

Chapter 2

The Key Role of Local Governance in Achieving the SDGs

Abstract

This chapter looks at the crucial role that local action plays in achieving the SDGs. It begins by revisiting *the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals* and ponders the reasons why we should have faith in the prospect for successful goal attainment. Next, it demonstrates the importance of local responses to global problems and challenges targeted by the SDGs and discusses the motivation of local actors to contribute to the changes that need to be made in order to generate inclusive prosperity while protecting the planet. Finally, the chapter identifies some of the key barriers to local action and reflects on how we broaden the scope and improve the conditions for local people and organizations to initiate and drive change.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals; local action; public and private actors; global governance; national governance; Millennium Development Goals

The UN SDGs

In 2000, the UN member states agreed on eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that focused on urgent problems in the Global South, such as high child mortality rates, extreme poverty, failure to fulfill basic needs, and environmental degradation. In 2015, as the deadline for achieving the MDGs neared, evaluation reports showed that millions of lives had been saved, a billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty, and clean drinking water was available to most people in the developing countries. Most significantly, perhaps, growth in low-income countries had accelerated more than in middle-income countries. Outcomes

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pertaining to the fulfillment of basic needs, such as healthy nutrition, schooling, and gender equality and protection of the natural environment, were more mixed and called for the intensification of future action.

Just as an athlete doing a 100-meter sprint would not think of stopping half way to the finish line, the UN had no intention of giving up its struggle to secure a shared prosperity in a sustainable world. Indeed, when the UN member states unanimously agreed on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in 2015, they raised the stakes and stepped up the global effort to make the world a better place while securing the future survival of humankind. The SDGs provide a blueprint for a sustainable development that allows people to grow and prosper without harming the planet and preserves these possibilities for future generations. The new goals are broader and more inclusive than the MDGs and more ambitious in targeting the root causes of poverty. Most importantly, the SDGs are universal in the sense that they are not merely goals for the Global South but target problems and challenges in all countries. The global relevance and validity of the SDGs is crucial since it underlines the common destiny of humankind, perhaps most acutely expressed by Goal 13, which prompts us to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

The SDGs address three themes: (1) social and economic prosperity; (2) fairness and social equality; and (3) environmental protection. These broad themes highlight three crucial aspects of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. There has been much discussion about possible tensions between some of the SDGs. For example, Goal 8 seeks to enhance economic growth while Goal 13 aims to reduce CO₂ emissions to combat climate change. However, whether goals such as these are compatible or not depends on how they are achieved. Hence, both the development of a strong green-tech sector and the transition to a circular economy may help to make Goals 8 and 13 mutually reinforcing.

The SDGs provide a common language for talking about intractable problems and the need for joint action and innovative solutions. The problems, goals, key concepts, and tools are described in the same terms in all the different languages, thus limiting ambiguous interpretations that may allow for the justification of inaction or actions that go against the SDGs. What is open for interpretation is not what to do, but how to do it.

Moreover, the 17 SDGs emphasize the need for a holistic approach to making the world a better place. Agenda 2030 stresses that many of the problems addressed by the SDGs are interconnected and that efforts to meet one goal will tend to have positive implications for other goals. For example, many initiatives aiming to promote clean water and sanitation in accordance with Goal 6 will have a positive impact on Goal 3 on good health and well-being. Securing positive synergies between some of the other goals – e.g., between Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth and Goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities – might be more challenging and call for a coordinated approach in order to prevent unintended negative spill-over effects. Indeed, the noble ambition of leaving no one behind can only be reached by moving forward on all of the goals and to do so by 2030. This urgent and holistic approach to goal attainment begs the

question of whether there is sufficient reason to believe that this new set of global goals are achievable.

The good news is that there are at least five aspects of the SDGs that greatly enhance the chance of their realization, or at least the prospect for making major progress toward goal attainment. The first aspect is that the 17 SDGs are further disaggregated into 169 targets and 231 indicators. The UN has made a huge effort to provide relevant data and measure progress on the different targets, and many individual countries are working to construct national baselines, develop appropriate indicators, and measure results. Thus, the SDGs are not merely abstract goals for a better world, but concrete and measurable targets that can be effectively assessed and monitored. Provision of data facilitates solution-oriented sustainability research (Filho et al., 2017). To this end, *Future Earth* has been designed as a global research platform and science-practitioner partnership that aims to provide the knowledge, ideas, and tools needed to catalyze, incubate, and coordinate transformation geared toward sustainability and the achievement of the SDGs.

The second aspect that supports goal attainment is that the SDGs have been mainstreamed within all UN organizations. The SDGs are not merely a task that the development branch of the UN has responsibility for and works with. All parts of the UN system are committed to supporting the realization of the SDGs and must document their particular contributions. The mainstreaming of the SDGs is in itself a major achievement considering the fragmentation of the UN system and the many and sometimes competing agendas.

The third aspect is that the UN member states are committed to using their government organizations, budgets, and policy instruments to work for the realization of the SDGs. Hence, this strategy takes into account that goals that are not supported by organizational infrastructures, financial means, and policy changes stand a slim chance of being met. In some countries, local governments have integrated the SDGs in their local governance strategy, and in other countries such as Norway, all government agencies as well as publicly financed research projects must demonstrate how they help to achieve one or more of the SDGs. Such institutional incentives are crucial for mobilizing the resources, momentum, and commitment that are needed for making real and decisive progress.

The fourth aspect is that the SDGs have been cleverly communicated to people all over the world, not least by means of the catchy multicolored pictograms that illustrate each of the 17 goals. The colorful icons shown in [Fig. 2.1](#) are easily recognizable and function as a symbol for efforts to make a better world for engaged citizens and stakeholders around the globe. The pictograms have made the SDGs come to life and gained an everyday presence on advertising billboards, pins that people wear on their clothes, and logos found on websites, magazine covers, etc. Perhaps this is one of the greatest ever communicative achievements of the UN.

Finally, the 2030 deadline for achieving the 17 SDGs creates a sense of urgency. We do not have all the time in the world. The clock is ticking and we have to act now to deliver on our bold ambitions, and signal that people can



Fig. 2.1. The Multicolored Icons Illustrating Each of the SDGs.

take action and accomplish great things when they join forces and set their mind to do it.

Here, seven years into the SDG era, the official assessment is that despite continued progress in some areas, goal attainment is not advancing at the speed required to meet the goals in time. In consequence, the SDG summit in September 2019 called for a decade of intensified action. We need *global action* to secure a strong political leadership and commitment to the SDGs at the level of national governments. We need *government action* to mobilize public institutions, budgets, and policies in the struggle to achieve the SDGs. We need *people action* that brings citizens, neighborhoods, civil society organizations, private enterprises, and trade unions to join forces to make progress. Finally, we need *inquiring action* by the media and academia in order to critically scrutinize, stimulate, and inform the search for ways to meet the goals (Fig. 2.2).

The UN and other global organizations play a crucial role in setting the agenda, stimulating multilateral action and monitoring progress. However, the real political, financial, and organizational capacity to drive the much-needed societal transformations is to be found at the national level. To even out the national capacities for achieving the SDGs, wealthy countries must undertake a massive transfer of aid, financial capital and investment, technology, expertise, and knowledge to less affluent countries and contribute to establishing trade agreements that are fair and favorable to these countries. Regional collaboration between neighboring countries may also spur balanced economic growth and facilitate diffusion of best practices supporting the development of effective, accountable, and democratic public institutions and free and independent media and research.

Yet, despite all their resources, capacities, and formal authority, it is difficult for global institutions, supranational organizations, and national governments to make real changes on their own because it is hard for them to reach, mobilize, and engage citizens and local stakeholders. Robust transformations toward the SDGs cannot be ensured simply from above. Instead they require engagement of

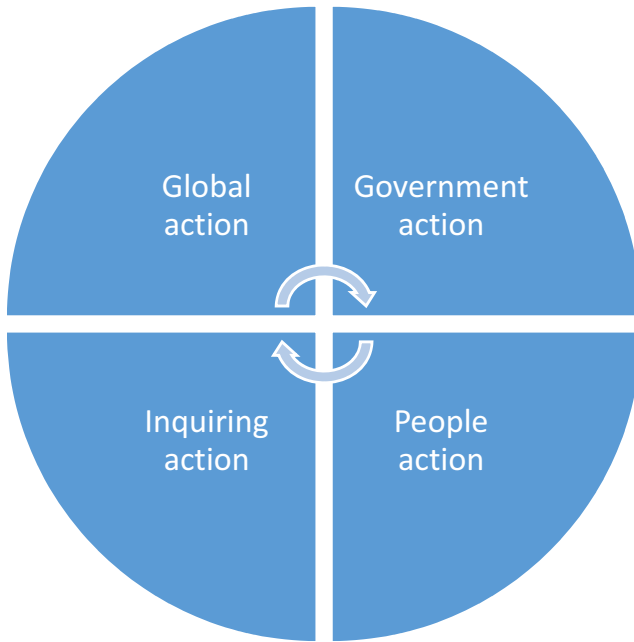


Fig. 2.2. Interrelated Patterns of Action Promoting the SDGs.

local public and private actors to find and employ new ways of redistributing wealth, producing and delivering welfare solutions, providing decent work conditions, facilitating transportation of goods and people, producing and consuming energy, protecting nature from degradation, etc. Local action is indispensable for reaching global goals for a sustainable future (Awortwi, 2016; Stoker, 2011; Sujarwoto, 2017).

Local Responses to Global Problems

Although the famous UN Agenda 21 slogan “think globally, act locally” tends to underestimate the need for global action, it stresses that local action holds the key to solving many of the global problems and challenges that have motivated the formulation of the SDGs. The slogan highlights the core of the argument advanced in this chapter, namely that local action is a cornerstone for solving some of the most pressing problems of our time. This line of thinking is also a central aspect of the UN’s strategic approach to implementing the SDGs (Reddy, 2016). Local action refers to on-site processes and projects that aim to develop and implement concrete solutions to specific problems as they occur in real time. Research suggests that local action can accomplish things that action at other levels of governance cannot (see Brinkerhoff & Johnson, 2009). In a nutshell, the proximity of local actors to pressing problems and context-specific opportunities

for action enhances their collective motivation and capacity to promote economic, social, and environmental sustainability. This proximity advances the translation of goals into concrete strategies, facilitates task coordination, accommodates the mobilization of resources, grants actors influence over decisions that affect them, and promotes social accountability.

To start with, local action is crucial for securing the social embedding and adaption of the SDG goals and targets to local conditions. Local actors have first-hand knowledge about concrete problems and challenges and the possible causal relationships between them (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). Without this local insight, it is difficult to predict what will work, to explain failure, and to develop alternative solutions that will perform better. Effective strategies for raising the level of education among children must take into account contextual factors such as the local educational tradition, existing school policies, school structure, available resources, and the job market. In the same way, decisions regarding which strategy works best for recycling waste depends on insider knowledge about the local infrastructure and local citizens' attitudes and behaviors.

Another important function of local action is to facilitate the translation of the SDGs to ensure that they are meaningful and relevant for those actors who are expected to contribute to their attainment. SDGs that are well adapted to local conditions and appear important to local actors can serve as common reference points for collective efforts to foster innovative solutions. Translation of global goals into local aspirations holds the potential to broaden the base of support for the SDGs.

Local action is also valuable because the proximity to concrete problem-solving tends to support a holistic approach to goal attainment. The closer you are to the complexities of real-life problems, the more difficult it gets to close your eyes to the interconnections between problems such as poverty, unemployment, and crime. Proximity stimulates holistic problem-solving. A case in point is the turn to community policing in many countries. The focus is on breaking vicious cycles between social and economic problems in a given neighborhood and high levels of crime and public insecurity, which may in turn deepen socioeconomic problems (Diamond & Weiss, 2016).

Local action also has the potential to mobilize resourceful local actors to support the effort to meet the SDGs. Local authorities, private businesses, civil society organizations, and social entrepreneurs possess so-called NATO resources that are important for achieving the SDGs. Christopher Hood (1986) introduced the concept of NATO resources to draw attention to four important governance assets. *N* stands for *nodality*, which refers to an actor's centrality in terms of connections to other actors. Having a central position in a network of local actors is an important resource for mobilizing others to act. *A* stands for *authority*, which refers to the position and legitimacy that actors enjoy, which tends to condition their ability to prompt action. *T* stands for the *treasure* that an actor possesses in terms of available financial and organizational resources that can grease the wheels of collaboration and fund projects. Finally, *O* stands for the *organizational capacity* that can be invested in problem solving or in bringing actors together and secure their fruitful interactions.

An illustrative example of the mobilizing capacity of local action is the role that local governments and universities played in mobilizing volunteers to plant one million trees in Iraq (United Nations SDG Partnership Platform, 2021). Another example is the mobilization of a wide range of local actors to promote innovative urban planning in Milan, Italy (Dente, Bobbio, & Spada, 2005). A final example is the European Union's LEADER program that aims to spur innovation and growth by mobilizing rural communities to stimulate tourism (Ballesteros & Hernández, 2019). Although national governments also have an important role to play in mobilizing societal actors with NATO resources, local governments and community leaders are well-placed to identify and recruit actors with relevant NATO resources and commit them to take action. If popular local politicians, well-connected public managers, and local business and community leaders are successfully recruited, they may, in turn, mobilize wider constituencies.

Local action is not only invaluable for adapting the SDGs to different contexts, for enhancing holistic problem-solving, and for promoting people action. It is also a means to grant affected actors some degree of influence over the form and content of initiatives that aim to meet the SDGs. Local action tends to broaden ownership over strategies, initiatives, and projects, thus mitigating local resistance to SDG projects. Moreover, local action empowers and enables citizens and other local actors to hold local and national governments accountable for their action and inaction vis-à-vis the SDGs (Cai, 2008; Fox, 2015; Warren, 2009). By doing so, local action stimulates competent and critical scrutiny of public governance processes and their outcomes.

We can now summarize by saying that although international organizations and national governments have a key role to play in prioritizing the SDGs through agenda setting, provision of funding and strategic design of incentives and collaborative institutions and platforms, local action also provides an essential support system for promoting people action and for concrete inquiry into barriers and drivers of efforts to promote the SDGs.

Why Local Actors Are Likely to Contribute to Achieving the SDGs

Local governance is vital for promoting the SDGs, but how realistic is it that public and private actors at local levels of governance will take on this challenge for spurring local action to achieve the SDGs rather than depending on international organizations and national governments? Although the temptation to leave the task to others is probably widespread, we point to a number of factors that may motivate local actors to contribute to meeting the SDGs. A first motivating factor is that signaling commitment to the SDGs may enhance the status and street credit of politicians, public agencies, private businesses, NGOs, and individual citizens (Nilsson, 2019). Concrete projects that help to achieve one or more SDGs can provide a powerful way of building local reputations for contributing to public value production. This reputational benefit depends on the moral force of the SDGs in a particular locale.

A second motivating factor is that the SDGs address societal problems that are visible and directly felt by local communities, organizations, businesses, and families. These direct experiences place a premium on finding practical solutions to the problems of everyday life, which are concrete rather than abstract. These practical problems and the prospect of solving them justify the investment of time and resources in fostering local action. For example, working together to clean up a polluted lake may have immediate benefits for residents who live nearby or rely on the water for their livelihood. Researchers such as Benjamin Barber (2013) predict that it is the concrete experience of societal problems that will motivate local actors to take the lead in curbing climate change and responding to other major governance challenges.

A third motivating factor is that getting involved in local SDG efforts may help local actors influence how society is developing while avoiding the partisan conflicts and ideological battles associated with national politics. Local governance tends to be more pragmatic in the sense of getting things done based on compromise and agreement. Although there are also interest conflicts and value disagreements at the local level, the immediacy of problems prompts actors to constructively manage their differences to find solutions that work in practice and have a demonstrable value to the public (Sørensen, 2020).

A fourth motivating factor is the recognition of interdependencies between different stakeholders that necessitate the need to exchange and share resources. As Jan Kooiman (1993, p. 4) famously argues in his book *Modern Governance*, the complex, dynamic, and diversified problems of our time are almost impossible for public and private actors to solve single-handedly, because they need access to the knowledge and resources held by other actors. If a city or local community wants to reduce its CO₂ emission, the local government will have to involve businesses and households to get them to reduce their energy consumption or use more sustainable forms of energy; if a child is performing badly at school, the teacher will need to work with parents to get them to help with homework; and if a business wants to market environmentally and socially sustainable products, they need to commit other firms as well to secure overall supply chain responsibility.

A fifth motivating factor is that there is often a relatively short distance from decision to action at the local level. When local actors decide to act, there is less risk of drowning in red tape than at higher levels of governance. Red tape refers to detailed rules and regulations that hamper rather than accommodate flexible, creative, and innovative problem-solving (Bozeman, 2000). The greater the distance between decision-makers and the problem they are trying to solve, the more rules and regulations are needed to ensure coordination and compliance. In this case, obeying the rules and regulation tends to become a goal in and of itself, thus displacing attention and energy away from actual problem-solving. At the local level, decision and problem are closer and thus red tape is less likely to discourage people from investing time and energy in taking action that would obviously benefit themselves and others.

A sixth motivating factor is that participation in local action is more flexible in terms of time and commitment than participation in national politics, which tends to be extremely demanding and all-absorbing. At the local level, a person can

spend an hour a week helping an aging or disabled neighbor to shop, invest two nights a week in teaching adults to read, or sign up to spend every third weekend picking up garbage along the local highway. People may also engage in short-term campaigns to build shelters for homeless youth (Bryson, Crosby, & Seo, 2020), or become part-time local councilors working for equal access to the internet or seek to remove barriers to economic growth for small businesses (Shenglin, Simonelli, Ruidong, Bosc, & Wenwei, 2017; Travers, 2012). Local action provides more opportunity for ad hoc participation.

A final factor that may motivate local action is that participation tends to enhance the acquisition of social and political capital. Engaging in local problem-solving helps people to build network relations that can curb loneliness and isolation for some people (Norris & Inglehart, 2013). Local participation can also be enjoyable and rewarding on a personal level or instrumental in helping individuals to build a career in an NGO, a local government agency, or a political party.

Fig. 2.3 below summarizes the seven factors that can motivate actors to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs through participation in local

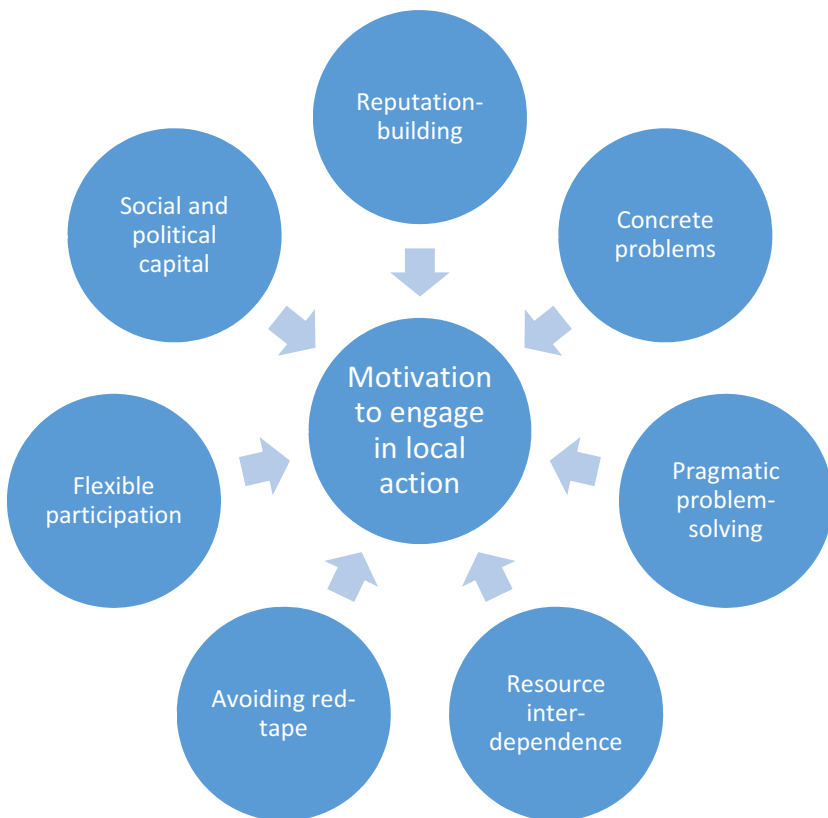


Fig. 2.3. Factors That Motivate Local Actors to Promote the SDGs.

action. Together, these factors justify high hopes regarding the prospects for engaging local actors in the promotion of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Barriers to Local Action

We should also keep in mind that there are conditions that may hamper local efforts to promote the SDGs. Fig. 2.4 identifies five conditions that can limit the scope for local action. The outer circles refer to “hard” barriers such as laws and regulations and allocated resources and skills, while the inner circles refer to “soft” barriers such as tradition, habits, culture, and community sentiments.

Externally imposed rules and regulations can limit the scope for local action. Dictating to public employees, businesses, NGOs, and local citizens what they can and cannot do is likely to weaken their motivation for getting involved in local action and for developing and maintaining commitment to their own initiatives

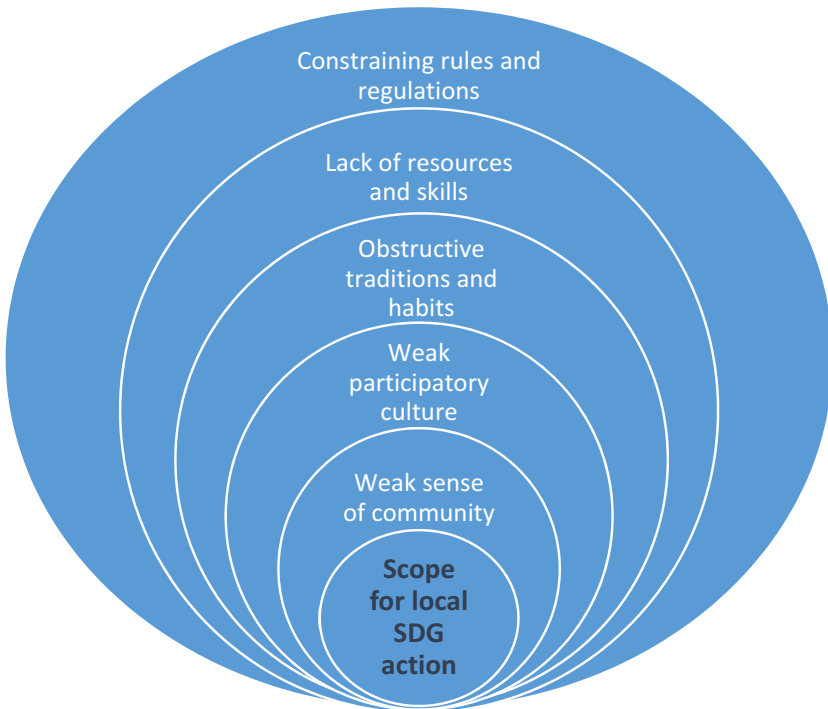


Fig. 2.4. Barriers to Local Action for the SDGs.

(Skelcher & Torfing, 2010). Moreover, limited local autonomy hampers open-ended exploration and development of new, innovative strategies, projects, and methods that take local conditions into account.

It can also impede local action if there are limited NATO resources, professional skills, and leadership capacity among local actors. When local governments and public agencies have little to contribute in terms of funding, formal authority to act, and organizational capacity, it is difficult for them to form robust partnerships with private actors and to persuade them to chip in. When there are few NGOs and businesses with new ideas and entrepreneurial competencies, there will be less local capacity to initiate and carry out SDG projects. Another hindrance is weak leadership from local politicians, public professionals, and civil society actors. Leadership is essential for defining problems that call for local action as well as for creating momentum, courage, and commitment for creative problem-solving (Briefs, 2018; Scheyvens, Banks, & Hughes, 2016).

Another barrier to local action is when the root causes of the problems that the SDGs address are products of deeply engrained local traditions and routinized practices. Traditions and routines are valuable because they build capacity to act in a complex world that offers endless opportunities for action. Without tradition, we would not know what counts as appropriate and meaningful behavior in different contexts, and without routines, people would have to think through everything they do all the time, which would impede our ability to concentrate on developing new ways of tackling problems when and where it matters most (March & Olsen, 1995). But sometimes traditions and routines become a barrier to solving the pressing problems that inform the SDGs. Many tend to be reluctant to move beyond their routines. Hence, it can be scary for communities to relinquish their traditional but harmful fishing methods in favor of embracing new untested methods, even if they promise to be more effective and better for the environment. Another example of the reluctance to change arising from customary behavior is the difficulty of preventing corruption where both public servants and citizens regard giving private gifts in return for public services as traditional and appropriate.

In some local communities, there is a strong participatory culture that serves as a basis for initiating local action for the SDGs. In other communities, people may not be used to participating in local problem-solving with each other or with the local public authorities. In addition, there may be few people with the participatory skills and experiences necessary for organizing local action and weak connections between public and private actors that limit efforts to forge local collaboration. A weak participatory culture, limited organizing skills, and thin network ties can be a serious barrier for engaging actors in activities that promote the SDGs. To redress these weaknesses, organizing efforts may have to focus on picking the low-hanging fruits that give people a positive experience with participating (Ventura, Miwa, Serapioni, & Jorge, 2017).

Finally, the propensity to take local action is related to how much the inhabitants identify with their locality. Weak community sentiments may suppress commitment to investing time and energy that goes beyond narrow self-interest

and that discourage from forming partnerships with others in an effort to turn the local community into a better place to live. It is noteworthy that community sentiments are sometimes stronger among newcomers who have chosen a particular locality and cherish its specific characteristics and atmosphere, while people who are born in a place may be less aware of their attachment and need to be reminded of its value and potential. Hence, newcomer may be easier to mobilize than long-term residents. Communities with high residential turnover can be difficult to mobilize because none of the residents have a strong attachment and are willing to invest in its future development.

Enhancing the Scope for Local Action

Mobilizing public and private actors and overcoming barriers to local action in the pursuit of the SDGs not only calls for local autonomy and discretion, NATO resources, skills, commitment and leadership capacities, and community-focused efforts from local actors to overcome the barriers listed above. It also calls for active and focused support from global and national levels of governance. [Table 2.1](#) provides a list of forms of support from higher levels of governance.

Those global and national actors who have the capacity to influence the conditions under which local actors operate can do a lot that give local actors and communities more opportunity for taking part in the promotion of the SDGs. For example, global actors can promote Fair Trade Agreements that can play a role in fighting poverty and empowering local communities or can introduce CO₂ emission trading regimes that prompt local energy producers to create partnerships for alternative energy sources (Hubacek, Baiocchi, Feng, & Patwardhan, 2017). National governments could integrate the SDGs into educational curriculums or delegate responsibility to local governments for initiating SDG action.

Global and national public institutions, media companies, research institutes, interest organizations and independent agencies and think tanks also have an

Table 2.1. What Global and National Levels of Governance Can Do to Stimulate Local Promotion of the SDGs.

(1) Sustainable rules of the game
(2) Agenda setting
(3) Funding
(4) Regulation that incentivizes local action
(5) Local autonomy to pursue the SDGs
(6) Local access to relevant scientific knowledge
(7) Training programs for local entrepreneurs
(8) A decentered communication infrastructure
(9) Celebrate local achievements
(10) Diffuse of best practices

important role to play in communicating the urgency of promoting the SDGs and the crucial role of local actors in achieving them. Global and national actors have privileged ability to capture the attention of large audiences and the ability to host events that bring together actors from different levels of governance in focused discussions about what needs to be done to meet the goals of one or more of the SDGs (Hajer et al., 2015).

Strong global and national actors can support promising local governance initiatives through the provision of funding in the form of special purpose grants or higher budgets for local governments, businesses and NGOs that are conditional upon progress toward achieving the SDGs (Awortwi, 2016).

Moreover, not all national rules and regulations are red tape that hampers local action and innovation. Green tape rules and regulations incentivize and empower local actors to take effective and innovative action in the pursuit of specific governance outcomes, such as the SDGs (DeHart-Davis, 2009). Policy-makers at higher levels of governance may play a key role in designing green tape that motivates actors to engage in local action for the SDGs rather than shrinking their autonomy.

Often, the ability of local governance actors to contribute to meeting the SDGs hinges on their access to scientific knowledge and hard facts about what works and how to avoid failure. Input from universities and research institutions is important in this respect, and it is a government task to facilitate collaboration between local communities, universities, and other research institutions that provide relevant knowledge in support for the development of local solutions. One way to do this is to create geographically-distributed university structures and to set obligations that universities will make their knowledge accessible to relevant local actors (El-Jardali, Ataya, & Fadlallah, 2018). A related task for universities and other teaching organizations is to provide practice-oriented leadership training for public professionals as well as for civil society and business entrepreneurs. Local actors may benefit tremendously from research-based knowledge about how to exploit drivers of and overcome barriers to local SDG action.

Efforts to develop viable and informed strategies for promoting the SDGs also hinges on the existence of well-functioning independent and critical media and a digital communication structure that accommodates exchange of innovative ideas, coordination of activities, and the formation of partnerships (Odendaal, 2003). Local actors rarely have the capacity to accomplish these tasks by themselves and must rely on national and global actors to do so.

National and global actors also have a privileged position when it comes to celebrating positive local achievements. Global prizes and awards such as “greenest city in the world” or “Europe’s best workplace” are powerful instruments when it comes to motivating politicians, firms, and organizations to change their ways, and so are the many different lead tables such as the PISA ranking on school performance, and labeling systems such as CSR charters and logos for organic products (Huang, Kuo, Hung, & Hu, 2019). However, it is essential that some of these instruments for celebrating contributions to meeting the SDGs do not only celebrate those communities, businesses, agencies, and organizations that

do best, but also highlight relative achievements. The initial conditions vary hugely between localities, and what is in reality good progress can end up standing out as failure.

A final task for global and national actors, including global special purpose organizations, national governments, interest organizations, and the media, is to secure the diffusion of best practices and examples of local progress on the SDGs. This can be done through the digital posting of case descriptions but also and most importantly through events such as innovation camps and workshops that facilitate face-to-face interaction that accommodates mutual learning between those who work with similar problems and projects in different local contexts.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, local action plays a crucial role for developing and implementing concrete strategies, methods, and tools for advancing the SDGs by taking into account contextual factors and mobilizing relevant and affected actors.

There are many factors that motivate public and private elites, subelites, and local citizens to get involved in promoting one or more of the SDGs, but there are also a number of barriers that hamper local SDG action and thus need to be overcome or mitigated in the future.

Promotion of local projects and initiatives calls for structural support and leadership. Although local governments and business and community entrepreneurs can to some extent deliver on both the structural and leadership dimensions, global and national decision-makers also have considerable influence on the local conditions for pursuing social and economic prosperity, social equality, and environmental protection. Hence, the high hopes for local SDG hinge on global and national endeavors to improve conditions for collaborative innovation at the local level.