The Role of Local Governments in Localizing and Implementing the SDGs: A Systematic Review of Challenges and Opportunities in the Sub-Saharan Context

Taye Amssalu Tesso[1]PhD Candidate & Dr. Daniel M. Nzengya[2]

St. Paul's University

Abstract

The sustainable development goals are a call for action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all the people will enjoy peace and prosperity. Halfway to their implementation, most African counties are off track in terms of achieving the goals and targets. This entails the need for a paradigm shift and requires innovative, urgent, and coordinated action for SDG implementation through localization and multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration. The implementation of this global agenda also requires the active involvement of multilayer governance including the local actors. Research conducted so far magnified the central role of local governments in localizing and implementing the SDGs. However, these researches are limited in scope and also lack appropriate methodological rigor. In view of this situation, this systematic review attempts to assess the methodological rigor and scope of previous research and reveals the challenges and opportunities of local government in implementing SDGs. It also documents the inferences of the previous research while implying future research areas from the existing limitations. Out of the 75 journals and other publication collected, ten of them met the inclusion criteria and reviewed. The central theme of the research questions for most of the study papers is the long for an appropriate SDG localization scheme to ease implementation at the local level. The structure, capacity, willingness, multi-stakeholder engagement, and characteristics of local government influence the accomplishment of the SDGs at locality. All those parameters need to be studied in context and content-specific settings in a participatory approach with a robust and vigorous methodological scope. Like the nature of the SDG which is interlinked and distinct, research and analysis on the same require effective coordination of all stakeholders including academic institutions and beneficiaries of the development interventions.

Keywords: SDG Localization, Role of local government, Decentralization, Development, Integration and Multi-stakeholder.

1.0 Introduction and Background

At the culmination of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), World Leaders representing their respective governments adopted a more comprehensive development outcome commonly called the Sustainable Development Goals or Agenda 2030**.** It is a call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and make sure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. According to the preamble of the resolution adopted at the Seventieth session of the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 on 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a plan of action with five critical pillars compromising People, Peace, Planet, Prosperity, and Partnership (UN Resolution, 2015). The implementation of the agenda is expected to address the most pressing global development issues and improve the living conditions of humanity across the globe. The 'plan' of the sustainable development goals is comprehensive, broad, integrated, and complex (Annan-Aggrey, Bandauko, & Arku (2021).

The 2030 agenda was developed on the principle of stretch and is ambitious. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, it is also comprehensive and applicable to developed and developing worlds as well as to life on earth and life in the ocean. The plan constitutes 17 goals with 167 targets and 243 indicators. They are integrated and indivisible. They also balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental. The development of targets and indicators also tries to balance among these three pillars and recognizes that sustainability is likely to be achieved if and only the three pillars are recognized and balanced. Agenda 2030 is not only highly integrated but also formulated in such a way that an action in one area affects the outcomes of the other. The development and approval of sustainable development goals are also much more consultative, transparent, and relatively participatory compared to the process of its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals that also had limited goals and targets.

Most African counties are off track in terms of achieving the goals and meeting the targets. The current global COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukraine crisis, the global economic recession, etc. exacerbated the situation adding fuel to the fire. The 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report of the United Nations (UN, 2021) emphasized the impact of the recent pandemic that regressed the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and called for the recommitment of governments, cities, businesses, and industries. The report used the latest available data and revealed the devastating impacts of the crisis on the SDGs and point out areas that require immediate actions from member states and the international community. Currently, millions of lives have been lost to the pandemic, human and economic toll has been unprecedented, inequality exacerbated, the cost of living heightened thus threatening decades of development gains. Africa has been hit particularly

hard by this unprecedented crisis. This demands a change of tact that entails for results oriented, innovative and coordinated action plan that will enhance the speedy implementation of the SDGs.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

All the integrated and comprehensive goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals are important to humanity. Nonetheless, the 2015 United Nations General Assembly Resolution emphasized that the most pressing global development issue for improving the living conditions of humanity across the globe is the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions. According to the 2021 Multidimensional Poverty index by United Nations and Oxford University, about 84.3% of poor people live in Sub-Saharan Africa (558 million) and South Asia (530 million). Consequently, development practitioners and philanthropic organizations argue that the success of the 2030 Agenda largely depends on the progress recorded in sub-Saharan Africa (Annan-Aggrey, Bandauko, & Arku, 2021).

The overall score of the African government on SDG achievement is 52.9% (Africa SDG Report, 2021). While some positive achievement has been realized in Northern and Southern Africa, the figure for East, West, and Central Africa is much lower than the continental average. In terms of positive SDG progress, the top eight ranked countries in Africa are Tunisia (1), Mauritius (2), Morocco (3), Algeria (4), Cabo Verde (5), Egypt (6), Botswana (7), and Ghana (8). The African continent is not only halfway towards achieving the SDG goals and targets by 2030 but also lacks representation among nations in the top 70% of SDG achievement. Furthermore, all the lowest 12 SDG scorers are from Sub-Saharan African countries. They include Guinea (51.3), Benin (51.2), Angola (50.9), Djibouti (50.3), Madagascar (50.1), DRC (50.1), Liberia (49.9), Sudan (49.6), Somalia (45.6), Chad (41.3), Central African Republic (39.3) and South Sudan (39.0).

1.2 Objectives of the Systematic Review

The objectives of this systematic review are:

1) Assess the methodological rigor of researches on SDG localization,
2) Analyzes the role of local government in SDG localization,
3) Reveals the challenges and opportunities of local government in implementing sustainable development goals and portrays future research direction on SDG localization and implementation in Africa.

4) Contributes to the strategies and policy intervention for coordinated and integrated development interventions for Agenda 2030 achievement in the sub-Saharan Africa context.

Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals

Localization of development in general and the SDGs in particular are rooted back to the basic principles of development embedded in the philosophy of "Leave NO ONE BEHIND" to reach out to the furthest and include them in the development intervention as well as addressing the systematic inequalities across different spectra. Broad-based inclusive development programmes that can contribute to poverty reduction and enhancing equality between and among different walks of life can be better planned, implemented, and monitored by being closer to the beneficiaries of the envisaged development progarmmes (Porter & Craig, 2004).

Sustainable development goals are global agendas agreed by member states to improve the lives of their citizens. Localization and/or domestication of those goals are not only the translation of the agenda to local reality for effective and well-coordinated multilevel governance but also making it relevant to the specific realities on the ground at a locality (Khan, Ferdous, & Bhuiyan, 2021), Bonsu, Hageman, & Kele, 2020).

Finalizing the global agendas with the consensus of member states is an important step but implementing them at an appropriate level is equally important if not more. And as such, locality and local development are becoming important elements of development strategies to achieve the SDGs and require efforts and actions from the local level. Cognizant of localization and the role of local actors, the United Nations established a UN Global Taskforce on the localization of the SDGs. The Global task force constructed a roadmap to help programme countries in their effort of contextualizing and concertizing the global goals to a more feasible and suitable action that conforms to the reality on the ground. The road map has five elements which include awareness-raising, advocacy, implementation, monitoring, and the next agenda (UN Global Task Force, Loca2030, Go local 2030.)

The Role of Local Government in Localizing the SDGs

The resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 illustrated some means of implementation with the primary responsibility on each country's government (UN Resolution 70/1, 2015). The government of each county includes many layers from national, subnational, local to village actors depending on the regulatory and legislative framework of each

country. The responsibilities of each hierarchy of the government can vary from the mobilization of financial resources, provision of basic services, expansion of accountable and responsive institutions.

Some argue that the inclusion and reference to local government in SDG 11 (Making cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, and sustainable) is a testimony to the critical role of local government in the implementation of the SDGs (Towards the Localization of SDGs, 2019) Nonetheless, the role of local government is beyond SDG 11. Well capacitated and empowered local government actively engage and delivers on the development needs and aspirations of their community with wider and varied mandates. The role of the state both at a national and regional level is indeed evolving owing to its ability to create an enabling environment and deliver on development results.

Local governments with other development actors are critical for the implementation and achievement of the SDGs. They are not only responsible and accountable for their community but also very close to households and individuals, particularly to those who are at risk of falling behind. They are the engine to reach the furthest and mainstream the leave no one behind in programming principles. Local communities and actors are best placed to understand the collective needs, challenges, and capacities of their locality and key partners to achieve this agenda. Local and regional governments are critical implementing partners of development planning. This is owing to their potential role in achieving the correlated targets in the long run through mainstreaming and localizing the SDGs (Mutiarani, & Siswantoro (2020); Croese, Oloko, Simon, & Valencia (2021); Bonsu, TyreeHageman, & Kele (2020)

SDG financing gap has been reported as a giant problem of SDG localization and implementation. Yet, the other side of the coin is not reported where the local government has a great potential to mobilize domestic resources. This can be done by strengthening tax capacity, broadening the tax base, and improving governance in revenue collection (Annan-Aggrey, E., Bandauko, E., & Arku, G. (2021). Besides the mobilization of resources, the local government plays a critical role in the management of the resources. Local budgets should be efficiently aligned with the priorities identified and established in the local or regional development plans. Effective management of resources at a local level is directly attributed to improved delivery of basic services such as education, healthcare, water, sanitation, security, and justice.

Challenges and Opportunities of Local Government in Localizing and Implementing the SDGs

Localization of development in general or localization of SDG in particular is not without challenges. They are also not a panacea to development problems. Challenges can be internal, external, manageable, or non-manageable at a local level.

According to some empirical research and statutory reports from the mandated organizations, the inadequacy of financial resources from both domestic and international sources, posed a critical challenge to SDG implementation in Africa and globally (The SDGCA, 2019; UN ECA, 2020) . The SDGCA (2019) highlights significant public revenue shortfalls in Africa. For example, one in five African countries does not raise enough in revenues to meet its basic state functions. Enhancing efforts to mobilize domestic resources has been at the center of financing development discourse. As indicated in the previous chapters, financial resources can be enhanced by strengthening tax capacity, broadening the tax base, and improving governance in revenue collection (Annan-Aggrey, Bandauko, & Arku, 2021; Mutiarani, & Siswantoro, 2020).

Likewise, many African countries are being challenged with institutional capacity, inadequate data, and social exclusion to localize and implement SDGs. Localization requires that local governments be provided with resources capacities commensurate with the responsibilities they are given in the implementation process. Weak local governance and lack of accountability at many levels of government hierarchy pose challenges to the implementation of development programms. For local governments to effectively function as strategic implementers of the SDGs, they need the requisite human capital and financial resources as well as autonomy to take decisions based on the needs of their citizens. Local accountability should be strengthened, and partnerships needs developed with civil society, local NGOs, and community-based organizations.

Another critical aspect of SDG localization and implementation is the lack of good governance at all levels of governance. Good governance determines the successful implementation of the SDGs for all types of local governments. Without good governance, there will be no mainstreaming of the leave no one behind principle, which is a foundation of all SDGs localization and implementation. Linking good governance to cross-sectored and nexus thinking, rather than current sectored/silo-thinking practices through the bottom-up concept of citizen science is highly important for SDG implementation and localization (de Siqueira, & Ramalho, 2022).

Despite the challenges, there are also opportunities to localize and implement the SDGs in Africa. Some of the opportunities are multi stakeholders' engagement through increasing awareness of citizens, taking advantage of the young and vibrant society in Africa, developing peer support mechanisms among countries and south-south learning. For effective localization and implementation of SDGs in Africa, there is need to capitalize on decentralization and participation. They are critical in achieving the targets of SDGs. An effectively decentralized system of administration with coordinated functions of multi-levels of government enhances the localization and decentralization of SDGs (Krantz & Gustafsson, 2021; Afandi, Anomsari, & Novira (2021).

Multi-level Governance and SDG Localization

Sustainable development goals localization is the transition of the global agenda to the national and down the ladder to the local hierarchy of government structures. Such translation of goals and plans is all about multilayered and multileveled governance. This process is neither a delegation nor a removal of authority and responsibility from one to another. It is the sharing of responsibility and accountability among multileveled governance structures.

The government machineries at local, regional, or national level are assumed to share a common purpose of improving the living conditions of the society and delivering results to their citizens. It is a cooperation framework of empowering all levels of government to take shared ownership through effective decision making, coordinated action, sharing expertise, skills, and knowledge, communicating effectively, and establishing consistent monitoring and reporting tools or structures.

Decentralization and Local Development

Decentralization is a long-standing concept for governance while it is a contemporary idea in the development discourse. It is the transfer of authority and responsibility from the central government to the lower level of government structure. Put it differently, it is the process by which some critical functions of the government like planning, decision making, and implementations are delegated and /or distributed from the central 'powerhouse' to the next level of hierarchy (The World Bank, 2019). From a development perspective, it is a process of planning, budgeting, deciding, and acting on the development priorities of the locality with all actors on the ground.

The concept of localizing development is closely linked to participation and decentralization. Participation has been popularized in development since the 1990s and has been part of development discourse since then. It is a counter attack to a highly criticized top-down policy in development that

excludes people from its processes (Bonsu, TyreeHageman, & Kele, 2020; de Siqueira, & Ramalho, 2022). The approach is expected to make development and its processes acceptable and inclusive as it embraces the needs, wants, priorities and interests of the community. It is all about bringing development closer to the people. Such inherent local development influences the achievement the national and global development goals.

System Approach and Multi Stakeholders Engagement through Bottom-Up Approach and SDG Localization

The sustainable development goal is a recent phenomenon and relatively new to research and there remains a knowledge gap that is attracting scientific research. One of the contemporary interests is that localization and achievement of the 2030 Agenda require a participatory, integrated, and systemic approach (Afandi, Anomsari, & Novira, 2021; Bonsu, TyreeHageman, & Kele (2020). Such initiatives involve various categories of actors from planning, implementation to monitoring. It also involves top to bottom and bottom-to-up processes in a sort of seamless interactive approach. The principle of SDG integration through systematic and multi-stakeholder engagement comprises the horizontal linkage between different policy areas. It also entails vertical linkage from global, national to local levels and territorial linkage between local governments [ibid]. At the heart of multi-stakeholder mechanisms is the participation of key territorial stakeholders, the whole of society, and the whole of government approach. The actors include but are not limited to government entities, civil society organizations, private companies and academia.

While applying the multi-stakeholder mechanisms, systems approach can help to characterize and identify useful leverage points. It also fosters participation that is needed to localize and catalyze development action. Given that each place has a unique geographical or spatial extent and therein lies its unique characters and problems. In a more sophisticated fashion, development systems thinking is a consideration of interconnections, holistic rather than reductionist approaches and exploration of dynamic and emergent behavior arising from the action of feedback relationships. It provides tools for managing complexities by shifting problem frameworks from linear cause-effect interpretations toward an understanding of complex situations (Pintér, Kok, & Almassy (2017). The approach enables integrated multi-level partnerships that have been Identified as one of the key drivers of SDGs. and are viewed as a synchronized and integrated development plan of the locality and are not a stand-alone SDG project.

Advocating for SDG localization and integration is all about planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programmes at all levels of the government hierarchy in a synchronized way. This includes national, regional, and local levels (Gustafsson & Ivner, 2018). As the SDGs are so integrated and interlinked of indivisible nature require systemic thinking and multi-stakeholder engagement. Systemic thinking is where all or different parts work together seamlessly while feeding each other from a subsystem to a super system. The approach requires the whole of society and the whole of government to collaborate.

In most of the scenarios, the development planning has been more top-down which excludes significant actors of development and is not compatible with the systematic and multi-stakeholder approach. The bottom line is that top-down and bottom-up approaches should complement each other to improve multi-level coordination and governance. Local governments need to establish their action plans for the SDGs that reflect their needs and local characteristics while the upper streams are expected to manage regulatory frameworks and allocate resources (Rocha de Siqueira, I., & Ramalho, L. 2022). The principle of focusing on a bottom-up approach will ensure that the delivery of the SDGs is grounded on local realities, which will make a significant contribution and enable the community to meet their basic needs and priorities.

1.3 Methods

This study followed five phases ranging from framing questions for a review, identifying relevant work, assessing the quality of studies, summarizing the evidence to interpreting the findings. First, the review questions on the role of local government in localizing SDGs for implementation were framed from broader areas of SDG localization. Second, relevant accessible intellectual works and publications related to the subject were identified with the intention of detailed and broad literature works. With the guidance and close consultation with the corresponding author, protocols of inclusion and exclusion were developed and implemented.

Broad areas of literature were gathered from credible open and closed sources including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Journal of Development Studies, Oxford Development Studies, and Springer link. The authors used search engines using key terminologies like SDG localization, the role of local government, decentralization and development. Likewise, nonacademic policy-related, SDG progress reports, and statistical analysis from the United Nations, Economic Commission for Africa, The World Bank and the African Union were used as a background document for the review. Africa SDG Index and Dashboard were also collected and reviewed as needed. About 75 SDG localization, Local Government and sustainable development goals-related publications were

collected and securitized against pre-established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Some of those criteria are that the published paper should be empirical, peer-reviewed, timely, and relevant to the framed questions. The author, coverage and scope and publishing house were also used to shortlist the most pertinent journal for the systematic review. Furthermore, non-conventional criteria like relevance to the Sub-Saharan African context, South-South learning and experience from SDG best-performing countries were added to enhance the quality of the review processes.

Accordingly, 60 papers were excluded as most of them are not empirical and not peer reviewed. Nonetheless, policy documents including United Nations General Resolutions, The Secretary-General Report on the SDG achievement, Africa SDG report and other pertinent documents are included and reviewed as needed. The databases used are acclaimed and well known. Some of the websites are from SDG-mandated institutions like the UN.

1.4 Results and Discussions

Critique of the Methodological Scope

The ten academic journals reviewed were carefully selected based on the pre-established protocols of the selection criteria. The study is on the role of local government in the localization of sustainable development goals in the Sub-Saharan context. The subject is unexplored and relatively new for academic discourses. And hence, some of the research papers were designed based on the exploratory approach with certain aspects of describing the situations. Indeed, an exploratory approach is appropriate as a foundation to identify the problems and for more scrutiny due to the limited research on SDG localization and nuance of the subject matter.

Out of the ten journals, one followed a quantitative approach, one followed a mixed approach but with more emphasis on the qualitative side while the remaining eight were purely qualitative. Even if it is not explicitly mentioned both cross-sectional and longitudinal approaches can be deduced from the research paper. Some case studies dealt with detailed analysis of sustainable development goals status in a locality across departments and sector. Hence the research designs were more of cross-sectional. There are two journal that treated sustainable development goals implementation over a time series and hence followed longitudinal approaches. All the journals used both primary and secondary data. The data gathering methodology of the journals ranges from surveys, interviews, Key informants, focus group discussions, and case studies to content analysis. The qualitative content analysis outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005,) for a detailed review of the

documents to obtain a sense of the whole and the Soft System Methodology (SSM) by Check land and Poulter (2010) were also used by two journals.

Mutiarani, & Siswantoro (2020) analyzed the impact of local government characteristics on the accomplishment of sustainable development goals using statistical analysis. The population of the study is also the sample and quite a good representative. The population of the study was the 34 provinces in Indonesia. This study constructed a regression, using the accomplishment of SDGs in the province according to the *scoring* via its size, own resource and administrative units. The dependent variable is the accomplishment level of sustainable development goals of the local government in question. It is derived from the result of own scoring measured via the total of all the individual scores of the provincial government and the individual provincial scores. The score or this dependent variable is the sustainable development goals achieved in 2015 and 2016. The scope of the variables is limited in terms of time series but quite wide in terms of the indicators of the sustainable development goals. It includes all the 17 goals of the SDGs. However, the scope of independent variables is limited to three namely, the size of the local government, the administrative unit of each local government and the local own source of revenue. There are significant and many more local government characteristics which have a more detrimental effect on sustainable development goals achievement. The research paper also lacks a qualitative assessment of the role of the characteristics of the local government in achieving the SDGs from different stakeholders' perspectives.

Despite the limitation on the number of independent variables, the research was guided by scientific principles of multiple regression whereby the role of dependent variables was established against the independent variables. Through multiple regression, the authors tested the hypothesis and conclude that region size and Local Own-Source Revenue affect SDGs accomplishment levels (Mutiarani, & Siswantoro (2020).

The eight-research papers used a qualitative approach mainly dependent on content analysis, conceptual development, thematic reporting, and testing of theories and global policies against the content and context-specific of each locality. The population of the study ranged from the continent of Africa, county-level analysis, and case studies at a municipality level. The study employed purposefully sampling methodology. Different types of data gathering methodologies were used. Interviews, key informants, focus group discussions and personal observations were employed to gather firsthand information while secondary data were collected from sustainable development goal reports, policy documents, and locality development plans.

Khan, Saha, & Bhuiyan (2018) attempted to develop a conceptual framework for mainstreaming sustainable development goals for the Local Government of Bangladesh. The research was explanatory and presented a synchronized view of local government functions in the localization and implementation of sustainable development goals. One local government was sampled as a representative for other localities which is extremely low in terms of scope. The justification provided hinged on the fact that the locality is the middle-level administration of the Country with an intermediary role as a policy-implementing agency of government at the sub-national level. The middle-level administration connects the central government agencies or higher local government bodies with the lowest tier. The paper used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were gathered from United Nations reports, government policies and laws, and non-government agencies. The primary data were collected through in-depth key informant interviews systematic observations.

The study had serious methodology limitations. It was not clear how many key informants were interviewed; interview questions were clearly indicated in the paper, and it was impossible to gauge the scope or content of the interview. Furthermore, the selection criteria and size of the interviewees were not included in the research report. Nonetheless, the study revealed and shaded lights on SDG mainstreaming and localization in a content and context specific settings.

The study paper by Eunice Annan-Aggrey, Elmond Bandauko, and Godwin Arku (2021) investigated the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development localization in Africa. They analyzed the achievement in the first quadrennial SDGs implementation status in Africa with the intention of policy action in the implementation period to come. The researcher used Africa as a population without any specific reference to the sample as the study is a detailed content analysis of critical policy documents and SDG status progress report on Africa. The report analyzed were from mandated and critical institutions like UNECA, UNDG Global task force for SDG localization, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), SDG Center for Africa, United Cities and Local Government, WB, Commonwealth Local Government Forum, and Brooking Africa Growth. This guarantees a diverse content for critical review in varied aspects and dimensions of the SDGs.

Based on the thematic analysis, the researcher grouped issues under common themes and selected the most frequently recurring issues that were pertinent to the local governance and SDG localization in Africa. Despite the very rich content analysis and Pan-Africanist approach, the scope of data is limited to top-down reports without triangulating with downstream reports from the

locality. There are no primary data to triangulate the content analysis risking the rigor and quality of the analysis.

Like many others, the research by Muhamad Nur Afandi and Endah Tri Anomsari (2021) employed an exploratory approach. The paper attempted to construct a conceptual model of localizing SDGs building on experiences and plans from local development plans in Indonesia. The study sample is one of the autonomous regions, West Java Province without justifying the limited scope and rather very small sample size. The specific research method used was Soft System Methodology (SSM) by Checkland and Poulter (2010). They used the consolidated four main steps of SSM: (1) finding out the problematic situation, (2) building a systematic model based on the root definition and analyses, and (3) discussing the proposed systematic model to get feedback from the 'real world' and (4) taking actions to improve the systematic model according to the feedback.

Both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed. Primary data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and personal observation while secondary data was collected from medium-term locality development plans. Very comprehensive data gathering tools were utilized but the content of data and subjects were not described and hence the scope of the information collected cannot be determined. Nonetheless, the draft conceptual model developed was discussed by multi-stakeholders of local development through a focus group discussion (FGD). The FGD was attended by multi-sectoral government agencies, with the main goal being to examine the suitability of the model with the situation in the real world. The research method was not only scientific but also participatory and contextualized. Essential components of qualitative research were included. The limitations are the non-involvement of the non-state actors in the interview and focus group discussion as well as the lack of definitions of the subject and content of the interviews and key informants.

The research paper by Krantz & Gustafsson (2021) on localizing the sustainable development goals through an integrated approach in municipalities has a descriptive and explorative approach. The paper explores the experience of an early adopter of SDG localization in a Swedish municipal in an integrated approach. The exploratory approach is justified since research on SDG localization in municipalities is still an unexplored field. It is also a case study of V€axj€o municipality on SDG localization. The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data is collected through interviews while secondary data is gathered from the municipality workplans. The subject of the interviews were those individuals actively involved in the baseline review of municipality

development plans and key project people from different departments like administration, education, business, welfare and spatial planning. The scope of the interview subject followed a multi-stakeholder approach. However, the number of interview participants and the details of the interview content were not included in the study paper. Two research questions enumerated at the beginning of the research phase are wide and seems high coverage in terms of localizing SDG in the municipality.

The research paper by Mandisvika (2015) is exploratory with a specific case study from Harare city with the phenomenological approach. The paper employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data for the research was gathered through observation and key informant interviews while secondary data were collected from Harare's 2014 budget, census, and existing forward plans. The purposive sampling technique was used while identifying the subject of the study. The details interview questions were described with a wide range of scope addressing issues related to local government, local economic development and municipalities. Nonetheless, the number and justification of the key informants were not described.

Croese, Oloko, Simon and Valencia (2011) analyzed the challenges of multi-level governance for global policy implementation in Africa. The intention was to explore the challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development goals implementation at the local level in Africa with an emphasis on two cities as a case study, Kisumu town of Kenya, and Cape Town of South Africa. The researcher also used a comparative study of both cities. Primary data were collected through key informants and focus group discussions with relevant government officials from national, subnational, and local levels. The number and justification of the focus group discussion and key informants were not described making the scope very limited.

The research by de Siqueira and Ramalho (2022) is a non-conventional exploratory design. The study tried to depict how caring about the number in participatory methodology would help SDG implementation and monitoring. To this end, they conducted 13 interviews via video calls with members of the major institutions in civil society, academic, and public administration that have been shepherding the 2030 Agenda in Brazil. They used semi-structured interviews. They also followed up by exchanges of emails or texts with additional content, like meeting transcripts and reports. The interviews conducted focused on everyone's experience with promoting the 2030 Agenda since 2015. The research lacks rigorous methods and also did not have a clear focus of analysis. There were no predefined research questions or problem statements. The authors are

exploring and trying to create some knowledge on the politics of care beyond data while discussing SDG localization.

The research paper by Bonsu, TyreeHageman and Kele (2020) is a case study with the purpose of an in-depth qualitative analysis of an issue to understand and explain contemporary issues from the perspective of participants for future-oriented SDG localization. The justification for the approach is that it allows detailed analysis of policy developments and program-based service reforms. It can also help for additional insights into the choice of desired strategies, and in turn, can help develop or refine theory in real settings. The study primarily depends on workshops to determine a framework for SDG localization using a bottom-up approach with the future-oriented mechanism. The paper used purposeful sampling to recruit a total of 14 year-13 students studying Advanced-Level (A-Level) subjects to ensure a multi-disciplinary, representative workshop sample. In this study, participants employed a STEEP framework to develop exploratory scenarios (i.e., possible futures and better strategies for realizing this future), including desirable scenarios by 2030.

The methodology helped to test and facilitate a bottom-up localization approach. The study group also engaged in Collective-Vision-Based Scenario thinking through targeted focus group discussion. Semi structure interviews were conducted to guide the discussion. The following questions were explored in the SDGs' future projections and thinking: What should the future look like in ten years? (Focusing on both national and local level analyses) As a future leader in an organization, what should be the local goal(s) around the SDG and how should it be achieved over the next ten years? What risks and challenges do we face over the next five to ten years? What contingency plans should we put in place? And what strategies are required to achieve the desired outcome? The questions are future-oriented, vision focus, risk management, and strategy development. However, the research methods lack the involvement of wider stakeholders or a whole of society approach. There were limited or no participation of community representative, private sector, Civil Society Organizations, Academia and the like. These would have helped to arrive at more robust policy recommendations and concrete actions required for SDG localization.

The study paper by Koha, Huh and Yea (2021) used a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The research design is exploratory. The SDGs were reviewed through surveys and focus group meetings to select headline indicators for Gyeonggi provincial government and local governments. Three steps of data collection from both primary and secondary sources were utilized. First, they identified high-priority goals based on the survey conducted on four groups: 1,000 residents, 214 civil servants, 39 experts, and 39 members of the Gyeonggi- do Council for

Sustainable Development. These goals were weighted when selecting the headline indicators. Secondly, the priorities of the 68 targets were investigated by the experts and members of the Council for Sustainable Development who participated in the process of establishing the Gyeonggi-do SDGs. They scored 68 targets on a 5-point scale and ranked in the order of highest average. Lastly, focus group meetings were held to discuss the outcomes of the target priority survey and to select the headline indicators to create local level SDG indicators for Gyeonggi, Korea.

The study also utilized the fuzzy-set ideal-type analysis method (STATA - (software for statistics and data science) version 16.0 used), to derive complex comparisons and implications beyond a simple comparison of index results by local government. Fuzzy set analysis is based on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), which is characterized by a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) research methodology and provides a special method of case studies. Lastly, the study converted the scores into a fuzzy-set score system through the STATA 16.0 program's calibration function, and the paper measured them according to three qualitative anchors: "fully in," "fully out," and "crossover point" as in the degree of the two.

In summary, all the study papers used descriptive and exploratory design. The sample and the population referenced ranges from the continent of Africa to countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia and Brazil. A case study of cities in Africa, Korea and Sweden is also used as a sample to explore the level of SDG localization and implementation. Nine journals used both primary and secondary data to respond to the research question. The Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews of the key informants of public officials, experts and local government. The personal observation was also used to gather primary data in some of the cases. Secondary data was collected from research articles, documents of the United Nations, government policies and laws, reports and manuals from government and non-government agencies. Since the research is related to Sustainable Development Goals, the use of mandated SDG implementation reports from the UN, the World Bank, the Africa Union, and the SDG Network guarantees value addition to the outcomes.

For 60% of the journals systematically reviewed, research design, sampling strategy, sample size, and data collection mechanism were not elaborated. The lack of detailed theories and philosophy contributed to those shortcomings. Despite those and similar limitations, the research paper produced a good conceptual framework for SDG localization and implementation. Those research papers magnified the central role of local government in localizing and implementing the SDGs. Given the wider range of data gathering tools and the use of both secondary and primary data, the methodological assessment of the publication is rated at a medium level. The major

drawbacks are lack of clarity in the design of the research method and non-delimitation and lack of justification of sample size and techniques used to gather data.

1.5 Limitation and Further Studies

Five out of ten journals clearly stated the limitations of the research. The limitations can be either substantive, scope, or methodological rigor. The paper by Mutiarani, and Siswantoro (2020) is limited to provinces in Indonesia and SDG performance from 2015 to 2016., It recommends a broader coverage and increased period series. The research by Khan, Saha, & Bhuiyan (2018) also hinted at a limitation of scope and lack of tests. They suggested that the framework developed needs to be tested. They recommended future research that can potentially shed light on the applicability of this exercise to the local governments in developing country contexts. Likewise, the journal of Annan-Aggrey, Bandauo and Arku (2021) recognized that localization of the SDGs in Africa is not amenable to a one size fits all approach and recommended content and context specify SDG localization research based on institutional architecture and varied local government structures of each locality. Similarly, the research by Krantz and Gustafsson (2021) argued the application of the scheme or conclusion is limited to a narrow, an in-depth single case study of a descriptive approach. Hence it suggested the need to have a wider coverage of analysis.

1.6 Conclusion

For the achievement of 2030 Agenda and SDG localization, local level is the entry point. And as such, the role of local government is critical. The structure, capacity, willingness and characteristics of local government all have a bearing in the accomplishment of the SDGs. Those parameters need to be studied in context and content-specific settings with more involvement and engagement of academic arena. It also requires a robust and vigorous methodological approach.

Like the nature of the SDG which is interlinked and distinct, research and analysis on the same require effective coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders.

1.7 Recommendations and Policy Implications

Localization and achievement of SDGs entail innovative, pragmatic and determined actions with attention to grass root development approach. The research so far has been less concerned with a grassroots approach demanding for more studies in collaboration with local actors. The collaboration between academics and actors of development is extremely vital to address the pitfalls of the existing initiatives.

SDGs are enumerated and agreed at a global level with no local context and realities. The contextualization, integration, and implementation heavily depend on the internalization as well as linking the local needs and interests to SDG. Such efforts require a coordinated and coherent policy formulation and implementation at a different level of multilevel government.

From the thorough review and systemic analysis of SDG localization journals, the following recommendations for policy recommendations are drawn for considerations by local, national and international actors.

1) Local governments are the foundation of mainstreaming SDGs and an entry points for SDG localization and implementation. Their active roles in planning, implementing and evaluating development progammes are critical. And as such the involvement of local government should be captured as part of overall national development planning, implementing and monitoring efforts.

2) SDG localization and implementation required effective coordination among multilevel governance structure and policy coherence through integrated and system approach. In a nutshell, there is a need for highly synchronized and coherent government functions with effective division of labor among multilayered structures.

3) Effective involvement of stakeholders including but not limited to community as a beneficiary, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, academia, marginalized groups (women, youth, PWDs, etc.), is necessary for broad based inclusive SDG localization and implementation from planning, implementation to monitoring.

4) Despite enormous opportunities for local governments for SDG localization and implementation, they are also encountered with multitudes of challenges like weak institutional capacity, inadequate financing, unavailability of data, etc. National government and international development partners should work together to address those gaps.

5) Finally, localities have their own unique characteristics. Hence, there is a need to developed SDG localization and implementation scheme for the localities based on scientific and research-proven initiatives. Such initiatives should be followed with mandated local- review and reporting of the local SDG implementation.

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