POLICY BRIEF:

SDG LOCALIZATION IN THE ARAB STATES

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The SDGs at a glance and current global context

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 represents an urgent call for action. The Agenda consists of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are a set of 17 goals and 169 targets that were defined and developed through an unprecedented dialogue among UN Member States, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders.

The 2030 Agenda calls for effective collaboration between relevant actors, knowledge, resources, skills and partnerships at both national and local level, in order to implement all of the 17 SDGs. Realization of the 2030 Agenda requires a participatory and inclusive approach at all levels, irrespective of gender, age, disability status and geographical locations. Localizing the SDGs is a crucial process for translating the global targets of the SDGs into the realities on the ground, and for individuals and communities to participate in the achievement of the SDGs and take ownership of the goals as their own and have a voice for their priorities, as well as to hold governments accountable for their commitment to the 2030 Agenda. **Without effective Localization processes with inclusive civic participation, top-down development policies may conflict with local priorities and fail to accommodate the specific development context at the local level.**

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda and 'building forward better' from the COVID-19 pandemic depends on full ownership and active involvement of communities, particularly reflecting voices of most vulnerable groups, with local actors including the private sector, academia, civil societies, in close cooperation with national governments and national and international associations of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs), while taking into account the different contexts of cities of all sizes and regions.

Agile and responsive local policies, developed and implemented through multi-stakeholder partnerships, will not only facilitate inclusive participation, but also foster social contracts between authorities and citizens from the bottom up. Equally, it is the local level where the trust between citizens and the state could be lost if such inclusive processes are not met. While such processes enhance the horizontal coordination of the multi-stakeholders, it is essential for the local policies to be also linked to the regional and central policies in order to strengthen vertical coordination and promote accountability within the multi-level governance.

The current COVID-19 crisis has exposed unprecedented challenges that local governments and local actors urgently need to address together on the ground, and has provided further stimulus to analyze, evaluate and recommend new ways of working collectively towards sustainable development tailored to the specific local context, including in fragile and conflict-affected settings where local governance systems play a key role in resilience building. COVID-19 has governments at all levels operating in a context of radical uncertainty, and faced with difficult trade-offs given the multidimensional challenges it raises.

1.2 Rationale and Objectives

Although many countries in the Arab States have embarked on SDG Localization processes, the terminology and implications of SDG Localization are often not well-understood, with inclusive and participatory mechanisms often lacking. While a number of initiatives are labeled as 'Localization', a comprehensive re-think of sustainable development through an SDG Localization lens is largely absent. This implies that there is significant room to improve collective prioritization of the SDGs in the local context and, thereby, incorporation of the SDGs into local development planning and monitoring of progress.

The rationale behind developing this policy brief is to **stimulate and inform SDG Localization oriented programming and advisory services across thematic areas at UNDP Global Policy Network (GPN) and the country offices (COs) of the Regional Bureau for the Arab States (RBAS). Flowing from this rationale, the aim of the policy brief is to enhance the understanding – and ultimately the promotion – of SDG Localization as a framework** to boost inclusive participation, prioritize local needs in development planning and build disaggregated monitoring and reporting mechanisms. The better understanding of SDG Localization as a framework to facilitate a bottom-up approach in various thematic areas will complement existing programming and allow UNDP to deliver differently at sub-national level. Through programmes across thematic portfolios, SDG Localization holds a particular potential to address the unique needs of the local level and become a key enabler for advancing sustainable development and leaving no one behind.

This policy brief will also feed into **the global UNDP strategic plans for the corporate Local Governance Portfolio, as well as the NextGen Local Governance Offer**. The current development of the NextGen UNDP Local Governance Offer, rooted in novel collaborative approaches to Local Governance as an enabler for delivering SDGs at local level, provides significant synergies to be leveraged.

Simultaneously, the corporate process of developing a new UNDP Strategic Plan must equally be explored and leveraged to secure a better understanding and positioning of SDG Localization across all COs.

The first part of the brief dives into the concept and application of SDG Localization as a framework to facilitate inclusive bottom-up development processes. Followed by a regional analysis of development contexts in the Arab States region. Particular attention is paid to the areas of governance and institutions, inequalities, conflict, disasters, shocks and fragility, and urbanization, which are inherent to this regional context, especially at the local level. In addition, a short analysis of COVID-19 response is provided in this section to reflect the most recent context. In the second half, building on the regional analysis, the policy brief then highlights a set of bottlenecks and enablers for SDG Localization to be considered in related programming and policy support.

The policy brief showcases a series of concrete examples that can inform COs of the practices of peers in other Arab countries. The issues and good practices highlighted in the brief are derived from an extensive desk review and direct consultations with RBAS COs. A few models of institutional and coordination mechanisms to implement the SDGs are also illustrated to show how the implementation of the SDGs is coordinated among the multi-stakeholders in the region.

1.3 Methodological Considerations

In order to avoid pre-conditioning the outcomes of this exercise, the methodological framework for this study is inductive i.e. no definition of SDG Localization has been used *a priori* to exclude certain practical experiences and lessons on SDG Localization. The central premise of the study is that SDG Localization is not merely an approach to land the global sustainable development agenda at local level but is rather a concept that foments local participatory setting of priorities and inclusive decision-making that strengthens local ownership of the sustainable development agenda.

Policy and institutional mechanisms to accelerate SDG implementation at all levels, are in particular considered as an accelerator of durable SDG Localization, and the brief will therefore – based on the preliminary analysis – place this concept firmly in the broader web of SDG-related priorities and enablers.

2 CONCEPT AND CRITICALITY OF SDG LOCALIZATION IN ACHIEVING THE 2030 AGENDA

This section aims to introduce the concept of SDG Localization and why it is critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and will then analyze the core enablers for SDG Localization in the Arab States which will be applied in the section on trends and enablers.

Prior to the adoption of SDGs, Localization has been defined as *"the process of designing and implementing local development strategies to achieve the MDGs. This involves promoting local ownership, understanding local needs and trends, and allocating resources to achieve targeted outcomes at the local level."* During the design of the 2030 Agenda, however, many actors argued for greater active involvement of local governments in achieving the sustainable development agenda[1]. As one of the results of this paradigm shift aiming to bring a global agenda to the local level, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments was set up in 2013. The taskforce is co-led by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and is a channel for the joint advocacy work of major international networks of local governments to bring their voices to the forefront of the international stage.

Following the window around the design and adoption of the SDGs, this position has been reflected consistently and increasingly in the language of the SDGs during the early years of implementation. This has culminated with the annual publication, since 2017, of annual global progress reports by the Global Taskforce of LRGs on SDG Localization[2], which is launched during the High-Level Political Forum which reviews general progress on the SDGs. Recent years have also seen active involvement of local level to inform the national review process through submission of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Furthermore, increasing number of cities are now producing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR)[3] on SDG progress, primarily by the cities that are actively using the SDGs for their sustainable development journeys. The Arab region has yet to see its first VLR submission.

SDG Localization's centrality to achieving the 2030 Agenda rests on the fact that:

- The ambitious agenda – with 17 goals and 169 targets that are cross-cutting and interlinked, the government cannot tackle them alone. **Two thirds of the targets call for actions at the local level**.
- While the SDGs are global goals and measure the country level's achievement, **delivery of the SDGs take place at local spaces**, leveraging local knowledge, capacities and locally grown solutions.
- Taking the SDGs to the local level is key to ensure **people at the risk of being left behind are fully accounted**.
- While the SDGs measure the achievement at the country level, **the development contexts often differ significantly within the country**. It is hence important to take into account varying realities among territories, ages and gender.

1 Going Local to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals Stories from Eight Countries http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/poverty-reduction/poverty-website/going-local-to-achieve-the-mdgs---english/UNDP_SNV_2009%20going%20local.pdf
2 https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/our-fourth-towards-localization-sdgs-report-calls-strengthening-local-and-regional
3 https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews

Evolving definitions of SDG localization:

Initially, when key partners UNDP, UN-HABITAT and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments published the *Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs* in 2016, the paper defined localization as follows: **"Localizing is the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators to measure and monitor progress"**

Since then, SDG Localization has proved to be an evolving concept, which has more recently been captured as follows by UCLG, the United Cities and Local Governments which comprises +300,000 members:

"Localizing [the SDGS] is not the parachuting of global goals into local contexts. It means implementing global agendas in cities and territories to achieve local and global goals. It is a process of harnessing local opportunities, priorities and ideas" (https://www.learning.uclg.org/localizing-sdgs)

The multi-partner initiative Local2030, under the auspices of the UN Deputy SG and co-led by UNDP and UN-Habitat with the Global Taskforce of LRGs, aligns with this definition on the local2030.org website.

Considering the varying realities among different territories, ages and gender is a crucial element in SDG Localization processes, and it helps identify those who are left behind in the SDG achievement at the country level. For example, in Egypt, while 16% of the youth (aged 18-29 years) are illiterate at the country level, once the data is disaggregated, it becomes evident that female youth living in rural areas record a much higher illiteracy rate of 24%.[4] In Sudan, at the country level, 68% of households have access to safe water, yet if disaggregated, the majority of those who have access to such water reside in Khartoum and the Northern States, and only a third of households have access to safe water in the peripherals.[5]

It is worth noting that targets of at least 11 of the 17 SDGs call for more integrated action at the local level. These targets also directly relate to the responsibilities of local and regional governments, specifically their ability to promote integrated, inclusive and sustainable territorial development[6], by leveraging local knowledge and capacities and producing locally grown solutions. Strong institutions are cited explicitly as key enablers of 10 SDGs, which is underpinned in particular by the sub-national level which is on the frontlines of delivering the majority of essential services that advance several SDGs.

In addition, the centrality of Localization and local governance systems to any genuinely sustainable development agenda has recently become increasingly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its demand for rapid response to both health and socio-economic impacts has placed local governance actors – particularly in cities – on the absolute frontline of both impact and solutions to rethink, recover and build back better, in most cases through multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships.[7] With that in mind, the next sections will examine the state of play of SDG Localization in the Arab States, including the potential bottlenecks and enablers (section 4) to achieve sustainable development. Interviews with 11 UNDP RBAS COs have been conducted to inform the analysis.

4 Youth in Egypt, UNICEF https://www.unicef.org/egypt/media/5351/file/Youth%20(English).pdf
5 Reliefweb, https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/world-water-day-68-percent-sudan-s-population-access-basic-improved-drinking-water-enar
6 More details on https://www.local2030.org/
7 https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-framework-immediate-socio-economic-response-covid-19

3 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS FOR SDG LOCALIZATION IN THE ARAB STATES

During COVID-19, the critical importance of local and multi-level governance systems in responding to citizens' needs and fostering sustainable development has become more evident than ever. Whilst some progress has been made over the past years in the Arab Region, the persistence of different forms of inequalities, weak state systems, protracted conflicts and situations of forced displacement, as well as growing challenges linked to climate and natural hazards, continue to hinder progress on delivering the SDGs at local level.

These underlying challenges are manifested differently in different local contexts, affecting local development gains and negatively impacting progress on SDG Localization. Not least, growing citizens expectations and

Figure 1. 2019 Arab Region SDG Index

Rank	Country	Score	Rank	Country	Score
1	Algeria	66.69	10	Bahrain	59.82
2	United Arab Emirates	66.17	11	Saudi Arabia	59.72
3	Morocco	65.77	12	Iraq	55.49
4	Tunisia	6533	13	Libya	53.90
5	Jordan	65.28	14	Sudan	52.11
6	Lebanon	63.09	15	Syrian Arab Republic	51.86
7	Egypt	61.59	16	Djibouti	51.04
8	Kuwait	61.08	17	Yemen	46.89
9	Qatar	60.57	18	Somalia	43.41

Source: 2019 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report

demands for more inclusive governments across the region speak to the imperative of promoting the role of responsive and accountable local governance systems in driving SDG-based development gains for their respective local communities.

This section provides an overview of some of the most pressing challenges that the countries across the Arab region are facing in terms of advancing the SDGs at local level, calling for the need to promote participatory approaches, inclusive decision-making, and strengthen the local ownership of the 2030 Agenda. The overview, and its underlying data sets, reflects a mix of national and local realities that underpin the differing contextual realities of countries across the region.

Overall, the 2019 Arab Region SDG Index, which describes the Arab States countries' progress towards achieving the SDGs, paints a diverse picture of development outcomes across the Arab States. As a whole, the region scores low on SDG achievement with an average score of 58 out of 100 (Figure 1). The Arab Region SDG Index dashboard (Figure 2) further shows that countries suffering from conflict and poverty remain the furthest away from achieving the SDGs[8].

3.1 Human Development, Governance and Institutions

The Arab Human Development Report Research Paper *"Leaving No One Behind: Towards Inclusive Citizenship in Arab Countries"* (2019) shows that the average annual human development advances in the majority of the Arab countries, with the exception of Bahrain and Iraq, have been either reversed or slowed since 2010 (Figure 3).

Despite diversity in government structures and socio-economic realities across the region, the Arab States generally suffer from weak state systems and fragility. This is compounded by detrimental characteristics such as excessive centralization, concentration of economic and political power with elite groups, high levels of inequality, and limitations of economic opportunities based on personal networks rather than competition. Furthermore, the Arab economies are to a large degree shaped by finite natural resources such as oil and external revenue from aid and remittances. In conflict-affected countries such as Syria, Libya and Yemen, among others, the governance situation is particularly dire with fragmentation, informality and power vacuums filled by non-state actors, often with the support of other regional or global actors.

In terms of addressing SDG Localization, it is an additional problem that weak state capacity, and in some cases lack of extension of State authority and financial resources to the full territory of the country, further limit statistical capacities. Data availability and accessibility on key indicators is a pressing need to be able to set baselines and drive progress through measuring the state of play on implementing and localizing the SDGs. This is a key concern as production of robust data is a fundamental requirement for holding governments accountable and addressing disparities[9].

Lack of political stability is another factor which, according to the existing evidence[10], appears to have negative impact on performance of indicators for sustainable human development, including social indicators (higher life expectancy, better performance by the educational system, etc.), environmental and climate indicators, as well as economic indicators.

8 2019 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2019/2019_arab_region_index_and_dashboards.pdf

9 https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-research-paper.html

10 2019 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report

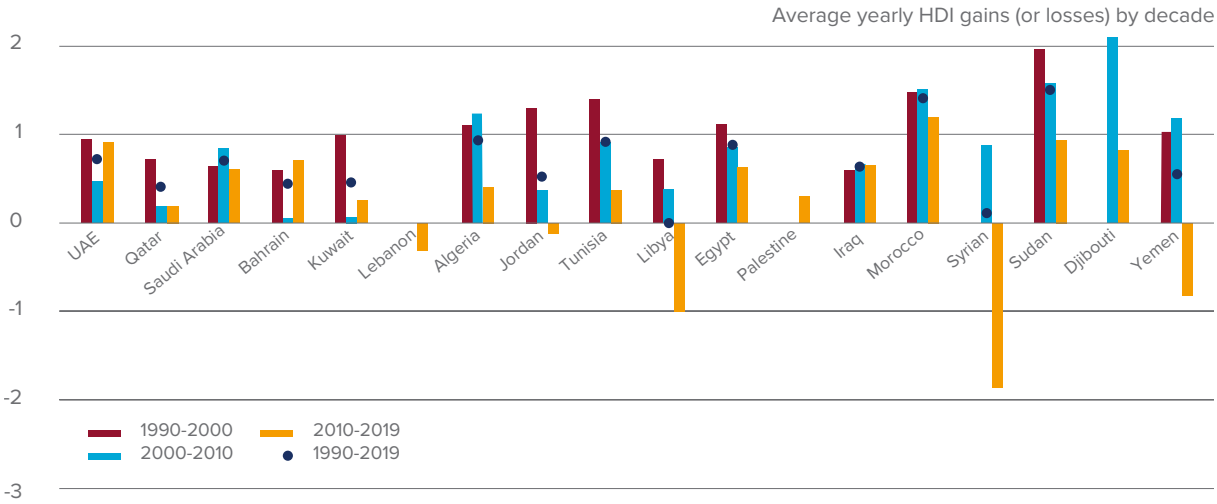
Figure 2: SDG Dashboard for the Arab Region

	NO POVERTY	ZERO HUNGER	GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	QUALITY EDUCATION	GENDER EQUALITY	CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	REDUCED INEQUALITIES	SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	CLIMATE ACTION	LIFE BELOW WATER	LIFE ON LAND	PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Algeria	●↗	●↗	●↗	●↑	●→	●↗	●↗	●→	●↗	●●	●↓	●●	●↗	●↓	●→	●→	●↗
Bahrain	●●	●→	●↗	●↑	●→	●↗	●↑	●↑	●↗	●●	●↓	●●	●↗	●→	●↓	●→	●●
Egypt, Arab Rep.	●↓	●↗	●↗	●↑	●→	●↑	●↗	●↗	●→	●●	●↗	●●	●↗	●→	●→	●↗	●↓
Iran, Islamic Rep.	●↗	●↗	●↗	●●	●↗	●→	●↗	●↗	●↑	●●	●→	●●	●→	●↗	●↓	●→	●↑
Iraq	●↓	●↗	●↗	●●	●→	●↑	●↗	●↗	●→	●●	●→	●●	●↗	●→	●↓	●→	●→
Jordan	●↗	●→	●↗	●→	●→	●↑	●↑	●→	●↑	●●	●→	●●	●↗	●→	●→	●↗	●→
Kuwait	●●	●→	●↗	●→	●→	●↗	●↑	●↗	●↗	●●	●→	●●	●→	●→	●→	●→	●↑
Lebanon	●↑	●→	●↗	●●	●→	●↗	●↑	●→	●↗	●●	●↓	●●	●↗	●→	●→	●→	●↗
Libya	●●	●↓	●→	●●	●→	●↑	●↓	●→	●→	●●	●↓	●●	●↗	●↓	●↗	●→	●↓
Morocco	●↗	●↗	●↗	●→	●→	●↑	●↗	●→	●↗	●●	●→	●●	●↑	●→	●→	●↗	●→
Qatar	●●	●↗	●↗	●↑	●→	●↗	●↗	●↑	●↗	●●	●→	●●	●↗	●→	●↓	●↗	●●
Saudi Arabia	●●	●↗	●↗	●↑	●→	●↗	●↑	●↗	●↗	●●	●↗	●●	●↗	●→	●→	●↗	●↗
Syrian Arab Republic	●●	●→	●↗	●●	●→	●↗	●→	●→	●→	●●	●↓	●●	●↑	●→	●→	●→	●↗
Tunisia	●↗	●→	●↗	●↑	●↓	●↑	●↗	●→	●↗	●●	●→	●●	●↗	●↗	●→	●↗	●↗
Arab Emirates	●↑	●→	●↑	●↑	●↗	●↗	●↗	●↗	●↑	●●	●↗	●●	●↗	●↗	●●	●↗	●↑
Yemen, Rep.	●●	●→	●→	●●	●→	●↗	●↓	●→	●→	●●	●→	●●	●↑	●→	●↓	●→	●↓

● SDG achievement ● Challenges remain ● Significant challenges remain ● Major challenges remain ● Data not available
↑ On track ↗ Moderately Increasing → Stagnating ↓ Decreasing

Source: Sustainable Development Report 2021

Figure 3: Average Annual Human Development Advances, by decade



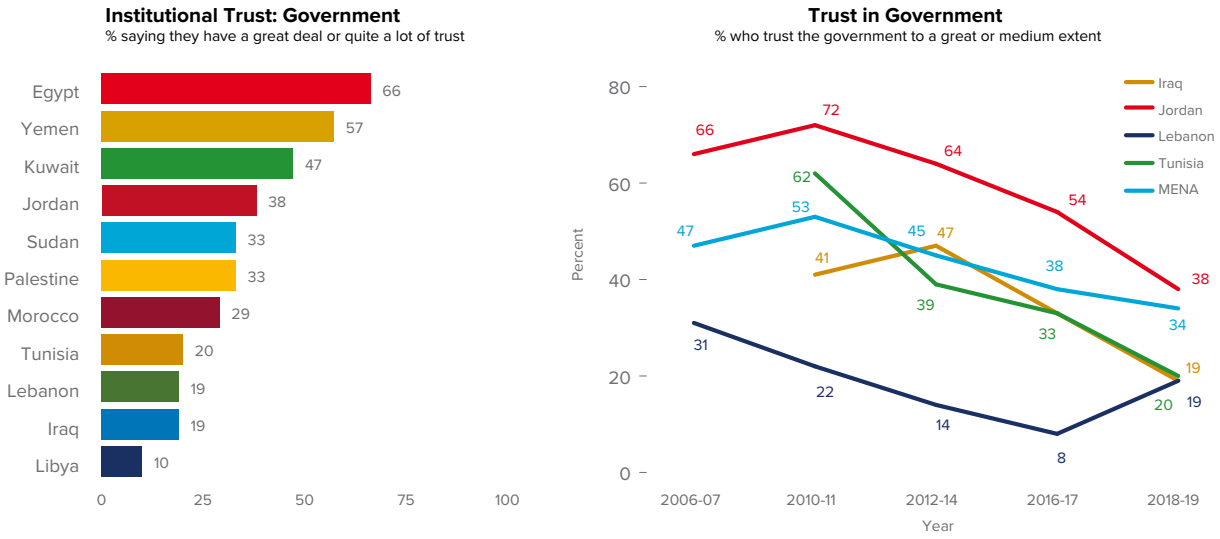
Source: HDRO.

Aggregating the plethora of issues related to governance and state-society relations in the region, the 2019 Arab Human Development Report demonstrates there is an absence of meaningful social contracts between governments and populations across the region. This has been aggravated by governments that have failed to respond effectively to the grievances and demands from the Arab uprisings over the last decade. As figure 4 illustrates, this has resulted in a general breakdown in legitimacy and trust in the Arab government systems. By 2018, trust had fallen across the region to just 34% on average, from a high of 53% during the Arab Spring in 2011. This fault line is especially pronounced among young people[11] and is compounded by an even lower trust in parliaments across the region[12].

Some countries in the Arab region, such as Sudan, are going through critical transitions towards social and political change. While this change is necessary and driven by popular demand, it also has a stalling influence on the negotiation of national and sub-national roles while transitions and their negotiated political settlements tend to focus on the political system, elections, changes to central government and its executive functions. This impairs the focus on crucial decentralization efforts which would otherwise have the potential to strengthen institutional and policy frameworks for SDG implementation at local level, ultimately raising central questions such as how to reconfigure state relations with local communities in the context of severe political and economic crises.

Across the region, it is important to note that over the past decade young people have increasingly played a vital role in demanding change and holding governments accountable for political commitments. In Sudan, for example, the Sudanese Resistance Committees, a grass-roots networks of residents – mostly youth – played a key role in demanding change in the build-up to the 2019 revolution that led to the current transitional government. At the same time, crises – including the impact of COVID-19 – are posing serious challenges for governments' abilities to invest in human capital, especially in ways

Figure 4: Trust in Government is falling



Source: Arab Barometer V.

11 Arab Barometer V (2020): https://www.arabbarometer.org/surveys/arab-barometer-wave-v/ (2018-2019)
12 Ibid.

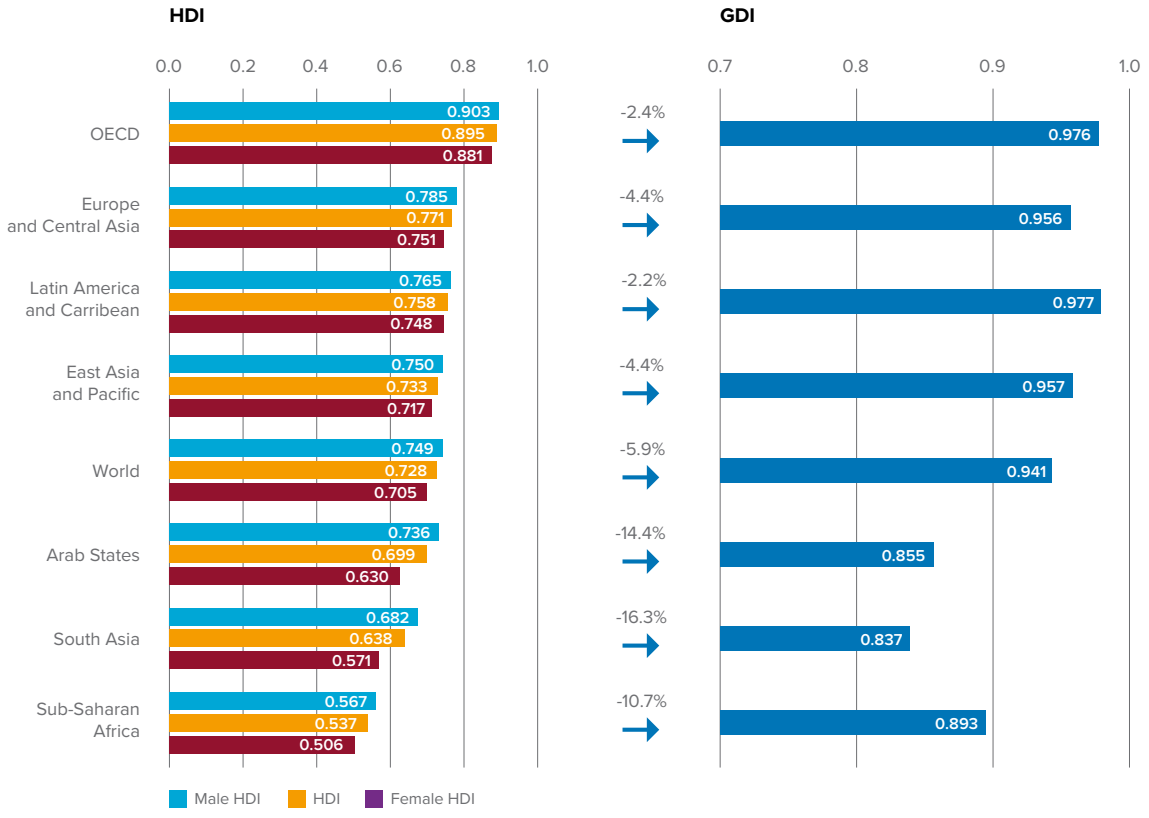
that provide opportunities for large generations of young persons, creating a fraught linkage between governance systems and expectations of human development progress. Given the growing share of young people in the demographics of the region, their expectations and grievances are essential to ensure that the 2030 Agenda is relevant at local level and from the bottom-up.[13]

3.2 Inequalities

Different forms of inequalities remain a major challenge for all countries in the region. Identifying and addressing discrimination based on different forms of groups or identities is crucial to respond to the rallying cry of the 2030 Agenda to Leave No One Behind (LNOB). In the Arab States, minorities, women and the poorest population groups among others face significant discrimination by law and in access to public services. Furthermore, people with disabilities are often unintentionally discriminated against by policies that fail to take their needs into account.[14]

However, the spatial component of regional disparities and exclusion – in some cases aligned to geographic ethnic fault lines – is equally central to the LNOB agenda that cuts across the SDGs. A common factor in the dissatisfaction and grievances with governance systems in the Arab States has been the marginalization of

Figure 5: Ratio of Female HDI to Male HDI and Gender Development Index (i.e. percentage gap between female and male HDI), by region



Source: UNDP Human Development Report Office

13 2019 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2019/2019_arab_region_index_and_dashboards.pdf

14 https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/huma_development/arab-human-development-report-research-paper.html

the "peripheries". This story of widening urban-rural divides, uneven regional development and political and economic exclusion of entire regions has in some cases torn at the social and territorial cohesion of countries in the region, thereby contributing to fragility. These inequalities are intimately linked to the challenges of achieving sustainable development objectives across localities in the Arab region. It is hence important to apply the SDG Localization framework to account for varying realities of the ground and define sustainable development policies in their contexts with active civic participation.

Several of these issues are tied to lack of *data* to track, with sound statistical foundation, inequalities between minority and majority populations and other forms of discrimination and marginalization. This, in turn, underscores the importance of developing an evidence base rooted in disaggregated data to advice policy development in countries and territories across the Arab region.

Whilst there has been some progress in advancing women's rights in the Arab States, low participation in civic, political and household decision-making continue to limit women's opportunity to address gender disparities.[15] As visualized in Figure 5, the Arab region represents the largest gender gap compared to all other regions[16], with a Gender Development Index value of 0.855 (where 1 indicates gender parity). This means that the gender gap between men and women in the Arab States region is 14.4%. The income gap is even more severe, with women's per capita income on average 78.9% lower than that of men in the Arab States region[17]. There are, however, examples of LG systems playing a critical role in addressing these challenges and promote inclusive participatory approaches and participation in decision-making. In Somaliland, for example, the SDG 16+ coalition of civil society organizations includes a number of youth and women's organizations that have coordinated action to identify priorities, increase awareness among public and decision makers, and accelerate implementation of SDG16 in all regions of Somaliland[18].

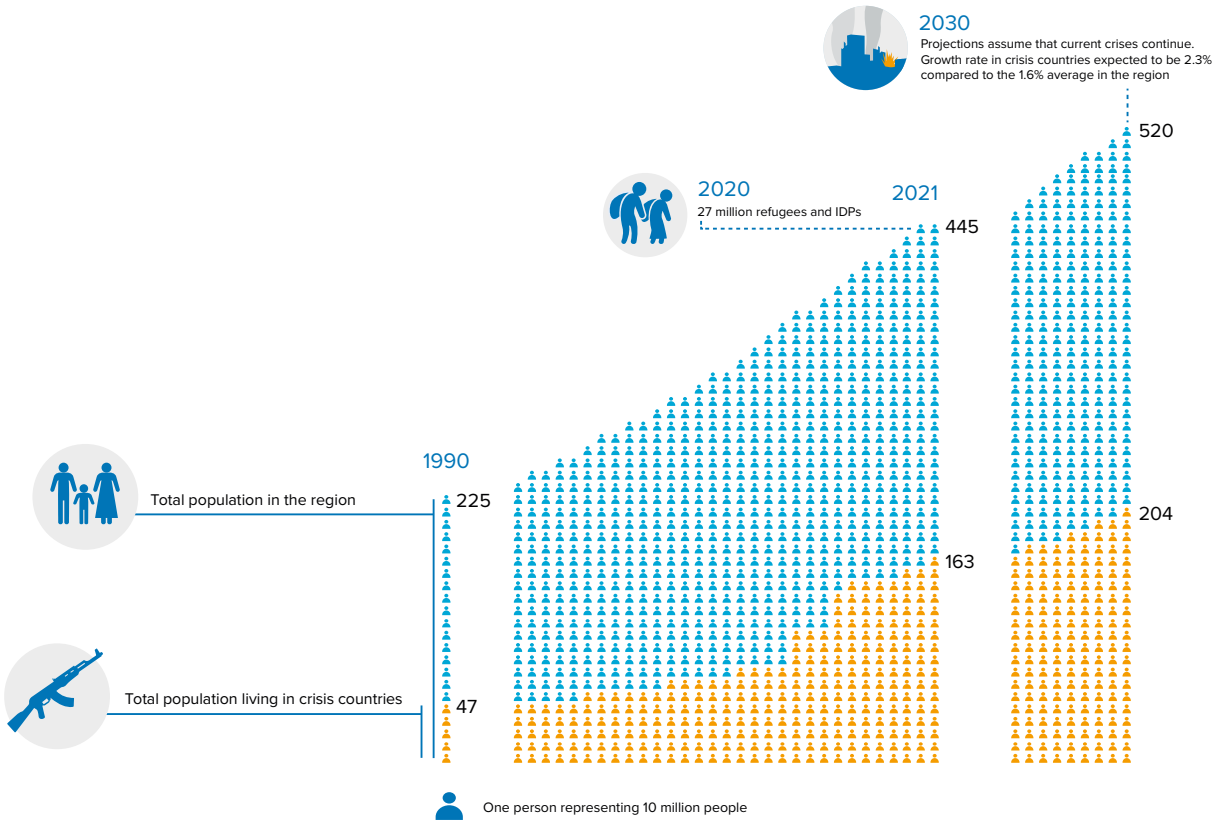
3.3 Conflict, shocks and fragility

Multiple challenges such as discrimination, inequality and poor governance tend to overlap in areas affected by conflict and large numbers of displaced populations – recent analysis points to data that only 18% of fragile states are 'on track' to achieve the SDGs[19].

In the regional context, the Arab Human Development Report Research Paper (2019) stresses that the human development fault lines have grown more complex since the Arab uprisings in 2011. It is estimated that if ongoing conflicts are not resolved and demographic projections do not deviate from current trends, 40 percent of people in Arab countries will live in crisis and conflict conditions by 2030[20]. To illustrate the devastating repercussions of this scenario on development indicators, it can be mentioned that during the conflict in Syria, gross primary school enrolment rates have declined by 50% while in Yemen, the percentage of working poor has more than doubled since the start of the conflict.[21] Figure 6 provides a projection of future number of people living in crisis.

15 2019. Gender Justice & Equality before the law https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/gender-justice---equality-before-the-law.html
16 South Asia, which has a lower GDI score, is considered a sub-region.
17 2019. Gender Justice & Equality before the law https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/gender-justice---equality-before-the-law.html
18 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24270Somaliland_SDG16_Progress_Report.pdf and https://www.saferworld.org.uk/multimedia/sdg16-in-somaliland
19 "SDG Progress: Fragility, Crisis and Leaving No One Behind", ODI https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12427.pdf
20 Arab Human Development Report 2019, p.3
21 http://www.arab-hdr.org/UNDP_Citizenship_and_SDGs_report_web.pdf

Figure 6: Projection of future number of people living in crisis



Source: UNDP, Arab Human Development Report, Leaving No One Behind

Compounded by the unprecedented forced displacement, fragility and conflict will continue to have a direct negative impact on SDG achievement. Such negatively affected development outcomes include multidimensional poverty, decent work, urbanization, health, social protection, education, water, and sanitization among others, and while displacement and conflict may be caused by the regional or country level, it is mostly the local level that feels the pinch. In the Arab States, both conflict-affected territories and those hosting large groups of forcibly displaced persons are often faced with these struggles, e.g. the dynamics and enormous challenges for host communities in countries bordering Syria over the past decade demonstrate the centrality of this issue as a persistent challenge to implementing the SDGs at local level. Additionally, gathering data and assessing how to restore functionality of LRGs and wider local governance systems in conflict-affected areas will be important for advancing the 2030 Agenda at local level.[22]

In addition to the fragility that arises from political transitions, crises and outright conflict, there is another element of fragility tied to climate and natural hazards which are often linked in a disaster/shocks-conflict nexus, where disaster or shocks and conflict are mutually reinforcing. This mutual reinforcement was observed in the aggravated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the already crisis-affected countries in the region. In the case of Arab States, many countries are facing challenges with regards to environmental degradation, poor management of natural resources, climate-related hazards, water scarcity and high reliance on imports of food and other

22 UCLG, "Towards the localization of the SDGs, 2019"

nutrition, and weak disaster preparedness. These challenges and risks are manifested differently depending on the locality, and are furthermore bound to undermine efforts to forge and sustain peace and achieve sustainable peace and development, as well as spin-off effects, such as an increase in human displacement.[23,24]

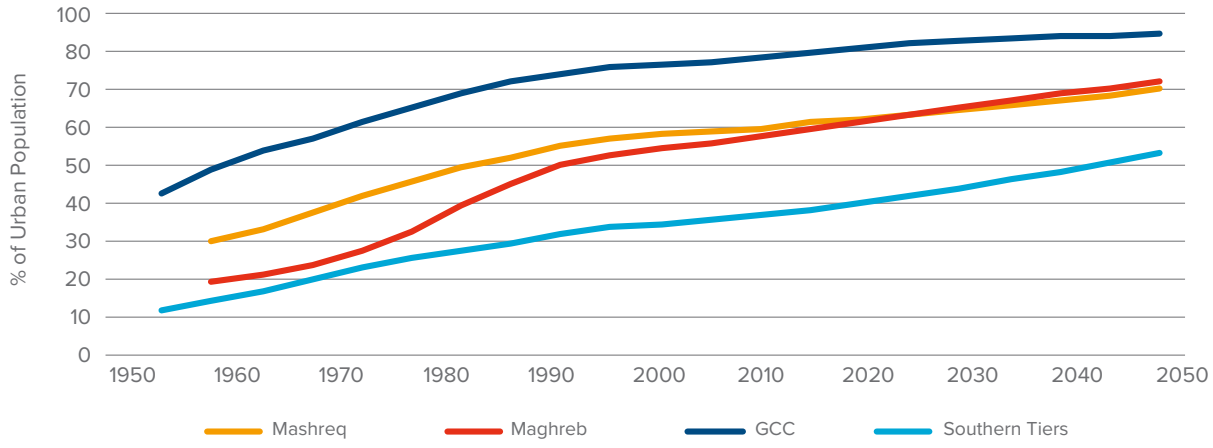
3.4 Urbanization

Projections indicate that more than two-thirds of the population in the Arab States will reside in cities by 2050 (see Figure 7). In 1950, just two cities of the region had a million people, whereas by 2025 this is expected to reach 31[25]. At a time of proliferation of new large and mega-cities, it is particularly useful to examine the role of the urban space in shaping the region as a whole and influencing its prospects of delivering the SDGs at local level.

While Arab cities are vibrant centers of economic, cultural and social activity, the region is seeing increasing and unplanned urbanization, largely due to poverty, climate change, socio-economic marginalization of agricultural communities, and conflict. This places immense pressure on cities and human settlements as well as scarce natural resources. This, in short, exacerbates exclusion and vulnerability. While cities have historically hosted diverse groups of internal and international migrants as well as displaced people, inequalities in and among cities and settlements are pervasive. Disparities persist in access to quality land and housing, services and infrastructure, as well as public spaces and a clean environment. To accelerate progress on SDG 11, Arab countries must meet the challenges of urbanization with people-centered planning and integrated spatial policies. Better governance in cities and settlements is an imperative that must go in parallel with the sustainable management of natural resources, including land.

With that in mind, cities play a key role not only for SDG 11, but rather as central actors that will make or break a successful SDG implementation – at both national and local level. An ongoing

Figure 7: Proportion of urban population in the Arab States



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018). World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, custom data.

23 UNDP 2018. Climate Change Adaptation in the Arab States – UNDP
24 2019 Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report
25 The State of Arab Cities 2020 (UNDP, UN-HABITAT, DEARASAT), https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Sustainable_development/the-state-of-arab-cities-2020.html

example of this is the role of urbanization in the COVID-19 impact, response and recovery, e.g. high rates of infection in informal settlements coinciding with lack of sufficient service provision in these areas (i.e. safe drinking water and sanitation, access to clean energy, access to health services, poor nutrition, etc.).

3.5 COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a lasting impact on global economic, political and social stability. Strict containment measures as a result of the pandemic are further exacerbating existing inequalities, particularly for the most vulnerable populations, putting health services under pressure and hampering economic growth. The pandemic is estimated to have a particularly devastating impact on youth and women in the Arab States who were already facing structural inequalities. According to ESCWA, Arab youth unemployment is the fastest growing, increasing from 19.5 to 23% between 2012 and 2020, and the highest worldwide. Lack of access to employment and closure of schools is likely to lead to a learning crisis for children, particularly affecting those who are excluded digitally, and possibly resulting in human development loss and increase in multidimensional poverty. 85.1% of young working-age Arabs work in the informal sector and have limited or no access to social and health insurance or credit facilities. For Arab women, it is twice as high as for men.[26,27]

Furthermore, the regional and local impact of the COVID-19 crisis is heterogeneous within the Arab States, with a strong territorial dimension putting pressure on local and regional governments. This is directly impacting SDG achievements and underscores the role of LRGs as central actors in ´building forward better´ and developing local solutions. Because of the pandemic, the challenges facing many of the cities in the Arab region have become even more acute. This is particularly impacting the most vulnerable populations, including people living in areas of high density as well as informal settlements where there is a lack of services and scarcity of resources. Furthermore, already existing spatial uneven development, both between and within cities as well as between rural and urban areas, run the risk of being exacerbated due to the inequality in capacity and resources of LRGs. Despite the challenges, the development of recovery plans represents an opportunity for LRGs to contribute to localizing the SDGs, reducing inequalities between geographical areas as well as addressing inequalities in income, health, housing, education and access to services.[28]

Due to decrease in the demand for oil, the oil-rich countries in the region face constraints on their ability to provide adequate stimulus and recovery packages. For the middle-oncome countries, decline in revenues from remittances, trade, tourism and other economic activities affect their capacity to deliver services and offer stimulus packages. For war and conflict affected countries, COVID-19 has added another layer to already existing crisis, complicating humanitarian actions as well as efforts to forge peace. 55.7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance across the region, including 26 million forcibly displaced persons. In such contexts, the pandemic must be understood and responded to within the broader humanitarian-development nexus.[29]

With this in mind, and informed by interviews with several UNDP RBAS COs, the following section will examine the potential bottlenecks and enablers for SDG Localization in the Arab States.

26 https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/uploads/impact-covid-19-young-people-arab-region-english.pdf
27 UN 2020. Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region An Opportunity to Build Back Better https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_arab_states_english_version_july_2020.pdf
28 UN, “Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19”
29 UN 2020. Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region An Opportunity to Build Back Better https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_and_arab_states_english_version_july_2020.pdf

4 CHALLENGES AND ENABLERS OF LOCALIZING THE SDGS IN THE ARAB STATES

This section sheds lights to challenges to SDG Localization efforts in the Arab States in a difficult operating environment exacerbated by both COVID-19 impact and current limits to donor support. It will then flow into a critical reflection on a set of enablers, with sensitivity to the different contexts across countries. Where available, good practices of tangible SDG Localization efforts, including cases with innovative approaches, will be showcased.

SDG Localization initiatives are only as effective as the national and local stakeholders' ability to align the SDGs with local priorities and to participatory planning allows. When comparing with similar overviews and analysis on the topic in other regions[30], it is evident that the evolving development context and crisis trajectory of the Arab States over the past 5-10 years has had tangible impacts on the sustainable development outcomes. Humanitarian, conflict prevention and political transition concerns have increasingly assumed center stage in the Arab region and provided a difficult environment for SDG Localization efforts.

The following outline of Localization trends and efforts in the region should be regarded through that prism, as also outlined in the previously described contextual factors. The approach of this section to distilling key trends, including illustrative country examples, has consisted of two key methodological elements:

- Light desk review of existing data, programmatic evidence, country reporting[31] and lessons learned that can be captured and harnessed from internal and external reports across all regions and including a clear focus on crisis countries;
- In parallel, targeted semi-structured interviews and/or focus group discussions were conducted with key UNDP staff in COs across the region to assess the state of play and most cutting-edge country-level experiences and lessons on what works and what does not. 11 UNDP COs reverted and offered their input which was distilled in a format of semi-structured one hour conversations.

4.1 Challenges to SDG Localization in the Arab States

According to the evidence sourced from the desk review and consultations with the RBAS COs, albeit non-exhaustive, the following were seen as the potential bottlenecks to SDG Localization in the Arab States:

1. ***Conceptual clarity on what SDG Localization means and, consequently, how it can be instrumentalized and adapted to do business differently is still lacking in the majority of countries.***

The consultations and analysis conducted for this policy brief indicate that there are

30 For example, *"SDG Localization in ASEAN: Experiences in Shaping Policy and Implementation Pathways. 2019"* https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/sdg-localization-in-asean.html

31 e.g. VNRs, GOLD reports and annual UCLG-led Localizing the SDGs reports for HLPF

significant disparities across the region in terms of understanding the definitions, background and potential building blocks, approaches and expected outcomes of SDG Localization. In particular, **SDG Localization is in many cases conflated with SDG implementation at-large and used inter-changeably**. This is the case for both UNDP COs and their counterparts. This leads to an oftentimes false notion that SDG Localization is taking place in any scenario where there are elements of SDG implementation, data and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), or similar are in place. This is partly due to the fact that there is not yet a complete clarity on SDG Localization at the global level, and "Localization of the SDGs" is often seen as adaptation of the 2030 Agenda in the national context, where the alignment process of the national development plans with the SDGs becomes the objective. This trend can be seen in the VNRs (e.g. Palestine[32]) where the section focusing on "SDG Localization" refers to the linkages between the national development plans with the SDGs without sufficient reference to the local level involvement, let alone SDG-aligned local development policies.

This conceptual conflation of SDG implementation at-large with SDG Localization may explain why **a significant portion of the examples on SDG policy and programming sourced from this consultation process, although presented as examples of SDG Localization, did not necessarily have a local level component.** Although adaptation of the global goals through aligning with national policies and strategies and prioritizing certain areas is part of the SDG Localization processes, the essential component of SDG Localization should include a bottom-up, inclusive and participatory citizen involvement in decision making, co-creating solutions and monitoring progress towards sustainable development of the given territory.

2. Localization is perceived as a luxury problem with limited relevance to the most fragile settings

The perceived importance of SDG Localization and even the SDGs at-large, both at national and local levels, is particularly limited among government counterparts in conflict-affected settings, especially where humanitarian needs and peace settlements are at the top of the agenda and there is political fragmentation with severe lack of State legitimacy. Based on both, desk review and CO consultations, it is evident that in these contexts, as in Yemen and Libya, for example, very low importance is generally assigned to the Localization agenda[33].

Among others, and in addition to the lack of political and administrative prioritization of Localization in conflict-affected settings, these countries often suffer from a lack of the necessary technical and financial capacity and coordination mechanisms in the public sector, an absence of quality data to set baselines and monitor progress, as well as aggravated gender equality issues and considerable challenges reaching vulnerable groups, socio-economic vulnerability to external shocks as evidenced by recent COVID-19 impact, fragmentation among civil society groups, and unpredictable funding environment[34].

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this does not mean that good cases from fragile settings are absent. As will be highlighted above, important efforts have been done in Iraq and Palestine for example. It does however underscore some of the challenges facing UNDP COs and development partners operating in the most fragile settings, and the highly uneven efforts towards this end, both across and within the countries in the region.

32 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20024VNR2018PalestineNEWYORK.pdf (p.13 "National ownership, localisation and integration of the SDGs")
33 Based on CO consultations (November 2020).
34 UNDP: SDGs in Crisis – Lessons Learned in Fragile Settings https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/crisis-prevention-and-recovery/sdgs-in-crisis---lessons-learned-in-fragile-settings.html

3. *The level, quality and coherence of programming and partnerships rooted in SDG Localization is uneven across countries in the region.*

While UNDP and partners have a range of tools on SDG Localization, there is no coherent baseline or clear standards for UNDP programming on SDG Localization that UNDP COs, including those in the Arab States, are committed to. This leads to a gap in terms of solid evidence and clear standards on *impact* of SDG Localization efforts at the regional and global level.

In addition, there are relatively few full-fledged, comprehensive Localization initiatives – most of the countries in the region remain in introductory phases and, unless results from traditional local governance and local development projects are factored in, more work has been carried out by UNDP on awareness-raising and in some cases support to data collection and monitoring, than on directly impact-oriented implementation.

Countries with strong dedicated SDG programming, including data and monitoring or other similar initiatives, such as Iraq and Tunisia, are significantly more likely to have coherent expectations and activities that drive both SDG Integration and Localization outputs, although the *localized* approach is rarely front and center in country-level SDG programming. By the same token, countries with strong Local Governance (sometimes including Local Development) and/or Decentralization programming could have solid vehicles for delivering elements of Localization but are in many cases likely to add an *'SDG Localization label'* on activities and outputs they were likely to implement in any case, rather than rethink the programmatic framework with a view to the positive impact SDG Localization principles and recommendations can entail. Such a rethink would also require advocacy with existing LRG partners and new partnership platforms with a stronger multi-stakeholder orientation that includes all the sectors involved in delivering the SDGs at local level – from local authorities, the private sector to civil society.

There are, however, examples of UNDP Local Development Planning, that increasingly adapts and integrates SDG components in institutional mechanisms and monitoring of SDG progress. This includes programming in Tunisia, Egypt, Djibouti and Iraq[35]. It will be important to harness these experiences and scale up the most effective options for Localization-flavored programming and partnerships – in particular with local and regional governments – across the region.

4.2 Enablers of SDG Localization in the Arab States

Despite the potential bottlenecks illustrated above, there are important components of SDG Localization embedded under a wealth of other, sometimes mutually reinforcing, initiatives. These pieces of the puzzle have proved useful in order to illustrate potential enablers across the region. They are consolidated here in six key enablers.

1. *Strengthening Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms that link ministries, different levels of governments and non-state actors can be a game changer for increased participation and connecting local and national development efforts.*

It is clear from the available literature, as well as country consultations conducted for this policy brief, that progress towards the local delivery of the SDGs and their targets is highly uneven –even *within* countries. This lack of coordinated progress can in part be traced to the lack of solid institutional coordination mechanisms. The engagement of SDG implementation tends to be limited to national level and focus more on the priorities of the central government rather than

35 Based on CO consultations (November 2020).

the multitude of stakeholders involved in the wider systemic governance of SDG Localization.

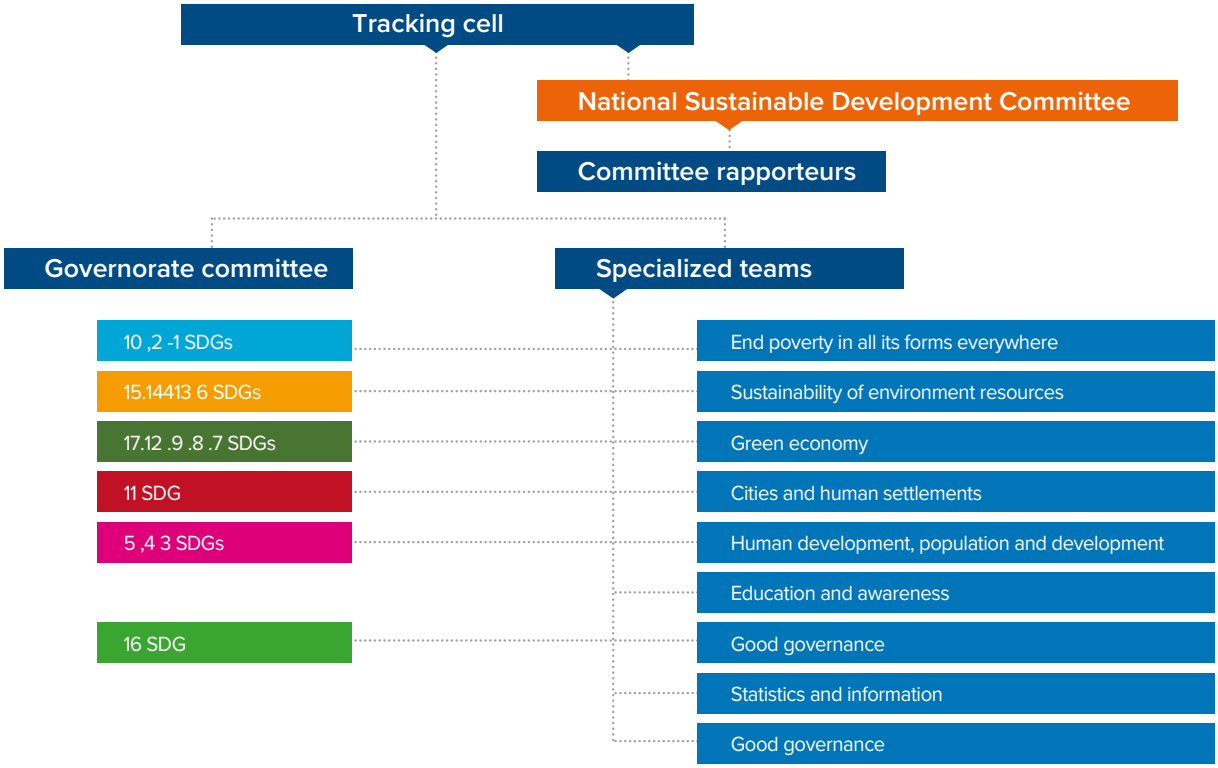
Active involvement of local and regional governments, and other local governance actors in the national coordination mechanisms promotes delivery of the SDGs at the local level by connecting the local priorities, while enhancing accountability and transparency through the bottom-up monitoring and reporting provided by the local stakeholders. Such institutional and coordination mechanisms that span multiple vertical levels of governance from national to local with horizontal networks of the multi-stakeholders offers a great opportunity for connecting efforts between the national and local levels, enhancing accountability and data collection, and building SDG ownership of the communities and individuals.

The below illustration[36] provides a few good practices of institutional and coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation in the Arab States.

1.1 Examples of Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms to implement the SDGs

Headed by the Ministry of Planning, the National Sustainable Development Committee serves as the monitoring body of the SDG implementation in Iraq[37]. The Committee comprises members of ministries, representatives of civil society organizations, the private sector and academia. Its mandate includes facilitation of SDG implementation at both national and local levels. The Specialized teams report on achievement of the specific SDGs, and the Governorate committee monitors SDG progress at the

Figure 8. Iraq's institutional and coordination mechanisms



Source: Iraq's VNR (2019)

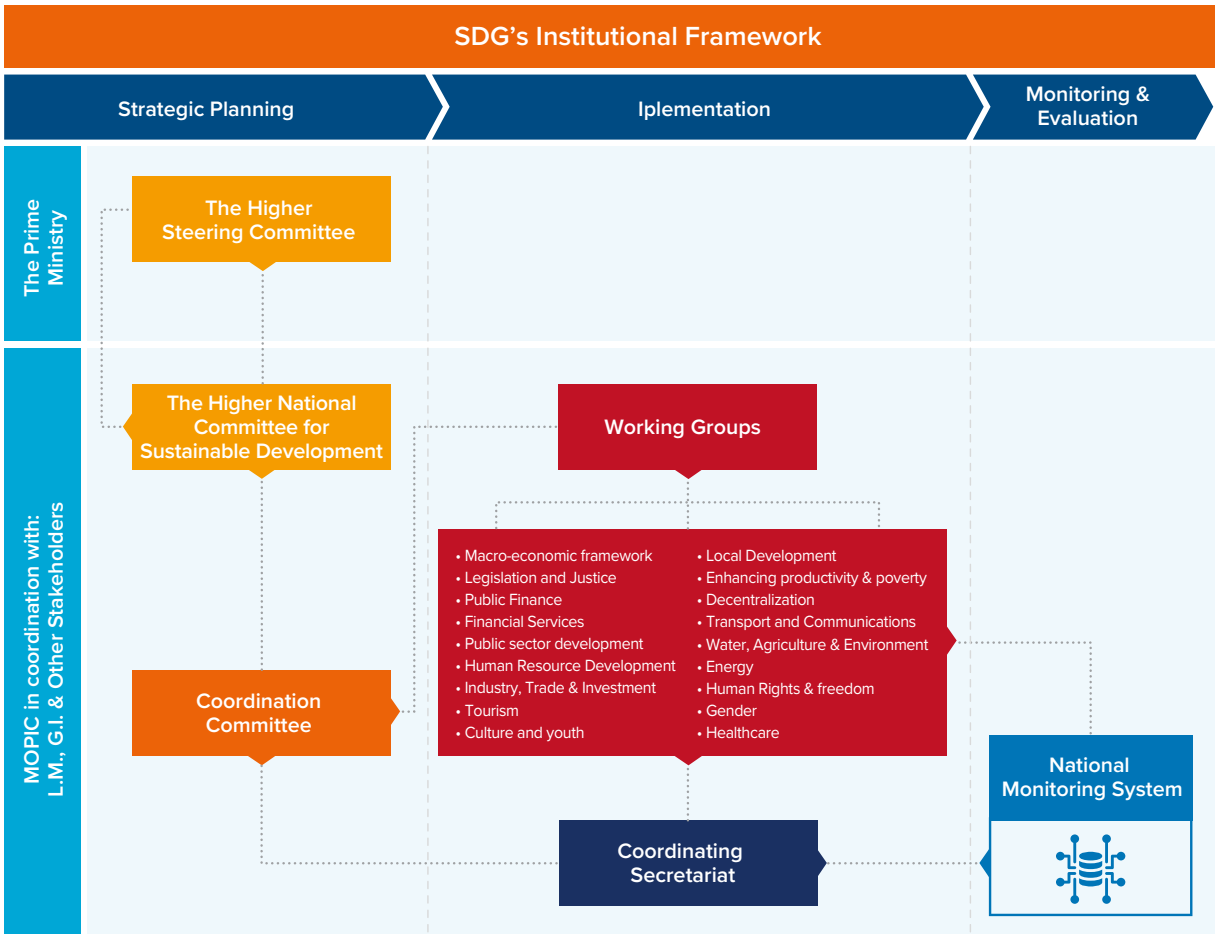
36 VNRs 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, GOLD V 2019 The Localization of the Global Agendas How local action is transforming territories and communities African Region, Gold V 2019 The Localization of the Global Agendas How local action is transforming territories and communities 2019 Middle East and West Asia region

37 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23789Iraq_VNR_2019_final_EN_HS.pdf

governorate level. Iraq commits itself to prepare its VNR through consultative processes among the national and local authorities, the parliament, the private sector, NGOs and representatives of various social groups. Furthermore, three governorates, Basra, Anbar and Karbala, prepared local reports for sustainable development in 2019. According to the VNR 2019, this is supposed to be followed by other provinces.

Jordan in its VNR[38] has called for strong coordination among all government and private institutions to ensure a cumulative effect to avoid duplication of efforts, and underscored the importance of civil society participation in its policy making to reflect the needs of the most vulnerable. Headed by the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, the National Higher Committee for Sustainable Development serves as a reference for all national efforts to sustainable development in Jordan, with membership from relevant line ministries, the private sector, CSOs, and representatives of women, youth, Senate (upper house), House of Representatives (lower house), and local communities. **Its membership was expanded in March 2017 to include broader Government and civil society participation**, with the view to ensure better alignment with the 2030 Agenda. The Coordination Committee provides direct supervision and management during

Figure 9. Jordan's Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms



Source: Jordan's VNR (2017)

38 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/16289Jordan.pdf

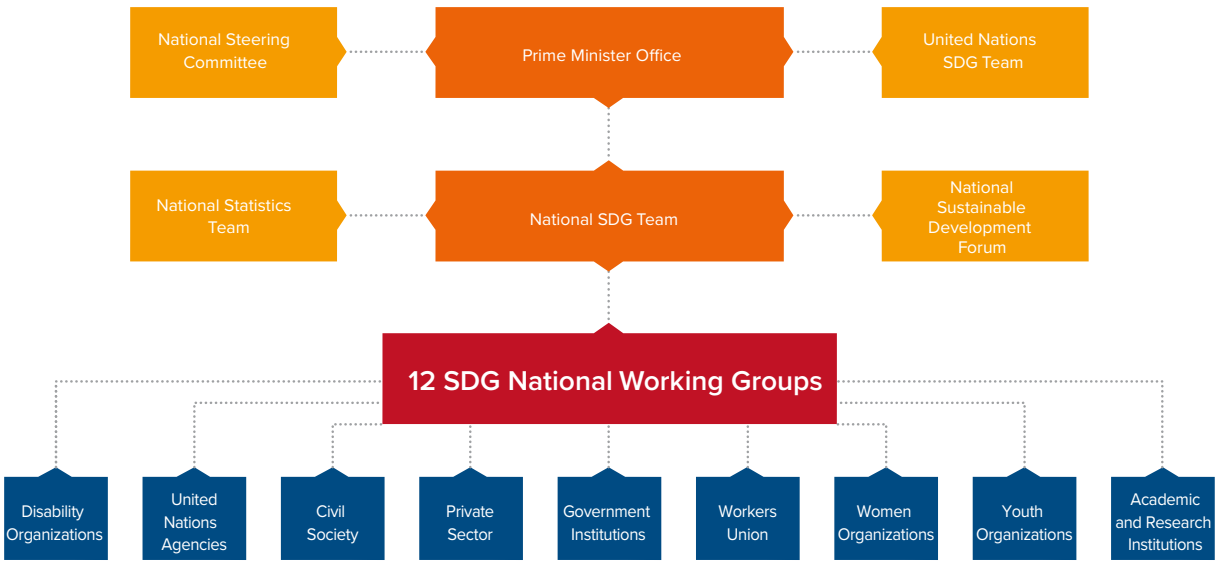
the preparation of the Executive Development Programmes (EDP) and ensures mainstreaming of the SDGs, targets and indicators within the national plans and interaction among the working groups. And the Working Groups, composed among others of representatives of local councils, define objectives and actions based on the EDP and in alignment with the SDGs, targets and indicators.

Led by the Prime Minister's Office, the National SDG team was established to define priorities in the State of Palestine and align the SDGs with the national development planning and budgeting, and review the progress towards achievement of the SDGs. Under the National SDG team, 12 SDG working groups were established to focus on one or more SDGs and are represented by members of relevant government institutions, NGOs, the private sector and academic institutions. Each working group has a focal point responsible for coordinating the stakeholders and connecting their progress with national efforts. Directed by the UN Resident Coordinator in Palestine, designated UN agencies support working groups highly relevant to their mandates. **Since the establishment of the working groups, civic participation became highly active, with over 300 new participants from various sectors in the SDG implementation and review processes**. The working groups were instrumental in developing Palestine's first VNR.

Whilst these examples highlight important steps taken by different countries to establish institutional and coordination mechanisms which ensure participation of civil society and other stakeholder, less information is provided on how LRGs have specifically been engaged. There is, in turn, ample scope for countries across the region to strengthen the active involvement of local and regional governments as critical actors for strengthening vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms for SDG Localization.

To complement institutional coordination at the national level, some countries have established networks of local government associations in order to coordinate on issues like SDG Localization. In the Arab States these include

Figure 10. Palestine's Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms



Source: Palestine's VNR (2018)

Lebanon, Palestine, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia[39]. As an illustrative example, and despite a difficult local context, the Palestinian association of local authorities (APLA) has aligned its strategy for the years 2019-2022 with the SDGs, launched awareness-raising campaigns for its local authorities to promote the Localization of the SDGs, and worked with partners to develop Municipal Technical Exchange Hubs project that support the SDGs[40].

Participatory institutional coordination mechanisms that break siloes of sectoral approaches of ministries, among different levels of governments and between states and non-states actors at the local level is a fundamental enabler for SDG Localization in any country. This in essence points toward the need for a stronger mechanism for the countries to expand related dialogues and experiment better coordination approaches, and to share solutions and innovative ideas across the region and beyond. There is an ample opportunity for UNDP to facilitate this through providing technical support in strengthening existing coordination mechanisms, particularly ensuring inclusion of local voices, for instance with local government networks such as the regional networks of UCLG as well as other UN agencies, regional think tanks, and other interested development partners.

2. SDG Localization is driving the emphasis on data generation and management

Although data accessibility is still low in several countries in the region, there is an increased emphasis placed on generating the necessary evidence-base for SDG implementation and monitoring to ensure the achievement of the SDGs and LNOB by 2030. Localization adds to this demand with its adaptation of indicators to different territories through addressing disparities between geographical regions and population groups. Addressing vulnerabilities in data-driven ways requires that the SDG targets and indicators be localized in the country's context, and furthermore in the localities' context, as well as governments and other stakeholders be able to disaggregate, including between men and women, different age groups, persons with disabilities and any other relevant social groups. As such, the inherent focus on Leaving No One Behind of the 2030 Agenda brings a strong focus on enhancing data-driven policy choices to localize the SDGs.

Tunisia contextualized SDG 16 aligned with its national priorities and principles enshrined in the 2014 constitution. Through a participatory process engaging Ministries, civil society organizations, UN agencies, local partners and universities among others, "Tunisian

Baseline Study of Tunisian Governance Goal

- Section 1 provides the objectives, methodology and process of the analysis
- Section 2 provides analysis on the progress of the TGG following a participatory self-assessment among the working group made of representatives from the government and civil society.
- Section 3 provides analysis on the means of implementation by aligning national policies and strategies that contribute to different targets.
- Section 4 provides preliminary analysis of the linkage between the TGG and the SDGs in line with the SDG 16+.

39 UCLG MEWA Gold report 2019, p. 33
40 UCLG (2020) Local and Regional Governments' Report to the 2020 HLPF, 4th REPORT, p. 56

Governance Goal (TGG)" was established with nine targets and 89 indicators based on the country's priorities. After a rigorous assessment of their relevance and measurement feasibility, the number of indicators was reduced to 34 in 2015. One of the very unique outcomes in this process was that they included measurement of civil society's participation in the management of public affairs, which the stakeholders found critical in the country's transition towards democracy. Tunisia also made progress in measuring TGG, such as measuring corruption through examining the crossover results of big data obtained from social media and 2014 household survey on public perception of corruption. A baseline study documenting the progress on the TGG was released in 2018.

Palestine also provides a good example of development of localized SDG 16 indicators in its particular context under occupation. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Justice, the national SDG 16 team composed of a wide range of stakeholders in Gaza, Jerusalem and Ramallah attended workshops on localizing the SDGs in February 2019, creating a more transformative and resilient approach enabled by institutional coordination at the central governance level as well as local level by working with established networks of local government associations. Due to the blockade of Gaza and moving restrictions, the participants in Ramallah were connected online with those in Gaza to jointly discuss and prioritize the most relevant indicators to their context, considering the restrictions and limitations placed by the occupation. This example illustrates that it is possible to take ownership of global goals under difficult circumstances and to establish linkages and jointly formulate development frameworks among stakeholders, even if they are geographically separated.

In **Somalia,** UNDP supported a study on "Localizing SDGs in Somalia", with a focus on promoting SDG 7 in Puntland.[41] SDG 7 was selected as priority for Puntland given that access to energy was their critical concern and renewable energy sources must be explored, particularly solar and wind power. In this initiative, the environment, challenges and opportunities for localizing the SDGs in Puntland were identified, and local data and information were collected to establish the baseline for monitoring progress on SDG 7. Based on these results, use of solar power was promoted in Puntland.

Iraq[42] provides another illustrative example of how data can be used to drive innovation for strengthening SDG Localization efforts. With Support of UNDP Iraq, an alliance 'Sustainable Development Network 2030', consisted of 28 local NGOs from all regions used Facebook to conduct surveys and gather data related SDG 16. The survey was disaggregated by age, sex and location. More than 1000 responses were collected and shared with the Central Statistics Bureau. The resulting data yet informal, informed Iraq's first VNR. Among the highlighted lessons was the success of engaging Iraqis from all over the country within a limited timeframe to collect data with limited available resources.

Whilst several of these examples are fairly new and more evidence of impact is still needed, they illustrate important steps taken by several countries towards making the SDGs more relevant for their respective contexts, as well as promoting participation and inclusion of different actors including the most vulnerable groups. The examples also illustrate opportunities for UNDP to continue promoting innovative solutions to generate and manage data as well as facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement as a key enabler for SDG Localization.

41 SDGs_and_SDG_7_Localization_Study_Report.pdf (sidrainstitute.org)
42 https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2019-07/Iraq%20-SDG%2016%2B%20Report%20-%20Country%20Practice%20.pdf

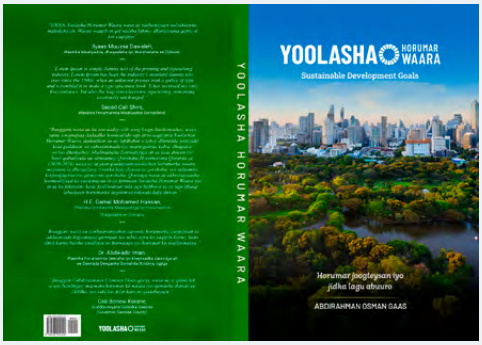
3. *There is scope to strengthen participatory approaches to Localization in the region*

Although many countries in the Arab States have embarked on some elements of SDG Localization, a fundamental emphasis on placing participatory, inclusive mechanisms at the heart of these efforts is still often lacking.

There are however several examples of local governance programming that succeeded in supporting local development planning and strengthened interface between state and society at local level – such as for example the Participatory Democracy and Local Development programme (CapDeL)[43] in Algeria and the UN Joint Programme on Local Governance (JPLG)[44] in Somalia.

The SDGs in the Somalia Context

The SDG handbook 'YOOLASHA' drafted by academia contextualizes the SDGs in Somalia context, by translating the Goals in the Somali language and analyzing the linkages between the SDGs and the horn of Africa region. The book also provides a step by step guide on SDG localization.



Under CapDeL, 10 pilot municipalities have promoted participatory local development planning and the SDG framework is used for the planning, implementation and monitoring of the local strategies. In JPLG, Somalia promotes a "local government ecosystem" at the city and state levels in all five Member States. It includes well-designed laws and systems for public functions (public procurement, budgeting, oversight, tax collection and other government functions), well-trained public employees able to implement these laws and systems, and an empowered citizenry involved in decision making. Furthermore, both Algeria and Somalia have contextualized the SDGs by producing SDG handbooks, which translated the global goals in the Arabic and Somali languages respectively. These handbooks are distributed to raise awareness of the SDGs among the local populations.

In Tunisia, under the Madinatouna project, nine cities have formulated city development strategies in which local actors worked together with a common vision towards sustainable development of their city. Overall, this project aimed to support the local authorities of these nine cities to elaborate their city development strategies in a collaborative manner with all the decentralized, private and associative actors, in particular young people and women, groups in vulnerable situations (e.g. migrants) as well as people traditionally excluded from the local development process.[45] As part of the project, SDG Camps were also organized to promote youth engagement in the SDG Localization process. A first initiative in Tunisia to localize the SDGs regionally took place in the Medenine region through a participatory approach, with territorial representatives of the region and the support of the UNDP Local Development Support Program (LDP), to link the regional five-year plan of Medenine with the SDGs.

43 https://www.dz.undp.org/content/algeria/fr/home/projects/programme-de-renforcement-des-capacites-des-acteurs-de-developpe.html

44 https://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/projects/un-joint-programme-on-local-governance-and-decentralized-service.html

45 http://www.medcities.org/documents/10180/1037041/Rapport+de+capitalisation+du+projet+Madinatouna.pdf/de3f9d0c-5a30-4904-b917-fd40d224714b

As a result, 14 SDGs were identified as priorities for the region, and this initiative allowed for the identification of specific targets and indicators relevant to the regional context for monitoring the SDGs, while preserving the link with national priorities.[46]

In Iraq, the Local Area Development Programme (LADP) implemented by UNDP in partnership with UN-Habitat, developed Provincial Development Strategies (PDS) in the Kurdistan Region and southern cluster of governorates. PDS provided a framework for local authorities to advance economic development at the local level through enhancing their linkages with international organizations, national authorities and investors. The preparation of PDS was led by Steering Committees, Technical Committees and Working Groups established at the local level, using a participatory multi-stakeholder approach. UNDP Iraq is currently supporting the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the development of KRG Vision 2030, expected to be finalized by April 2021. The foundation for this work is based on earlier cooperation, including previous support to KRG Vision 2020. The KRG Vision 2030 will be aligned with the Government Programme 2019-2023 and forms part of a broader effort towards achieving the SDGs in Iraq. Additionally, UNDP Iraq[47] has supported SDG localization in three pilot governorates (Anbar, Karbala and Basra) where Local Sustainable Development Reports were prepared to reflect the actual needs of the governorates toward sustainable transition.

Initially developed in the Municipality of Madrid, CONSUL provides an innovative online platform for citizen engagement in open debates, project development, participatory budgeting and legal development. The platform is used by more than 35 countries and 135 institutions, reflecting voices of over 90 million citizens. In the Arab States, Somalia and Morocco have tapped into this tool for participatory local level decision making. Through the online citizen engagement, in the city of Melilla in Morocco, citizens were actively involved in deciding where to invest €4,600 for city development[48]. In Somalia, local priority projects are being identified especially in the urban space.

There are also SDG inclusion and consultation initiatives aimed at specific population groups, such as youth and women's groups, with support from UNDP or other development partners. An example of the inclusion of youth ambassadors and Community based Organizations in the

Enabling Communities for Climate Change Adaptation Planning: Understanding Gender Roles

In Jordan, a local-oriented project aimed to empower local communities through **youth ambassadors** and **Community based Organizations** (represented by both men and women) in three different governorates to design local climate change adaptation plans. It also provided a platform for local communities to share these climate change adaptation plans with relevant ministries and municipal councils. Furthermore, the effects of climate change on gender roles were investigated and mainstreamed into the plans.

The project did not only create a platform for collaboration, but also contributed to build capacity among youths and community-based organizations, providing them with insight into the practical measures to take in order to promote resilience.

46 Medenine-region-guidelines-for-the-location-of-MDGs.pdf (local2030.org)
47 https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/all-projects/Support-to-implement-and-monitor-the-SDGs.html
48 https://participa.melilla.es/

design of local climate change adaptation plans in Jordan[49] is included in the box, and a wider selection of examples from Bahrain, Sudan, Djibouti, Syria, Somaliland and UAE can be found in the Annex.

4. *Harnessing social and digital innovation to unleash the SDG Localization potential*

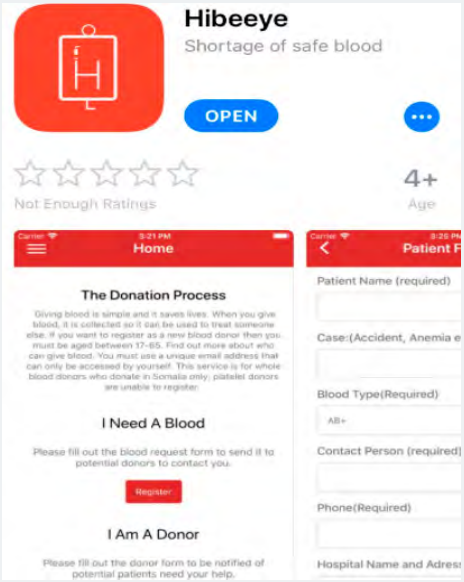
There is significant unexplored potential for a strong interface between SDG Localization and social as well as digital innovation. In particular the urban space provides a significant potential in bringing a sizeable impact towards sustainable development at the local level through social and digital innovations. The growing importance and possibility of innovation offers an opportunity to accelerate sustainable development in various ways, from enhancing equality, access to education, good health, economic growth, responsible institutions to partnerships, regardless of the territories. The local talents are being discovered as pioneers for the change, local finances are mobilized in unpreceded ways, and more and more people are raising their voices in the digital outlets.

In harnessing the potential of social and digital innovation to achieve SDG Localization, it is critical for the innovation to be linked to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and leverage local resources and capacities to co-create solutions to development challenges in the given context. Below are a few good practices of the innovative practices of the region that brought together local resources and capacity with the aim of enhancing sustainability of their localities.

The Local Solutions Mapping platform where units such as the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Libya is active in scanning for and sharing SDG Localization solutions as well as tagging them to specific indicators to facilitate monitoring. One of the issues addressed was solid waste management. UNDP Libya Lab Team gathered grassroots solutions from local organizations and individuals, in partnership with the private sector and governmental institutions that are keen to implement the country's solid waste management strategy. In this initiative, the locally grown solution to tackle waste management was proven to be an effective way to radically improve the landscape of the country.

UNDP Jordan embarked on an interesting initiative in 2020, the Tanmiah System, which seeks to provide systems and guidelines for the eventual application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and business intelligence to support planning and project implementation at both the national and governorate levels across all sectors in Jordan. The Tanmiah system will collect and analyze 400 economic and social indicators about each governorate and connect them to a geographical information system to help decision-makers in making the right decisions based on the specific needs and funds available for each location[50]. Furthermore,

'Hibeeye' mobile app



49 11/SDG%20Good%20Practices%20Publication%202020.pdf
50 www.jo.undp.org/content/jordan/en/home/stories/faster--easier-and-smarter-service-delivery--this-is-how-jordan-.html

its public relations management system (PRM) allows citizens to submit service requests and provide feedback to current local investment initiatives.[51] The system has also been used as a socio-economic observatory to monitor and measure impacts of COVID-19. This provides a good example of how the use of digital tools can contribute to the creation of better informed policies and address different territorial challenges.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Somalia has made a great progress in generating social and digital innovation, especially among the youth. An app 'Trify', for instance, was developed by two young Somali women under UNDP Somalia's Future Ready Initiative. It enables prompt and safe transportation in the city of Hargeisa, thereby contributing to greater urban security and resilient urban development. Another app 'Hibeeye', which means "donor" in Somali, allows access to blood banks and safe blood transfusion by rapidly connecting donors and recipients. The development of Hibeeye was inspired by the plight of victims in the aftermath of the Mogadishu bombings of October 2017, where distribution of available and safe blood became critical. The app has been making a vital contribution to public health and urban resilience. These examples highlight the comparative advantage of local knowledge and capacity to identify issues and build solutions, and the potential of youth entrepreneurs to pioneer initiatives.

There is significant potential for UNDP – through collaboration between technical teams working on SDG integration, governance, innovation, inclusive growth, gender and more – to play a central role in enabling SDG Localization solutions through social and digital innovation. This would include harnessing UNDP's global reach, through GPN, to demonstrate – and ultimately adapt – solutions from other regions where social/digital innovation has been 'tapped' more effectively and with a more explicit lens on SDG Localization.

> ***5. VLRs provide an excellent opportunity to monitor and report the SDG progress made at the local level while promoting social accountability, multi-stakeholder engagement and disaggregated data analysis***

As part of the follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development suggests in its Paragraph 89 that major groups and other stakeholders, including local authorities to report on their contribution to SDG implementation. Against this background, a number of local and regional governments have embarked on the review processes of SDG implementation in their territories and submitted VLRs. While the VLRs are considered informal reports, such processes "can contribute towards multilevel governance and the transformation necessary to achieve just, resilient, and sustainable cities, territories, and societies that leave no-one and no place behind in the aftermath of the crisis"[52].

The value of reviewing the progress of SDGs implementation at the local level is paramount, as it sheds light on the unique development situation of the territory, whose progress might considerably differ from other territories. For instance, whereas the city of San Francisco, Oakland California meets "Moderate to Good Performance" or above for 13 SDGs with no goals significantly lagging behind, Baton Rouge, LA records eight SDGs as "poor performance" with no SDGs reaching "Moderate to Good Performance" nor "Good Performance". [53]

51 OECD Public Governance Reviews Engaging Citizens in Jordan's Local Governments Needs Assessment process
52 https://www.uclg.org/en/taxonomy/term/1706
53 2019 US Cities Sustainable Development Report https://sdgindex.org/reports/2019-us-cities-sustainable-development-report/

Globally, a small but growing number of cities are now reporting progress on their efforts to localize the SDGs through VLRs submitted to the global High-Level Political Forum. Meanwhile the first VLR has yet to be submitted from the Arab region, even at a time when cities have provided an outsize number of the solutions to the challenges of the COVID-19 impact. The global list of VLRs submitted by local authorities can be found here, as well as the guidelines for VLRs here.

6. *Harnessing innovative practices for financing for SDG Localization*

Five years into the SDGs and as we are in the *Decade of Action* it is increasingly clear that the financing for SDG implementation, let alone Localization of the Agenda, is inadequate. This is true nowhere more than in the Arab States where provinces, municipalities, and other local authorities do not have sufficient financial resources and mandates to fund a proactive role in localizing the SDGs with all that it entails of participatory planning, implementation and monitoring.

In addition to the inadequacy of the overall financial envelope, there are significant challenges related to distribution between center and periphery and in particular on limited fiscal decentralization, financial autonomy, transparency and alternative options for revenue generation of LRGs in the Arab region. These elements create dependency of LRGs in a region with highly centralized governance systems across the board, and thereby curb their capacity to fund themselves, their activities and hence their leadership and opportunities for predictable planning on SDG Localization [54].

As such, continuous efforts must be made to explore innovative ways to realize SDG financing. This would involve thinking out of the box, understanding of the national context and related legislations and bringing the national partners closer to the localities, exploring alternative finance such as crowdfunding, social and development impact bonds and pay-for-success systems, as well as partnering with various actors including Public-Private Partnerships and other cities. In the Muslim world, Zakat (donations) could be mobilized to support SDG financing through Islamic finance.

There are a few leading practices where LRGs have managed to make progress on bringing SDG financing to the local level. The box illustrates Morocco's examples on mobilizing resources for territorial sustainable development. Crowdfunding platforms are increasingly being used for resource mobilization even in crisis settings, such as 'Yemen Our Home', an innovative platform that links the Yemeni Diaspora with projects targeting conflict-affected communities. 'Live Lebanon 2.0', a digital impact investment platform brings in smaller investors and fosters a stable impact investment on areas such as clean energy, social entrepreneurship and health. In the context of the COVID-19 Pandemics, UNDP launched a solidarity campaign in the Arab States, with the aim to engage communities in supporting local solutions. The campaign provided access to centralized tools to felicitate crowdfunding campaign creation to mitigate the impacts of economic reversals and widespread loss of income in the region.

Another example of UNDP support under the Joint SDG Fund is the UN Joint Programme "Mobilizing Public-Private, Innovative and Alternative Financing as Levers SDG Financing Architecture for Tunisia" where an important component is to enhance national capacity to mobilize domestic public and private financing for the achievement of the SDGs at both national and decentralized levels.[55]

54 https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-MEWA-REGION-web.pdf
55 https://jointsdgfund.org/programme/mobilizing-public-private-innovative-and-alternative-financing-levers-sdg-financing

Bringing SDG financing to the local level in Morocco

- In Chefchaouen, the local authorities mapped 63 projects belonging to the Communal Action Plan 2016-2022 and municipal budget against the SDG framework. This exercise allowed the city to set priorities and identify the social, economic, environmental, cultural and human aspects of actions and municipal investment for the coming years. A tool was developed based on the project. (uclg.org/sites/default/files/the_sdgs_in_the_municipal_map_0.pdf)
- In the framework of the national initiative Cities without Slums, the city of Casablanca has undertaken important work in co-financing the rehousing of informally housed households by mobilizing household finance and third-party investments. These new policies develop from international housing rights frameworks and covenants, such as the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs. The third-party contract arrangement also provides these households with guarantees regarding both the financing of the construction – which generally costs EUR 70,000 – and its realization, in terms of both quality and timing.

(UCLG Gold Report 2019, Africa)

To enable SDG Localization, it will be crucial for UNDP policy advisors and COs to become familiar with the financial mechanisms and technologies that could mobilize resources and play a proactive role, not only in mobilizing resources, but also in developing the capacities of partners from local governance systems to identify and harness innovative practices for financing SDG Localization efforts.

5 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the given lessons, and in particular the enablers for SDG Localization outlined in the sections above, the following are a set of policy and programmatic support options. These will be important to consider for UNDP COs, relevant Regional Hub teams and Global Policy Network advisors alike in order to ensure effective incorporation of SDG Localization approaches in programming and policy advisory services.

1

Policy Recommendation # 1: **Strengthen existing institutional and coordination mechanisms**

Participatory institutional coordination mechanisms that break siloes and promote multi-stakeholder engagement are a fundamental enabler for SDG Localization in any country. The majority of the countries in the Arab States region, including countries affected by crisis, have taken important steps towards this end. In order to make sure that local priorities are taken into account, support is particularly needed to develop better mechanisms to connect development efforts at local and national levels and promote dialogue among a wide range of actors. This implies promoting approaches that ensure active involvement of LRGs and local voices, including different groups of society.

In cases where national and local development plans, as well as institutional and coordination mechanisms are particularly weak or not in place, steps should also be taken to raise awareness of the SDGs and support the development of such plans. Whilst being sensitive to the context, lessons can be harnessed from experiences from contexts which have faced similar challenges.

2

Policy Recommendation # 2: **Support networks of local government associations**

Local and regional government associations, including the regional network of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), play an important role in coordinating and addressing issues like SDG Localization. Supporting these networks is not only important in order to promote dialogue and SDG ownership of the communities and cities, but also in order to promote the sharing of best solutions and innovative ideas, both within countries and across the region. Examples from the region show that this has proved to have positive effects in fragile and conflict affected environments.

3

Policy Recommendation # 3: **Support the generation and management of data to make the SDGs relevant for the respective contexts, as well as for the local communities and individuals**

Data and monitoring will be crucial to developing the necessary evidence-base for SDG implementation and monitoring as well as identifying those who are left behind in the achievement of the SDGs. UNDP should support this process by building capacities and encouraging participatory approaches to data generation and management to ensure that the data reflects the needs and interests of the people in the respective localities.

This is equally important in conflict-affected settings as it can contribute to shedding light on how the impacts of conflict and the needs of different localities vary within a country. In contexts where there are limited capacities and resources available, including in fragile and conflict-affected settings, supporting innovative and less costly methods for data collection can be applied and still be an important contribution in the effort towards strengthening SDG localization.

4

Policy Recommendation # 4: **Participatory and inclusive mechanisms should be placed at the heart of all SDG Localization efforts**

Taking into account the different realities among territories, age and gender are crucial elements in SDG Localization processes. Additional efforts are needed to promote inclusive approaches that ensure the participation of a broad range of actors, including specific population groups such as youth and women's groups, and serve to strengthen the interface between state and society at local level. This implies not only supporting partners in developing mechanisms for participation and inclusion of different groups, but also placing participatory and inclusive mechanisms at the heart of UNDP's SDG localization programming.

5

Policy Recommendation # 5: **Support the development of social and digital innovations to address Localization challenges in the given contexts**

Social and digital innovations have the potential to create impact towards SDG localization, particularly if local resources and capacities are leveraged and the solutions are made. There is significant potential to explore this further, particularly in urban spaces. As highlighted in this policy brief, this can be equally relevant in contexts where there is ongoing conflict. In this endeavor, UNDP should identify local talents and innovations to make sure that solutions to local development challenges are relevant for the given contexts and to ensure local ownership in SDG localization processes. Furthermore, enhancing the collaboration between different technical teams within the UNDP, i.e. SDG integration, governance, gender, peacebuilding and other teams, will be crucial in order to harness lessons learned and adapt solutions from different regions and country contexts, including in fragile and conflict settings, where social and digital innovations have been developed with an explicit focus on SDG localization.

6

Policy Recommendation # 6: **Encourage LRGs to develop Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)**

Reviewing the progress of SDG implementation at the local level represents an important opportunity to monitor and report on the SDGs progress at the local level and to shed light on the development situation of the respective territory. In contexts where SDG implementation processes have been initiated, supporting local authorities in developing VLRs can be an opportunity to highlight the efforts of local authorities and how, for example, COVID-19 and other critical development challenges play out differently in different territories. Although this may be less applicable to crisis settings, it should be noted that the VLR can be adjusted according to the financial, human and technical resources available.

7

Policy Recommendation # 7: **Address the financing gap, including by raising awareness and building capacity of partners to explore financial mechanisms and technologies that could mobilize resources for SDG Localization**

Innovative ways to enable financing for SDG localization should be explored in order to overcome the challenges related to limited fiscal decentralization, financial autonomy, transparency and lack of alternative options for revenue generation of LRGs across the region. UNDP should develop the sufficient knowledge and systematize evidence of financial mechanisms and technologies that could mobilize resources. This includes exploring new partnerships and alternative finance practices such as crowdfunding, impact investments, pay-for-success systems etc. Examples provided show that several of these practices have proven to also be relevant in conflict settings. UNDP should also play a crucial role in supporting the capacity development of local governance systems partners to identify different financial mechanisms and technologies for resource mobilization.

In conclusion, whereas there is a lack of full-fledged SDG Localization initiatives, and coherent understanding of this concept in the Arab region, the policy brief identified a growing number of innovative practices that could unlock the full potential of SDG Localization.

Promoting SDG Localization as a framework will imply supporting and facilitating processes towards spatial participatory planning and budgeting, bottom-up SDG monitoring process and locally grown solutions across thematic areas. This in turn, requires programming efforts on SDG localization that carefully account for the territorial differences. The final set of policy recommendations provided above is part of the effort to inspire and inform a new wave of evidence-based country-level programming and policy advice on SDG Localization in all the different development settings across the Arab States.

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7 ANNEX

ANNEX 1: Relevant tools and publications on monitoring and data for SDG Localization:

- E-Handbook on SDG Indicators
- VNR Handbook
- VNR Website
- UNECE Task Team on communication of statistics
- Roadmap for Statistics on SDGs UNECE
- UNDP Implementation guidance
- UNDG Guidelines to support country reporting of the SDGs
- UN Global Pulse and UNDP Guide for Data Innovation
- Migration Governance indicators
- Migration Profiles
- Making every woman and girl count
- www.local2030.org

ANNEX 2: Selection of good practices aimed at raising awareness and including youth:

1. **Syria**: The Syrian Youth SDGs Advocates Platform aims to build a community of UNDP SDGs Syrian Young Leaders.
   https://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/library/Supporting_the_resilience_of_local_communities.html

2. **Bahrain**: Young Leadership Programme (YLP) unlocks the potential of young people in Bahrain and foster their active role in achieving the SDGs through supporting innovation by youth.
   https://www.bh.undp.org/content/bahrain/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/YLP6_decade_of_action_launch.html
   https://www.bh.undp.org/content/bahrain/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/King_Hamad_Award_3rd_edition.html

3. **Jordan**: The local-oriented project aims to empower local communities through Community based Organizations and youth ambassadors in three different governorates in Jordan to design local climate change adaptation plans. It will also provide a platform for local communities to share these climate change adaptation plans with relevant ministries and municipal councils.
   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=31032 https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/SDG%20Good%20Practices%20Publication%202020.pdf

4. **Djibouti**: Supported by YLP, youth organizations in Djibouti are organizing activities to support and empower a diverse group of young women and men in the design, implementation and scaling of innovative, efficient and sustainable development solutions.
   https://www.dj.undp.org/content/djibouti/fr/home/YLP.html

5. **Sudan and Djibouti**: Young African Leaders initiative (YALI) is set out to equip the next generation of skilled young African leaders. The objective in this partnership is to proactively engage, develop, and support the young leaders, exposing them to leadership tools, models and diversity of thought in a network of other youth and organizations changing the world.
   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=26780

6. **Somaliland**: The SDG 16+ coalition is a group of civil-society organizations (including a number of youth and women organization) which coordinate action across the country. They have worked to identify priorities, increase awareness among public and decision makers, and implement SDG16+ in all regions of Somaliland.
   https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24270Somaliland_SDG16_Progress_Report.pdf
   https://www.saferworld.org.uk/multimedia/sdg16-in-somaliland

7. **UAE**: SDG School Awareness Campaign targets students, parents and teachers at public and private schools in the UAE to raise awareness on the SDGs, engage children and build their capacity. https://geostat.fcsa.gov.ae/gisportal/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=8ff47c6cee28466ead1b7a2b6f0e6d11

8. **Morocco**: EFELA and UCLG Africa launch the African Cities for Women's Economic Empowerment Campaign.
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https://www.uclga.org/news/launch-of-the-call-for-expressions-of-interest-in-the-campaign-african-cities-in-favour-of-the-economic-empowerment-of-women/

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http://www.arabstates.undp.org or www.arab-hdr.org
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