

UCLG Gold V Report: Africa Chapter

“The SDGs will only be implemented effectively if they are embedded into national and local processes and actions. National and local ownership and commitment will thus determine their success. Therefore, the success with implementing SDGs will be entrenching them in national and sub-national strategies, plans and policies and ensuring bottom up processes for implementation.”

South African Local Government Association (SALGA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Commitment to the implementation of the SDGs and New Urban Agenda at the national level in Africa is high and reflects a continental shift towards a push to sustainable development that has local action at its core. There is, however, a mismatch between the policy commitments to devolution and the capability of local authorities to effectively drive and deliver on the 2030 agenda.

Support for SDGs at regional and national level

As a continent, Africa's own Agenda 2063 reflects a shared vision for development and Africa was the only region in the world to articulate a common position on the 2030 Agenda in the run-up to Habitat III. At the national level, the commitment to implement the SDGs at all scales is apparent in the presentation of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) of a number of African countries. So far, 20 African countries out of a total of 103 countries have participated in the UN HLPF via the first, second and third round of the VNR process in 2016, 2017 and 2018, and 18 countries are committed to present their reports in 2019. Local issues and actors were foregrounded in all cases, suggesting that African nations embrace, in at least some way, the importance of local innovation and reporting on SDG implementation.

SDG localisation trends

A review of localization processes across the continent shows that the experience and contexts for SDG implementation is varied. There are Africa wide trends, including:

- SDG localisation tends to be led or supported by UN agencies, with some exceptions;
- few countries have specific SDG national plans instead focussing on alignment or adaptation of national development plans;
- most countries that have National Urban Policies have not yet aligned these to the SDGs;
- mechanisms for coordination and reporting exist at the highest political level such as the Presidency or Prime Minister's office and are generally coordinated by one key Ministry or an inter-ministerial committee including a combination of the Ministry of Planning, Development, Finance and/or Foreign Affairs;
- the participation of subnational governments' representatives in the consultation process for the preparation of the VNRs is still limited (they were involved in just 8 countries out of the 18 that presented their VNRs between 2016 and 2018);
- while a variety of stakeholders tend to be included in coordinating and committees, such as civil society, private sector and academia, only in 6 countries these structures explicitly have either included or consulted local government representatives.

How front-running local governments and associations are supporting localisation

- Front-running and pioneering cities, local governments and regions (e.g., the municipality of eThekweni-Durban and several more in Benin) in many countries are increasingly committing to implement the SDGs and integrating various Goals and Targets in their development plans (e.g., Kenya's counties), either with or without the support of their national governments;
- local and regional governments' associations are taking initiatives to disseminate and mobilise their members through conferences and workshops (e.g., in Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, Togo and South Africa) and participating in national

coordination mechanisms (e.g., the ANCB in Benin, in Botswana, the Council of Governors in Kenya, and the UCT in Togo);

- various countries are supporting pilot projects in different municipalities to implement the SDGs (e.g., Botswana, Rwanda and Uganda), often assisted by UN agencies (e.g., Algeria, Cape Verde and Sierra Leone);
- several other cities have carried out initiatives related to different areas of the SDGs, including slum upgrading, climate change, and risk prevention, even before the SDGs were adopted by the international community (e.g., Cape Town's work in partnership with the South African Shack-Slum Dweller International Alliance, or the municipality of Mukuru in Kenya);
- likewise, regional and global networks of local and regional governments have also increasingly put the 'localization agenda' at the centre of their strategies.

Local government capacity and the extent of decentralisation is highly variegated

The limited participation of sub-national and urban governments in SDG implementation frameworks is reflective of partial and complex decentralization reforms, many of which have only been implemented since the 1990s. Like many regions of the world, in Africa *de jure* decentralization (the distribution of powers and functions to sub-national structures as defined by law) does not reflect the *de facto* decentralization situation:

- local authorities do not always cover the whole country;
- some national governments block local political strengthening, especially if an opposition is in power;
- local governments lack fiscal and other capabilities;
- national governments, donors, and lenders continue to reinforce centralized and sectoral processes, despite discourses and rhetoric on the value of sub-national and integrated approaches to development;
- in many countries, however, the decentralisation process has either stagnated or witnessed setbacks and regression.

Ambiguity in subnational roles, power and functions

Most African countries give recognition to the establishment of local government and provide administrative divisions at the provincial and regional level. However, the territorial divisions at the municipal and sub-municipal level are not always clear or recognized in the Constitutions of these countries or the other legislative texts. Moreover, for many countries detailed information on municipal and lower administrative divisions' in terms of governance, functions, power, and responsibilities are unclear or are lacking. Overall, core competences of local governments are largely in the social realm and around basic service delivery, but most countries have significant overlaps in responsibilities between the different levels of sub-national government. Often, functions such as public transport, roads, electricity and water and sanitation are controlled at the national or regional level or through nationally owned state-owned enterprises.

The jurisdiction of local government needs clarification

Given the lack of clarity on what local government is tasked to do, the funds it is allocated for these tasks and how it is assessed in its achievements, it is very difficult to monitor local progress on the SDGs. The lack of legibility is particularly acute in small and medium sized cities (67% of Africa's urban population and 26% of Africa's total population), where the service delivery mandate is functional not just to the city residents but also to the wider peri-

urban and regional hinterlands. Territorial leakage overlays what is an already extended and underfunded mandate and negatively affects the extent to which local governments can effectively work towards the implementation of the SDGs. This also points to the issue of the mismatch between functional urban areas and administrative areas (particularly in metropolitan areas – which gather almost 37% of Africa’s urban dwellers), as cities grow quicker than the adjustment of administrative boundaries. Clarity around functional mandates and jurisdictions is necessary for successful SDG localisation.

Fiscal decentralisation incomplete

In parallel to political decentralization and questions of governance is the issue of fiscal decentralization. Finance is one area where local government is rarely able to act alone. The limited fiscal resources availability for African sub-national governments severely hampers autonomous policy impact. As indicated in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (paragraph 34), the appropriate assignment of autonomous fiscal functions at the sub-national level is crucial for the implementation of wider global development agendas on the continent. The extent to which sub-national levels of government can effectively mobilize revenues, control expenditure priorities, and engage in borrowing activities are all fundamental to the fiscal autonomy and effectiveness of sub-national governments and their ability to innovate on the SDG implementation. Notably, sub-national fiscal data for many African countries is difficult to access. The data is often not publicly available, not online, incomplete, or outdated.

Inter-governmental relations

At least 18 African countries have policies that resemble a NUP, but the technical capabilities, legal frameworks, financial instruments, and political will to deliver on these complex policies appear to be lacking. Translating and devolving national policy and expenditure processes around the SDGs to the local level is difficult, demanding not only a change of values but also the recalibration of laws and the budget, along with the reconfiguration of the civil service and the overall structures of government. It is only through national reform and institutional change that the enabling environments can be created necessary to bring both local and regional governments as well as other relevant stakeholders into the sustainable development journey. Hence, the quality of intergovernmental relations and policy coherence, not just a narrow understanding of devolution, is key to overall 2030 progress, as well as to the achievement of the Agenda 2063 in Africa. A number of countries across the African continent, such as Burkina Faso, Kenya and South Africa, are making headway in creating a “whole of society” approach to the implementation of the SDGs through the creation of multi-level governance frameworks, albeit not always without challenges. These challenges range from follow-up and review mechanisms, to incomplete fiscal decentralisation and the lack of local policy guidelines and coherence between different global agendas.

Critical local and regional government partners are not adequately acknowledged

Because the African context is one where the *de facto* powers and resources of sub-national government are limited, there is a need to consider what other actors fulfil these roles in partnership, parallel or competition with local government. The most important set of actors in these auxiliary roles to local government in Africa are chiefs and traditional authorities. Another example of partnerships that have a sustained influence in the direction and thrust of local government is that of residents’ committees. Further examples of stakeholders whose presence impacts local dynamics in tandem with the local state, possibly but not necessarily

in harmony with the commitments to the multi-lateral agreements, include state owned enterprises, large corporations (e.g. mining), as well as large NGOs or international organisations.

Need for localised data monitoring and evaluation

African data systems are not strong, making it hard to compare or establish aggregate patterns. There is a need for more structural support for the development of locally embedded monitoring and reporting processes – to national and subnational governments and globally on the SDGs. Such processes also need to include the empowerment of local communities, civil society and other stakeholders to understand, analyse and use data independently in order to hold government to account. In addition, there is a need for partnerships to produce relevant data for monitoring development progress, especially for indicators for which currently no data is being produced. Some countries have opted to create a mechanism to collect subnational place-based data (e.g., Kenya established the County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System, Zimbabwe created focal points appointed by local authorities to support the work of the national State Statistical Committee). UCLG Africa, in close partnership with Shack/Slum Dwellers International, has promoted an innovative campaign – Know Your City – that gathers citywide data on slums and uses this information to build inclusive partnerships between the urban poor and their local governments.

Local initiatives and partnerships for SDG localisation

Efforts towards achieving sustainable social, economic and environmental development are evident across the continent, but rarely framed explicitly around the SDGs. Here, the SDGs have the potential to become an awareness raising tool and a lever to advocate for decentralization and help local and regional governments conceive new instruments compatible with Agenda 2030, the New Urban Agenda and the Agenda 2063 of the African Union. As mentioned above, local bottom-up SDG action across Africa is incipient and limited to a number of pockets but includes:

- alignment of local and regional government plans and strategies with the SDGs;
- local and regional government networks which allow for advocacy, peer-to-peer exchange, learning, capacity building and partnering for SDG localisation;
- champion cities with visionary political leadership and/or well-established connections to international networks and funding;
- development and data-driven partnerships of/with non-state actors such as community, civil society and private sector;
- knowledge co-production urban laboratories – often in partnership with academia.

Linking global and regional agendas

A closer link between the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda and the Agenda 2063 for Africa could be an opportunity for local and regional governments and their networks in the continent to promote a more integrated urban and territorial development approach. As acknowledged in the 2063 Agenda, Africa needs more inclusive and prosperous urban areas to drive the development of the continent, and promote balanced, inclusive and resilient urban systems, and better articulated metropolitan areas, intermediary cities and territories. In the achievement of these objectives, local and regional governments play a critical role: they need clearer competences, powers and tools, as well as stronger dialogue and collaboration across all levels of government.