

Policy Brief Series

Recommendations for WSSD2: Localizing Social Development

Affirming Localization and Empowerment of the Local Level for Inclusive Social Development

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Introduction and Context

This paper presents key recommendations by the United Nations Local2030 Coalition on the role of localization for the implementation, review, and follow-up of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action. The Coalition is the UN system-wide platform dedicated to advancing the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level, through its 14 UN entities and five constituencies. The paper leverages the Coalition's mandate and technical expertise on localization to underscore the importance of empowering local and regional governments (LRGs) and demonstrate how local actors and stakeholders can contribute to the localization of the Second World Summit for Social Development (WSSD2) process and outcomes.

Opportunities

The evolving global development landscape and subsequent growing demand for localization presents a timely opportunity to better align global commitments with local realities. LRGs play a vital role in translating national policies into meaningful, community-level action, helping to ensure that development responds to diverse local contexts and addresses in-country disparities. Their proximity to communities enables LRGs to identify needs, foster inclusive participation, and deliver context-specific solutions. Over 60% of SDG targets and 70% of climate solutions depend on local action – making engaging and empowering LRGs as strategic partners critical. By institutionalizing multilevel governance mechanisms and strengthening coordination across sectors, countries can enhance policy coherence and accelerate progress towards sustainable development goals. The localization approach brings together all levels of government and stakeholders in solidarity to advance inclusive, effective, and resilient social development.

Alignment with Prior Agreements and Relevant Strategies

This essential role of LRGs, local actors, and localization has been repeatedly affirmed across major UN agreements – including in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration (Commitment 4) and its Programme of Action (14(d), 72(b-c)), which emphasizes the importance of strengthening the role of LRGs, communities, and civil society; and encourages decentralization and the facilitation of local participation in social development. Subsequent agreements have reinforced this consensus, including in the 2030 Agenda (paras 21, 34, 45, 52, 77, 79-81), the New Urban Agenda (paras 1, 8, 9, 15(b), 15(c)(ii), 16, 21, 23, 25, etc.), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (paras 5, 34, 42, 48, 62, 66, 67, 92, 112, 117, 125, 130), the Future We Want (paras 22, 42, 43, 76, Section E on regional, national, subnational and local levels (97-103), 135, 253), and the Pact for the Future (Action 6, 32, 55(e)), among others.

These references lay the foundation and confirm the broad consensus that localization, community empowerment, and multilevel governance are essential to achieving global commitments. The mandates of UN entities – such as UN-Habitat, permanent co-chair of the Local2030 Coalition and lead of its Secretariat, whose newly adopted Strategic Plan aligns closely with this agenda – also increasingly reflect these priorities.

Recommendations



1) Acknowledge LRGs as Key Actors in Social Development: Reaffirm the essential role and contributions of LRGs in advancing plans, policies, and investments that reduce poverty and inequalities and promote full and productive employment and decent work, effective social protection systems, social economy, inclusive labour markets, and access to housing, land, and health and basic services for all.



2) Engage LRGs and Local Stakeholders in the WSSD2 Process: Ensure the meaningful engagement of LRGs and local stakeholders in shaping and implementing the WSSD2 outcomes. Their proximity to communities positions them to identify local priorities, potential and needs and to respond with tailored, inclusive policies and plans.



3) Promote Multilevel Coordination and Context-specific Local Strategies for Social Inclusion: Strengthen whole-of-government approaches that articulate and align national, subnational, and local efforts, including feedback from the local level. Support the development of local strategies and action plans, engaging local stakeholders across all sectors, including employers' and workers' organizations, civil society, the private sector, cooperatives, and academia, to be context-specific, yet coherent with national priorities.



4) Deepen Inclusive Local Participation and Accountability: Reinforce the importance of inclusive and participatory governance and social dialogue to build trust and improve the accountability and responsiveness of public services at the local level. This includes mechanisms that empower communities to participate in planning, budgeting, and oversight of programmes and initiatives, with particular attention to marginalized groups.



5) Enhance Institutional and Operational Capacity of LRGs: Endorse adequate and reliable resourcing of LRGs and local actors to implement relevant international agreements, transforming high-level commitments into concrete, locally driven, and socially inclusive action. Invest in strengthening the institutional and delivery capacity of civil society and LRGs to design and implement integrated social development responses to interrelated and complex social development challenges.



6) Scale up Innovative Local Action: Integrate local actors and community-led solutions in the financing, implementation, and follow-up of local action. This approach fosters systemic change through more coherent, integrated, and context-responsive strategies, investments and programmes to scale up impact, accelerate progress, and drive innovation in addressing social development and social economy gaps across all levels of governance.



7) Advance Local Data, Monitoring and Reporting Systems: Promote mechanisms for national–local coordination and support LRGs and local and community actors in contributing to monitoring, reporting and review processes through coherent, multilevel governance frameworks. Strengthen local data systems and the use of local-level and disaggregated data – by income, gender, age, geography, disability, and other factors – including through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) alongside Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), to inform inclusive, location-specific and evidence-based social development policies and assessments.