

02



Asia-Pacific

Regional chapter



Woman harvesting crops at Seoul's urban fringe, Republic of Korea (photo: © Ainara Fernández Tortosa).

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1. Introduction

The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda have been widely embraced in the Asia-Pacific (ASPAC) region. Most governments are working towards including them in several development policies and planning and monitoring frameworks at the national and sub-national levels. There are, however, still significant challenges facing the implementation of the SDGs in the region; and advancing localization through enhanced territorial development strategies is one of them. The region's vast population and geographic area, rapid levels of urbanization and environmental threats all affect the localization of the SDGs.¹

The ASPAC region, as defined by UCLG, is divided into four sub-regions, namely: Southern and South-western Asia, South-eastern Asia, Eastern and North-eastern Asia and Pacific Island countries. The region encompasses a wide range of sub-regions, countries, special administrative regions and some of the world's wealthiest and poorest countries, as well as the largest and most isolated countries and cities on Earth. It is home to more than 56% of the world's population (4.1 billion inhabitants), of which around 50% live in urban areas.² And it is one of the most diverse and fastest growing regions of the world, accounting for more than 60% of the world's economic growth and development.

Urbanization has helped millions escape poverty through increased productivity and employment opportunities, improved quality of life, and large-scale investments in infrastructure and services.³ Most of the 2.26 billion Asia-Pacific urban dwellers live in relatively densely populated urban environments, with the urban population predicted to reach 3 billion by 2035. The region has more than 4,400 urban centres with populations of over 50,000 people. Around

300 cities have populations of over one million, of which 21 are megacities (urban agglomerations with more than 10 million inhabitants); several of them are forming supra-cities or urban regions with populations of over 50 million (such as Delhi-Lahore or the Pearl Delta Metropolitan Region).

Lao PDR (photo: Sasha Popovic, bit.ly/31XrtXZ).





At the same time, small and medium-sized cities are growing rapidly, creating long urban corridors and clusters in many countries. Sixty-five percent of the urban population in the ASPAC region lives in medium-sized cities.⁴

Urbanization is one of the megatrends facing the region in the coming decade. Although coupled with rapid economic growth, urbanization entails significant environmental and social costs.⁵ Asia is home to more than half of the world's cities most vulnerable to a range of natural disasters, including rising sea levels

resulting from climate change.⁶ Even though the proportion of the urban population living in slums has decreased, the number of people living in slums is increasing. Disaster risk, slums, air pollution, congestion, informality, and access to (and quality of) basic services are among the challenges facing many Asian cities.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific's (UNESCAP) 2019 assessment of progress in SDG implementation underlines the significant improvement made in the region, particularly with respect to poverty reduction, education and life expectancy. However, the report also stresses that 'on its current trajectory, Asia and the Pacific will not achieve any of the 17 SDGs by 2030'.⁷ Measures are underway to achieve affordable and clean energy (SDG 7). Yet inequalities are widening and many sub-regions are lagging behind. Several areas show little progress in food security (SDG 2), supporting industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), building sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11),

Asia is home to more than half of the world's cities most vulnerable to a range of natural disasters, including rising sea levels resulting from climate change.



A resident fetches water from emerged land at the bottom of dried-up Banteng Lake in the Rongkop District, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (photo: Tribun Jogja/ Hasan Sakri, t.ly/O5097).

combatting climate change (SDG 13), protecting life below water (SDG 14) and life on land (SDG 15), and supporting peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16). For three of the Goals, the situation has deteriorated, including water and sanitation (SDG 6), ensuring decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and supporting responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).⁸

Large disparities between countries threaten Asia-Pacific's overall ability to achieve the SDGs. According to SDG performance indexes, South Asian countries' scores are below the global median (with the exception of Bhutan), while South-eastern Asian countries are distributed around the median (with the exception of Myanmar, with much lower scores) and East Asian countries, namely Australia and New Zealand, score over the median.⁹ Massive investments are needed to achieve the SDGs in the ASPAC region (estimated at USD 1.5 trillion annually).¹⁰

This chapter presents an overview of the progress made towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia-Pacific countries, with a focus

on the role of local and regional governments (LRGs). The challenges of localization of the SDGs in the region have been partially documented in several reports.¹¹ The chapter is divided into four sections. Following the introduction, Section 2 discusses the SDG implementation strategies adopted by countries in the region and the enabling institutional environments for sub-national government action; section 3 describes activities currently being undertaken at the local level to develop a territorial approach to the implementation of the SDGs, showcasing local practices that address some key development challenges faced by cities and territories in the region. The conclusion synthesizes findings and outlines an action agenda to accelerate the localization of the SDGs in the region through a territorial development approach. 

2. National and local institutional frameworks for the implementation of the SDGs

2.1 National strategies and institutional arrangements for implementation of the SDGs

All countries in the ASPAC region have signed up to the SDGs. The preparatory phase to support the implementation of the SDGs involves a range of activities, from integrating the SDGs in national development strategies (alignment of national development plans or strategies to the SDGs) to the development of institutional frameworks (for example, the appointment of national coordinating committees) and the establishment of monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Twenty-eight countries have presented Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) between 2016 and 2019.¹² Nine countries have committed to present their VNRs in 2020. The majority of the Voluntary National Reports reflect the progress that countries are making in the preparatory and implementation phases.

SDGs national strategies and plans

As summarized in Table 1, countries in the ASPAC region have taken significant steps towards mainstreaming the SDGs into their national planning processes, and governments have designated national, focal or nodal agencies to coordinate the implementation of the goals. The UNESCAP synthesis report on the 2019 VNRs highlights that a majority of countries have revised or realigned their National Development Plans (NDPs) to support the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda.¹³

As shown in Table 1, a majority of countries use their national development strategies as a framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, thus ensuring the integration of the SDGs in their development plans. Some countries have integrated the SDGs into sectoral plans, for instance the South Korean 3rd National Basic Plan for Sustainable Development, which selected the goals and targets that were considered the most relevant based on national priorities. Other countries mapped sectoral plans and policies and assigned responsibilities to the different ministries and agencies to cover all the SDGs. China, for

example, aligned the SDGs with its Five Year Plan.¹⁴ Japan launched a sustainable development vision and plan soon after adopting its commitment to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.¹⁵ Indonesia mapped its mid-term plans against the SDGs.¹⁶ Countries such as Australia and New Zealand are still working on defining their strategy, but have integrated the SDGs in different areas.¹⁷ The Small Pacific Island States face unique difficulties in developing plans and are more reliant on international support. The United Nations Pacific Strategy (UNPS) 2018-2022 proposes a five-year strategic framework to support the UN system's collective response to development priorities in 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories.¹⁸

In regional forums organized by UNESCAP, countries stressed the importance of effectively integrating policy responses, improving inter-ministerial coordination and establishing adequate monitoring systems, which are particularly affected by the lack of resources and primary statistical data at all levels to measure performance.¹⁹

With respect to the implementation of the SDGs from the perspective of sub-national governments (SNG), the localization of strategies to realize the SDGs and the role played by local governments is mentioned in a number of VNRs (Bhutan, China, Japan, South Korea, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam; in India mainly at state level), while a few others make specific references to territorialization strategies

The UNESCAP synthesis report on the 2019 VNRs highlights that a majority of countries have revised or realigned their National Development Plans to support the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda.

Table 1 National strategies and institutional arrangements for the implementation of the SDGs

Bangladesh

The 2030 Agenda has been integrated into Bangladesh's Seventh Five Year Plan (2016-2020) and an action plan has been prepared. Coordination: SDGs Inter-Ministerial Implementation and Monitoring Committee established by the PM. No LRG participation reported.

Bhutan

The 12th Five Year Plan (2018-2023) has been aligned with the SDGs. The process was initiated in the 11th Plan. The plan focuses development on National Key Result Areas (NKRAs). Coordination: Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNHC) Commission (inter-agency coordination body), including a High-Level SDG Working Committee (in charge of preparation of the VNR) with parliamentary oversight.

Cambodia

The Cambodian Sustainable Development Framework, approved in November 2018, will be integrated into the National Strategic Development Plan. Coordination: National Council on Sustainable Development, which is coordinated by the Planning Ministry in charge of SDG implementation. LRGs consulted.

China

China's 13th Five Year Plan (2016-2020) for Economic and Social Development adopted in March 2016 reflects the SDGs. In September 2016, the country also released China's National Plan on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which translates each target of the SDGs into action plans for the country. Several sectoral plans are also aligned with SDGs. Coordination: inter-agency coordination mechanism (43 government departments) led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. No direct participation of LRGs.

India

SDGs are integrated in the Three Year Action Agenda 2017-20, as well as in the 15-year vision and 7-year strategy. Coordination: National Institution for the Transformation of India (*NITI Aayog*), chaired by the Prime Minister. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation formulates indicators. Only states' chief ministers are represented in coordination mechanisms.

Indonesia

SDGs are incorporated in the national development vision (*Nawacita*) and at all three levels of Indonesia's development planning: National Long-Term Development Plan 2005-2025, the National Medium-Term Development Plan 2015-2019 and in the 1-year Government Work Plan. An SDGs Action Plan (2017-2019) was launched in June 2018. In addition, Indonesia is formulating a 2030 Agenda Roadmap and integrating the SDGs in the preparation of the Medium-Term Regional Development 2020-2024 and Regional Work Plan at the sub-national level. Coordination: SDGs National Coordination Team, headed by the President. There is also an implementation team, which is coordinated by the Ministry of National Development Planning (BAPPENAS), an expert panel and four multi-stakeholder forums for follow-up. SDG coordination teams have also been created at the sub-national level.

Japan

The 2018 Basic Policies and 2018 Economic Growth Strategy are committed to promoting the SDGs. In December 2017, Japan adopted the 2018 SDG Action Plan and in June 2018, the Expanded SDG Action Plan. Coordination: SDGs Promotion Headquarter, headed by the Prime Minister (inter-ministerial structure). LRGs involved in SDG Promotion Roundtables (consultative level).

Republic of Korea

The Third National Basic Plan for Sustainable Development 2016-2020 provides a basic platform for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Coordination: Commission on Sustainable Development (led by Ministry of Environment). It includes civil society organizations (CSOs) and academia, the Office for Government Policy Coordination and the Committee for International Development Cooperation (CIDC) for international policies (led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). No direct participation of LRGs reported.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

A set of SDG Promotion Guiding Principles were adopted in 2016. The SDGs have been integrated into the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2016-2020), and in its monitoring and evaluation framework; into the Ten Year Socio-economic Development Strategy (2016-2025) and into the Development Vision toward 2030. Lao PDR is developing a roadmap for implementing the SDGs. Coordination: National SDG Steering Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, and led by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Investment and the Lao PDR Statistics Bureau. No participation of LRGs reported.

Malaysia

SDGs have been integrated into the Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 and Vision 2020. Coordination: National SDG Council (chaired by the Prime Minister) and a National Steering Committee (chaired by the Director of Economic Planning Unit), which includes five Cluster Working Committees (with ministries, CSOs, the private sector, academia, UN agencies and youth). Similar mechanisms were created at the state level.

Maldives

Alignment of SDGs is underway. Coordination: National Ministerial Coordination Committee (inter-ministerial mechanism), chaired by the Prime Minister and coordinated by the Ministry of Environment and Energy; there is also a technical committee (multi-stakeholder). Local governments aligned their five-year development plans (2017-2021) with the SDGs.

Myanmar

The National Comprehensive Development Plan (NCDP) 2011-2031 and the 2nd Five Year Plan 2016-2021 has been revised to include the SDGs and Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (Draft version, February 2018); Readiness Report of Myanmar's Official Statistics for SDGs and SDGs Baseline Indicators Report. Coordination: Ministry of Planning and Finance.

Nepal

Nepal integrated the SDGs into its 14th Periodic Plan (2016/2017-2018/2019), and into sectoral strategies and annual programmes. The SDGs Status and Roadmap 2016-2030 serves as a framework. Coordination: SDG Steering Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister. There is also a National Planning Commission and an SDGs Coordination and Implementation Committee (chaired by the Vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission). CSOs, private sector and development partners participate in nine SDG Implementation and Monitoring Thematic Committees. Local authorities recently elected.

Pakistan

SDGs are embedded in the Pakistan Long-Term Development Agenda, in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2018-2023) and provincial medium-term development strategies, and public sector development programme. A national SDG Framework towards 2030 was adopted in 2018, while the provinces are in the process of developing Provincial SDG Frameworks. Coordination: National Economic Council, chaired by the Prime Minister and Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms. The four provinces have established SDG Support Units in their planning and development departments (plus two extra units in federally administered areas), as well as technical committees and thematic clusters. Focal persons have been nominated down to district levels. Taskforces in the national and provincial parliaments have been established to review progress and facilitate legislative support for implementation. A National Advisory Committee on SDGs has been announced.

Philippines

The SDGs are integrated into the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, complemented with national budget allocations through the Public Investment Programme, which are geared towards the achievement of the country's long-term document 'Ambisyon Natin 2040' and 10-Point Socio-economic Agenda. Coordination: Sub-committee on the SDGs to be set up as part of the Budget Development and Coordination Committee (DBCC), chaired by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and co-chaired by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). The sub-committee will also include technical working groups in economics, environment, social and governance.

Singapore

Singapore adopted a whole-of-government approach to develop and implement integrated and sustainable policies as part of its Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015. Coordination: Inter Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development, co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources.

Sri Lanka

The Vision 2025, the Public Investment Programme (2017-2020) and the 'Blue Green' budget of 2018 are the foundations of the strategic development framework. A National SDG Action Plan (2017-2020) was developed in 2016 but not implemented. Coordination: Sustainable Development Council (SDC) during the first years under the purview of the Presidency and Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife Conservation (Act 19, October 2017), although recently the ministry has been dissolved. The SDC should comprise 12 members, three of whom are from provincial councils (appointed by the President), but LRGs are not involved.

Thailand

The SDGs are integrated within the 20 Year National Strategy Framework (2017 - 2036) and the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017 - 2021). Coordination: National Committee for Sustainable Development (CSD), chaired by the Prime Minister (multi-stakeholder, with three taskforces and a secretariat assured by the National Economic and Social Development Board).

Table 1 National strategies and institutional arrangements for the implementation of the SDGs

Timor-Leste

National Strategic Development Plan 2011-2030 and Roadmap for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2017. Coordination: SDG Working Group (government ministries, parliament, academia, private sector, media, religious organizations, and representatives of civil society, with the United Nations as observer). There is a VNR Secretariat (including a Planning and Monitoring and Evaluation Unit-UPMA) and a CSO advisory group. The creation of a National Commission for the SDGs has been proposed.

Viet Nam

SDGs have been integrated into the Five Year National Development Plan (2016-2020). The seventeen global SDGs have been nationalized into 115 Viet Nam SDG (VSDG) targets in the 'National Action Plan for Implementation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development' (NAP). The NAP will be implemented in two phases: 2017-2020 and 2021-2030. Coordination: Ministry of Planning and Investment, in charge of SDG implementation; Inter-sectoral Working Group on SDGs; and the National Council on Sustainable Development and the Competitive Enhancement, which provides strategic advice.

PACIFIC

Australia

Australia has not developed a process to integrate the SDGs into national and sub-national policy yet. Coordination: Inter-departmental Committee, co-chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Council of Australian Government acts as the coordinating forum for the states and territories.

Fiji

Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plans. Coordination: Ministry of Economy and SDGs Taskforce.

New Zealand

A Living Standards Framework was developed by the New Zealand Treasury, while Statistics New Zealand developed Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand (*Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa*). The country has also adopted an Urban Growth Agenda. Coordination: SDG national summits ensure the involvement of all sectors, including LRGs, in building a multi-sector action plan for SDG implementation, which is currently underway. The 2nd SDG Summit was held in September 2019, in order to 'accelerate action, together'.

Kiribati

SDGs are aligned with the Kiribati Development Plan (KDP) 2016-2019 and Kitinsyi Vision 20. Coordination: Development Coordinating Committee and SDG Taskforce, which operate under the oversight of the National Economic Planning Office of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. The Kiribati Local Government Association has contributed to the VNR.

Nauru

Nauru has demonstrated its commitment to achieving the SDGs through the review of its national sustainable development strategy (NSDS).

Palau

National SDG Framework, National Sustainable Development Plan; Palau 2020. Coordination: SDG Coordinating Unit, including several working groups.

Papua New Guinea

Vison 2050 and National Strategy for Responsible Sustainable Development for Papua New Guinea. Coordination: National Executive Council, Central Agency Coordination Committee, MTDP-SDGs National Steering Committee, technical working groups.

Samoa

The Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2016/17- 2019/20 is aligned with the SDGs, as well as with the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA). Coordination: National SDG Task Force (inter-ministerial), chaired by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. No reference to LRGs.

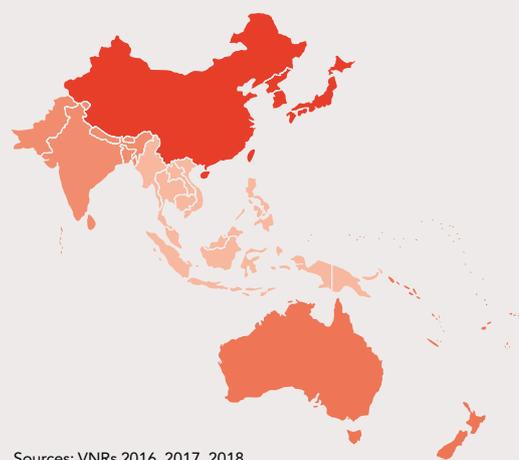
Tonga

Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025. Coordination: The Planning Division in the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates the implementation of the SDGs in Tonga, supported by the Tonga Sustainable Development Taskforce (a multi-stakeholder body) and a Technical Working Group (which supports the Taskforce).

Vanuatu

Vanuatu 2030. The People's Plan, Annual Development Report, and Final Technical Report on the National SD Plan 2016-2030 (also aligned with the Pacific Roadmap for SD). Coordination: Department of Strategic Policy, Planning and Aid Coordination, within the Office of Prime Minister.

Asia-Pacific Region



Sources: VNRs 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; UNDESA (2017 and 2018). 'Compendium of National Institutional Arrangements for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'; UCLG Surveys.

(Indonesia). Many countries make efforts to raise awareness among local governments through campaigns, national symposiums, conferences, seminars and forums. However, such outreach efforts are often sporadic and the involvement of LRGs is still limited, as outlined in a number of reports and studies.²⁰

Indeed, both a review of the VNRs and local governments' testimonies show that the participation of LRGs in the preparation of these reports remains limited. Local governments participated in the consultation process (mostly through multi-stakeholder workshops or occasional consultations) in only 11 out of the 28 countries that have presented their VNRs.²¹

Although the responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs in the 2030 Agenda lies with central governments, LRGs should be involved to a greater extent in the preparation of VNRs and subsequent review documents.

Institutional arrangements

The scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires cross-sectoral action from all parts of government, as well as from non-governmental stakeholders. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, member countries have put in place different mechanisms to ensure coordination and follow up of the commitments. Many have used pre-existing national mechanisms (e.g. Bhutan, Cambodia, India, South Korea, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Thailand, Vanuatu and Viet Nam). Others have created new processes and designated national focal or nodal agencies in charge of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, mostly at high levels of government — prime ministerial or inter-ministerial level — to ensure governmental commitment (e.g. Australia, Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Maldives, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines Samoa, and Sri Lanka). In some cases, the mechanisms involve other non-governmental stakeholders such as the private sector, NGOs, religious groups and academia (e.g. Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Palau, Samoa, Timor-Leste and Thailand).

The involvement of LRGs in coordination and follow-up mechanisms is still more limited than their participation in the VNR processes. Only in six countries have LRGs been involved or consulted in some way through national mechanisms (in Japan and Indonesia and, to a lesser extent, in Australia and Samoa; in India and Pakistan only state governments have been consulted).²² In some countries, LRGs are involved to a greater extent in sub-national mechanisms at regional or local level (e.g. China, India, Indonesia and the Philippines). In some cases, despite the existence of multi-stakeholder national mechanisms, local governments are not



Streets of Manila, the Philippines (photo: Stefan Munder, t.ly/ze0eN).

directly associated with them (e.g. South Korea, Malaysia and Thailand). Some countries have not defined coordination mechanisms yet (e.g. New Zealand).

The Asian Sustainable Development Forum has also emphasized the importance of adopting a 'whole-of-government approach' and the importance of conducting full and comprehensive consultations that involve a wide range of stakeholders, including CSOs, NGOs, think-tanks, businesses, local governments, philanthropic organizations and the media.²³ ◉

The involvement of LRGs in coordination and follow-up mechanisms is still limited: only in six countries have LRGs been involved or consulted in some way through national mechanisms.

2.2 Enabling institutional environments of local and regional governments

Overview of regional trends

Since the 1990s, decentralization and state reforms have taken place in most Asia-Pacific countries, yet the pattern of decentralization differs greatly from country to country. As is often the case, in federal countries such as Australia, India, Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, Malaysia, the federated units (states or provinces) have legislative jurisdiction to determine the institutional arrangements for their local government systems, assign functions and responsibilities, and regulate the fiscal framework for local governments. Local government is generally a state or province matter. In unitary countries, the determination of local governments' institutional environment and their oversight are the responsibility of central government, while the scope of local government is defined in the countries' constitutions and complementary legislation. Some constitutions, such as those in Bhutan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, make clear provisions for local governments.

Constitutional and legal reforms have continued to take place over the last decade and have entailed territorial and political reorganizations.²⁴ Bhutan and Myanmar in 2008, Pakistan in 2010 (the 18th Constitutional Amendment makes it compulsory for provinces to establish local government systems), Fiji and Viet Nam in 2013, Nepal in 2015 (which entailed the federalization of the country), and Thailand in 2017 have all adopted new constitutions. In the Philippines, a constitutional draft was presented to the President in July 2018 that would entail the creation of 18 federal regions.²⁵ Similarly, constitutional reform is being proposed in South Korea to embed decentralization in the constitution. Over the past years, other laws have reformed local government frameworks in the majority of countries in the region.

In 2018, UCLG ASPAC and Cities Alliance proposed an evaluation of how enabling the institutional environments were for local governments, in terms of supporting sustainable development in the regions (Cities Enabling

Environment, or CEE, Assessment).²⁶ The assessment offers a review of local governance in the region. According to the assessment (based on 11 criteria to reflect the different dimensions of an 'enabling environment' for LRGs), the most economically developed countries in the region (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea), as well as Bhutan, Indonesia and the Philippines, have the most enabling environments for local government action (see Figure 1).

Within this group, the assessment finds that LRGs in Japan and New Zealand benefit from the most favourable enabling environment with respect to local autonomy and accountability. This is followed by Australia and South Korea, with lower scores in terms of constitutional arrangements and fiscal decentralization respectively. A special Act on Autonomy and Decentralisation and Local Administration System was promulgated in South Korea in March 2018.

Bhutan scores highly in terms of sustainable development, but less so on local democracy (assemblies are elected but executive bodies are appointed).

Despite being a highly centralized political regime, China also ranks highly. SNGs benefit from a relatively large degree of autonomy in terms of implementing local development policies, and local assemblies and executive bodies are elected (although not necessarily across the whole country, and higher levels of government often influence elections). Indonesia's score is low on urban policies and sustainable development policies, while the Philippines has a low score on fiscal decentralization. It should also be noted that legal frameworks are not always fully implemented in the Philippines.²⁷

A second group of countries with intermediate rankings includes Thailand, Viet Nam, India and some Pacific Islands such as Vanuatu.²⁸ The majority of these countries have low scores on fiscal decentralization. Within the framework of the 2015 Law on Organization of Local Administration adopted in 2015, Viet Nam's local governments are considered part of the national government's administrative body and organized according

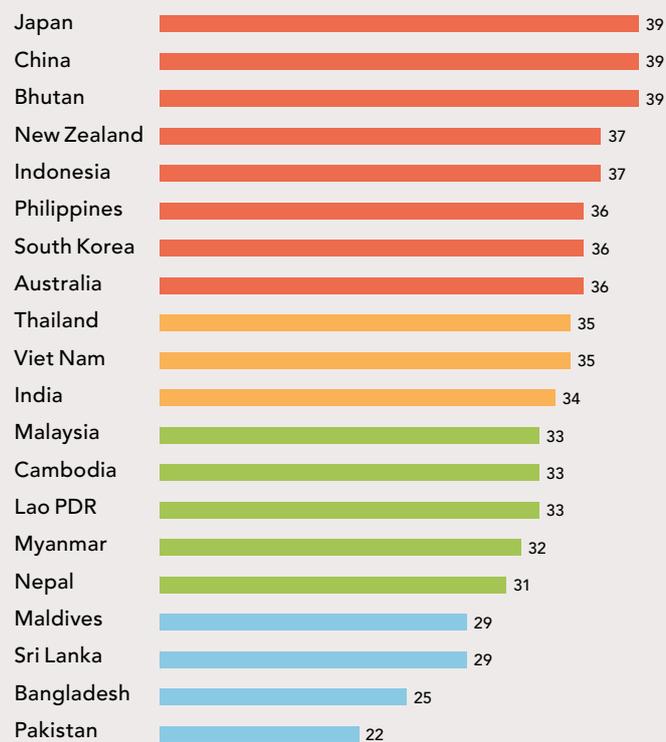
to a centralized structure; local assemblies are elected but executive bodies are appointed, while local budgets are a part of the state's budget and must be approved by the National Assembly. In Thailand, decentralization has slowed significantly because of the instability of the political system in the country; the Ministry of Interior can intervene in or modify local policies. In India, decentralization is uneven, despite the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments of 1992 that give recognition and protection to local governments. Some states have made progress with respect to decentralization, but in a majority of states local governments have very limited powers and resources.²⁹

A third group includes countries where local government reforms are still at an early stage or where local administration is effectively more deconcentrated than decentralized. This group includes Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Myanmar. All have low scores in terms of local democracy and fiscal decentralization. In Cambodia and Lao PDR, local assemblies are elected but executive bodies are appointed. In Malaysia, state governors are elected, but both local assemblies and executive bodies of local governments are appointed. Tasks that were traditionally devolved to local governments have been partially recentralized or privatized. In Myanmar, following the 2008 Constitution, local administrations' oversight became the responsibility of the newly created states and regional governments. Therefore, in spite of the institutional changes, the local administration system remains highly centralized.³⁰ Following the recent constitutional and legislative reforms (including the Local Governance Operation Act and Inter-Governmental Fiscal Management Act 2017), Nepal could also be included in this group; new local authorities were elected in May-June 2017, yet overall capacities of local governments remain weak.

A final group includes those countries with the lowest scores, namely Bangladesh,³¹ Pakistan,³² and Timor-Leste.³³ In these countries, decentralization reforms have either stagnated or regressed altogether. Sri Lanka was initially put in this group, but local elections were finally held in the country as recently as February 2018 for all its 340 local governments (24 municipal councils, 41 urban councils and 275 divisional councils). It was the largest election in Sri Lankan history.³⁴ In the Pacific Region, the Maldives, Fiji, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands also form part of this group, since local governments are remarkably weak here, in terms of political and fiscal autonomy.³⁵ In some cases, central governments have not delegated effective functional authority to local administrations. Consequently, greater reform is needed in these two last groups of countries in terms of defining the role of local authorities, increasing local powers and fiscal decentralization and setting up frameworks

Figure 1

CEE Assessment ratings by country



Notes: Rankings go from 34 or higher (most favourable legislative enabling environment) to 22 or lower (enabling environment generally unfavourable to cities).
Source: UCLG ASPAC, Cities Alliance, and UNDP. 'City Enabling Environment Rating', 48.

for performance assessment. Other Pacific Small Island Developing States (with the exception of Fiji and Palau) have their own specific features or do not have local self-government systems at all.³⁶

In many nations, despite efforts to clarify the allocation of responsibilities, there is significant overlap between different levels of government — states, regions and local governments — and some legal provisions have not been implemented. In many cases, central line agencies exert direct control over local governments or manage similar responsibilities, undermining their autonomy in spite of legislative provisions.

The strengthening of local democracy is a key area identified for regional reform by the CEE Assessment, although some progress has been observed. In 2017, Nepal held the first local elections in almost two decades and in Bangladesh, district councils were elected in 2016 for the first time, although this did not apply to the whole country. As mentioned above, Sri Lanka's 2018 local elections finalized a process that had been suspended since 2015. In Pakistan, following the 2010 18th Constitutional Amendment, all provinces passed local government regulations and were able to hold local elections in 2015 and 2016.

However, in January and May 2019 respectively, local governments in the provinces of Balochistan and Punjab were dissolved. In the latter, a new law, the 'Punjab Village Panchayats and Neighbourhood Councils Act' of 2019, mandates the provincial government to hold elections within a year. Malaysia has elections at state level, but local elections have been suspended since 1965. Local elections in Thailand, suspended since the military coup in 2014, were scheduled to take place 90 days after the national elections in March 2019. In Myanmar, the first local elections took place in the country's main cities (Yangon and Mandalay) in 2019.³⁷ In Fiji, local authorities have

been appointed since the military coup in 2006. In other Pacific Small Island Developing States, government structures operate in parallel with customary chiefdoms and there is a high level of consultation amongst the community.

Unfortunately, women's representation is still limited in the region (on average only 19% of seats in national parliaments and local governments are occupied by women).³⁸ Nepal's new constitution mandates a 40% quota of elected women representatives at the municipal level. As a result, 95% of the 293 municipalities now have women councillors and deputy mayors. Other countries have also established quotas for women (e.g. India,

Table 2 Territorial organization of countries in the Asia-Pacific region as of 2018

2018	System of government and form of state	Levels of SNGs	Total SNGs	1 st level (municipal)	2 nd level (intermediary)	3 rd level (regional/state)
Australia	Constitutional Monarchy Federation	2	570	562		8
Bangladesh	Republic Unitary state	3	5,930	5,377	489	64 districts
Bhutan	Absolute Monarchy Unitary state	3	225	nd	205	20
Brunei Darussalam	Absolute Monarchy Unitary state	No local government				
Cambodia	Constitutional Monarchy Unitary state	3	1,856	1,646	185	25
China, PR (1)*	Popular Republic Unitary state	4**	3,216	2,851	334	31
Fiji	Republic Unitary State	1	27	27		
India	Republic Federation	2	267,464	267,428 262,771 rural local bodies (Panchayat) 4,657 urban local bodies		36 29 States 7 Union territories
Indonesia	Republic Unitary state	3	83,892	83,344	514	34
Japan	Constitutional Monarchy Unitary state	2	1,788	1,741		47
Kiribati	Republic Unitary state	1	26	26		
Korea, Republic of	Republic Unitary state	2	243	226		17
Lao PDR (1)	People's Democratic Republic - Unitary state	4	18		NA	18
Malaysia	Constitutional Monarchy Federation	2	167	154		13
Maldives	Republic Unitary state	2	209	188		21
Myanmar	Republic Unitary state	3	414	325	67	22
Nauru	Republic Unitary State		14	14		

Indonesia and Sri Lanka). However, in Indonesia, despite the 30% quota applied to the parliament's composition, women legislators represented 16% at provincial level and 14% at municipal level (16.6% at national level).³⁹ In the Philippines, the proportion of women in local government was 31% in 2016, but this fell to 21.3% in 2018.⁴⁰

Changes in the territorial organization of countries in the region

There are approximately 437,000 SNG entities in the Asia-Pacific region, with up to four distinctive levels of local government, ranging from large cities

with populations of over five million to small semi-autonomous self-governing neighbourhoods or villages with a few thousand inhabitants.⁴¹ In addition to LRGs, there are quasi-governmental and authority districts which operate across local government boundaries, such as metropolitan development authorities, capital districts, planning or utility agencies, and educational local authorities (Japan). In many cases, the areas under their jurisdiction do not correspond to local governments' administrative boundaries, which poses coordination difficulties when it comes to the planning and management of cities and urban areas.

2018	System of government and form of state	Levels of SNGs	Total SNGs	1 st level (municipal)	2 nd level (intermediary)	3 rd level (regional/state)
Nepal	Republic Federation	2	760	753		7
New Zealand	Constitutional Monarchy Unitary state	2	78	67		11
Pakistan	Republic Federation	3	10,333	10,200	129	4
Palau	Republic Unitary State	1	16			16
Papua New Guinea	Constitutional Monarchy Federation	1	318	296		22
Philippines	Republic Unitary state	3	43,761	42,045	1,634	82
Samoa	Republic Unitary state	2	330	330		
Solomon Islands	Constitutional Monarchy Unitary	2	10	1		9
Singapore	Republic Unitary state	No local government				
Sri Lanka	Republic Unitary state	2	350	341		9
Thailand	Constitutional monarchy Unitary state	2	2,517	2,441		76
Timor-Leste	Republic Unitary state	2	455	442	13	
Tonga	Monarchy Unitary State	2	178	155		23
Tuvalu	Constitutional Monarchy Unitary	1	8	8		
Vanuatu	Republic Unitary state	1	9			9
Viet Nam (1)	Socialist Republic Unitary state	3	11,938	11,162	713	63

*These statistics exclusively cover mainland China and exclude the two special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao.

**The fourth level consists of the townships/villages (39,862). Although these are not acknowledged in the constitution, they are recognized by the Budget Law and the fiscal system.

Source: World Observatory of Sub-national Government Finance and Investments, CLGF and other sources.

(1) China, Lao PDR and Viet Nam are considered to be a 'one party system'.

It is difficult to identify a common trend with respect to the evolution of territorial organization in the region. Japan, for example, reduced the number of SNGs between 1999 and 2016 from 3,232 to 1,741 and amalgamation continues to be encouraged. Australian states also reduced the number of local governments from 862 in the 1980's to the present 562. In Nepal, as already mentioned, the move towards federalism reduced the number of SNGs and established three levels of government. Some countries are putting forward strategies to foster cooperation between territories for service delivery (e.g. Australia, Japan and New Zealand). China approved, in 2019, a decree to foster urban integration and coordination between rural and urban areas. On the other hand, India increased the number of states to 29 and in 2015 created the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) to promote cooperative federalism. In Indonesia, the 2014 'Village Law' gives more visibility and prominence to this tier, providing villages with a legal basis to access their own share of fiscal transfers. Bangladesh created a new division in 2015 (Mymensingh) and new municipalities by merging or adjoining wards through the union of villages. As part of its 2017-2018 programme, South Korea is attempting to address the regional imbalances between Seoul and the surrounding regions. Table 2 provides an overview of the number of tiers and local governments for countries in the region. There are no local governments in Singapore, Brunei, Nauru and Tonga.

Countries in the region face the growing challenge of managing large metropolitan regions under a multiplicity of government layers. In order to address the coordination and urban management issues in such large metro areas, cities such as Bangkok, Delhi and Manila have established metropolitan development authorities whilst countries such as Australia, China, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and Viet Nam have all given special status to their capital cities and large metropolitan regions.⁴² Japan also adopted a law in 2015 enabling the merger of metropolitan areas into new special entities modelled on Tokyo's system of metropolitan governance.

Changes in local and regional governments' fiscal autonomy and capacities⁴³

As a general trend in the region, the delegation of administrative powers and responsibilities is stronger than fiscal decentralization, which results in critical vertical fiscal imbalances. Consequently, local governments tend to struggle with budgets and ensuring enough investment funds to fulfil their responsibilities.

Figure 2 shows the ratio between local and central government public revenues and expenditures for 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Nearly one third of total government

expenditures and revenues are realized at the sub-national level (33% and 34% as a percentage of general government expenditures and revenues respectively). Measured in terms of GDP, the average levels of expenditures and revenues in the Asia-Pacific region are 9% and 8.1% respectively (as compared to 16.2% and 15.9% of GDP on average for OECD countries). There is a clear gap between federal countries (Australia, India, Malaysia and Pakistan) where LRGs represent 11.2% and 10.4% of GDP for expenditures and revenues; and unitary countries, which mobilize only 8.2% and 7.2% of GDP for expenditures and revenues (and 1.5% less than this if China is excluded).⁴⁴

In countries where fiscal decentralization is more advanced, local expenditures and revenues correspond on average to 15.2% and 15.4% of GDP (for example Australia, Japan and South Korea). However, such figures only reach on average 1.7% of GDP for expenditures and 2.2% for revenues for less fiscally decentralized countries (e.g. Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka). Between these two lies Indonesia, where local government expenditures and revenues represent 8.1% of the country's GDP. New Zealand, the Philippines and Thailand lie closer to the group of less fiscally decentralized countries⁴⁵ whilst, in stark contrast, China and Viet Nam sub-national expenditure levels represent 21.6% and 15% of GDP respectively (equivalent to 85.4% and 56% of total public expenditure)⁴⁶ — yet the spending autonomy of these LRGs is largely constrained by central government policies.

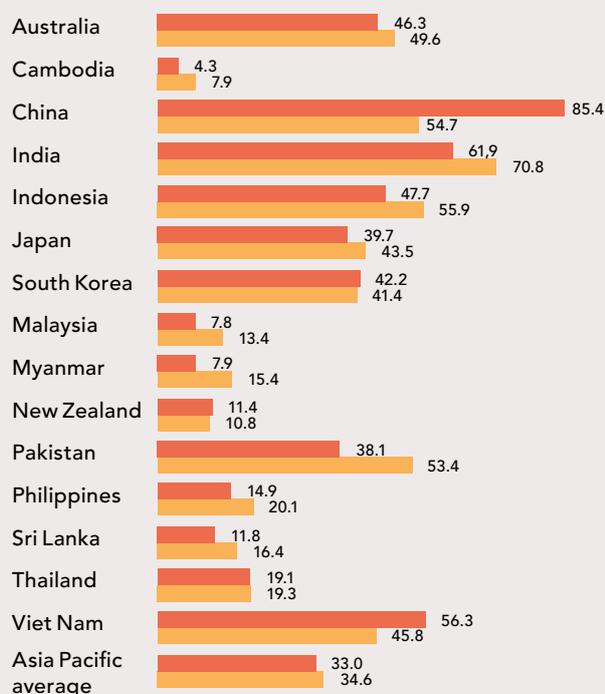
For the majority of SNGs in the region, spending responsibilities include general public services, public infrastructures and transport (e.g. urban management, roads and municipal facilities), environmental protection (including waste management) and management of amenities. In some countries, education, health, housing and social assistance represent a significant share of local spending (e.g. Indonesia, China, South Korea and Viet Nam). In countries with aging populations, social and health-related expenditures are increasing, as is the case in Japan and South Korea. In other countries, for example Cambodia and Bangladesh, local responsibilities are defined by law, yet most small local governments do not have the necessary resources to perform their functions. Most developing countries in the region are experiencing a growing mismatch between expenditure responsibilities and resources.

Over the past years, fiscal reforms have been implemented in the majority of countries in the region, although there is a divergence in trends towards both de- and recentralization.⁴⁷ In terms of SNGs' capacities to raise their own resources, many LRGs in the region operate under severe fiscal constraints. In more economically developed

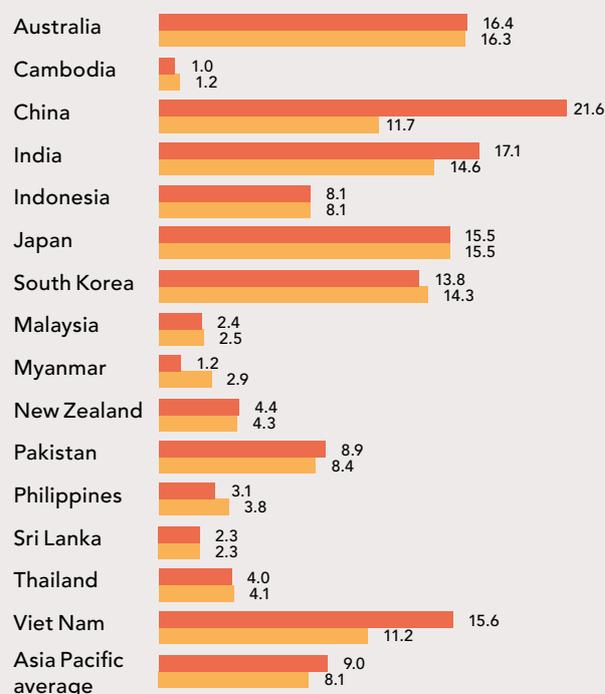
Figure 2

Sub-national government revenues and expenditures as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of general government expenditures and revenues (2016)

SNG expenditures and revenues on GG



SNG expenditures and revenues on GDP



■ SNG expenditures % of GG ■ SNG revenues % of GG

■ SNG expenditures ■ SNG revenues

Source: World Observatory of Subnational Governments Finance and Investments (2019). Data collected are from 2016.

countries, tax revenues are more decentralized (in Japan and South Korea, for instance, tax revenues respectively accounted for 47% and 32.8% of sub-national revenues). In federal countries, for example Australia, local taxes represent around one third of sub-national budgets, whilst in India the figure is 72%. In Pakistan, LRGs lack the capacity to collect taxes effectively. In China, local governments have very limited taxing powers although local tax represents almost 50% of local budgets. In Indonesia and the Philippines, local taxes represent a limited part of local revenues (16% and 23% respectively). In other Asia-Pacific countries with developing economies, tax revenues are much more centralized.

Transfers, although intended to reduce fiscal imbalances, constitute a major part of sub-national government revenues and make local governments dependent on them. In South-eastern Asia, transfers represent on average

around 50% of SNGs' revenues, ranging from 19% in Malaysia, 20% in Cambodia 62% in Thailand, 68% in the Philippines and 83% in Indonesia. With respect to more economically developed countries, transfers in South Korea represent 58% of sub-national budgets, followed by 45% in Australia, 43% in Japan and 26% in New Zealand (compared to an average of 37% in OECD countries). In the majority of countries, how transfers are spent is often determined at the national level, reducing local authorities' room for manoeuvre. Some countries are increasing the share of tied grants (e.g. in Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam), while in other countries reforms are underway to reduce the share of earmarked grants, as is the case for example in Japan. In some countries, transfers are often delayed (e.g. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Sri Lanka), transferred erratically or sometimes not transferred at all (e.g. Nepal and Pakistan).⁴⁸

Giving local governments more fiscal autonomy is still the area where most reform is required. This needs to be enhanced by strengthening LRG capacity to raise their own resources (local taxes and fees) in addition to financial transfers from central government.

Uncertainty and delay in transfers hinder local governments' financial capacities, making it more difficult for them to invest in local infrastructures.

Throughout the region, local tax revenues are low and expenditure efficiency is weak. In general, property-based taxation remains significantly under-utilized. City authorities have land, fixed assets and infrastructure that could potentially be used to generate funds. The booming urban property market provides a great opportunity to expand local government revenue, for which land value capture mechanisms should be put in place (e.g. betterment levy, land readjustment or tax increment financing).⁴⁹

Investing is a major function of LRGs in many countries in the region. In Australia, China, India, Japan and Viet Nam for example, LRGs are responsible for over two-thirds of public investments, whilst this figure is 59% and 58% respectively in Indonesia and South Korea and 32% in New Zealand and Pakistan.

Local governments in the region can *de jure* engage in borrowing, generally with the approval of central government (or state/province). However, with the exception of countries, India and the Philippines, access to borrowing is in fact limited (and very restricted in some countries such as Cambodia).⁵⁰ In a country with a developed economy such as New Zealand, LRGs traditionally borrow to fund capital expenditure programmes. Here, the Local Government Funding Agency was created in 2011 through the joint initiative of local and central governments as a debt vehicle to raise bonds on financial markets and lend to member LRGs. In India, a state-level pooled finance development fund scheme has been established by the Ministry of Urban Development to provide credit enhancement to LRGs wishing to access bond markets (e.g. Ahmedabad),⁵¹ while in the Philippines access to loans is often through Municipal Development Funds (although municipal debt is in fact limited). In China, until recently local governments had a considerable degree of autonomy over land concession revenues and could engage in indirect borrowing from banks through local government financing

vehicles. However, since 2015, the Chinese government has been making efforts to control local debt.⁵² The use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to finance infrastructure investment is rare (except in China).

The effect of limited access to borrowing is that even cities that have the capacity to borrow to fund economically viable critical infrastructure are often prevented from doing so by rules and regulations that are not linked to local situations but applied uniformly across countries. Such regulations have a significant impact on the competitiveness of cities and their ability to raise the capital they need to fund essential infrastructure to support development needs.

Even where fiscal decentralization has evolved in the regions, local fiscal autonomy is often constrained and has even regressed in some countries.⁵³ To finance the implementation of SDGs, however, LRGs must play a stronger role in the mobilization of domestic resources. Effective and more equitable local taxes and efficient public spending can reinforce inclusive and accountable governance. Innovative land-based financing, for example, can contribute to raising revenues for sustainable development, particularly in cities (as for example the recent property tax reforms in Bangkok following the approval of the Land and Building Tax Act in November 2018).⁵⁴

As discussed in this section, in most Asia-Pacific countries local governments operate within constrained institutional frameworks and under the restrictive oversight of either the central government in unitary countries, or the provincial or state governments in federal countries. LRGs' capacity to fulfil their responsibilities and improve their accountability is hampered by ambiguous and overlapping functional allocations between levels of government; extended remits without the requisite funding; and growing conflict over the scope of decentralization. Such limitations to local action hinder local governments' ability to carry out their assigned tasks effectively and, therefore, to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs.⁵⁵

According to the CEE and UNESCAP's assessments of progress regarding SDG implementation, giving local governments more fiscal autonomy is still the area where most reform is needed. In order to generate revenues to finance the development of infrastructure and service delivery, LRGs' fiscal autonomy must be enhanced by strengthening their capacity to raise their own resources (local taxes and fees) in addition to financial transfers from central government. Given the rising rates of urbanization and the limited central funds available for local development in many countries in the region, strengthening local government capacities and revenues is becoming increasingly pressing in order to improve the efficiency of domestic resource mobilization. 

2.3 Multilevel governance mechanisms for implementing the SDGs

National governments are responsible for setting country-level goals and targets for the SDGs and for defining the strategy to achieve them. LRGs have, however, critical responsibilities in achieving many of these objectives. The realization of the 2030 Agenda's imperative to 'leave no one behind' entails a strong spatial and territorial component that makes coordination across all government levels critical for the Agenda's realization. For this reason, it is crucial to adopt a territorial approach to local development that ensures the vertical and horizontal coordination of policies and planning strategies. This, in turn, is key to ensuring policy coherence across different levels of government. For such coordination to rise, it is necessary to effectively enact the principle of subsidiarity and enable LRGs to take action in an autonomous and accountable way. For local action to become a catalyst of global change, LRGs must be able to access different available local capital sources, in accordance with specific local and national contexts and institutional frameworks. LRGs' actions will enhance resource mobilization from the national level and channel it towards sustainable development actions at the local level. They can also go the extra mile and mobilize additional resources, resulting in an easier, more effective final policy outcome.

As previously discussed, countries in the region are implementing different public administration arrangements to realize the SDGs. Top-down approaches, where the different sub-national levels of government are asked to follow national policy directives or priorities, are the most common means of promoting this process. However, more nuanced strategies and mechanisms are

progressively emerging in different countries. The approach is necessarily different in the most developed Asian economies, where due to a more embedded local autonomy, there are relatively stronger initiatives coming up from local governments regarding the design of sustainable policies (e.g. in Australia, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand). The following section analyses some examples of these approaches, ranging from countries with an environment that enables LRG action, to countries where local autonomy is limited or local governments are weak.

Kid in front of a Shinto shrine in Sumiyoshi ward in the city of Osaka, Japan (photo: Geoff Whalan, bit.ly/2B7E9Qp).



SDG coordination and local initiatives in countries with favourable enabling environments

Japan and **South Korea** are both countries with relatively robust SNG capacities, but they have taken two different approaches to developing their SDG implementation strategies. Whilst in South Korea coordination initiatives are bottom-up and stem from cities, in Japan coordination strategies have been put forward under the clear leadership of the central government. **Japan**, whose decentralization process started in the 1990s, has specific laws governing local autonomy, with clear provisions regarding the devolution of powers. As previously mentioned, the SDG Promotion Headquarters ensures the coordination of the SDG strategy at the inter-ministerial level, while the

SDGs Promotion Roundtable Meeting promotes multi-stakeholder engagement, including that of local governments. The Headquarters sets a National Implementation Framework to ensure the adoption of a 'whole-of-government approach', integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development (economy, society and environment). Based on a long tradition of strong collaboration between central and local governments, the Japanese government encourages local governments to incorporate the SDGs into their strategies and policies. As part of the second pillar of the Japanese SDG implementation strategy (SDG-driven regional vitalization), the government launched a new project: the 'SDGs Models of Local Governments'. Through this initiative, the whole of central government provides intensive support to selected local governments in their implementation of the SDGs.⁵⁶ With the support of different programmes (such as 'Future city' and 'Ecomodel city'), cities have shown a proactive interest in implementing innovative strategies and action plans to localize the SDGs, in a tradition that closely ties local government with central government policies (see Section 3.2 for more details).

In **South Korea**, based on the experience of the Agenda 21 and the Local Councils for Sustainable Development (created in the 1990s), LRGs have taken the lead in promoting sustainable development. Since 2016, local governments and NGOs have developed regional actions within the frame of the Local Sustainability Alliance (LSAK). Based on the 2nd National Strategy and Five Year Plan for Green Growth (2014), in 2016 the Ministry of Environment released the Third Sustainable Development Fundamental Plan (2016-2020), designed to adapt the SDGs to national conditions.⁵⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was nominated as the lead agency in charge of coordinating the implementation of the SDGs. The communication process between local and national bodies on sustainable development has, however, been complex and difficult. Independent national agencies manage their areas in siloes, and there exists a large degree of overlap in terms of the division of responsibilities across levels of government. Many cities have established their own local SDG implementation system (for more details, see Section 3.2). In 2018, the new government designed a roadmap to implement the SDGs and launched a five-year Urban Regeneration New Deal with the aim of strengthening collaboration between local and national governments. In January 2018, a new Presidential Committee on Autonomy and Decentralization was set up. A revised bill, the Special Act on Autonomy and Decentralization and Local Administration, was promulgated in March 2018.⁵⁸

The previous discussion highlights the differences between the two countries: one with

Box 1

Chinese strategies to strengthen local buy-in of SDGs policies

Within the 'Development Plan of China's Innovation Demonstration Zones for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' adopted in December 2016, central government and local governments work in direct collaboration to develop local variations for policies, to promote innovation and drive policy learning and change. Three pilot cities have been selected: Guilin, Shenzhen and Taiyuan. These pilots should facilitate vertical coordination between the central government and provincial and city governments, and horizontal coordination between different departments at both the central and local levels, as well as create better opportunities for public participation (see also Section 3.2 below).⁶⁰

The process involves reform at different levels. At the national level, the State Council has issued an official document, determined the implementing ministry, confirmed the involved departments and participating organizations, and established the inter-ministerial meeting to provide support to the SDG pilot zones. At the local level, in pilot cities, legislation has been adopted to confirm the city's overall sustainable development planning to 2030. Cities are also establishing SDG-related institutions to conduct further implementation work.

By doing this in several pilot locations, different versions of one policy or means of governance can be tested, thus developing more room for bottom-up innovation. Successful cases can then be adopted nationwide. Another tool put in place to encourage local governments to make priority choices is 'awards competition'. Here, a city can set up a special task force or a special office for coordination. Competitions and awards help consolidate multiple targets into a clearly defined goal, promote cooperation between government departments - which usually have different interests — and mobilize greater support from stakeholders.

Source: Bingqin Li and Qian Fang (2018). 'Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals by Chinese Cities' (developed for this report); and UNDP (2018). 'SDG Localization in ASEAN: Experiences in Shaping Policy and Implementation Pathway'.

strong national government leadership supported by a tradition of close collaboration with local governments (Japan), the other with important bottom-up dynamics and difficulties articulating local and national strategies (South Korea).

Cross-level efforts to ensure LRG mobilization in countries with complex governance frameworks

The SDGs pose massive governance challenges in the large number of countries looking for new coordination mechanisms. This is particularly the case in very extended and complex countries such as **China**, where generally a top-down approach has been taken in the implementation of the SDGs. In principle, national plans need to be adapted to local levels but with central coordination. However, the government system is unavoidably multi-layered and covers a wide range of regions with significant differences. Consequently, it requires greater effort to bring local governments on board and there is a need to develop an awareness and understanding of the 2030 Agenda at the local and regional level. Experience has shown that top-down approaches can put great strain on local government officials, who may resort to short-term measures that are not sustainable.⁵⁹ Indeed, in order to implement complex policies, China is developing a set of tools that involves a mix of policy processes instead of adopting a traditional top-down approach. One of these is 'pilot initiatives', designed to involve local governments and facilitate experimentation (see Box 1).

In **China**, as in most countries, implementation of the SDGs will demand more public finance, which plays a vital role in investments and in catalyzing other sources of resources. However, funding and resources at different levels of government often do not match. In the past, this mismatch was not as problematic, as local governments could rely on land revenues and borrowing money to deliver unfunded services. However, local government land sales and borrowing capacity have been curtailed more recently. At the same time, the share of total public investment with respect to GDP has slowly started to decline, having peaked at 46% in the period 2010–2013. These challenges have emerged against a backdrop of fiscal reforms in the tax system and public spending. An Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations Act is announced for 2020 that could introduce modifications to the framework.⁶¹

Another approach combining both top-down and bottom-up initiatives is being developed in **Indonesia**, in response to the diversity of Indonesian sub-national governance systems spread out across this large archipelagic nation and comprising governors, regents (heads of districts) and elected mayors. The National Coordinating Team and the Ministry of Planning (BAPPENAS) are in charge of ensuring both horizontal coordination

at the national level (between over 30 ministries and agencies) and vertical coordination between the different levels of government and non-state actors.⁶² Since 2015, legal reforms have been introduced to clarify the allocation of responsibilities between the different levels. Provinces have supervisory functions on matters that require cross-jurisdictional cooperation. However, they do not

Box 2

The Indonesian puzzle for the localization of the SDGs

At the sub-national level, public investment is mostly undertaken by regency and city governments, which respectively represent 1.8% of GDP and 59% of public investment. Therefore, one of the main challenges is the effective coordination of national and sub-national development plans. In principle, SNGs must take into consideration Indonesia's National Medium-Term Development Plan for their own regional development policies. To ensure the mainstreaming of SDGs at all levels of government, a Presidential Decree (No. 59, July 2017) requires the integration of SDGs into the national and sub-national mid-term development plans, and mandated the preparation of an SDG roadmap and action plans that include clear deadlines at national, provincial, district and city levels. More details on the mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and reporting at national and sub-national levels were defined in later regulations (National Planning Ministerial Regulation No. 7, 2018), which request annual reports and bi-annual monitoring at all levels of government. Another decree of the Ministry of Home Affairs was issued in 2018. As of early 2019, 19 out of 34 provinces had developed their SDG action plans (RAD) and the remaining 15 provinces were in the process of doing so. As a result of the 2018 local elections, 117 new sub-national development plans are being drafted in 17 out of 34 provinces and 100 out of 514 districts or cities.

To support the localization of the SDGs, the government developed a strong communication strategy, technical guidelines and a set of metadata indicators for each of the SDGs' pillars and targets. At the provincial level, Regional Coordination Teams (TKD) for SDG implementation have been established. They gather together local stakeholders and are supported by the planning agencies at provincial, district and municipal levels. Governors' decrees or regents' decrees set the legal basis for actions in many provinces. Each governor is responsible for coordinating a regional action plan in coordination with all other regents and mayors. Communication through provincial data hubs using the OneData portal is designed to support follow-up, while an SDG Academy is planned to facilitate capacity building. However, coordination is not always effective and many obstacles are emerging, as highlighted in local governments' testimonies (see Section 3.2).

Source: Republic of Indonesia, VNR 2019; UNDP (2018). 'SDG Localization in ASEAN: Experiences in Shaping Policy and Implementation Pathways'; and Teti Armiami Argo and Zuzi Anna (2019). 'Empowering local Government Capacity and Regional Government Association to Strengthen Development Goals'.

China has attempted to strike a balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, as well as developing efficient policy implementation mechanisms that involve a broader range of actors.

have hierarchical authority over local governments and mainly perform coordination-related tasks. Furthermore, to make matters more complex, LRGs often make use of local public enterprises in order to fulfil their responsibilities: as of 2014, there were around 650 enterprises (including drinking water companies and marketplaces) owned and managed by regencies and cities and 108 owned by provinces. In light of this, the government is implementing a multifaceted strategy to promote the localization process, with a special focus on integrated planning (see Box 2).

It should be noted that in parallel, the Indonesian government has developed the National Urban Development Policy 2015-2045, aimed at closing gaps and achieving sustainable urban development with reference to three milestones: liveable cities (all cities to attain minimum standards for urban services), green cities, and smart and competitive cities. Local government associations (LGAs) consider their involvement in the process of elaboration of the strategy to have been partial.⁶³

The case of the **Philippines** contrasts with that of Indonesia. The country's territorial organization is also complex, with multiple islands and territories (14 regions, the autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao, the national capital region and the special Cordillera Administrative Region) that have gone through an important decentralization process. Local governments comprise three levels — province, city and municipality and sub-municipal barangays. As mentioned above, the country is currently discussing an initiative that would involve the adoption of a federal system. The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) is responsible for the coordination of the SDG implementation strategy, while the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) supports the localization of SDGs. The SDGs are integrated in the National Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022 and monitored through the Socioeconomic Report SDG Annex. The Philippines sees the localization of the SDGs as a means to reduce regional disparities. The main mechanisms for SDG localization are regional development plans and comprehensive development plans at regional and local levels. In June 2017, the national government issued an

executive order requiring all levels of government to implement the PDP and public investment programme 2017-2022 (EO 27, "Directing all government agencies and instrumentalities, including local government units, to implement the Philippine Development Plan and Public Investment Program for the period of 2017-2022."). In November 2018, the NEDA and DILG, through the Joint Memorandum No. 01 Series of 2018, "Guidelines on the Localization of the Philippine Development Plan Results Matrices and the Sustainable Development Goals", spearhead its implementation. SDG data monitoring and evaluation is managed by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), which released the initial list of the SDGs for Monitoring in the Philippines, and implemented it through PSA Council Resolution No. 4 Series of 2016, "Enjoining Government Agencies to Provide Data Support to the SDGs."⁶⁴

NEDA's regional development offices are responsible for crafting and coordinating the regional development plans. Provincial governors usually chair the Regional Development Council, acting as the formal mechanism for coordination and multilevel governance. However, the view of local government organisations is that 'local government units' are not completely aware of the ongoing process, despite several workshops held by DILG in all the regions. The new matrices were launched ahead of the national and local elections (May 2019), without real consultation; and not all local governments have the capacity to respond to their requirements.⁶⁵

As part of the localization efforts aimed at following up the implementation process, NEDA, DILG and the Philippines' Statistical Office developed assessment criteria for SDG implementation, linked to access to specific funds (e.g. the Seal of Good Local Governance).⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the alignment between the funds to support local governments' plans and the SDGs is not clear for LRGs. Testimonies stress that local plans will continue to be aligned with the funds rather than with the national SDG strategy. On the other hand, LRGs also find it difficult to access specific funds to support adaptation to climate change and resilience projects. Significant gaps are observed between national policy objectives and the actions taken by LRGs on the ground. There is an over-reliance on regulatory approaches instead of promoting outreach, collaboration and capacity building efforts between national and local governments. Vertical and horizontal coordination between organizations remains patchy, producing weak linkages in planning and fragmented policy. The current electoral conjuncture and other national debates (in particular with respect to federalism) do not help the buy-in process either.⁶⁷

The examples of China, Indonesia and the Philippines serve to highlight the obstacles

that are emerging with respect to supporting localization and promoting integrated planning strategies. China has attempted to strike a balance between top-down and bottom-up initiatives, as well as developing more innovative and efficient policy implementation mechanisms that involve a broader range of actors. In Indonesia, the obstacles and gaps to harmonizing the different processes have emerged as a result of strong efforts to ensure buy-in at the sub-national level and support pilot initiatives. In the Philippines, the government has pursued a stricter top-down approach. It prioritises reporting mechanisms but still devotes limited support and funding to new SDG priorities.

Policies to strengthen coordination of SDG implementation between national and sub-national governments in federal countries

In federal countries such as India, Australia and Pakistan, where each federated state has its own legal framework, the landscape for SDG implementation is just as complex. In **India**, the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) — the national planning authority — has been assigned the responsibility of monitoring the implementation of the SDGs, which requires

the full engagement of state governments, union territories and local government units. The central government is developing initiatives to invigorate the federal structure of the country through the promotion of 'cooperative and competitive federalism'. The objective is to boost performance in each state by moving from a top-down planning approach to a bottom-up approach, promoting experimentation, benchmarking and the sharing of experiences across states.⁶⁸ As a result of this push, every state and union territory (UT) has also set up a special centre, unit or team for guiding and overseeing SDG implementation. As many as 23 states and UTs have prepared their 'Visions' documents and action plans⁶⁹ towards 2030. The SDG cells and committees are expected to build collaboration across sectors, departments and agencies within states' administrations to facilitate effective inter-departmental/inter-sectoral collaboration. The involvement and participation of district administrations, rural and urban local governments in the implementation structures will need to be reinforced further (for more information on sub-national actions see Section 3.2). Different stakeholders have criticized extensively the way in which current federal programmes address many of the urban and local dimensions of SDG implementation.⁷⁰

Social housing apartment blocks in Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia (photo: © Ainara Fernández Tortosa).



In **Australia**, different mechanisms for policy coordination exist. As part of the effort to support LRGs, the Australian government released the Smart Cities Plan in 2016, which outlines a vision for productive and liveable cities by promoting collaboration between all levels of government, the private sector, research organisations and the local community. 'City Deals' is a key component of the plan, promoted as a collaborative approach aimed at bringing together the three levels of government to support urban policy and develop a shared vision to improve infrastructure, innovation and job accessibility in a specific geographic area.⁷¹ City Deals is an example of special purpose vehicle funds conceived as partnerships to leverage funds for project financing. However, many mayors argue in favour of adopting discretionary instead of nationally-targeted funding programmes to support localization of the SDGs (see Section 3.2).⁷²

In **Pakistan**, the National Economic Council under the aegis of the Planning Commission of Pakistan set up the National SDG Framework in March 2018. SDG Units have been established within the Federal Planning Commission in Islamabad and in the four Planning and Development Departments and Boards at the provincial level. Two such units have also been established in the federally administered areas. Technical committees and thematic clusters support their work. There is no representation of district or local governments in these coordination units, but focal persons were nominated at the district level. These mechanisms are based on the National SDG Framework and are meant to facilitate alignment. However, vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms are weak at all levels and their development faces a range of obstacles: 'Most national and provincial policies and action plans are not backed by sufficient financial resources, and decision-making processes that are markedly top down hamper sub-national prioritization'.⁷³ Political uncertainty and the lack of a local government system (dissolved in the provinces of Balochistan and Punjab) are also significant obstacles to implementation.

Challenges to coordination in countries with enabling environments unfavourable to local action

Other countries with weak enabling environments at local government level, such as **Bangladesh**, **Cambodia**,⁷⁴ **Lao PDR**,⁷⁵ **Malaysia**, **Myanmar**,⁷⁶ **Nepal**,⁷⁷ **Sri Lanka**, **Thailand** and **Viet Nam**⁷⁸ follow more traditional top-down approaches, with limited or no consultation of SNGs or administrations. Many of these countries have also developed national urban development strategies (such as Cambodia, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Lao PDR and Viet Nam), with

governance arrangements that are often unclear, to ensure synergies with other sectoral policies.⁷⁹ Often countries have created 'deconcentrated governments units' and agencies that represent central or regional governments at territorial levels, taking on many responsibilities that in principle have been devolved to local governments (e.g. in Bangladesh, Lao PDR or Malaysia). This constrains the roles of local governments and often leads to poor vertical and horizontal alignment between national and local SDG-related priorities, hampering the possibility of creating more integrated approaches in the territories.

The Government of **Sri Lanka**, for example, seemed very committed to the SDGs. It created the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife (MSDW) to support SDG implementation in 2015. In 2016, the MSDW launched a consultative process (the National Sustainable Development Engagement Platform⁸⁰) and drafted the Roadmap and National SDG Action Plan (2017-2020). The Action Plan was presented to various stakeholders at the national and provincial levels but was not implemented. In October 2017, a Sustainable Development Act was passed in parliament and it was expected that the government would establish a Sustainable Development Council (SDC) in early 2018 to ensure the development of a national strategy for SDG implementation. The Act required every ministry, department and sub-national authority to prepare an SDG strategy. However, the process lost momentum. The SDC was appointed at the end of 2018 and, despite the initial commitments, no substantive action has been taken to ensure localized and decentralized planning for the implementation of the SDGs. The Voluntary National Review (VNR) presented in 2018 claims that multi-stakeholder consultation took place in March 2018, but these consultations appear to correspond more to formalities than to real engagement. Members from provincial councils and local authorities were not explicitly consulted or engaged.⁸¹ Weak policy leadership and the absence of a national SDG roadmap and operational framework, exacerbated by a highly fragmented institutional structure and weak policy coordination across sectors, has created a critical gap in effectively mainstreaming and integrating the SDGs in Sri Lanka.⁸²

As summarised here, cooperation across levels of government has intensified since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the varying approaches taken by countries range from policy efforts towards integrated planning to efforts to design better harmonised sectoral policies and enhance policy delivery to engage all levels of government, to weak or incipient national SDG strategies with poor or ill-defined policies aimed at promoting integration by involving sub-national governments.

Within the first group, strategies range from more centralized approaches to combined strategies that mix central guidelines with flexible approaches at sub-national levels. Often, more top-down forms of vertical integration are not supported by the emergence of truly shared spaces across different levels of governments to resolve conflicting priorities and reduce the gap between administrations. In contrast, more flexible policies for SDG localization pay more attention to the need to conciliate national priorities with local initiatives and, in addition, to promote local development processes to test experiences on a small scale that might then be potentially scaled up across levels of governments. This second option facilitates territorial development approaches.

This diversity reflects, to some extent, both the varied national institutional frameworks for SNGs in the region and the fact that territorial development strategies that could catalyse localization processes in most countries are still in the preliminary stages of development. Countries with more favourable institutional frameworks for LRGs show stronger mechanisms for multilevel integration (e.g. Japan) as well as SNGs that have the capacities and resources to be pro-active in the SDG localization process, even when national leadership is still limited (e.g. South Korea). In other countries, for example China and Indonesia where local autonomy is progressing, governments are exploring modalities to promote sub-national initiatives and develop pilot experiences to ensure gradual harmonization and policy coherence.

Intermediary cities are often neglected when it comes to localization strategies in the region, yet intermediary and medium-sized cities play a crucial role in the development and functioning of national systems of cities and regions.⁸³ In many countries, such as Bangladesh and China, they are growing faster than large cities. Intermediary cities provide a vital connection to more than 65% of the world's population living in smaller towns and cities and rural areas, which are facing urbanization, management and development challenges. Most are not getting the resources, knowledge and capacity they need to implement the SDGs. They must be given greater prominence in the area of policy development and in the allocation of national resources, if the SDGs are to be successfully achieved in this region by 2030.

Political instability and election cycles can interfere with SDG implementation, which adds an extra layer of complexity to localization processes. Inflexible vertical hierarchies hinder the adaptation of lines of planning, implementation strategies and resource allocation to local contexts, as well as local government accountability — which is key to ensuring the involvement of local stakeholders (civil society and the private sector). Lack of

In many countries, such as Bangladesh and China, intermediary cities are growing faster than large cities.

clarity regarding responsibilities, duplication or fragmentation of jurisdictions and functions, unfunded mandates and weak mechanisms for reconciling conflicting priorities can generate weak or perverse incentives for local governments to adopt proactive policies. It can also lead to the adoption of short-term unsustainable policies as a response to inflexible vertical planning (as mentioned above in the case of China). In many cases, and particularly in federal countries, horizontal coordination at sub-national level is as complex and problematic as it is at national levels.

A significant criticism by local governments in the region is that they have not been adequately consulted during the preparation of national strategies that must be adapted to the territories, nor in the setting of national SDG target priorities. Furthermore, LRGs express frustration at not having been given the necessary resources to establish the enabling environment required to support the socialization and localization of the SDGs. Most countries face enormous disparities between SNGs with respect to development levels, as well as the capacities and resources available to them for implementing the SDGs.

Asia-Pacific countries need to accelerate progress in the implementation of the SDGs by empowering local governments and community groups to lead territorial development processes and deliver in an integrated fashion across all the Goals and global sustainability agendas. During the Sixth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development organised by UNESCAP (Bangkok, 27-29 March 2019), representatives from all countries reiterated their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and shared key initiatives implemented at the national and local levels, including the establishment of coordination mechanisms and the enhancement of multi-stakeholder engagement. SDGs could become the catalyst for strengthening the intergovernmental system (e.g. planning, budgeting, financial management and accountability), supporting sustainable development and improving governance.⁸⁴

The next section analyses in more in detail how local and regional governments are moving towards the localization of the SDGs in their cities and territories through territorial developmental strategies. ○

3. The contribution of local and regional governments to the localization of the SDGs

Building on the findings of the previous section — which explored national strategies for SDG implementation, the institutional framework to support a territorialized approach, and the degree of vertical and horizontal integration — this section studies the processes and actions undertaken by LRGs of the Asia-Pacific (ASPAC) region for the localization of the 2030 Agenda through territorial developmental strategies.

The momentum and commitment in support of the localization of the SDGs in the ASPAC region have grown, but progress throughout the region has been uneven. Several countries have advanced in implementing the SDGs at the local level, making significant progress in awareness-raising and local plan alignment with the Goals. Most local governments in Asia-Pacific, however, still do not know the SDGs, or at best have a limited awareness of them and

how they link to their daily tasks. Only front-running cities and regions have advanced to the operationalization and implementation stage of the SDGs; and even at this stage, in many cases, implementation has consisted of basically ‘retrofitting’ the SDGs into existing projects and activities (often supported by the Millennium Development Goals, Agenda 21 and other global development policy frameworks). Moving from commitment or alignment to concrete territorial strategies that operationalize the agendas into the daily initiatives and lives of their communities has been the most challenging step for most LRGs in the region. Local governments are expected to learn how to prioritize programmatically and, given the limited amount of resource, often have to ‘choose’ which SDGs are actually applicable in reality. This section focuses on the initiatives local governments are implementing to overcome these challenges. ◉

Students of a local school in Kathmandu, Nepal (photo: Julien Cavadini, bit.ly/2IBB3YN).



3.1 Awareness-raising and SDG ownership: the role of LRG networks and partners

LGAs and regional associations in Asia-Pacific are playing an active role in the localization of the SDGs and the establishment of territorial development strategies. A wide range of actors from different contexts and at different levels are contributing to the emergence of new initiatives, supporting dissemination and training and providing technical assistance: regional organizations (e.g. UNESCAP, ASEAN, APEC, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)); the Asia-Pacific section of UCLG (UCLG ASPAC), Citynet, the regional offices of global organizations (e.g. AIMF, C40, CLGF, ICLEI and Regions4SD); other networks working with local governments (e.g. LOGIN);⁸⁵ and local government partners. UCLG ASPAC regularly organizes forums, edits publications and promotes training as part of its commitment to raise awareness of the global agendas. It has also provided support to specific national programmes (Indonesia and Pakistan, for instance, analysed in detail below). As mentioned in Section 2, it carried out an assessment of 28 countries in the region to explore whether the national legal and institutional environments have in fact been conducive to the localization of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda.⁸⁶ Citynet has promoted training actions and study trips; with UNESCAP and the Seoul Metropolitan Government it has supported the Urban SDG online portal, a tool for knowledge-sharing and city-to-city cooperation for sustainable urban development in the region.⁸⁷ LGAs have also promoted greater involvement of local governments in regional mechanisms through, for example, the ASEAN Mayors Forum and the UNESCAP Forum, as well as via capacity-building actions.⁸⁸ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the ADB, together with other international institutions (e.g. the GIZ) and agencies, are implementing several projects for the

localization of SDGs at the regional and national level.⁸⁹

Associations in **South-eastern Asia** have been particularly active. In 2018 in **Indonesia**, national associations joined UCLG ASPAC in the nation-wide project LOCALISE, supported by the European Union (for more information see Section 3.2). This has elicited partnerships with stakeholders such as CISDI, GIZ, Indonesia Climate Alliance and the SMERU Research Institute. In addition, the Association of Indonesian Municipalities (APEKSI) and the Indonesian Regencies Government Association (APKASI) have established training programmes for local government officers and stakeholders, and developed toolkits for the dissemination of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda.⁹⁰ Foundations, academia and UN agencies, with UNDP at the forefront, have also been promoting various learning initiatives on the SDGs.⁹¹

In the **Philippines**, both the League of Cities and the League of Municipalities have been active in SDG localization through seminars, information sharing, conferences and workshops. The League of Cities has developed pilot projects with different partners to promote integration of the SDGs into local activities, for example the Vertical Integration for Low-Emission Development (V-LED) in collaboration with UN-Habitat; the Building Climate Resiliency Through Urban Plans and Designs programme with the support of German cooperation agencies and UN-Habitat; the Ambitious City Promises project with ICLEI; the Global Initiative for Resource-Efficient Cities with UNEP; and the 'Green, Green, Green' project of the Philippine Department of Budget and Management, amongst others.⁹² The League of Cities, moreover, co-leads Citynet's SDG Cluster.

The Association of Cities of **Viet Nam** participated in several national workshops and, in 2018, organized two meetings on SDGs in the Mekong Delta region and in the country's

northern region.⁹³ Other associations in the sub-region are still at quite a preliminary phase. In **Cambodia**, the National League of Communes (NLC) has included the SDGs in its five-year strategic plan (2018-2022) which, to date, has not been implemented. The **Malaysian** Association of Local Authorities (MALA) has worked on connecting local governments with international activities linked to the SDG framework in, for example, Sabrang Perei and Penang.⁹⁴

In **East and North-Eastern Asia**, the **Republic of Korea** has historically been very active, particularly through the Local Sustainability Alliance of Korea (LSAK) and as part of international networks such as ICLEI, Citynet and UCLG. LSAK is the network organization for Local Agenda 21 and includes Korean local governments and CSOs. The network provided its members with a platform to share knowledge and information and better integrate the SDGs into their policies and programmes. The Korean Institute Centre for Sustainable Development (KICSD) has, finally, developed various training courses and research projects on the SDGs and other themes related to the development agendas.⁹⁵

In **South and South-Western Asia**, the All India Institute for Local Self-Government (AIIISG) coordinates 26 centres responsible for education, research and capacity building for local urban bodies. The Institute is developing a learning agenda and provides technical assistance for sustainable local governments, linking the SDGs with key Indian programmes (e.g. AMRUT, PMAY, EQUI-City, Smart Cities Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, and the National Urban Poverty Reduction Programme). In **Pakistan and Bangladesh**, a range of conferences and workshops have taken place during the past year with the support of international agencies and national government. Local authorities from all the provinces of Pakistan gathered at a Local Government Summit in Islamabad in March 2017 in support of localization and with six major issues to address: education, employment, energy, water, peace and governance.⁹⁶ In April 2018, with support from UNDP and GIZ, UCLG ASPAC and the Local Council Associations from Pakistan's four provinces organized an international conference, 'Think Global, Act Local — SDG Implementation through Local Governments', in which delegates from Pakistan's local governments discussed the role of LRGs in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, debating with delegates from over a dozen countries from the Asia-Pacific region. UCLG ASPAC, in partnership with the Association for the Development of Local Governance (ADLG) of Pakistan, launched a flagship initiative in March 2019 — the Local Empowerment, Advocacy and Development for SDG Localization (LEAD for SDGs) — a four-year project with the support of EU funding. The project will assist

In Kiribati, the national LGA (KiLGA) helped ten councils put together their development plans aligned with SDGs.

local governments, their associations — the Local Council Association of Balochistan (LCAB) and the Local Council Association of Sindh (LCAS) — and other stakeholders to localize the SDGs.⁹⁷ In **Sri Lanka**, the Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities (FSLGA) developed several awareness-raising workshops and pilots to integrate the SDGs into local plans and budgets in two provinces.⁹⁸ In **Nepal**, the three existing associations — the Association of District Development Committee of Nepal (ADDCN), the Municipal Association of Nepal (MuAN) and the National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal (NARMIN) — are making efforts to disseminate the SDGs. NARMIN, for example, adopted the 15 Points Directives to Rural Municipalities for the mainstreaming of the SDGs into the local planning and monitoring process (in the fields of health, sanitation and nutrition).⁹⁹

In the **Pacific region**, the associations of local governments in **Australia** — ALGA, the Western Australia Local Government Association, and the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors — worked with the federal government to contribute to the reporting process in 2018, gathering experiences at the local level. In **New Zealand**, Local Governments New Zealand (LGNZ) formed part of the reporting unit to the HLPF in 2019 and was asked to present its own contribution to the report. The association has publicised the SDGs to its members. It developed a toolbox to assist local authorities to meet the challenges of sea level rises and extreme weather events, with advice on adaptation and mitigation, and is leading a project designed to improve the quality and safety of water supplies, in addition to a project to improve access to quality affordable housing. The Society of Local Government Managers has developed a national set of indicators that aligns closely to the SDGs and has distributed these to all councils to enable them to provide annual monitoring reports.¹⁰⁰ In **Kiribati**, the local government association (KiLGA) has ensured the dissemination of the SDGs through its monthly newsletters, radio, forums and workshops and its Executive Director participated in the process of drafting the country's VNR in 2018. In 2018-2019, the Association helped ten councils put together their development plans aligned with SDGs and, with support from UNICEF, assisted five councils to develop their WASH policies and development plans aligned to the SDGs.¹⁰¹ 

3.2 Alignment of local strategies and plans (preparatory phase)

The preparatory phase of localizing the implementation of the SDGs involves a wide range of activities — from gap analysis and alignment of the SDGs with local plans to outlining innovative strategies and programmes. In light of this, this sub-section provides an analysis of where the region's countries stand with regard to the involvement of LRGs in the preparatory phase of SDG implementation. In order to do so, this Section explores the extent to which the region's various countries have been including LRGs in the process of alignment

of their development plans with the SDGs. This Section first introduces the countries that have clear national strategies, are making efforts to target LRGs, and are making faster progress in the preparatory phase and have aligned the SDGs with their sub-national plans (e.g. Japan, Indonesia and China). In South Korea, LRGs are taking the lead based on the legacy of the Local Agenda 21 movement. LRGs in other countries such as Australia and New Zealand are also progressing at a different pace, building on their experience of sustainable policies. In India and Viet Nam, top-down strategies are leading to an increasing gap between the state or provincial levels and the local levels (districts or local governments units) in the SDG implementation process. There is also difficult context and uncertainty hindering local government engagement in three other countries — the Philippines, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. In the Philippines, LRGs tend to be more involved in projects, with little account taken of the full SDG framework: 'beyond project-based targets, there are limited efforts to align the SDGs with the planning, financing and monitoring frameworks'.¹⁰² It is essential here to build awareness of the many examples of initiatives in this context.

Box 3

Local Voluntary Reviews - Toyama, Kitakyushu and Shimokawa

In **Kitakyushu Metropolitan Area** (966,000 inhabitants) the local government focused on the three pillars of sustainable development, 'Fostering a trusted Green Growth City with true wealth and prosperity, contributing to the world'. The city integrated the SDGs into the Kitakyushu Basic Environment Plan, which was revised in November 2017. This aligned fulfilment of the SDGs with environmental policies. The city will continue to introduce SDGs into administrative plans in areas other than the environment; and in the revision of administrative plans including the '*Genki Hasshin! Kitakyushu Plan*' and the Kitakyushu City Master Plan. The city uses SDG-related indicators to review progress.

Toyama City (418,300 inhabitants) has developed compact city planning based on a polycentric transport network. The city has a framework of implementation, centred on overarching divisions, and cooperates with industry, government and academia. It includes concrete cases of integration of the three dimensions through sustainable transport — e.g. Light Rail Transit networks — as well as universal health coverage through the Machinaka General Care Centre.

Shimokawa Town (3,355 inhabitants) set its 'Shimokawa Vision 2030: The Shimokawa Challenge: Connecting people and nature with the future', which translates 17 goals into seven different localized goals as part of a very inclusive, engaged process. The core activity of Shimokawa Town in pursuing sustainability is cyclical forest management, which maximizes use of its rich forest resource.

Source: <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/sdgs/vlr/index.html>.

Examples of joint national-local efforts to align SDGs with sub-national development plans

As mentioned above, LRGs in Japan, Indonesia and China have moved faster as far as alignment efforts are concerned. In **Japan**, over 30 cities and towns are involved in the implementation of the SDGs, with the support of the national government through the 'Future City Initiative' (a product of the pre-existing 'Eco-Model Cities' programme), with a special focus on environment, aging population and the involvement of the private sector and civil society.¹⁰³ The city of Yokohama has been amongst the most committed, with its 'Yokohama Future City' initiative focusing on environment, eldercare and culture.¹⁰⁴ Many other local governments are promoting initiatives through outreach campaigns aimed at local stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of the SDGs for local

development (e.g. Shiga and Nagano, Sapporo, Otsu and Omihamichan). Hamamatsu — known as ‘SDGs *Miraitoshi*’ or ‘future city’ — aligned its strategic plan with the SDGs in order to promote the preservation of forestry, cleaner energy and interculturalism.¹⁰⁵ Three cities — Toyama, Kitakyushu and Shimokawa — launched their Voluntary Local Reviews in 2018 (see Box 3). Over the period 2019-2020, Japan will also revise its SDGs Promotion Guiding Principles.

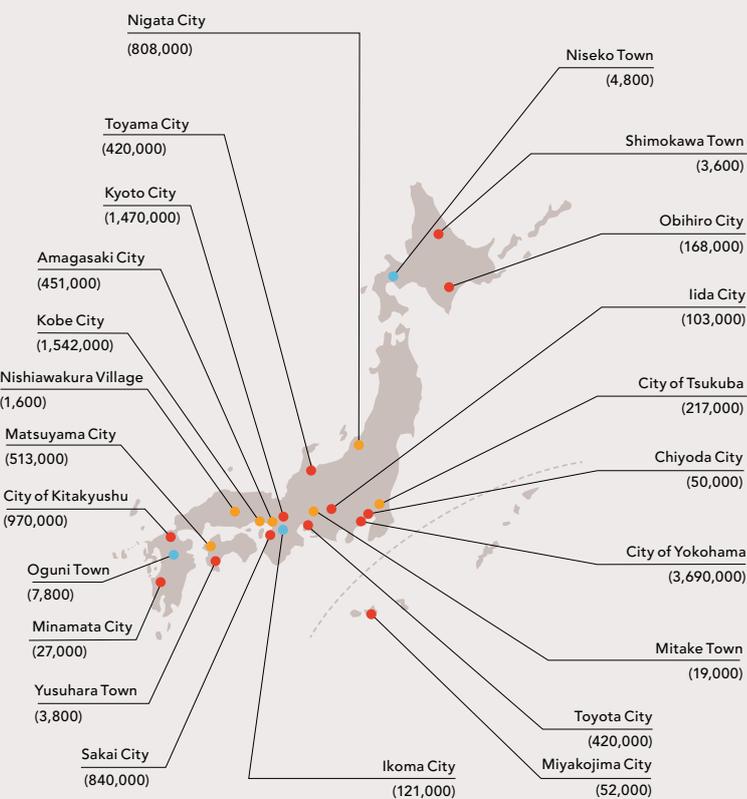
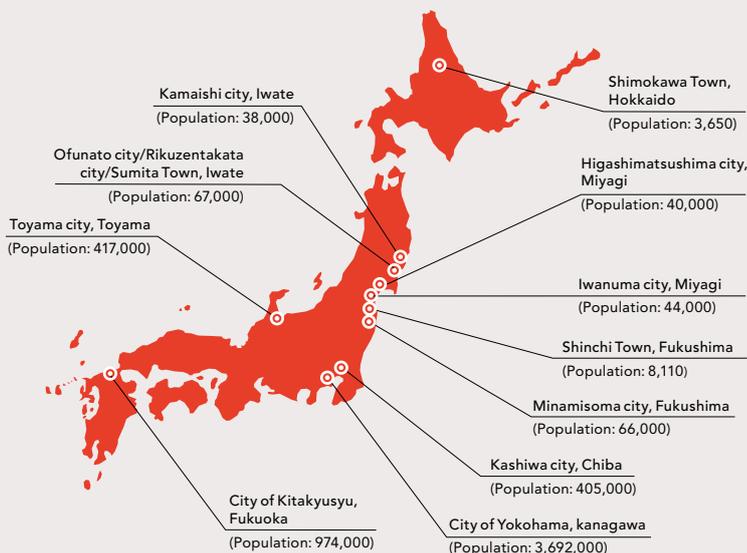
In **Indonesia** local governments are required to act by Presidential Decree No. 59 (see Section 2.3) and are making efforts to integrate the SDGs into provincial and local plans.¹⁰⁶ After the 2018 local elections, 17 provinces and 514 districts worked to mainstream the SDGs into their new local and regional plans. At the start of 2019, 19 out of 34 provinces had developed and formalized their SDG local action plans (RADs). Fifteen more provinces are in the process of completing their RADs. As mentioned previously, the LOCALISE SDGs project has, since 2018, worked in 16 provinces and 14 cities (see Figure 4). The project aims to develop training and knowledge sharing, support the preparation of SDG local action plans through technical assistance and networking, as well as follow up the status of SDG implementation and formulate strategy recommendations to localize the SDGs programme.¹⁰⁷

The LOCALISE project carried out a survey on the status of SDG implementation, which concluded that the provinces (11 out of 16) — particularly in West Indonesia — have a higher implementation rate than the cities. Only three cities — Jambi, Bengkulu and Pangkalpinang — have a high score in terms of implementation. There is also a gap between eastern and western local governments: the majority of western provinces have launched and prepared their own RADs, whereas in eastern provinces, only a few are doing so. While the majority of provinces mentioned that they had benefitted from an ‘enabling environment’ in terms of developing regional plans, they also faced critical obstacles. The survey found several issues still pending.¹⁰⁸ Data has generally not been adapted to the requirements of the indicators. Moreover, limited access to financial resources in the region has hindered bottom-up participation. More generally, different local governments have different timelines for their regional long-term development plans, so that several regions have not yet included the SDGs in their regional planning strategies. In addition, local governments have limited authority to implement local action plans at the provincial level: this either makes the plans too distant from the local context, or gives them a set of indicators that are not relevant to the actual monitoring needs of local governments. As regards monitoring, both medium and long-term regional plans have not been properly reviewed. As a result, local

Figure 3

Selected Future Cities and Eco-Model Cities in Japan

Future City: municipalities selected in 2011



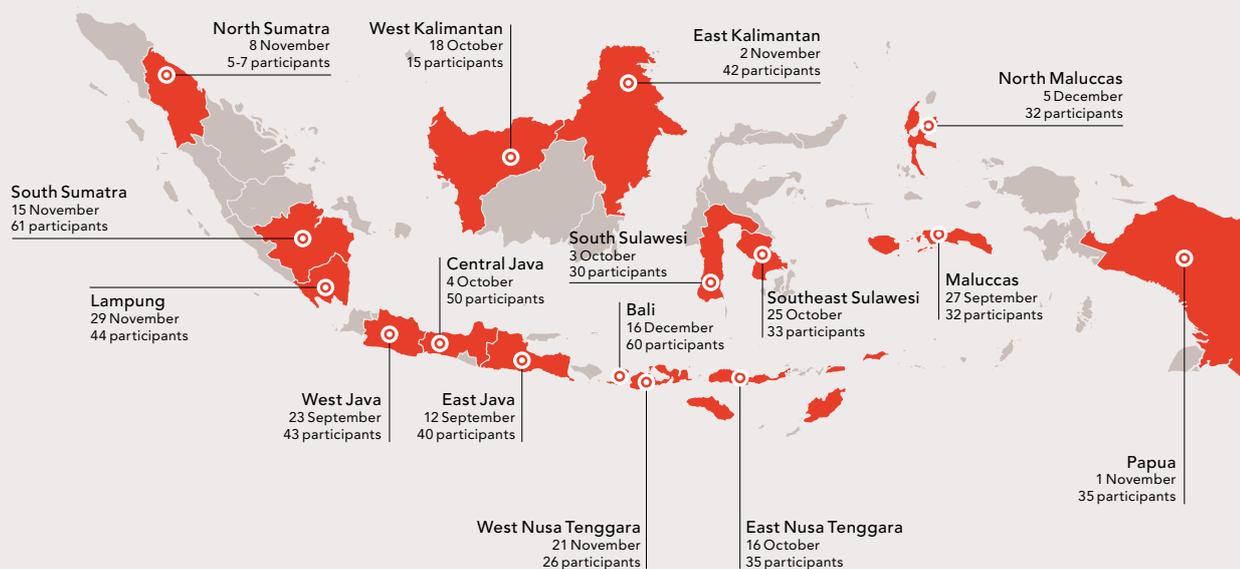
selected in 2008 selected in 2012 selected in 2013

* figures in parentheses show the population of each city

Source: https://www.japanfs.org/en/projects/future_city/index.html.

Figure 4

LOCALISE project: provinces and cities involved in the training process



governments are not able to fully adapt them to their vision of the localization challenges ahead and, in any case, there is generally weak reference to SDG indicators in the first place. This has been exacerbated by the lack of training initiatives overall — i.e. institutions or activities that increase awareness and understanding of the SDG framework across local government. These issues are compounded by the immense diversity and complexity of Indonesia's geography, which has significantly undermined cooperation and mutual learning. As a result, current regulations tend not to assimilate more of the SDGs and their overall view of development, which in turn curbs attempts by local governments to adapt, integrate and coordinate a more bottom up approach to SDG-based regulation at the local level.

One example mentioned in the Indonesian VNR is that of East Nusa Tenggara Province, and the rapid development of a Regional Mid-Term Plan 2018-2023 aligned with the SDGs and regional priorities. One of the key problems here were indicators and the need to make adjustments taking into account the availability of data.¹⁰⁹ Jakarta has integrated the priorities of the national plan and the SDGs into its mid-term plan (RPJMD), supported by a participatory approach (*e-Musrenbang*, participatory electronic budgeting and planning). Other cities are more focused on specific actions related to SDG 11 — such as Balikpapan, Surabaya, Palembang, Semarang, Yogyakarta and Bogor.

China reported in 2016 that SNGs are elaborating their own five-year plans in

accordance with the blueprint of the Chinese government's 13th Five-Year Plan, which is already aligned with the 2030 Agenda.¹¹⁰ At the same time, as mentioned above in Section 2.3, after the adoption of Innovation Demonstration Zones for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 16 cities applied to be part of it and on March 2018 the first three SDG pilot cities were chosen. These were: the city of Guilin, with a project focus on innovations in natural landscape conservation, eco-tourism and ecological agriculture; the city of Shenzhen, centred on sustainable development and good megacity governance driven by high-tech innovation; and the city of Taiyuan, focused on improving water quality and the atmospheric environment, including the surrounding ecological environment and tackling five types of pollution in the territory. The experiences of these cities will be rolled out to the rest of the country and ten demonstration zones built during the 13th Five-Year Plan period. The process is strongly supported by UNDP through awareness raising (Massive Open Online Courses), assessment support, training and workshops (involving 1,337 public officers in 41 counties and three provinces), advisory services, follow-up during the implementation process (1-2 years) and certification (SDG Seal).¹¹¹

On the other hand, other cities and provinces are competing in different areas to foster sustainable development through ambitious and innovative programmes e.g. Deyang, Yiwu, Haiyan and Huangshi as resilient cities; and Chengdu, Nanhu, Zhejiang Langzhong, Libo and Chibei as models for international sustainable pilot cities (some of

these examples will be developed in Section 3.3). According to the Provincial and Large and Medium Cities Sustainable Development Ranking 2018 Annual Report,¹¹² Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Tianjin, Guangdong, Chongqing, Shandong, Fujian and Anhui rank top ten in terms of sustainable performance among provinces and metropolitan cities. According to the ranking, the most developed and wealthy regions, such as Beijing, Shanghai, the Pearl River Delta and other coastal cities, ranked the highest. Coastal cities on average have better environmental quality than inland cities, whilst cities in the central and western regions are facing severe environmental pressures because they have less capacity to protect resources and the environment and to manage consumption, all of which are crucial to sustainable development.¹¹³

A bottom-up led model of sub-national engagement in the localization process

In **South Korea**, since 2015 local governments have begun to revise their strategies to put SDGs as a central value and establish local

SDG implementation systems (see Table 3). As mentioned above (Sections 2.3 and 3.1), there is a longstanding tradition in South Korea of sustainable agendas.¹¹⁴ As of 2016, 210 of 243 local governments have formulated their local 'Agenda 21' and around 100 local governments established 'local councils for sustainable development' involving civil society and the private sector.¹¹⁵ These local councils are not, however, recognized as local governmental organizations. Therefore, the Framework Act on Low-Carbon and Green Growth (LCGG Act, established in 2010) also required the formation of Local Committees on Green Growth in 17 metropolitan and provincial governments, but this has had limited impact.

Policies in Seoul are summarized in Box 4. Two analyses identify similar factors hindering stronger action on the part of local and regional governments: limited awareness and support; lack of connection between local policies and regional development plans, as well as with national policies; shortfalls in budget and personnel; weak implementation capacity and the absence of monitoring mechanisms (localized indicators,

Table 3 Involvement of local governments in the implementation of the SDGs in South Korea (2018)

Stage	Examples	
Type A (Implementation stage)	Metropolitan municipality	Seoul, Gwangju
	Basic local government	Suwon, Dangjin, Dobong-gu (areas of Seoul city)
Type B (Transition stage)	Metropolitan municipality	Incheon, Daegu, Daejeon, Ulsan, Sejong Metropolitan Autonomous City, Gyeonggi-do Province, Gangwon-do Province, Chungcheongbuk-do Province Chungcheongnam-do Province, Jeollabuk-do Province, Gyeongsangnam-do Province, Jeju Special Self-Governing Province
	Basic local government	Gimpo, Gwangmyeong, Siheung, Ansan, Pyeongtaek, Asan Gangneung, Wonju, Jecheon, Cheongju, Jeonju, Suncheon, Yeosu, Geoje, Changwon, Gapyeong-gun, Seochon-gun, Damyang-gun, Incheon Nam-gu, Incheon Bupyeong-gu
Type C (Preparation stage)	Metropolitan municipality	Cities and regions not belonging to A, B
	Basic local government	Cities not belonging to A, B

Type A - Implementation: Operational system (implementation, modification of the plan, indicator development, evaluation system).

Type B - Transition: Building a system for implementation (establishing plans and strategies to implement sustainable development, education for public officers and citizens).

Type C - Preparation: Establishment of foundations (basic ordinances, definition of institution, Commission on Sustainable Development, etc.).

Source: KDI (February 2018), Establish guidelines for the implementation of the SDGs by Local Governments, Final Report, p. 189 (in Korean).

The 2030 Seoul Master Plan and the Seoul Sustainable Development Goals

Since 1995, the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) has led efforts to build a sustainable city, with a population of 10.1 million people. The first Sustainable Development Commission (2013-2015) established the Master Plan for Sustainable Development in 2015 and evaluated the sustainability of Seoul based on the Sustainable Development Indicators System. The second Sustainable Development Commission (2015-2017) focused on implementing the Master Plan for Sustainable Development. In 2017, the Seoul SDGs were established using a bottom-up approach and the SDGs were merged into all of Seoul's policies, plans, and administration and moved through the cycle of implementation, evaluation and revision.¹¹⁷ The 2030 Seoul Plan was developed by citizens at each stage of the planning.¹¹⁸ To realize the future vision, five core issues were identified: 'people-centred city without discrimination, dynamic global city with a strong job market, vibrant cultural and historic city, lively and safe city and stable housing and easy transportation, community-oriented city'.

Source: The Seoul Sustainable Development Goals 2030, 17 Ways to Change Seoul. For more information see: <http://www.urbansdgplatform.org/board/viewPublicationDetail.msc?no=146>.

insufficient data and periodic assessment).¹¹⁶ The same sources call on the national government to develop local government SDG guidelines and a promotion strategy that reviews relations between local and national governance bodies such as Green Growth Committees; develop adequate regulations; introduce stable budgets; and strengthen public-private cooperation and joint efforts at monitoring.

Initiatives have generally been generated in the environmental department. Efforts are now underway to retrofit the strategy to respond to the new SDGs framework, with a view to developing a more integrated approach. But this is likely to take time (as demonstrated by Table 3, which classed the majority of local governments as being in the transition or preparatory stage).

Taking advantage of local sustainable initiatives in countries that are still defining national localization strategies

While LRGs in **Australia and New Zealand** are progressively referring to the SDGs as a framework, they are already implementing different initiatives and programmes for sustainable policies aligned with the SDGs. In **Australia**, cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and the Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council in Perth were among the first councils to

integrate the SDGs into their plans or strategies (Sustainable Sydney 2030, Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, and Perth Regional Environment Strategy 2016-2020).¹¹⁹ Other cities have also, for some time now, been developing sustainable policies consistent with the SDGs, for example Fremantle which has adopted the One Planet Fremantle Strategy, whilst districts such as Illawarra are leading a group of 'healthy cities' in the region.¹²⁰ Other local authorities are promoting climate change and sustainability actions in their communities to build resilience and adaptation capacity. Over 100 local government areas that encompass more than 300 cities and towns across Australia, representing almost 11 million people, have joined the Climate Council's Cities Power Partnership, which encourages, motivates and accelerates local initiatives in emissions reductions and clean energy.¹²¹ However, as recognized by the Australian Local Government Association, 'many councils have been slow on the uptake to integrate the SDGs into their planning process and community strategies'.¹²² The Australian government has been active in recent years in catalysing the development of Smart Cities through its City Deal and Smart Cities and Suburbs' programmes.¹²³

In **New Zealand**, Local Government New Zealand publicized the SDGs to its member councils to support the preparation of the VNR in 2019. In fact, local councils have been active in developing sustainable policies for some time. In 2014 Auckland Council adopted the Living Lightly and FutureFit programme, encouraging Aucklanders to shift to a low-carbon path by proposing six climate action themes (Move, Shop, Eat, Energy, Grow and Talk) to change lifestyles.¹²⁴ In addition, its Waste Management and Minimisation Plan 2018 has a vision for the city to be zero waste by 2040. The Greater Wellington Regional Council has adopted an electric-first policy for its own vehicle fleet and has invested in electric buses to replace diesel buses.¹²⁵ Its biodiversity strategy Our Natural Capital aims to reduce predators and protect threatened species through mobilizing community action.¹²⁶ Rotorua Lakes Council has established an innovative partnership with the indigenous people of its district, the *Te Arawa Iwi*, which provides Iwi with a voice in the policy and decision-making processes of the council.¹²⁷ In 2017, New Zealand local leaders launched a Local Government Leaders' Climate Change Declaration to support initiatives to reduce greenhouse gases and commit locally to respond to climate change.¹²⁸ As mentioned above, local authorities have also completed an assessment of the amount of underground and above ground infrastructure that will be affected by sea level rises, based on three different scenarios. Discussions between local and central government are underway to

identify options for meeting the costs involved and providing councils with the powers to halt development in areas likely to be affected by sea level rise in the future.¹²⁹ Through the Urban Growth Agenda (UGA), the New Zealand national government are seeking to implement the New Urban Agenda. All cities and local government areas should promote direct public participation in urban planning processes. Other priorities include waste reduction, improving air quality standards, universal access to green and public spaces, age-friendly communities and better access for persons with disabilities. The national government has committed USD 47 million for local council initiatives. Projects must have at least 50% co-funding and be up to five years in duration.¹³⁰ In 2019, New Zealand's national government adopted its first 'well-being' budget based on its commitment to protect human, natural, physical and social capital, and has developed a programme of local and national indicators to assess progress.

Top-down SDG strategies and the widening gap between intermediary and local levels

India and Viet Nam are two examples of countries where the alignment process is taking place at provincial or state level, widening the gap with local governments. For example, in **India** there is a significant difference between the involvement of state levels and local government bodies. As mentioned in Section 2.3, almost all states and union territories (UTs) have set up a special centre, unit or team to coordinate SDG implementation. Twenty-three states and UTs have prepared their Action Plans or Vision 2030 documents; six states have developed or are in the process of developing an SDG monitoring framework; 15 states and Delhi's UT have worked on specific indicators; and nine states have reported interventions related to aligning their budgets with the SDGs.¹³¹ In contrast, the involvement and participation of district administrations, rural and urban local governments is lagging behind. There is common agreement that representatives of *Panchayati Raj* institutions and urban local bodies and community organizations need to be more systematically part of the implementation process and receive capacity support.¹³² 'Despite these attempts, localising SDG indicators at the state or the urban scale remains quite limited in India'.¹³³ The situation in small towns and villages is even more critical.¹³⁴

In **Viet Nam**, twenty-two provinces issued their provincial action plans for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹³⁵ Following the Prime Ministerial Decision on the National Action Plan for Implementing the 2030 Agenda (No.622/QD-TTg, 10 May 2017), provincial governments are the key coordinators at the

local level for implementing and reporting on the achievement of indicators to central government. Provinces direct implementation and reporting in the cities and towns under their jurisdiction.

Limited local government initiatives in countries facing significant uncertainties and an adverse institutional environment

In other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, LRGs are also taking action but in more difficult circumstances and with more limited capacities. In the **Philippines**, despite the national executive order (Order No. 27) requiring all levels of government to implement the national development plan (PDP), aligned with the SDGs, the current political context and existing mechanisms mean they face some difficulties (see above Section 2.3). However, since 2015 the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), in partnership with the League of Cities, the Local Government Academy and several international agencies has been promoting the SDGs in over 34 cities, as a follow up to the MDG FACES programme (focused on children in poor urban communities).¹³⁶ For example, the cities of Naga, Iriga and Montelupa have made efforts to incorporate SDGs into their development plans. They have introduced a system of (local target) scorecards to gather baseline data on governance. The scorecards evaluate whether development plans are aligned with the SDGs.¹³⁷ Similarly, in 2017, the *Galing Pook* Awards Programme shortlisted 30 municipalities and barangays that have developed initiatives complying with the three pillars of sustainable development in different areas: participatory governance (Angon, San Fernando), poverty reduction (Zamboanga del Norte and del Sur) and economic development (Tagum City), support to informal workers (garment sector in Taytay) and poor communities (fisheries in Ambao, youth in Ilocos Norte), access to basic services (water in San Luis, waste management in Makati, transport in Legazpi, road maintenance in Davao), affordable housing (Quezon) and slum upgrading (Dipolog City), sustainable tourism (Loboc), urban renewal and green cities (Pasig), clean food (Marikina) and, finally, inter-municipal cooperation for better services (PALMA Alliance in the Cotabato Province).¹³⁸ Other local governments are also active and follow a range of programmes supported by international institutions and local government organizations (such as the League of Cities) related to sustainable policies e.g. Angeles City, Tagum, Legazpi, Ormoc, Cagayan De Oro, Pasig, Parañaque and Marikina for climate mitigation and adaptation and resilient initiatives. Other examples include Or Sorogson, a pilot city for the Global Initiative for Resource Efficient Cities;

the city of Cebu for solid waste management; the cities of Baguio and Quezon for planned sanitation and tourism through PPPs, and others. But these represent individual one-off projects rather than an integrated approach that refers to the full SDG framework.

In **Sri Lanka**, the SDG Action Plan developed in 2016 envisaged the development of provincial sustainability plans to showcase examples of good practice in implementing SDGs and sustainable villages at the local level. In 2016 and 2017, senior officials of provincial councils and local authorities were trained in mainstreaming and integrating the SDGs, but this has taken place on an *ad hoc* basis. The level of awareness and engagement of provincial councils and local authorities in the SDGs is still low and no substantial efforts at local sustainability planning have been initiated. Local governments face a lack of clearly defined, devolved and decentralized SDG processes from central government. As discussed in Section 2.3, the formulation of provincial sustainability plans has not been effectively pursued. A preliminary attempt to establish a cluster of sustainable villages in Pannala in the Kurunegala district also failed, creating a gap in regional and local sustainable development planning. The limited initiatives developed in 2019 by the national association FSLN (mentioned above in Section 3.1) risk being suspended due to insufficient

financial support, and there is no clear vision of what LRGs need to do; a roadmap is not sufficient if there is not the means for action.¹³⁹

In **Pakistan**, district/local governments are not associated with the SDG coordination units created at provincial level. Following the Local Government Summit on the SDGs in Islamabad in March 2017 and an international conference in April 2018 (see Section 3.1), local governments' awareness of the SDGs increased, creating more political space for LRGs in SDG implementation. However, the lack of legal and financial frameworks weakens the localization of the national agenda in provincial plans and the development of localized territorial strategies. There are huge challenges of coordination within the four provincial governments in terms of strategies, monitoring and reporting mechanisms. There is no mechanism to track the progress of SDG implementation due to lack of data availability at central and local levels, and local governments were not involved in the reporting process in 2019. It is expected that the 'LEAD' initiative for SDG implementation launched in March 2019 will help to assist local governments and their associations in the future.¹⁴⁰

Monitoring local initiatives

The lack of reliable data to effectively measure progress towards the SDGs remains one of the region's biggest challenges. Despite a significant increase in the availability of SDG indicators since 2017 - including disaggregated data - data gaps remain for two thirds of the global SDG indicators.¹⁴¹

Data management systems at the sub-national and local levels are 'relatively dysfunctional, especially with the use of quantitative indicators to measure results and progress'.¹⁴² However, some initiatives at local level are emerging. China selected Deqing County as a pilot study area in 2017, the aim being to comply with the UN Global Indicator Framework and provide a good example in measuring the overall progress towards the SDGs using geo-statistical data and methods that could be shared and replicated across the world.¹⁴³ In New Zealand, for instance, the Society of Local Government Managers has already developed a national set of indicators that align closely to the SDGs, which have been distributed to all councils to enable them to conduct annual monitoring reports. At a national level, Indonesia has created a OneData portal as a data hub, coordinated by the National Development Planning Agency and the National Statistics Bureau. This will allow districts, municipalities and provinces to gather, compile and report on the correct indicators in line with the SDG and national development indicators. 📍

Fishermen gathering net in Mannar, Sri Lanka (photo: Adam Jones, bit.ly/2p7TtK4).



3.3 Local actions for the implementation of SDGs (operationalization stage)

Operationalization of the SDGs involves turning visions and plans into actions. Actions may include re-engineering of current sustainable development initiatives started prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, or new projects and programmes to support the localization of the SDGs and other global initiatives. The latter include the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction Agreements.

This section highlights selected examples of LRG initiatives that contribute to the operationalization of the SDGs through integrated territorialized policies. There is particular focus on Asian cities, which have emerged as centres of innovation and prosperity, but are also the locus where major challenges are concentrated. The examples focus in particular on climate change, resilience and energy challenges (contributions to a sustainable planet), sustainable infrastructures (prosperity), and inclusiveness (a people-centred agenda). They cover a limited range of development issues but provide insights into the extent of efforts to localize the SDGs in the region. Preference has been given to initiatives that are outcome driven and include cross-sector approaches to maximise policy complementarities and synergies between sectors, in line with the SDG principles.

Sustainable cities and territories for a sustainable planet

Recent assessments highlight the need for the Asia-Pacific region to accelerate the path to achieve the goal of sustainable cities.¹⁴⁴ SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda require more integrated urban planning and inclusive urban governance. The impact of sustainable cities goes far beyond SDG 11 (ten of the 17 SDGs are linked to SDG 11).¹⁴⁵ Moreover, taking into account the speed and scope of urbanization in the region, the world's sustainable development prospects increasingly depend on how Asian and Pacific cities are managed, and how they adopt more sustainable and inclusive patterns of development.

As discussed in Section 3.2, frontrunner cities stand out in their efforts to align their plans with the SDGs and build more integrated approaches through planning and combined sectoral policies. Visionary local governments are taking the lead, for example Seoul, which has revised its masterplan using the SDGs as a framework, adopting people-centred policies (see above Box 4). Other cities have adopted integrated planning approaches both with and without reference to the SDGs. Guangzhou's 'One Plan for All' strives to promote coordinated economic, social and environmental development.¹⁴⁶ Other cities, both big and small — e.g. Toyama Compact City Strategy (Japan),¹⁴⁷ Sustainable Sidney 2030 (Australia),¹⁴⁸ Da Nang Sustainable City (Viet Nam),¹⁴⁹ and Naga Comprehensive Land Use Plan (the Philippines)¹⁵⁰ among others— are fostering more coherent urban sustainable policies.

Table 4 groups the efforts of cities to localize the implementation of SDG 11 under certain 'umbrella' sustainability themes. These include eco, green, inclusive, innovative, liveable, resilient, safe, smart and sustainable cities. Many cities in the region have adopted these terms as concepts and brand names to emphasize implementation of SDG 11 and other agendas.

Many of these sustainable city initiatives predate the introduction of the SDGs, but they represent an important legacy of programmes. Many cities rebranded their image in response to a need to adapt their old declining economic activities to new regional and global economic trends. Some cities adopted a broad and comprehensive policy framework in order to 'green' their economies and become smarter cities promoting new technologies.¹⁵⁸

This legacy encompasses different concepts of sustainability. Moreover, the region has different traditions and city models, for example dense and compact cities versus extended and sparse urban areas.¹⁵⁹ Poor urban governance and weak regulatory frameworks represent one of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of the SDGs. Many cities in the region are experiencing growth without

Table 4 Different strategy concepts of urban sustainability to support the implementation of the SDGs

Concept	Feature	Focus aspect	Examples
Eco City /Eco Villages	A city built on the principles of living in harmony with the environment; using renewable energy and other resources.	Environment, economy Goal 11.6	Wuxi Eco-City, Tangshan Eco-City, Kunming Eco-City. Examples of Eco-villages in Bangladesh, India and Nepal ¹⁵¹
Green city ¹⁵²	Green urban biodiversity; green economy that is low-carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive.	Environment, economy Goals: 11.6, 11.7a, 11.7b	Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Shenzhen, Tianjin, Shanghai, Songdo, New Town (India)
Inclusive city ¹⁵³	A city that has spatial inclusion, social inclusion and economic inclusion (World Bank, 2015).	Social inclusion Goals: 11.2, 11.7b	Metro Manila, Karnataka (India), Kanazawa (Japan)
Innovative city ¹⁵⁴	A city that is innovative and a major driver of economic growth.	Social organization, economic growth Goals: 8.2, 8.3, 9.5.b, 17.6, 17.8	Singapore, Hong Kong
Liveable city	A city with good ecological sustainability and liveability, providing a high quality of life. Liveable cities also include healthy cities.	Environment, social inclusion Goals: 11.1, 11.2, 11.3	Melbourne, Adelaide (Australia), Singapore
Resilient City	A city where individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems have the capacity to survive, adapt, and grow, no matter what kind of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience. ¹⁵⁵	Responsiveness, adaptability Goals: 9.1, 9.4 a, 11.5 c	Bangkok, Da Nang (Viet Nam), Christchurch, Newcastle, Semarang (Indonesia) For a complete list of '100 Resilient Cities' in the region see regional membership of the '100 Resilient cities' initiative.
Safe Cities	Cities designed for crime prevention, public area safety and security, with a person-oriented city design.	Safety, cities for people, women Goals: 5.2, 5.2, 5.3, 11.2, 16.1-3	Melbourne, Sydney, Osaka, Tokyo, Singapore
Smart city ¹⁵⁶	Using modern communication technology to support sustainable urban development and a high quality of life.	Holistic perspective, infrastructure Goals: 8.2, 8.3, 9.5.b, 17.6, 17.8	Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur, Makassar, Singapore, Mumbai, Bangalore, New Clark City, Phuket. 65+ cities in the region focused on smart city plans and programmes.
Sustainable city	A city 'where achievements in social, economic and physical development are made to last' and one which is inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (UNDP, 2015).	Holistic perspective Goals: 11.2, 11.3, 11.7.c Also mentioned in 34 sub-goals, in particular Goals 8, 9, 12, 13	Brisbane, Auckland, Bandung, Dalian, Zhangjiakou, Chengdu

Source: Gong, W. et al¹⁵⁷ (2016) adapted to include SDG sub-goals

any holistic urban plan (e.g. only 24% of Indian cities have master plans). Persistent challenges (unplanned urban expansion, demographic trends, persistence of poverty and inequalities, services and infrastructure deficits, degradation of natural resources), coupled with climate change and the region's vulnerability to natural disasters, increase

the likelihood that the development gains of the last decade will be rolled back.¹⁶⁰ Below is a brief review of initiatives in these two areas, so central for sustainable cities in the region.

Climate Change. Goal 13 is one of the Goals where little progress has been made in the ASPAC region between 2000 and 2018.¹⁶¹ The region has

countries that both contribute to over half of the world's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but are also geographically vulnerable and highly exposed to the damaging impacts of climate change.¹⁶² The heatwaves in **Delhi** (India) and **Melbourne** (Australia) in 2019 are examples of this. Both adaptation and mitigation measures require massive infrastructure and social investment.¹⁶³ In 2019, 130+ cities in the ASPAC region made commitments to the Global Covenant of Mayors on Climate Change and Energy (GCoM) to develop mitigation and adaptation policies.¹⁶⁴ South-eastern Asia is the sub-region with a large number (nearly 70) of SNGs committed to this, including key metropolitan areas (e.g. **Jakarta**, **Surabaya**, **Kuala Lumpur**, **Quezon City**, and **Can Tho**), regions (e.g. **Iskandar**), and intermediary and small cities (e.g. **Probolingo** and **Bontang** in Indonesia, **Putrajaya** in Malaysia, **Borongan** in the Philippines, and **Phuket** in Thailand).¹⁶⁵ In Indonesia, an intensive mentoring process was implemented in 34 provinces to ensure the integration of the national action plan for GHG emissions in regional and local development plans.¹⁶⁶

In East Asia, Japanese cities have been involved in climate change actions for a long time. **Tokyo's** Climate Change Strategy is attempting to reduce final energy consumption (which has decreased by 21.1% since 2000) and CO₂ emissions (which decreased by 36.1% between 2000 and 2015). At the same time, renewables account for more than 11% of final electricity consumption, notably due to the increase in solar energy production capacity.¹⁶⁷ In South Korea, many cities have made commitments.¹⁶⁸ In **Changwon**, the '2020 Environmental Capital' initiative launched in 2008 planted millions of trees and reduced air pollution, urban noise and average summer temperatures by about 3 to 7 degrees celsius.¹⁶⁹ In China, a recent publication by the Asian Development Bank highlighted 50 projects implemented by Chinese cities that have successfully implemented effective GHG reduction strategies and environmental improvement measures. Chinese cities are committed to a reduction of 318 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year by 2030.¹⁷⁰ In South Asia, several cities and states have made commitments, although the majority are only in the preliminary phases.¹⁷¹ The Indian Government supports different programmes to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency.¹⁷² In the Pacific region, **Brisbane**, **Melbourne** and **Sydney** — among 20 other Australian local governments — are examples of where climate change initiatives have been implemented.¹⁷³ In New Zealand, local governments adopted a strong statement to support climate change responses.¹⁷⁴ In 2015, the **Greater Wellington Regional Council** (GWRC), launched its Climate Change Strategy and Implementation Plan.

LRGs also play a role in the preservation of forest ecosystems (e.g. the Melbourne Metropolitan Urban Forest Strategy). The **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province** (Pakistan) surpassed the objective of the project 'one billion tree tsunami', initiated in 2014. The major impact of this success also triggered a national reforestation campaign, 'Plant for Pakistan'.¹⁷⁵

Resilient cities. Since 2005, the Asia-Pacific region has recorded almost 60% of total global deaths, with 80% of people affected and 45% of total economic damage due to natural disasters.¹⁷⁶ The number of urban residents potentially facing high or extreme multiple hazards is currently around 742 million, and could reach nearly 1 billion by 2030.¹⁷⁷ The 'Making Cities Sustainable and Resilient Campaign', launched by the UNDDR (formerly UNISDR) and UN Habitat, was highlighted in a report to the HLPF and involves more than 400 cities in the Asia-Pacific region (the majority in South and South-eastern Asia).¹⁷⁸ The campaign seeks to build the capacity of local governments, anchoring resilience across various institutions. Another scheme already mentioned is the 100 Resilient Cities initiative, which involves 19 cities in the region and has the aim of helping them become more resilient to the physical, social and economic challenges of this century.¹⁷⁹ The following are some examples. In Indonesia, most provinces have adopted Disaster Management Plans (DMP), while at district/city level 30% — equivalent to 118 cities — have adopted DMP. However, more effort is needed to ingrain disaster preparedness into the culture of people.¹⁸⁰ In the Philippines, a large majority of LRGs in nine regions (over 17) have incorporated Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies into their local plans, albeit the capacity to implement them remains limited.¹⁸¹ Iloilo is considered a DRR champion: after the typhoon in 2008, the city created a City Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council (CDRRMC) and developed a disaster plan involving barangays (villages), setting up a Disaster Information Centre and installing electronic signboards and bulletin boards.¹⁸² Another project acknowledged by the UN SDG Platform is the Metro Colombo Urban Development Project, developed in 2012 to reduce the physical and socio-economic impacts of flooding and strengthen strategic planning processes.¹⁸³ In India, Surat is frequently mentioned as a good example; here, the city has developed an 'End-to-End Early Warning System'.¹⁸⁴

Sustainable local infrastructures

Water and Sanitation. Even though the region has made significant progress in terms of access to safe drinking water, progress with sanitation has been much slower. 300 million people still lack access to safe drinking water and 1.5 billion do not have access to sanitation.¹⁸⁵ Following a

UNESCAP assessment regarding Goal 6 (water and sanitation), the Asia-Pacific region is expected to miss the Goal's targets and, in fact, will be in a worse position by 2030 than it was in 2000.¹⁸⁶ Rapid urbanization is challenging the ability of local governments to keep up with the rapidly growing demands on their freshwater supplies. In many cities, access to water is limited both in time and quality. Cities also face vulnerabilities due to outdated water supply systems and inadequate capture and storage capacity. In addition to limited access to sanitation that affects urban areas, a considerable proportion of wastewater already collected in the region is not treated before being discharged or reused (80% — 90% is discharged into water bodies in developing countries as of 2015).¹⁸⁷ While a central government agency is generally charged with the management and protection of water resources, LRGs are primarily responsible for water supply. The service is often delivered directly by state/provinces or municipalities (operation and maintenance) or through special purpose authorities, especially in big urban areas (public corporations or utilities), with some involvement of the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (e.g. Manila Water Company). Community-managed alternatives are also frequent in small towns and rural areas. Some utilities, such as **Melbourne's**, Victorian Water Corporation (Australia) has used SDG 6 and other SDG targets to develop its 2030 Management Strategy in consultation with stakeholders and customers, to ensure improved community wellbeing and a better natural environment.¹⁸⁸ Many big cities are at the forefront of water management technologies in the region (e.g. NEWater in Singapore¹⁸⁹ and Arisu - Office of Waterworks in Seoul).

Localized solutions to wastewater treatment, such as decentralized wastewater treatment systems, are emerging at the technical and policy levels in South and South-eastern Asia. For example, **Rajkot** (India) developed a Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System in 2015. The 'system treats sewage from 236 households, saving 4,000 kWh of electricity (SDG 7) and reducing 15 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year (SDG 11.6).¹⁹⁰ **Coimbatore** in southern India (1 million inhabitants) is currently working on a concept for intelligent water management to develop localized innovative water supply and wastewater disposal technologies.¹⁹¹ Community-led total sanitation initiatives have been developed in the past decade in India, for example, supported by national programmes (e.g. the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan initiative). **Xiangyang** City in Hubei Province (China) is testing out technologies for recycling sludge from wastewater treatment into energy, and recovering resources through an innovative cost effective green treatment process.¹⁹² Based on Mauri

tradition, the **City of Rotorua** (New Zealand) has developed an ecosystem re-entry mechanism, including restoration of the mauri (life-force) of the *wai* (water), as well as *Kaitiakitanga* (care of the environment), to support the principle that water is intrinsic to life and therefore also needs to sustain life and be life-sustaining.¹⁹³

Only a few basin management systems are in place, such as in the Mekong River Basin and the Aral Sea Basin, although these need to be scaled up to ensure efficiency of water resource use and management. Improved watershed management requires more involvement and contribution from LRGs. Asia-Pacific developing countries need an additional USD 14 billion annually to provide universal access to water and sanitation by 2030. And in South and South-West Asia, sanitation facilities account for 56% of the total financing needs of the water and sanitation sector, compared to 44% for access to water-related infrastructure. In urban areas, improving the management of tariffs, fixing leakages and regular maintenance can help reduce financing needs.¹⁹⁴

Solid waste management and the circular economy. Cities in the region are also generating increasing volumes of solid waste. SDGs 11.6 and 12.3-5 focus on the treatment and recycling of waste, with a view to developing a circular economy. Poor management and disposal of waste has an impact on many other SDGs related to soil, groundwater and marine pollution, as well as a healthy environment. A number of cities have adopted comprehensive waste management strategies based on the 3R principles (reduce, reuse and recycle — SDG 12.5). **Surabaya** (Indonesia, 3.3 million inhabitants) developed an e-3Rs and created a waste bank where residents are paid in return for recycling plastic bottles and cups. The city also has an educational programme and community-based waste management, in order to reduce the levels of waste and increase recycling in the city.¹⁹⁵ In **Chennai** (India), two municipalities signed a plastic waste recovery agreement in July 2018 with a cement plant to recover plastic waste sorted by residents in order to limit the amount of plastic sent to landfill. Residents are also being asked to sort organic waste in order to adopt vermi-composting, and biogas equipment is going to be installed.¹⁹⁶ **Bandung City's** Low-Carbon Plan (2014) includes the reduction of waste going to landfill from 69% to 25% between 2013 and 2019 and promoting the 3Rs and waste-to-energy schemes. In 2010 **Bangkok** initiated a solid waste separation programme at community level and built a waste-to-energy plant operating in the Nongkhem District (generating 8MW of power), but this only accounts for about 3% of the total solid waste generated.¹⁹⁷

Other initiatives in medium-sized cities, small towns and villages are being promoted

by different partners (e.g. in Quy Nhơn, Viet Nam and Battambang, Cambodia).¹⁹⁸ Innovative initiatives in the region have received international attention. For example, **Wuhan** (China, 10.9 million inhabitants) received the Guangzhou International Award for Innovation for the transformation of one of the largest landfills in Asia into a recreational park and ecological garden covering an area of over 170 square km.¹⁹⁹ The project involved government departments as well as experts from 82 cities. This is the largest application of aerobic technology for landfill remediation and the biggest ecological bridge in China. **Seoul** has made significant progress in solid waste management in a relatively short period of time. It has reduced the waste sent to Sudokwon Landfill (where methane gas is captured and converted into energy, while organic food waste goes through composting), switched to incineration facilities (recovering enough energy to supply 800,000 households), created four Resource Recovery Centres, and increased the rate of household waste recycling to 65% (almost twice the OECD average). As a result of this policy, Seoul has been able to achieve a 57% reduction in waste generated per capita and increased recycling rates nearly 20 fold. Partnerships between waste pickers and local governments can also be seen in the Global South (**Dhaka, Jakarta and Manila**). These informal solid waste collection systems gather recyclables separately and then give them to waste pickers in sorting centres. The **Kapiti Coast** near Wellington KCDC (New Zealand) redistributes waste levy fees paid by waste disposal operators to community groups, businesses, Maori and other community organizations in the form of Waste Minimization Grants, reducing waste to landfill and associated greenhouse gas emissions. However, the reality is that most cities struggle to manage solid waste in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible way, mainly relying on open dumping and uncontrolled landfilling.²⁰⁰

Transport and mobility. Fast urban growth has led to a dramatic increase in motorized vehicles, severe congestion and air pollution. Careful planning of public transport, inter-modal transfer centres and innovative solutions for traffic management are necessary to make the Asia-Pacific region's transport systems more sustainable and accessible, to decarbonize transportation and improve the air quality in urban areas. Examples of more sustainable and integrated public transport networks, electric vehicles, and use of smart transport systems include innovative initiatives by LRGs in support of localizing SDG 11.2 and the New Urban Agenda.²⁰¹

Several key urban areas have adopted a mass transit-oriented policy with the aim of reducing private car dominance and improving the share of public transport modalities (subways, light train, high bus usage) and integrated fare systems. Cities

such as Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo have among the more advanced and innovative systems. Hong Kong has invested heavily in a passenger rail and metro network, implementing restrictive car ownership and use policies, while the Mass Transit Railway Corporation operates a unique business model to capture property added value to invest in transport. As a result, public transport is used for 90% of all motorized journeys and the car ownership rate is lower than that of other cities of similar wealth. These transport patterns have resulted in very low transport-related energy use and carbon emissions.²⁰²

Other metro areas, such as the **Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR)**, are making strides to decarbonize the transport sector (including an elevated rail system, underground train network and an airport rail link), as well as extending the Pun-Pun, the city's first bicycle-sharing programme.²⁰³ **Bandung City** launched its 'Better Urban Mobility 2031' plan to develop public transport, including a seven-line Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, as well as low-emission vehicles. **Kochi City** (India) commissioned the development of a new metro in 2017.

Inspired by the success of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in Bogota (Colombia), **Transjakarta** and **Seoul** BRT systems started operating in 2000, and **Islamabad** BRT in 2012.²⁰⁴ Now BRT is currently serving around 10 million people per day in Asian cities, half of which are in China. **Hanoi's** first BRT was launched in 2016. The city's 'Masterplan for 2030 with a vision to 2050' envisages eight urban rail corridors, eight BRTs and several monorail corridors, with increases in the modal share of public transport to reach 35% - 45% by 2030, with a 30% reduction in private transport in the same time period.

Other cities are moving towards electrification of the bus network. By the end of 2017, all of **Shenzhen's** bus fleet — 16,359 vehicles — had been replaced with electric buses. This is the world's first city to adopt a completely electric fleet of buses, leading to a reduction in the city's emissions of 1.35 million tons of CO₂ each year.²⁰⁵

Careful planning of public transport, inter-modal transfer centres and innovative solutions for traffic management are necessary to make the Asia-Pacific region's transport systems more sustainable and accessible, to decarbonize transportation and improve the air quality in urban areas.

Soft mobility is also being promoted in the region. In the historic district of Monas, the city council of **Jakarta** has, since July 2018, been providing its first bicycle sharing stations, with the aim of reducing the use of cars in one of the most polluted cities in the world.²⁰⁶ **Kochi City** (India) inaugurated a bike sharing scheme in July 2018, with stations located at the foot of the metro (commissioned in 2017) to facilitate the switch between transport modes.²⁰⁷

Beyond these outstanding examples, the challenges are particularly significant among least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries. Needs assessments, based on a business-as-usual scenario, point to the high level of investment needed - a doubling or even tripling of current levels of infrastructure investment.²⁰⁸ However UNESCAP stresses that the business-as-usual scenario is not a very viable option (due to urban sprawl, maintenance costs, and transport technologies).

Inclusive cities and territories (a people-centred agenda)

Cities are considered engines of economic growth, with global leadership roles in education and science, technology and innovation, but also home to widening inequalities. Poor people living in urban areas remain marginalized despite recent growth, youth unemployment is high and migrants are often greatly disadvantaged with respect to their rights. Urban population growth in the region has not been matched by growth in housing units or equitable access to land, resulting in housing shortages and the persistence and growth of slums.²⁰⁹

Adequate and affordable housing, neighbourhood upgrading. Access to affordable housing is one of the biggest challenges facing this region, home to the world's largest concentration of urban slum populations. In 2014, people living in poor quality housing were estimated to number around 440 million, representing close to 27% of the total urban population in the region.²¹⁰ Although the proportion of people living in slums is decreasing in all sub-regions, the absolute number is increasing in many cities. Right to shelter and tenure is a basic human right; and one of the key challenges is how to build inclusive

cities that avoid marginalization, fragmentation and urban segregation.

Decentralization would increase the role of local governments in housing policies, but in many cases housing policy has been recentralized. In the Philippines, for example, the Urban Development and Housing Act which in the past gave local governments responsibility for providing housing has been hindered by their lack of control over land, as well as insufficient funds.²¹¹ China is an interesting exception, because local governments are able to develop housing alternatives. More importantly, they are able to interact with their local communities and other local stakeholders to negotiate a more equitable and sustained city development strategy, in which housing for the poor is a key element. They can also develop more gender sensitive approaches, to facilitate engagement by women in community planning and initiatives.

One of the more successful examples of a collaborative approach for slum upgrading is the Baan Mankong programme in Thailand. Implemented by the national Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), in close collaboration with community organizations and with the support of local governments, the programme has provided secure land and housing to two thirds of the country's urban poor over the past decade. The institutionalized participation of informal communities in the development of the urban fabric has renewed the city's policy practices and the authorities' vision of the future of the metropolis.²¹²

In the Philippines, since 2008 the **Iloilo** Local Housing Board has facilitated coordination between local government and the urban poor federation to participate in the city's formal planning process, disaster rehabilitation and relocation strategies that operate at the citywide scale.²¹³ The Prevention and Improving the Quality of Urban Slums in **Tanjung Pinang** (Indonesia),²¹⁴ the older Cross Cutting **Agra** Programme (India),²¹⁵ and the Citywide Settlement Upgrading and Prevention Strategy in **Port Moresby** (Papua New Guinea)²¹⁶ are among many other examples.²¹⁷

Cities are supporting programmes for low-income populations, sponsoring affordable housing to protect inhabitants from evictions.²¹⁸ The **Seoul** Type Housing Voucher Programme (redefined in 2013) provides a subsidy for low-income citizens as well as other options through their Public Lease Housing Policy.²¹⁹

However, many national and local governments still refuse to acknowledge urban populations living in slums, keeping these inhabitants 'off the radar' and unregistered in official databases. The growing urgency to provide adequate, affordable housing to millions of households calls for a paradigm shift in housing policy and practice, in

In 2014, people living in poor quality housing were estimated to number around 440 million, representing close to 27% of the total urban population in the region.

order to guarantee a sustainable future for cities.²²⁰ Experience suggests that, without comprehensive public localized interventions and community involvement, private housing expenditure alone will not solve the slum problem in developing countries.²²¹

Safe and Creative Cities. Urbanization has been associated with increasing prosperity, but also with unhealthy environments, insecurity and violence that frequently affects more vulnerable groups. Local governments in the region are acting to create fair, safe and liveable environments for all, and particularly for women, children and the elderly, as well as minorities and the marginalized. A human rights-based approach contributes to more peaceful and inclusive societies.

Different modalities of gender-sensitive public policies and services, including safer and green spaces, are emerging to reduce discrimination against women and support gender parity (SDG 5 and 16). **Logan City Council in Queensland, Australia**, has introduced a Safe City Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020.²²² **Seoul's** Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Project (CPTED) targets troubled neighbourhoods, with the involvement of communities, schools, the private sector, police, and district offices in an effort to seek innovative ways to tackle crime.²²³ Other cities have adopted different policies through specific regulations to protect women's rights and avoid harassment and violence, e.g. **Guangzhou, Seoul** (Ordinance on Gender Equality), **Faisalabad** (Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016), and **Kathmandu** (Public Transport Code of Conduct 2010). Beyond legislation, **Busan** has committed specific funds to prevent sexual violence. **Hyderabad** (India) is one of eight cities in India to participate in the Home Ministry's 'safe city' plan to end sexual harassment. **Bhopal** has improved transport access and safety for women. **Guangzhou, Kuala Lumpur, Zhengzhou, Shenzhen, Kolkata, Delhi** and **Hyderabad** have created women-only spaces on public transport.²²⁴ In **Ho-Chi-Minh City**, the HCM Safe City programme adapted the National Thematic Project on Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response (2016-2020).²²⁵ Many others have launched awareness campaigns and have hotlines, mobile apps or SMS to facilitate the reporting of sexual assaults. In **Indonesia**, Women's Schools (Sekolah Perempuan) have been established to provide informal education to empower women, jointly implemented by local governments, CSOs and communities in 54 villages and towns in different districts and provinces.²²⁶ Several Indian states have implemented specific schemes aimed at empowering the most vulnerable tribal groups or castes (Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Telangana). Moreover, Kerala became the first Indian state to introduce a policy for transgender people.²²⁷

Local governments are also developing different modalities, such as participatory planning and budgeting, to boost civil society participation in local decision-making, as set out in SDG 16.7 (e.g. **Vinh City** in Viet Nam; **Solo** in Indonesia; **Hwaseong** in South Korea; and **Seberang Perai** in Malaysia).²²⁸ In the **Philippines**, the Grassroots Participatory Budget programme (formerly Bottom-up Budgeting) succeeded in the mid-2010s in expanding to virtually all local government units (1,633 in total, in 2015).²²⁹ **Chengdu** (China) has been practising participatory budgeting since 2008, and has funded over 100,000 projects. Participatory budgeting is a powerful tool to meet the SDG imperative to 'leave no one behind' by involving migrant workers (e.g. Taoyuan)²³⁰ and persons with disabilities (e.g. Sanxia district).

Cities are also taking advantage of cultural policies and people's initiatives to boost inclusion, creativity and to celebrate diversity. As part of its heritage, **Pekalongan** (Indonesia) recognizes itself as the 'City of Batik' a sector in which 60% of the workers are women.²³¹ **Kanazawa** (Japan) has fostered synergies between local artisans and other creative areas, combining tradition, innovation and new technologies.²³² The province of **Jeju** (South Korea) has committed to preserving the custom of *haenyeo* (women divers) as an eco-friendly sustainable fishing practice, rooted in traditional knowledge.²³³

Inspired by the spirit of the **Asia Human Rights Charter**,²³⁴ local governments such as **Gwangju** (South Korea) have carried out extensive memorial and human rights education programmes with a view to promoting peace, culture and human rights in both the city and its regional environment.²³⁵ Others, such as the Regency of **Wonosobo** and **Palu City** (Indonesia) have created city human rights commissions to protect religious diversity, minority groups and develop awareness-raising programmes.²³⁶

This section has highlighted a range of innovative programmes, schemes and experiences increasingly being tested and implemented in the Asia-Pacific region. Other important aspects would be worth exploring such as energy transition, local food systems, urban agriculture, open government and new technologies etc. Most of these programmes are concentrated in frontrunner cities, mostly large urban areas, and are managed by innovative local leaders often supported by an exchange of experiences between international networks and partnerships. To move to the next phase and transform urban patterns of development in the Asia-Pacific region, it will be necessary to refine and scale up these emerging local approaches. This will require more collaborative policies between local, national and international institutions and actors and a significant increase in resources available at sub-national levels. ○

4. Conclusions

As stressed in the UNESCAP Report 2019, far-reaching initiatives and reforms are needed in the Asia-Pacific region to transform the current trajectory which, if unchanged, will not allow the region to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.²³⁷ To reverse these trends, the same report calls for accelerated efforts, the adoption of coherent and integrated policies that look at the interlinkages between the Goals, as well as good governance and appropriate and effective investments to lead countries to a truly sustainable future.

Local and regional government actions can accelerate SDG implementation

This chapter has highlighted where local and regional governments (LRGs) stand in this process. It offers a brief but general overview of initiatives on the ground, in cities, provinces and municipalities and in different countries. It shows some of the progress and gaps at sub-national levels, as well as the decisive role played by local authorities, national associations and regional networks of LRGs to support territorial strategies for the localization of the SDGs and other global agendas (climate change, disaster risk reduction, New Urban Agenda). These networks ensure regional dissemination and knowledge-sharing, peer to peer exchange and a significant advocacy role with regards to national and regional institutions, as well as alliances with CSOs, academia, and the private sector. They are important players in the expansion of the localization movement.

However, the dissemination of the SDGs at sub-national level in the region is still limited and **requires more engagement from all partners — LRGs, civil society, national governments and international institutions — to make significant progress in terms of LRG involvement.**

At the same time, the chapter highlights a multitude of initiatives in cities, regions and provinces that are promoting sustainable change, although they are not necessarily 'labelled' as SDGs. Most tend to be more project-oriented, but could provide the foundations for integrated territorial approaches to climate change, disaster risk reduction, access to basic services and housing, gender equality, public mass transport, smarter cities, and circular economies. Many initiatives are putting people at the centre, enhancing opportunities for institutions and stakeholders to interact and find synergies.

These actions have enormous transformative potential, although there is still a way to go in terms of scaling up and addressing systemic flaws, in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. But they paved the way. More local governments in the Asia-Pacific region will have to rely on collaboration with civil society and horizontal coordination between territories — networks, partnerships and the exchange of resources and knowledge — in order to realize the 'quantum leap' needed to make implementation of the SDGs a reality in the region. **The mainstreaming and upscaling of local actions through integrated territorial approaches will be important accelerators to meet the 2030 targets and catalyse governance transformations.**

However, as the previous sections underlined, the potentialities of LRGs' contribution to the SDGs have not always been clearly acknowledged. Only 11 countries (out of 28 that reported between 2016 and 2019) involved LRGs in the preparation of the VNRs and only four countries involved them in the national coordination mechanisms (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, and New Zealand) (see Sections 2.1 and 2.2).²³⁸ The limited involvement of LRGs in these processes constrains their mobilization and hinders multilevel dialogue to foster coordination

and collaboration. **There is much to do in terms of involving LRGs in the VNRs and in the national coordination mechanisms in order that decisive steps can be taken towards localization of the 2030 Agenda.** At regional level, the systematic participation of LRGs in UNESCAP's annual Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and in the ASEAN's Forum of Mayors has contributed to stronger SNG representation and multilevel governance.

Next steps

Based on these findings, representatives of local government associations of several countries in the region, national governments and international institutions gathered at the Siem Reap Workshop, co-organized by UCLG, jointly with UCLG ASPAC, LOGIN Asia, Development Partners Network on Decentralization and Local Governance (DeLoG) and ADB (8-9 April 2019), to discuss the **three main reforms needed to underpin the localization of the SDGs: 1) governance reforms, 2) financing reforms and, 3) public management reforms.** These reforms can easily be linked to the 'policy proposals' defined by UNESCAP in its analysis of the links between urbanization and the 2030 Agenda.²³⁹

Governance reforms

Renewed governance policies are required that recognize the multiple benefits of interlinkages between urbanization, territorial strategies and the SDGs. There is a need to **think strategically about localization, territorial and urban development across a range of diverse city sizes** (small, medium and large), as well as across the different levels of territorial governance. Synergies between the New Urban Agenda, the SDGs and national development strategies need to be strengthened. Coordination efforts can also be explored for the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) agreed at the COP 21 in Paris on climate change that countries need to submit or update in 2020. A common approach is needed to build synergies, tackle sectoral fragmented approaches and improve the allocation of resources between public administrations.

Effective decentralization policies are also central to underpin governance efforts, empower LRGs and support SDG localization through strong territorial development strategies. Although decentralization is not a panacea *per se* and countries show divergent progress and experiences in the region, the chapter shows clear differences between empowered LRGs and LRGs with less enabling environments (see Section 2.2). The former, particularly when they are led by a visionary local leader, play an active role, develop bottom-up initiatives, mobilize local actors and resources involving the whole potentiality of a territory, and

are committed partners for the accomplishment of the SDGs. On the other hand, when LRGs operate with more constrained powers and weak capacities and resources, their contribution is limited and they play a more passive role. As shown above (see section 2.3), the lack of clarity about local governments' legal mandates and areas of jurisdiction in some countries needs to be addressed through proper assignment of functions between levels of government.

Vertical and horizontal coordination remains a great challenge and requires governance reforms to foster multilevel dialogue and cooperation. Horizontal cooperation at sub-national level is also critical to foster territorial development strategies and strengthen the management of growing metropolitan areas, megacities and urban corridors, as well as for key environmental issues such as river catchments (e.g. the Ganges River catchment). The scale of the challenge and the means needed to tackle them are enormous.

Financing reforms

As mentioned in the introduction, the UNESCAP Report 2019 reveals that achieving the SDGs by 2030 would require an annual additional investment of USD 1.5 trillion for Asia-Pacific developing countries.²⁴⁰ This includes a range of urban and territorial infrastructure investments across multiple sectors.²⁴¹

Countries in the region are adopting reforms and introducing initiatives to support local investment in services and infrastructures. Certainly there are great contrasts between high income countries, with cities and regions that have access to well-developed capital markets and adequate instruments to finance urban infrastructures and, at the other end, low income countries, with cities and territories showing low revenues, low creditworthiness and difficulty attracting banks and investors. Emerging countries show different landscapes. International support will continue to be crucial for less economically developed countries, land-locked developing countries and Small Island Developing States. Further consideration is needed as to how to respond to the different regional contexts, and large, medium and small cities and their capacity to access resources.²⁴²

When adequately empowered and led by a visionary local leader, LRGs play an active role in mobilizing local actors and partners for the accomplishment of the SDGs.

In summary, reforms are needed to tackle urban and regional infrastructure gaps and improve capacity at the sub-national level to mobilize financing to respond to the SDGs. **Investment flows can be enhanced where national and local authorities clearly articulate strategies for sustainable urban and territorial development.** Applying an incremental approach to developing empowering and progressive local tax systems and a better share of national fiscal revenues (rationalize intergovernmental flows) is needed to boost resource mobilization efforts in the region. Asia-Pacific economies have boomed over the last decades, but many rapidly growing cities have failed to capture this and continue to accumulate infrastructure deficits (see Section 2.2). Enhanced local government resources — including land value capture and good urban and territorial assets management — that can act as levers to attract different sources of finances. However, fiscal strategies will not necessarily mobilize resources at sufficient scale.

There is a need to tackle inadequate borrowing frameworks and regulations to facilitate LRG loans and access to markets.

The sources and mechanisms of credit for LRGs vary considerably across countries. Stronger partnerships between central and local governments (with help from local and international finance) can help multiply sources of financing and develop innovative financial instruments to redirect funds to sustainable development projects: moving from more traditional municipal funds and banks to newer 'green' funds and investment tools that merge domestic and international funds.²⁴³ Some national governments are launching new initiatives — such as 'SDG Indonesia One Platform, — to mobilize funds from different sources (private sector, philanthropic and religious funds).²⁴⁴ At the international level, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank, and multilateral climate funds are increasingly a source of infrastructure financing in emerging economies.²⁴⁵

To scale investment, national and local governments require strategic, far-sighted reforms and coordinated action that recognizes those policy inter-relationships likely to have the greatest and most sustainable impact.²⁴⁶



Fishermen gathering net in Mannar, Sri Lanka (photo: Adam Jones, bit.ly/2p7TtK4).

Policy coherence and national planning systems

The governance reforms that are needed to develop policy coherence, improve coordination among different levels of government and support territorial development strategies implies a progressive evolution of management traditions within and between institutions. This is particularly sensitive with regards to the national planning systems that many countries look to as a way of localizing the SDGs.

Several countries have developed robust policies to foster national and local coordination; improve the capability of sub-national levels to lead development processes; develop training initiatives; and explore new financing mechanisms to promote vertical and horizontal cooperation. Other countries, on the other hand, even though they acknowledge the need to embed the SDGs into local processes, have not yet defined clear territorialization strategies nor followed a 'trickle-down' approach to galvanize the local effect of national policy. They often lack the necessary frameworks, technical assistance and incentives to support local buy-and territorial development approaches. Inevitably, those countries in the first group have recorded faster progress, although even they are experiencing difficulties and still require improvements in territorial approaches and sub-national coordination. There are still different planning approaches that co-exist, widening the mismatch between plans and budgets, the inconsistency among indicators and the availability of data — let alone the differences in political orientation. In order to accelerate action and scale up the impact of policy on sustainable development, a territorialized strategy will be necessary.

Fragmented reporting systems hinder ownership and institutionalization of the SDGs across different levels of government. Strengthening local reporting capacities and closing the data gap will need particular attention and support. National and local capacities to define and collect disaggregated and localized data should be part of territorialization strategies, to ensure that planning processes at all levels are founded on realistic targets and that effective implementation can be monitored.

One of the most important imperatives in the localization of the SDGs is to promote adequate integration of policies and strategies via improved and effective coordination mechanisms. In countries with complex geography, diversity and multi-layered government levels — many of them engaged in the decentralization process — **implementation of the SDGs needs to focus more on integrated planning mechanisms, better resource management and monitoring efforts between national and sub-national governments.** In decentralized countries, the principle of subsidiarity should be at the heart

of the relationship between different institutional tiers in order to address the structural problems of power-sharing imbalances, capacity gaps and financing shortages.

Addressing the main challenges of localization requires compliance with the 2030 Agenda's call for a holistic approach to development. This can result in enhanced policy coherence (SDG 17.14) and greater stakeholder involvement at all levels. Limited consultations and uncoordinated decision-making have traditionally pervaded the governance systems of many Asia-Pacific countries. LRGs must call for better consultation, and the power to set priorities and determine the plays in resource sharing if they want to truly localize implementation.

The Asia-Pacific region's inherent complexity, size and diversity have made progress on localization uneven throughout the region. The challenges that impact these countries are massive and diverse; the range and complexity of multi-layered levels of governance, plans, strategies and institutions vary so much across the region that it is impossible to define one standard roadmap where 'one size fits all'. However, new governance frameworks, adequate resource mobilization and more effective management to catalyse territorial development are all urgently needed to boost SDG implementation, mainstream local experiences, and further engage local and regional governments and communities in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, thus helping to reverse the current trajectory and accelerate the region's transition to a sustainable future. 🌀