

DPADM input for 2016 ECOSOC Integration Segment
Implementing the 2030 Agenda through Policy Innovation and Integration

Policy innovation “at all levels”

Successful implementation of the SDGs requires policy innovation “at all levels” – i.e., both at the level of central government and local authorities. While national government has the ultimate responsibility for implementing Agenda 2030, **local authorities also assume a vital role in SDG implementation.** Countries often rely on local authorities for delivering many public functions and services on the ground. Local authorities, as the closest level of government to the people, are well placed to do this and forge the partnerships needed to pursue the aspirations of the SDGs. SDGs have targets that are directly or indirectly related to their daily work. Local authorities are also often very committed to sustainable development.

It is therefore important that local authorities are well equipped to meet the challenges of SDG implementation. But their constraints related to their capacities and financial resources can hamper their efforts to localize and implement the SDGs. These constraints however vary from one kind of local authority to another, as some are better placed than others to raise resources. **The ability of local authorities to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs can be greatly enhanced through innovative approaches to enhancing their capacities and that of other actors involved in realizing the SDGs at local level.**

Thus, for example, **local implementation of the SDGs requires policy innovation for resource mobilization by local authorities.** Local authorities also need innovative approaches to building human capacity, undertaking critical partnerships with stakeholders at the local level (with the required safeguards and quality assurance mechanisms) and developing and analyzing the information and data required to develop actions to meet their own local-specific goals.

To help implement the SDGs, **each country needs to determine its own SDG priorities for policy innovation.** Although there is a common set of the SDGs, individual countries’ deficits in respect to those goals, the way they prioritize them and the potential for existing systems to contribute to realizing them is certain to vary greatly. Accordingly, the design and implementation of any policy innovation program will be country-specific, considering the context, politics, capacity and other relevant factors.

Policy integration and national-local relations

Finally, policy innovation for SDG implementation at local level requires effective horizontal policy integration within governments and vertical policy integration through effective working relationships across government levels.

Local governments have an inherent advantage in policy integration. This relates to the fact that there are fewer actors and greater overlaps in practice at local level. Horizontal policy integration may further be enhanced if local authorities are vested with general mandate to support the development of their territories and welfare of their constituents and thus to pursue integrated development strategies that can help transcend the “functional silo” tendency associated with traditional decentralization.

Developing effective national-local relations and integration across different levels of governments (vertical integration) is a good example of the complexities of policy integration in practice.

The initial steps to strengthen vertical policy integration may include reviewing the state of relations within governments and reforms within countries. Depending on the country context, empowering local authorities as stronger partners in sustainable development and as players in a multi-actor team, including through adequate resource and responsibility sharing, may contribute to achieving the SDGs.

Effective policy integration requires a clear commitment and leadership both at the national and local level to steer policy integration, along with mobilizing the support of people to institutional reforms affecting the responsibilities and approaches of local authorities (including at the central level).

Countries have complex characteristics, context and political economy, which means there is no single approach to vertical policy integration that will fit all cases. Nor is there a golden rule on how what and how much should be done at local versus national level. The issue in the coming years will be how countries can strengthen national and local processes that identify needs and required actions and institutional reform across the national and local level for realizing the transformations needed to realize the SDGs in each country.

Primary source

Sharing responsibilities and resources among levels of governments: Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (authored by Paul Smoke and Hamish Nixon) (2015)

<http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN95873.pdf>

Policy integration in government in pursuit of the sustainable development goals - Report of the expert group meeting held on 28 and 29 January 2015 at United Nations Headquarters, New York (2015)

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/csocd/2016/egmreport-policyintegrationjan2015.pdf>