MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE FOR SDG LOCALIZATION

Ghana

KEY FINDINGS

Ghana is making use of the decentralized planning system defined in the National Development Planning (Systems) Act of 1994 in order to consistently and sustainably carry out the goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda and the pledges made under Agenda 2063. Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies at the local level and Ministries, Departments and Agencies at the federal level are given planning duties under this system. To draw attention to the SDGs, build creative partnerships and accountability systems for their implementation, and incorporate lessons learned into ongoing national development initiatives, new coordination and leadership structures have been formed: a Technical Committee, an SDG Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC), a High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC), and a CSOs Platform on SDGs.

Vertical integration is achieved through the National Development Planning Commission at the apex, supported by 16 regional coordinating councils. Other coordination and leadership structures have been established to provide focused attention on the SDGs. An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (2017-2024), the government’s national development strategy, incorporates the SDGs, using the guidelines for preparing medium-term development plans, that require ministries, departments and agencies, as well as local authorities, to align their activities with SDGs.

Horizontal integration is achieved at the national level through the High-Level Ministerial Committee and the SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee; at the city level, in Accra, through the Metropolitan Planning Coordinating Unit, which comprises the head of all the administration departments.

To ensure coordination and collaborations on SDGs within the CSOs sector, the Civil Society Organizations Platform on SDGs was established. With over 300 local and international CSOs as members, the Platform is divided into 17 sub-platforms, each of which is in line with one of the 17 goals. Additionally, a sub-platform with a youth focus addresses issues affecting youth across all the goals.
The Republic of Ghana is a unitary presidential constitutional democracy, divided into 16 administrative regions, 261 local metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, 58 town or area councils, 108 zonal councils, and 626 area councils. The norms for the decentralization process are laid out in the Local Government Act of 1993. It outlines the processes to establish municipal governments, their responsibilities, and their funding. Then, the 1994 National Development Planning System Act and a modification to the Civil Service Act completed the legal basis for decentralization. Since 2010, Ghana has developed two sets of four-year National Decentralization Action Plans (2010-2014 and 2015-2019), with the goals of defining the roles of traditional leaders and civil society organizations in local administration and creating a thorough, well-organized decentralization strategy.

The latter places emphasis on the coordination of development finance and capacity-building for local governments. The 2016 amendment to the Local Government Act serves as the current legal foundation for decentralization in the nation. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is responsible for ministerial oversight of local governments.

Concerning planning, the Government’s national development blueprint – An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (2017-2024) – reflects the SDGs, following a 3A approach: align, adopt, and adapt the SDGs and targets into the policy framework as well as results framework. To do so, the guidelines for preparing medium-term development plans require ministries, departments and agencies, as well as local authorities, to align their activities with SDGs. Ghana has taken advantage of its decentralized planning system to ensure better coordination of SDG implementation processes and to better integrate the agenda into its national and subnational levels of planning. In particular, the national government decided to reinforce the regional and local coordinating councils to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination in the territories. Other relevant bodies for SDG planning include the Ministerial Committee and the Implementation Coordination Committee (chaired by the NDPC), which also involve catalytic institutions and CSOs in the human rights, finance, environment areas.

In addition, an SDG Advisory Unit has been established in the President’s Office to support President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-role Addo’s as Co-Chair Emeritus of the United Nations Secretary-Eminent General’s Group of SDG Advocates – reflects the SDGs, following a 3A approach: align, adopt, and adapt the SDGs and targets into the policy framework as well as results framework. To do so, the guidelines for preparing medium-term development plans require ministries, departments and agencies, as well as local authorities, to align their activities with SDGs. Ghana has taken advantage of its decentralized planning system to ensure better coordination of SDG implementation processes and to better integrate the agenda into its national and subnational levels of planning. In particular, the national government decided to reinforce the regional and local coordinating councils to ensure vertical and horizontal coordination in the territories. Other relevant bodies for SDG planning include the Ministerial Committee and the Implementation Coordination Committee (chaired by the NDPC), which also involve catalytic institutions and CSOs in the human rights, finance, environment areas.

In regards to political commitment and institutional arrangements for SDG implementation, Ghana is relying on its decentralized planning system, which assigns functions to Ministries, Departments and Agencies at national level, and to local authorities at sub-national level. As expression of strong political commitment for SDG implementation, all government bodies at different level are requested to ensure provisions on relevant aspects and dimensions of the SDGs, and consequently report.

National SDG coordination is done through the National Development Planning Commission at the apex, supported by 16 regional coordinating councils. Other coordination and leadership structures have been established to provide focused attention on the SDGs, build innovative partnerships and accountability mechanisms around their implementation and integrate lessons learnt into national development policies and plans. These consist of:

- a High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC);
- a Technical Committee;
- an SDG Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC);
- a CSOs Platform on SDGs.

Concerning implementation, Ghana’s national budget has been aligned with the SDGs, with budget tracking as a tool that helps track government allocations and expenditure on each SDG target. On this basis, financing mechanisms are being progressively adapted to support regional or local initiatives. Building on the experience with the Millennium Development Goals, for which several gaps were identified in coordination and implementation, Ghana is now improving its planning, monitoring and implementation capacity at the local level through the recruitment of additional local government staff and the appointment of statisticians. These efforts have been further consolidated through training sessions organized by the Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs).

Ghana stands out for actively creating institutions and mechanisms for SDG review and reporting, as well as championing the SDGs ahead of presenting its first VNR to the 2019 HLPF following the preparation of an SDG baseline report in 2018. A second VNR was presented at the HLPF in 2022, built on the methodology of the first one. Review processes were similarly coordinated by the ICC hosted by the National Development Planning Commission. A further committee, led by Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and including...
other key technical bodies, was set up to guide the indicators’ assessment and selection process. After a screening of initially identified indicators, a total of 102 indicators were reported on against a total of 66 in the first VNIR. A rapid assessment was conducted to integrate relevant qualitative information in the review. The GSS also conducted a COVID-19 tracker survey in cooperation with UN Agencies to assess the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on households, businesses, and local economies. Despite some improvements in the number of adopted indicators, access to reliable and timely data at the appropriate level of disaggregation remains a challenge. This requires further efforts in strengthening M&E systems and mechanisms to assess the impact of the SDGs particularly in areas associated to social indicators in relation to the “leave no one behind” principle.

Local reviews constitute one of the best examples and drivers of exchange and cooperation across levels. The opportunity to support the VLR was introduced by NDCP, who also provided formats to other local governments for reviews, opening the possibility of scaling up this procedure and producing their own report.

**HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION**

Concerning political commitment and institutional arrangements, the High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC), made up of 15 ministers, provides strategic direction for the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2063 to ensure a ‘whole-of government’ approach to implementation, by actively engaging all sectors of government in a cross-sectoral and co-ordinated manner. The SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) is made up of representatives of 10 key ministries, departments and agencies, and the Office of the President, along with the SDG Philanthropy Platform, civil society organizations and the National African Peer Review Mechanism Governing Council. The ICC is intended to streamline and strengthen cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

About planning, the preparation of the mid-term development plan at city level in Accra is coordinated by the Metropolitan Planning Coordinating Unit (MPCU), which comprises the head of all the administration departments. This provides a platform for horizontal integration of the planning process, enhancing transversal collaboration and policy coherence, maximising synergies and limiting trade-off across different departments’ initiatives based on potential interlinkages among multiple SDGs. Following a broad-based participatory and cross-sectoral consulta-

tion process, suitable programmes and projects are then designed to address the development priorities reflected in adopted SDGs targets.

SDGs are effectively mainstreamed into the country’s development agenda and ensuing policies, plans and budgets at different levels. The coordination architecture - including horizontal/cross-sectorial articulation mechanisms - is highly reckoned and ensures a good degree of alignment and coherence of policies and plans for SDG implementation.

Horizontally integrated processes, in particular, ensure that budgets at different levels are aligned with SDGs targets and indicators, which in turn allows to maximise synergies in the allocation and monitoring of resources for interlinked policy goals. At both national and city levels, however, key challenges to effective implementation persist, with particular relation to:

- data availability and management;
- local capacities to design and implement multi-sectoral initiatives to leverage interlinkages among the SDGs;
- a substantial financing gap.

This requires a further development and consolidation of horizontally coordinated implementation systems and capacities, as well as their articulation across levels – with particular respect to the intermediate governance layer at the level of regions. Another key area for improvement concerns the assessment of local governments capacities and results in key SDG localization areas, as basis for orienting and tailoring resources allocation. Performance-based grants are being piloted and should be complemented by the introduction of adapted sets of indicators to adequately reflect and monitor local governments’ delivery in key areas.

As a response to these challenges, the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana has undertaken SDG training and awareness sessions for staff and its national executive council, and it also organized nationwide SDG sensitization workshops in all ten regions in 2017. Moreover, with the support of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, NALAG has launched several projects to improve the capacity of local, provincial and district governments to adapt the SDGs to their local realities, focusing so far on four Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies.

**Review and reporting** have notable examples at the city level in Accra, relevant SDG indicators reflecting the multidimensional and integrated/cross-sectorial nature of the plan were also (if necessary) adapted to the local context and included in its monitoring and evaluation framework, to help track progress of implementation and provide further evidence-based orientation to decision-making.
In accordance with the plan preparation guidelines issued by the NDPC, the Accra Municipal Assembly subjects its draft medium-term development plan to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), that serves as a valid reference to integrate the different dimensions of sustainable development in the planning process through a balanced integration of environmental management, socio-cultural, economic and institutional development issues.

Regarding political commitment and institutional arrangements, the SDGs Implementation Coordinating Committee is intended to streamline and strengthen cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, through the involvement of the SDG Philanthropy Platform and civil society organizations, among others.

The SDG Technical Committee includes representatives of civil society organizations, private sector, academia and other stakeholders. Moreover, the Civil Society Organizations Platform on SDGs was set up to ensure coordination and partnerships on SDGs within the CSOs space. The Platform has a membership of more than 300 local and international CSOs clustered into 17 sub-platforms aligned to each of the 17 goals. There is also a youth-focus sub-platform addressing youth-related concerns across the goals. CSOs are important focal points for an efficient stakeholder engagement: they enable stakeholder analysis and support, especially district-level CSO chapters, which are sub-platforms at the local level and work with grassroots groups, individuals, and districts.

One illustrative example of stakeholder engagement in planning at the city level is the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA). It prepares its medium-term development plan through a participatory and inclusive process that involves a wide range of stakeholders including traditional authorities, civil society organizations, private sector, persons with disabilities and youth groups. The process is guided by the planning guidelines issued by the National Development Planning Commission.

Implementation at different levels, policymaking, planning, and review and reporting processes is largely based on extensive multi-actor consultations and participatory processes. Yet, in relation to some key identified challenges in SDG implementation, there is a recognized need and an opportunity to strengthen and further structure strategic partnerships with the private sector and CSOs. A stronger coordination system is necessary to trigger collaborative actions that in turn allow untracking investment opportunities for SDGs at both national and communities’ level, attracting financial resources and engaging capacities and technologies for innovative solutions. There is also a strong need and potential to enhance the engagement and collaboration with the private sector in the identification and joint implementation of strategic initiatives for SDGs.

Concerning review and reporting, both VNR in 2019 and 2022 were conducted through open, inclusive and multi-stakeholder processes with the active participation of a wide range of state and non-state actors at both national and sub-national levels. A first round of mostly virtual consultations focused on the institutional framework and the review process, including the selection of indicators and a view at the mainstreaming of the SDGs into national development policies and frameworks. A second round of consultations allowed to present the draft report to various stakeholders for their inputs and validation. This included all relevant ministries, departments and agencies, members of parliament, as well as civil society organizations, traditional authorities, private sector and business groups, the academia, youth and women groups, and development partners.

The extensive consultative process at the basis of the VNR elaboration provided an opportunity to leverage data from key stakeholders, including members of the CSO Platform. For instance, a case study template on innovative interventions was distributed to all consulted stakeholders.

To improve the data production and management system, following the first VNR, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) had conducted a review of data availability for SDG indicators production, resulting in the creation of a National Data Roadmap, to be implemented through a multi-stakeholder advisory committee.
This summary reports the main information on multilevel governance for SDG localization in Ghana. It is part of the wider global research “Accelerating progress towards the localization of the SDGs and post-pandemic recovery through enhanced multilevel governance”. The research is the building block of UN-Habitat’s effort to strengthen global knowledge and practices on multilevel governance as a key process to localizing the SDGs. The research has been led in partnership with ARCO (Action Research for CO-development) and with the support of knowledge partners: Brookings Institution, LSE Cities, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, United Cities Local Governments.

The analysis summarized here is mainly based on information collected through key informant interviews with the national coordination body for SDG implementation in Ghana (i.e., National Development Planning Commission), the main association of Local and Regional Governments in the country (i.e., National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana) and one local authority actively committed to SDG localization (i.e., Obuasi Municipal Assembly). Moreover, it provides information extrapolated from the official Voluntary National Reviews (2019 and 2022) and the Voluntary Local Review by Accra Metropolitan Assembly (2020), as well as from relevant global reports, including the yearly UCLG report to the High-level Political Forum “Towards the localization of the SDGs”, OECD/UCLG (2019), OECD (2020), OECD country profiles on PCSD, Brookings (2020, 2022), and the policy briefs on “Emergency Governance for Cities and Regions” by LSE Cities, UCLG & Metropolis (2021).