



**Regions4**

Sustainable Development



UNIVERSITY of STRATHCLYDE  
CENTRE FOR  
ENVIRONMENTAL LAW  
AND GOVERNANCE

# 2018 Report

## Localizing the SDGs: Regional Governments Paving The Way



## **DISCLAIMER**

The analysis, results, and recommendations are those of the authors and of Regions4 Secretariat. These do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, descriptions or positions of member regional governments or those who responded the survey.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Thanks to all the regional governments and associations who replied to the questionnaire.  
Special thanks to the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), UNDP ART and ORU Fogar colleagues for the active contributions to the text and for the support in increasing the reach of the survey.

Thanks also to all Regions4 Secretariat team, for the inputs, contributions and support provided.

This report was made possible thanks to the special contribution and financial support of the Basque Country government.





## FOREWORD FROM REGIONS4'S PRESIDENTS: WHY REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS NEED TO LEAD THE WAY



*Joke Schauvliege, Minister  
of Environment and Spatial  
Development of Flanders*



*Maria Cecilia Alvarado,  
Vice-President of Azuay*

The universal, transformational and inspirational character of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are particularly important for regional governments. The SDGs, developed under the 2030 Agenda, might at first sight not represent a huge innovation, especially when considering we have been working on most of their themes since many years, but they already have greatly influenced subnational policies. When translating the SDGs to our realities and planning for their implementation, we have the chance to review policy making, improve thematic coordination and boost morale in public services by engaging civil servants and experts in the construction and implementation of a renewed agenda for our regions.

Furthermore, the SDGs provide us with the opportunity to further develop participatory models of governance and accountability mechanisms, and to craft multi-stakeholder partnerships. While there is a growing concern about the “shrinking space” for the engagement of civil society, our proximity to our citizens places us in a favorable position to use the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a means to improve stakeholder engagement, working closely with women, local and rural communities and all those who are inspired to build the future we need.

Regional governments can bridge different levels of government in the process of localizing the SDGs and their targets. Building on trends and guidelines from national and global levels, we enhance ambition, complement efforts and assist local governments and municipalities engaging in the localization of the SDGs. Many regions are already collaborating with cities in their territories to foster engagement, increase capacities and support local strategies and actions to achieve the SDGs. All of this ultimately contributes to coherent and coordinated efforts at all levels.

Considering the unique role of regional governments in this process, we believe that the present report is a fundamental exercise of compiling and mapping existing modalities and approaches adopted by some regions and that contribute to the localization of the SDGs. Capturing this panorama will not only stimulate other regional governments to engage with the 2030 Agenda, but it will also provide insights on ways to improve the implementation of the SDGs and push it forward. We need spaces that enable exchange and learning among peers, and Regions4 is a network that facilitates this kind of cooperation.

We call for all regional governments in the world, developed and developing alike, to join us and make this a collective process, based on mutual support and collaboration, so that we can better face our own specific circumstances and challenges.



## MESSAGE FROM REGIONS4'S SECRETARY GENERAL: FOR A SPECIALIZED FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW PROCESS FOCUSED ON REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS



*Natalia Vera,  
Secretary General Regions4*

When the 2030 Agenda was adopted back in 2015, we were excited to see the ambitious and inclusive result after a long negotiation process. Most of all, because we had also contributed to that process, advocating for a territorial vision and a subnational perspective in the SDGs. Regions4 was established on the sidelines of the Johannesburg Summit, in 2002, precisely with the mission to strengthen the voice of regional governments and support their engagement in the global sustainable development agenda. Since then, Regions4 has continued to assist the position of regional governments in the subsequent negotiations, including the process that led to the adoption of the SDGs.

Against this background, we immediately understood how Regions4 had to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. First, we had to spread the word about the importance of the 2030 Agenda for the subnational level, informing and engaging as many regions as possible. Then we had to support their implementation efforts, highlighting the particularities of the 2030 Agenda in their regard and providing channels for continuous peer learning. Finally, we had to continue strengthening their voice at global level by reporting back examples, good practices and needs of our constituency, in order to fulfil its role in the 2030 Agenda.

This report is our contribution to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). Moreover, it is a study that highlights the institutional responses regional governments are giving to this complex and multifaceted agenda. Our aim is not only to share the contribution of regional governments to the SDGs, but also to understand the internal process undertaken by each region to incorporate and transform the global agenda into their own, reflecting their specific circumstances.

Regions4 is thus generating information on a field where data is rather scarce. Although some information on the experience of regional governments can be found in national reports, it is important to analyze in further details how and to what extent regional governments have pursued the implementation of the SDGs, as well as the challenges they have faced along the way. This will enable us to highlight good practices and identify potential actions that could inspire subnational governments elsewhere and be scaled up.

Regions4 has a long trajectory in facilitating peer learning and review, and this report triggers many interesting ideas for follow-up activities to enhance the capacities of regional governments to properly address the SDGs.

This report is the result of a fruitful collaboration with partner organizations that also work specifically with regional governments, such as Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR), ORU Fogar and the ART Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP ART). Building on this collaborative spirit, we must all come together – especially the champion regions, who are paving the way, and the organizations dedicated to support the implementation of the SDGs in territories -, to consolidate a permanent community of practice for mutual support, joint projects and exchange of ideas and experiences.





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The success of the 2030 Agenda will greatly depend on its implementation in cities and territories. Local and regional governments are especially well-positioned to undertake this task. They are closer to the level where actions are more likely to produce measurable results, in a more transparent, responsive and inclusive process. However, this is not a task that local and regional governments can or should do on their own. The localization of the SDGs requires the involvement of all levels of governance, to ensure cross-scale integration and the design of mutually supportive and cohesive national and territorial policies. Moreover, it requires the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders, to join efforts, foster innovative solutions and foment a sense of ownership, which are fundamental to push the 2030 Agenda forward.

The objective of this report is to map the process undertaken by different regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs. Building on the mapping exercise, the report stresses a set of clear overall policy recommendations and approaches that could be replicated by regional governments. The report is based on a survey carried out with 47 regional governments across the globe, and was jointly developed by Regions4 and the University of Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance. Based on the data collected, it was possible to identify common trends, good practices and shared difficulties, and to draw policy recommendations aimed at further improving the implementation of the SDGs by regional governments. The data collected also provides relevant inputs to the follow-up and review mechanism of the 2018 HLPF.

### Localizing the SDGs through regional governments

Nearly all (92%) of the regional governments that responded to the survey declared to be **familiar with the SDGs and in early or advanced stage of implementation**, and 87% declared to have a specific policy and/or action to implement the SDGs. This data indicates that regional governments are actively paving the way towards the implementation of the SDGs in their territories.

Although there is no blueprint for the implementation and localization of the SDGs in regional governments, it is possible to identify common elements that usually guide this process. These elements or

steps include **defining a vision, mapping existing governance structures, adopting a policy, enacting laws, and creating and/or adapting institutions.**

The main challenges in the implementation of the SDGs identified by the respondent regional governments were (i) the **difficulty to prioritize the SDGs over other agendas** (around 45%), followed by (ii) the **need for additional support, capacities or trained staff** and (iii) **insufficient financial resources** (both mentioned by approximately 32%).

### Enablers of a multi-level and multi-stakeholder process

As part of their efforts to implement the SDGs, many regional governments focus on establishing partnerships with different sectors and a dialogue at all levels. The attention given by regional governments to multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder engagement reveals their concern for ensuring greater accountability, ownership and coherence in the implementation process. Diversified partnerships have the potential to bridge knowledge and capacity gaps and to mobilize the necessary resources to support regional governments in the localization of the SDGs.

- Approximately 71% of the respondent regional governments described to have undertaken or foreseen any process of **consultation to discuss the implementation of the SDGs with civil society, universities, private sector or other stakeholders.**
- An overwhelming 85% have conversations, projects or joint actions with the respective central government in relation to the implementation of the SDGs. This collaboration can take place either through existing or new mechanisms. However, **it is commonly agreed that these mechanisms still need to be improved, both in terms of the frequency of meetings and the level of integration between national and subnational efforts.**
- Approximately 81% have developed or planned collaborations, joint events or other activities to **build capacities and support local governments in their respective region**, in the implementation of the SDGs. City-region cooperation can enhance territorial cohesion and help build urban-rural linkages.
- The horizontal collaboration between regional governments worldwide, as well as other forms of **decentralized development collaboration (DDC), can enable peer-learning and review and**

### support regions in the localization of the SDGs.

DDC can help shape new alliances in a common effort to better understand challenges faced, and move towards solutions that can be replicated and scaled up.

## A territorial approach to SDGs & HLPF reviews

What truly distinguishes the contribution of regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs is their capacity to undertake an integrated territorial approach, which simultaneously addresses multiple SDGs and their interlinkages. In this regard, it is crucial that regional governments pursue their own strategies and plans for the implementation of the SDGs, building on national and global guidelines and experiences. It is also crucial that regional governments develop adequate indicators and proper data that will not only allow follow-up and review at territorial level, but will also feed into national voluntary reviews, providing relevant inputs for both national and global monitoring efforts.

- **Monitoring progress on the localization of the SDGs** should build on local and territorially disaggregated data. 50% of the regional governments with specific policies and/or actions in place have adopted new or existing indicators or measurement systems, which shows a need to further develop statistical capacities, in line with national and international processes.

- **Integrated territorial approaches** concomitantly consider the interconnected effects of policies over urban, rural and natural areas, integrating the multiple dimensions of a territory, such as the social, cultural, environmental and economic ones. Regional governments shared good practices in their implementation of all the SDGs under review by the 2018 HLPF, with a slightly higher selection (almost 66%) of SDG 15. Hence, it confirms that their contribution could be relevant for all SDGs being reviewed at the 2018 HLPF.

- In the process of elaboration of **voluntary national reviews (VNRs)**, 16 regional governments in the survey were from countries presenting VNRs in the 2018 HLPF. Among these regional governments, only half was contacted by the respective central government and able to contribute to the VNR process. The report provides a number of recommendations for improving VNRs processes in order to secure a meaningful input from engagement of regional governments.

## Need for continuous support and additional data

Although this report can help strengthen the support provided to the localization of SDGs through regional governments, additional data and continuous monitoring is required to generate proper information on the efforts of regional governments around the 2030 Agenda.

Regions4 has a long-track record in facilitating peer-learning and exchange opportunities, which will be fundamental for consolidating a community of practice specialized in the contribution of regional governments to help accelerate the localization of the SDGs.

Interested and relevant partners should come together to further developing capacity building projects and a permanent process of follow-up and review on the implementation of the SDGs in territories.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, UN member-States adopted the “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The Agenda sets, through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, a new global framework to end poverty, promote prosperity and people’s well-being, and protect the environment. Although reflecting a commitment undertaken by national governments, it is well acknowledged that the 2030 Agenda can only become a reality if all relevant stakeholders are engaged with it and committed to its implementation. Particularly, the contribution of regional governments is fundamental to enable the “localization” of the SDGs.

**The objective of this report is to map the process undertaken by regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs.** This process includes, amongst other elements, the adoption of policies and laws, creation and/or adaptation of institutions and deployment of actions. The mapping exercise present in this report has enabled us to highlight good practices ultimately leading to policy recommendations aimed at further improving the process of implementing the SDGs by regional governments. The report provides an **input to the 2018 High-level Political Forum (HLPF)**, answering the call for major groups and other stakeholders to report on their implementation efforts<sup>1</sup>.

1) UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ (25 September 2015) UN Doc A/RES/70/1, para 89 (“we call upon those actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda”).

**The report is based on a survey carried out with 47 regional governments across the globe**, developed in collaboration with the University of Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance and with the support of the CPMR, UNDP ART and ORU Fogar.

Being part of the Regions4 continuous engagement in the global sustainable development discussions, this report will be used to strengthen the support provided to regional governments by Regions4 and other partners. At the same time, the report is an invitation for practitioners, associations and experts to join us in this effort, developing capacity building projects and a permanent process of follow-up and review on the implementation of the SDGs in territories.

Building on this first report, Regions4 will work with regions and partners to continuously monitor and generate information on the efforts of regional governments around the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

## 2. A TERRITORIAL APPROACH TO LOCALIZING THE SDGS

Localizing the SDGs refers to their incorporation and implementation in cities and territories, based on the leadership of local and regional governments. Localizing the SDGs is not just about local implementation; it is also about placing cities and territories at center stage.

In order to do so, localizing the SDGs needs to involve all levels of governance and engage all stakeholders, to ensure cohesion and to allow cross-fertilization between national plans and territorial policies. In turn, localizing the SDGs also requires empowering local and regional governments by creating the necessary conditions and enhancing their capacity to adequately implement the global agenda. This empowering process will unlock the potential of subnational governments to mainstream the SDGs and targets into their own plans and policies.

Beyond SDG 11 on cities, localizing the SDGs is the opportunity to address the interconnections of all SDGs at the local and territorial levels.

One of the core elements for a successful localization of the SDGs is a territorial approach. It stands for more than just a geographical concept, but rather an approach that simultaneously addresses urban, rural and natural areas, integrating the multiple dimensions of a territory, such as the social, cultural, environmental and economic ones. Taking a territorial approach

means designing public policies and services based on the citizens' needs, especially focusing on urban-rural linkages, in terms of the flows of people, goods and the necessary infrastructure. In this context, the role of regional governments is self-evident.<sup>2</sup>

Although there is a growing acknowledgment of the relevance of localizing the SDGs and taking a territorial approach, these efforts need to be accelerated. This report aims to contribute to this process, by showcasing and analyzing the measures undertaken by some regional governments to promote the necessary institutional change capable of materializing the sustainable development of territories.

### 2.1. Why focus on regional governments?

Regional governments from all parts of the world have a crucial and unique role to play in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, given their proximity to the level where actions are more likely to produce measurable results. Based on their own competences and enabled by their much-needed territorial perspective, regional governments need to define their own strategies and plans building on national and global guidelines and efforts. Another necessary step is to establish adequate legal and institutional frameworks, and take action towards the achievement of the SDGs.

For the purposes of this report, "regional government" means the immediate level of government underneath the central or national government.<sup>3</sup> There are different terms to express the same concept depending on the country, such as regions, states, provinces, domains, territories, länder, cantons, autonomous communities, oblasts etc. Therefore, regional governments are different from local governments (cities and municipalities). In this report, subnational governments represent both local and regional governments.

On topics such as sustainable and resilient agriculture, water management, protection of biodiversity, infrastructure, urban-rural linkages, public education and health, and many more, regional governments are the ultimate responsible for delivery. In addition to their concrete competences in the provision of basic services and infrastructure, regional governments are closer

2) *Urban-Rural Linkages to Advance Integrated Territorial Development: Guiding Principles and Framework for Action*. Second Draft 12 June 2018. In press. See more at <<https://urbanrurallinkages.wordpress.com>> access 13 June 2018.

3) This is inferred from the definition of "local government" in F Bealey, *The Blackwell dictionary of political science* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers 1999) <[https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bkpolsci/local\\_government/0?institutionId=396](https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bkpolsci/local_government/0?institutionId=396)> access 15 June 2018.

to the level where most actions are expected to produce positive results, and, therefore, they are ideally positioned to enable territorial approaches for the SDGs.

Regional governments' efforts to implement and localize the SDGs could also contribute to ensure compliance with the 2030 Agenda. This contribution is especially relevant given the unenforceability of the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda. At the same time, focusing on regional implementation can expand the reach and legitimacy of the SDGs, due to the proximity of regional governments to their citizens and the positive effect this brings in terms of accountability.

## 2.2. The survey and consultation process

The primary source of information of the present report is a survey organized by Regions4, with the support of the University of Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance. Furthermore, the report is also based on continuous desk research, including materials collected from consultations held by Regions4 throughout the years.

The survey was carried out through a questionnaire, which was made available into English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The questionnaire was widely distributed, combining invitation letters from Regions4 Presidents and the support of like-minded organizations, specifically CPMR, ORU Fogar and UNDP ART.

The survey was open from March to early May 2018 and received 51 responses, including 45 different regional governments, 2 associations of regional governments and 1 university. For the purpose of data analysis, where the same region provided more than one response, the multiple responses were combined. Therefore, of the 51 responses received, only 47 were taken into account for the purpose of this report<sup>4</sup>.

4) The Catholic University of Santos, in Brazil, is member of Regions4, representing the academic and educational sector. The University has facilitated contacts with regional governments in Brazil and helped complement some of the replies. Therefore, their response to the questionnaire is not included in the list of respondents, but is reflected in different regional governments' contributions.

List of respondent regional governments and associations	
Region	Country
Ahafo	Ghana
Aichi	Japan
Åland	Finland
Association Nationale des Communes	Benin
Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes	France
Azuay	Ecuador
Basque Country	Spain
Bignona	Senegal
Bourgogne-Franche-Comté	France
Bretagne	France
Catalonia	Spain
Ceará	Brazil
Navarra	Spain
Nordrhine Westphalie	Germany
North Sumatra	Indonesia
Nouvelle-Aquitaine	France
Palawan	Philippines
Paraná	Paraná
Piauí	Brazil
Plateau	Benin
Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	France
Québec	Canada
Rabat Salé Kénitra	Morocco
Rivera	Uruguay
Centre-Nord	Burkina Faso
Council of Governors	Kenya
Emilia Romagna	Italy
Flanders	Belgium
Goias	Brazil
Gossas	Senegal
Grand Est	France
Jalisco	México
Manabí	Ecuador
Marche	Italy
Misiones	Argentina
Morona Santiago	Ecuador
Saint - Louis	Senegal
Santa Elena	Ecuador
São Paulo	Brazil
Skåne	Sweden
Southern Denmark	Denmark
Southwest Finland	Finland
Sud-Comoé	Ivory Coast
Valencia	Spain
Västra Götaland	Sweden
Wales	UK
Western Province	Sri Lanka

Figure 1. List of respondent regional governments and associations (region/country)



In some cases, bilateral conversations followed the responses to the questionnaire. Ideally, validation of all responses and additional details would be recommended for a refinement and updates of the case studies. Considering the tight time and resources available, the survey and follow-up conversations sought the input and perceptions from the departments and staff members responsible for sustainable development efforts in each regional government. Therefore, responses to the questionnaire are not to be considered official submissions, as that would have required an exhaustive bureaucratic process and the approval of pertinent authorities.

The questionnaire was structured to collect information on different aspects and elements of regional governments' implementation efforts. These, which also determine the structure and chapters of this report, were the following:

- i. General perceptions and engagement of respondent regional governments in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation;
- ii. Instruments and policies established or used to addressing the SDGs under the respective administration;
- iii. Specific actions and activities developed to discuss and enable the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- iv. Overall challenges and difficulties in making the SDGs an integral part of the governments' agenda;
- v. Multi-stakeholder partnerships and mechanisms for consultation with civil society and other sectors;
- vi. Multi-level governance and experiences of collaboration with national and local governments;
- vii. Specific experiences and good cases in the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15 – under review during this year's HLPF;
- viii. Engagement in Voluntary National Review processes.

### 3. LOCALIZING THE SDGS: OVERVIEW AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Perceptions and engagement level

**Nearly all (92%) of the 47 regional governments that replied to the questionnaire declared to be familiar with the SDGs and in early or advanced stage of implementation**, as shown in the chart below (scales 4 and 5).

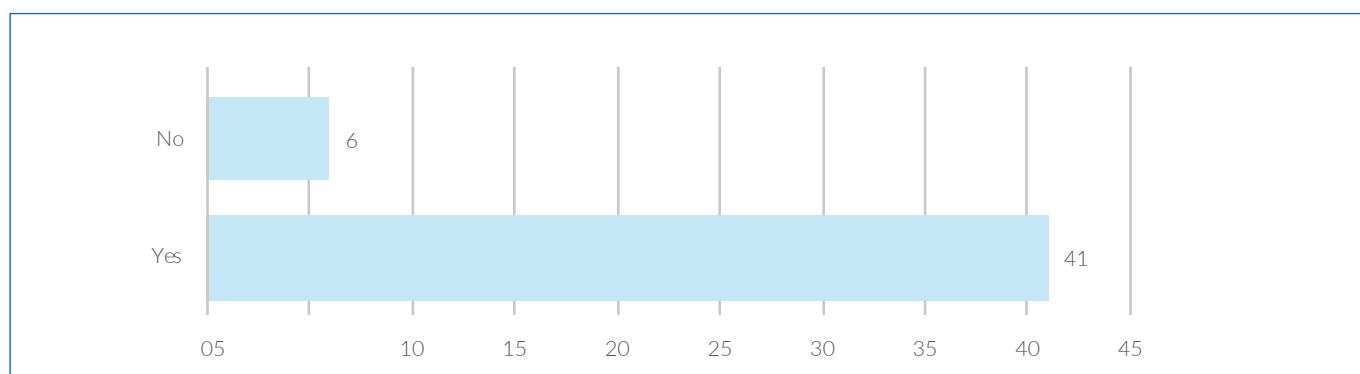
Graphic 1. In a scale of 1-5 to what extent are you familiar and involved with the implementation of the 17 SDGs, part of the UN 2030 Agenda?



Furthermore, **41 regional governments (around 87% of the total) declared to have a specific policy and/or action regarding the implementation of the SDGs.**

Some of the respondents had already in place specific policies, laws and institutions regarding sustainable development, even before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. While some of these governance structures had to be adapted or reinforced, the revision process in itself can also provide helpful insights on how to implement the SDGs at a territorial scale.

Graphic 2. Does your government have a specific policy and/or action to discuss and implement the SDGs in your region?

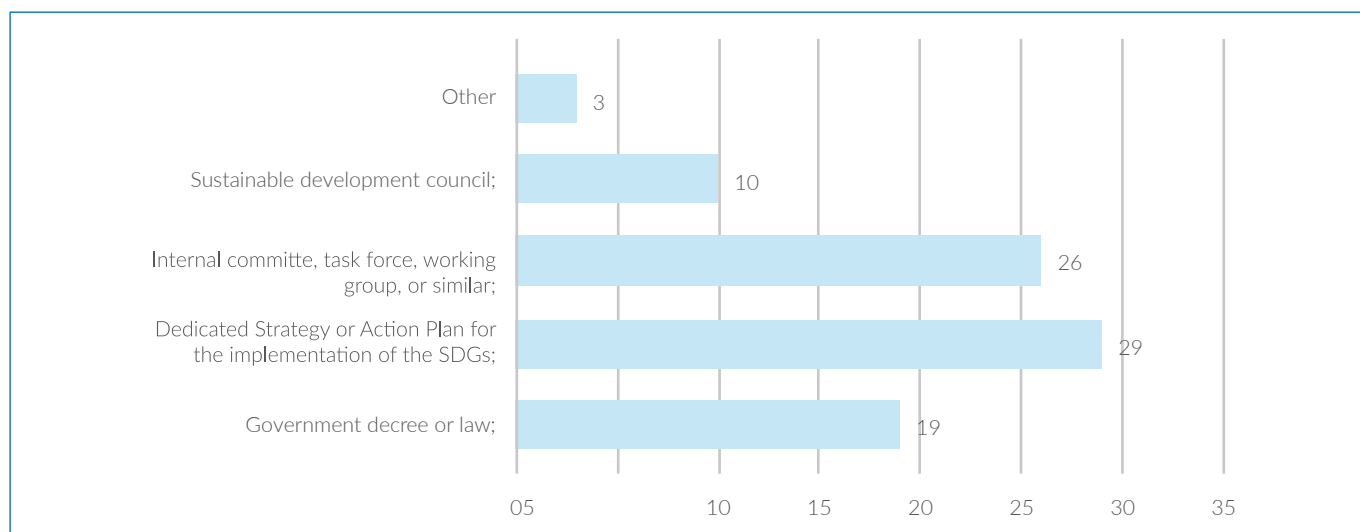


### 3.2. Policies and instruments adopted

41 regional governments declared to have a specific policy and/or action to implement the SDGs. Three instruments stood out as the most commonly used: (i) a dedicated strategy or action plan, adopted in 29 out of 41 regional governments (around 70%); (ii) an internal committee, task force, working group, or similar, adopted in 26 out of 41 regional governments (nearly 65%), and (iii) a government decree or law, adopted in 19 out of 41 regional governments (around 45%).

The following chart indicates the number of regional governments that have adopted each one of the instruments listed therein. As the numbers show, one regional government may have adopted more than one instrument, as they are often interconnected and mutually reinforcing, combined as part of a wider process of implementing the SDGs.

Graphic 3. Instruments to implement the SDGs



The process of implementing the SDGs, or the way the latter is structured, influences the results achieved and provides important elements to consider from the outset. In general terms, implementation of the SDGs involves **defining a vision, mapping existing governance structures, adopting a policy, enacting laws, and creating and/or adapting institutions**. However, this sequence is not static or unidirectional, and there can be an interchange between one step and the other depending on local circumstances and on the inputs generated during the implementation of a policy<sup>5</sup>. For instance, some regional governments had already some institutions in place which played a role in defining a vision and a policy, while others have undertaken a mapping exercise prior to defining a vision.

5) Åsa Persson and Hens Runhaar, 'Conclusion: Drawing lessons for Environmental Policy Integration and prospects for future research' (2018) 85 *Environmental Science and Policy* 141, 142-143.

Be that as it may, having a plan in which these steps are taken in a logical sequence according to the local context is a useful tool in the implementation of the SDGs. This is a 'cyclical and interactive process of planning, participation and action in which the emphasis is on managing progress towards sustainability goals rather than producing a "plan" as an end product'<sup>6</sup>, as precisely described in the outcome document of the International Forum on National Sustainable Development Strategies, held in Ghana in 2001 as part of the preparatory work to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development.

### 3.2.1. Defining a vision

A way to start the process of implementing the SDGs and steer actions is by **defining a vision**. The latter is a reflection of how the concerned society portrays itself in the future from a social, economic and environmental perspective. Developing a vision is an inherently political process that should be inclusive and participatory, engaging as many participants, from as many different backgrounds and representing as many varied stakeholders as possible.

The benefits are at least twofold: not only does it enrich the discussions and open them up to innovative proposals, but it also helps to create a sense of ownership, which is a key factor to ensure long-term engagement of all the relevant actors, including the public and private sectors, and the civil society. The vision resulting from this political process should also be ambitious and long-term, so as to inspire creative and bold solutions, pushing the agenda forward, and also its continuity throughout the years.

Regional governments provide some good examples of a vision as part of the process of implementing the SDGs. For example, the **Åland Islands** in Finland, in order to elaborate their Development and Sustainability Agenda, which contains its "vision" and strategic development goals, organized a 'vision-workshop'. It was open to everyone living in the islands, and 96 people were able to put forward proposals on which to build the vision. A panel of 59 experts was then requested to formulate strategic goals necessary to implement the vision. A draft document compiling

all the proposals was discussed in different groups and in open meetings for the general public, before being finally adopted<sup>7</sup>.

A similar approach was adopted by the region of **Valencia** in Spain by means of a strategic conference called 'The Challenges of Valencian Development Cooperation Post-2015'. The aim of this event was to rethink the vision of the government's development plan in light of the SDGs, and to consider challenges and opportunities. Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and think tanks were among the participants of the event<sup>8</sup>.

Another example worth highlighting comes from the Federal State of **North Rhine-Westphalia**, in Germany. The vision guiding the sustainability strategy adopted in 2016 was developed as part of a research project which aimed at analyzing and reflecting the design of this policy from a science perspective. Three rounds of dialogues were held between different stakeholders from both science and practice, in order to establish a vision and the targets necessary to make it achievable and measurable<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.2.2. Mapping existing governance structures

With a vision in mind, another useful step is to **map the existing policies, laws and institutions**, in order to identify the ones that may be relevant to the implementation of the SDGs. The mapping exercise will also enable to better assess whether such policies, laws and institutions need to be adapted and/or complemented together with any legal and constitutional constraints in this regard. The advantage of this exercise is to build upon existing structures where present, profiting from acquired experience and from well-functioning processes. This is part of the so-called internalization approach.<sup>10</sup>

6) UN Division for Sustainable Development 'Guidance in Preparing a National Sustainable Development Strategy: Managing Sustainable Development in the New Millennium – Background Paper No. 13' (DESA/DSD/PC2/BP13) para 3 <[http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/nsds\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/publications/nsds_guidance.pdf)> access 18 June 2018.

7) Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland: The vision and the Seven Strategic Development Goals (bärkraft.ax) 23-24 <<http://www.barkraft.ax/sites/default/files/attachments/page/media/development-and-sustainability-agenda-for-aland-2017-03-01.pdf>> access 18 June 2018.

8) Systematization, The Region of Valencia and the local implementation of the SDGs: A region committed to Cooperation and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Generalitat Valenciana and UNDP, May 2016) 4 <<http://localizingthesdgs.org/library/202/The-Region-of-Valencia-and-the-local-implementation-of-the-SDGs-A-region-committed-to-Cooperation-and-the-2030-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development-.pdf>> access 18 June 2018.

9) Miriam Muller and Oscar Reutter, 'Vision Development towards a Sustainable North Rhine-Westphalia 2030 in a Science-Practice-Dialogue' (2017) 9 Sustainability 1111, 1-2.

10) Åsa Persson, Nina Weitz, and Måns Nilsson, 'Follow-up and Review of the Sustainable Development Goals: Alignment vs. Internalization' (2016) 25(1) RECIEL 59, 65.

In the region of **Valencia**, for example, a working group was established by the Directorate General for Cooperation and Solidarity under the Department of Transparency, Social Responsibility, Participation and Cooperation to align, disseminate and evaluate the policies regarding sustainable development that were already in place.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this work, amendments were made to the Organic Laws of the Regional Government, and a new law on cooperation was enacted taking the SDGs as terms of reference.<sup>12</sup>

In the region of **Catalonia**, the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development prepared a report analyzing the socio-economic scenario related to each SDG at both the international and European contexts, as well as the challenges for Catalonia in relation to each one of the targets under 16 SDGs.<sup>13</sup> The aim of the report was to provide the Government of Catalonia with a panorama of the challenges ahead in order to design a proper plan. Around 60 external experts were involved in this process, according to the report.<sup>14</sup>

For this mapping to be effective, it is crucial to have, from the outset, a clear understanding of the SDGs in order to be able to identify and focus on the specific areas and/or issues that will be relevant for local implementation. This is where capacity building actions and inputs from internal and external experts can play an important role.

### 3.2.3. Adopting a policy

With a clear vision of the society's desired future and with a panorama of its current position and challenges, a regional government is better equipped to identify the gaps that need to be bridged (see box 1 for details on the 'ABCD method' adopted in the Åland Islands). The **pathway to bridge these gaps is normally set by a policy**, understood as a written document providing the direction for actions in a specific area and establishing the principles that shall inform them. Policies have been the most common instrument adopted by regional governments, which usually embody these policies in a document called dedicated strategy or action plan. A policy normally defines and/or incorporates principles that shall

serve as guidelines. It will also define goals/targets which translate the SDGs to the local context and it will adopt specific indicators as a reference for monitoring and evaluation. Finally, a policy may establish further actions to be undertaken.

Against this background, there is often more than one way of reaching a same target, and as the issues addressed normally touch upon and have an impact on different policy areas, the choice of one particular action instead of another requires technical expertise in order to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each possible approach.

One common measure to deal with these trade-offs is to establish inter-ministerial or inter-departmental commissions and technical committees to take part in policy design. In fact, nearly 65% of the regional governments that declared to have a specific policy and/or action to implement the SDGs have established an internal committee, task force, working group, or similar. This can be considered a powerful institutional transformation fostered by the 2030 Agenda, as it improves coordination and collaboration between different thematic departments within a regional government, combining efforts and promoting a holistic and integrated approach to policy design and implementation.

In **Catalonia**, an inter-departmental commission was established to coordinate at high-level the elaboration of a strategy by a technical committee composed of 17 working groups, one for each SDG. These working groups were formed by representatives of the regional departments (conselleries) with competences related to the specific SDG, favoring synergies among different policy areas and promoting coordination and coherence<sup>15</sup>

In the region of **Flanders**, a working group was set up with representatives from all policy areas to coordinate policy preparation and implementation in the region. In 2015, Flanders adopted the Visie 2050, a long-term strategy on Sustainable Development<sup>16</sup> and now has adopted the Vizier 2030, as the translation of the SDGs into the Flemish subnational level, which includes

11) Acuerdo de 25 septiembre de 2015 del Consell.

12) Ley 18/2017, de 14 de diciembre, de cooperación y desarrollo sostenible.

13) SDG 17 on partnerships was considered instrumental and was not included in the report.

14) Report 3/2016, 'The 2030 Agenda: Transform Catalonia, Improve the World - The challenges for meeting sustainable development goals in Catalonia' (Barcelona, 27 September 2016) 10 <[http://cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Informes/2016/Agenda\\_2030\\_CAT/CADS-Report\\_3\\_2016\\_The-2030-Agenda\\_Transform-Catalonia\\_Improve-the-World.pdf](http://cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Informes/2016/Agenda_2030_CAT/CADS-Report_3_2016_The-2030-Agenda_Transform-Catalonia_Improve-the-World.pdf)> access 18 June 2018.

15) The 2030 Agenda: Transform Catalonia, improve the world. The implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya) 10 <[http://cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Agenda\\_2030/The-2030-Agenda\\_transform-Catalonia\\_improve-the-World.pdf](http://cads.gencat.cat/web/.content/Documents/Agenda_2030/The-2030-Agenda_transform-Catalonia_improve-the-World.pdf)> access 18 June 2018.

16) Vision 2050: a long-term strategy for Flanders (Department of Public Governance and Chancellery. English version of 2018. See more at <<https://www.vlaanderen.be/en/publications/detail/vision-2050>> access 14 June 2018.

## Box 1: The Åland Islands and the 'ABCD-' or 'back-casting' method (\*)

One of the essential elements of the strategy adopted by the Åland Islands to implement the SDGs is the so-called 'ABCD-' or 'back-casting' method. It is built around these three questions:

- Where do we want to get to?
- Where are we now?
- And how can we bridge the sustainability gap – based on our own circumstances?

These questions are answered following a specific method, which consist of four sequential steps:

- Defining a vision (or desired position in the future);
- Analyzing the current position in relation to the vision and identifying the gap and main challenges between (A) and (B);
- Brainstorming possible short and long-term actions and solutions that can contribute to bridging the gap between (A) and (B), and
- Prioritizing possible actions and defining a concrete action plan.

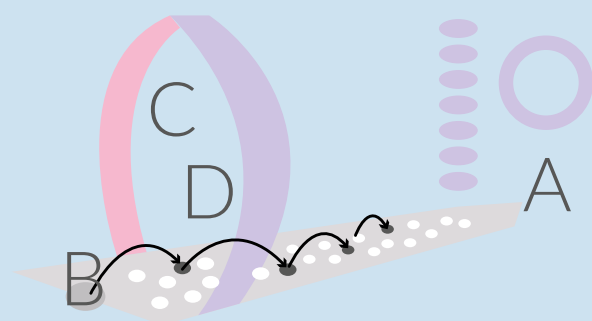


Figure 2. 'ABCD' method of Åland

One of the advantages of this method is to provide a guideline or matrix that can be adopted by governments and by stakeholders alike in their efforts to implement and/or adapt policies and processes in line with the SDGs.

(\*) Bärkraft.ax, Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland: Status Report 1 as approved by the Development and Sustainability Council on 12 June 2017, <<http://www.barkraft.ax/sites/default/files/attachments/page/statusrapportbarkraft-en-k2.pdf>> access 04 June 2018, pages 2, 36, 49-50.

their 49 sustainable development goals.<sup>17</sup> At the federal level, the task to develop the first National Sustainable Development Strategy, aiming at implementing the 2030 Agenda and promoting policy coherence, was assigned to the Inter-Ministerial Conference for Sustainable

Development. This body is composed of federal, regional and community representatives responsible for sustainable development and development cooperation, and it is the main tool to promote dialogue between the different levels of governance.<sup>18</sup>

A similar approach was adopted by the government of the Basque Country, where the Foreign Affairs department leads an interinstitutional commission, which involves representatives from different departments of the government, as well as representatives from cities and provinces in the region. Building on the work of the commission, the president of the region announced the Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda, which links all 17 SDGs in 93 commitments, 80 planning instruments, 19 legislative initiatives and 50 indicators in the official government's program for 2016-2020.<sup>19</sup>

These mechanisms of policy integration across levels and scales of governance will be discussed in more details in section 5 of this report.

However, the choice of one action instead of another, or the prioritization of a specific course of action, is ultimately a political decision. While defining priority targets is a way of narrowing the spectrum of action and rendering implementation more effective, it must be the result of an inclusive and participatory process,<sup>20</sup> akin to the process of defining a shared vision of society. The means through which this participation takes place will very much depend on local circumstances.

In the Åland Islands the policy document was the result of a collective work, to which everyone living in the islands was invited to contribute from the very beginning. The policy was developed not only through workshops and open meetings specifically held as part of this work, but also through a network called Bärkraft.ax, which is open to anyone and which enables a permanent dialogue between public and private sectors, and civil society.<sup>21</sup>

18) Pathways to Sustainable Development: First Belgian National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (UN High level Political Forum, NY 2017) 4-5 <[www.sdg.be/nl/publications/2017-national-voluntary-review-belgium](http://www.sdg.be/nl/publications/2017-national-voluntary-review-belgium)> access 18 June 2018.

19) Euskadi Basque Country 2030 Agenda - Basque Contribution to Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. 2018 148-149. See also the government's press release for the launch of the document <<https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/news/45073-lehendakari-presenta-agenda-euskadi-basque-country-2030-alineada-con-los-objetivos-desarrollo-sostenible-onu>> access 30 May 2018.

20) Åsa Persson, Nina Weitz, and Måns Nilsson (n 3) 68.

21) Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland: The vision and the Seven Strategic Development Goals (bärkraft.ax) 18-19.

17) Vizier 2030 (Flemish government). See more at CIFAL-Flanders news <<http://cifal-flanders.org/flanders-translates-sdgs-to-local-level/>> access 14 June 2018.



A similar, but more formal approach can be identified in the region of Flanders, where advisory councils, usually established by law and composed of different societal groups, take part in political dialogues, advising public authorities on how to shape policy. The Socio-Economic Council of Flanders and the Flemish Environment and Nature Council are examples of those advisory councils.<sup>22</sup>

Another aspect to take into account is that a strategy or action plan usually covers medium to long-term scenarios and, therefore, needs to be subject to periodic review to adjust its focus towards the established vision, which can in turn evolve as well according to the review. This normally happens through annual reports. However, in addition to that, some of the regional governments have also opted to breakdown their strategy into annual work programs, making it possible to prioritize actions based on trending issues and current constraints (e.g., budgetary issues) and creating a more institutionalized follow-up mechanism.

In the region of **Valencia**, the policy on cooperation and sustainable development is translated into a 4-year master plan (Plan director de cooperación). This plan stems from consultations and evaluations of previous measures, and its final approval requires a prior approval by the regional Parliament (Les Corts) through a resolution. The objectives and priorities stated in the master plan are implemented through an annual work program (Plan de acción anual), and

the relevant mid- and final reports are prepared and made available through an accountability webpage (Portal de Transparencia).

A similar approach is taken by the state of **Sao Paulo**, in Brazil, using a multi-year budget planning (Plano Plurianual or PPA) which translates the government's budgetary planning for a period of 4 years based on priorities and strategic objectives. The statistical office of the state of Sao Paulo is working to identify synergies between the SDGs and the PPA, and to establish a link between the respective indicators.<sup>23</sup> Along the same lines, the state of Goiás, also in Brazil, has used its PPA to operationalize the SDGs.

### 3.2.4. Enacting laws

**Enacting laws** is another useful instrument to implement the SDGs. In fact, around 45% of the regional governments with policies and/or actions in place declared to have government decrees or laws in this regard. For the purposes of this report, decrees and laws are taken in a broad sense and include any written and binding document adopted by a legislative body (Parliament or similar) or made under the powers conferred by an act of said body (delegated legislation, such as decrees, regulations, and rules).<sup>24</sup>

22) *Pathways to Sustainable Development: First Belgian National Voluntary Review on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* (UN High-level Political Forum, NY 2017) 6.

23) *Rovena Negreiros, Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável – ODS: Mensuração a partir do Estado de Sao Paulo* (SEADE, Brasil 2017).

24) *Jonathan Law and Elizabeth A Martin (eds), A Dictionary of Law* (7edn, OUP 2009) 162.



In Belgium, the details on how the policy cycle is structured can be found in a 1997 federal law and in a 2008 **Flemish** decree. In the region of **Valencia**, these details are provided for in the new law on cooperation and sustainable development issued in 2017 (see box 2 for more details on the Valencian law). In **Sao Paulo**, the PPA is approved through a law of the state of Sao Paulo.

In the **Palawan Islands**, in the Philippines, the Republic Act 7611 on the Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP), in force since 1992, declares that it is the policy of the State to protect, develop and conserve its natural resources, and that it shall support and promote the socio-economic development goals of the country. The SEP is promoted as a comprehensive framework that guides the local government and agencies concerned in the formulation and implementation of plans, programs and projects. The same Act creates the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, responsible for implementation and policy direction, with the possibility of being integrated by members of the public and/or private sectors. It also creates the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff to provide technical support.

In **Wales**, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 reflects the regional government's efforts to translate and implement the 2030 Agenda. The Act imposes positive procedural obligations on public bodies with regards to the pursuit of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being. Pursuant to this law,

public authorities are required to report on the actions undertaken to implement the objectives set therein, and shall be advised and assisted by a Commissioner for Future Generations. It also provides for the establishment of public service boards in local authority areas, which shall also plan and take action in the pursuit of sustainable development (see box 3 for more details on this Welsh Act).

As these examples show, a law can serve different purposes. It is often the means to flesh out a policy, by operationalizing the principles and objectives that shall inform the activities of public authorities and/or private agents. A law can also detail actions to be undertaken and specify who shall be responsible for what. Finally, a law can establish procedural obligations such as monitoring and reporting, and specify the sources of funding. One of the values of translating policy into law is to establish clear commands and to vest them with legal and binding effects, to institutionalize processes and safeguard the core elements of a policy from circumstantial political changes, in so far as possible and desirable.

### 3.2.5. Creating and/or adapting institutions

**Creating and/or adapting institutions** are also relevant steps in the implementation of the SDGs at a local level and help operationalize policies through laws. Of the regional governments that declared to have a specific policy and/or action to implement the SDGs, nearly 65% have established



View of the sea from Pope Luna's Castle, Valencia. Credits: Shutterstock.com

## Box 2: Comunitat Valenciana and the 2017 law on cooperation and sustainable development (\*)

The object of this law is to regulate the activities of the public administration in the region of Valencia that relate to international development cooperation and to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

Although the main focus is on the external action of the region, this law also regulates the **coordination and collaboration** between the regional government (Generalitat), the local governments, and other public and private actors in their activities towards implementing the SDGs.

The law is divided into four main titles (general provisions, planning, resources and sanctions), providing details on:

- Which **principles** shall inform the regional government's policy on international development cooperation;
- How this policy shall be translated into a 4-year master plan (Plan director de cooperaci3n) and its respective annual work programs; which **procedural obligations** need to be observed along this process; which **institutions** are **involved** and which role each one plays;
- Which **instruments and modalities** of cooperation can be used; **what should be prioritized**;
- How projects financed under this policy shall be **monitored and assessed**; how the information collected in this process shall be made public;
- How the **annual budget** should be prepared taking into account the credits reserved to the international development cooperation policy, and
- Which **sanctions** can be applied in the event of any breach of the provisions in the law; which process should be followed and what the competent bodies are.

(\*) Ley 18/2017, de 14 de diciembre, de cooperaci3n y desarrollo sostenible (BOE-A-2018-99).

an internal committee, task force, working group, or similar. And around 25% have created a sustainable development council. Among these structures, some are established for a short-term mandate, such as task forces and working groups, while others, such as advisory councils, have no specified term and could be better identified as institutions. The latter are herein considered as a group of people organized according to a particular set of rules, with defined roles and responsibilities, and following a proper decision-making process in the fulfilment of a mandate. Institutions can be created by policies and/or provided for by legislation.

In the region of **Catalonia**, for example, the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development is a collegiate body created in 1998 whose main activities include advising the government on policies and actions, formulating proposals, ensuring transversal integration, and promoting dialogue between the government and other actors. The Advisory Council's President is appointed by the government among people of recognized prestige, and the other members (from 10 to a maximum of 15) are nominated by the government upon proposal of the Council's President. They have a 2-year mandate, renewable for additional periods of 2 years, and are given functional autonomy.

Another feature of the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of **Catalonia** refers to the participation of experts: not only can they be invited for meetings, but they can also integrate groups on specific issues, with stable or task-long duration, for the purpose of providing non-binding recommendations.<sup>25</sup> The council participates in the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils network (EEAC), which is an observer member of the European Commission high-level multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the SDGs in the European Union.<sup>26</sup>

25) Decret 41/2014, d'1 d'abril, del Consell Assessor per al Desenvolupament Sostenible de Catalunya.

26) European Commission Multi-stakeholder platform on SDGs - The high level multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. More info at <[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/global-topics/sustainable-development-goals/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/global-topics/sustainable-development-goals/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs_en)> access 12 June 2018.

### Box 3: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

This law, passed on 29 April 2015, has some interesting provisions worth highlighting:

- **Duty on public bodies:** public bodies are required to set and publish well-being objectives designed to maximize their contribution to achieving the well-being goals, as well as to take all reasonable steps to meet those well-being objectives;
- **Well-being goals:** the Act lists and describes each one of the seven well-being goals. The combination of these goals provides a vision for Wales. Goals and vision are presented here as synonyms;
- **Positive procedural obligations:** public bodies need to take into account the importance to balance short and long-term needs; the need to take an integrated approach, and the importance of involving a plurality of stakeholders and establishing partnerships;
- **National indicators and annual report:** Welsh Ministers are required to publish national indicators to measure progress towards the well-being goals. They are also required to set milestones in relation to those indicators. For each financial year, the Welsh Ministers must publish a report on the progress made towards the achievement of the well-being goals by reference to the national indicators and the correspondent milestones;
- **Future trends report:** in the 12 months from the date of the general election Welsh Ministers must publish a report containing future trends in the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and any related analytical data and information. The report needs to take into account any action taken by the UN in relation to the SDGs and assess how that action can have an impact on Wales;
- **Role of the Auditor General:** the Auditor General for Wales must carry examinations of public bodies to assess the extent to which they have complied with their obligations as established in the Act;
- **Future Generations Commissioner:** this is an individual appointed by Welsh Ministers after consulting with the National Assembly. The main role of the Commissioner is to encourage public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impacts of their actions, and to monitor and assess progress towards the well-being objectives. The Commissioner's functions include providing technical advice and recommendations to public bodies, the Auditor General and the Welsh Ministers. It shall be assisted by a panel of advisers.

In the **Åland Islands**, the Development and Sustainability Council is responsible for following up the implementation of the Development and Sustainability Agenda. The Head of Government is both member and chair of the Council, which meets normally twice a year. The Development and Sustainability Council is composed of at least 8 and up to 14 members, appointed by the government for a 2-year term and chosen among leading people from various sectors, including representatives of agricultural producers, businesses, and academia.<sup>27</sup>

The possibility to have members of both public and private sectors integrating these institutions has the advantage of broadening the angle from which policies and actions are analyzed. It allows different perspectives to be taken into account and to be balanced throughout the process, increasing the chances of reaching a solution that is more easily accepted and implemented by the concerned parties.

Moreover, structuring institutions in a way that is more transparent, participatory and inclusive, and imprinting this ethics into the institutions' daily operations contributes to the creation of a certain institutional culture in which these values are embedded and can be further advanced over time. This institutionalization helps to counterbalance, at least to a certain extent, the effects of political fluctuations, provided that a degree of autonomy and political will is present.<sup>28</sup>

Institutions can also serve as platforms for cooperation and assistance. The region of Southwest Finland provides an interesting example. Since 2008, the Service Centre for Sustainable Development and Energy, a regional advisory organization known as Valonia, provides support to municipalities,

<sup>27</sup> Development and Sustainability Agenda for Åland: Status Report 1, approved by the Development and Sustainability Council (12 June 2017) 43.

<sup>28</sup> Måns Nilsson and Åsa Persson, 'Policy note: Lessons from environmental policy integration for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda' (2017) 78 *Environmental Science and Policy* 36, 38.

#### Box 4: Institutionalization of partnerships: Valonia – Service Centre for Sustainable Development and Energy of Southwest Finland (\*)

Established in 2008, Valonia is a regional advisory organization part of the Regional Council of Southwest Finland. Valonia is composed of experts from different backgrounds, providing technical support to municipalities, companies and other actors on issues of sustainable development. Energy efficiency, mobility, wastewater treatment and environmental awareness and education are among the areas in which support is provided. Valonia's actions include informational materials, trainings, courses, workshops and other events which promote networking and sharing of information and experiences.

Valonia also plays a fundamental role in implementing regional programs in cooperation with municipalities. This contribution is made through:

- The work of Valonia's experts, who take part in municipalities' workgroups and in planning procedures;
- Valonia's financial resources, which mostly come from national and international funding for projects and remuneration received for the advisory services provided. Contributions made by municipalities account for less than 25% of Valonia's budget; and
- Valonia's management group, which is composed of representatives from municipalities, business corporations, academia, the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, and the Regional Council for Southwest Finland.

(\*) Valonia, Programme 2020 – Southwest Finland as forerunner in sustainable development, Southwest Finland Sustainable Development Programme 2015–2020 (Valonia, Finland 2014) 11–13. See also <<http://www.valonia.fi/en/valonia>> access 05 June 2018.

businesses and other actors on issues of sustainable development. Valonia cooperates with municipalities in the implementation of regional programs and is responsible for planning, applying for funding, promoting coordination at regional level and engaging relevant actors and partners in this work. Valonia's management group is composed of representatives from municipalities, businesses, academia, and the Regional Council of Southwest Finland. Part of Valonia's budget comes from municipal contributions, but the main sources of funding are regional, national and European programs (see box 4 for more details on Valonia).

One of the benefits of institutionalizing partnerships is to enable municipalities to do more than they would be able to do if not partnering with other municipalities and actors. Furthermore, having an institution dedicated to this work provides the structure (staff, budget, processes) and the stability necessary to develop long-term projects and to build know-how.

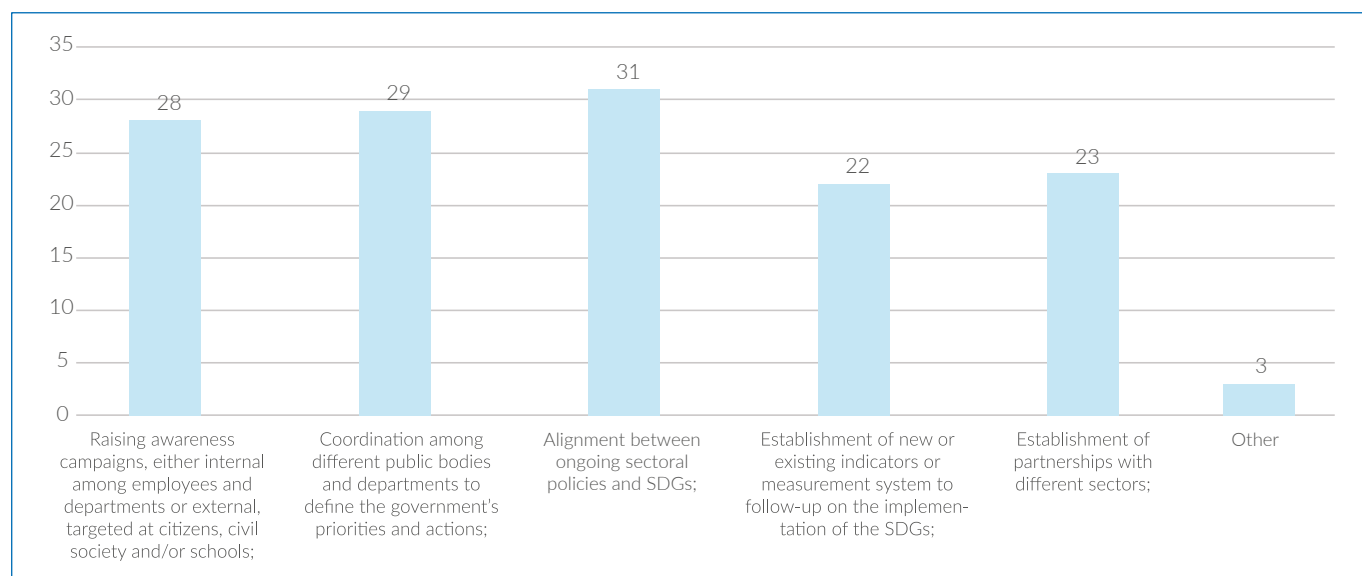
Given the fundamental role played by multi-stakeholder consultations and partnerships in the successful implementation of the SDGs, this topic will be analyzed in more detail in section 4 of this report.

### 3.3. Modalities of actions adopted: tools to overcome main challenges

Among the 41 regional governments that declared to have a specific policy and/or action to implement the SDGs around 70 to 75% have adopted actions regarding alignment between ongoing sectoral policies and SDGs (31 regional governments), coordination among different public bodies and departments (29 regional governments), and awareness raising campaigns (28 regional governments).

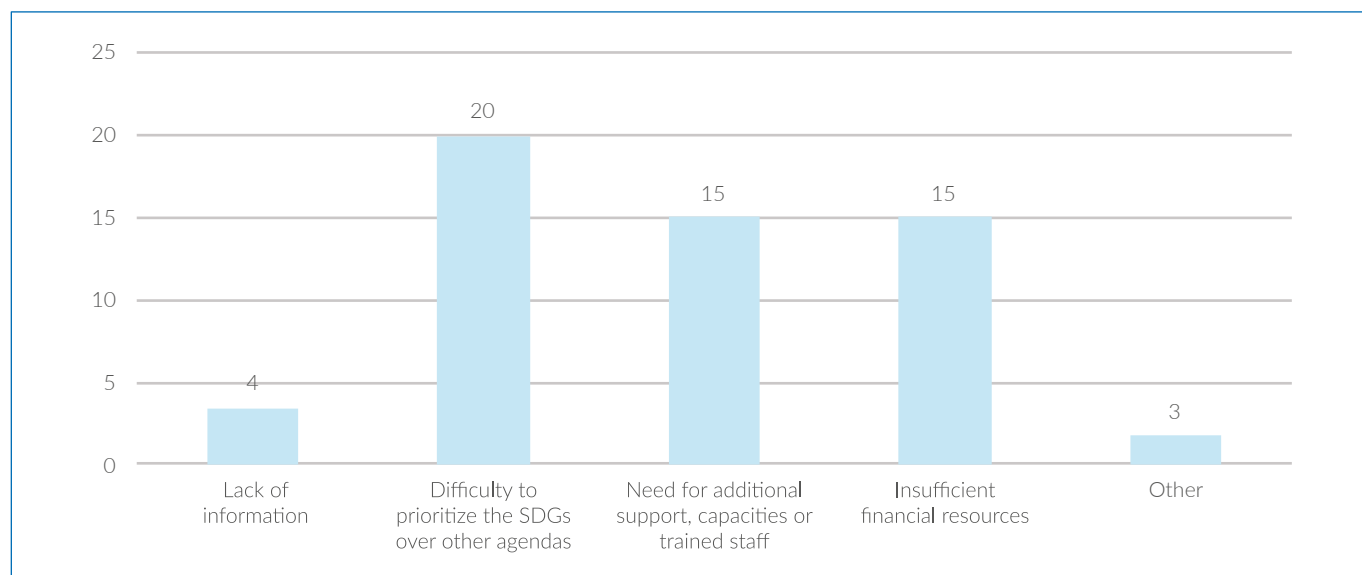


Graphic 4 - Actions Adopted



Although these actions normally reflect and constitute measures adopted to implement a policy, they can also be part of the preparatory work necessary to design it. Without knowing what the SDGs are, a regional government might not even consider developing a specific strategy or adapting its current policies. Without having technical capacity or know-how, a regional government might not be able to map the field and design an adequate policy. In these cases, awareness raising campaigns and partnerships for capacity building and technical support might be needed in the first place. Therefore, it is useful to analyze the data on actions adopted together with the data on main challenges and difficulties, which includes replies from regional governments that have no specific policies and/or actions in place.

Graphic 5 - Main challenges and difficulties



### 3.3.1. Coordination and alignment

The main challenge faced by the respondent regional governments is the difficulty to prioritize the SDGs over other agendas. This most likely includes the difficulty to address potential conflicts between the SDGs themselves,<sup>29</sup> and it could explain the major focus placed on actions to promote **coordination and alignment**.

<sup>29</sup> M Stafford-Smith et al, 'Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals' (2017) 12 Sustain Sci 911,912.

As discussed in section 3.2.3, one way of promoting coordination among public bodies and departments is to create inter-departmental or inter-ministerial commissions and working groups. These bodies are normally composed of representatives from different departments, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of most of the issues related to sustainable development. Some of these commissions include representatives from local, regional and national governments, promoting policy coordination and coherence across different levels of governance. This can also be pursued through alliances established within and between municipalities. Multi-level coordination and alignment will be discussed in more details in sections 5 and 7 of this report.

When it comes to prioritizing one action over another not only technical, but also political decisions are involved. Therefore, adequate and effective means of public participation must be adopted, including, but not limited to, issue-specific or one-time-only consultations. To this end, allowing representatives of different sectors to integrate the structure of institutions involved in the preparation of policies, such as advisory councils, favors the quality of the final document, making it more tailor-made to regional circumstances. In Kenya, for instance, a national SDG coordination committee was established with ministers from the national government together with members from the private sector, UN agencies, county governments, and civil society.

Moreover, having open forums for debate operating on a permanent basis, and networks for exchange of views and lessons learned, creates or reinforces a culture of public engagement and a sense of ownership, which are most welcome in the collective effort to implement the SDGs (see box 6 for details on Irekia, the Basque Country's tool for open government).

With these governance structures in place, the task of aligning ongoing sectoral policies and the SDGs can be better undertaken. However, this alignment process would still benefit from a complete mapping of the existing policies, laws and institutions. This mapping is normally reflected in an initial report, which serves as a guideline for developing policies and/or adapting existing ones.

### 3.3.2. Training

This mapping exercise is one area where **expert inputs and capacity building** might be required to guarantee a clear understanding of the SDGs. With this knowledge, a regional government is better equipped to identify and focus on the specific areas that need to be coordinated and aligned. The region of Catalonia is one example.<sup>30</sup>

Technical support might also be extremely helpful in developing analytical tools to assess the mutual interactions of the SDGs and their impacts on ongoing policies across different sectors. Initial

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30) As mentioned in section 3.2.2, around 60 external experts were involved in the preparation of an initial report that would serve as a basis for a plan to implement the 2030 Agenda in the region.



Flock of sheep in Saibi mountain. Urkiola, Basque Country. The region has both very industrialized and rural areas. Credits: Shutterstock.com



efforts to build these diagnostic tools have been reported and could provide relevant insights to foster policy coherence.<sup>31</sup>

The need for additional support, capacities or trained staff was reported as the second most common challenge faced by the respondent regional governments. To tackle this problem, some of them have relied on experts to help develop strategies or to take part in technical meetings or working groups in order to provide recommendations. Networks, such as the European Sustainable Development Network, and programs promoted by the United Nations Development Programm are also among the sources of technical support mentioned by some regional governments.

Other measures include establishing partnerships with universities, businesses and other associations, to promote transfer of knowledge and mobilize the skills needed. That is the case in the region of **Valencia**, where NGOs and the civil society at large have been involved in preparing informative guides on each SDG, with the assistance of universities and councils, to help training policy-makers.

In the **Basque Country** and in the state of **Sao Paulo**, online training courses and internal sessions on SDGs have been organized for civil servants and directors of different departments within the public administration, as part of the efforts to raise awareness and build capacity.

31) Måns Nilsson and Åsa Persson (n 7) 38.

### 3.3.3. Awareness

**Raising awareness campaigns** is a further action carried out by regional governments, undertaken by almost 60% of the respondents. These campaigns appear to be effective if one considers the relative small number of regional governments that have listed “lack of information” as one of the main challenges and difficulties (only 4 out of 47). Raising awareness campaigns are also varied, including seminars, workshops, online courses, educational programs, and even festivals.

In the region of **Valencia**, for instance, teaching and promotional materials have been widely distributed and displayed in schools, libraries and other public venues. A similar approach was taken by the state of **Sao Paulo** in Brazil, where the Secretariat of Education has partnered with the social business StoryMax to produce e-books with stories that have the SDGs as background; the idea is to make these books available to the entire public-school system.

Another relevant way of raising awareness is by setting an example. In this regard, public regional government authorities have a valuable role to play. They have the means to establish an adequate legal framework and to create a conducive environment for businesses and citizens to change their behavioral and consumption patterns. However, these are not the only instruments available. Public authorities are also

#### Box 5: Open government: Basque Country and Irekia (\*)

Irekia is an online platform active since 2010 enabling permanent and direct communication between civil society and the Basque Government, using a non-administrative language. This online tool is managed by the Open Government Directorate, under the General Secretary of the Premier's Office.

Irekia constitutes the starting point for the development of the concept of open government, which is based on three pillars:

- **Transparency:** information and data on governmental actions, decisions and plans are made available in real time;
- **Participation:** policies, laws and actions are submitted to public debate, with the possibility of interested parties to present their own proposals ('grassroots proposals') and/or questions to be further discussed or clarified; and
- **Collaboration:** innovative mechanisms are put in place to combine efforts from public authorities, private sector and civil society. One example is the Open Data Euskadi, a tool which makes it possible for the public data to be redistributed and reused by third parties to develop services.

Material collected from social media (social networks, blogs, websites and forums) is also used as input for government proposals.

(\*) Basque Country, What's Irekia <<https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/en/site/page/about>> access 17 May 2018.

able to raise awareness by integrating the SDGs in their public procurement rules, as has been done in the region of **Västra Götaland** in cooperation with the Swedish government.

Along the same lines, the Ministry of Finance of the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia issued a circular in 2017 containing general investment guidelines for the management of assets held by the civil servants' pension fund. In one of its provisions, the guidelines expressly state that securities issued by 'ethically or ecologically problematic entities may not be acquired' and that relevant sustainability aspects must be taken into account when analyzing the security and profitability of an investment.<sup>32</sup>

These are two examples of ways to implement SDG 12, which are analyzed in more detail in section 6.4 of this report.

### 3.3.4. Partnerships

**Establishing partnerships with different sectors** has the potential not only to bridge knowledge and capacity gaps when it comes to local implementation of the SDGs, but also to help minimize difficulties related to insufficient financial resources, which are both the second most common challenge faced by the respondent regional governments. Partnering with businesses and civil society associations, and promoting their direct engagement in the execution of specific projects and/or services can help alleviate the pressure over often tight public budgets. Similar partnerships have also been established among municipalities as a way to join efforts and resources and to profit from a common budget, nurtured by national and external sources of funding, as in the case of Valonia in **Southwest Finland**.

Equally important when it comes to financial resources is the elaboration of the regional government's public budget. Without the necessary funds, no vision and no policy can be fully implemented, no matter how advanced and ambitious they might be. For this reason, it is important that the budget be fine-tuned with the policy adopted, taking into account actions and priorities established therein. And this is, in essence, a matter of planning and of political coordination, an area in which mechanisms of alignment, collaboration and participation play an

important role, as already discussed above. Breaking down policies into annual work programs, in which priorities are clearly stated, and having laws with guidelines for the preparation of the budget can also be useful mechanisms in this process.

Another aspect worth highlighting is the use of partnerships as an empowering tool to promote the so-called decentralized cooperation, connecting local initiatives to the international level, as further discussed in section 5.3. The regional network called GESCOD (Grand Est Solidarités et Coopérations pour le Développement), established in the region of **Grand Est**, in France, is one example. Members of the network include representatives of local governments and public authorities; associations engaged in international cooperation; institutions in the economic, social and environmental sectors, and any natural person under certain circumstances. By joining the network, members need to observe its code of ethics (charte de valeurs), which expressly refers to the 2030 Agenda.

One of GESCOD's ongoing initiatives is called 'Associations and Schools for the SDGs' (Associations & Scolaires pour les ODD). It promotes partnerships between associations engaged in international cooperation, public education and sustainable development, on the one side, and schools in the region of Grand Est, on the other. During one school year, projects, tours and events shall be developed to engage students, promoting citizenship education and raising awareness on the SDGs.<sup>33</sup>

By gathering different actors, from multidisciplinary settings, and by promoting the conditions for them to work together on a common challenge, partnerships are also effective catalysts for innovative solutions, which can then be scaled up.

### 3.3.5. Monitoring, evaluation and indicators

One final point to consider is about monitoring and evaluation. Strategies to implement the SDGs usually cover medium to long-term scenarios and, within this timeframe, it is important to assess the progress made and the challenges ahead. This is normally done through periodic reports, which serve two main functions: on the one hand, they help to identify the

32) Ministry of Finance circular of 2 May 2017, General Investment Guidelines for the management of assets held by the civil servants' pension fund of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (Pension Fund NRW) <[https://www.nachhaltigkeit.nrw.de/fileadmin/download/General\\_Investment\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.nachhaltigkeit.nrw.de/fileadmin/download/General_Investment_Guidelines.pdf)> access 08 June 2018.

33) GESCOD, <<https://www.gescod.org/>> access 06 June 2018. For the initiative's leaflet, see also <<https://www.gescod.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Plaqueette-ODD.compressed.pdf>>





Aerial view of Eixample district, Barcelona, Catalonia. The region is famous for its innovative urban planning. Credits: Shutterstock.com

adjustments that need to be made in the policy and to plan the next set of actions and priorities; on the other, they ensure transparency and allow the society, directly and/or through the relevant parliament, to hold the government accountable and to push the agenda forward.

In the absence of compliance and enforcement mechanisms to guarantee the implementation of the SDGs, periodic reports play a crucial role in keeping the momentum and safeguarding the credibility of public commitments. Participatory and collectively built follow up mechanisms are also useful ways to mitigate negative side-effects of shared and often diluted responsibility.<sup>34</sup>

In the **Åland Islands**, for example, an annual report is provided by the government to the parliament, where the normal political scrutiny can be held. The same report is discussed during the annual Forum for Sustainable Development, in which anyone living in the Åland Islands is allowed to participate, and where good examples and lessons learned are also presented. Having this forum for open debate and ongoing assessment of the actions taken towards the goals is an important mechanism to foster engagement and sense of ownership.

Another interesting example in this regard is found in the 2017 National Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in Belgium. Pursuant to this document, all levels of governance shall jointly elaborate a report twice per government term, highlighting progress, identifying gaps and developing recommendations. In this process, broad dialogue shall be established with relevant stakeholders.

Whereas the relevance of reporting seems evident, it is not often clear what should be measured and what should be the baseline or reference. Just over 50% of the regional governments with specific policies and/or actions in place declared to have adopted **new or existing indicators or measurement systems** to follow up on the implementation of the SDGs. These numbers might indicate that this is an area that still needs to be better understood and developed.

In fact, some of the respondents declared to be currently working on the design of indicators. In **Catalonia**, for example, a task force has been especially created for this purpose. Statistical institutes have also been engaged in this work; in **Sao Paulo**, the state data management unit is working to integrate the SDGs into the existing indicators and to develop a data framework for monitoring and implementation. A similar approach was taken in Belgium, where the Inter-Federal

34) Åsa Persson, Nina Weitz, and Måns Nilsson (n 3) 60-61.

Statistical Institute has a dedicated working group to progressively incorporate and/or adapt existing indicators (including OECD and Eurostat) according to the local context.

In this process of defining indicators, there are at least two important aspects to consider. The first one is about meaningfulness; if the periodic reports are to have any real function in evaluating progress and enhancing the effectiveness and quality of a policy, it is crucial that the indicators used to analyze the data be meaningful. They should reflect the goals and be informed by the same ambition as the strategic vision. The second aspect to consider is about alignment; while it is necessary to build goals and indicators based on local circumstances, they also need to align with national and international concepts, classifications and methods in order to promote consistency and efficiency. This is one of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics<sup>35</sup> and is especially important when preparing national reports required at international level. Having comparable data is also relevant to enable benchmarking and exchange of lessons learned.

In the most recent report released by the UN Secretary-General on the progress towards the SDGs,<sup>36</sup> some targets were not included due to the lack of data or of comparable data, based on the repository of national statistical agencies. This highlights the importance of designing adequate indicators and engaging regional governments to provide more accurate and disaggregated data, avoiding the need for estimations to be made by specialized international agencies. Enlarging and enhancing the quality of data is a fundamental contribution to evidence-based decision-making and accountability in the process of implementing the SDGs.

## 4. MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

At this point it is worth to recall that the objective of this report is to map the process used by regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs. The mapping exercise present in this report enables to highlight good practices aimed at further improving the implementation of the SDGs by regional governments. Against this background,

effective public participation is a key feature in how regional governments implement the SDGs. This section analyzes different forms of stakeholder engagement, such as multi-stakeholder consultations and partnerships, in the implementation of the SDGs by regional governments.

While some of these examples have already been discussed in earlier sections of this report, the importance they behold for regional governments in their implementation of SDGs calls for further attention. In fact, it is through effective public participation schemes that regional governments can truly reflect the voices and concerns of the people and communities living within their territory, ultimately enabling regional governments to truly localize the SDGs.

It is, hence, important for regional governments to enable opportunities for the contribution from civil society organizations, private sector, indigenous peoples, academia and other stakeholders in their actions on the SDGs. In doing so, regional governments contribute to a greater ownership and legitimacy of the process adopted in the implementation of the SDGs. In fact, actors that compose each region's society have unique knowledge and understanding of the needs and challenges faced on the ground that could better inform regional policies and result in more efficient approaches to the SDGs.

At the global level, regional governments can establish partnerships with UN agencies, multilateral banks, think tanks and other expert organizations. In particular, international stakeholders can help mobilize technical and financial resources to improve the capacities of regions in the localization of the SDGs, including through access to the most advanced tools and technologies.

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to describe if they had undertaken or foreseen any process of consultation to discuss the implementation of the SDGs with the civil society, universities, private sector or other stakeholders. Of the 47 respondents, 30 (approximately 64%) replied to have carried out consultations, while three others (6,4%) confirmed to have planned activities in the near future.

The responses showed a variety of consultation modalities and innovative ways of collaborating with different stakeholders. Among the responses, options included: inter-ministerial sustainable development

35) UNGA Res 68/261 'Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics' (29 January 2014) UN Doc A/RES/68/261.

36) UN Economic and Social Council Report of the Secretary General 'Progress Towards the Sustainable Development Goals' (11 May 2017) UN Doc E/2017/66, paras 2 and 4.



conferences; engagement with NGO coalitions on SDGs; consultations through regular consultation mechanisms, such as activities at the parliament, or through new mechanisms established with this specific purpose, as an annual forum on SDGs. Moreover, many have organized specific activities, such as seminars, workshops, working sessions for the redefinition of cooperation guidelines or public hearings.

Some of the activities stressed in the report focused on the engagement of specific sectors, such as youth, private companies or universities. Additionally, some emphasized the international support and collaboration with global institutions when establishing consultation processes. In many cases, the initial consultations and participatory sessions led to permanent frameworks of engagement.

For example, the government of the **Western Province in Sri Lanka** is preparing 3-year action plans for the implementation of the SDGs, taking into consideration its territorial circumstances. This process is being driven in close collaboration with local universities, and it includes the organization of the International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Development – Lessons learned from Millennium Development Goals and a way forward to SDGs, in Colombo, October 2018. The event envisages the opportunity to identify and connect actors interested in supporting the localization of the SDGs in the province. In preparation for the Conference, the provincial government opened a call for papers to encourage the academic community to reflect and study approaches for implementing the SDGs.

Other regions have adopted similar approaches, as **Scania**, in Sweden, which established a SDG platform with Lund University and representatives of the private sector and the civil society. In the case of **Quebec**, the mid-term review forum of their Sustainable Development Strategy (2015 – 2020), taking place also in October 2018, will be a unique opportunity to discuss partnerships and the implementation of the SDGs.

The province of **Azuay**, in Ecuador, has partnered up with the Group FARO and the Latin America Future Foundation to organize dialogue and working sessions to discuss the localization of the SDGs. The government organized workshops and set up focused groups, composed of representatives from local governments, universities, the civil society and national ministries for the definition of priority actions around the SDGs that were most relevant for the province's circumstances.

## Box 6: Toolbox for localizing the SDGs

The Toolbox is a virtual pioneering knowledge and information sharing platform, available in English, French and Spanish, which aims to support the localization of the SDGs. Promoted by UNDP, UN-Habitat and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, the platform provides practical tools designed for local and regional governments and other local policy makers and practitioners interested

in contributing to the implementation and review of the SDGs at the local level. The resources are divided around three main categories, taking users from the point of initializing the SDG localization process, setting up enabling institutional frameworks and finishing with resources to support capacities' strengthening.

The Toolbox is open for external contributions as users can upload and share their experiences, tools, as well as engage in real-time discussions with all participating partners of SDG localization community. The experience of each one matters and by sharing insights and information, this collective effort aims to contribute to achieving sustainable development, transforming the global goals into local realities.

More information: [www.localizingthesdgs.org](http://www.localizingthesdgs.org).



A further example comes from the region of **Brittany**, which is committed to adopting a new territorial project towards a sustainable transition, which will be based on the exhaustive participation of stakeholders and a multi-year calendar of consultations. This initiative is the Breizh COP, in reference to their own Conference of the Parties. Building on 11 thematic areas, the Breizh COP foresees several stages of participation and contribution from stakeholders, in order to finally adopt an inclusive regional development strategy by 2020, which should also address the SDGs.

Figure 3. Different steps planned in the Breizh COP<sup>37</sup>



Regional governments, such as Paraná, Basque Country, Sao Paulo, Valencia and others have mentioned partnerships with UNDP in the promotion of a territorial debate on the SDGs or with the UN Global Pact in their engagement with the private sector. The UN system and international organizations have been key players in strengthening the localization of the SDGs, especially considering their global distribution, country offices, technical capacities and access to state-of-the-art methodologies and debates. The government of Piauí, in Brazil, recently launched the “Piauí SDGs Project”<sup>38</sup>, an initiative

in collaboration with UNDP to enhance human development in the region, by pursuing the SDGs. The project in the Brazilian state is set to begin with a Rapid Integrated Assessment, used as a methodology to incorporate the SDGs into the ongoing policies and plans. Besides, it is also inserted in an ongoing development project with the World Bank.

## 5. MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND EXPERIENCES OF COLLABORATION WITH NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Another important lesson that this report reiterates is how regional governments implement the SDGs is the need for greater coherence and coordination of the efforts within a country. Coordination requires the establishment of meaningful links and appropriate dialogue channels between national and subnational levels. Although it is important to establish specific policies on the SDGs, focusing on the local and territorial conditions, these specific policies must be accompanied by an enabling and collaborative environment among all levels of governance. A clear framework can help divide tasks and responsibilities, avoid duplications, while improving comparison, mutual support and alignment whenever possible.

The interaction among national, regional and local governments for the definition and implementation of policies is usually referred to as multi-level governance.<sup>39</sup> The latter may operate in different directions, vertical integration in national-region and region-cities interactions, as well as horizontally, in region-region collaboration. Moreover, international collaboration involving subnational governments is often referred to as decentralized cooperation.<sup>40</sup>

37) Breizh COP - Les étapes de la démarche <<http://www.breizhcop.bzh/presentation/etapes-demarche/>> access 13 June 2018.

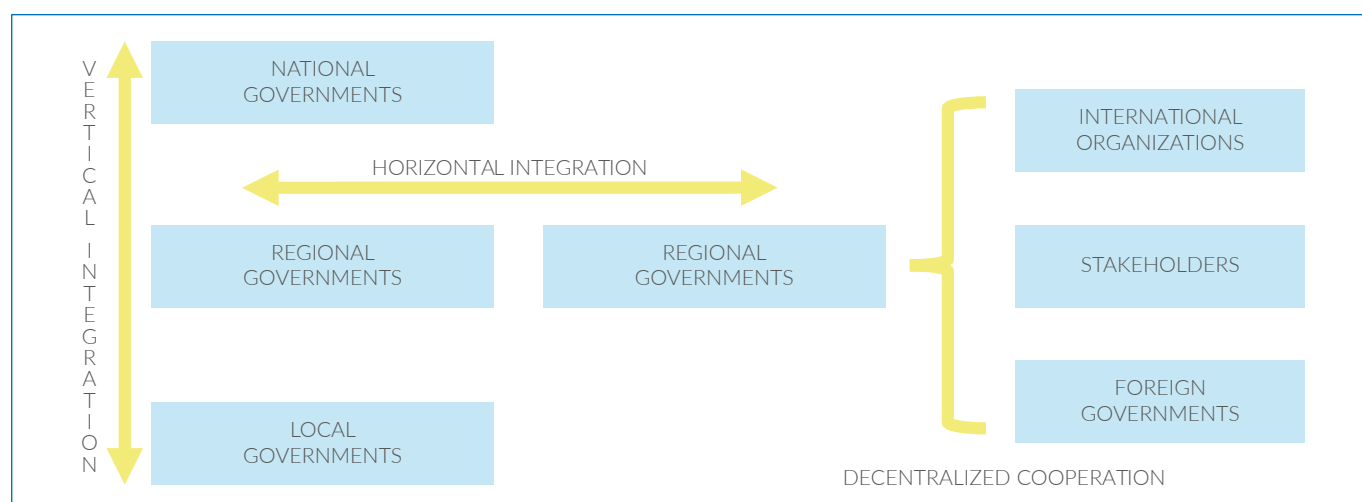
38) 'Governo do Estado e PNUD lançam projeto "Projeto ODS Piauí": Piauí state government news <<http://www.pi.gov.br/materia/governo/governo-do-estado-e-pnud-lancam-projeto-projeto-ods-piau-5375.html>> access 13 June 2018.

39) Multi-level governance is an example of cross-scale integration, in the sense of governance arrangements established between institutions with different scopes, jurisdictions and epistemologies. The concept of scale is herein applied to identify the different subject areas of analysis, such as spatial, temporal, jurisdictional and institutional. See Casey Stevens, 'Scales of integration for sustainable development governance' (2018) 25(1) *Intl Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology* 2.

40) Filippo Terruso, 'Complementing traditional diplomacy: regional and local authorities going international' (2016) 15 *European View* 325.



Figure 4. Multi-level governance and decentralized cooperation



Against the backdrop of multi-level governance and decentralized cooperation, in the following subsections the report will highlight examples of vertical and horizontal integration by discussing (i) cooperation between regional and national/central governments, (ii) between regional governments and cities and, finally, (iii) cooperation between regions themselves in the implementation of the SDGs.

## 5.1 Regions in cooperation with national/central governments

National and central governments also have a fundamental role to play in localizing the SDGs. National governments are responsible for establishing the institutional framework in which subnational governments operate, by allocating competences, capacities and financial resources. Hence, it is important that such frameworks adequately empower and incentivize subnational governments to lead on the localization of the SDGs. More specifically, national governments may:

- i. Provide useful guidelines, knowledge and technological tools for subnational governments to develop bottom-up processes for the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda;
- ii. Create new financial instruments, review fiscal competencies and subnational tax system, or even establish or allocate funds to support subnational governments in localizing the SDGs;
- iii. Review institutional and regulatory frameworks, especially in terms of the devolution and decentralization of powers, in order to enable an appropriate response of subnational governments to the SDGs;
- iv. Establish councils, commissions and other institutions for engagement and contribution from a regional government, including in the process of preparing the respective voluntary national review;
- v. Support capacity building, training and other activities to qualify human resources, raising awareness on the 2030 Agenda within subnational governments;
- vi. Develop an adequate indicators' structure and collect territorially disaggregated data, ensuring that national statistical offices establish partnerships with subnational governments for the collection and analysis of data in cities and territories.

In the questionnaire, respondents were requested to comment if they held any conversations, projects or joint actions with the respective central government, in regards to the implementation of the SDGs. Of the 47 respondents, a vast majority (85% and 40 responses) replied positively. Among the positive answers, 65% of the respondents (26 responses) mentioned that this collaboration takes place through previously existing mechanisms, as councils, forums or even through informal direct communication with national ministries. The other 35% (14 responses) commented that new projects were established, specific meetings organized, and in some cases whole new structures were specifically created for the national implementation of the SDGs, which allowed for the participation of regional governments.

For example, in the **Palawan** province, the 2030 Agenda is led by the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, which includes representatives from three different departments of the national government<sup>41</sup>, and enables direct exchanges and joint actions between both levels. In another example, the **Center-Nord** region of Burkina Faso counts with a permanent consultation framework (Cadre de Concertation Regional) to coordinate actions and actors on the territory's development. It consists of a multi-stakeholder participatory body that includes national government representatives. This body meets regularly in ordinary sessions throughout the year. According to the Center-Nord region, the consultation efforts currently focus on developing a work program towards jointly defining a regional development plan that will contribute to the implementation of the SDGs.

Similarly, **Flanders**, in Belgium, is part of the Inter-ministerial Conference on Sustainable Development at federal level, which gathers ministers from all government levels to decide on the federal actions towards the SDGs implementation. As part of the Italian National Strategy for Sustainable Development, **Emilia Romagna** and the Italian regions are invited to present reports to the national Ministry of Environment, which in turn reports on the SDGs implementation to the Presidency of the Council of Minister. Moreover, regions in Italy participate in the National Council for Development Cooperation,<sup>42</sup> which allows regions to provide inputs for the national efforts on the SDGs and has been discussing new guidelines for cooperation in the 2030 Agenda framework.

The **Kenyan counties** participate in the national SDGs coordination committee and have been working with different national ministries for the review of specific SDGs, for example in the monitoring of SDG 6 on water, based on reports and information collected by the counties. The Brazilian states of **Sao Paulo, Paraná** and **Goiás** participate in the National Commission on SDGs. Moreover, Sao Paulo has been collaborating with the national government in the organization of regional workshops on SDGs and in the establishment of **Sao Paulo's** subnational council on SDGs – which should ultimately include representatives from the federal level. Despite the existence of exchanges or conversations between regional and central governments, the responses to the questionnaire reveal a general feeling that the existing structures are not taken advantage of as much

as they should be or do not promote enough integration of national and subnational efforts in the implementation of the SDGs. Therefore, it is recommended that mechanisms for multi-level governance meet more regularly and establish a concrete roadmap and meaningful opportunities for collaboration and exchange between regional and central governments, as discussed in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

## 5.2 Region-city collaboration in localizing the SDGs

Cities and local governments are also at the center of localizing the SDGs, since they are particularly well positioned to target urban issues and to develop more effective policies based on local circumstances.<sup>43</sup> Collaboration between cities and regions can promote greater territorial cohesion and an integrated perspective of all combined impacts of actions adopted to implement the SDGs. Furthermore, region-city collaboration can help identify the needs of local governments, and provide them with capacity building and training opportunities, subsidies or guidance to support the localization of the SDGs. Moreover, regional governments may:

- i. Provide the necessary support for cities in the development of local plans and strategies for implementing the SDGs, especially by ensuring coherence with regional efforts and respective policy;
- ii. Ensure a territorial approach to local efforts, in terms of enabling urban-rural linkages, a metropolitan governance structure and a holistic view of the interconnected effects of policies over certain areas;
- iii. Promote trainings and capacity-building workshops and sessions to raise awareness and engage municipalities towards local SDGs implementation efforts, as well as in support to the respective approaches of the regional government;
- iv. Support monitoring, follow-up and review of local plans on the SDGs, as well as their integration into territorial and national actions.

38 out of 47 regional governments which have answered the questionnaire (approximately 81%) have developed, or planned for the near future, collaborations, joint events or other activities to build capacities and support local governments in their respective region, in the implementation of the SDGs. The responses showed a wide array of actions, ranging from training and capacity

41) It includes representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resource (DENR), National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Department of Agriculture (DA).

42) Established by Italian national law n. 125/2014.

43) G Melica et al, 'Multilevel governance of sustainable energy policies: The role of regions and provinces to support the participation of small local authorities in the Covenant of Mayors' (2018) 39 Sustainable Cities and Society 729.

building sessions, workshops, events, new and previously existing committees, networks or other structures of dialogue, to campaigns, policies and incentives targeting local governments. Some regional governments have signed agreements or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with local governments, while others have developed pilot-projects in support of specific local policies and plans for the SDGs.

The efforts for localizing the SDGs in the government of **Paraná** focus particularly in supporting and engaging municipal governments. The Brazilian state fostered the commitment of all its 399 municipalities in the region with the 2030 Agenda. The state organized training sessions and encouraged cities to use the Guide for Integrating the SDGs into Brazilian municipalities<sup>44</sup>, developed by the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM), in collaboration with the ART initiative of UNDP. Finally, Paraná committed to the elaboration of an annual regional government report, Paraná with eyes set on SDGs' (Paraná de Olho nos ODS) (see box 7 for more details on the Paraná case).

In a similar approach, **Flanders** is keen to establish new partnerships to enable the implementation of the SDGs, with special focus on Flemish cities. Particularly, Flanders supports CIFAL Flanders<sup>45</sup> in the organization of training sessions and workshops for cities and provinces' employees, to raise awareness on the 2030 Agenda and support localization.

The province of **Azuay**, in Ecuador, is keen on ensuring the SDGs become a priority for the entire provincial territory. In order to do so, the government of Azuay established as a condition precedent for its collaboration in local projects that the relevant canton or municipal government justify how the proposed activities or projects will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Another example comes from the **Basque Country**, where the regional government facilitates the Udalsarea 21, an official network that brings together 183 municipalities of the region in the pursuit of sustainable solutions for common issues. The initiative was established in 2002 and supported cities to implement the Agenda 21. Now, the network is reviewing its work plan to make use of their consolidated structure and assist municipalities in the localization of the SDGs.

44) The guide is available in Portuguese in the Confederation website <<http://www.cnm.org.br/biblioteca/exibe/2855>>.

45) CIFAL Flanders is the UNITAR affiliated International Training Centre for Authorities & Leaders <<http://cifal-flanders.org/>> access 8 June 2018.

### Box 7: Alliances with and between municipalities: 'Paraná with eyes set on the SDGs' (Paraná de Olho nos ODS) (\*)

The State of Paraná, Brazil, is implementing a program called 'Paraná with eyes set on the SDGs' (Paraná de Olho nos ODS), developed by the Secretary of Urban Development and the serviço social autônomo Paracidade (a non-profit organization and dedicated to promote and undertake activities related to regional, urban and institutional development of municipalities). The program is developed in partnership with the Information Technology and Communication Company of Paraná (CELEPAR), the State Audit Court and other institutions.

The program is a tool to localize the SDGs at the municipalities' level. The municipalities interested in joining the alliance proposed by the State of Paraná need to sign a document reflecting its terms of engagement (Termo de Compromisso), which include a commitment to:

- Publicly engage with the SDGs;
- Take the SDGs into account when developing policies, programs, projects and actions, as well as when preparing the municipality's budget;
- Establish mechanisms for reporting, monitoring and evaluation of progress made towards the goals established;
- Promote the engagement of other institutions within the municipality; and
- Establish partnerships.

Once joined the alliance CELEPAR, together with the Economic and Social Development Institute of Paraná (IPARDES), develops business intelligence aimed at gathering, organizing, and analyzing data from the relevant municipality in order to create indicators to support the implementation of the SDGs.

(\*) "Paraná de Olho nos ODS" reúne prefeitos da ASSOMECA em Curitiba (Press release) <<http://www.paracidade.org.br/modules/noticias/article.php?storyid=2247>> access 18 May 2018.

**Southern Denmark** region has developed an MoU to establish partnerships with city governments in their territory, particularly to assist them in measuring progress on the SDGs implementation, and thus enable a consistent follow-up and data from the local level. Similarly, the state of **Goiás**, in Brazil, has chosen the municipality of Alto do Paraíso to integrate a pilot-project and receive state support in developing a local plan to implement the SDGs. In collaboration with UNDP, the national government and several local stakeholders, Goiás organized seminars and activities to understand how the SDGs could be linked in the context of the Cerrado Biosphere Reserve<sup>46</sup>, where the municipality of Alto do Paraíso is located.

### 5.3. Region-region and decentralized cooperation

The implementation of the SDGs can benefit from the collaboration between peer governments. Despite differences between countries, **regions throughout the world will benefit by cooperating with other regions**, in a common effort to better understand challenges faced, and moving towards solutions that can be replicated and scaled up.

46) Biosphere reserves are nationally determined areas that "promote solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use". UNESCO information on biosphere reserves <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/biosphere-reserves/>> access 8 June 2018.

UNDP defines decentralized development cooperation as the "work of local and subnational governments, civil society, NGOs, the private sector and academia with counterparts in other countries to advance local sustainable human development"<sup>47</sup>. A recent OECD report recognizes different concepts and applications of decentralized development cooperation (DDC). Against this background, the document emphasizes the importance of DDC for the localization of the SDGs, and highlights the important role that cities and regions play in the implementation of the SDGs. In this regard, the report explains that DDC can support local and regional governments' implementation efforts, since they may "utilise DDC to support knowledge and peer-to-peer exchange within and across countries on how to mainstream SDGs in their local and regional policies, as well as planning, investment, and strategies".

Furthermore, DDC in the format of projects, events, initiatives, working groups, or including international associations of regional governments, contributes to improve the governments' capacities to deliver on the global agendas, since DDC contributes to: "1) generating spaces for the exchange of experiences and knowledge transfer, 2) fostering alliances for learning, and 3) creating strong links between the territories and their stakeholders"<sup>48</sup>.

47) UNDP, ART Initiative, 2011 Annual Report <<https://issuu.com/artpublications/docs/ar2011>> access 10 June 2018.

48) Agustí Fernández de Losada, 'Shaping a new generation of decentralised cooperation for enhanced effectiveness and accountability' (2017) Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) & PLATFORMA 13.



Bruges cityscape with water canal at sunset, Flanders. Credits: Shutterstock.com





View from Maytree Gardens in Chapada dos Veadeiros, Goiás. The region is mostly covered by a unique type of savannah biome, named 'cerrado'. Credits: Shutterstock.com

In this panorama, Regions4 stands out in the promotion of opportunities for peer-learning, exchange of experiences, and long-term DDC projects. In fact, initial webinars, exchanges and conversations have been held in the past and have allowed regions to understand what their fellow counterparts are doing to localize the SDGs. Bearing in mind the need to strengthen decentralized cooperation along these lines, it is necessary for like-minded organizations to come together and expand opportunities for projects and activities between regional governments and relevant international stakeholders.

Another example on the European scale could be quoted in the works CPMR is leading through its Task Force on Climate Change, directly dealing with SDGs tied to the economy of the sea. The brainstorming sessions between its member Regions allow for exchanges of good practices in application of the 2030 Agenda to specific peripheral and maritime issues. The CPMR Inter-Mediterranean Commission also organized a training on integrated territorial development, focusing on awareness raising with regards to integrated policy-making and including the localization of SDGs in both northern and southern Mediterranean shores.<sup>49</sup>

49) Training session organized with PLATFORMA and the European Commission (April 2018). See more at <<https://cpmr-intermed.org/cohesion/training-on-integrated-territorial-development-in-the-mediterranean/6699>> access 18 June 2018.

### Box 8: RegionsAdapt as a decentralized cooperation platform (\*)

**RegionsAdapt** that aims to inspire and support regional governments to take concrete action, collaborate and report on climate adaptation. By joining the initiative, regional governments commit to:

- Adopt a strategic approach to adaptation and prioritize adaptation actions.
- Take concrete actions on adaptation in at least one of the key priority areas identified by the regions;
- Report data on the progress of the adaptation actions on an annual basis through the risk and adaptation section of CDP's states and regions platform.

**RegionsAdapt** has 70 signatories (65 regional governments and five associations), and provides an active platform for exchange and peer-learning between participant regions, and it also includes international experts working on the different thematic areas of adaptation. Every year, the initiative presents a report in collaboration with CDP, with an evaluation of regional governments' efforts on climate adaptation.

By working in different priority areas, **RegionsAdapt** facilitates the exchange of information on skills and challenges, in order to encourage regional governments to adopt common standards and, based on these standards, to develop cooperation projects.

\* **RegionsAdapt** is an initiative of the **Regions4** [www.regions4.org](http://www.regions4.org).



## 6. REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND SDGS UNDER GLOBAL THEMATIC REVIEW

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) meets annually at the United Nations Headquarters, and is the main platform for the global review on the progress of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In this sense, the HLPF plays an important role as ‘key “orchestrator of orchestrators” for the SDGs’,<sup>50</sup> helping to set a global agenda and to promote concerted actions around often conflicting priorities. The theme of the 2018 session is Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies, which will review in further details the following SDGs:

Figure 5. SDGs under thematic review during the 2018 HLPF



The HLPF provides a unique opportunity for the identification of good practices and methodologies to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs worldwide. There is sometimes the impression that the SDGs and the HLPF are the domain only of States. However, the implementation of the SDGs is much more multifaceted than that, as also this report has presented. Accordingly, the HLPF is also an important platform for a global review of the localization of the SDGs, based on the active input of subnational governments, as well as universities, civil society, UN institutions and the private sector. A continuous engagement of subnational governments in the HLPF and a progressive debate on the localization of the SDGs could promote efficient tools for a rapid expansion of the localization process.

Clear evidence of the importance of regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs and at the HLPF itself is the fact that for the first time ever at the 2018 HLPF, the Local and Regional Governments' Forum will take place, organized by UNDESA, UN-Habitat and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. The Forum will discuss the importance and progress on the localization of the SDGs and will be attended by local and regional leaders, national governments and relevant stakeholders, who will all be promoting their further engagement in localization efforts.

Regional governments have specific competences and capacities that allows them to act on a broad range of topics that contribute directly to the implementation of the SDGs in review in 2018. Many good practices could be reported against each of the SDGs, some of which will be highlighted in the subsections below, building on information collected through the questionnaire, or during exchange opportunities organized by Regions4. What distinguishes **the contribution of regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs is their capacity to undertake an integrated territorial approach capable of simultaneously addressing multiple SDGs and their interlinkages**. It is important to move away from silo approaches, which handle the different SDGs independently.<sup>51</sup>

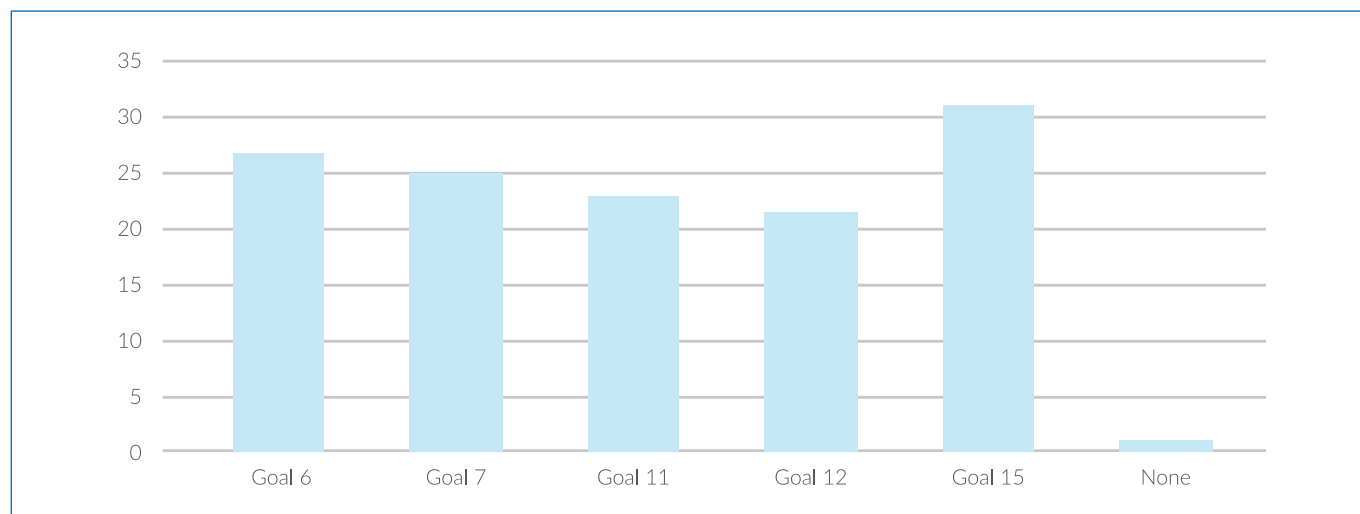
However, this movement towards more integrated approaches does not mean discarding the relevance of the expertise and know-how developed within specialized ministries and agencies; on the contrary, it means establishing more efficient mechanisms for collaboration and peer-learning.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, regional governments can contribute strongly to integrated approaches on the implementation of the SDGs.

50) Rakhyn E Kim, 'The Nexus between International Law and the Sustainable Development Goals' (2016) 25(1) RECIEL 15, 19.

51) Barbara Adams and Karen Judd, 'Silos or system? The 2030 Agenda requires an integrated approach to sustainable development' (2016) Global Policy Watch #12.

52) Mans Nilsson and Asa Persson, 'Policy note: Lessons from environmental policy integration for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda' (2017) 78 Environmental Science and Policy 36, 38.

Graphic 6. SDGs in which regions believe to have a specific good-practice that effectively contributes to its implementation



In the questionnaire, regional governments were asked whether they considered to have good practices regarding the implementation of any of the SDGs being reviewed this year by the HLPF. More than one response was allowed, and it is interesting to note that regions chose different SDGs, showing their contribution could be relevant for all SDGs in this case. There was a slightly higher selection, with 31 out of 47 responses (almost 66%), for SDG 15. Considering regional governments' engagement in the global biodiversity agenda, it is understandable that the territorial efforts of regional governments can be particularly effective for the conservation of terrestrial ecosystems and to combat land degradation.

## 6.1 Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Many regional governments are directly involved in the provision of water and sanitation management and services to their citizens. Based on their territorial and holistic view, many regions combine water management with the protection of ecosystems and a participatory approach, improving governance through the inclusion of relevant actors.

**Lombardy** greatly depends on its water resources for hydropower production. In face of climate change and the reduction of mountain glaciers, the region is collaborating with other regions in Italy for the adequate management and conservation of the Po River. In this case, and also for other basins and rivers, Lombardy has established the "River Contract" as a tool that engages stakeholders in order to collectively define territorial plans and water management strategies to ensure the availability of water.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, **Quebec** also focuses on the importance of an improved water governance, setting Integrated Water Resources Management as a core approach in the provincial water policy<sup>54</sup> and continued in the Québec Water Strategy 2018-2030. The methodology has an inclusive approach and promotes a greater understanding of the integrated and cumulative effects in the use of water resources and aquatic environments.

The **Sud-Comoe** region, in Ivory Coast, combines the protection of water resources with sustainable fish production - which also contributes to tackling poverty eradication and food security in the country. During the construction of lagoons and water reservoirs for the production of native fish species, the region also aims at improving the population's access to water. Hence, the program simultaneously contributes to SDGs 1, 2, 6 and 15. Concurrently, the province of **Morona Santiago**, in Ecuador, promotes the sustainable cultivation of native fish species in collaboration with families and local communities, as a way to combat child malnutrition and as an alternative to the massive production of tilapias.<sup>55</sup> The native species require a stricter control of water, which ultimately contributes to the development of actions to improve water quality and conditions.

53) Silvia Guerra, 'Disputed or shared territory? The Italian experience of River Contract: New Relationship between River and its Region' (RegionsAdapt webinar, 2016).

54) Quebec Water Policy 2002 <<http://www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/eau/politique/index-en.htm>>

55) Tilapia refers to several fish species of mostly freshwater that belong same family type. Although native to Africa, tilapia farms have quickly expanded throughout the world and it offers a cost-effective method of producing.



The Río Abanico Valley on the Amazonian slopes in Morona Santiago province. Credits: Shutterstock.com

The state of **Sao Paulo**, in Brazil, has established the Program Water Springs (Programa Nascentes), which focuses on restoring riparian forests through the planting of over six million native trees, to increase vegetation coverage, protect water resources, improve water quality and prevent erosion (acting on both SDGs 6 and 15).<sup>56</sup> Also in Brazil, the state of **Ceará** has enacted a comprehensive State Policy on Water Resources, which includes a plan for increasing resilience to drought periods that are frequent in the region. The plan is also linked to the state's efforts to face climate change (SDG 13).

Adopting specific policies and plans on the thematic areas is a common aspect of regional governments, which can become an important pathway to the achievement of the SDGs. In this regard, the government of the Basque Country enacted the Hydrology Plan 2015-2021 and also the Flood Risk Management Plan for the same period, which are aligned with the government's efforts to tackle climate change, and particularly envisages to halting the deterioration of water resources.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup>) Governo do Estado de Sao Paulo, 'Programa Nascentes', <<http://www2.ambiente.sp.gov.br/programanascentes/>> access 10 June 2018.

<sup>57</sup>) Plan Hidrológico de la Demarcación Hidrográfica del Cantábrico Oriental, Royal Decree 1/2016, of 8 January. Plan de Gestión del Riesgo de Inundación de la Demarcación Hidrográfica del Cantábrico Oriental 2015-2021, Royal Decree 20/2016, of 20 January.

## 6.2. Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Many regional governments have policies and plans to improve access to and increase the share of renewable energies, including, in some cases, completely phasing out the use of fossil fuels. Moreover, in many cases the energy efforts are also closely integrated with territorial climate change plans and policies.

**Flanders'** energy plan includes ambitious targets to increase the matrix of wind power and solar panels (approximately 6.4 million new panels by 2020). The region has developed specific activities to protect vulnerable families through financing mechanisms and subsidies for roof insulation. Along similar lines, the regional government of **Gossas**, in Senegal, is taking actions to improve access to clean energy sources, especially considering the high domestic dependency on wood-fuel. The initiative is part of a Territorial Approach to Climate Change program and includes subsidies for the installation of solar panels and modern energy grids. The initiative also has a particular focus on empowering women, who are usually associated with the task of burning wood for cooking and other domestic uses in the Senegalese households.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup>) Regions4, 'RegionsAdapt 2016 Report: An assessment of risks and actions' (2017) 7, 24. More about the initiative <<http://www.initiativesclimat.org/Toutes-les-initiatives/Resilience-du-departement-de-Gossas-face-au-changement-climatique>> access 30 May 2018.

## Box 9: Catalonia to become an electrical-vehicles (EV) friendly territory (\*)

Catalan Climate Change Law and the Agreement for the Energy Transition both approved in 2017 sets on self-generation energy from PV solar and electrical mobility as key to accelerating the shift to a renewable, democratic and decentralized energy model.

The Catalan Institute for Energy - ICAEN launched different initiatives to transform Catalonia into an EV-friendly jurisdiction. One of these is the creation of the Catalan Fast Recharge Infrastructures Network. 52 fast recharge stations have been deployed all over Catalonia, and 50 more will be during the following years with financial support of the ICAEN. The network is expected to be completed by the end of 2019, consisting of a network with recharging stations within a 30km radius.

The users have a card that enables the access to recharging stations and can consult online for their location and availability. Soon the recharging stations will be available through a mobile app.

Particular efforts have been made to disseminate comprehensive information on benefits of EV. ICAEN in cooperation with other organizations promotes the annual exhibition EXPOELECTRIC that in its 8th edition last year gathered 25.000 visitors and 50 expositors. To date a total of 9.300 EV are registered in Catalonia, 9 per 1000 new passenger cars and 35 per 1000 new motorcycles are EV.

\* Catalonia efforts on EV promotion are especially fostered by the Strategical Plan for the Deployment of EV Recharge Infrastructure in Catalonia 2016-2019 (PIRVEC). More info at < [http://icaen.gencat.cat/es/energia/usos\\_energia/mobilitat/vehicle/recharge/index.html](http://icaen.gencat.cat/es/energia/usos_energia/mobilitat/vehicle/recharge/index.html) > access 14 June.

In **Catalonia**, the National Agreement for Energy Transition aims to transform the current Catalan energy model into one based 100% on renewable energy, preferably by 2050<sup>59</sup> (see more in box 9 Catalonia to become an electrical-vehicles (EV) friendly territory). Energy is also at the core of the **Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes** regional policies, for example through the STARTER EnR initiative, which funds and promotes studies on renewable energies and new production models. The French region focuses on the development of two incipient sectors, namely to advance the use of methane and hydrogen as renewable fuels, especially for mobility and transport uses.<sup>60</sup>

**Nouvelle-Aquitaine** has established the Permanent Council for Energy and Climate Transition (COPTEC as per the French acronym).<sup>61</sup> The council is a multi-stakeholder platform which promotes opportunities for exchange and reflections to come up with collective solutions for energy and climate change. Some European regions, such as Västtra Götaland, aligns to the Energy Union initiative, and has committed to becoming fossil free by 2030<sup>62</sup>, especially by increasing solar and wind power.

## 6.3 Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities and urban centers are at the core of some of the main challenges faced by humanity, but are also hubs of opportunities enabling the transformation the world needs. It is estimated that half of the global population currently lives in cities, a number expected to grow to two-thirds by 2050<sup>63</sup>. However, it is important to understand that cities are not isolated systems. They are and should be considered as part of complex territories, and it is necessary to address urban-rural linkages and their interconnected effects over natural areas and resources. The role of regional governments is particularly important specially to enable an integrated territorial approach.

**Jalisco**, in Mexico, is working towards the approval of a new approach which combines urban, territorial and ecological planning. The approach maps and adds geographical references to the different land uses and impacts. A similar approach is adopted by the state of **Sao Paulo**, in Brazil, where the economical

59) Generalitat de Catalunya, National Agreement for Energy Transition, 2017 20.

60) STARTER EnR Dispositif d'amorçage et de développement de projets de production d'énergies renouvelables en Auvergne Rhône-Alpes. See more at <<https://www.auvergnerhonealpes.fr/aide/163/289-starter-enr-dispositif-d-amorçage-et-de-developpement-de-projets-de-production-d-energies-renouvelables-en-auvergne-rhone-alpes-envi-ronnement-energie.htm>> access 6 June 2018.

61) Le Conseil permanent de la transition énergétique et du climat (COPTEC). See more at <<https://www.nouvelle-aquitaine.fr/grands-projets/conseil-permanent-transition-energetique-climat-coptec.html>> access 7 June 2018.

62) Target to eliminate fossil energy in the region by 2030 as part of the Climate 2030 – Västtra Götaland in transition. See more at <<http://klimat2030.se/in-english/>> access 12 June 2018.

63) UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, '2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects' <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>> access 18 June 2018.





Wind farm field in Oldejou, Catalonia. Credits: David Ortega Baglietto / Shutterstock.com

ecological zoning is used as a tool to understand territorial vulnerabilities and potentialities, based on natural and socioeconomic characteristics and dynamics of the region.<sup>64</sup>

On another aspect, the province of **Azuay** has established a plan for building inclusive and safe cities. The Ecuadorian province particularly focuses on eradicating gender violence and all types of prejudice by assisting local governments in their territory to adopt positive actions in cities, thus supporting the implementation of the province's agenda in this regard.<sup>65</sup>

It is also important to highlight the connection between SDG 11 and the New Urban Agenda, adopted in 2016 during the Habitat III Conference. For example, **Catalonia** approved a Decree for the elaboration of an Urban Agenda in Catalonia. To do so, it has created a public-private body -called the Urban Assembly of Catalonia- composed of all levels of urban governance, stakeholders, representatives of the private and public sectors.<sup>66</sup>

## 6.4 Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Regional governments can promote new models of production, provide subsidies, and adopt policies to boost circular economies or ensure the sustainable procurement in the government's expenditures.

Many regional governments connect their efforts on SDG 12 with actions for sustainable and ecological agriculture. **Azuay**, in Ecuador, has established the AgroAzuay, a mixed private-public ownership company that works together with rural communities to promote sustainable practices and market opportunities for products observing requirements of sustainability and environmental conservation.<sup>67</sup> In an analogous way, the province of **Misiones**, in Argentina, has established Agrifam, a provincial institution concerned with the support and assistance of small family producers in order to strengthen their capacities and access to technological and innovative tools, as well as provide better access to fair market dynamics.<sup>68</sup>

**Rivera**, in Uruguay, adopted a project called "**Flor de Lana**", which supports rural women through traditional handcraft, rescuing important cultural and sustainable values and promoting a different consumption pattern.<sup>69</sup> Also in terms of sustainable consumption

64) Zoneamento Ecológico-Econômico do Estado de São Paulo <<http://www2.ambiente.sp.gov.br/portalzee/>> access 6 June 2018.

65) Ordenanza para la Garantía de los Derechos Humanos, Libertades y el Reconocimiento de la Diversidad Sexual y la Identidad de Género en la Provincia del Azuay. 2016 <<http://www.azuay.gob.ec/prv/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ORDENANZA-PARA-LA-GARANTIA-C3%8DA-DE-LOS-DERECHOS-HUMANOS-LIBERTADES-Y-EL-RECONOCIMIENTO-DE-LA-DIVERSIDAD-SEXUAL-Y-LA-IDENTIDAD-DE-G%3%89NERO-EN-LA-PROVINCIA-DEL-AZUAY.pdf>> access 7 June 2018.

66) Agenda Urbana de Catalunya. News Departamento de Territorio y Sostenibilidad <[http://territori.gencat.cat/es/details/Article/agenda\\_urbana](http://territori.gencat.cat/es/details/Article/agenda_urbana)> access 10 June 2018.

67) See more at <<http://www.agroazuay.ec/>> access 5 June 2018.

68) See more at <<https://agrifam.misiones.gob.ar/>> access 5 June 2018.

69) <<http://www.mvotma.gub.uy/portal/sala-de-prensa/item/10007001-producir-en-areas-protegidas.html>>



and production, **Flanders** aims to reduce waste in the food chain by 15% between 2015 and 2020. Besides, Flemish policies include, among others, taxes on landfill and incineration and subsidies for recycling centers.

Especially in Europe, several regional governments are conducting research to understand ways of shifting their territories into circular economies. **Lombardy** led on the implementation of the **Circe Project**<sup>70</sup> (European regions toward Circular Economy), a project that also counts with the participation of **Catalonia** and other regions. The project supports studies and debates, aiming at disseminating the model, which fosters an innovative design of goods, packages and other production processes, allowing them to remain in the production cycle, reducing waste, resources consumption and negative environmental impacts.

## 6.5 Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Regional governments are essential actors to enable integrated, ecosystem-level landscape and territorial planning. They have competences on forest and protected areas management, as well as capacities to develop ecotourism policies and to protect biodiversity and ecosystems within their territory. With that in mind, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) expressly recognized their contribution to the achievement of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the realization of global biodiversity agenda.<sup>71</sup>

70) Circe Project - European regions toward Circular Economy is a European Union Initiative. See more at <<https://www.interregeurope.eu/circe/>> access 6 June 2018.

71) CBD Conference of the Parties (COP 10) adopted decision X/22, which includes a Plan of Action specifically supporting and coordinating efforts with subnational governments (SNGs), cities and other local authorities in achieving the Strategic Plan and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. See UN Doc UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/X/22.

Since then, several regional governments have adopted their own Biodiversity Strategy or Action Plans.<sup>72</sup> For example, the **Basque Country** adopted the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, which reflects directly the implementation of SDG 15 and the CBD targets.

The government of the state of **Campeche**, in Mexico, committed to reducing deforestation by 80% by 2020, as part of the Rio Branco Declaration, together with many other regional governments members of the Governors for Climate and Forests Working Group (GCF Task Force).<sup>73</sup> The state has pledged, in the context of the Bonn Challenge<sup>74</sup>, to restore a total of 0.75 million hectares: 0.4 million hectares by 2020 and 0.35 million hectares by 2030. The Mexican state has also established a REDD+ Strategy, which includes the prevention, surveillance and combat of forest fires as well as the responsible use of fire in agricultural activities.

In accordance with target 15.8, which is to prevent and reduce the impact of invasive alien species, the province of **Quebec** addresses the topic in different action plans, such as the Climate Change Action Plan 2013-2020 and the Saint-Laurent Action Plan 2011-2026. As part of its multi-stakeholder efforts, Quebec has defined a list of existing invasive alien species in the territory as well as a list of potential future threats.<sup>75</sup>

72) Ministère du Développement Durable, de l'Environnement et de la Lutte Contre les Changements Climatiques, Subnational governments in action for biodiversity - Case studies, 2016.

73) Campeche, Rio Branco Declaration & INDC info sheet: <[https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5896200f414fb57d26f3d600/t/59339e30f7e0ab04a7278340/1496555059232/Rio\\_Branco\\_Declaration\\_and\\_INDCS.PDF](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5896200f414fb57d26f3d600/t/59339e30f7e0ab04a7278340/1496555059232/Rio_Branco_Declaration_and_INDCS.PDF)> access 14 May 2018.

74) Campeche, Bonn Challenge <<http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/mexico-campeche>> access 14 May 2018.

75) Quebec State Government. Plan d'action Saint-Laurent 2011-2018. <[http://planstlaurent.qc.ca/fr/biodiversite/conservation\\_de\\_la\\_biodiversite\\_projets\\_2011\\_2016/especes\\_exotiques\\_envahissantes\\_2011\\_2016/harmoniser\\_les\\_programmes\\_et\\_activites\\_de\\_detection\\_et\\_de\\_suivi\\_despeces\\_exotiques\\_envahissantes\\_et\\_identifier\\_les\\_lacunes.html](http://planstlaurent.qc.ca/fr/biodiversite/conservation_de_la_biodiversite_projets_2011_2016/especes_exotiques_envahissantes_2011_2016/harmoniser_les_programmes_et_activites_de_detection_et_de_suivi_despeces_exotiques_envahissantes_et_identifier_les_lacunes.html)> access 18 June 2018.



Rural-worker in cacao field in Azuay province. Credits: Azuay Provincial Government

## Box 10: “Invasive Alien Species - Subnational governments achievement towards Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 and SDG Target 15.8”

In its role of facilitator and promoter of exchanges and cooperation among regional governments, Regions4 has established the initiative Regions for Biodiversity Learning Platform (R4BLP). In the framework of this initiative a study has been conducted to understand the contribution of regions to handle the issue of invasive alien species (IAS).

The report, currently in press, will be presented to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and will be made available on the Regions4 website. It evaluates the progress and challenges towards achieving Aichi Biodiversity Target 9 and SDG 15.8 by leading regional governments from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South and North America.\*

A considerable number of regions have controlled or eradicated threats within their territories and are actively working to engage indigenous and local communities in the development of strategies. Though regions in the global south reported a series of common gaps and challenges, such as the limited capacity in taxonomic identification of species, insufficient data for risk analysis and insufficient methods for pathway analysis, they also reported to be increasingly working to include IAS as a crosscutting issue among their agendas.

One of the main findings of the report is that subnational government's deep knowledge of their territories and their ability to rapidly respond to threats puts them in a unique position to safeguard biodiversity and to halt one of the biggest threats to biodiversity, invasive alien species.

\* Participating regions are: Ahafo, Alberta, Azuay, Basque Country, Benin Republic, Campeche, Canary Islands, Catalonia, Flanders, Gossas, Lombardy, Morona Santiago, North Sumatra, Ontario, Palawan, Québec, Région Sud-Comoé, Regional Council of La Reunion, Rivera, Santa Elena, São Paulo, South Australia.

**South Australia** has successfully identified the principal pathways for the establishment for each of the priority invasive species known in their Natural Resource Management (NRM) regions. The Report Cards, which summarize the improvement towards achieving targets and outline the condition of the state's natural resources, provide details that assist in the management and control of invasive species.<sup>76</sup>

## 7. PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION OF REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS IN VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) have become the main mechanism through which national and central governments present internationally their progress on the implementation of the SDGs. These reviews are mandated by the 2030 Agenda<sup>77</sup>, as part of its follow-up and review mechanisms. The VNRs are presented during the HLPF and are also expected to involve multiple stakeholders<sup>78</sup> and take place also at the subnational level<sup>79</sup>. Moreover,

VNRs are envisaged as the international instrument aimed at sharing experiences and lessons learned at the national level, thus strengthening practices everywhere and accelerating the implementation of the SDGs.

As of 2017, only 38 countries (58%) of all those that had presented VNRs had involved subnational governments in the preparations of their respective reports.<sup>80</sup>

Of 47 responses to the survey, 16 were from regional governments in countries presenting VNRs in 2018. Among these, 8 regions (50%) informed to have been contacted by the respective central government and were able to contribute to the VNR process.

For example, **Spain** established the High-level Group for the 2030 Agenda by a resolution of 2017,<sup>81</sup> which was mandated to prepare the VNR to be presented at the 2018 HLPF. The High-level Group committed to developing a national strategy for the implementation of the SDGs, creating statistical criteria and indicators to inform

76) South Australia report cards <<https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/NRM-Report-Cards/Pages/Home.aspx>>.

77) UNGA Res 70/1 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (25 September 2015) UN Doc A/RES/70/1, para 79.

78) Ibid, para 84.

79) Ibid, para 7.7

80) United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) 2017: National and Sub-National Governments on the Way Towards the Localisation of the SDGs. Barcelona: UCLG. 11

81) Resolución de 13 de octubre de 2017, de la Secretaría de Estado de Cooperación Internacional y para Iberoamérica y el Caribe (BOE-A-2017-12294).

the preparation of national reports, establishing dialogue and coordination mechanisms between and among the regional governments, but also with civil society. In this regard, regional governments in the country were invited to attend meetings of the Group and to submit summaries of the respective regional efforts in the implementation of the SDGs.

In **Sri Lanka**, the national plan and efforts towards the SDGs included specific projects assigned for the regional governments to lead on. In the process of developing the VNR, provincial governments are requested to inform on their progress on each of the projects commissioned by the national government once a month. For that, the provinces are provided with specific templates, which include information on the financial costs and progress of the actions developed.

In **Ecuador**, information regarding the VNR process and opportunities for participation seem unclear to the provincial governments in the country. Regardless, it was highlighted that the national statistical office (*INEC - Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos*) held initial consultations with the provincial governments to collect their inputs and data to be incorporated into the national data and efforts for implementing the SDGs.

In the case of **Senegal**, regions reported having been invited to workshops that evaluated the national progress around the SDGs. Each of the regional

councils in the country could submit a compilation of their respective contributions to the implementation of the SDGs.

In relation to the VNR processes, there is a concern that mechanisms and spaces for the elaboration of national reports need to consist of more than the opportunity to provide inputs. On the contrary, **structures created for the elaboration of VNRs should seek to establish meaningful mechanisms of multi-level governance and coordination, leading to a real integration and support of territorial policies and plans of regional governments into the national reviews.**

Moreover, the questionnaire also asked regions to share ideas of how national governments should foresee the inclusion and contributions of regional governments in the elaboration of VNRs. According to the responses, some key findings and recommendations were identified:

- i. National reports should be based on subnational inputs and reports, which could follow specific guidelines, templates and even indicators previously agreed between the regional and central government. In that context, it will be important to involve national, and subnational if available, statistical offices for an inclusive process to pre-determine national and subnational indicators, as well as methodologies for the collection of data.

### Box 11: Report Regional governments in the Voluntary National Reviews: contributions and recommendations for a more inclusive process (\*)

In 2017, Regions4 conducted a survey with ORU Fogar of 12 regional governments in countries presenting VNRs during the HLPF that year. Although 75% of these regions informed to know the respective country was preparing a VNR, only half had the opportunity to provide inputs. Moreover, the report highlighted the cases of Kenya and Belgium as good practices on the inclusion of the regional governments in the elaboration of their respective VNRs, and beyond in the continuous exchange for the implementation of the SDGs.

Kenya had established an Inter-Agency Technical Committee, to coordinate and collect inputs from subnational stakeholders, including from county governments. The relationship between the national government and the Kenyan Council of Governors, an association representing all county governments in the country, included opportunities for feedback and validation of the draft report and additional activities to build the capacities of counties to implement the SDGs.

In official interactions with the federal government in Belgium, the regional governments had the opportunity to share their practices, challenges and plans on the SDGs, which were facilitated by a political steering committee. During these sessions, the federal government and subnational entities jointly decided what information would be finally included in the VNRs, which thus fully reflects the experiences and efforts of the regions in Belgium.

\* Regions4 2017, *Regional governments in the Voluntary National Reviews: contributions and recommendations for a more inclusive process*. Available at [www.regions4.org](http://www.regions4.org)

As discussed in section 3.3.5, it is crucial to tailor-made indicators based on local circumstances, without however losing sight of national and global references.

**ii.** It is possible to connect the VNR elaboration process with existing multi-level mechanisms such as national sustainable development councils, or through the establishment of new ones, such as high-level groups, committees and commissions at the national level. All of them should foresee and foster the active engagement of subnational governments.

**iii.** VNRs should foresee the organization of several consultation sessions and events. Consultation should be as broad and inclusive as possible, and could include subnational sessions supported by local and regional governments.

**iv.** National processes of follow-up and review should be linked to the permanent and inclusive mechanisms for the implementation of the SDGs. Beyond the presentation of VNRs at the HLPF, the engagement of regional governments should be continued, periodic and include the validation of national reports. This collaboration could be facilitated by national associations of regional governments.

**v.** National efforts on follow-up and review, and also on implementation, should present regional governments as catalysts of a bottom-up dialogue in their territories. This requires strengthening the capacities of regional governments to implement and monitor the SDGs, and also the official recognition of their role in the national reviews.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

The objective of this report was to map the process undertaken by regional governments in the implementation of the SDGs. Special attention was also given to the SDGs covered by the 2018 HLPF thematic review.

The data collected through the questionnaire provided a panorama of policies, laws, institutions and modalities of actions adopted, as well as an overview of the main challenges and difficulties faced by some regional governments when implementing the SDGs. The mapping exercise highlights good practices ultimately leading to policy recommendations aimed at further improving the process of implementing the SDGs by regional governments.

Furthermore, concrete experiences and solid examples of practices undertaken by regional governments illustrate their importance in the localization of the SDGs. In this regard, regional governments have adopted modalities for the establishment of multi-stakeholder and multi-level governance mechanisms in support of inclusive processes for implementing the SDGs.

Although the responses of regional governments to the 2030 Agenda may be multi-faceted, different elements flowing from the analysis of the data collected can be highlighted:

- **Relevance of following a process:** The process of implementing the SDGs, or the way it is structured, influences the results achieved. Therefore, it is important that regional governments plan ahead and follow key steps which include defining a vision, mapping existing governance structures, adopting a policy, enacting laws, and creating and/or adapting institutions. The sequence in which these steps are taken or even the need to take all the steps may vary according to local circumstances, but it is important that the overall process flows in a logical and efficient way;

- **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** Implementing the SDGs involves not only technical, but also political decisions regarding which actions should be adopted or prioritized by regional governments. Therefore, adequate and effective means of public participation must be adopted, including, but not limited to, issue-specific or one-time-only consultations. The benefits of this approach are at least twofold: it allows different perspectives to be taken into account, enriching the decision-making process. At the same time, it creates or reinforces a culture of public engagement and a sense of ownership, which is necessary to support a long-term agenda regardless of government terms and political affiliations;

- **Ambitious long-term policies and adequate financing mechanisms:** The process of implementing the SDGs shall lead to ambitious and long-term regional governments' policies, in order to inspire creative and bold solutions and to push the sustainable development agenda forward. To operationalize these long-term policies and to fully exercise the new mandate to implement the SDGs, regional governments must be provided with the necessary financial resources, which link to long-term budget planning and partnerships;

- **Adequate indicators for monitoring and evaluation:** As policies are long-term, periodic reports must be undertaken by regional governments in order to monitor and evaluate the progress made towards the implementation of the SDGs. However, for this assessment to be effective, it is crucial to have



adequate indicators, which reflect the same level of ambition as in the policy. While it is necessary to build goals and indicators on local circumstances and to produce territorially disaggregated data, these efforts need to be aligned with national and international references, for the purposes of preparing national reports required at international level and which reflect territorial realities more accurately;

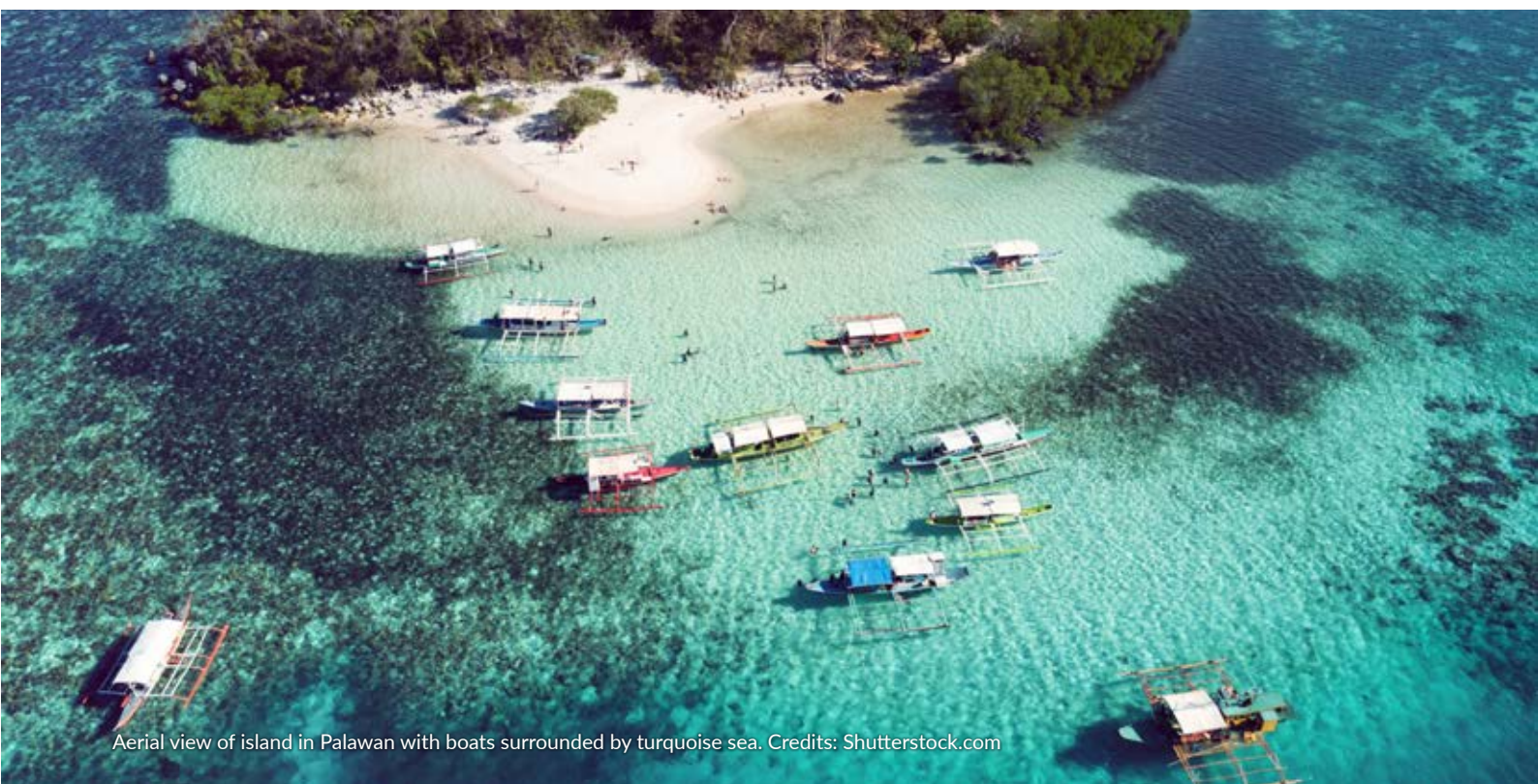
- **Partnerships:** Establishing partnerships with businesses, academia, NGOs and civil society associations and international organizations; becoming a member of expert networks, and joining alliances across different levels of governance are useful ways of sharing experiences, bridging knowledge gaps, and combining personnel and financial resources necessary to design and implement a coherent policy;

- **Integrated territorial approaches:** As the SDGs cover a broad range of topics and thematic areas, one of the key contributions of regional governments is their capacity to simultaneously address multiple SDGs and their interlinkages. Moving away from silos, an integrated territorial approach concomitantly considers the interconnected effects of policies over urban, rural and natural areas, integrating the multiple dimensions of a territory, such as social, cultural and economic. Particularly for the SDGs under review at the 2018 HLPF, the holistic view and territorial perspective of regional governments show their relevance in making progress around the thematic goals.

- **National implementation and VNR:** Although a growing number of countries recognize the role of regional governments and include them in their national implementation efforts, it is important to establish additional opportunities for meaningful dialogue and permanent collaboration across all levels of governance. This is particularly important in the elaboration of VNRs, a process in which inputs from regional governments are essential for an accurate follow-up and review mechanism and can contribute to a greater cohesion among national and territorial efforts.

Strengthening the localization of the SDGs will allow the necessary transformation of subnational processes and structures towards accelerating the realization of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, regional governments must be recognized as fundamental partners, and supported accordingly in order to enable the implementation of the SDGs at the subnational level.

Moving forward, new projects and activities should be developed to further assist and enhance the capacities of regional governments towards the achievement of the SDG. Building on this report, a validation of the responses and additional details will be pursued. In particular, a coalition of interested partners should be consolidated for the continuous generation of information on the efforts of regional governments to implement the 2030 Agenda.



Aerial view of island in Palawan with boats surrounded by turquoise sea. Credits: Shutterstock.com



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## About Regions4



Regions4 (formerly known as the nrg4SD) is a global network that solely represents regional governments (states, regions and provinces) before UN processes, European Union initiatives and global discussions in the fields of climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. Regions4 was established in 2002 at the World Summit in Johannesburg and currently represents 42 members from 20 countries in 4 continents. Through advocacy, cooperation and capacity building, Regions4 empowers regional governments to accelerate global action. For more information, visit: [www.regions4.org](http://www.regions4.org)

## About University of Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG)



The University of Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) is based at the University of Strathclyde Law School in Glasgow, Scotland and was established in 2012. SCELG strives for globally impactful research, teaching and knowledge exchange in a wide range of inter-connected areas of environmental law and governance, including biodiversity, climate change, forests, oceans & fisheries, land & food, water, human rights, environmental justice, and corporate accountability. SCELG's research has a strong emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goal, their implementation and their relationship with other areas of environmental law and governance. SCELG systematically engages with local, regional and international actors to co-identify real-life knowledge gaps and strategic directions for research on the role of law in environmental governance at different levels and in different sites.

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