Localizing SDG Week

Series of Roundtables on Localizing SDGs in Asia and the Pacific (19-22 April 2021)

Concluding Remarks

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Distinguished panelists, colleagues from the OECD, UNDP, Development Partners Network on Decentralization and Local Governance (DELOG), ADB, and dear participants

1.   On behalf of the organizing team, I am pleased to deliver the concluding remarks of this series of roundtables on *Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).* Subnational governments are at the frontline as first responders to rapid urbanization, climate change with differentiated localized impacts, and external shocks such as COVID-19 pandemic. Their proximity to affected communities means subnational governments play a key role in delivering services, as well as economic development and public investment. The OECD-UCLG's *World Observatory on Subnational Finance and Investment* data has highlighted that substantial amount of public spending and investment in sectors such as health, education, social protection, water supply, and environment and climate change, which contribute directly to SDGs, take place at the subnational government level. So, without meaningful engagement and tangible contributions by the subnational governments, achieving the SDGs by 2030 will remain an elusive dream. This discourse on *Localizing the SDGs* is hence timely and necessary. In the last four days, four "enablers" for localizing SDGs were discussed through four panel discussions.[1]

2.   The panel discussion on the first day focused on '*policy coherence and institutional development'* in multi-level governance. The interactions highlighted that for subnational governments to contribute meaningfully to SDGs, certain requirements need to be in place. These include: (i) a strong legal framework with clear functional assignments and authorities among all government tiers; (ii) allocation of resources that commensurate with the mandates of SNGs; (iii) good implementation strategies and guidelines; (iv) investments and plans for strengthening

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[1] This is based on the 4+1 enablers highlighted by UNDP in its programmatic note. UNDP. *SDG Localization in Asia and Pacific: Programming note*. Bangkok.

operational efficiencies of local public institutions through digitization of systems and capacity development; and (v) platforms for effective coordination among government tiers and other stakeholders. Overcoming silos and leveraging the inter-dependence of sectors were also emphasized. The discussion reinforced that to put these requirements in place, adequate financial resources and political commitment are key, which in fact set the context for the *panel two discussion on 'financing'.*

3.   The need for billions of dollars to achieve the SDGs has been underlined time and again by different studies. The importance of strategic thinking and prompt actions for exploring and mobilizing diversified financing sources, and forging strategic partnerships (in support of these) are some of the reiterated messages we are taking away from our panel discussion on the second day. Despite the strong involvement of SNGs in areas that underlie SDGs, enabling fiscal frameworks are not in place in many countries in Asia and the Pacific region. Fiscal decentralization systems should therefore be improved, through grants and tax reforms, optimization and innovation (e.g. land-value capture instruments) and equalization mechanisms to provide more fiscal space to SNGs to finance SDGs. While public resource could be increased through these measures, public resources alone is not sufficient to finance SDGs. Partnerships with private sector, and philanthropic organizations need to be proactively explored. We heard some examples of how subnational governments have been managing to tap into such resources. On the other hand, to learn that it is not always the lack of resources, but policy and institutional barriers that prevent funds flowing to subnational governments is thought-provoking. We have noted that understanding and analyzing the interlinkages among policies, institutional capacity, incentive mechanisms, and financing is necessary to determine effective strategies for mobilizing and making resources available to subnational governments.

4.   We have three main takeaways from the panel discussion on the 3rd day, which focused on '*data and monitoring'*. First, multilateral organizations like ADB, UNDP and OECD have developed innovative systems of data collection for SDGs, which could be publicly accessed and used for evidence-based policy making, and formulating appropriate strategies and plans to achieve SDGs. Second, non-conventional data collection methods, such as those led by civil society or community organizations, could complement well with conventional methods, such as those led by National Statistical Offices. While state-run data systems often cannot collect data sets that are comprehensively disaggregated and granular, community-based monitoring systems have been proven to be capable of collecting such granular data, which not only contributes to

voluntary national reviews but also enriches policy analysis. By combining data collected through conventional and non-conventional systems, the issue of inadequate data in monitoring SDGs could be addressed to some extent. And third, innovative tools that facilitate data exchange across countries and partners (ADB's system), and those with visualization capacity (OECD's system) are already available for a richer analysis and better tracking of SDGs. More people need to know about the existence and accessibility of such innovative tools. There are also calls for more cooperation in statistics across Asia and the Pacific region, including at the community level. Moreover, the ability to understand and use the data is often weak in many countries. Knowledge sharing and capacity development is hence important as well, which set the context for the fourth and the last panel discussion on '*multi-stakeholder engagement, partnerships, and knowledge sharing'.*

5.   The examples presented today have shown the importance of a 'whole of society' approach to localize the SDGs, the wealth of experience and knowledge that could be harnessed, and the abundance of information and materials that are publicly available. The 'Social Innovation Platforms' that Indonesia is implementing with UNDP shows that there are new solutions to co-design local development portfolios and de-risk public and private investments. The example from the Pacific on advancing the localization agenda through multi-stakeholder coalitions is fascinating and serves as important learning opportunity for many. Mechanisms and platforms to share these knowledge and information are important, but even more crucial is the capacity of locally elected representatives, public officials and other development practitioners, including civil society organizations, to make use of such information and apply the knowledge gained. By working together and forging strategic partnerships, such sharing and capacity development activities could be better realized. We therefore need to invest our time, efforts, and resources in expanding our partnerships, promoting multi-stakeholder engagement, and facilitating knowledge sharing and capacity development. In fact, this series of roundtables embodies the notable partnerships among multilateral development organizations, a knowledge network, governments, global associations, and civil society organizations.

6.   I would like to thank all the panel members who gave their valuable time and shared with us valuable learning and experience, which benefitted hundreds of people. As per our record a total of more than 800 people from 36 countries participated in the roundtable series. I would also like to thank the moderators for their time and undertaking an important role of moderation. Finally, let me thank the organizing team of these roundtables: **Patrick Duong, from the UNDP**

Regional Hub in Bangkok; **Dorothee Allain-Dupre and Isabelle Chatry from the OECD Paris**; **Christian Luy from the DELOG Secretariat Germany; Toni, Aly, Abigail, and Rachana from ADB's governance thematic group, Rainer Rohdewohld, and ADB's IT and event management teams for the fantastic job in successfully organizing these important roundtables**. I hope there will be more such events in the future to share knowledge, and continued partnerships to jointly take forward this important agenda of localizing SDGs. And we are very pleased that UNDP is considering to host a similar online event next year with ADB, DeLOG and OECD. Thank you very much and have a pleasant day or evening.

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