Multilevel Governance, Localization, Stakeholders' Engagement, and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Oromia, Ethiopia

Taye Amssalu
St. Paul's University

Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a universal framework for addressing global challenges, encompassing 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and promoting prosperity by 2030. Yet, progress remains critically off track. The 2024 SDG Report shows that only 17 percent of targets are on schedule, with Africa experiencing particularly slow advancement. Ethiopia ranks 145th out of 167 countries on the SDG Index, with a score of 55.5, reflecting persistent challenges. Oromia Regional State, the country's largest and most populous region, is central to Ethiopia's SDG trajectory but continues to face governance fragmentation, weak localization, resource constraints, and widespread multidimensional poverty. This study examines the interplay of multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholder engagement in shaping SDG implementation in Oromia, with a focus on the People Pillar (Goals 1–5). Grounded in a pragmatist philosophy and informed by systems, governance, and stakeholder theories, the study employed a mixed-methods design. Survey data were collected from 321 respondents through multistage proportionate stratified random sampling, complemented by 15 key informant interviews and document analysis. Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics, regression models, and diagnostic tests, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to capture institutional dynamics and contextual challenges. Multilevel governance showed a positive but statistically weak association with SDG outcomes, underscoring fragile intergovernmental coordination. Localization demonstrated a significant influence but revealed inconsistencies in aligning global indicators with regional priorities, compounded by limited technical and fiscal capacity. Stakeholder engagement emerged as a moderating factor, significantly strengthening the link between localization and implementation. A combined model explained 14.4% of the variance in SDG implementation. In Oromia, SDG implementation level is moderate but fragile: SDG 3 and 4 recorded relative gains, while SDG 1, SDG 2, and SDG 5 faced entrenched barriers. Theoretically, the study refines the Integrated Governance–Localization–Stakeholder Engagement (IL-SE) Model, demonstrating its relevance for SDG implementation. Practically, the study offers recommendations, including institutionalizing multi-stakeholder platforms, enhancing fiscal and technical decentralization, and strengthening integrated planning and monitoring systems. These measures are essential to bridge the gap between policy ambition and developmental outcomes. By depicting Oromia's experience within global SDG debates, the research contributes to both scholarly discourse and practical pathways for accelerating sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Multilevel Governance, Localization, Stakeholder Engagement, People Pillar, Implementation

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Agenda for Sustainable Development, also known as the 2030 Agenda, marking a significant shift in global development goals. The agenda introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and peace through a universal approach. It serves as a call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030, anchored in five critical pillars: People, Peace, Planet, Prosperity, and Partnership (UN Resolution, 2015). However, achieving these objectives remains challenging, and according to the latest SDGs report, only 17 out of 169 targets are on track, while 35 percent show stagnation and 17 percent have regressed from the 2015 baseline. Contributing factors include the COVID-19 pandemic, financial crises, governance challenges, limited localization, global warming, climate change, and geopolitical conflicts (United Nations, 2024).

The implementation of SDGs represents a transformative agenda that requires coordinated action across multiple levels of governance, contextualizing global goals to local needs, and active engagement of diverse stakeholders. Multilevel governance, which emphasizes the interplay between global, national, regional, and local actors, is critical to ensuring that SDGs policies are effectively tailored to local contexts and priorities. Localization, the process of adapting global goals to local realities, is essential for addressing the unique socio-economic, cultural, and environmental challenges faced by communities, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of SDGs initiatives. Furthermore, stakeholders' engagement, involving governments, civil society, the private sector, and local communities, fosters inclusive decision-making, ownership, and accountability, which are vital for the successful implementation of SDGs. This research seeks to explore the synergies between multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholders' engagement, aiming to identify strategies that enhance coherence, participation, and effectiveness in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Empirical studies on SDG implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa highlight both progress and persistent challenges, emphasizing the critical role of governance structures, resource constraints, and stakeholder engagement. While some countries, such as Morocco and Rwanda, have made significant strides in integrating SDGs into national development plans and

localizing goals through decentralized governance (UNDP, 2020), issues such as limited financial resources, weak institutional capacities, and inadequate data systems hinder effective implementation (Asad, Hassan, & Sheikh, 2021). Research underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly in addressing cross-cutting goals like poverty reduction, health, and education, but notes that unequal participation and power imbalances often marginalize local communities, putting localization at risk (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). Case studies from countries like Ghana demonstrate successful examples of localized SDGs initiatives driven by strong political will and community involvement (Ahenkan & Osei-Kojo, 2018), while others, such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Sudan, face significant barriers due to political instability and resource scarcity (Ajayi & Adesote, 2020; UNECA, 2019).

Ethiopia ranked 145th out of 167 countries on the SDGs index, with a score of 55.5, which exemplifies these challenges. Despite initiatives like the Green Legacy Program (GLP) and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), the country continues to struggle with persistent poverty, hunger, weak infrastructure, governance deficits, regional conflicts, and climate change issues (UN, 2024). Similar challenges are evident in the Oromia Regional State, the largest region with over 40 million inhabitants. Governance fragmentation, limited resources, and socio-economic disparities hinder the progress. Poverty rates in Oromia Regional State decreased from 28.7 percent in 2011 to 23.9 percent in 2016, partly due to programs like the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). However, infrastructure gaps, rural poverty, and inequality persist. Governance challenges and resource constraints further impede sustainable development efforts. Despite these hurdles, potential pathways for progress exist through enhanced localization of SDGs, effective multilevel governance, and robust stakeholder commitment.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the role of multilevel governance, localization and stakeholders' engagement on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The specific objectives were:

(i)   Evaluate the status of implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.
(ii)   Determine the influence of multilevel governance on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.
(iii)   Determine the influence of localization on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

(iv)   Evaluate the influence of stakeholders' engagement on the relationship among multilevel governance, localization, and the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

(v)   Determine the effect of multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholder engagement on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

Significance of Study

This research on multilevel governance, stakeholders' engagement, localization, and implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia holds significant importance across several dimensions. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on SDGs implementation, particularly in the context of developing nations and federal systems. By examining the interplay between multilevel governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and localization efforts, the research provides insights into the complexities of implementing global goals at regional and local levels. The findings helps to bridge the gap in academic understanding of how different governance layers interact in SDGs implementation process, potentially leading to new theoretical frameworks for effective SDGs governance in federal systems.

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents literature on the existing linkage between multilevel governance, stakeholders' engagement, localization, and implementation of SDGs. To accomplish this, the study considers the pragmatism philosophy and three theories that underscore the relationships among these variables. They are system theory, stakeholder theory and governance theory. A presentation of the empirical review of literature on the variables follows.

Theoretical Framework

Theories play a fundamental role in research by providing a structured framework for understanding, explaining, and predicting phenomena. This research is built on three interconnected but distinct theories. Namely, System Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Governance Theory.

Empirical Literature Review

This section discusses empirical studies of the relationships among the variables in this study. These are multilevel governance and implementation of SDGs, stakeholders' engagement and

implementation of SDGs, and localization and implementation of SDGs. The review aims to identify gaps that need to be bridged through research and provide clarity to the study objectives.

Multilevel Governance and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

Multilevel governance involves distributing power and decision-making among different levels of government: national, regional, local, and supranational. This approach recognizes different government levels' varying capacities and expertise, fostering collaboration to address complex issues. Multilevel governance promotes subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the appropriate levels, including at the most local level. It also enhances citizen participation in decision-making processes (Pazos-Vidal, 2019).

The advantages of multilevel governance for development in general and SDGs implementation, in particular, are policy coordination, resource allocation, citizen engagement, and capacity building. Coordinating policies across different levels of governance improves the effectiveness of integrated approaches to development (e.g., infrastructure, environmental protection, social welfare). Local governments, with their knowledge of local needs, can utilize resources more efficiently and equitably across services and development needs. Citizen engagement is enhanced with a well-functioning multi-governance system (Croese, 2021).

Localization and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is both broad and ambitious, requiring global goals to be adapted to local contexts to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. This process, known as localization, is critical for the successful implementation of the agenda, as it tailors global objectives to the specific needs, priorities, and capacities of individual countries or regions (Biermann et al., 2022; Sachs et al., 2023). Without localization, SDGs risk remaining abstract concepts that fail to resonate with or address the realities of people's lives (Le Blanc, 2022; Horan, 2021).

Localization is widely recognized as a complex and multifaceted challenge, yet it is an essential precondition for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Bruno & Hiranya, 2023). One approach to localization involves developing country-specific and subnational strategies that align global goals with local priorities, supported by top-down guidance and frameworks (Van Zanten & Van Tulder, 2022). At the same time, a bottom-up approach is equally

important, emphasizing the active participation of local actors, including government agencies, businesses, NGOs, and community groups in the planning and implementation of development interventions (Bebbington & Unerman, 2020; Kanie et al., 2022).

Stakeholders' Engagement and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

Effective implementation of SDGs depends on engaging stakeholders from various sectors (Nonet et al., 2022; Jun & Kim, 2021; Rashed & Shah, 2021). This engagement is crucial because SDGs require trade-offs and value judgments that cannot be made solely by governments. Stakeholder involvement is essential to build consensus, identify common challenges, and mobilize resources. This includes working with government, civil society, businesses, faith-based groups, and academia. They collectively contribute to setting priorities, aligning actions, and promoting ownership of SDGs. To achieve SDGs, partnerships between the government, the private sector, civil society, academia, and international organizations are necessary. Point in an example can be where the UN provides international governance, while national governments create an enabling environment for implementation, civic organizations advocate and raise awareness, academia contributes knowledge and innovation, and the private sector with the local community drives implementation (Global Task Force and UN-Habitat, 2016; OECD, 2017; UNDP, 2016). Multi-stakeholder platforms facilitate partnerships and provide leadership for successful SDGs implementation.

Study Hypotheses

Based on the study objectives, empirical literature review, and the relationships depicted in Figure 1 above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H_1: Multilevel governance has no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State

H_2: Localization has no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State

H_3: Shareholders' engagement has no significant moderating influence on the relationship between multilevel governance, localization, and the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State

H$_4$: Multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholders' engagement have no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter includes the research methodology adopted. It explains the philosophical orientation of the research and the research design chosen for the study. Additionally, it provides details about the study area, target population, and elaborates on the research instruments to be employed. It also discusses pre-testing procedures for ensuring validity and reliability. The chapter also covers the data analytics that was used in the study.

Research Philosophy

This research is grounded in Pragmatist philosophy. Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes practical outcomes as the primary criterion for determining the validity and effectiveness of ideas.

Study Context

The study focuses on the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia, which plays a strategic position in the Ethiopian political, social, and economic spheres. Oromia constitutes about 34 percent of the total land mass of Ethiopia and 40 percent of its human population. It is physically and demographically the largest in Ethiopia (Ethiopia Peace Observatory, n.d.). It has 20 zones, 30 town administrations, and encompasses 287 rural districts.

Research Design

The research methods, study type and time horizon are presented as follows.

Research Method

Both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches was used in this research. This approach is especially beneficial when studying research questions in which the measurement of the research outcomes applies, besides the process through which the outcomes are achieved (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2010).

Study Type

The study employed both descriptive and explanatory research approaches, making it well-suited to explore the complexities of multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholder engagement in the implementation of SDGs in the Oromia region of Ethiopia.

Time Horizon

The research used a cross-sectional design, where data is collected at one point in time across different sectoral offices. This design is appropriate for examining the current progress and level of implementation of the pillar of SDGs in Oromia.

Study Population

The study target population is directly involved in SDGs planning, implementation and monitoring in the Oromia regional state. It includes government officials from key bureaus of the regional government, leaders and experts of CSOs engaged in SDGs, academia, the private sector, and development partners supporting SDGs implementation in the region.

Sampling Method and Sample Size

The research employs multistage proportionate stratified random sampling with different approaches for quantitative and qualitative data. As described above, the population involved in this study is highly heterogeneous, comprising various stakeholder groups such as sectoral bureaus from the regional government, CSOs, academia, private sector actors, and development partners. These groups play distinct roles in the implementation and support of SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

Data Analysis, Results and Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the results and findings derived from the analysis of the collected data. The presentation follows the research objectives, beginning with demographic information, followed by the implementation of the SDGs (the dependent variable), and then the findings for each subsequent objective.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information captured in the study included gender, duration of service in the organization, position held, level of education, category of the organization, and the emphasis placed on SDGs. Each variable was analyzed in terms of percentage distribution as discussed below.

Reliability and Validity Tests

The overall Cronbach's Alpha for all the variables of two independent variables (multilevel governance and localization), one moderating variable (stakeholders' engagement), and one dependent variable (implementation level of SDGs) was 0.835, indicating good internal consistency.

To establish the validity of the research instrument, both content validity and construct validity were assessed. Content validity was ensured through expert review. A panel of two subject-matter specialists, comprising experts in SDGs implementation and research methodology, was invited to evaluate the measurement instrument.

Diagnostic Tests

To determine the suitability of the data for regression analysis and to ensure the validity of the research findings, several diagnostic tests were conducted on the dependent and independent variables constructs obtained from the factor analysis. The tests performed included: normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. Satisfying these assumptions is critical to obtaining unbiased estimates and reliable statistical inferences from the regression model.

Status of Sustainable Development Goals Implementation Level

According to the 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR) report on SDG implementation from the analysis of the available 161 SDGs indicators, 25.47% have already been achieved, while 41.61% are currently on track to meet their targets. Conversely, 11.18% require significantly accelerated efforts, and 21.74% are off-track and necessitate specific and focused interventions.

The 'people' dimension of SDGs, encompassing the foundational first five goals forms the essential people pillar. This pillar addresses the most fundamental human development needs, focusing on eradicating deprivation and ensuring equitable access to basic rights and opportunities. Its scope is defined by 23 specific targets, measured through a comprehensive set of 72 indicators designed to track progress in these critical areas. Ethiopia's 2025 VNR,

submitted to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), provides a detailed assessment of progress on this pillar. The data reveals a mixed picture of a moderate 11.11% (8 indicators) have been fully achieved, representing concrete successes in specific areas. Encouragingly, the majority – 51.39% (37 indicators) are assessed as currently on track, demonstrating significant momentum towards meeting their targets by 2030. However, challenges remain substantial. Nearly one-fifth (18.06% or 13 indicators) are progressing too slowly and require accelerated intervention to regain the necessary trajectory. Most concerning is the 19.44% (14 indicators) critically off-track.

Oromia's performance across the SDGs one to five is marked by a combination of progress, challenges, and persistent structural gaps, with dominantly moderate to low progress as evidenced from the key survey data, document analysis of statutory bureaus and key informant interview. While health and education access have improved, poverty and food security remain widespread, and gender equality continues to face institutional and cultural resistance. The overarching message across the collected data is that the average status of implementation is moderate.

Cross-Cutting Thematic Issues in Oromia's SDG Implementation

The analysis of Oromia's SDG implementation across the people pillar (goals 1–5) reveals that progress is shaped as much by cross-cutting structural and governance issues as by sector-specific interventions. Both document reviews and interviews converged on at least five interrelated thematic issues: (1) governance and coordination bottlenecks, (2) financing and resource mobilization deficits, (3) fragility of progress amidst shocks, (4) weak data and monitoring systems, and (5) limited stakeholder participation and localization. These themes are consistent with national reflections in Ethiopia's 2025 VNR and resonate with global SDG reporting, but they manifest in unique and often acute ways in Oromia.

The synthesis of those cross-cutting themes explain much of the unevenness in Oromia's SDG trajectory. Progress is visible in certain indicators maternal mortality, school enrollment, community-based health insurance, and agricultural production but these gains are continuously undermined by conflict, financing gaps, weak data, and fragile governance systems. As one respondent summarized, "*Making the region politically stable needs to be priority number one" (KII-7, June 2025).* Without stability, resources, and accountability mechanisms, SDG gains remain precarious and unevenly distributed.

The thematic analysis suggests that Oromia's pathway to the 2030 Agenda requires not only sectoral interventions but also systemic reforms: stronger governance coherence, sustainable financing mechanisms, robust data systems, resilience to shocks, and genuine localization of the SDGs. These cross-cutting reforms will determine whether the region can transform partial and fragile progress into sustainable development outcomes for its nearly 40 million citizens.

Multilevel Governance and Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to examine the relationship between multilevel governance (independent variable) and IL-SDGs (dependent variable). There was a positive and statistically significant moderate correlation between multilevel governance and IL-SDGs, $r = 0.322$, $p < .05$. This indicates that higher perceptions of effective multilevel governance are associated with better implementation of localized SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis revealed that each of the five multilevel governance constructs across policy coherence and integration, legal framework, decision-making.

The second objective of this study was to examine the influence of MLG on the implementation level of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The hypothesis tested was that 'H$_{01}$: multilevel governance has no significant influence on the implementation level of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The model summary (Table 4.14 below) shows that MLG significantly influences the implementation level of SDGs (IL-SDG) in Oromia, with $R^2 = 0.103$, $F(1, 316) = 36.434$, $p < 0.05$. This means that multilevel governance accounts for 10.3% of the variation in SDGs implementation, while the remaining 89.7% is explained by other variables not considered in this study.

Table 4.1   Model Summary of Multilevel Governance on and Implementation Level of Sustainable Development Goals

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.322^a	.103	.101	.48504	.103	36.434	1	316	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Multilevel Governance									

From Table 4.16 below, the predictive equation is IL = 1.121 + 0.248MLG, which indicate a positive and statistically significant relationship between MLG and IL-SDG implying that a

one-unit improvement in MLG leads, on average, to a 0.248-unit increase in SDG implementation level.

Table 4.2   Coefficient of Multilevel Governance on and Implementation Level of Sustainable Development Goals

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.121	.124		9.058	.000
	Multilevel Governance	.248	.041	.322	6.036	.000
a. Dependent Variable: IL-SDGs						

These findings quantitatively demonstrate that MLG is a significant driver of SDG implementation in Oromia, although the effect size suggests that it is only one of several critical factors. This aligns with governance theory, which emphasizes that complex development goals such as the SDGs require coordinated action across multiple levels of government, but that governance alone is insufficient without adequate resources, policy coherence, and stakeholder engagement (Bache & Flinders, 2016; Shawoo et al., 2020).

Interviews with regional policymakers and development practitioners revealed convergence with the statistical results. Respondents repeatedly noted that effective SDG implementation in Oromia depends on the clarity of roles between federal, regional, zonal, and woreda administrations, and the strength of intergovernmental coordination. One senior official stated, *"When the federal and regional plans are aligned, and woredas are supported with resources and training, implementation moves faster. But when plans come late or budgets are delayed, even the best strategies cannot be realized."*

Localization and Implementation Level of Sustainable Development Goals

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Localization (independent variable) and the Implementation of Localized SDGs (IL-SDGs) (dependent variable). As presented in Table 4.21, the results indicate a positive and statistically significant moderate correlation, r (316) = 0.350, $p < .05$. This finding suggests that higher levels of SDG localization efforts are associated with more effective implementation of localized SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

The third objective of this study examined how localization influences the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Oromia Regional State. The hypothesis tested was ' H_2: Localization has no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The model summary (Table 4.22) shows that localization significantly influences the implementation level of SDGs (IL-SDG) in Oromia, with $R^2 = 0.122$, $F(1, 314) = 43.703$, $p < 0.05$). This means that localization accounts for 12.2% of the variation in SDG implementation, while the remaining 87.8% is explained by other factors and the error term. The 12.2% influence shows a moderate level of influence.

Table 4.3: Model Summary of Localization on IL-SDG

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.350ᵃ	.122	.119	.48039	.122	43.703	1	314	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Localization									

As indicated in Table 4.24, the regression coefficient was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.258$, $t = 6.611$, $p < 0.05$), implying that a one-unit increase in localization corresponds to a 0.258-unit improvement in the IL-SDG index. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.350$) suggests a moderate effect size, indicating that while localization is not the sole determinant, it is an important contributor to SDG progress in Oromia. These findings led to the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Table 4. 1: Coefficient of Localization on IL-SDG

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.088	.118		9.203	.000
	Localization	.258	.039	.350	6.611	.000
a. Dependent Variable: IL-SDGs						

Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis, H_{02}: Localization has no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State and accepted the alternate hypothesis, H_{21}: Localization has a significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State

The interview findings converged with the quantitative results, underscoring that localization enhances SDG outcomes by strengthening contextual relevance, community ownership, and alignment between local priorities and global targets. Several key informants stressed that when woreda and kebele development plans are explicitly linked to SDG targets and indicators, the monitoring and evaluation process becomes more meaningful and progress more tangible.

Stakeholders' Engagement and Sustainable Development Goals Implementation

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between Stakeholders' Engagement (moderating variable) and the Implementation of Localized SDGs (IL-SDGs) (dependent variable). As shown in Table 4.28, the results indicate a positive and statistically significant moderate correlation, $r(318) = 0.347$, $p < .05$. This suggests that higher levels of stakeholder engagement are associated with more effective implementation of localized SDGs in Oromia Regional State.

The hypothesis to test is H_3: Shareholders' engagement has no significant moderating influence on the relationship between multilevel governance, localization, and the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The Multiple linear regression analysis presented in Table 4.29 revealed that MLG and LOC together explained 12.9% of the variance in IL-SDG ($R^2 = 0.129$, $F (2, 313) = 23.246$, $p < 0.001$). When the interaction terms between stakeholders' engagement and the governance variables were introduced, the explained variance rose to 15.9% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.030$, F-change = 5.566, p = 0.004), indicating that stakeholders' engagement has a statistically significant moderating effect. The inclusion of stakeholders' engagement increases the uptake of many variables.

Table 4.5: Model Summary of Moderating Factor on IL-SDG

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.360a	.129	.124	.47919	.129	23.246	2	313	.000
2	.399b	.159	.149	.47235	.030	5.566	2	311	.004
a. Predictors: (Constant), Localization, Multilevel Governance									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Localization, Multilevel Governance, MG*SA raw, LC*SA raw									

However, the detailed coefficients showed that this moderating effect was uneven: while the interaction between MLG and stakeholders' engagement was not statistically significant (β =

–0.147, p > 0.05), the interaction between LOC and stakeholders' engagement was positive and significant (β = 0.197, t = 2.203, p = 0.028). This suggests that active engagement of stakeholders amplifies the benefits of localization on SDG implementation but does not significantly influence the MLG–SDG relationship.

Table 4.6: Coefficient of Moderating Factors on IL-SDG

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.010	.127		7.920	.000
	Multilevel Governance	.102	.064	.133	1.603	.110
	Localization	.182	.061	.247	2.988	.003
2	(Constant)	1.356	.184		7.383	.000
	Multilevel Governance	.458	.275	.593	1.665	.097
	Localization	-.443	.267	-.600	-1.659	.098
	MG*SA raw	-.147	.091	-1.050	-1.611	.108
	LC*SA raw	.197	.090	1.444	2.203	.028
a. Dependent Variable: IL-SDGs						

These findings converge with qualitative evidence from the full interview report, where respondents consistently emphasized that localized planning and implementation are more effective when community members, civil society organizations, and local institutions are actively involved in decision-making. For example, one local development officer noted that "when communities and local organizations are part of identifying priorities, the projects are better received, and resources are used more effectively." Participatory approaches in sectors such as agriculture and health were frequently cited as successful examples, with farmer cooperatives helping tailor agricultural extension services to local needs and women's groups improving the uptake of maternal health services.

Multilevel Governance, Localization, Stakeholder Engagement and Implementation Level

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the interrelationships among the main study variables: the independent variables (Multilevel Governance and Localization), the moderating variable (Stakeholders' Engagement), and the dependent variable (Implementation of Localized SDGs – IL-SDGs). The analysis revealed that IL-SDGs had positive and statistically significant moderate correlations (r = 0.3 to 0.4) with all three variables:

- Multilevel Governance: $r(318) = 0.322$, $p < .05$
- Localization: $r(316) = 0.350$, $p < .05$
- Stakeholders' Engagement: $r(318) = 0.348$, $p < .05$

These results suggest that stronger governance structures, more effective localization processes, and greater stakeholder engagement are all associated with higher levels of SDG implementation at the regional level.

The fifth objective of this study was to examine the combined effect of multilevel governance (MLG), localization (LOC), and stakeholders' engagement (SE) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (IL-SDG) in Oromia Regional State. The hypotheses test.H_4: Multilevel governance, localization, and stakeholders' engagement have no significant influence on the implementation of SDGs in Oromia Regional State. The multiple regression results presented in Table 4.33 indicate that the combined model is statistically significant (R^2 = 0.144, $F(3, 312) = 17.432$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 14.4% of the variance in IL-SDG. This suggests that, taken together, MLG, LOC, and SE form a meaningful explanatory framework for SDG implementation in the region, although a substantial proportion of variance (85.6%) remains attributable to other contextual, institutional, and resource-related factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.135 confirms the robustness of the model, accounting for the number of predictors used.

Table 4.7: Model Summary of Combined Model on IL-SDG

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.379ᵃ	.144	.135	.47602	.144	17.432	3	312	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder's Engagement, Localization, Multilevel Governance									

As presented in table 4.35, the coefficients indicate that within the combined model, both localization ($\beta = 0.174$, $t = 1.973$, $p = 0.049$) and stakeholders' engagement ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 2.277$, $p = 0.023$) have statistically significant positive effects on SDG implementation, while the effect of multilevel governance ($\beta = 0.053$, $t = 0.597$, $p = 0.551$) is not statistically significant when considered alongside the other variables. This finding suggests that, in Oromia's current context, the direct effect of MLG on SDG implementation may be mediated

through or overshadowed by the more immediate and operational roles played by localization and stakeholder participation. In practical terms, the data imply that context-specific adaptation of SDG targets and the active involvement of local actors have a more direct and measurable influence on achieving SDG outcomes than the broader institutional architecture of governance alone.

Table 4.8 : Coefficient of Combined model on IL-SDG

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.937	.131		7.170	.000
	Multilevel Governance	.041	.069	.053	.597	.551
	Localization	.129	.065	.174	1.973	.049
	Stakeholder's Engagement	.144	.063	.187	2.277	.023
a. Dependent Variable: IL-SDGs						

The qualitative evidence from the full interview report reinforces these quantitative findings. Respondents consistently emphasized that translating national SDG frameworks into locally relevant plans—and ensuring that communities, civil society organizations, and private sector actors are actively involved—produces tangible progress. One regional planning official noted, "The more we tailor our plans to the needs of our woredas and bring local leaders into the process, the more results we see on the ground." Similarly, a CSO representative stressed that "engagement builds trust and accountability; without it, even good plans lose momentum."

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a consolidated summary of the research findings, presents the overarching conclusions derived from the analysis, and offers actionable recommendations based on the study of Multilevel Governance, Localization, Stakeholder Engagement, and their collective impact on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia. The aim is to translate the empirical and thematic insights into a coherent framework for policy, practice, and future scholarly inquiry.

Summary of Findings

The study, grounded in a pragmatic philosophy and utilizing a mixed-methods approach, yielded critical insights across its five research objectives. The assessment of the People Pillar (SDGs 1-5) revealed a situation of moderate but fragile progress. While targeted interventions have produced measurable gains in sectors like health and education, these are undermined by persistent challenges in poverty, food insecurity, and gender inequality. Thematic analysis identified cross-cutting structural barriers, including governance fragmentation, significant financing shortfalls, and unreliable data characterized by "fake reporting," which collectively obscure true performance and hinder effective intervention.

Quantitatively, the regression analyses provided nuanced understanding of the core variables. Multilevel Governance (MLG) demonstrated a positive and statistically significant, yet modest, effect on SDG implementation ($R^2 = 0.103$), indicating that while formal structures exist from federal to woreda levels, their functional capacity to produce tangible outcomes remains limited. Localization (LOC) was found to be a statistically significant and moderate driver of SDG progress ($R^2 = 0.122$), affirming the importance of adapting global agendas to local contexts, though this process is constrained by inadequate resources and technical capacity. The analysis of Stakeholder Engagement (SE) revealed its role as a significant moderator, strengthening the relationship between localization and SDG implementation but failing to significantly influence the MLG-SDG pathway. This suggests that participatory processes are most catalytic when governance is anchored at the local level.

The synthesis of these findings into an Integrated Governance–Localization–Stakeholder Engagement (GLS) Model confirmed that the synergistic combination of these three dimensions offers the most robust explanation for SDG implementation ($R^2 = 0.144$). Within this model, localization and stakeholder engagement emerged as the most direct and significant drivers, whereas MLG alone was not a significant predictor unless complemented by localized and participatory mechanisms.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the primary constraint to effective SDG implementation in Oromia is not the absence of policy frameworks or governance structures, but rather profound systemic weaknesses in their operationalization. The existing decentralization policies and multilevel governance arrangements are significantly undermined by political instability, resource

shortages, weak accountability systems, and limited inclusivity. Progress on the People Pillar is uneven, and the potential of MLG remains unrealized due to coordination failures. While localization is a confirmed critical success factor, its effect is diluted without dedicated financial and technical backing. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement has yet to evolve from a consultative exercise into a collaborative and transformative force, limiting its ability to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the entire governance system.

Recommendations

Policy   Recommendations

To address the identified gaps, a policy shift towards integrated and synergistic approaches is essential. Policymakers should prioritize establishing formal intergovernmental coordination forums to enhance vertical policy coherence and unlock the potential of MLG. Localization must be backed by legally mandated fiscal transfers and sustained capacity-building programs to ensure local plans are both ambitious and executable. Furthermore, stakeholder engagement should be institutionalized within the government's planning cycle, moving beyond ad-hoc consultations to mandated partnerships with civil society, the private sector, and academia in co-designing and monitoring SDG interventions.

Practice   Recommendations

At a practical level, several actions are recommended. Permanent multi-stakeholder SDG councils should be established at regional and zonal levels to provide platforms for aligned strategic planning and participatory monitoring. Concurrently, targeted training is needed to strengthen the technical capacity of local administrations in data-driven planning, budgeting, and performance management. To foster grassroots ownership, SDG communication strategies should be developed and disseminated in Afan Oromo through community media and traditional institutions. Financially, diversifying funding sources through mechanisms like diaspora bonds and public-private partnerships is critical to reduce overreliance on central transfers. Finally, the monitoring framework must be strengthened through independent SDG audits and real-time digital reporting tools to ensure data integrity and accountability.

Suggestions   for   Future   Research

Building on this study's contributions to multilevel governance theory, future research should pursue two primary directions. First, comparative subnational studies across Ethiopian regions like Amhara, Somali, and Tigray would be invaluable for distinguishing nationwide systemic

challenges from context-specific barriers. Second, conducting deep-dive, single-SDG case studies would provide granular, sector-specific insights into the unique implementation bottlenecks and success factors that aggregate studies may overlook.

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