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of ICLD's International Training Programme,
Photo: Shannon Lövgren

Localising the SDGs

A toolkit for local governments¹

Local governments are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to creating a more inclusive world. This policy brief summarises four tools for civil servants and politicians to include the SDGs in their daily work.

What are the SDGs?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of a universal declaration that sets specific objectives for all nations in the world to end poverty, ensure the protection of our planet, and create peace and prosperity.² They make up a group of 17 goals contained in the Agenda 2030 declaration. The overall goal of sustainable development requires integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns by multiple actors in our society.³ The agenda has a big focus on achieving development within the environmental boundaries of our planet and on the principle of 'leave no one behind'.

What does localisation of the SDGs mean?

Local and regional governments are key actors in the implementation and transformation of the SDGs. The process of localising the SDGs means:

- taking these goals to the subnational level of government (towns, regions, districts, cities);
- translating the global goals into local goals;
- setting up priorities and plans for implementation;
- making contextual assessments and monitoring progress.⁴

About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

¹ This toolbox was compiled by Selma Johansson and Ana Maria Vargas (2021).

² United Nations, 2015. 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'

³ See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5839GSDR%202015_SD_concept_definiton_rev.pdf

⁴ For more information about localising the SDGs see: 'Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and monitoring at the Subnational Level', p.10:

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/818_11195_commitment_ROADMAP%20LOCALIZING%20SDGS.pdf#:~:text=%E2%80%99Localizing%E2%80%9D%20is%20the%20process%20of%20taking%20into%20account,and%20using%20indicators%20to%20measure%20and%20monitor%20progress.



What is the role of local government?

Local and regional governments have a key role in the achievement of the SDGs. That role includes the following:



Planning and implementing: 65 percent of the indicators and goals are under the mandate of local governments.⁵ Therefore regional and local governments have a key role in the process of planning, contextualising and implementing the SDGs to meet the needs of their citizens.⁶



Inclusion and participation: The SDGs are the result of lengthy negotiations to reach a consensus of global leaders at the United Nations. However, to achieve the goals citizens must be on board. Thanks to their close relation with citizens in everyday life, local governments have a key role to play in raising awareness and building a strong consensus for the SDGs at local level.



Monitoring and evaluation: Local governments play a key role in monitoring and reporting progress on localising the SDGs. They help move the process forward by supporting the development of broad, integrated and participatory monitoring and reporting. This, in turn, leads to the development of public policy in relation to the goals.

Local democracy and the SDGs



Local democracy and the SDGs go together, given that the goals are a means to achieve a more equal, environmental, and democratic world. Some SDGs are directly linked to democratic issues (SDGs 5, 11 and 16). Overall, the goal of 'leaving no one behind' implies thinking about social inclusion and participation – which are key areas of local democracy.

Supporting local democracy is a way to enhance and create opportunities to implement the SDGs. By including transparency and accountability to citizens, local governments can ensure that their actions to implement the SDGs are responding to citizens' needs.



Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.4: By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance



Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.



Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries



Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels



Goal 16: Peace, justice, and strong institutions

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

⁵ https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_vlrlab_guidelines_2020_volume_i.pdf

⁶ The role of local and regional governments in monitoring and reporting progress on localising the SDGs. EU, 2019.

Tools for local governments



1. Introduction to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs

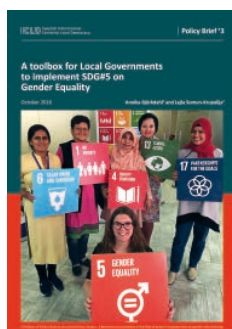
ICLD has developed a digital education module to give you an 'Introduction to Agenda 2030'. This module provides information on what Agenda 2030 is and how you can use it to create a more sustainable world. It has a list of links to organisations that provide more information about the goals. The training sessions were developed in collaboration with Statistics Sweden.

Duration: about 20 to 30 minutes. For more inspiration, watch these short videos:

- From the Millennium Development Goals to the SDGs: [Part 1](#)
- Goals 1 to 6: [Part 2](#)
- Goals 7 to 12: [Part 3](#)
- Goals 13 to 17: [Part 4](#)
- Next steps: [The Sustainable Development Goals, SDG Introduction, part 5 - YouTube](#)

To know which targets are most relevant for local governments, see this app developed by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG): [THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS \(uclg.org\)](https://uclg.org)





2. ICLD toolbox on SDG 5: Gender equality

ICLD, together with Annika Björkdahl and Lejla Somun-Krupalija⁷, has created a toolbox for implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality as a guide for local governments. The toolbox consists of four recommendations on how to implement SDG 5. Local government officials can use the toolbox to map the mechanisms that exist in their municipality to implement SDG 5. These are examples of some of the mechanisms presented in the toolbox.⁸

Duration: 1 to 2 hours



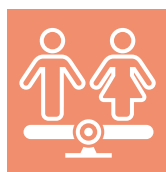
1. Institutional mechanisms

- Commission on gender equality to meet regularly
- Appoint a gender focal person with responsibility for SDG 5
- Develop a Local Gender Action Plan that includes SDG 5 targets
- Ensure gender-responsive budgeting to address SDG 5 targets
- Ensure women are represented in decision-making



2. Tools to change perceptions and behaviour

- Gender awareness-raising and gender training
- Gender-sensitive language
- Responding to specific needs of women and girls, putting these issues among the priorities of local authorities' policies and programmes



3. Tools to mainstream process

- Gender-disaggregated data to map challenges to gender equality
- Monitoring and periodical assessment of progress towards gender equality
- Gender mainstream proposals and strategic documents passed by the municipal council
- Review citizens' initiatives for promotion of gender equality



4. Cooperation for gender equality

- Cooperation and coordination among different government units
- Cooperation with other government institutions
- Cooperation with NGOs and grassroots organisations

⁷ Björkdahl, A. and Somun-Krupalija, L., 2018. 'Toolbox for Local Governments to implement SDG5 on Gender Equality', ICLD
⁸ See: <https://icld.se/app/uploads/files/icld-policybrief-sdg5-a-toolbox-for-local-governments.pdf> p.6

3. SDG Impact Assessment tool

The SDG Impact Assessment Tool is a user-friendly learning tool through which a local government can self-assess how an activity, policy initiative or project affects the SDGs. When finished, the results are visualised by the tool and provide the basis for making a strategy to reduce negative effects and improve positive effects in relation to the SDGs. The tool can be used in a workshop format alongside colleagues or partners. It was created by the Gothenburg Centre for Sustainable Development at Chalmers University of Technology and the University of Gothenburg, in collaboration with SDSN Northern Europe and Mistra Carbon Exit. The tool is generically designed to be usable in a wide range of different projects.

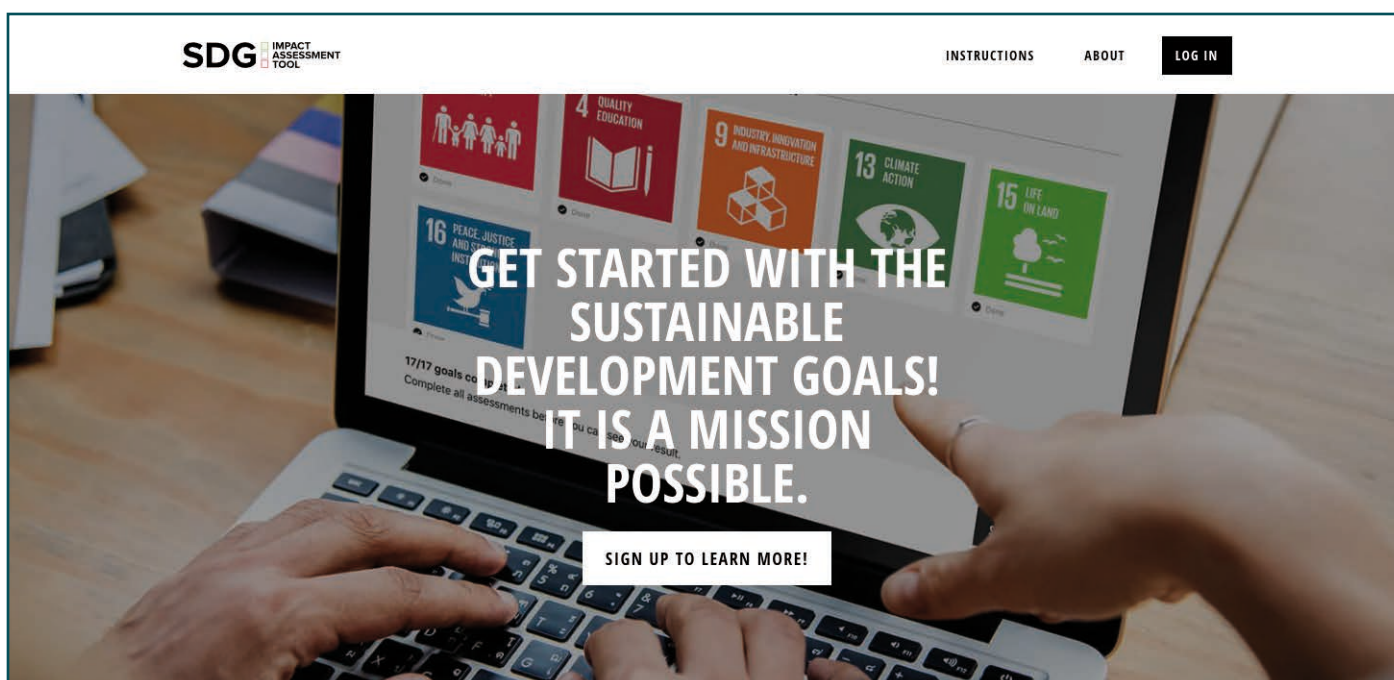
Duration: 2 to 3 hours

How? Main steps:

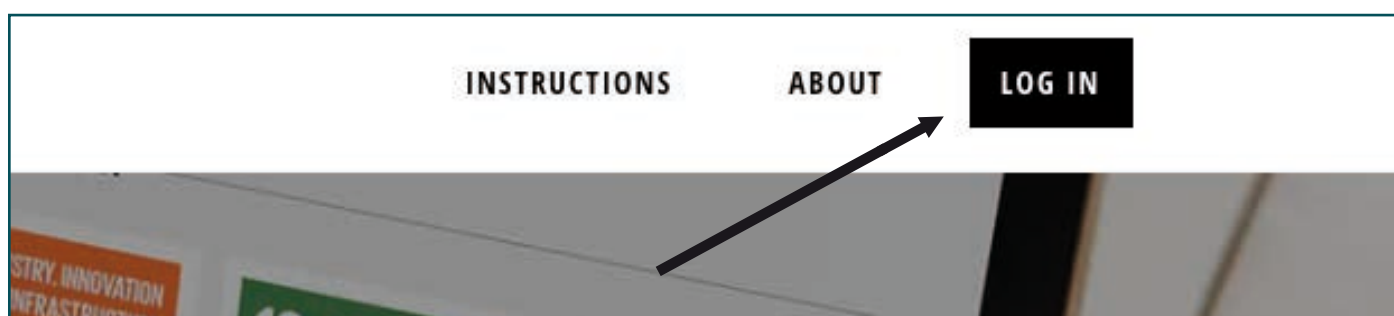
Step 1 – Creating an account

To get access to the SDG Impact Assessment Tool you need to sign up using your email.

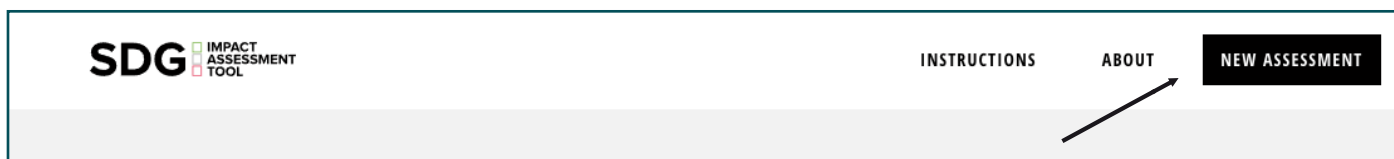
Go to <https://sdgimpactassessmenttool.org/en-gb>



Signing up takes just a few minutes – then you are ready to use the tool. All you have to do is log in.



Step 2 – Start using the tool



Step 3 – Start assessing

This is the part where you start sorting the SDGs based on your initial assessment of their relevance to your project. There are three categories:

- Relevant
- Not relevant
- Don't know



You go through all the 17 SDGs and categorise them by relevance. Part of the assessment consists of thinking about and discussing the project in relation to the SDGs.

Step 4 – Impacts

In this step you go through the 17 goals and assess your project's impact on them. 'Direct positive' or 'direct negative' are the immediate impacts of implementing the solution, whereas 'indirect positive' or 'indirect negative' are impacts that might arise as consequences of the implementation. 'More knowledge needed' is chosen in cases where the knowledge base is too uncertain or is insufficient for making an assessment.

For example:

- **Direct positive:** an example is a project to increase awareness on environmental and climate issues among secondary students. This project has a positive impact on target 13.3 to improve education on climate change.
- **Indirect positive:** The same project would have an indirect positive impact on SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, since increased environmental awareness can lead to better consumer choices.
- **No impact:** There is no impact on SDG 2 to end hunger.
- **Direct negative:** A project to improve urban space to become resilient to climate change can have a negative impact on SDG 8 on decent work if it includes the displacement of street vendors and other groups earning a livelihood in public spaces.
- **Indirect negative:** The same project could have an indirect negative impact on SDG 1 to end poverty if the street vendors and other vulnerable groups do not find alternatives to earn a basic income.
- **More knowledge needed:** when it is not possible to see clear direct or indirect impacts.

How does your solution affect the SDG 1?

DIRECT
NEGATIVE

INDIRECT
NEGATIVE

NO IMPACT

INDIRECT
POSITIVE

✓
 DIRECT
POSITIVE

DON'T KNOW - MORE KNOWLEDGE NEEDED

Step 5 – See results

When you have assessed the impact for all the SDGs, you will be able to move to the next step and see the results.

17/17 goals completed

This is the assessment board. Click on each goal and complete all assessments before you can see your result.

SEE RESULT

You will see a table displaying your assessments and how they correlate with each other. When scrolling down this page you will also be able to make some strategic choices. This is the last step of the tool.

Direct positive	1		3					8	9	10	11					17
Indirect positive		2		4	5	6							13		15	
No impact							7							14		16
Indirect negative																
Direct negative																
More knowledge needed												12				

Step 6 – Discuss strategies and steps to increase positive impacts and reduce negative impacts

The final step consists of answering the following questions. These questions should help local governments to think about how to enhance positive impacts and reduce negative ones. They can also help you to think about possible knowledge gaps. Finally, local governments could think about how to reframe, rethink and re-organise their projects. These are the questions:

How can we further strengthen the positive impacts of our project on certain goals?

Are there any additional partners or actors that we can include in our project to further enhance a certain goal?

How can we mitigate negative impacts of our project on certain goals?

How do we address knowledge gaps that we may have about a certain goal?

4. Monitoring frameworks and VLRs



Duration: 1 to 3 months

What is a VLR?

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) are written documents to map and monitor the achievement of the SDGs at the subnational level.⁹ They resemble the National Voluntary Reviews that are submitted by nation states as part of their reporting to the UN. UCLG and UN-Habitat have developed some guidelines for local governments to conduct their VLRs, but there is not a single format.¹⁰ VLRs go beyond their monitoring and evaluation function and have great potential to evolve. It is a way for local governments to demonstrate their commitment to the SDGs and to monitor their implementation.¹¹ ICLD is developing a toolbox to help local governments to write their Voluntary Local Reviews with a focus on democratic governance.

⁹ See: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_vrlab_guidelines_2020_volume_i.pdf p.7

¹⁰ See: https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/uclg_vrlab_guidelines_2020_volume_i.pdf p.11

¹¹ Ibid.

How long does it take to create a VLR and how complex is it?

A VLR can take from one to six months to create. Several factors may play a role in this process. Unlike other tools that have been presented, the VLR is more complex. It fills a different but very important role when it comes to monitoring and evaluating the process of implementing the SDGs.

What are the main steps in making a VLR?

When getting started with VLRs, certain steps need to be taken. These are broadly:

- defining and planning
- implementation
- follow-up
- monitoring localisation strategies and priorities.¹²

Some examples

The city of Cape Town in South Africa published its first VLR in 2019. The document (27 pages) was an ambitious initiative of the City Council in collaboration with the Mistra Urban Future Centre and the African Centre for Cities of the University of Cape Town. It was framed in the broader context of the municipal strategy for adapting local policies to the framework of the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 as well as the New Urban Agenda.¹³

A more bottom-up approach was used in the city of Canterbury in the United Kingdom. Here, a coalition of local citizens' associations joined the Canterbury SDG Forum. These civil society initiatives worked together on an implementation report in 2019 (33 pages). The report includes a qualitative assessment of the implementation of the SDGs and citizens' recommendations to improve the localisation and implementation the SDGs.

Another example is the process of the Swedish cities of Uppsala, Stockholm, Malmö, and Helsingborg to produce their first VLRs in 2021. Each city developed their own approach, but they all benefited from an exchange of ideas with other cities in Finland. In the future, ICLD hopes to develop more North–North, South–South and North–South exchanges for local governments interested in developing their VLRs and learning from peers.

Where can I find more information?



You can find more information on how to work with VLRs in the UCLG and UN-Habitat handbook: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/07/uclg_vlrlab_guidelines_july_2020_final.pdf

Here you can find the exact steps and information that can be helpful throughout the process of doing a VLR.

¹² See: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/07/uclg_vlrlab_guidelines_july_2020_final.pdf p.6

¹³ See: [uclg_vlrlab_guidelines_2020_volume_i.pdf](#) p.15