkiye) raises awareness of healthy food sources to support farmers facing low profits. It promotes local and rare products, such as local seeds, and facilitates information exchange among farmers and consumers.[76]

LRGs can increase their role in food waste management. The city of **Almere** (the Netherlands) has created the Coalition Extraordinary Almere programme, bringing together a community of supermarkets based on the principle of reciprocity. **Bordeaux Métropole** (France) collaborates with Les Détritivores to collect biowaste from one of its restaurants, with workers benefitting from a social reinsertion programme, to turn it into compost. **Riga** (Latvia) addresses food waste by converting 40% of landfill biomass into energy and heat for greenhouses. This sustainable solution prevents 2,000 m3/hour of harmful gases and provides both energy and food security benefits to the country through the renovation plan for the Getlini landfill. In **Bruges** (Belgium), the food distribution platform Flavour was established to reduce food waste and provide healthy food to people in poverty. Local welfare associations, social grocery stores and restaurants are

3.1

involved in collecting and distributing surplus food. The successful initiative has expanded to nine other municipalities in a partnership called *Werkkracht 10*,[77] showing how local government entities can play a crucial role in addressing food waste and poverty. **Loulé** City Council (Portugal) has partnered with Dar i Acordar to join the Zero Waste Movement, focusing on recovering surplus food to address social needs. It works with public and private entities to redistribute, reduce and recycle food waste, preventing 152 tons in 2022 and benefitting over 18,000 people.

3.1.5 Challenges and conclusions

LRGs are making strides to address the different dimensions of poverty through local action. However, doing so requires addressing poverty as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, experienced differently by different populations and locations. This is one of the most pervasive challenges currently facing humanity. While SDG targets and indicators emphasize the importance of a multidimensional approach, integrating diverse criteria and understanding local contexts remains complex. LRGs have to navigate various dimensions of poverty, including economic, social, cultural and political aspects, which requires comprehensive strategies tailored to local realities. LRGs require inclusive policies and practices that address the needs of marginalized populations, which may differ considerably. As such, they should actively engage with communities to identify barriers to access and develop targeted interventions that promote inclusivity.

This paper has showcased different pathways through which LRGs are making progress. However, there is a pressing need to formally acknowledge the responsibilities related to reducing poverty and hunger that LRGs effectively have. In some regions, LRGs are responsible for significant expenditure in economic affairs, environmental protection and other key areas. In others, they face constraints due to limited budgets and mandates. Both ensuring equitable distribution of resources and prioritizing interventions based on local needs pose challenges for LRGs. Across all regions, effectively engaging with impoverished communities to assess their needs and prioritize expenditure is a precondition for successful local actions to address multidimensional poverty. Moreover, LRGs require increased fiscal autonomy to ensure continuity and flexibility regarding investment priorities that are essential to shift the dynamics that fuel poverty.

Scale is also fundamental for effective investments. Understanding how urbanization trends connected to economic activities – even if sometimes global – shape the distribution and prevalence of poverty is essential for all policy actions, including local actions. Implementing actions based on evidence at neighbourhood, city, metropolitan and regional scales, and analyzing the synergies and trade-offs of these different actions, is decisive. Although not all initiatives must be scaled up, addressing challenges related to scaling up local initiatives requires effective multilevel coordination across levels of government.

As global emergencies, including climate change and protracted conflicts, become more pressing, the local responses necessary to counter poverty grow increasingly complex. Strengthened and coordinated cooperation is required across multiple sectors, including economic development, health care, education and social protection, **as well as across various stakeholders**, including government agencies, civil society organizations and community groups, to implement integrated solutions. **Different levels of government must also collaborate, including increased horizontal cooperation between LRGs.** Many of the actions highlighted in this paper are already being led by LRGs along these lines, going beyond policy silos and drawing on multistakeholder cooperation. However, achieving consensus and coordination among diverse stakeholders can be challenging, especially as competition for resources intensifies in the context of complex emergencies.

Building LRGs' capacity to effectively address poverty is essential. This includes enhancing their technical skills, fostering leadership and governance capacities and strengthening institutional frameworks for poverty reduction. Investments in capacity building and institutional strengthening are crucial for empowering LRGs to develop and implement sustainable poverty alleviation strategies.

Adequate data availability and monitoring mechanisms are crucial for making evidence-based decisions and tracking progress in poverty reduction efforts. LRGs may face challenges in accessing timely and accurate data, particularly in regions with limited resources and infrastructure. Establishing robust data collection systems and monitoring mechanisms is essential for LRGs to assess the effectiveness of their interventions and make informed policy decisions. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the effectiveness of and desirability for scaling up the local actions showcased, doing so is necessary to effectively tap into the transformational potential of local action and build trust with engaged communities, paving the way for strengthened future public–community collaboration. It is urgent to consider ongoing local actions to address SDGs 1 and 2 through different pathways based on an informed assessment of their potentialities and limitations.

3.2

3.2.1 Introduction

Today, countries and territories are experiencing global disasters caused by climate change. In Latin America and Asia-Pacific, heavy rains and hurricanes impact both oceans and land, while Europe, East Asia and Africa are coping with the effects of drought as well as alternating desertification and large floods. The world's climate emergency has shown its first global and transboundary impacts. As temperatures continue to rise, extreme events will intensify and pose increasingly difficult challenges. Heatwaves exacerbate the effects of drought, intensify wildfire activity, amplify water scarcity resulting in agricultural losses and inflict considerable harm on communities worldwide.

In its latest *State of the Global Climate* report, the World Meteorological Organization officially declared 2023 as the hottest year ever recorded, with the global average near-surface temperature standing at 1.45°C compared to pre-industrial levels. The average temperature rise has reached 1.2°C over the last 10 years and could exceed 1.5°C, the threshold for averting the worst impacts of climate change, in just five years. The global population's exposure to heatwaves is expected to rise further with continued warming. Without additional interventions and adaptation measures, geographical disparities in heat-related mortality mean that marginalized communities with limited resources will be disproportionately impacted. All of this urgently underscores the need for global mechanisms to fight climate change, a phenomenon directly linked to other global emergencies.

Despite this harsh context, local and regional governments (LRGs) have been at the forefront of responses to achieve a just and sustainable future for all. LRGs have innovated mitigation and adaptation solutions to improve urban planning, advanced sustainable production and consumption of goods and services, responded to electrification needs through low-emission and alternative energy solutions, enhanced carbon uptake and storage (e.g. using green spaces, ponds, trees) and offered myriad other responses that can be customized for existing, rapidly growing and new cities. LRGs are fostering a just ecological transition by linking social and climate justice efforts, seeking to transcend territorial economic dependence on unsustainable natural resource extraction. To promote planetary resilience, they are also tackling the uneven distribution of risks for marginalized groups, such as displacement, gentrification and commodification.

This paper seeks to assess progress on localizing SDG 13 (Climate Action) in light of the global processes undertaken in and beyond the framework of the Paris Agreement. The paper begins by examining

LRGs' commitment and action in addressing climate change and SDG 13, highlighting the significance of urbanization and recent international developments and agreements. It then evaluates various local approaches for achieving SDG 13: (a) global advocacy actions; (b) efforts to achieve SDG 13's specific targets; and (c) cross-cutting efforts to achieve SDG 13 in conjunction with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy). Subsequently, it identifies the primary challenges and opportunities related to the effective realization of SDG 13 and its interconnected goals. Lastly, the paper concludes with a series of key policy recommendations across different governance levels. This paper draws upon thorough secondary research, complemented by insights gleaned from the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments (GTF)/United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2024 Survey responses, ensuring a comprehensive and rich analysis.

3.2.2 Trends in SDG 13 action and advocacy

Analyzing the state of SDG 13 localization requires first examining the global frameworks driving progress on climate action at different levels as well as the trends that are facilitating (or hampering) achievement of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda recognizes the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as "the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change." Recently, global policy-making has centred efforts on the specific implementation of the Paris Agreement, which supports implementing SDG 13. **While not explicitly mentioned in the Paris Agreement, some SDG 13 targets are necessary to achieve its goals; they are addressed by the UNFCCC's other work.**

Since its inception, the Paris Agreement has spurred nearly universal engagement in addressing climate change by establishing objectives and conveying a sense of urgency to the international community in responding to the climate emergency. However, worldwide emissions continue to diverge from projected global mitigation trajectories to meet the temperature target outlined in the Paris Agreement. As a result, the window for fulfilling current pledges is rapidly closing, underscoring the pressing need to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The *Summary for Urban Policymakers* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) *Sixth Assessment Report* indicates that without immediate and deep reductions in emissions, global warming would exceed 2°C by 2050 (5°C in the Arab region), affecting even more cities and their people, infrastructure and ecosystems. Indeed, limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C requires a deep, rapid and sustained reduction in global greenhouse

gas (GHG) emissions of 43% by 2030 and 60% by 2035 compared to the 2019 level, as well as reaching net zero carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions by 2050.

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The IPCC's *Sixth Assessment Report* reveals that **urbanization has exacerbated the effects of global warming in cities, especially those lacking vegetation and bodies of water**. The combination of extreme seawater events, increased by both sea level rise and storm surge, with extreme rainfall and river flow events will increase the probability of flooding. SDG 13 is the SDG with the most regression in Asia-Pacific and other regions. In the Arab region, there is insufficient data for four out of the five targets. In Latin America, progress on SDG targets 13.2 and 13.3 is regressing, while no data is available for the other three targets. Even Europe is unlikely to get on track with cutting GHG emissions by 2030, and the number of persons affected by disasters is constantly increasing.

Localizing and realizing both the Paris Agreement and SDG 13 depends on the world's ability to respond to the effects of the triple planetary crisis, which encompasses climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution. Moreover, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, small island developing States and least developed countries and territories encountered significant setbacks in their progress towards the SDGs. They are falling behind and struggling to catch up with their regional counterparts. Through localization, LRGs can lead the necessary responses to the triple planetary crisis, addressing the territorial dimensions of global challenges and elevating their demands to the global level in the framework of the multilateral system.

According to the CDP-ICLEI Track reporting platform, in 2022, **80% of almost 1,000 reporting cities were facing significant climate hazards, from extreme heat to floods**. In 28% of these cities, hazards threatened at least 70% of their population, and 25% were facing a high-risk hazard expected to increase in intensity and frequency by 2025. Environmental stressors such as climate change and pollution, combined with urban sprawl and the transformation of open areas, exert significant pressure on the socio-ecological systems of cities and their outskirts. These phenomena can exacerbate the deterioration and loss of natural habitats; fragment ecosystems; and impact human health, wellbeing, social unity, equity and city resilience.

Transport, infrastructure and buildings are three critical drivers of climate change linked to urbanization. Mitigation action in these sectors, as well as increased adaptation finance, led to global climate finance flows reaching an annual average of 803 billion USD in 2019–2020, a 12% increase over the 2017–2018 period. The third edition of the *SLOCAT*
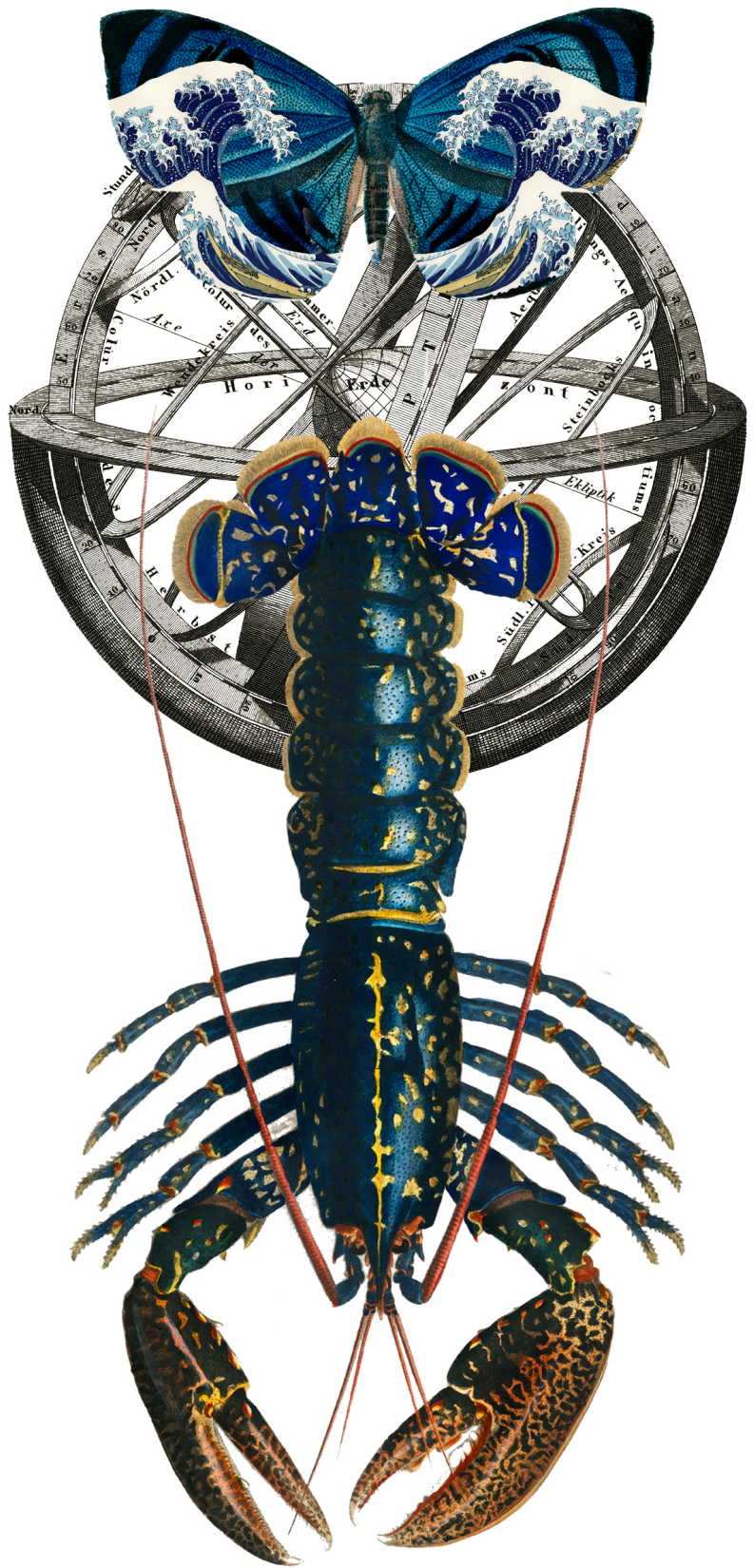
Transport, Climate and Sustainability Global Status Report reveals that urban transport accounted for 8% of global CO_2 emissions and around 40% of global transport emissions in 2020. Unless interventions are taken, motorized mobility in cities could rise by 94% between 2015 and 2050. According to the GlobalABC 2022 Global Status Report for Buildings and Construction, 158 out of 196 countries (81%) mention buildings in their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) action plans, and 79 out of 196 (40%) have building energy codes; however, only 26% of countries have mandatory codes for all buildings.

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Unfortunately, the report does not capture information on LRGs' building energy codes or standards.

Marginalized communities, especially in the Global South, suffer disproportionate impacts from climate change despite their minimal contribution to it. From 2010 to 2020, regions highly vulnerable to disasters, where around 3.3 to 3.6 billion individuals reside, encountered human mortality rates from floods, droughts and storms that were 15 times higher compared to regions with minimal vulnerability. Within cities, the first quintile of the population (i.e. the lowest-income residents) face the most severe gaps in urban adaptation – and are thus exposed to greater climate risk. Smaller and lower-income cities are more likely to lack adaptation planning capacity. The IPCC's *Sixth Assessment Report* reminds us that addressing inequalities and climate action must go hand in hand, underscoring the need for a strong loss and damage mechanism that enables reparations and restorations. Here, LRGs are asking to be, and must be, part of the solution.

The Paris Agreement views NDCs, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and long-term strategies and plans to lower GHG emissions as critical tools to advance climate goals. Through their innovative approaches and community engagement, LRGs are indispensable in bridging the gap between national ambitions and ground-level implementation, ensuring that NDCs lead to tangible and lasting climate resilience, sustainability and a just ecological transition. **While countries are already submitting either updated or second NDCs** (including, for example, 29 out of 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean) **to adapt and mitigate vulnerability to climate change impacts, LRGs are not often included in defining, implementing or assessing NDCs**. Urban content in NDCs is likewise deficient: according to a study by UN-Habitat, United Nations Development Programme and University of Southern Denmark, 34% of the 194 NDCs analyzed have low or no explicit urban references (including some from the Global North), while 39% have only moderate urban references. As sustainable urbanization is essential to bridging climate goals and action, collaboration across all levels of government is urgently needed, with LRGs' full and meaningful participation in defining, implementing, monitoring and evaluating such instruments.

With time slipping away, taking swift and significant action – beyond just making plans and commitments – is essential. Achieving net zero emissions, setting higher targets to mitigate and adapt to climate change and applying an environmental justice lens to all our actions are urgent if we are to prevent disastrous outcomes and ensure a sustainable future. This inevitably requires bringing LRGs on board as full decision-makers.

3.2.3 Progress on localizing SDG 13 while closing the climate action gap through the Paris Agreement, the UNFCCC, sustainable urbanization (SDG 11), clean water (SDG 6) and affordable and clean energy (SDG 7)

LRGs have a critical role in taking climate action and responding to the triple planetary crisis. In the face of the urgent need to limit global warming to 1.5°C and the increasing climate hazards faced by cities globally, progress has been significant with many cities committing to ambitious climate targets and actions. LRGs' responses have covered a wide range of governance actions (see Figure 3.2.1).This paper seeks to assess progress on localizing SDG 13 (Climate Action) in light of the global processes undertaken in and beyond the framework of the Paris Agreement. The paper begins by examining

Figure 3.2.1 Pathways for climate adaptation and mitigation in cities
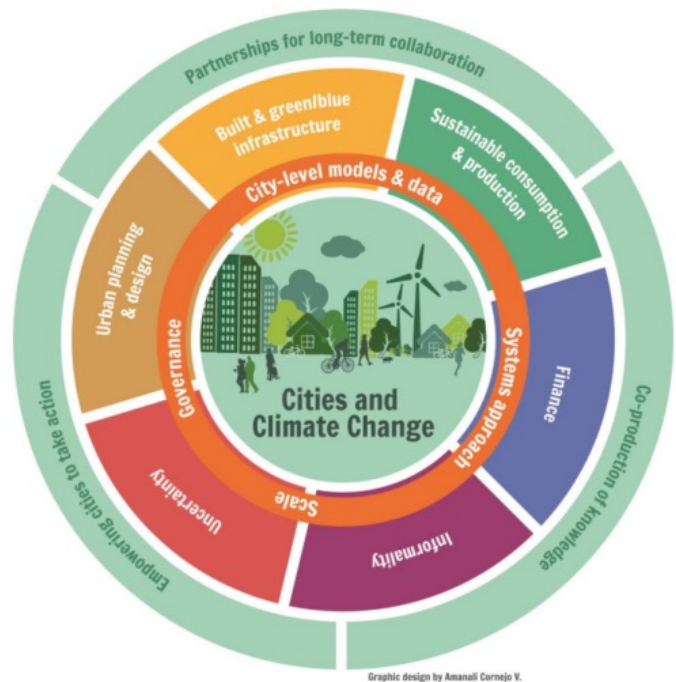
Source: 2019 IPCC Global Research and Action Agenda on Cities and Climate Change Science

Looking ahead, multilevel and global partnerships and inclusive actions will be crucial to achieving the targets outlined in SDG 13 and the Paris Agreement. The momentum generated by recent international climate conferences, such as the 2021, 2022 and 2023 UN Climate Change Conferences (COP26, COP27 and COP28), signals growing recognition of LRGs' vital role in global climate efforts. Nevertheless, efforts must now run in two directions: first, parties must translate commitments into tangible on-the-ground actions to effectively combat climate change. Second, they must restore the losses and damages from emerging climate change impacts, as voted by the parties at COP27 with the creation of the Loss and Damage Mechanism.

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This section analyzes the commitments and efforts made by LRGs worldwide to fulfil the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement in the six coming years, as well as the role they may take on for the remainder of the Decade of Restoration. The subsections below discuss advocating for a greater recognition of LRGs' role in defining and implementing solutions, as well as contributing to SDG 13 targets and other closely related SDGs: SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

LRGs' climate action advocacy

Since 1995 at the UN climate negotiations, the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (LGMA) has been representing towns, cities and regions on behalf of the GTF. After the recognition of all levels of governments in the preamble of the 2015 Paris Agreement, thousands of cities and regions have declared climate emergencies, adopted ambitious targets and helped to elevate national commitments, demonstrating that multilevel action is critical to stay under the 1.5°C threshold. The preamble of the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact recognized the urgent need for multilevel action. The first-ever Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change, convened by UNFCCC and UN-Habitat, recognized multilevel partnerships through the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) initiative during COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh (Egypt) in November 2022.

In the leadup to the first global stocktake of the Paris Agreement at COP28 in Dubai (United Arab Emirates, UAE) in December 2023, **cities and regions across all continents convened their official local stocktakes, focusing on local commitments, interaction with their national plans and actions for climate justice domestically and globally**. They also actively engaged in the UNFCCC technical dialogues. Meanwhile, from the Amazon Cities Forum to the Africa Climate Summit and the first-ever G7 Roundtable on Subnational Climate Actions with U7 (a group of urban networks from across the world), multilevel action has been one of the strongest elements across numerous intergovernmental processes.

BOX 3.2.1

BOX 3.2.1 LUSAKA'S LOCAL STOCK-TAKE

In **Lusaka** (Zambia), the LusakaStocktake4ClimateEmergency session provided a forum for the mayor to speak with youth representatives, councillors and community leaders to assess their joint vision, key challenges and opportunities in reaching climate goals. Participants identified the main challenges as increasing floods, waste management needs, dependence on the use of charcoal (which depletes forests), a widespread lack of awareness of climate change, and limited access to healthy food. One priority solution identified was clean cooking technologies to replace charcoal. These conversations demonstrated the need for multilevel alignment with the Zambian NDC through, for example, engaging NDC committees. Participants also requested improving the Constituency Development Fund to increase the share of green investments and disaster funds from 5% to 20% to foster stable income and climate change solutions.

At COP28, the LGMA supported convening the Local Climate Action Summit, hosted by the COP28 Presidency and Bloomberg Philanthropies, alongside the World Climate Action Summit, resulting in the launch of the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP). COP28 also saw the second edition of the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change, and the LGMA convened the third edition of the Multilevel Action and Urbanization Pavilion and actively engaged in the UNFCCC negotiations.

By the end of the COP28 Local Climate Action Summit and the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change, 72 nations had endorsed the CHAMP initiative, and the COP28 UAE Consensus included at least 15 specific paragraphs on multilevel action and urbanization in various decisions. One such paragraph was paragraph 161 of the Global Stocktake decision, which urges Parties and non-Party stakeholders to join efforts to accelerate delivery through inclusive, multilevel, gender-responsive and cooperative action.
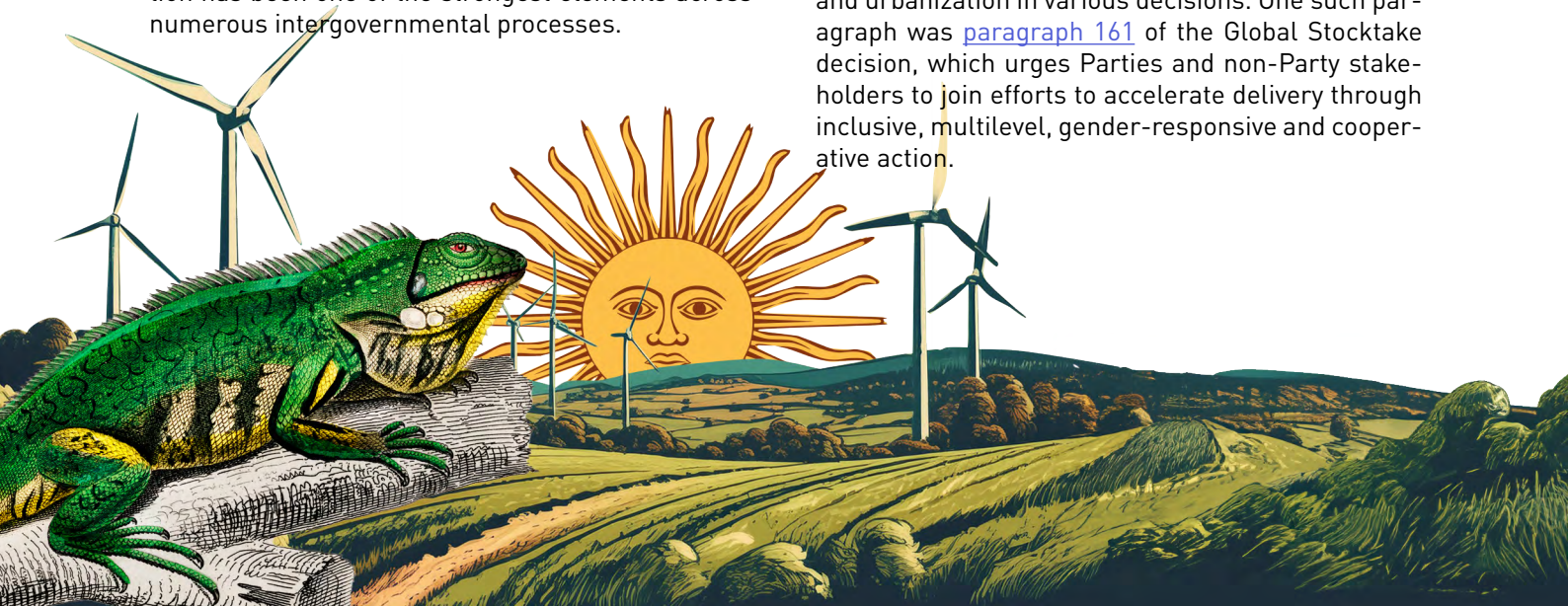
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Table 3.2.1 Subnational climate advocacy under the UNFCCC, 1990–2024

Period	UNFCCC event or milestone	LGMA initiatives	Subnational achievements
1990–1999	• 1992: Earth Summit • 1995: First UNFCCC Conference of the Parties • 1997: Kyoto Protocol adopted	• 1990: ICLEI, Climate Alliance • 1992: Local Agenda 21 • 1995–1997: Municipal Leaders' Summits on Climate Change	The **LGMA** is designated as essential partners under the UNFCCC alongside businesses and CSOs.
2000–2009	• 2005: Kyoto Protocol entry into force • 2007: Bali Road Map • 2009: Copenhagen Summit (COP15)	• 2005: US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement • 2008: European Covenant of Mayors • 2008: C40, UCLG, Regions4 and The Climate Group included in the LGMA • 2009: Local Government Climate Lounge	The **Local Government Climate Roadmap** is born with a mission to recognize, engage and empower LRGs.
2010–2015	• 2010: Cancún Climate Change Conference/Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (COP16) • 2012: Lima-Paris Action Agenda • 2015: Non-State Actor Zone for Climate Action (NAZCA) platform • 2015: NDCs	• 2010: Mexico City Pact • 2010: Establishment of carbonn Climate Registry • 2011: Durban Adaptation Charter • 2015: Creation of Under2 Coalition • 2013: Resilient Cities • 2014: Compact of Mayors • 2013: Friends of Cities	The **Paris Agreement preamble** recognizes the importance of all levels of governments in climate action.
2016–Present	• 2016: Marrakech Partnership • 2021: Talanoa Dialogues • 2020: LGMA's higher connection with High-Level Champions • 2023: Global Stocktake	• 2016: Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy • 2018: CitiesIPCC • 2019: First Climate emergency declarations • 2019: CDP/ICLEI Track reporting platform • 2019: Friends of Multilevel Action initiative • 2020: City Climate Finance Gap Fund • 2020: Race to Zero campaign and breakthroughs • 2021: Race to Resilience campaign and breakthroughs • 2022: SURGe • 2022: Sharm-El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda • 2022–2023: Ministerial Meetings on Urbanization and Climate Change • 2021–2023: Multilevel Action and Urbanization Pavilions • 2023: Daring Cities • 2023: CHAMP	The **Glasgow Climate Pact preamble** underscores the urgent need for multilevel action, and paragraph 161 of the **Global Stocktake decision** urges Parties to take multilevel action.

Source: Compiled based on information from the LGMA website (www.cities-and-regions.org)

Table 3.2.2 Key milestones since the 2019 HLPF review of SDG 13 in relation to cities and regions

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UN/UNFCCC	National/global	LGMA/GTF
• 2019: Climate Action Summit: ICLA Track, City Climate Finance Gap Fund	• 2019: International Conference on Climate Action Heidelberg Conference	• 2019: Coalition for Urban Transitions report, Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance
• 2019: IPCC Cities and Climate Action Agenda	• 2021: G20 Platform on SDGs Localisation and Intermediary Cities (G20 PLIC)	• 2019–2023: U20 Mayors Summits
• 2020: Race to Zero campaign, Making Cities Resilient 2030	• 2021: NDC2.0, some with urban components and multilevel action	• 2020–2023: Daring Cities forums
• 2021: Glasgow Climate Pact, with preamble highlighting multilevel climate action	• 2022/2023: G7 communiques with multilevel and urbanization references	• 2021–2023: Multilevel Action and Urbanization Pavilions at COP Blue Zone
• 2021/2023: UNEA-5/6 Cities and Regions Summit	• 2023: G7 Roundtable on Subnational Climate Actions, including Climate and Urbanization Ministries as well as U7 representatives	• 2021–2023: U7 Mayors Summits
• 2021: Coalition on Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Food Systems (UFS Coalition)	• 2023: Amazon Cities Forum, Africa Climate Summit	• 2021: Cities Race to Zero
• 2022: Call to Local Action for Migrants and Refugees	• 2023: COP28 Local Climate Action Summit and CHAMP initiative	• 2021: Innovate4Cities initiative
• 2022: Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework with target 12 on urban green space and the second ten-year Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities		• 2022: IPCC's *Summary for Urban Policymakers* (part of its Sixth Assessment Report)
• 2022: Desertification decision on urban-rural linkages		• 2022: Cities Race to Resilience, RegionsAdapt, CDP-ICLEI Track platform
• 2022: Sharm-El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda, SURGe		• 2023: Sustainable Development Solutions Network's Global Commission for Urban SDG Finance
• 2022–2023: Ministerial Meetings on Urbanization and Climate Change		• 2023: Stocktake4ClimateEmergency
• 2023: International Zero Waste Day		
• 2023: UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA2) Resolution		
• 2023: SDG Summit-Localization, UN Climate Ambition Summit		
• 2023: Global Stocktake decision, UAE Consensus (paragraph 161 urging multilevel action)		

Source: Compiled based on information from the LGMA website (www.cities-and-regions.org)

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Delivering the SDG 13 targets

• Localizing SDG target 13.1 on strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters

When disasters strike locally, LRGs' ability to respond and recover is tested. As the nearest level of governance to the people, LRGs serve as first responders. Most disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures fall under their responsibility, often tied to municipal services, placing LRGs at the forefront of DRR.

Localizing SDG target 13.1 is crucial for strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters at all levels. Indeed, SDG indicator 13.1.3 emphasizes the importance of this local-level focus, tracking the proportion of LRGs that adopt and implement these crucial DRR strategies. According to the CDP-ICLEI Track platform, 573 LRGs have an adaptation plan. This work underscores LRGs' vital role in advancing the global agenda for DRR and climate resilience and achieving broader national and global objectives. Likewise, LRGs' commitment and progress towards the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 are pivotal. However, even though DRR strategies have been adopted rather comprehensively on national and local levels in Europe, bold efforts are still needed in the rest of the world's regions.

Among the many LRGs worldwide that have adopted resilience and DRR laws, plans and strategies, Taipei, the **Canelones** department (Uruguay) and **Niterói** (Brazil) are notable example. Latin America and the Caribbean ranks as the second most disaster-prone region globally. From 2000 to 2019, it experienced 1,205 disasters, including 548 floods, with floods being the most frequent hazard in the region. At high risk of disaster, **La Paz** (Bolivia) has experienced geodynamic events (e.g. landslides and mud flows) and hydrometeorological events (e.g. floods, cyclones and river overflows), exacerbated by population growth and human action. To face this risk, the municipality enacted Municipal Autonomous Law No. 005/2010 on Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management as the regulatory basis for emergency response. This law addresses the issues of prevention, response to emergencies and disasters, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

To reduce the risk of flooding around the Ocloro River, **San José** (Costa Rica) created a Risk Mitigation Plan including short-, mid- and long-term steps. To minimize immediate risks, it upgraded two bridges, widened a street and enhanced drainage areas. The city also added green spaces and greenery on rooftops and walls for better water retention.

Long-term plans identified 11 major projects such as building new bridges, expanding the drainage system and transitioning to medium-rise buildings for more green space, while an early warning system was implemented for flood preparedness. San José's approach highlights the **importance of combining technical and scientific expertise with robust political support and active involvement of communities and local stakeholders**.

In governing DRR and climate change adaptation and mitigation, LRGs often place human rights and climate justice at the centre of their initiatives. This approach is essential, particularly in addressing climate-induced displacement and ensuring that marginalized populations are protected and supported. By integrating principles of equity and justice into their climate actions, LRGs help safeguard the well-being of all community members, ensuring that no one is left behind. The **Accra Metropolitan Assembly** (Ghana) has shown its dedication to mitigating migrants' climate vulnerabilities. This commitment involves producing data on the presence of migrants in the city's informal economy, enhancing this economy's resilience to climate change impacts and improving working conditions for migrants engaged in informal waste management. With support from the Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees, **Beira** (Portugal) is undertaking significant initiatives to support the dignified relocation and reintegration of displaced communities affected by severe coastal storms, converting markets into temporary shelters and relocating up to 100 families to a safer area.

Building on the success of the first Making Cities Resilient (MCR) campaign, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction launched the MCR2030 Campaign in 2020 as a global partnership to strengthen DRR and resilience. The campaign strives to ensure cities become resilient and sustainable by 2030, contributing directly to the achievement of SDGs 11 and 13, among others. It has built on the 10-year legacy of the Resilient Cities Congress, which emphasized the need for more efficient multilevel and multistakeholder collaborations, improved financing for LRG action, better planning and action, mainstreaming of resilience in the sustainability agenda and broader inclusion of marginalized populations. As of 2023, over 1,500 cities are participating in the MCR2030 process, including the 28 cities announced as MCR2030 Resilience Hubs. These cities have benefitted from analyses, tools and capacity building that support them to better understand and respond to DRR and resilience needs.

Similarly, in the framework of the UNFCCC global climate action agenda and its Race to Zero and Race to Resilience campaigns, the Cities Race to Resilience campaign was launched by a coalition formed by C40 Cities, CDP, the Global Covenant of Mayors

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for Climate & Energy, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, Resilient Cities Network, UCLG, the World Wide Fund for Nature and the World Resources Institute. This campaign, which includes hundreds of committed cities such as **Makati** (the Philippines), **Peñalolén** (Chile), **Gaziantep** (Türkiye) and **Cocody** (Côte d'Ivoire), focuses on driving them to join and pledge their commitment to the global fight against climate change. These cities are committed to implementing inclusive and resilient climate actions ahead of and beyond COP27. The RegionsAdapt Initiative is leading regional governments' engagement in the UNFCCC Race to Resilience. Around 80 regions are involved, such as **Ahafo** (Ghana), **Campeche** (Mexico), **Cross River State** (Nigeria), **Gujarat** (India) and **North Sumatra** (Indonesia).

Overall, **localizing SDG target 13.1 empowers LRGs to lead on climate action, fostering resilient and adaptive communities**. LRGs' proactive governance, commitment to sustainable practices and focus on inclusive and just policies are instrumental in building a resilient future capable of withstanding climate-related hazards and natural disasters.

• Localizing SDG target 13.2 on integrating climate change measures into policies, strategies and planning

Throughout history, cities have emerged as compact settlements within vast, thriving natural environments. Currently, urban areas consume the majority of natural resources, contributing to most negative environmental impacts. Indeed, they account for about 78% of the world's energy consumption and emit more than 70% of GHG emissions. If cities do not change their relationship with their natural environments, nature's ability to support a global population exceeding nine billion by 2050, with two-thirds residing in urban regions, will be jeopardized.

LRGs play a pivotal role in transforming public policy-making towards just, ecological transitions and sustainable development, particularly through innovative urban and territorial planning. **By re-naturing cities through strategic planning, LRGs work to re-embed urban systems within natural ecosystems in a compatible, sustainable and long-term manner, enhancing the vitality of both.** This approach involves challenging socio-spatial fragmentation and promoting policies that ensure proximity, accessibility and urban-rural reciprocity. LRGs play a crucial role in providing sustainable public services, including fostering energy efficiency and climate neutrality; managing waste, wastewater and sanitation; improving the sustainability of their transport services; and fostering biodiversity, green areas and belts, and urban gardens, ensuring these services meet the needs of their communities.

Despite the missed opportunities for multilevel co-ordination with their national governments through NDCs, among other instruments, LRGs continue to set ambitious targets in various sectors. According to the *Renewables in Cities 2021 Global Status Report*, 830 cities in 72 countries have set renewable energy targets in at least one sector (power, heating and cooling or transport), and over 610 of these cities have established 100% renewable energy targets. In addition, the 2022 impact report of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy reveals that with its 12,500+ signatories in 144 countries, one billion people live in cities committed to climate mitigation and adaptation. By 2050, these signatories are projected to reduce global GHG emissions by 4.1 gigatonnes of CO_2 equivalent. LRGs' have a significant role in promoting capacity-strengthening mechanisms for effective climate change-related planning and management in all world regions (SDG target 13.b).

By prioritizing pollution reduction in their plans and strategies, LRGs contribute heavily to creating healthier and more sustainable living environments. In particular, **LRGs' climate efforts have centred on energy efficiency and climate neutrality, aiming to diminish reliance on fossil fuels and shift towards more sustainable and renewable energy consumption patterns**. LRGs who have committed to becoming climate neutral by 2050 or earlier include **Johannesburg** (South Africa), **Buenos Aires** (Argentina), **Bonn** (Germany), **Cluj-Napoca** (Romania) and **Åland** (Finland).

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BOX 3.2.2

BECOMING CARBON NEUTRAL IN BRAZIL

In Brazil, **Niterói**'s Social Carbon Neutrality Programme promotes discussion about climate change in low-income communities. It aims to expand to other areas, reaching the entire city to engage all citizens in concrete actions to reduce GHG emissions. As the national coordinating body of the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy in Brazil, the **Brazilian Association of Municipalities** has actively delivered in-depth support to over 30 municipalities to develop a GHG emissions inventory, vulnerability and risk assessments and local climate action plans to overcome municipalities' lack of expertise, political support and financial resources, particularly in small and medium-sized municipalities.

The **Brulocalis** (Belgium) local government association has organized several working groups and awareness-raising activities focused on promoting the shift from fossil-fuelled vehicles to electric vehicles and enhancing the use of alternative modes of transport, in line with the Good Move regional strategy. Additionally, Brulocalis has recently become involved in the Renolution regional strategy, which aims to expedite the renovation of energy-efficient buildings in Brussels. As part of this effort, Brulocalis is organizing a working group to address collective and group renovation projects.

The **Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality** (South Africa) initiated the Model Energy-Efficient Public Building project to demonstrate the potential of alternative energy solutions for sustainable energy production and distribution. The project aimed to raise awareness and build capacities about energy needs, reduce demand and use renewables within the building. In Cameroon, several women mayors who are part of the Network of Locally Elected Women of Africa, Cameroon section (REFELA-CAM), launched the Women Sustainable Energy Programme. The programme aimed to establish REFELA-CAM as a recognized entity, advocate for access to services (particularly electrification), fight climate change and train and support women-led cooperatives to collaborate with municipalities for energy service upkeep.

In parallel, LRGs have taken actions to diversify and improve their means of public transport to reduce their impact on the planet. Globally, the transport sector contributes to over 24% of CO_2 emissions and 14% of annual GHG emissions. Road transport ac-

counts for approximately 72% of the total CO_2 emissions from the transport sector. In certain regional contexts, the use of private transport is predominant. For example, only one-third of the urban population has convenient access to public transport in regions such as North Africa and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Central and South Asia. Other issues deepen transport-related inequalities, such as time spent travelling; access to various modes of transport, especially public transit; affordability; and safety and non-discrimination. In **Amman** (Jordan), the accessible, diverse and low-carbon transport system includes bus rapid transit, public and non-motorized transport options and enhanced pedestrian infrastructure and green spaces. It has focused on the city's poorer and more densely populated neighbourhoods and involved community members of all ages.

As main providers of essential public services, LRGs are responsible for reducing waste and developing sustainable waste management systems for environmental protection purposes. The 2021–2025 **La Paz** en Movimiento Municipal Plan (Bolivia) includes promoting a clean city through sustainable, participatory and integrated environmental and solid waste management. In **Atyrau** (Kazakhstan), a climate roadmap requires rethinking the use of solid waste landfills to adhere to all updated environmental regulations as well as include waste recycling, leaving burying waste as a last resort. It also prioritizes working with industries. For example, the city aims to minimize the negative impacts of the Atyrau oil refinery on groundwater, flora, fauna and atmospheric air by rebuilding the mechanical treatment facilities and the standard treated wastewater channel. By integrating waste recyclers into its social waste management system, **Pune** (India) has taken bold climate action and provided citizens with more affordable and reliable waste services. In turn, recyclers, who usually work in the informal economy, gain more secure livelihoods and formal recognition for their work.

Some LRGs have broken with the assumption of unlimited resources and moved to alternative economic models that involve a substantial reworking of resource extraction and use systems. In doing so, they promote a renewed relationship with resources such as waste, energy, food and time. The sponge city model in **Shenzhen** (China); the solar-powered water supply project in **Makang'wa Village** and **Chamwino** (Tanzania); the **Federation of Municipalities of Zgharta Caza**'s reduction and rationing of water use through improved governance with the water, agriculture and tourism sectors; public schools' rainwater collection systems in **Atizapán** (Mexico); and support to community-level waste reduction in **Brisbane** (Australia) all contribute to the rethink, regenerate, reduce, reuse and recover framework of the circular economy.

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On another note, **LRGs are actively engaged in efforts to regenerate local natural commons, resources and ecosystems; enhance biodiversity; and improve the quality of life for both human and non-human living beings**. They are moving away from solely anthropocentric conceptions of development and considering the rights of future generations.

Nature, urban trees and forests offer a systemic approach to localize the SDGs and climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, which is especially important considering that biodiversity loss is ranked as the third-highest severe risk for the world over the next 10 years (up from fifth place in 2021). Efficient and cost-effective nature-based solutions can cool cities by up to 8°C, increase resilience to floods and landslides, reduce energy consumption, capture localized traffic pollution, increase biodiversity, improve citizens' health and foster vibrant neighbourhoods. LRGs worldwide have taken the opportunity to strategically plan and sustainably oversee urban trees and forests, thereby contributing to realizing the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the New Urban Agenda. Over 300 LRGs are part of CitiesWithNature and RegionsWithNature, the official platforms where LRGs report on their actions and voluntary commitments to the global biodiversity framework. This represents strong support for implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, including target 12 on urban green spaces, and the Convention on Biological Diversity's second 10-year Plan of Action on Subnational Governments, Cities and Other Local Authorities.

BOX 3.2.3

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO DRIVE CLIMATE ACTION, RECOVER HERITAGE AND BUILD COMMUNITY

Local efforts by LRGs and multilevel, collaborative spaces demonstrate an unparalleled drive to restore, safeguard and expand the quantity and quality of green spaces and biodiversity within urban areas. The reforestation experience of **Antsirabe** (Madagascar) illustrates this point. Likewise, **Tandil** (Argentina) has planted over 212,000 trees in three years, improving air quality and providing shade. It combined this work with a programme on solid waste management, new recycling points and new solar and wind farms. The province of **Azuay** (Ecuador) aims to plant over a million endogenous trees to preserve and recover the forest heritage of the territory.

In Spain, the green belts of **Terrassa** and **Sant Boi de Llobregat** and the *Congost Natura* project of **Granollers** contribute to establishing interconnected urban green and blue infrastructure. This infrastructure integrates cities with their surrounding environments, ensuring the sustainable and comprehensive conservation of natural, agricultural and forest areas. These LRGs defined this transformation together with citizens, users, workers and property owners, contributing to the sustainability and liveability of the Barcelona metropolitan area, one of the most densely populated areas in Europe.

In these efforts, rural-urban symbiosis plays a key role in addressing challenges related to cities' ecological transition. Intermediary cities have been critical for territorial cohesion. **By adopting integrated territorial approaches and horizontal collaborations, LRGs can enhance ecological resilience, ensure food security and support sustainable agricultural practices. Such actions facilitate resource sharing and economic interdependence, while also addressing socio-economic disparities, unsustainable production and consumption patterns and environmental challenges.** Against this backdrop, intermediary cities are crucial actors for re-evaluating life systems and reestablishing social connections with all population groups, local stakeholders and other levels of government. Notable examples include the Sustainable Fair in the intermediary city of **Lincoln** (Argentina), which serves as a direct platform for producers to meet with consumers. **Valongo** (Portugal) created four urban vegetable gardens with 500 plots, some of which are accessible to people with disabilities, to foster sustainability, organic farming, social inclusion and quality of life. The Greening **Bogotá** project (Colombia) illustrates how in times of food insecurity, establishing public vegetable gardens offers concrete solutions to climate change, serves as a supply of fresh and nutritious products, strengthens community bonds and preserves indigenous plants and seeds.

Heritage lies at the heart of the discussion on culture and the climate crisis, as increasingly acknowledged by global leaders, for example, at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh. LRGs have long included creative, cultural and heritage perspectives into climate action to envision new futures not bound to the carbon economy. They are increasingly understanding nature and culture as interconnected and incorporate this perspective in activities addressing the climate emergency. Despite the significant potential of cultural heritage to drive climate action and support communities in transitioning to low-carbon, climate-resilient futures, this potential is often overlooked. Preserving natural and cultural heritage, repurposing buildings and safeguarding traditional knowledge are vital for addressing climate change

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and creating more resilient cities and communities. In this regard, the state of **California** (USA) conducted a comprehensive analysis to integrate cultural heritage and climate action, aiming to better comprehend the intersection of culture with climate-related efforts by government entities in the state's different territories. In the historic centre of **Morelia** (Mexico), the city is preserving heritage buildings and monuments for new purposes: fostering creative hubs, reducing environmental stress, enhancing the circular economy and engaging the local community.

> **• Localizing SDG target 13.3 on improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning**

SDG indicator 13.3.1, which doubles as SDG indicator 4.7.1, aims to measure the extent to which education on global citizenship and sustainable development is mainstreamed in different policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment. According to the *2023 Sustainable Development Goals Report*, **47% of national curricula in the 100 countries analyzed do not address climate change**. Furthermore, **only one-third of teachers can explain climate change's local impacts and 70% of young people can, at best, grasp the basic principles of climate change**. Applying their competences and skills in education, training, climate issues and public participation, LRGs play a crucial role in localizing SDG target 13.3. Sustainable development topics are broad, and LRGs focus on their interconnection, including ecological ethics; climate action; disaster preparedness education; water, sanitation and hygiene; sustainable food and agriculture education; and net zero emissions.

Under the Green Schools Partnership Programme, **Lusaka** (Zambia) is collaborating with schools, community organizations and businesses to create a holistic and sustainable approach to environmental education. The initiative integrates water, sanitation, hygiene and climate change education principles into the school curriculum. It fosters a sense of collective commitment and responsibility for sustainable practices, addresses the specific needs of diverse communities and promotes equitable access to essential environmental education. The cross-departmental collaboration within the LRG has been critical to enhance the programme's effectiveness. **Taipei City** is promoting small-scale planting on all public school roofs, with a surface of over 166,000 square metres, integrating food and agriculture education and reducing indoor temperatures.

Through a public space reforestation programme, the municipality of **Palestina** (Ecuador) offered trees

to schools to foster students' commitment to restoring the ecosystem and minimize pollution. Other cities such as **Matosinhos** and **Pombal** (Portugal) support their schools through regional or international programmes such as the Eco-Schools programme led by the European Blue Flag Association. Schools that develop a plan with their students and community with specific initiatives for sustainability and climate action receive a flag as a reward, a source of pride and motivation for continued and sustained action. **Niš** (Serbia) supports a youth-based NGO that organizes lectures and cleaning actions with entrepreneurs.

BOX 3.2.4

BUILDING CAPACITIES AND FOSTERING PARTICIPATION FOR CLIMATE TRANSFORMATION

Beyond direct work with young people and their teachers, LRGs have long raised awareness and built capacities among public and private stakeholders. **Brital** (Lebanon) raises awareness and human and institutional capabilities to mitigate climate change, adapt to it, reduce its impact and provide early warning by holding awareness campaigns in educational institutions and civic gatherings. In **Yaroslavl** (Russia), the First Green Forum focused on the business community to exchange urban greening practices and launch a strategic programme to monitor green areas and restore green funds. **Sultanbeyli** (Türkiye) has prioritized participatory and data-based local strategies to tackle climate change and become more resilient.

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At the global level, initiatives such as UCLG's Climate Resilience Modules 1 and 2, peer learning on climate issues (including the peer learning note *Urban Ecosystem Restoration & Nature-based Solutions* from the INTERLACE project) and the C40 Knowledge Hub provide local policy-makers and practitioners with tools, practical experiences, useful information and LRG insights to advance climate action in their territories. Likewise, since 2010, the Adaptation Fund has invested more than 1 billion USD in climate change adaptation and resilience initiatives, supporting 160 localized projects targeting the most marginalized communities from both urban and rural areas in developing countries and impacting over 43 million people worldwide. For example, a project in central Lao PDR has helped enhance climate resilience in rural, small towns along the country's east-west economic corridor. It provided socially inclusive and climate-resilient water infrastructure, incorporated climate change considerations into urban planning and built awareness and capacities at all levels.

These and other initiatives support the quest of multilateral global governance institutions, including the UN system and LRG networks, to shape and institutionalize climate action at the local level.

BOX 3.2.5

THE YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION FUND

Bloomberg Philanthropies is collaborating with UCLG and the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation at Johns Hopkins University to deliver the Youth Climate Action Fund. This innovative programme provides technical assistance and funding to support 98 cities worldwide in engaging tens of thousands of youth aged 15 to 24 in designing, producing and overseeing urgent climate solutions, from tree-planting to policy-making. Microgrant-funded efforts, proposed by youth and selected by cities, are expected to ignite awareness and action in communities to advance climate goals as critical as meeting decarbonization targets and reducing consumption-based emissions.

By enhancing city capacities in engaging youth for climate action, the fund directly contributes to SDG 13 targets. Most specifically, it supports target 13.3 by improving education and capacity on climate change mitigation and adaptation, fostering local projects that empower youth to lead sustainable urban transformations. By the end of the programme, LRGs are expected to have improved capacity for climate action and see improved youth knowledge on ways to mitigate or adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The cross-cutting dimensions of SDG 13 and climate emergency declarations as integrated solutions to the climate crisis

Initiating urgent, profound and consistent reductions in GHG emissions across all sectors is essential for mitigating climate change. In addition to worldwide action for climate-resilient development and expedited implementation of adaptation and mitigation strategies, emissions reduction requires maximizing synergies among SDGs and minimizing their trade-offs. Indeed, tackling issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing inequalities necessitates finding a balance among environmental, social and economic goals. The 2030 Agenda provides a framework for approaching these challenges in a systematic and integrated way. **Understanding the relationships between SDG 13 and SDGs 11, 6 and 7 and strategically planning efforts to localize the 2030 Agenda are critical components of climate action.**

First, to accomplish SDG 11 on creating inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements, LRGs must also prioritize climate action. For example, enhancing public transport (SDG target 11.2) aims to reduce the number of private vehicles, thereby decreasing GHG emissions. Urban planning that prioritizes green spaces and energy-efficient buildings (SDG target 11.7) not only makes cities more liveable but also helps mitigate urban heat islands and reduce overall energy consumption. Cities that adopt waste management and recycling programmes can lower their carbon footprints while improving local environments (SDG target 11.6).

The need for clean water (SDG 6) in human society is taking on increasing importance. As our world progresses, threats to this vital resource are particularly concerning. Climate change-induced temperature spikes pose a significant threat to water security across the world. In the Arab region in particular, 13 countries are already falling below the absolute annual renewable freshwater scarcity threshold, set at 500 cubic metres per capita. This trajectory will exacerbate phenomena such as heatwaves, droughts, flash floods, wildfires and sea level rise, all of which carry profound implications for food security. But the erratic shifts in the planet's climate are not the sole contributing factor. Factors such as population growth, urban congestion, tourist influxes, rising living standards, various forms of waste and excessive consumption are all placing mounting pressure on water security.

Water remains a common good essential for all humanity. Beyond its role in sustaining daily life, water stands as a cornerstone of human dignity, underscoring its status as a fundamental public service. The human right to water and sanitation is, however,

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often inadequately acknowledged and inconsistently respected, with unfair resource distribution. LRGs, including urban centres and rural areas, bear a growing responsibility to ensure access to water and sanitation while mitigating water-related disasters such as floods and droughts. Beyond their commitment – demonstrated, for example, through LRGs' declaration on "Water for Shared Prosperity" after the 2024 World Water Forum in Bali – LRGs have put this responsibility into practice, protecting communities, nature and the water cycle.

The two boxes below illustrate how LRGs are facing one of the most pressing water-, urbanization- and overall climate-related challenges: droughts.

BOX 3.2.6

HOW CAPE TOWN FACED AN UNPRECEDENTED DROUGHT

In summer 2018, **Cape Town** (South Africa) faced an unprecedented environmental crisis due to a three-year drought. Described as a one-in-300-year climate event, the drought threatened to leave the city's municipal dams dry. The city's resilience planning models were insufficient and did not anticipate a drought of such magnitude, leading to underestimation of climate change impacts on dam inflows, despite initial assessments indicating water security until 2022.

In response, the city outlined potential emergency water rationing. If necessary, the emergency measures would begin on "Day Zero," when water would be shut off to suburban homes and businesses. The police and military would be placed on standby for possible civil unrest. While Day Zero was ultimately averted, the episode underscores cities' fragility when faced with environmental shocks exacerbated by political, bureaucratic and infrastructure challenges.

According to the OECD, the threat of "Day Zero" prompted significant actions, including risk assessments, communication efforts and regulatory changes during the peak of the drought from 2017 to 2018. The city council appointed a Water Resilience Task Team in May 2017 to develop a Water Resilience Plan with augmentation targets, focusing on groundwater, reuse and desalination. The city's new Water Strategy, released in 2019, aims to transform Cape Town into a water-sensitive city by leveraging diverse water resources, varied infrastructure and ecological principles for flood control, aquifer recharge and water reuse. Additionally, the city is pursuing partnerships with various entities to enhance freshwater quality and manage water pollution.

The Cape Town experience offered several lessons learned, such as the need to strengthen integrated basin governance; advance the water allocation reform to better manage trade-offs and address inequalities; foster accurate data to promote the development of evidence-based policies and decisions; improve technical and economic efficiency and sustainability of water and sanitation services; strengthen capacities; and foster transparency, integrity and stakeholder engagement.

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BOX 3.2.7

DROUGHT MITIGATION EFFORTS IN CATALONIA AND THE BARCELONA METROPOLITAN AREA

Catalonia (Spain) has also faced climate change-related droughts. On 2 January 2024, the Catalan Water Agency declared a drought emergency for the Ter-Llobregat reservoir system, affecting over 200 municipalities with a total of six million inhabitants. It activated its emergency plan after water reserves fell below 16%. The region restricted water consumption to 200 litres/person/day (with 90 litres recommended), encompassing domestic, industrial, commercial and public sector use. Specific constraints included a ban on watering gardens (except for trees in public parks, for which municipalities use groundwater for subsistence irrigation), refilling pools in most cases and washing cars at home, as well as limitations on watering grass pitches for sports.

Within the Catalonia region, the **Barcelona Metropolitan Area** has one of the lowest per capita water consumption rates in Europe at around 106 litres/person/day. Building on its progress to reduce household water consumption by around 16% between 1999 and 2021, in 2023, it developed the Strategic Plan for the Comprehensive Water Cycle. This plan seeks to reduce the water deficit that Barcelona could experience and sets objectives for 2050. It also aims to tackle five main challenges: increasing guaranteed water supply and system efficiency; increasing the resilience of the water cycle; enhancing water quality; adapting current systems to future requirements; and improving governance, management, knowledge and transparency.

Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (SDG 7) also falls within integrated climate action. Fostering renewable energies and reducing reliance on coal and oil for generating electricity moves significantly towards reducing GHG emissions, enhancing energy security, mitigating climate change and decreasing vulnerability to price fluctuations. Indeed, both SDG 13 and SDG 7 call for a drastic change in our energy consumption to complete a just transition.

Despite improvements in certain components of SDG 7, all global regions show concerning reverse trends for SDG 13. To face these challenges, LRGs have demonstrated many good practices that contribute to both goals. For instance, in line with its overall position on sustainable energy, the ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability network adopted its voluntary 100% Renewables Cities and Regions Energy Compact and created the 100% Renewables Cities and Regions Roadmap. Cities such as **Zhytomyr** (Ukraine), **Rosario** (Argentina) and **Makati** (the Philippines) have signalled their commitments to these goals by joining these initiatives. Showcasing its belief in the need for multistakeholder cooperation, ICLEI also joined the 24/7 Carbon-Free Energy Compact led by Sustainable Energy for All to push for the full decarbonization of electricity systems.

Crucially, creating effective policies requires understanding the various environmental effects of urbanization as well as clean water, sanitation and energy design, manufacturing, project locations and utility operations. For instance, compared to conventional energy plants, many renewable energy technologies produce significantly less emissions of traditional air pollutants over their life cycles. However, manufacturing or constructing these technologies may account for significant emissions or may impact biodiversity and wildlife when technologies are placed in vast areas instead of integrated in existing spaces. Implementing extensive green infrastructure and retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency can be costly and resource-intensive, potentially diverting funds from other essential urban services such as health, education or affordable housing (or even cause gentrification and raise property and rent prices). Reducing emissions from industrial and agricultural processes can sometimes lead to increased water use or water pollution if not carefully managed. LRGs can innovate to monitor the current adverse effects of their SDG-related actions and find solutions to these trade-offs. For example, contrast painting of blade turbines can decrease annual bird collisions and subsequent fatalities from wind power plants.

As climate change continues to pose increasing threats, over 1,900 LRGs in more than 34 countries have declared a climate emergency. These declarations acknowledge the crisis affecting all aspects of local life, humans, nature and the planet as a whole. They compel municipalities to make urgently needed changes such as emissions reductions; rethink the climate impacts of urbanization and the provision of water, sanitation and energy for all; and build resilience. LRGs declaring a climate emergency thus go beyond mere declarations: they are investing resources and enacting policies to address the root causes of GHG emissions, while encouraging engagement from their community. This movement underscores **the critical role that local leadership plays in the global fight against climate change, the importance of localized, holistic strategies and plans that tackle climate impacts and inequalities, and the need for coordinated action at all levels of governance**.

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One of the first cities that declared a climate emergency was Bonn (Germany) in 2019, sending a strong signal to national and international legislation. Building on its declaration, in 2023, the council adopted the Climate Plan 2035. The plan includes an overall strategy with seven fields of action, as well as 37 action plans with over 200 concrete first steps, describing what the city must do to achieve climate neutrality and stay within the 1.5°C threshold per the Paris Agreement. More than 320 randomly selected citizens, numerous important stakeholders, city employees and municipal enterprises all contributed to the plan through four Bonn4Future climate forums. Based on its successful emergency declaration, the German city, together with ICLEI, launched Daring Cities in 2020. This global initiative supports urban leaders to take on the climate emergency, and it drove growing global momentum through climate emergency declarations and preparations towards COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, including a 10-point Call for Transformation.

Another notable city is **Makati** (the Philippines), which is often hit by typhoons (20 per year in the country) and increasingly intense and unpredictable storms. As part of the broader Comprehensive City Development Plan, the city's Comprehensive Land Use Plan includes incentives to encourage flexible, innovative and disaster-resilient planning and actions in the development process. This plan encompasses policy formulation, land use and urban planning, infrastructure, housing and solid waste management, among other areas, and builds on multilevel and multistakeholder collaborations.

To summarize, climate emergency declarations demonstrate it is critical to thoroughly assess the existing and potential trade-offs between these goals and the actions that LRGs and other actors put into practice to achieve each of them. Integrated policy approaches that consider the interdependencies among climate action, urbanization, water management and energy efficiency for all are essential. Achieving a harmonious balance between sustainable urban development and climate action requires careful, inclusive and strategic planning and policy-making that considers both environmental and social dimensions of sustainability.

3.2.4 Challenges

Top-down approaches and the lack of sound multilevel coordination schemes hamper local contributions to achieving SDG 13. As discussed above, LRGs are rarely included in NDCs or other nation-level plans and strategies, and urban content in these instruments has been rather scarce and vague across all world regions. LRGs are still regarded as mere implementers of national decisions, undermining their capacity to drive the innovation and transfor-

mation required by the 2030 Agenda. Paragraph 161 of the COP28 Global Stocktake decision urged UNFCCC Parties to ensure multilevel action, operationalizing one of the most important goals of the LRG constituency in the climate negotiations.

Several countries have already demonstrated numerous models of such collaboration. In Japan, the Ministry of Environment secured climate neutrality commitments from 300+ cities and prefectures. These commitments serve as a precursor to committing to climate neutrality in the revised Japanese NDC. In the USA, the revised NDC praises commitments by cities, states and Native American nations as the basis to increase national climate ambitions after the country rejoined the Paris Agreement in 2021. Many countries in the Global South including the Dominican Republic, Rwanda, Chile and Morocco elevated their national commitments in collaboration with their LRGs, in particular through support from the NDC Partnership. Parties are invited to submit their second NDCs with a timeframe of implementation until 2035. While every nation will define their own way of implementing such a commitment, the COP28 CHAMP initiative endorsed by 72 nations as of April 2024 offers an opportunity for a coordinated and collaborative approach. In it, LRGs are involved in designing and implementing these new NDCs to be presented by Parties at COP30 in Belém in 2025.

Limited technical and financial support also pose critical barriers to achieving SDG 13. According to a recent analysis by UNFCCC, developing countries require close to 6 trillion USD by 2030 to fulfil their NDCs. The United Nations Environment Programme suggests that adaptation costs alone could potentially rise to 330 billion USD annually by 2030. Fulfilling COP28 commitments and proposals requires additional skills, technologies and policies. However, and despite LRGs providing a large share of the public investments necessary to comply with and implement them (in the OECD, 70% of public investments), **decentralization processes are generally not mature enough to finance ambitious investment schemes necessary to meet the challenges LRGs face**.

Recently, direct subnational access to the Loss and Damage Fund has been introduced, and sustainable urbanization has been recognized as a non-market approach under Paris Agreement article 6.8. LRGs' bankability has been increased through project pipeline facilities such as the Transformative Actions Programme or Cities Finance Facility, multilateral development banks and international finance architecture have been reformed, and initiatives such as the Adaptation Fund, through its enhanced direct access mechanisms, have allowed countries to directly secure funding and create local projects through accredited national implementing entities. All these initiatives offer valuable opportunities to broaden the

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share of national and international climate finance allocated to LRGs. In addition, LRGs can act as catalysts for unlocking the potential of their populations through soft loan schemes, green bonds and cooperative models, for example, and of the private sector through energy performance certificate facilities, for instance.

At the same time, while many LRGs possess innovation skills and have numerous potential projects, some are not investment-ready. They require enhanced capacities to conduct feasibility studies and develop business models. To effectively harness local potential, it is crucial to support LRGs in bridging the gap between their climate and energy plans and adequate financing solutions. This work is particularly necessary to promote capacity-raising mechanisms in small island developing States and least developed countries (SDG target 13.b).

3.2.5 Opportunities

Despite the many challenges, significant opportunities for localizing and achieving SDG 13 exist:

● **Local climate budgeting, climate funds and public procurement ensure targeted, efficient allocation of resources to effectively address climate change impacts that respond to citizens' and local stakeholders' needs, innovations and capabilities.** Public procurement accounts for 15 to 20% of global GDP, and LRGs are responsible for almost 50% of procurement decisions. **Tampere**'s (Finland) climate budget integrates climate action into the city's budget and financial statements. It monitors progress towards the goal of carbon neutrality and the adequacy of implemented actions, while also providing information for decision-making and increasing transparency for residents. **Catalonia**'s (Spain) Climate Fund, backed by the 2017 Climate Change Law, has financed research and development projects in climate change mitigation and adaptation. LRGs, research centres, private companies and civil society organizations have implemented such projects. The fund obtains 50% of its resources from the CO_2 emission tax applied to motor vehicles and 20% from the tax targeting facilities that impact the environment. In **Tshwane** (South Africa), the city's procurement officials are encouraged to systematically include green requirements in all tenders, including as minimum criteria in sectors such as transport, food, energy and construction. The Tshwane Sustainable Public Procurement Strategy seeks to stimulate a domestic market for more sustainable goods and services, support resource efficiency across economic sectors and reduce GHG emissions.

● **By developing 15/30-minute cities or neighbourhoods, LRGs have aligned their strategic planning to decarbonization and re-naturing scenarios**. While reducing congestion, car dependence and air pollution, these models also ensure that daily resources and amenities are accessible on foot or by bike, fostering equality. **Buenos Aires**'s (Argentina) Third Climate Action Plan 2050 targets a reduction of more than 50% in emissions by 2030 compared to 2015. It aims for total carbon neutrality by 2050. Among its four areas of action, Buenos Aires has prioritized building a city of proximity, in which pedestrians can access all necessary spaces and services quickly and closely. It also aims to foster an inclusive city, guaranteeing fair distribution of the benefits of climate action and including all neighbourhoods.

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In Malta, the **Local Councils' Association**, in partnership with Transport Malta and the Planning Authority, is implementing the Slow Streets initiative, geared towards giving streets back to people rather than cars and focusing primarily on residents' wellbeing. These new strategies plan to ensure safe, sustainable, healthy and efficient mobility within localities, in addition to providing more public open space that contributes to better quality of life. These initiatives offer residents the chance to experience their neighbourhoods anew, with a network of safe walking and cycling corridors linking civic landmarks, medical facilities, children's creative play areas and other essential services. **Tbilisi**'s (Georgia) comprehensive approach to proximity includes a superblocks programme, a Cycling Master Plan, a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, the construction of bus rapid transit corridors and community involvement in the creation of new parks in the city.

● **Participatory budgeting, citizen participation and community-led climate action are essential levers for sustainable and inclusive responses to climate change.** From campaigns to raise awareness among youth on the importance of sustainability and climate action to the involvement of local communities and stakeholders in the different stages of climate action planning and implementation, these initiatives demonstrate the power of grassroots engagement in driving meaningful change. Communities can tailor climate strategies to their specific needs and contexts, ensuring more effective and equitable outcomes. Such participatory approaches not only enhance the relevance and acceptance of climate policies but also foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among local populations, ultimately leading to more resilient and adaptive societies.

Participatory budgeting has proven to be an [effective tool for gauging climate change and adaptation needs](#). It provides a quick and cost-efficient method for identifying real-time needs and strategic resource allocation. Additionally, it can be used to detect trends and forecast the location, timing and severity of climate change impacts, similar to how a barometer predicts weather patterns. Its capacity to rebuild trust in public institutions, foster community ownership of the commons and enhance citizen participation in decision-making is likewise essential to revitalize democratic systems necessary for driving societal transformation.

A growing number of cities and regions are using participatory budgeting to find shared solutions to various local effects of climate change.

Arzgir (Russia) converted abandoned buildings into fire stations and renovated and cleaned water reservoirs, allowing firefighters to reach most of the municipality in less than 20 minutes. Also in Russia, the **Bashkortostan** region built an emergency information system to alert local people to wildfires in agricultural areas using loudspeakers, among other means. In Senegal, **Dalifort-Foirail**'s communities adopted various projects to install rainwater drainage systems to tackle increasingly frequent problems with flooding. **Luhwindja** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) built seven bridges and repaired other infrastructure destroyed by heavy rains and flooding, enabling remote and rural communities to remain connected. **Yaoundé 1** (Cameroon) ensured people's access to water through a community fountain in the Etoudi neighbourhood during the dry season, allowing it to ration water use and reduce waste.

Cuenca (Ecuador) used participatory budgeting processes to better understand the needs of residents in the municipality's 21 rural parishes with the highest levels of poverty and migration, who are also most affected by the city's environmental hazards. Most of these projects were related to water access and management. A [study conducted by the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy, UCLG and other institutions in 2020](#) found that the 10 cities analyzed with available data (small and middle-sized cities from both the Global North and South) spent around 22 million USD in climate adaptation and/or mitigation efforts through 900 participatory budgeting-approved projects over a two year period. These results demonstrate how this practice can propel climate action.

Creating partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders also requires listening to, encouraging, enabling and sustaining innovative community-led practices. Among others, LRGs can contribute to this by adjusting existing regulatory frameworks and providing land, means, opportunities and funding to facilitate the shift towards more sustainable lifestyles and human settlements, as demonstrated throughout UCLG's 2022 *[GOLD VI Report: Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality](#)*. The **Basque Country** (Spain) has launched the [Energía-Ekiola project](#), which supports citizen cooperatives in generating renewable energy. This initiative particularly aims to reduce inequalities and contribute to achieving the region's goal of 20% renewable energy in final energy consumption.

● **Human rights-based and social justice approaches to climate action have been embraced by numerous LRGs globally to address**

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environmental sustainability and social equity. LRGs have integrated these principles into their resource allocation, policies, programmes and projects, seeking to overcome territorial economic dependence on unsustainable natural resource extraction. At the same time, they aim to tackle the uneven distribution of risks for marginalized groups, such as displacement, gentrification and commodification. For example, through its urban agriculture programme, the **Nouakchott** region (Mauritania) aspires to achieve food self-sufficiency, reversing its traditional dependence on food imports. Such policies advance a paradigm shift, prioritizing quality of life and wellbeing rather than growth and economic performance and placing care at the core of life sustainability. The rethinking and prioritization of local and global commons are key for solidarity and collective prosperity and resilience, and LRGs can further protect, revitalize and strengthen such efforts.

● **Decentralized cooperation has emerged as a key driver for local and sustainable actions.** In the vein of reversing traditional North-South relations towards more horizontal collaborations that put Global South local knowledge and values upfront, decentralized cooperation is often considered the best investment in capacity development. By fostering collaboration at the local level, it brings climate initiatives closer to the communities most affected, ensuring that actions are tailored to local needs and conditions. This approach enhances local ownership and accountability, engages local institutions and actors and leverages local knowledge and participation. As seen throughout this paper, global networks of cities have been particularly active in supporting city-to-city cooperation for environmental and climate change initiatives.

The **Barcelona Provincial Council** (Spain) is at the cutting edge of decentralized cooperation practices. The council has launched several projects with the general objective of promoting the resilience of Mediterranean landscapes and forests in the face of climate change, addressing the impact of land abandonment and highlighting the importance of protecting natural and cultural heritage. In addition, work has been done to strengthen the capacities of actors from different Mediterranean countries, empower municipalities and local communities in Lebanon and promote new cooperation in forestry matters with local entities in Morocco.

● **The Loss and Damage Mechanism serves as an opportunity to promote a just transition and climate justice, especially for the Global South (including least developed countries and small island developing States) and marginalized communities.** This fund, which resulted from strong lobbying from the African parties, was adopted by the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) and the COP serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA). It focuses on assisting developing countries that are particularly exposed to the adverse effects of climate change in responding to economic and non-economic losses and damages associated with these adverse effects, including extreme weather events and slow onset events.

Under a whole-of-governance approach, this mechanism could foster a renewed approach to mitigating harm and planning future development and growth. Cities and territories have an opportunity to identify the losses and damages regarding biodiversity, identity, culture and other parameters that this fund may encompass. To further the fund's purposes, LRGs can identify territorial-level issues and support mobilizing solutions.

● **The IPCC has recognized LRGs' role in climate action.** The IPCC's 2018 *Summary for Policymakers* calls for drawing on local knowledge and strengthening the capacity of municipal teams to support local, national and global policy-making. To go beyond national, regional and global figures, scientists need to dig deeper into locally adapted contextualized knowledge. At the same time, local policy-makers need to leverage the scientific parameters and knowledge in order to evaluate the ambition of planning mechanisms and tools. Together, they can plan smart territories in an integrated manner, applying the different global agendas but focusing on climate action as the key lever. **Joining strengths between scientists and policy-makers to better assess local action and multilevel governance in a renewed multilateralism is thus key.**

● **The new global CHAMP initiative presents opportunities for LRGs to influence national-level climate action instruments.** The CHAMP initiative, adopted at COP28 (the most ambitious, inclusive, and fruitful conference yet for multilevel action and urbanization, according to LGMA), has begun developing a strategy for countries that have endorsed the CHAMP pledge. **As multilevel dialogues for climate action are still being defined, LRGs have many opportunities to support their national governments in defining climate strategies.** According to LRGs, this process should allow (a) consulting across the different spheres of governance; (b) collaborating to unlock mitigation and adaptation action opportunities; (c) creating inclusive institution-

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al and informal processes when defining the new NDCs; (d) supporting investments in NDCs throughout the different spheres of governance and stakeholders; (e) undertaking regular and inclusive country-led reviews of national and subnational progress on implementing CHAMP commitments through existing processes; and (f) meeting with LRG leaders, among the CHAMP endorsers, at a global High-Level Political Dialogue on Multilevel Climate Action in the leadup to both COP29 and COP30 to share good practices and lessons learned in implementing the CHAMP commitments.

Although new parameters have entered the process with the UNFCCC COP progress, a proper measurement of the implementation of SDG 13 and its targets may be useful to be addressed in conjunction with the UNFCCC resolutions.

3.2.6 Conclusions and recommendations

LRGs respond first to climate disasters, drive community action for the ecological transition and serve as guardians of our commons. Complementing LRGs' efforts and innovations, the multilateral global governance system (including the UN and LRG networks) is helping to shape and institutionalize climate action at the local level. The latest COP outcomes, particularly from COP28, target more inclusive, ambitious and multilevel action and place a renewed focus on social and ecological dimensions. In this vein, climate action can better respond to communities' needs and priorities to build just, net zero, nature-positive and land-neutral societies.

Monitoring the implementation of SDG 13 must go beyond evaluating the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Acknowledging the current state of the planet, accelerated actions by all stakeholders are needed to stay under the 1.5°C threshold. Strengthening and operationalizing the commitments made by LRGs and the parties, as well as ensuring NDCs and other national plans and strategies include LRGs, will be necessary to raise ambitions towards 2030 and 2050. Action is needed despite the pressing social and economic problems, threats such as wars and military conflicts, and short-term policy priorities.

This paper offers several recommendations for driving bold, holistic and inclusive climate action:

● **Foster collaboration across governmental tiers:** Ensure LRGs' active and substantive involvement in shaping, executing, overseeing and assessing NDCs, NAPs and long-term strategies to reduce GHG emissions. Establish supportive policy and regulatory frameworks that advance and accelerate climate action from the bottom up, acknowledging soft knowledge and science-based data from different stakeholders.

● **Enhance complementary actions by UN agencies, LRG networks and other actors for strengthened multilateralism:** Support efforts to build inclusive multilateralism and ensure ambitious outcomes of the UN Summit of the Future.

● **Tackle structural North-South and socio-spatial inequalities:** Develop a holistic approach to climate losses and damages that puts marginalized communities and Indigenous populations at the core of planet restoration. Include LRGs in the governance of the new Loss and Damage Mechanism, from assessment and implementation to evaluation.

● **Localize finance for local climate action:** Furthermore, systemically integrate the LRG constituency in multilevel governance and finance strategies and global climate conversations and agreements.

● **Support an integrated perspective on SDG 13:** Consider the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda, leveraging synergies among SDGs while minimizing trade-offs. Uphold the principles of leaving no one behind and fostering transparency at all times.

● **Promote climate justice in urban re-naturing:** Ensure that expanded re-naturing efforts focus on social inclusion and reconnecting all people to natural systems. Combine LRG and civil society actions and participation under a human rights-based approach to bring climate justice into the re-naturing of urban environments

PAPER 3. ADVANCING PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES (SDG 16) AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS: A GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

3.3

3.3

3.3.1 Introduction: SDG 16 as a local and global commitment

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 provides an ambitious set of commitments to build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies for all. Its targets and indicators, broad in scope, collectively underscore that the pursuit of peace, justice, equality and inclusion is not only a development imperative in and of itself, but also a precondition for realizing broader development (and political) priorities – across the 2030 Agenda. **Yet, despite such importance, progress in its imåΩplementation is markedly insufficient and, in some areas, backsliding.**[1]

As policy-makers, practitioners and thought leaders reflect on what it will take to accelerate delivery of SDG 16 and the larger 2030 Agenda during this second, and final, half of the implementation period, focus and investment should be placed on where noticeable progress is being made at all levels of government, including local and regional governments (LRGs), and where additional progress will be most needed.

"Making progress at the local level has proven instrumental in driving transformation on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from the ground up. [...] Building peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice, based on respect for human rights, must be at the centre of our roadmap of action. This is critical to deliver better access to basic services, better socio-economic opportunities and improved governance systems. [...] As catalysts of transformative change, local and regional governments are incubating ideas, bringing actors together, drawing on local assets and knowledge and testing solutions on the ground."

Deputy Secretary-General
of the United Nations (UN)
Amina Mohammed[2]

Urbanization is an inevitable global mega-trend. Two-thirds of the world's population is likely to live in cities by 2030, with the number of cities in low-income countries projected to grow by 76% between 2020 and 2070.[3] Against a backdrop of proliferating global crises, geopolitical strife, growing inequalities, discrimination and the rising cost of living, empowering LRGs to act and further deliver on more peaceful, just and inclusive societies is critical. LRGs are already the "first responders" to some of our time's most pressing issues and instrumental to global efforts to leave no one – and no place – behind. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that 65% of all

169 SDG targets are not achievable without LRG involvement.[4] Whether linked to economic downturns, organized crime and violence, climate change or public health crises, LRGs are de facto charged with providing the services, support, knowledge and expertise required to effectively respond.

Local and regional actors, strategies and approaches to SDG 16 implementation are a necessity amidst receding public trust in many national governments and components of the multilateral system.[5] As such, **LRGs are critical for accelerating progress on SDG 16 and its interlinkages across the SDGs, as well as rebuilding trust in institutions, bolstering against future crises and fostering peace in the long term**. Mere recognition of LRGs is not sufficient. They must also be equipped with the necessary resources, capacity and authority to help bridge the gap between SDG 16 targets and real progress.

This paper attempts to:

● Unpack the larger state of play of SDG 16's three pillars – peace, justice and inclusion – and their interlinkages with other SDGs as part of a discussion on the overall enabling environment for LRGs to advance SDG 16 at the local level

● Highlight the work of LRGs to advance SDG 16 with tangible impact for people and communities

● Provide recommendations on how to empower and strengthen LRGs in their work in building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies amidst an evolving global order

SDG 16: A goal and enabler at local levels

SDG 16 was designed not only as a means of building more peaceful, just and inclusive societies but also as an enabling goal – correlating to a broader network of interlinked goals and targets across the SDGs (see Box 1). As such, it offers actionable approaches to, and solutions for, progress not only on peace, justice, equality and inclusion but also across the SDGs. It provides means by which to rebuild trust in institutions and governance systems globally. This catalytic and enabling role of SDG 16 applies to both national levels and local and regional levels.

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BOX 3.3.1

THE SDG 16+ FRAMEWORK

The catalytic character of SDG 16 is reflected in its reframing as **SDG 16+**. This framing lays out how SDG 16's official goals and targets influence – and are influenced by – other SDGs, as presented in Pathfinders' 2017 *Roadmap for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies*.[6] Updated in 2019, the roadmap provides a plan for delivering more peaceful, just and inclusive societies, including by demonstrating how 24 targets across seven other SDGs directly correlate to aspects of peace, justice and inclusion. Namely, these are SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Consumption) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). This framing illustrates the **enabling** qualities of SDG 16 (or SDG 16+) at all levels. Since the launch of the roadmap, Pathfinders has explored other interlinkages, including with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Additionally, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has undertaken a number of studies looking at empirical evidence on how key tenets of SDG 16, including the quality of governance institutions, link to other SDGs, such as SDGs 1, 10 and 14 (Life Below Water). UNDP is publishing an upcoming report on SDG 13 (Climate Action).[7]

Leveraging this enabling feature of SDG 16 can help LRGs do more with less, while supporting strategic prioritization vis-à-vis local policy and trade-offs, particularly where national action is absent or challenging. Failing to account for factors linked to peace, justice and inclusion can similarly generate inverse or regressing SDG outcomes. Further, SDG 16's adoption as part of a universal development framework offers legitimacy, with entry points on politically sensitive issues (e.g. corruption). Meanwhile, monitoring and local and subnational reporting systems, addressed below, offer an opportunity to measure progress and hold authorities to account.

Beyond the overarching value of SDG 16 as a policy framework, this goal's particular relevance for LRGs can be understood through the following prisms:

● **People-centred approaches:** Effective SDG 16 interventions are often people-centred – based on the lived social, economic and political realities and priorities of people and communities. LRGs have underutilized capacity to understand and act upon such approaches, which tend to

be collaborative, bottom-up and attuned to local contexts.

● **Leaving no one, and no place, behind:** LRGs' proximity to local issues and constituencies often means that they, along with others such as civil society and to a lesser extent business, are well-placed to advance SDG 16 based on local contexts and needs, while accounting for under-served districts, territories and marginalized groups. Local and regional multistakeholder partnerships also offer particular advantages, including in data collection and how it informs policy/policy sequencing and the monitoring of progress. For example, cities such as **Mumbai** and **Delhi** (India) and **Kathmandu** (Nepal) have worked with the Red Dot Foundation and its "crowdsourced data, community engagement and institutional accountability" in the framework of the Safecity platform for reporting gender-based violence (GBV), to inform action in cities and communities.

BOX 3.3.2

PEACE, PREVENTION AND SOCIAL COHESION IN MERSIN (TÜRKIYE)

In the immediate aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis, the coastal city of **Mersin** (Türkiye) received large numbers of asylum seekers and migrants – adding to its already diverse and multicultural makeup. Although the city assumed a welcoming stance, this rapid and large-scale migration put pressure on local communities and absorption capacities of local institutions. In response, the Mersin metropolitan municipality established a Social Cohesion Centre together with the International Organization for Migration. The centre's broader aim was to support integration efforts and build bridges between new migrants and their host communities – including through intercultural learning and peace education to promote coexistence and prevent the risk of potential conflicts. To these ends, the Social Cohesion Centre developed programmes facilitating access to services provided by central and local government institutions (and other city actors), as well as counselling services, guidance on judicial matters, health information, education and children's activities. The centre's people-centred, inclusive and peace-oriented approach proved popular and successful. This can in part be attributed to its emphasis on local knowledge, networks and organizations, which also earned Mersin a finalist position in the 2022 United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Peace Prize.

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While LRGs are often at the forefront of innovative solutions to advance SDG 16 in policy and practice, the enabling environment in which they operate is frequently not conducive to supporting, nor scaling, such output. In addition to increased investment and access to financial resources, public sector capacity building, decentralization, partnerships and a seat at the global table as decision-makers (not only implementers) would improve LRGs' enabling environments and their work to advance SDG 16 and the SDGs overall, as well as the metrics and measurement therein.

A snapshot of the data

As highlighted in the SDG 16 progress report by UNDP, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), across the globe "human rights commitments are not being met, violence is on the rise, inequality continues to hinder inclusive decision making and corruption erodes the social contract."[8] The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report further emphasizes the gravity of this situation.[9] Women also continue to fare far worse as compared to men across many indicators. In short, none of the targets for SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies are on track. Since 2020, most of the latest available data demonstrate that progress previously made has stagnated or regressed.

While data availability on SDG 16-specific targets has improved at national and global levels, with some data now available for all official indicators, in absolute terms, significant gaps remain. This shortage is often pronounced at subnational and local levels. The governance focus of SDG 16 also makes it more complex to assess, quantify and measure than other SDGs such as SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), which both have superior data coverage. At national levels, LRGs may lack incentives to be transparent on politically sensitive issues, such as arbitrary detention or discrimination.[10]

While LRGs' capacity, and the enabling environments they operate in, often constrain measurement of SDG 16,[11] LRGs have important advantages, such as proximity to local communities, as well as processes such as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs). VLRs and VSRs can play an important role in supporting LRGs to plan, execute and review SDG 16 implementation – while offering a forum to deliberate on sensitive issues transparently to communicate LRGs' priorities to wider audiences and to find collaborative solutions to implement them.[12] To this end, the UN has recognized VLRs and VSRs as "an essential tool to show progress and foster exchange on local implementation of the SDGs."

BOX 3.3.3
VLRs AND VSRs AND SDG 16

There is growing collective knowledge on progress and innovation at the local and regional level, alongside improved efforts at monitoring and reporting on progress, including through VLRs and VSRs. Between 2020 and 2023, 147 VLRs were submitted to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. For the 2020–2022 group of submissions, around 42% reviewed SDG 16.[13] While the focus, structure and coverage (and type of LRG) regarding SDG 16 varies between the submitted reports, certain themes feature more prominently than others. A 2022 UNDP study found, for instance, that the commitment to leave no one behind was increasingly referenced in VLRs, albeit inconsistently and to varying effect.[14]

3.3.2 Peace and violence reduction: Local approaches and results

Across the globe, among all regions and country income levels, and in conflict and non-conflict settings alike, violence remains a persistent and complex challenge. Following an encouraging five-year drop from 2016 to 2021, recent years have seen an increase in global violent deaths, linked to the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, political instability, insecurity and humanitarian emergencies, among other factors.[15] At a local level, cities are often venues for multiple (and interrelated) forms of violence: from conflict-related violence and organized crime to GBV and intentional homicides. With respect to homicides, the vast majority occurs outside of conflict zones[16] – and mostly in highly populated, urban settings – positioning LRGs to play an important role in violence reduction globally.[17]

Cities are also where some of the most innovative and effective efforts for violence prevention and reduction (SDG targets 16.1 and 16.2, principally but not exclusively) are taking place. LRGs and civil society organizations worldwide are spearheading innovative and important approaches to combat urban violence, demonstrating that this phenomenon is neither given nor inevitable. These initiatives include the Peace in Our Cities network, as well as the Strong Cities Network, to tackle the most serious forms of urban violence.

3.3

GLOBAL PARLIAMENT OF MAYORS AND PEACE IN OUR CITIES

In 2020, the **Global Parliament of Mayors** and **Peace in Our Cities** global networks joined together with 60 city leaders and urban networks representing more than 1,500 cities and metropolitan areas in 33 countries to adopt a resolution committing to halving urban violence by 2030. The resolution sets out 11 commitments to build more safe and secure cities. It was welcomed by the UN Secretary-General, who noted that cities have "demonstrated that it is possible to act effectively to prevent and address the root cause of violence and insecurity."[18]

The multilateral system, with the UN at its centre, is increasingly paying notice. A report by the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism makes the case for a greater role for cities in global governance,[19] in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to inclusive and networked multilateralism. The Secretary-General has also emphasized the promotion of peace and peacebuilding from the territories,[20] further underscoring LRGs' importance in peacebuilding and violence reduction.

To better contextualize and highlight LRGs' role, results and challenges in advancing more peaceful societies, the subsection below outlines the nature of urban violence and innovative examples of policies, programmes and learning being spearheaded at local and regional levels to address violence.

Interpersonal violence: A ubiquitous challenge

Urban violence largely consists of different forms of interpersonal violence: an umbrella term referring to (non-conflict) forms of violence such as intentional homicides, physical assault and sexual and intimate partner violence.[21] **While the drivers of interpersonal violence vary by form and context, they are frequently associated with injustices and unaddressed grievances, economic and social deprivation and rising socio-economic inequalities.**[22] Horizontal or group-based inequalities (and State-led exclusion) generate notably high risks of violence and conflict,[23] including high levels of harassment, hate speech and GBV. Vertical inequalities, which primarily reflect class-based inequalities, are in turn associated with high levels of homicide and criminal violence.

Homicides in particular are one of the most severe forms of interpersonal violence. They are a principal policy challenge for national and local governments alike. In 2021, the global number of homicides hit a two-decade high.[24] It accounted for three times the number of people killed in armed conflict and terrorism and reflected particularly high rates observed in Latin America and the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa (at 19.91 and 14.09 homicides per 100,000 population, respectively, per UNODC data).[25] Homicide levels are also highly territorially contingent, tending to be concentrated in specific geographic locations – down to neighbourhood and street level – and among specific parts of the population.[26]

The full extent of interpersonal violence is unknown,[27] but drivers tend to be magnified in cities, with different "hot spots" therein. Differential or inadequate access to public resources, infrastructure and services, as well as income and wealth disparities, has uniquely urban features and reflects asymmetries of power or exclusionary political processes.[28] This reality, again, highlights LRGs' importance in addressing such complex challenges, with the examples below capturing the efficacy and innovation of their efforts.

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BOX 3.3.5

PAZOS IN PALMIRA AND UTOPIAS IN IZTAPALAPA

In **Palmira** (Colombia), the mayor's office founded the PAZOS project in 2011 to address high levels of gang violence among youth. The project's comprehensive violence prevention strategy moves away from the more military approaches that are common in Colombia, using psychosocial support and job training to provide youth with skills and job opportunities as well as to promote non-violence. The project also provides a monthly stipend for participants to ensure their continued ability to participate. Arts and sports are used to promote the non-violent use of public spaces, and PAZOS partners with FC Barcelona to support sports programmes that highlight a culture of peace. As of 2022, the city has experienced its lowest rates of violence in 17 years. It received UCLG's Peace Prize the same year.

The mayor of **Iztapalapa** (a borough of Mexico City often ranked as one of the country's most dangerous areas) has been working to create "utopias" (community spaces known as Units of Transformation and Organization for Social Inclusion and Harmony) throughout the city to reduce violence since 2018. These utopias serve each of the territorial directorates in the city and provide communities with services such as athletic facilities, lessons in fine and performing arts, medical attention for people who use drugs and legal and psychological support for survivors of domestic violence. Twelve utopias have been built to serve the most densely populated borough of Mexico City so far.

The wide-ranging impacts of urban violence and how LRGs are addressing it

Violence not only impacts people's and communities' immediate safety but also their livelihoods, economic prospects, political stability, social cohesion and ability to access basic services.[29] Segregation and social and racial discrimination further translate into urban ghettoization.

These impacts – as well as the positive effects of violence prevention and reduction – call for recognizing the centrality of SDG 16 and its interlinkages across the SDGs. Beyond its evident link to SDG 11 on sustainable cities, addressing urban violence is tied to other development priorities at local levels, including:

● **The global climate crisis** (SDG 13): The adverse effects of climate change – or, conversely, the positive advantages of adaptation and mitigation efforts – impact inequality and exclusion. Climate-related changes can exacerbate territorial disputes and pressures related to climate vulnerability in urban areas.[30] Additional research highlights the likelihood of links between intense climate change and an increase in crime in cities, with particular impact on vulnerable neighbourhoods.[31]

● **Community (and individual) health and well-being** (SDG 3): This goal refers to not only physical harm but also trauma, psychological impacts of violence, and harm such as premature mortality from non-communicable diseases. This broad definition of health and well-being points to the need to treat urban violence as a public health challenge as much as a security and criminal justice issue.

● **Gender equality and women's empowerment** (SDG 5): Gender-based inequalities and violence are linked to pressures of urbanization and issues such as access to housing, services and support and the safety of public spaces. About one in three women globally experience some form of GBV – from psychological abuse and sexual assault to femicide.[32]

● **Inclusive and sustainable economic growth** (SDG 8): Increased homicide levels lead to decreased gross domestic product per capita and declining growth rates.[33]

● **Reducing inequalities** (SDG 10): Inequalities are strongly associated with socio-economic disparities and the exclusion they foster. Their impacts, exacerbated by the pandemic, affect all regions and country income levels – including high-income and major emerging econo-

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mies where income inequality has risen over the past four decades.[34]

These interlinkages demonstrate the importance of an integrated approach to violence reduction (along with other components of SDG 16). Many LRGs have spearheaded such an approach, whether in addressing structural inequalities, health, gender or economic growth. For example, in **Recife** (Brazil) – and in the context of a fragmented institutional landscape, pervasive drug trafficking and violence and poor service delivery – the city established community peace centres, also known as COMPAZ, in 2016. As part of a larger, multilevel public security policy implemented by the Pernambuco state government, Recife now hosts four centres in city neighbourhoods characterized by high levels of social inequality, economic decline and violent crime. The COMPAZ reflect a holistic approach to crime and violence prevention, which includes promoting responsible citizenship, human rights and a culture of peace. In concrete terms, this effort entails educational, cultural, sports and other recreational activities, as well as justice services aimed at providing young people with safe and viable alternatives to organized crime and life on the streets. The programme initially covered 16 of the city's 94 neighbourhoods. Today, some 40% of the city's 1.5 million inhabitants live within a three-kilometre radius of these centres, improving access to critical services for marginalized and underserved populations. The COMPAZ initiative won the 2022 UN Public Service Award and was a finalist of the 2022 UCLG Peace Prize.[35]

Similarly, **Medellín** (Colombia), once known as the murder capital of the world, has undergone a dramatic transformation through its three-part approach, which combined social programmes, urban planning and policing. This multipronged strategy has drastically lowered the city's homicide rates.[36] In **Titibirí** (Colombia), since 2023, the Weaving Citizenship: Training and Social Support for Democracy, Participation and Reconciliation project has sought to overcome decades-old challenges related to drug trafficking and guerrilla violence by strengthening citizen participation in public affairs.

Regarding interlinkages with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), cities such as **New Delhi** (India), **Port Moresby** (Papua New Guinea), **Hawassa** (Ethiopia), **Banja Luka** (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and **Guatemala City** (Guatemala) joined forces with UN Women on the flagship Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls initiative. This initiative has identified interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, develop relevant laws and policies to this end, invest in safety and economic viability of public spaces, and change social norms so that women and girls may enjoy public spaces free from violence.

BOX 3.3.6

URBAN VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN THE USA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM OAKLAND

The city of **Oakland** in California (USA) launched the Oakland Ceasefire Strategy in 2012 – a partnership between community leaders, social service providers and city law enforcement. Its implementation began following an in-depth analysis of violence and crime in the city, which found that assumptions about the perpetrators, victims and causes of violence were incorrect. Data revealed that the average perpetrator of violence was in their late 20s (not youth), the average victim was male (not female) and causes were often of an interpersonal and group-based nature (not drug-related).[37] These insights allowed leaders to better target their outreach efforts. One such example is the Oakland Unite programme, which provides life coaching to offenders and at-risk individuals, using social services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), law enforcement, faith-based groups, schools and community members at the neighbourhood level. Ceasefire also focused on building trust and improving relations between police and local communities to increase reporting rates and witness testimony.

From 2012 to 2018, Oakland saw a 50% reduction in both fatal and non-fatal shootings, as well as a 70% reduction in armed robberies. These data were compared to 12 other cities in California and showed that results could be largely attributed to the implementation of Ceasefire.[38] To further these gains, the city established a Department of Violence Prevention in 2017, which focused on community and family trauma and GBV prevention and response. While the city has since seen a stark uptick in violence and crime (notably carjacking), the mayor of Oakland recently attributed the violence in part to Ceasefire becoming defunct in 2020.[39]

Select lessons learned in LRGs reducing and preventing urban violence

As described above, LRGs are strategically positioned to not only pursue violence reduction but also invest in and advance prevention. This dual opportunity draws on their proximity and accountability to local constituencies, as well as their ability to improve local governance dynamics and accountability, pursue human rights-based approaches, safeguard freedom of information and promote racial and gen-

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der equality (with due sensitivity to how these intersect). LRGs and local leaders play a critical role in shaping the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies.[40]

While successful prevention initiatives are highly contextual (and often data-limited), several instructive local lessons and solutions can be drawn upon. A study of municipal offices of violence prevention points to various examples, and it highlights the importance of civilian leadership (i.e. avoiding over-reliance on law enforcement), political and societal buy-in to ensure sustainability, and strategic prioritization, especially where resources are limited. This means focusing on interventions that target high-risk territories, contexts, groups or individuals more likely to suffer from or participate in violence,[41] as well as targeting potential drivers (as linked to drug or alcohol abuse or gun possession).[42] **The latter, reflected in SDG indicator 16.4.2, is also a highly city-specific challenge in that small arms proliferation is intimately linked to high levels of interpersonal violence.**[43]

In short, to advance sound approaches to violence reduction efforts at local levels, efforts must be interrelated and multifaceted, focused, legitimate and balanced.[44]

Finally, zooming back out to global support for SDG 16+ at local and regional levels, international initiatives and forums can be particularly useful, in terms of both the visibility they afford and the connections between cities they facilitate. For example, over the past four years, the UCLG World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace has highlighted LRGs' role in addressing urban violence and human security. The forum has grown into a space that builds upon LRGs' local peacebuilding initiatives and the interaction between service provision, reduction of inequalities, and peace and security in cities and territories. Another example can be found in Africa. In 2023, through the **International Association of Francophone Mayors** (AIMF), several local mayors and representatives of the Sahel region met in Senegal to discuss the role of LRGs in security issues. They came up with the Dakar Declaration, raising the need for better decentralization schemes, the importance of their involvement in the national coordination of security response, and a city fund to deal with humanitarian responses at local levels.

BOX 3.3.7

CITY DIPLOMACY, THE GLOBAL MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT AND UCLG

The global municipal movement is built on the transformative and preventive nature of city diplomacy among LRGs. Building bridges for solidarity and dialogue between cities and territories is a means to address current and future conflicts related to natural resources and the climate crisis, and to promote sustainable peace. LRGs also have a history of engaging at the international level and addressing conflict at home. This is the basis for city diplomacy.

LRG networks, and in particular UCLG, have harnessed this understanding of city diplomacy in the form of the UCLG Municipal Peace Talks. These talks have brought LRGs, their associations and civil society representatives together to discuss post-conflict reconstruction and to target advocacy towards national governments in bringing an end to current conflicts. These talks aim to influence the development of the UN Pact for the Future and the multilateral agenda.

Similarly, highlighting LRGs' role in realizing global compacts related to SDG 16 can further legitimize, empower and acknowledge such efforts and action, while **contributing to broadening and strengthening voices from the Global South in the multilateral arena (SDG targets 16.8 and 16.a)**. For example, the Mayors Mechanism – composed of UCLG, the Mayors Migration Council and the International Organization for Migration with support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – aims to bring LRG expertise to State-led discussions, advocate for policy coherence on migration and forced displacement issues and maximize opportunities for innovative, direct partnerships with LRGs.

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BOX 3.3.8

A PARTICULAR CASE: ÅLAND'S DE-MILITARIZED ISLANDS OF PEACE

In Finland, national and international law have enshrined **Åland**'s special status as an autonomous, demilitarized and neutralized area, leading to it being called the "Islands of Peace." These three components, together with minority protection, make the "Åland example" useful for international conflict management.

3.3.3 Access to justice: A local issue

Equal access to justice for all and the rule of law (SDG target 16.3) are foundational to the SDG 16 framework and, as such, all SDGs, underscoring the importance of meeting people's justice needs in an inclusive, fair and timely manner. Yet today, some 5.1 billion people worldwide lack meaningful access to justice.[45] Approximately 1 billion people lack official proof of identity,[46] and a much larger number do not possess a quality identification document (ID) that is verifiable for comprehensive use (SDG target 16.9).

While justice and rule of law often fall under the purview of national institutions, this responsibility is highly dependent on context and the overarching governance structure. For example, if a government is federal, local or provincial governments often lead on access to justice issues, including through local courts, city and county policing, and local mediation and dispute resolution. **LRGs are, therefore, critical to supporting justice for all people and communities and for local buy-in and ownership therein.**

BOX 3.3.9

THE RIGHT TO LEGAL IDENTITY: THE MEXICAN STATE OF TLAXCALA

A legal ID is an essential tool for establishing one's legal existence and exercising one's rights, ensuring social protection, gaining lawful employment and accessing public services (including health, education and often justice services), many of which are locally procured. As exclusion from opportunities offered by law disproportionately affects marginalized groups, **legal identification is also an important means to ensure no one is left behind and a prerequisite for enforcing anti-discrimination laws and policies (SDG target 16.b)**. Groups with limited access to internet connectivity may face barriers to obtaining a legal ID due to online application requirements; once they obtain an ID, they may face digital skill and access barriers to using it.[47] Some 3.4 billion legal ID holders have limited ability to use it on digital platforms.[48] This situation stresses the important role of LRGs in ensuring equitable and affordable access to digital infrastructure, as well as (digital) partnerships between authorities at all levels.

An instructive example can be found in the Mexican state of **Tlaxcala**. This state made the right to legal identity for foreign-born individuals a matter of policy, and a means to prevent statelessness and secure people's access to other rights and services.[49] Tlaxcala did so by eliminating the requirement to present an apostilled foreign birth certificate to obtain dual nationality.

Local actors, local knowledge

Specific data on equal access to justice are generally limited but in demand. In 2023, only 50 countries reported data for SDG indicator 16.3.1, which measures the share of victims of violence who reported their victimization to authorities. Even fewer reported data for the indicator measuring incidence of physical, psychological and sexual violence (SDG 16.1.3). This data gap demonstrates the difficulties in grasping the scale and scope of justice challenges and in developing the policies and laws required to address them.[50] It also reinforces the need for complementary indicators and data sources to identify justice priorities and ensure that policies at all levels are evidence-based[51] and draw upon disaggregated data.[52] **LRGs can play an important role not only in collecting data but also in advancing solutions that reach those furthest left behind.** While facing various challenges, LRGs are key for implementing solutions and bridging the gap between the national and local, as well as the formal and informal.

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BOX 3.3.10

IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN LEBANON THROUGH MUKHTARS

Mukhtars (locally elected officials) in Lebanon are neighbourhood- or village-level representatives of the State who are responsible for tasks such as birth and death registration, residency papers and even tax collection. In some cases, they can serve as mediators in domestic and public disputes and will even accompany police when entering a home. In Lebanon, these officials have taken on an even bigger role, serving as liaison between the State and Palestinian refugees struggling to access justice services.

Many Palestinian refugees living in informal settlements often face a precarious loophole: these encampments are not officially recognized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) nor serviced by the State. These "extra-State areas" do not often have running water, sanitation or other basic services. Mukhtars have been able to guide refugees through complicated legal processes, provide residency papers and even mediate interactions with local service providers to improve living conditions. They continue to work to deliver access to justice through registration and, in 2024, have protested price hikes in registration stamps that would drastically decrease the number of registration applications mukhtars can process.[53]

Access and inclusion in delivering justice

The interlinked nature of access to justice often make locally anchored solutions central to addressing the needs of people and communities. For example, the adjudication of contested and scarce arable land, water and other natural resources (SDG 13) can drive economic (SDG 8) and climate-related insecurity and increase risks of violent conflict at the community level.[54] Similarly, limited or unequal access to justice is associated with societal polarization, which itself can be a driver of conflict and violence.[55] **This situation points to justice not only being an access issue (i.e. the availability of judicial institutions such as courts) but also a quality issue** – which is linked to the inclusiveness of legal processes, the fairness of dispute resolution mechanisms and the means by which people can secure and access their human rights on an equal standing, often at the local level.

LRGs are key in making sure that justice systems are accessible, affordable, timely and people-cen-

tred. In Colombia, the creation of local justice systems (*Sistemas Locales de Justicia*) attests to this ability. These systems, a collaborative process between the State and local actors and governments to better respond to justice needs at the municipal level, aim to identify the legal needs and system weaknesses regarding access to justice in each territory. Their objective is to ensure effective, timely and viable responses for local populations, as well as the resources to carry them out. To date, 141 systems exist in Colombia at the municipal level and six at the departmental level.[56]

Connected to local justice systems are justice houses (*casas de justicia*) – one-stop-shop, multistakeholder venues that provide information on rights, legal advice and conflict resolution services. They aim to facilitate access to formal and non-formal justice services to support peaceful conflict resolution and strengthen community coexistence. Justice houses are physically located primarily in places with high levels of vulnerability, criminality, community conflict and/or social or economic marginalization that have reduced or non-existent physical or institutional justice capacity (including cities of over 100,000 people as well as small towns in conflict-torn territories). While initially a State-conceived programme, the Ministry of Justice in Colombia now only considers opening a local justice house[57] if local governments (large cities) request one. These justice houses operate with both local and national funding, and local governments maintain them in the long run. To date, there are 114 justice houses in 92 municipalities.[58] While access to justice often entails jurisdictional complexities, LRGs are clearly on the front line of delivery, design and innovative solutions.

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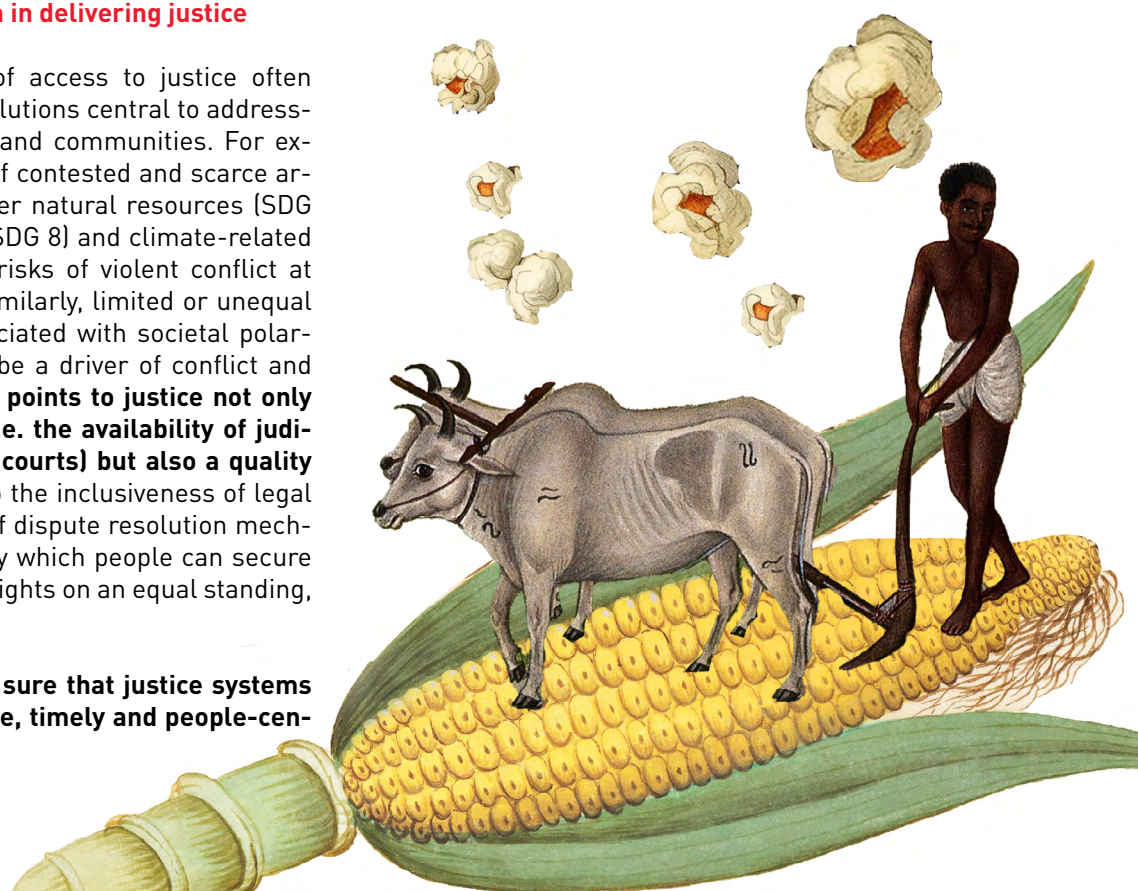
BOX 3.3.11

BRIDGING FORMAL AND INFORMAL JUSTICE: NAKURU, KAJIADO AND ISIOLO

Local justice actors, including LRGs, often operate within customary and informal justice systems, which can be Indigenous, traditional or religious in nature. Despite often serious shortcomings,[59] these systems are the principal means by which people, especially marginalized and at-risk groups, claim their rights and seek justice globally, as these systems tend to be viewed as legitimate and geographically accessible. They also operate in local languages, on reasonable timeframes and at affordable costs.[60]

In Kenya, the judiciary established the Taskforce on Traditional, Informal and Other Mechanisms Used to Access Justice in Kenya (known as the AJS Taskforce). A multilevel and multistakeholder group composed of academia representatives, local leaders, NGOs and government agencies, the AJS Taskforce undertook a four-year consultative process to understand the ways in which Kenyans access justice and what role alternative justice systems play at local levels.

Action plans were drafted in collaboration with **county governments** to implement the AJS Taskforce's policy (released in 2020) based on counties' needs and resources, with specific plans drafted with the counties of **Nakuru**, **Kajiado** and **Isiolo**, beginning in 2022. The blending of formal and informal justice systems, implemented by local governments, has shown positive results. Over the first three months of implementation, 74 cases were resolved in Nakuru county.[61]

3.3.4 Inclusive, transparent and responsive institutions: A local prerogative

SDG target 16.6 seeks to "develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels." Indicator 16.6.1 addresses the ability of governments to implement budgets," with 16.6.2 focuses on the portion of the population satisfied with public services.

Similarly, SDG target 16.7 seeks to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels," with indicator 16.7.1 measuring the proportion of positions in local and national institutions compared to national population distributions. As such, both of these SDG 16 targets have clear direct relevance to LRGs'

work. Indeed, LRGs often enjoy higher levels of trust than their national counterparts.[62] A 2023 OECD country survey found that 46.9% of people reported high or moderately high trust in their local government on average, compared to 41.4% for national governments.[63]

While variations in trust levels may reflect subjective factors, such as critical media or demanding citizenry (not only poorly performing institutions),[64] they also stress the importance of investing in local institutions and ensuring they are inclusive, diverse and representative. This aim can be pursued through deliberative and participatory processes such as participatory budgeting, planning and social dialogue tools often employed by LRGs. These methods not only ensure that a city or region's governance reflects the interests and needs of its residents but also ensure that policies are rooted in principles of non-discrimination (SDG target 16.b), inclusion, respect and mutual trust.[65]

Participatory and open forms of government at the local level

LRGs are often at the forefront of advancing participatory and open forms of government, initiating policy-making processes of co-creation, co-planning and participatory budgeting that involve citizens and different stakeholders. Notable examples of participatory budgeting, which aims to foster democratization, inclusion and transparency at the local level, can be seen in the cities of **Nilüfer** (Türkiye), **Warsaw** (Poland), **Seoul** (Republic of Korea) and **Seberang Perai** (Malaysia).

Collaborative policy-making is further illustrated by co-creation and co-planning processes in several cities and neighbourhoods around the world. In 2022, **Maipú** (Chile) developed a Local Open Government Plan together with its citizens and local stakeholders, with the aim of promoting the municipality's openness, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and inclusion. Citizens were asked to articulate their priorities, which included creating citizen-led neighbourhood plans; putting adolescents at the centre of local action; and improving the deployment of citizen security, including through technology. Other municipalities in Chile, including **Renca** and **Peñalolén**, have also generated open government plans.

Similarly, **Nilüfer**'s (Türkiye) 2020–2024 Strategic Plan, dubbed "My City, My Future" was premised on active citizen engagement to determine the city's mission, policy priorities and strategy for execution. Its development included participatory studies, stakeholder perception surveys and neighbourhood workshops that brought together residents and decision-makers across 64 neighbourhoods. The in-

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clusive, participatory nature of this process led to projects that seek to ensure children, young people, women, older people and people with disabilities can participate in the city's social life through various activities and services. Neighbourhood networks have also been key in **Santa Fe** (Argentina) and in **Ormoc**'s (the Philippines) DAGYAW citizen participation platform, demonstrating the universal value of such processes, regardless of location.

BOX 3.3.12

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND COMPREHENSIVE CARE

The importance of youth empowerment in citizen-led and pro-democracy movements can be seen through examples such as the LUCHA movement and the Citizens' University programme in **Goma** (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Against a backdrop of more than two decades of repeated wars, interethnic tensions and a youthful population, both initiatives aim to mobilize citizens to become aware of their power and responsibilities and be agents of positive change.

Sakarya's (Türkiye) Project Workshop with Young Participation and **Mishiha**'s (Burundi) Growing Peace Clubs are designed to work with young people, providing them with various forms of support to enable and empower their active participation in social and community decision-making processes. In **Monterrey** (Mexico), comprehensive care centres for adolescents help teenagers deal with trauma by offering psychosocial support and socio-productive workshops. They aim to reduce youth recruitment by criminal groups.

As previously noted, the SDG 16 framework offers useful entry points for deliberation and action on contentious policy issues through participatory, deliberative and collaborative processes.[66] **Leveraging open government, for example, and its principles of transparency, accountability and participation at local levels, can help address issues such as corruption (SDG target 16.5)**, as illustrated by Open Government Partnership Local, UNDP and UCLG's Building Bridges, Empowering Citizens campaign.

BOX 3.3.13

ADDRESSING CORRUPTION: A LOCAL APPROACH IN BARCELONA AND IZTAPALAPA

Effective governance and inclusion are linked to the absence of corruption (SDG target 16.5). Corruption is defined in a myriad of ways (in both the Global North and Global South), including bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion and State capture, which can include the procurement of local contracts and services. While several countries have seen reductions in bribery levels, in part due to the digitalization of public services, some 20% of individuals and 13% of businesses from countries with available data report having paid a bribe to a public official or being asked for a bribe by a public official.[67] The prevalence of bribery largely depends on variations in income levels and the pervasiveness of crime and interpersonal violence, often concentrated in cities.

Yet again, LRGs are playing a critical role in delivering positive change in people's lives. In Spain, the **Barcelona** City Council created an Office of Transparency and Good Practice. This office put in place a Code of Conduct as well as an anti-corruption "ethical and good governance mailbox," a digital channel for citizens to directly report corruption in the administration of public funds. Similarly, the mayor of **Iztapalapa** in Mexico launched an anti-corruption drive, which replaced private water delivery providers who charged high rates and often demanded bribes. By halting the outsourcing of this essential service, the city government was able to provide free water to those who previously did not have access. The savings involved in this process allowed for increased spending on local infrastructure and recreational spaces.

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Access to information, the digital divide and efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation

Access to information (SDG target 16.10) is impacted by transparency in public policy processes; the independence exercised by media and journalism; and the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation, including the deliberate spread of conspiracy theories and adversarial narratives.[68] Public access to quality information allows citizens to exercise their rights, hold their governments to account and make more informed decisions about their lives.

Despite the digital divide narrowing significantly over the past two decades, some 2.6 billion people worldwide remained offline in 2023, with clear geographic discrepancies in internet use (urban use being 31% higher globally).[69] This divide reflects access factors, including affordability and availability of relevant content, and impedes equal access to services and inclusive political participation.[70]

While the intersection of these factors can result in pockets of digital exclusion in cities even amidst otherwise high levels of connectivity, LRGs are adopting innovative approaches to reduce the digital divide. In **Cape Town** (South Africa), city authorities launched the SmartCape Access Project to help close the digital divide and promote digital inclusion and literacy. The project provides free access to computers and the internet in public libraries, and through public Wi-Fi hotspots.

LRGs are also actively working to combat mis/disinformation, despite the regulation of digital platforms and media outlets tending to fall under the purview of national institutions. One such initiative can be found in **Malmö** (Sweden), where authorities, together with a coalition of public and private sector partners, launched the Safe and Secure Digital City project. This pilot initiative tracks expressions of hate across online platforms (including social media), its instigators and intended targets, with the aim of exposing patterns and reducing socially divisive information manipulation. Through the initiative, Malmö has built city-wide partnerships to address hate online, created a digital intervention team and trained municipal staff and social workers in digital de-escalation skills.

The proliferation of mis/disinformation presents a growing threat to the functionality and perceived credibility of LRG institutions and actors.[71] Cities, often at the epicentre of targeted disinformation campaigns, are increasingly compelled to confront an array of disinformation threats, including those related to climate change, gender issues and public health misinformation.[72] **Information manipulation impacts cities' ability to govern and deliver necessary services for their constituents, and it can lead** to tensions and public safety concerns as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.[73]

Addressing inequality and exclusion and responsive governance at the local level

Access to information and prevalence of mis/disinformation are important factors in understanding both discontent and trust in public institutions, which are often driven by perceptions of injustice alongside rising income, wealth and group- or identity-based inequalities. They are associated with societal polarization and support for autocratic forms of populism,[74] as well as increased risks of social unrest.[75]

Today, 71% of the global population lives in countries where inequalities have increased;[76] inequality between countries was dropping but is now stagnating. As inequalities continue to rise, divisive narratives and political strategies increasingly erode social cohesion, democracy and efforts towards building equitable and peaceful societies. According to V-Dem data, almost every region has seen polarization rise since 2005. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer found that over half (62%) of respondents polled in 28 countries believe that the social fabric that once held their country together has grown too weak to serve as a foundation for unity and common purpose. Tackling inequalities and polarization, particularly in an age of polycrisis,[77] is a critical component of responsive governance and key to addressing growing trust deficits in governance globally, including at local levels.[78]

Against a backdrop of rapid urbanization (by 2050, 70% of the world may live in cities),[79] LRGs' critical role in addressing inequalities, protecting human rights and delivering responsive governance is that much more apparent. Many LRGs are addressing inequalities through policies and concrete measures by mayors across diverse regional contexts, from **Utrecht** (the Netherlands) to **Barcelona** (Spain).[80] An additional example is **Rosario** (Argentina), which is addressing its history of urban inequality and the impacts of climate change through its urban agricultural programme. This programme provides "low-income residents access to underutilized and abandoned public and private land to cultivate food."[81] Since its launch, the programme has expanded into neighbouring jurisdictions.

LRGs play an important role in safeguarding and ensuring that institutions are responsive, inclusive, equitable and adaptive. **Local mechanisms implemented to support and measure LRG adherence to the principles and practice of good governance further speak to LRGs' relevance and innovative approaches to SDG 16, as well as the need to support their empowerment and capacity.**

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BOX 3.3.14

MONITORING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SERBIAN TOWNS AND MUNICIPALITIES

In 2018, the **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities** (SCTM) in Serbia developed the Good Governance Index, a measurement instrument for monitoring the implementation of the principles of good governance at the local level. This tool, developed with support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), serves as a barometer on accountability, transparency, participation, efficiency and effectiveness, equality and anti-corruption. It defines objective and measurable indicators for assessing the implementation of public policies, legal rights and obligations, as well as for identifying areas of improvement. These indicators allow local governments to identify areas to focus funding and capacity building.

While political and democratic backsliding is often expressed nationally, it can significantly impact democratic progress at local levels. **LRGs can act as a backstop, further underscoring the importance of institutionalizing local democracy.** While this backstopping ability does not discount the potential for local leaders themselves to be authoritarian or repressive, it does reinforce the importance of having open, transparent, accountable and equitable LRGs. For example, based on an analysis of 184 countries, 113 have regional or local-level provisions for direct democracy (e.g. referendums or citizen initiatives).[82] In these contexts, fostering inclusion is essential to strengthening the social contracts that underpin the relationships between institutions that govern and those who are governed (the former delivering for the latter).[83] To this end, promoting gender equality is essential. Women's representation in institutions tends to be higher at local than national levels. Data from 141 countries show that women account for 35.5% of elected members in local deliberative bodies (with only three countries at 50%).[84]

3.3.5 SDG 16 and LRGs: Looking ahead

Advancing SDG 16 at all levels is an urgent matter and a policy imperative of utmost importance. This is particularly true at local and regional levels, given urbanization trends, global backsliding or stagnation on SDG 16 and challenges facing national governments to leave no one behind. LRGs must therefore be empowered to deliver on more peaceful, just and inclusive societies as a means of strengthening social contracts and rebuilding trust, as well as delivering on people's needs and development priorities and securing a better future for all.

LRGs are not "gap fillers" but essential actors on their own merits and in our global governance structures. As this paper has conveyed, the drivers and impacts of violence, injustice, inequality and exclusion have important local dimensions – and local solutions and actors must be front and centre in our collective response.

As four billion people go to the polls in 2024, there is a clear, credible case for empowering and investing in LRGs, mechanisms and frameworks. Past the halfway point to 2030, much needs to be done to elevate their status and visibility and foster an enabling environment for LRGs to do their work in our collective efforts to leave no one behind.

Against such a backdrop, this paper makes the following suggestions:

● **Utilize multilateral policy forums and frameworks such as the 2024 High-Level Political Forum to amplify and empower the work of LRGs in advancing SDG 16, while strengthening collaboration with national governments, multilateral and regional organizations, civil society (from grassroots organizations to international NGOs) and other stakeholders.** Doing so would increase the policy footprint of LRGs, raise the profile of local SDG 16 issues and actors and further feed into policy processes.

● **Empower LRGs as partners in delivering on more peaceful, just and inclusive societies through the Summit of the Future** and, amidst the climate emergency, the overarching polycrisis and global urbanization trends, which will continue to place pressures on cities. To this end, it is important to leverage the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments[85] to advise on the essential role of LRGs in defining and developing links between urbanization, violence prevention, peacebuilding, justice, equality and good governance at local and regional levels – as well as offer recommendations for a more enabling environment to make this happen. This would include making recommendations focused on SDG 16 in the lead up to and after the Summit of the Future, a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

● **Prioritize and support LRGs' capacity in collecting and disaggregating local data on SDG 16, while amplifying subnational reporting processes, such as VLRs and VSRs.** LRGs and their civil society partners are important for addressing data gaps at local and regional levels.

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Such data can help build context-specific evidence on SDG 16 and its interlinkages – important as a means of accounting for at-risk and marginalized populations and the commitment to leave no one and no place behind. To this end, VLRs and VSRs should be adequately resourced.

● **Support people-centred approaches in every aspect of SDG 16 localization, as well as open, non-discriminatory, inclusive and participatory practices.** From policy planning, budgeting and implementation to monitoring and review, it is vital to deliberately put the needs, priorities and perspectives of people and the communities they live in at the core of action. Particularly in settings where institutional capacity or representation is limited, people-centred approaches anchored in empirical realities are important stepping stones to build more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. This effort entails supporting LRGs in their work to include local communities, marginalized groups, civil society actors and other stakeholders in decision-making processes.

● **Improve enabling environments and sufficiently resource, empower and enable LRGs to further act on SDG 16 and its interlinkages.** Support LRG engagement and participation in national policy processes and the role of effective, collaborative and inclusive multilevel governance arrangements to balance bottom-up and top-down approaches and improve collaboration, multidirectional information sharing and decision-making. Deepen decentralization for more supportive legal and policy frameworks. Such work requires improving the visibility of local actors and issues as they relate to SDG 16 implementation (plans, priorities, strategies and budgets), promoting the participatory nature of LRGs, building the capacity of local actors, investing in local data collection and analysis and providing proper resources.

● **Promote and invest in initiatives that build trust between groups and with authorities at the local level.** Against a backdrop of shifts in global order, policies and practices to implement SDG 16 at the local level must be prioritized and account for increasing levels of distrust in governments and polarization in society in order to advance social justice, protect human rights and reduce inequality for all. To achieve this aim, support good governance principles and practices, including fighting corruption and fostering transparent and accountable approaches to policy-making. In policy dimensions where national governments have strong prerogatives – such as ensuring people's access to justice and legal identification – leverage LRGs' capabilities to make sure they respond to local populations' needs as much as possible.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

Local and regional governments (LRGs) and their associations (LGAs) have proven their unwavering dedication and increasing capacity in fostering sustainable development in the face of interconnected crises, including the lasting and multifaceted impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and violent conflicts. With the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) off track to be completed by 2030, the six years ahead require intensified local-to-global efforts, innovative policy-making and collaborative action. In particular, the global community needs to recognize and promote LRGs' role as leaders of sustainable development in their territories, accelerate progress and ensure a sustainable future for all. This section not only synthesizes the report's key findings in this direction but also suggests various pathways forward, stressing LRGs' essential role in fighting poverty and hunger, leading equitable climate action and promoting a new agenda for peace.

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

• The global community has taken steps to reform and revitalize the current multilateral system by broadening LRGs' involvement, but we are still far from where we should be.

In 2023, the SDG Summit Political Declaration recognized the New Urban Agenda as a critical accelerator of the 2030 Agenda through localization and prompted all stakeholders to foster multilevel coordination to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Likewise, the independent group of scientists in charge of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report acknowledged LRGs' role in achieving sustainable development and extended consultations with the organized constituency of LRGs as part of the process.

As we head towards the Summit of the Future in September 2024 and the Second World Summit for Social Development in 2025, the constituency of LRGs aims to develop a multistakeholder coalition that places equality at the centre of a renewed social contract. In this context, the 2024 High-Level Political Forum presents an opportunity to address LRGs' role in promoting sustainable cities and territories, which includes reducing inequalities, working for social justice and non-discrimination, supporting peace and good governance and protecting our planet's systems.

In the journey towards a networked multilateral system, in which all stakeholders play an essential decision-making role to benefit their citizens, it is important to assess and tackle the obstacles to SDG localization. Reinvigorating multilateralism under the lens of SDG 17, through subsidiarity and the principle of leaving no one behind, is necessary to establish a fairer system that engages LRGs as the primary level of government representing local communities.

• Blooming locally led SDG localization innovations and reporting efforts, such as Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), demonstrate the power of grassroots initiatives in driving sustainable development and the importance of integrating local perspectives into national strategies.

LRGs are progressively recognizing the relevance of the SDGs and committing to advance them. For example, they are developing measures to eradicate poverty and hunger, taking actions against climate change and promoting peace and justice through local diplomacy and peacebuilding measures. The hundreds of practices compiled in this report illustrate over 150 LRGs' and LGAs' local SDG leadership, strategizing, planning, budgeting, awareness raising, capacity building, stakeholder engagement and reporting efforts. Almost 9 out of 10 survey respondents have made important progress on designing an SDG-aligned strategy or action plan. Furthermore, over 6 out of 10 respondents have raised awareness on SDG localization among their staffers, members, populations and local stakeholders, and the same proportion has implemented concrete programmes and projects aligned with the SDGs.

VLRs and VSRs to track progress on these efforts are flourishing in all world regions. Furthermore, this reporting has significantly enhanced local-national relations for sustainable development. Among many

other benefits, all seven VSRs produced in 2024 have served as critical tools for LGAs to advocate before their national counterparts and have been taken into account in Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes. VLRs and VSRs, a critical policy instrument and process for sustainable development, have also improved LRGs' and LGAs' sustainability strategies, fostered stronger connections within and between these institutions and promoted a comprehensive grassroots approach to social engagement. These expanding efforts call for increased recognition and support at all levels and increased cooperation with LRGs and LGAs to better achieve the SDGs.

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> • **Without LRGs' and LGAs' commitment and brave initiatives, we will not be able to end poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2), fight climate change (SDG 13) and achieve peaceful cities and territories that rebuild trust (SDG 16).**

LRGs are taking comprehensive approaches to tackle poverty, mitigate and adapt to climate change and respond to peace, justice and participation challenges. As demonstrated in this paper, they have:

● Promoted equal and accessible local public services to curb inequalities, poverty and hunger within their communities

● Strengthened local economies of care and equality and fostered local resilience and climate justice by putting human beings and their basic rights at the centre

● Incorporated resilience and climate change actions into policies, strategies and planning at the local level

● Supported the push for climate action by enhancing education, raising awareness and building human and institutional capacity to mitigate climate change, adapt to its effects and reduce its impacts

● Put in place innovative and effective solutions for violence prevention and reduction and the promotion of a new culture of peace

● Improved quality, affordability and equal access to justice for all

● Advanced participatory and open forms of governments to rebuild trust between citizens and institutions

LRGs play a critical role in combatting the complex, multidimensional challenges of poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), from a people approach. They do so by leveraging their proximity to communities to develop and tailor effective policies and services. They focus on providing inclusive public services such as education, health care and housing, in addition to fostering local economic development and enhancing resilience against climate shocks through a lens of care and equality. Initiatives such as urban agriculture, community-led savings groups and local food markets illustrate LRGs' efforts to promote food security and economic stability. However, LRGs face significant challenges, including socio-spatial distribution of poverty and varied capacities due to decentralization frameworks, which require resilience and innovation to overcome. Effectively reducing poverty and eliminating hunger require inclusive policies, community engagement, fiscal autonomy and multi-level coordination to address complex emergencies.

LRGs are at the forefront of the fight against climate change, innovating in mitigation and adaptation strategies to build resilience and protect our planet. They are crucial for implementing the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, especially SDG 13, by serving as first responders to climate disasters, driving sustainable urban development and fostering the rights to water and sanitation (SDG 6) and energy (SDG 7). The global community must foster multilevel collaboration, ensuring LRGs are actively involved in shaping and executing national climate strategies and nationally determined contributions. There is an urgent need for a just transition that addresses the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities and integrates climate justice into urban re-naturing efforts. Enhancing LRGs' role in global climate finance and promoting a holistic approach to the SDGs are essential efforts for a sustainable future.

LRGs' bottom-up efforts promote a new culture of peace, foster justice and strengthen inclusion and participation under a government perspective. The causes and effects of violence, injustice, inequalities and exclusion have significant local dimensions. LRGs are, therefore, a cornerstone of achieving SDG 16 to create more peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Their actions help strengthen social contracts and rebuild trust amid increasing global distrust in governments. Through city diplomacy, peacebuilding measures in their own territories and access to justice for local communities, LRGs are aiming to meet people's needs and development priorities.

In the global sphere, LRGs are promoting renewed schemes within the multilateral system such as the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on LRGs. Empowering LRGs through supportive environments, frameworks and resources can enhance LRGs' recognition and role in these processes. Efforts need to be doubled down to facilitate the collection and use of local data (such as through VLRs and VSRs) for SDG 16. Fostering inclusive, participatory

governance through people-centred approaches is critical for addressing gaps, ensuring no one is left behind and advancing social justice overall.

• Acknowledging local efforts and innovations within national processes remains a crucial unresolved issue.

Achieving the SDGs hinges on the active participation and collaboration of all levels of government, including LRGs. LRGs are critical in implementing the SDGs at the local level and in achieving the goals' transformative and inclusive impact. However, despite their crucial role and some progress this year, LRGs are more often than not overlooked in national

SDG implementation strategies, coordination mechanisms and VNR processes. This year, 12 out of 29 (41%) of the countries reporting to the 2024 High-Level Political Forum have shown a lack of meaningful involvement of LRGs in the VNR processes, with participation being either absent or sporadic. Also, 63% of reporting countries have not integrated LRGs into their national coordination mechanisms at all or only through ad-hoc consultations or punctual meetings. Progress is not uniform across regions, and much remains to be done. To strengthen the inclusion of LRGs in these processes, it is essential to establish clear mechanisms for consultation and collaboration between national governments, LRGs, LGAs and civil society organizations.

4.1

4.2   WAYS FORWARD

- **Eradicating poverty from the bottom up through sustainable, resilient and innovative LRG-led solutions**

LRGs are actively engaged in addressing poverty through local actions aimed at improving livelihoods, enhancing access to essential services and fostering economic opportunities at the grassroots level. However, effectively tackling poverty, a complex and multifaceted issue experienced differently across diverse populations and regions, requires comprehensive strategies. LRGs must navigate various dimensions of poverty – economic, social, cultural and political – while addressing interconnected challenges such as climate change, peace and hunger.

This challenge calls for policies and practices that are grounded in local realities, capable of addressing socio-spatial inequalities and responsive to the diverse needs of marginalized communities. To do so, adopting whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches is essential. These approaches promote enhanced community engagement, empower LRGs with greater authority and resources, recognize and manage interdependencies among different issues and build the capacities needed to effectively combat poverty.

- **Enhancing decentralization to empower LRGs and increase their participation in national strategies and coordination mechanisms for implementing the SDGs**

LRGs and LGAs report significant obstacles to SDG achievement, including inadequate access to funding; insufficient workforce, technical means and capabilities; poor support from national governments; and lack of coordination between government levels. At the same time, the active participation of LRGs and local stakeholders at every stage and level of decision-making, with their localized knowledge, innovations and equality-driven goals, is crucial to achieve the SDGs. To speed up sustainable responses to the compounding effects of current crises (including the triple planetary crisis; ongoing wars and conflicts; the societal, physical and emotional scars of the COVID-19 pandemic; and the cost-of-living crisis) and enhance localization efforts, national and global strategies need to be aligned with the needs and ambitions of local communities and, thus, with local strategies. Continuous dialogue among spheres of government is required, starting with LRGs' inclusion in SDG coordination mechanisms set up by national governments. Thorough communication, support and capacity building are required, for instance, to leverage and localize data systems at all levels.

These efforts can be more strategically and holistically achieved by establishing institutional and regulatory frameworks to distribute powers, duties and resources in a decentralized manner following the principle of subsidiarity. Enhancing national, regional and local policy planning, development, monitoring and evaluation, in addition to promoting adequate representation and active participation in decision-making processes, significantly enhances the development of equitable urban and territorial systems, fulfilling the aspirations and needs of local communities.

- **Organizing LRGs' participation in national reporting processes and aiding LRGs in their reporting endeavours, especially VLRs and VSRs**

LRGs have demonstrated their commitment to achieving the SDGs through strategic voluntary reporting exercises worldwide. Indeed, 295 VLRs and 44 VSRs attest to this commitment. However, the systematic integration of their findings in national reporting processes such as VNRs is a critical unresolved matter. National governments and the international community as a whole need to establish clear reporting frameworks that ensure LRGs' voices are heard and their contributions recognized, in the form of valuable knowledge, data and key recommendations to advance sustainable development. In addition to embracing VLRs and VSRs as essential groundwork for their strategies and reports, national governments should involve LRGs from the very first stages of VNR processes. They can do so, for example, by inviting LRGs to be part of the national reporting team or by following up on progress through regular consultations. Involving other stakeholders and acknowledging their shadow reports are likewise encouraged.

Moving forward, national governments should seize the opportunity to transform these ad hoc cooperation channels into permanent coordination mechanisms, whose goals, functioning and outcomes can be replicated across policy agendas and processes. It is only through these collaborative arrangements that we will be able to achieve a more comprehensive understanding and shaping of local, national and global progress towards a more sustainable future.

• Accelerating transformation through human rights-based and caring approaches

Embracing human rights-based and caring approaches in local, national and global policy-making will accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, propelling progress as the world is now only six years away from the 2030 deadline. These approaches prioritize equality, inclusion and dignity, ensuring universal access to basic services such as health care, education, housing and clean water and sanitation. Rethinking care involves redefining the role humans must play in society, the interrelation with nature and the type of government and local service provision needed to define and design a sustainable, fair and just future for all with room for the next generations' aspirations and dreams.

By integrating human rights principles and fostering care and empathy in different localized contexts, we can accelerate advancements in sustainable development, foster resilient communities and safeguard the planet's commons. This proactive approach not only meets immediate needs but also builds a foundation for enduring global progress, embodying a commitment to justice and shared prosperity for generations to come.

• Fostering a renewed and networked multilateral system to ensure the representation of our communities and localizing the Pact for the Future

LRGs need to play a critical role in renewing and revitalizing multilateralism. Redefining multilateralism and global financial structures begins with a grassroots approach, placing LRGs and communities at the forefront. Ahead of the UN Summit of the Future, and in light of the Pact for the Future, it will be essential to ensure adequate representation in decision-making bodies for the LRG constituency, fortify local finances and fiscal decentralization and recognize LRGs as key actors with policy-making capabilities.

As part of the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Group on LRGs's work, our constituency has succeeded in getting the draft UN Pact for the Future to include an action on the call we have been promoting. Ahead of the Second World Summit for Social Development, it will be critical to develop this pact's provisions into a global social agenda that is driven by local public service provision. Only then will we ensure the localization of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 in connection with all other global goals, setting the world back on the path to achieve the SDGs.
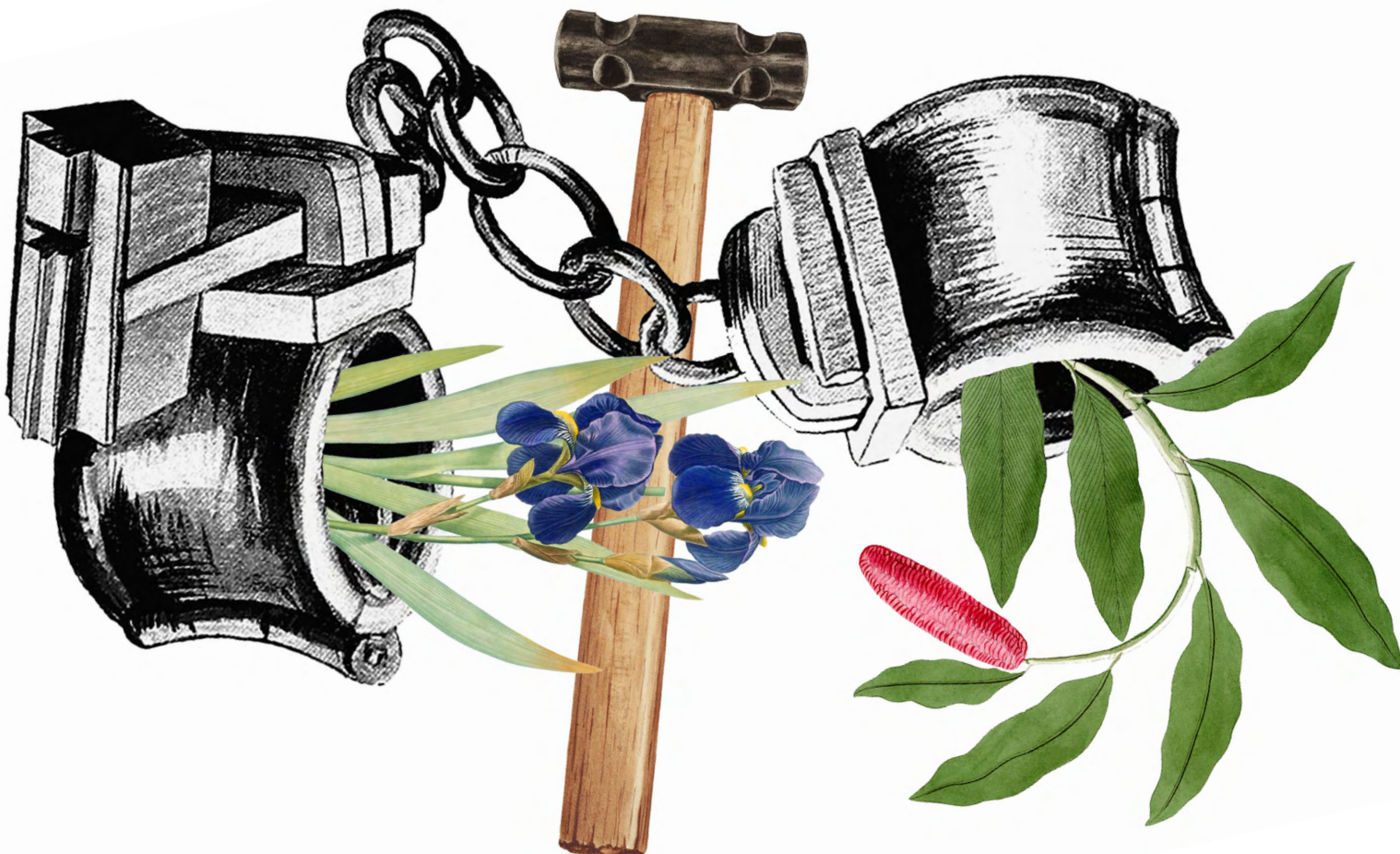
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27 This data is extracted from the OECD-UCLG World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment. This database covers 135 countries and draws mostly on data from 2019 to 2022. Consequently, this subsection's overview does not account for the dramatic changes in world regions where violent conflicts have started since then. Please refer to the database for more information, including the exact countries and data on which this analysis is based: https://www.sng-wofi.org/data/.

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29 This data only represents the USA, as there is no data in this category for other countries in the NORAM region. In the specific case of the USA, 89.3% of subnational expenditure on recreation, culture and religion is undertaken at the State level, while only 1% is undertaken at the city level.

30 Once again, data is only available for the USA, as there is no data in this category for other countries in the NORAM region. In the USA, 91% of all subnational expenditure on education is done at the State level, while only 1.2% is undertaken at the city level.

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