

# WORKING WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

## A QUICK START GUIDE FOR LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS





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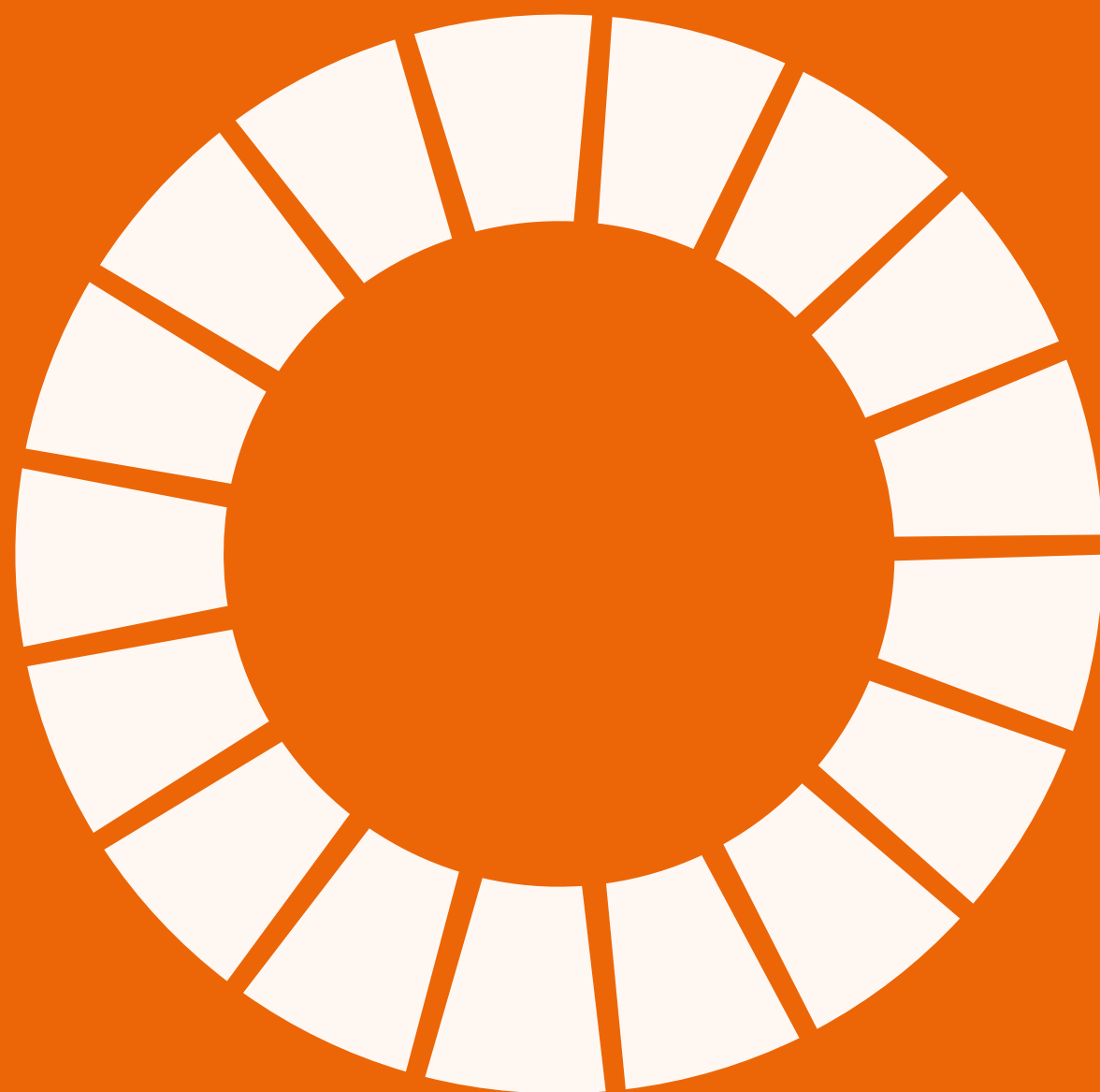
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## FOREWORD

Imagine a world where local governments all embrace the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). From bustling cities to serene villages, collective action fuels progress towards eradicating inequality and preserving our planet's beauty. Cities and regional governments claim their place on the world stage as important partners in global debates such as peacebuilding, sustainability and democracy. Local governments form international partnerships and bridge the differences that have undermined progress on the national level for years.

In recent years, PLATFORMA, the pan-European coalition of local governments and associations, has made significant strides in decentralised cooperation. PLATFORMA advocates for the SDGs, where local and regional governments (LRGs) are pivotal and where international partnerships are crucial. Since 2015, LRGs acting on the international stage have actively shaped policies, activities, and awareness around the SDGs. Together with LRGs and local government associations (LGAs), we have influenced international recognition for contributions by LRGs. As a member of the Political Council of PLATFORMA, I am proud of these efforts.

However, as we celebrate these accomplishments, it is crucial to recognize the challenges ahead. To achieve the goals, all LRGs must be involved. Therefore, we gladly present this interactive guide with tools, resources and many practical examples on a wide variety of SDGs in local policy.

I hope this guide will inspire, activate and enable LRGs to start working with the SDGs. Looking forward, I eagerly anticipate the future alongside PLATFORMA, visualizing a future marked by innovation, collaboration and meaningful change.

Warm regards,

**Jeroen Diepemaat**

*Vice-Mayor of the Municipality of Enschede, The Netherlands*

*Member of the PLATFORMA Political Council and the VNG committee for European and International affairs*





# Introduction

This interactive guide is a practical tool for any LRG wanting to start their journey on the SDGs. The SDGs, established in 2015 by the United Nations, cannot be achieved without the effort of LRGs. Many core themes within the SDG agenda are themes in which LRGs already take an important role. The SDGs offer a different viewpoint on creating impact on these issues, which can benefit local governments. Therefore, this interactive guide aims to provide a quick overview of information for local governments to start working with the SDGs.

In this guide you will find the following information:

1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals?
2. The role of LRGs in achieving the SDGs
3. How LRGs benefit from working with the SDGs
4. How to start working with the SDGs?
5. Integrating the SDGs in local policy
6. Working with the SDGs as a local politician
7. The SDGs and international decentralised cooperation
8. Join the worldwide SDG movement

Many LRGs and their associations publish helpful documents and best practices on the Agenda 2030 and PLATFORMA decided to collect these and create this guide to inspire other governments. Although there are many inspiring documents on the 2030 Agenda, many of these documents are often written in languages other than English. For purposes of accessibility and scalability, this interactive guide has chosen to include only English-language publications. Visit the websites of LRGs and associations to view these documents.

In addition, we encourage all PLATFORMA members to continue publishing documents and best practices on the SDGs, as this activates and inspires other members, and creates synergy in our journey towards reaching the goals.

For more practical examples and guides, visit the [website of PLATFORMA](#) on the SDGs.

# 1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

In 2015, the United Nations created [17 SDGs](#) with input from national and local governments, academia, NGOs, and the private sector. These goals aim to create a better and more sustainable future for everyone. Unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals, which only focused on the Northern hemisphere, the SDGs are universal and signed by all members of the UN.

The Agenda 2030 includes 169 subgoals and 244 indicators that require collaborative efforts to achieve. These indicators might seem like a lot, but it is a practical starting point for anyone wanting to work on the SDGs and to measure progress.

The goals cover sustainable production and consumption, livable and safe communities, qualitative and participatory governance, and more. The main message of the SDGs is "leave no one behind". In our pursuit of sustainability, we must keep attention on the most vulnerable groups in our society and on creating a broad support base.

Many LRGs already work on these issues, but the SDGs can provide a coherent framework with a balanced perspective on the social, economic, and physical domains. On many occasions, these domains are very much interdependent. For example, urban design and safety on the streets, or gender equality and education, or health and income inequality.

In addition, the Agenda 2030 provides a framework to assess and reflect on policies in the social, economic, and physical domains. It helps identify which themes receive considerable attention, which need more effort, and which goals are interdependent and can reinforce each other.

## More information:

[Learning module on the SDGs by UCLG](#)

[The SDGs: What Local Governments Need to Know - Interactive guide by UCLG](#)

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

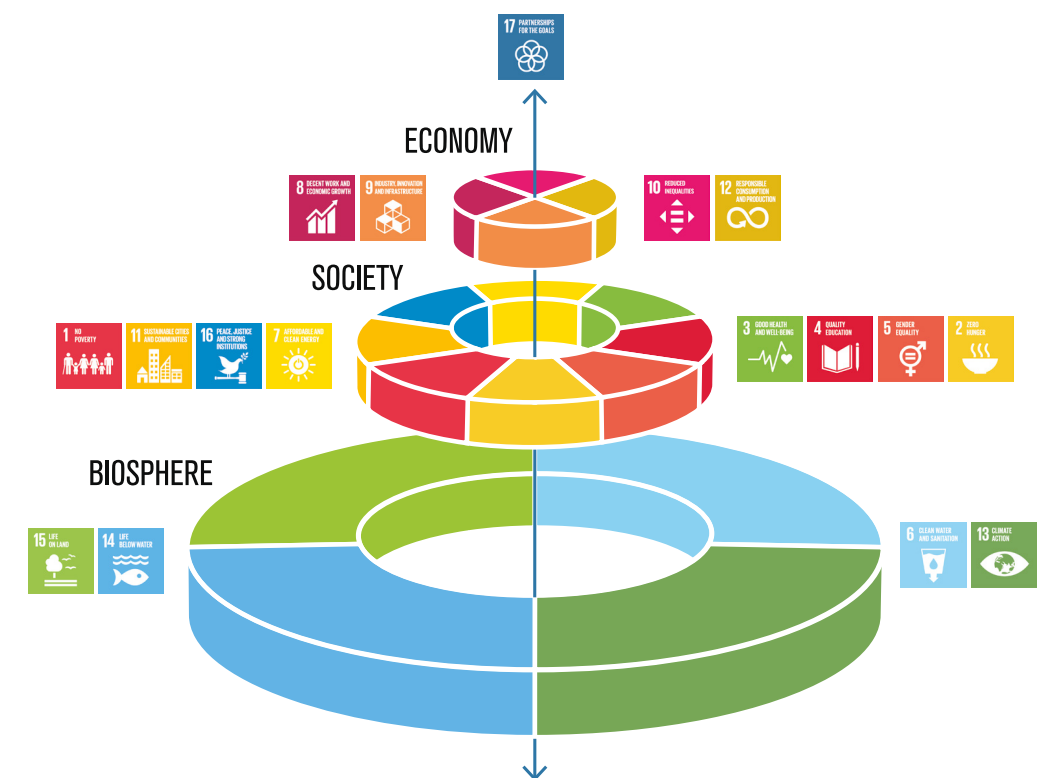




## 2. THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN ACHIEVING THE SDGs

LRGs play a key role in achieving the SDGs both as an independent player and as intermediaries between national governments and citizens. As much as 65% of the targets cannot be achieved without the engagement of LRGs ([OECD, 2020](#)). On issues such as the energy transition, inequality, biodiversity and education, the community level solutions are a crucial part. This vital role is specifically emphasized in SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. In other words, many global issues are in fact also local issues.

While LRGs already contribute to the goals, they can benefit from the agenda by using the SDGs as a tool to work towards sustainability on the social, economic and physical domain. The SDGs offer another important perspective by taking into account the policy effects on people both here and now, as well as people elsewhere and later.



Cities and municipalities can choose different ways to integrate Agenda 2030, depending on what fits best their policy objectives and community. Generally, three ways can be identified: 1) policy development & evaluation, 2) enabling and facilitating networks and partnerships, and 3) communicating by raising awareness. Additionally, being closest to citizens, LRGs are pivotal in promoting awareness of sustainability and supporting local initiatives.

#### The role of local government associations

Many LGAs support their members in integrating the SDGs. They facilitate the exchange of best practices, as well as reporting progress towards (inter)national governments. Find the network of PLATFORMA, which includes LRGs and LGAs, [here](#).

#### More information:

200 examples from European LRGs have been collected in: [European territories localize the SDGs: Making this the Decade of Action \(PLATFORMA, 2023\)](#)

[The SDGs in municipal policy - A manual for local governments \(VNG, 2021\)](#)



Annual meet-up of Global Goals municipalities in the Netherlands in 2023

## 3. How LRGs benefit from working with the SDGs

The SDGs are not just a set of 17 independent policy goals which must be achieved. The SDGs are a framework of interdependent goals and offer a different approach on sustainability. LRGs not only work to achieve the SDGs, they also adopt the principles of the SDGs in order to work with the SDGs. There are multiple ways LRGs can benefit from this.

### 1. Guideline for developing and reviewing policy

First of all, the goals offer a **guideline for developing and evaluating local government policies**, serving as a global agenda for sustainable development with a positive mindset. They highlight areas of focus and potential gaps, while also lending legitimacy and funding prospects in dialogue with national and international governments. By contextualizing local policies within a broader international and sustainable context, the goals enhance their significance and promote long-term planning.

### 2. Strengthening coherence between policy domains

Secondly, the goals **foster coherence among policy domains**, promoting connectivity within the government. This counters departmental segregation; for instance, linking inclusion and urban design to improve accessibility for people with disabilities requires interdepartmental collaboration. Similarly, collaboration between education and sustainability departments can educate youth about climate awareness.

### 3. Common language & practical approach to sustainability

Thirdly, the SDGs create a **common language**, fostering dialogues with citizens, partners, and sectors like private, educational, and societal organizations. They facilitate international partnerships and offer recognizable icons for practical sustainability engagement with local stakeholders.

### 4. Monitoring of progress of sustainability

Lastly, the goals function as a **monitoring and reporting tool** for tracking sustainability objectives through subgoals and indicators. This enables governments to benchmark, share progress, and identify areas requiring further action.



## FOUR WAYS LRGs CAN BENEFIT FROM THE SDGs



Guideline for policy development



Strengthening coherence between policy domains



Common and universal language



Monitoring and reporting tool

## 4. How to start working with the SDGs?

LRGs can choose different ways to integrate the Agenda 2030 in their community, depending on what fits best. Governments already connected to the SDGs have used various ways to begin. The following part showcases different routes to take and highlights examples of different LRGs. These are not set in stone as it always depends on the local context, needs and preferences.

### 1. Policy development

#### Inventory

A baseline assessment helps identify priority goals for action. The municipality of Renswoude in the Netherlands conducted an inventory of policy activities, then chose specific goals linked to the physical domain. The Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) compared goals with policies for progress tracking. In the publication [‘Best practice of local authorities on SDG’](#) (2021) an index is made on what LRGs are doing on each SDG. By working out a first inventory, governments can choose the right approach and, for example, a selection of prioritized SDGs.



## SDG strategy

Certain governments begin with a strategic approach to SDGs, either encompassing all goals or a subset. Both options have pros and cons. A focused selection allows manageability and alignment with existing agreements, while focus on all goals reveals goal interdependencies, fostering an organizational framework for the local government.

### EXAMPLE: HOW CAN A TOOL ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LOCAL SDG STRATEGY? – MUNICIPALITY OF SAINT-FONS, FRANCE

Keywords: SDG strategy, monitoring & evaluation

The municipality of Saint-Fons, France, was one of the first cities to use [the Reference Framework for Sustainable Development \(RFSC\)](#), a free online toolkit for European local governments, to develop a local sustainable development strategy aligned with the 17 SDGs: the Saint Fons 2030 Agenda. The RFSC was used to conduct an evaluation and a prospective scenario for 2030. The RFSC showed that 70% of the actions currently implemented in the territory were focused on five SDGs, which challenged the municipality to find a better balance towards a more integrated approach, particularly by giving greater priority to the SDGs involving environmental issues. Throughout the process of developing the 2030 Agenda, which included surveys and workshops with local stakeholders to collect ideas and co-create the strategy, the RFSC proved useful to visualize areas with room for improvement and raise awareness of the SDGs. A monitoring and evaluation system based on a selection of indicators provided in the RFSC tool was proposed and constitutes the basis for an annual assessment and tracking progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Find more information on the Saint-Fons project [here](#).

## 2. Forming alliances and partnerships

An effective approach to commencing SDG efforts is forming partnerships and networks aligned with the goals. Firstly, governments can engage stakeholders—businesses, schools, civil society, youth, and more—to jointly create sustainability objectives. Initiating with a kick-off event gains support and visibility. Secondly, linking up with existing sustainability initiatives and networks is equally valuable. Connecting SDG ambitions to these networks can be reinforcing, as LRGs and societal networks feel mutually supported. Finally, collaboration can extend beyond societal partners, as local and regional governments can unite for regional challenges—energy, waste, infrastructure, biodiversity—through SDG-based partnerships, enhancing collective impact.

## 3. Communication

Enhance your approach by incorporating digital resources like SDG icons within policy documents and public platforms. There are icons for the 17 goals as well as for the underlying targets, which help to concretely visualize how your LRG contributes to the SDGs.

The SDGs are a universally and accessible language. By aligning local policies with these goals, other organizations working with the SDGs can easily relate their sustainability goals, fostering a shared commitment.

Prominently showcase the SDGs within public spaces, such as town halls. Consider displaying them via a flag-raising ceremony or featuring them at entrances. See for instance [Amsterdam's SDG House](#), where SDG tiles are put in front of the entrance, exemplifying their integration into public spaces.

Many organizations have developed various communication tools on the SDGs. See for example the toolkit of [the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities \(VVSG\)](#) or of [Local 2030](#), a network and platform that supports the on-the-ground delivery of the SDGs.



### More information:

[Agenda 2030 in my municipality: A handbook for practitioners for localizing the SDGs - publication by GIZ & NALAS \(2019\)](#)

# 5. Integrating the SDGs in local policy

When working with the Agenda 2030, an LRG can adopt different roles.

1. A governing role by integrating the SDGs in the policy making process & evaluating progress
2. A connecting role by forming alliances and networks
3. A communicating role by raising awareness on the SDGs.

## **A governing role: integrate SDGs in policy development & evaluate progress**

An LRG can use the SDGs as a guiding framework in the policy making process in order to create coherence between different domains. New policy programs can be aimed at all goals or a subset and can be created together in regional or multi-level governance cooperation. Examples are a program on local inclusion, sustainable energy, or participatory governance. Read for instance the example of the municipality of Saint-Fons, France.

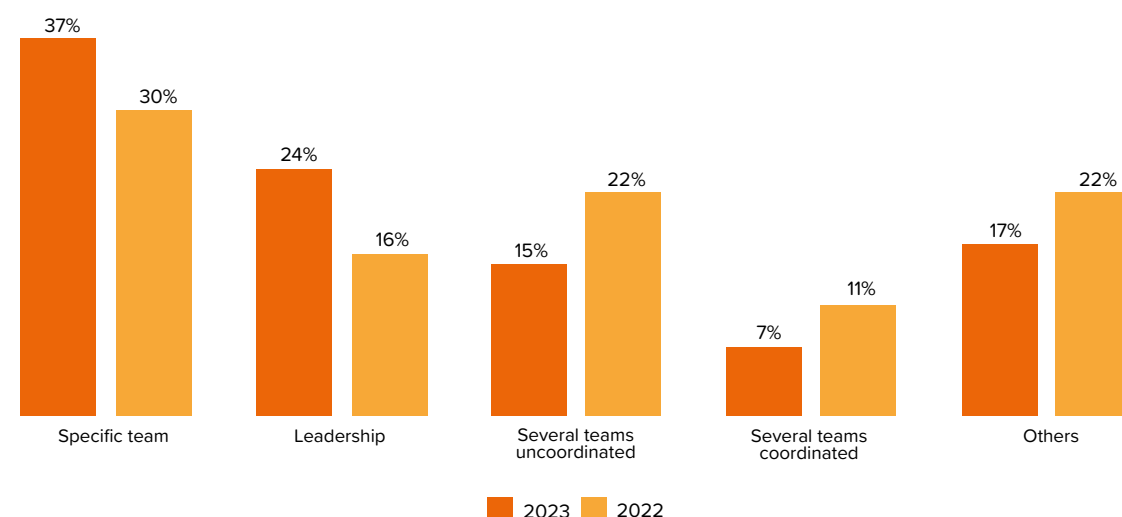
Another question can be how to allocate the SDGs. A government can choose to allocate SDG policy to a specific alderman or civil servant, for example the one already working on sustainability, or to allocate it to one or various departments in the organization, raising awareness within the local government and creating interdepartmental connections.

LRGs and LGAs organize SDG activities in various ways, as is shown in the graph from the Platforma report '[European Territories Localise the SDGs](#)' (2023).





### Responsibility for the coordination of SDGs within the organisation



Source: PLATFORMA, *European Territories Localise the SDGs: Only six summers left to make the most of the Decade of Action (2023)*

### Monitoring and reporting on the SDGs

Monitoring and reporting is an important part of the governing role LRGs can take. The SDGs include 169 subgoals, making it a detailed framework to use for a monitoring system. LGAs and LRGs can choose to report through a dedicated SDG report such as a Voluntary Subnational Report (VSR) or a Voluntary Local Report (VLR). Contributing to these local reports benefits **vertical coherence** between different layers of governments, it **identifies obstacles**, and it **complements and contributes to the Voluntary National Reviews**. View the [2023 progress report of PLATFORMA and CEMR](#) in which 41 LRGs participated.

On the national level, governments report on the SDGs through a [Voluntary National Review](#). In 2023, the European Union will present its first EU-level Voluntary Review (EUVR).

Next to these collaborative reports, LRGs and their associations can choose to set up their own SDG monitor. The Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE) developed a [local SDG monitor](#) in 2018 in which data can be found for all large Italian cities. Another inspiring example of local monitoring is of the Statistical Institute of Catalonia, which established [a comprehensive monitoring tool](#) in 2017, comparing its data with Spain and the European Union.

### Examples of Voluntary Subnational and Local Reviews:

[Voluntary Subnational Review Sweden - Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions \(2021\)](#)

[Voluntary Local Review Amsterdam - Municipality of Amsterdam, the Netherlands \(2022\)](#)

[Voluntary Local Review Bonn - Federal City of Bonn, Germany \(2022\)](#)

### More information:

[Voluntary Subnational & Local Reviews - Website of UCLG](#)

[Guidelines for Voluntary Subnational Reviews \(UCLG 2021\)](#)

[Voluntary National Reviews \(UN HLPF\)](#)

[Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level \(UCLG\)](#)

[Creation of the Local SDG Platform to support efforts by local governments toward achieving the SDGs \(United Nations, 2019\)](#)

[SDG Monitoring at the Local Level - Recommendations for developing a harmonized indicator set for Local Government Associations and their partners \(VNG, 2022\)](#)

### A connecting role: establishing partnerships and enabling networks

LRGs are often central to many local networks and can choose to involve different partners in their efforts for the Agenda 2030. Governments can choose to work together with the private sector, as many companies also desire to work more on sustainability. To raise awareness and spark new initiatives, governments can also form alliances with the educational sector. Partnerships do not have to be created from scratch, often there are already existing alliances or networks around sustainability. It can be very fruitful for LRGs to support existing energy from local stakeholders.

“

*“The citizens’ involvement is key to building resilient governance systems and implementing the 2030 Agenda which in turn will lead to inclusive and peaceful societies.” – Gunn Marit Helgesen, CEMR President*

### **EXAMPLE: THE BRISTOL SDG ALLIANCE – MUNICIPALITY OF BRISTOL, UNITED KINGDOM**

Keywords: sustainable community, SDG network

In the English city of Bristol in 2016, a “Bristol SDGs Alliance” was formed by people wanting to promote the UN’s newly agreed framework locally. This grew to include individuals from key Bristol institutions: its two universities, council officials, business representatives and voluntary organizations and networks. The Bristol SDGs Alliance is now a network of stakeholders representing more than eighty organizations, meeting every six to eight weeks to share best practice and information, and to advocate and adopt the SDGs in their own organizations.

Find more information about the organization [here](#).

### **EXAMPLE: A COMMUNITY EFFORT ON STARTING WITH THE SDGS – MUNICIPALITY OF BIJELJINA, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA**

Keywords: SDG strategy, SDG network

The City of Bijeljina embarked on a “bottom-up” strategy in early 2017, engaging local stakeholders to promote sustainable development. Noteworthy efforts include a comprehensive survey on SDG awareness involving public, private, and civil sectors. Consultations with international bodies, like the UN, informed their approach. A robust framework for promoting the SDGs emerged, coupled with training for municipal staff using UN methodology. There were awareness sessions extended to diverse partner groups at the city level, fostering collaboration among private, public, civil sectors, and academia. Tangible progress emerged through localized projects, e.g., skill enhancement for unemployed, inclusive playgrounds, vocational training expansions, all feeding into Bijeljina’s revised 2019-2023 Development Strategy, embodying the SDGs. In 2018, the strategy led to the establishment of an inclusive playground for children in the main city park. Before, the place was not accessible to children from low-income families and children with disabilities. Now, the playground is accessible to all children.

”Partnership, cooperation and coordination at local level provide the basis for a systematic approach for achieving sustainable development for all of us. Why is the implementation of the Agenda 2030 at the local level this important? Because life happens at the local level and the SDGs are relevant to the local level”. - Mile Pejcic, City of Bijeljina, Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Read more about Bijeljina’s efforts [here](#).

Next to in-person networks, some governments also establish a SDG platform: a website in which all SDG initiatives are included, together with contact details of all initiatives. This way, citizens and initiatives are able to find each other and connect. Find an example of a platform below.

### **EXAMPLE: COOPERATION THROUGH A SDG PLATFORM - MUNICIPALITY OF OOSTERHOUT, THE NETHERLANDS**

Keywords: SDG network, SDG platform

The municipality of Oosterhout in the Netherlands drives SDG contributions via an online platform, fostering local collaborations among businesses, education, nonprofits, and citizens for holistic sustainable progress. The 17 SDGs guide this initiative, with free first-year memberships offered to encourage broad participation and knowledge-sharing across the network.

The platform promotes knowledge sharing, showcases initiatives, and connects local supply and demand. Focused on active cooperation, it aims to engage numerous entrepreneurs, organizations, and residents of Oosterhout for tangible local impact. This hub integrates education, integration, and participation, allowing initiators to seek assistance while companies offer specialized support.

“The municipality of Oosterhout wants to spark the SDG journey. Therefore, we developed the easy accessible website Oosterhout SDG Lokaal (Oosterhout SDG local). To emphasize the goals, we highlight one goal each fourth Thursday of the month.” - Mark Buijs, mayor of the municipality of Oosterhout, the Netherlands

Take a look at the platform [here](#).

Next to local partnerships, the SDGs provide excellent opportunities for international partnerships. More information can be found in the section ‘The SDGs and international decentralised cooperation’.

### **A communicating role: raising awareness**

Because of the accessible language and the recognizable icons of the Agenda 2030, the goals are an effective medium in spreading awareness on the broader approach towards sustainability. Many LRGs take the opportunity to participate in efforts on the SDGs in this way.

Various LRGs start working on the SDGs by adding the icons to policy documents such as coalition agreements, which contributes to awareness on the goals.

Other activities on raising awareness are for example the organization of yearly activities or public outlets made by local administrators. More and more governments raise the flag on the 25th of September, celebrating the anniversary of the establishment of the goals. Through the exchange of local initiatives with PLATFORMA, the community can mutually inspire progress in their SDG pursuits.



*“In our policy the SDGs inspired to give coherence to various efforts for social, economic and ecologic sustainability. In the upcoming period we use the goals as a guideline for developing and evaluating policy. We will connect each focus point of our coalition agreement with one or more SDGs.” – Municipality of Delft, the Netherlands*

See an example of raising of awareness from Spain below, or watch the [video](#) of the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities in which mayors explain the goals.

#### **EXAMPLE: INVOLVING CHILDREN THROUGH A SDG EXHIBITION & LABORATORY – REGION OF MALLORCA, SPAIN**

Keywords: education, youth, sustainable community

From 17 April to 19 May, the Es Rafal library in Sa Pobla, Spain, became a space to discover the Agenda 2030 and its objectives, through the exhibition of Fons Mallorquí (Majorcan Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation) titled «Committed to the Agenda 2030». The exhibition aimed to introduce visitors to the 17 SDGs and some of their targets. A laboratory on the SDGs was created for the schoolchildren in the municipality and more than 400 pupils learned to identify the SDGs.

The exhibition comprised of five panels, each dedicated to one of the SDGs. The goal of this exhibition was to raise awareness about the specific targets that need to be achieved in the next 10 years, and to guide authorities in their efforts to achieve them. Inspired by the exhibition of Fons Mallorquí, Malena Tugores, the manager of the library, created an SDG laboratory for schoolchildren to identify the SDGs in the books available in the library. The laboratory was designed around the idea of a story, where stories in the books dealt with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. The laboratory provided an innovative and fun way for children to learn and discover the SDGs. The activities were hosted in the educational centers of Sa Pobla and

426 children participated in the initiative, making it a pioneer in Mallorca. The success of this initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of Global Citizenship Education activities.

Find more information about the exhibition [here](#).

#### **EXAMPLE: AWARENESS THROUGH EDUCATION ON THE SDGS – MUNICIPALITY OF JAUNPIL, LATVIA**

Keywords: education, youth

In Latvia, the municipality of Jaunpils involved youth and children in raising of awareness on the SDGs. The government organized a series of events, beginning with a creative workshop named «Wise, even wiser: understanding UN SDGs together,» during which Jaunpils secondary school students crafted a wooden puzzle illustrating SDGs. This was succeeded by an educational excursion, «Me and EU: understanding the European Union,» which took them to Riga. There, they visited the EU House, the national parliament, and the LALRG, delving deeper into SDGs implementation in Latvia and the role municipalities play in this process. In another activity, participants of Jaunpils “Animation Studio” produced 10 cartoons featuring how children and young people understand SDGs. All these activities contributed to raising awareness on the SDGs, as the municipality continues to do.

Find more information about Latvia’s local efforts on the SDGs [here](#).

#### **More information:**

[SDG Publications compiled by VVSG with tools in English, French and Spanish](#)



## 6. Working with the SDGs as a local politician

In democratic local governance, political councils determine policy priorities. When regarding the role of local politicians, four approaches can be distinguished, which can be linked to the SDGs.

### **Agenda-setting**

Council decisions to engage with the SDGs provide a clear mandate to officials and administrations. The council can take an important first step towards SDG integration and sustainability prioritization, fostering the use of SDGs as a reference framework.

### **Policy development**

The council can also contribute to the desired implementation by making the SDGs part of the policy development. The council can guide the organization by selecting which goals to focus on or by using the SDGs as framework to review new policy.

### **Representation**

Local politicians ensure that the commitment of the government is in line with what is going on in society. In addition, the council can raise awareness and facilitate cooperation between the local government and partners in society.

### **Monitoring**

The council can call the local government to concretize commitment through action plans, objectives, budgets by including SDG indicators. Through effective monitoring, results on the SDGs can be made visible.



### EXAMPLE: THE SDG CITY OF HARELBEKE – MUNICIPALITY OF HARELBEKE, BELGIUM

Keywords: policy development, representation, SDG strategy, citizen involvement

Harelbeke, a pioneering SDG city in Belgium, stands out for its proactive approach to translating the Agenda 2030 into local action. Spearheaded by the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), the city embraced the SDGs as a framework during a pilot project, which fuelled an organization-wide integration. After introducing its staff to the SDGs, Harelbeke hosted brainstorm sessions to link ideas to the goals, resulting in policy proposals, which were then handed over to Harelbeke's political parties. The SDGs then became cornerstones for the city's strategic multi-annual plan, refined through citizen engagement in six round table events, yielding 12 priority objectives. Regular reporting and annual monitoring sessions ensure accountability, while street art amplifies SDG awareness citywide. In 2030, they hope to have achieved the SDGs and are planning to host a big celebration.

Watch a video of the SDG journey of Harelbeke [here](#).

#### More information:

[The Sustainable Development Goals in the municipal council A guide for municipal councillors worldwide with examples from the Netherlands \(VNG, 2021\)](#)

[Integrating SDGs into local election manifestos \(VVSG, 2018\)](#)



Local politicians in the municipality of Sittard-Geleen, the Netherlands, commit to the SDGs together with local school children by placing their SDG ambitions in a 'time capsule' for 2030.'

## 7. The SDGs and international decentralised cooperation

The SDGs are a universal language and an excellent starting point for international partnerships. SDG 17: 'Partnerships for the goals', specifically calls for global partnerships as means to achieve progress on the other 16 goals. LRGs play a crucial part in achieving keys areas of the goals, and can accelerate impact through international partnerships. LRGs also stand closer to citizens and local needs and strengths. In other words, when facing challenges related to the SDGs, decentralised cooperation is an important vehicle for achieving the SDGs.

Decentralised cooperation can benefit from an SDG focused approach because it aims towards long term impact through taking into account a broad spectrum of goals. It stresses the interrelatedness of topics such as good education, proper jobs, healthcare, quality public services and sustainable infrastructure. Additionally, the SDGs are an international framework and policy language. This can help to bridge possible differences between international partners and smoothen international cooperation.

LRGs can benefit from international development cooperation because of peer-to-peer learning, international profiling, and jointly setting up projects with international partners. There are many good practices and policy toolkits available for LRGs to build upon the experiences of other LRGs. They can be found in the links below.

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*“The SDGs have proven a very good basis for cooperation, because they provide a universal language that helps to bridge cultural differences when discussing a particular problem and the approach to solve it. In doing so, we find out that local governments working in different environments, basically share to a large extent the same challenges”.*

*Etienne de Jager – Municipality of Utrecht, the Netherlands*





### EXAMPLE: EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH SDGS IN INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – CITY OF MALMÖ, SWEDEN AND LUSAKA CITY, ZAMBIA

In 2014, Lusaka City Council in Zambia and the City of Malmö in Sweden embarked on a transformative partnership, driven by the SDGs. Facilitated by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD), this collaboration stemmed from a shared vision to amplify youth participation and address pressing climate challenges.

The project was ignited by a joint recognition of the necessity to strengthen strategies by involving young voices. Through a strategic pilot initiative, the municipalities sought to bridge gaps in climate action and organize knowledge dissemination, inclusive dialogues, and active youth involvement. Lusaka and Malmö underwent a profound process of integrating the SDGs into their local agendas, ensuring that the objectives resonated with their unique contexts. This dynamic partnership resulted in tangible outcomes. Lusaka established the Junior Council, a dedicated platform for youthful perspectives, while Malmö empowered its Green Student Council and Young Ocean Ambassadors program. These initiatives harnessed young talent and insight, facilitating input into municipal decisions related to climate and environmental policies.

Importantly, the project's innovative methodologies were encapsulated in a digital toolkit, serving as a roadmap for other municipalities. This toolkit, launched in 2020, equips LRGs with practical tools, such as dialogue checklists, to foster effective youth engagement. Ultimately, the Lusaka-Malmö partnership exemplifies the SDGs in action, nurturing a generation of informed and engaged citizens while catalyzing broader climate and sustainability efforts.

Find more information about the project and the toolkit [here](#).

### EXAMPLE: EMPOWERING SUSTAINABILITY: KORTRIJK'S SDG-FOCUSED TWINNING WITH CHEFCHAOUEN – MUNICIPALITY OF KORTRIJK, BELGIUM

The city of Chefchaouen, Morocco, is making major investments in renewable energy, including through solar panels, more trees in the city and nature around it, and is seen as a national pioneer in this. In Belgium, Kortrijk too, is committed to a sustainable, livable city of the future, including more green in the city center, the expansion of nature in the city and innovative ways of using energy. The two cities decided to embark together on a twinning based on

the SDGs. Both cities share a commitment to climate action and renewable energy, aligning with SDGs 13 (Climate Action) and 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy). The partnership includes expertise exchange, green initiatives, and sustainable mobility planning to mitigate climate change's local impact.

Additionally, a strong asset of the twinning is the possibility for young people and students from the cities to participate in joint internships and research projects on the themes of climate, nature and environment. But the exchange opportunities also go wider. Sporting and cultural exchanges are also organized. In doing so, young people, specifically vulnerable young people, are given the opportunity to expand their horizons.

#### More information:

[About Decentralised Cooperation \(PLATFORMA\)](#)

[The SDGs: Global Commitment, International Cooperation, Local Action – an Aid for Local Governments \(VNG, 2020\)](#)

[The SDGs in Municipal International Cooperation - 40 inspirational examples \(VVSG, 2020\)](#)

OECD (2023), "Decentralised development co-operation: A global policy toolkit and guidance for practitioners", OECD Regional Development Papers, No. 46, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3cb22851-en>.







## 8. Join the worldwide SDG movement

In addition to addressing local concerns, the SDGs extend their impact beyond communities and countries, involving international organizations, corporations, NGOs, and more. These entities collectively contribute to the global movement centered around the SDGs, driven by a diverse array of inspiring events, of which the most important are listed below.

Most importantly, the **25th of September** marks the world anniversary of the SDGs. On this day, governments, businesses, civilians and other societal actors worldwide raise awareness for the SDGs. Many institutions, such as LRGs, raise the SDG flag to mark this anniversary. In many countries there are several action days around the 25th of September. There are conferences, public outlets by public figures, publications of sustainability reports and local actions aimed at sustainability. Find inspiration from events organized around the 25th of September by a wide variety of initiators worldwide on the [Act4SDGs website](#).

The [High-Level Political Forum](#) (HLPF) is the main UN platform on sustainable development. It focuses on the follow-up and reviews of the current SDGs. The Forum meets annually since 2013 and is attached to the United Nations General Assembly. The Voluntary National Reviews are the base for the meetings of the HLPF, facilitating the sharing of experiences, lessons learned and best practices. In addition it aims to strengthen governmental organizations, policies and partnerships in the context of the SDGs.

Once every four years, the [SDG Summit](#) takes place. This Summit, during the week of the UN General Assembly, reviews the implementation of the Agenda 2030. It brings together leaders from different governments, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. Next to a review, it aims to respond to the impact of current crises and provide political guidance upon achieving the SDGs. The first Summit happened in 2019, the following in 2023.

Next to international events there are many national SDG campaigns as well. LRGs can join ranks with other levels of government, civil society and businesses to move forward together.

### More information

Find more events by the UN about the SDGs [here](#).