



# A HANDBOOK

**LOCALISING SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)  
IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION**



**GLOBAL  
UTMANING**

A handbook Localising sustainable development goals (SDGs) in the Baltic Sea Region, based on the outcomes of the Baltic 2030 Capacity building programme – Localising SDGs 2020.

Overall aim of the programme - Increase sustainability leadership among catalysts and drivers of systemic changes. Improve multilevel governance for SDGs implementation.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

This publication is co-production between Council of the Baltic Sea States and independent think-tank Global Utmaning.

*The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.*

### Co-operation in the Baltic sea region

Consisting of 11 Member States (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia & Sweden), as well as the European Union, the CBSS supports a global perspective on regional problems. These include politically and practically translating the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Palermo Protocol and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, into regional actions on the ground.

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SWEDISH ENVIRONMENTAL  
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# INTRODUCTION



This handbook aims to share the lessons learnt and to provide recommendations to support local, sub-regional and national actors in better understanding how to strategically adopt the 2030 Agenda framework, and how to take first and further steps to map and put the SDGs into practice in systemic and integrated ways. Agenda 2030 and its SDGs are meant to be used as a framework to streamline policies and actions to achieve sustainability by 2030 world-wide. The key feature of the Agenda 2030 is that it is universally applicable considering regional, national and local realities, capacities and levels of the development and specific challenges.

To adapt Agenda 2030 and its SDGs to the Baltic Sea region (BSR), The Baltic 2030 Ministerial Declaration and the “Baltic 2030 Action Plan” provides a general roadmap for working together between sectors and stakeholders to reach the sustainable development vision by 2030 across the Baltic Sea Region. The Leadership and Capacity Building Programmes were initiated and established by CBSS Baltic 2030 programme in response to the call of the Action Plan on all actors in the Baltic Sea Region —including civil society, young people, businesses, education institutions, regional and local authorities — to take the urgently needed “bold and transformative steps” towards sustainable development. The handbook compiles the outcomes of the *Baltic 2030 Capacity Building – Localizing SDGs Programme*, a platform for local actors to understand their role in the promotion of the SDGs, to network and to learn from each other about existing solutions and best practices for an integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda. The *Programme* was implemented with the support of independent think-tank Global Utmaning and funded by the Swedish Institute.

The *Programme* gathered more than 60 local, regional and national experts of strategic planning and sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region countries, with representatives coming from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and including Belarus and Ukraine. The handbook also highlights some of the challenges faced by stakeholders when adapting sustainable development patterns, outlines recommendations and proposes ways forward to further support the localisation of the SDGs in the BSR and beyond.

## Why are the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs important also for municipalities and regions?

It is a wide-spread opinion among many actors at sub-national level that the 2030 Agenda is a framework whose responsibility mostly lies with the national governments, Ministries of Foreign Affairs in particular. There are also some other common misconceptions related to the 2030 Agenda, for example, that countries in Northern Europe do not need to address certain SDGs, such as SDG1 - No poverty and SDG2 - Zero hunger. Many of the problems connected to these goals are very relevant for European municipalities. SDG1, for example, relates to addressing poor people’s access to social care and increased vulnerability to

effects of climate change; SDG2 is connected to sustainable agricultural systems and malnutrition, including reduction of unhealthy lifestyles and obesity.

In addition to this, municipalities and regions often lack a proper understanding of the integral nature of the 2030 Agenda, presuming that the sole goal of the SDG framework that affects them or is relevant to them is SDG11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities. Others concentrate only on certain sectorial policies, for instance SDG13 for municipalities focusing on low-carbon strategies or SDG12 for those who prioritise circular economy and waste management, or any other specific goals related to particularly relevant projects they might be working on in the field of environment, equality, or economic development.

## **Some existing instruments for Localising SDGs**

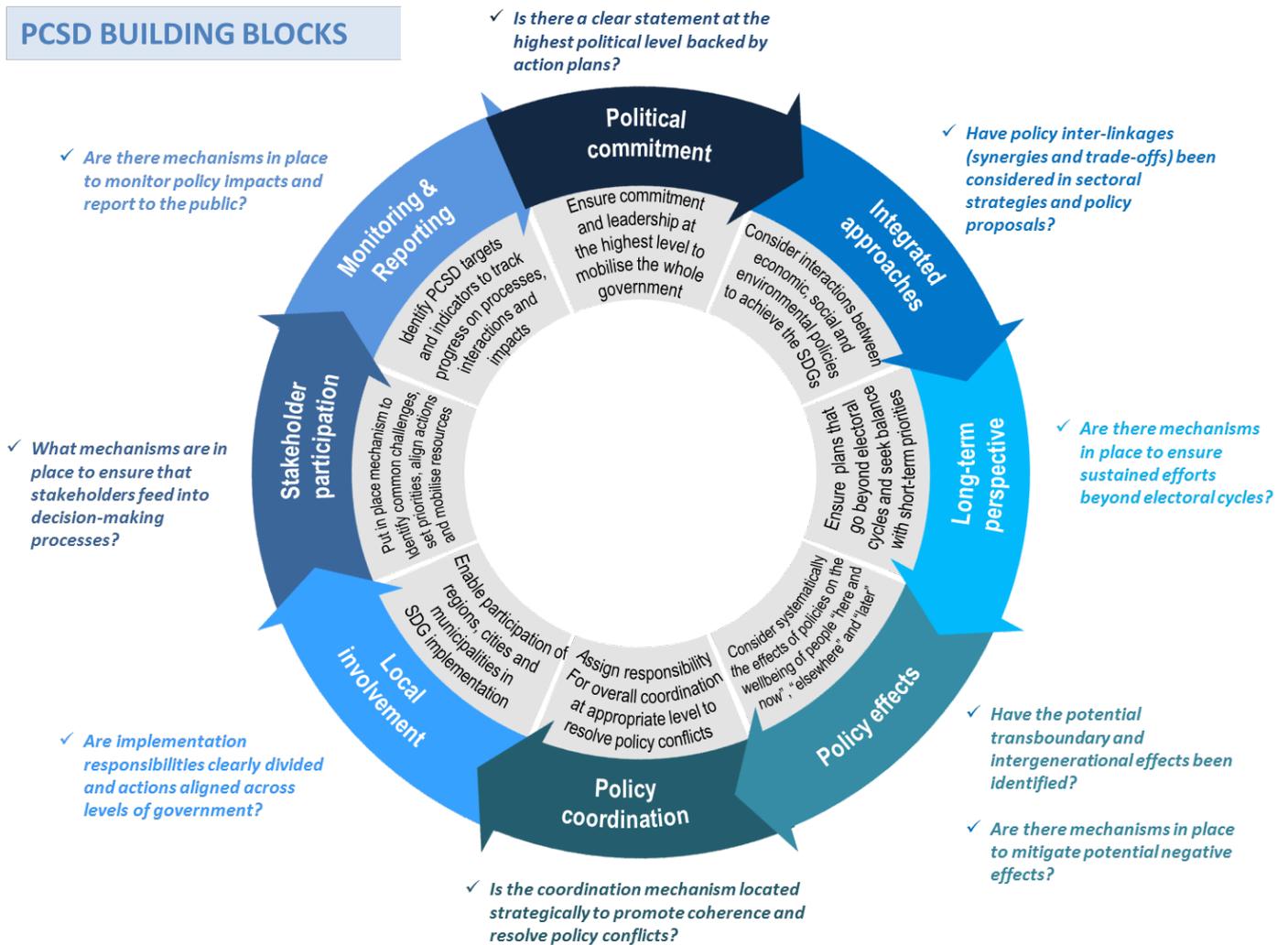
Localising SDGs is an aspect of the 2030 Agenda implementation which in the last years has been receiving more attention from the main global and regional organisations working with sustainable development. The New Urban Agenda (NUA) was endorsed on 23 December 2016 by the UN General Assembly and represents the local translation of the 2030 Agenda.

Agenda 21, adopted at the Rio Conference in 1992, had a specific section (28) to underline the role of local authorities' initiatives in supporting the Agenda, which was translated into the Local Agenda 21 that, in turn, triggered the development of a great number of projects and actions on sustainable development. Similarly, New Urban Agenda provides an overall framework, aligned to the SDGs, for inclusive, participatory human settlements which act as hubs and drivers for balanced, sustainable and integrated urban and territorial development, and work towards reducing disaster risk and vulnerabilities, as well as protecting, conserving and restoring ecosystems. Several tools have been developed to help local actors translating this framework and the SDGs into concrete measures adapted to their own specific scale and context.

## **Framework for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD Framework) SDG 17.4**

The PCSD Framework was developed by the OECD to provide guidance on how to analyse, apply and track progress of policy coherence for sustainable development, as called for by target 17.14 of the SDGs. The framework is designed to enable policy-makers – ministries, legislators, governmental leaders, development agencies and other key stakeholders – to screen policies, organisational structures, and policy-making processes, and to consider contextual factors which can influence the achievement of the SDGs. The framework is also meant to help policy officials examine their current institutional mechanisms and practices aimed at promoting policy coherence, and to determine what changes are needed, if any, to adapt and align their current institutional set-ups to the vision of the 2030 Agenda. The framework highlights eight key areas that shall be addressed when furthering policy coherence for sustainable development:

## PCSD BUILDING BLOCKS



Source: Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2017: Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity, OECD (2017).

Building up on the experience of OECD and the PCSD framework, the participants of the Programme identified the areas they considered most challenging when working with the 2030 Agenda, in order of relevance:

1. "Balancing economic, environmental and social concerns" is the most challenging aspect of the 2030 Agenda. "When local authorities concentrate on the implementation of only one goal - i.e. economic development and the attraction of investors, then the preservation of nature and well-being of the citizens might be forgotten";
2. "Involving sub-national, regional and local level of government" is the second most challenging aspect of the agenda implementation. "The ministries are representatives of the executive power at a national level, and thus are responsible for creating the legislative framework for enabling the sub-national, regional and local levels to implement innovation and sustainable solutions to foster the wellbeing of people and help to protect the environment";
3. "Engaging key stakeholders beyond government"
  - "The needs of citizens are important. They should be part of the policy. The policy must be well defined and monitored. Everyone must be involved in the process. Key stakeholders are citizens. Politicians define actions and we all must act. The most important is to have a strategy and monitoring and assessment tools";
4. "Assessing policy effects and impact on the well-being of people";
5. "Monitoring and reporting to measure impact and inform coherent policy making";

6. "Coordinating conflicting policies and priorities"  
*"Many local politicians plan projects in a short-term cycle and the long-term target is not evaluated strongly enough. Cities also tend to have conflicting strategies - how to integrate these?"*;
7. "Mobilizing whole-of-government action";
8. "Reconciling short-term and long-term priorities";

# ROADMAP

## Challenges – Good Examples – Recommendations – Ways forward

This handbook aims to present the findings and outcomes of the experts from municipalities and regions that are among the frontrunners in the Baltic Sea Region on the localisation of the SDGs. The lessons learnt therefore originate from direct experience of practitioners and later elaborated through surveys, workshops, presentations and discussions which took place within the framework of the *Programme*.

The *Programme* and its participants highlighted five main intersecting challenges which are relevant and applicable when working with sustainable development in local, regional or national settings. These challenges are closely connected to a successful application of PCSD mechanisms and reflect the relevance of the aforementioned eight building blocks of the PCSD framework.

The five major Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region are:

- Awareness and political will;
- Cross-sectorial and multilevel cooperation;
- Commitment and responsibility;
- Involving stakeholders;
- Monitoring and evaluating achievements.

Said challenges were used to reflect in a more constructed way about existing opportunities, resources and ways forward to address the identified challenges. These opportunities lie in the methods and instruments that already exist and are applied in some cases and could work as a motivation for other cities and regions who are taking their first steps in localising SDGs.

Opportunities:

- Build on existing structures and capacities;
- Establish institutional frameworks for SDG implementation on national, regional and local levels;
- Promote SDGs via online education, social media, influencers, ambassadors, and high-level officials;
- Cooperate between peers in cities comparable in size and status;
- Integrate SDGs into law-making procedures;
- Integrate SDGs into planning and budget and/or provide financial incentives to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for SDG implementation;
- Ensure that political leadership is strong and located at a high level;
- Develop multi-stakeholder master plans and regional plans;

- Establish or strengthen structures for multi-stakeholder involvement;
- Adopt cross-sectorial methods;
- Make best use of online tools for stakeholders' engagement and cross-sectorial and multilevel collaboration;
- Organise regional forums within the country or between neighbouring countries for exchanging knowledge on the implementation of SDGs;
- Find inspiration in frontrunners;
- Establish partnerships for data collection on different governance levels and promote crowdsourced data collection to ensure highest efficiency, quality, relevance and comparability.

Starting from these challenges, opportunities and good practices identified by practitioners in municipalities and regions of the Baltic Sea Region, it was possible to provide some proposals for sub-national strategic implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and recommendations for decision-makers to accelerate the transition towards sustainable development in national contexts by capitalizing on existing competence and skills present in the BSR and its regions and municipalities.

The following sections of this handbook will be divided according to the challenges and will outline good examples, recommendations and ways forward for how to overcome them. The aim is to provide readers with inspiration and concrete methods for how to address similar challenges in their own context. Each section also draws inspiration from the PCSD Framework and includes a set of guiding analytical questions to use as point of reference for understanding the impact of the challenge in any specific organisation or structure.



## CHALLENGE - AWARENESS AND POLITICAL WILL

### Context

The overall lack of awareness about the 2030 Agenda and the lack of political will to address the SDGs among stakeholders in the region was highlighted as a major challenge when working for sustainable development in cities, regions or at a national level. The knowledge and awareness of the SDGs and how to integrate them in existing policies and practices is insufficient in decision-makers and public servants as well as in the rest of the civil society (politicians, citizens, institutions, businesses and organizations). That prevents the formation of an adequate strategic integrated approach that the application of the 2030 Agenda framework would require. Consequently, the low level of awareness and knowledge of how the SDGs relate to local actions, translates into a lack of political will in supporting the 2030 Agenda implementation. There is a need to spread information in more understandable ways and to develop ways of connecting the SDGs to local realities and to matters of relevance for politicians and citizens. It would help in developing strategies and action plans to address existing challenges in innovative and integrated ways.

Also, the OECD PCSD Framework stresses the need to build awareness of the substance of the 2030 Agenda and of how the SDGs can help address existing challenges. It is stated that “Heads of State and Government, local authorities, business leaders, policy makers, parliamentarians, citizens, and other stakeholders should understand the nature of the new sustainable development agenda, the economic, social and environmental challenges that we all are confronting, and the need to address them in an integrated and coherent manner”<sup>1</sup>.

The implications of economic, social and environmental sustainability need to be brought into the general societal debate and into sectoral policy agendas. A clear vision about the principles and operational objectives for SDG implementation need to be well understood by the public, politicians, public organisations and across all levels of government. Similarly, the benefits of aligning national and local plans as well as institutional mechanisms and policy-making processes to the SDGs need to be highlighted.

### OECD questions

The OECD proposes some guiding questions from its PCSD framework on how to map and support raising awareness about the challenges that the SDGs aim to address, as well as the nature of the Agenda 2030:

- Are the concepts of sustainable development, SDGs, and PCSD well understood by the public, governmental organisations and across levels of the government?
- What efforts have been made to develop clear, widely accepted and operational objectives and principles for achieving the SDGs?
- How do the SDGs inform policymaking?
- Has the role of policy coherence for sustainable development been considered for implementing the SDGs?

### Challenge

Participants of the *Programme* underlined that the main challenges associated with lack of awareness and political will, include:

- Low awareness of the SDGs in general in our countries on all levels;
- The integrated and complex nature of the Agenda makes it difficult for the responsible authorities/

<sup>1</sup> OECD Toolkit for PCSD (2015) p.14 [http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE\\_Toolkit\\_Generic.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE_Toolkit_Generic.pdf)

institutions to gain wide knowledge required for SDG implementation in short time within existing limited resources and possibilities;

- Lack of awareness of how the SDGs relate to local actions and plans and knowledge on what each local government/organization or even individual can do to help the SDG implementation;
- Lack of capacity to provide a simple justification to decision-makers on the benefits of SDG integration;
- Low awareness results in little or no political support for or pressure on local or regional administrations to align to or to update strategic plans for development with the 2030 Agenda;
- Lack of communication and cooperation from national authorities on how to localise SDGs and how to align local 2030 Agenda implementation to national priorities and actions;
- Work with sustainability and SDGs is already being accomplished by stakeholders in everyday work, however, often it is not known or recognised that these actions are contributing to the SDGs and that implementation is already taking place;
- Translation of the SDGs into strategies and documents supporting the local 2030 Agenda implementation, and at the same time ensure that the framework is adopted at a sufficiently understandable level, which would be easily understandable and relatable to the interests and priorities of politicians and of the general public. The approach should follow the principle “personal challenges win against global challenges”;
- Incapability of decision-makers to prioritise long-term decisions instead of short-term goals, as well as to balance social and environmental concerns instead of only having a strong focus on the economy.

## Recommendations

1. Promote SDGs via online education, social media, the use of prominent people and high-level officials as “ambassadors” to whom local policymakers and citizens can relate;
2. Prepare, promote and disseminate the information and reports on the achievements of the SDGs in an attractive and catchy way to the politicians and the public in general, for example, via visualised data and information;
3. Create digital platforms for awareness raising, in order to offer opportunities for professionals and engaged people to share and exchange valuable knowledge for multiple purposes: education, fund-raising, and idea exchange on localising SDGs. These platforms would also help to generate valuable information and data, including job opportunities, mobilisation of necessary funds, and support for local monitoring of SDG implementation;
4. Facilitate dialogue and communication with the private sector by explaining the economic long-term gains in transitioning to more sustainable solutions and by engaging these actors in the co-creation of a long-term sustainable development vision for municipalities and regions;
5. National authorities should adopt a proactive approach when engaging with local municipalities to raise awareness and commitment, to give support through guidelines and toolboxes, and to provide resources and financial incentives in taking up their responsibilities and committing to SDG implementation;
6. Find inspiration in forerunners in your own country or in your neighbouring countries - they are most likely sharing very similar challenges;
7. Develop a list of success stories, for example, projects, initiatives, and strategies that might help to inspire practicable action on sustainable development on regional or local levels.

## Ways forward

### Beginner

**Vision:** Coordinated process of spreading knowledge and awareness regarding SDGs. SDGs are communicated in simple language, with clear emphasis on the benefits for the socio-economic system and for the environment, accounting for present and future generations.

**Suggested actions:** Initiate educational projects that will help in developing and achieving a common understanding of local priorities within the SDGs framework; map out existing challenges and needs with the support of the 2030 Agenda framework and, on the basis of this analysis, proceed with the integration of the SDGs into existing regional and local strategic planning systems. Address the gaps highlighted in the map and propose realistic solutions. Ensure that the adequate resources are allocated for the proposed

actions and that they can be followed up with through a simple but effective and regular monitoring system.

## Progressing

**Vision:** Ensured stakeholder awareness of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs and they are involved in the implementation process by defining clear roles and responsibilities.

**Actions:** Use already existing structures to promote the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Involve media in the information campaigns. Make the SDGs fashionable among the population with the help of ambassadors and role models citizens can relate to. Generate new projects related to the SDGs on all levels (local, regional, national, transnational) and support multi-level coordination. Encourage cooperation with municipalities/regions of a similar size or with comparable challenges, making best use of the existing good practices and knowledge at the Baltic Sea Region level. Organise twinning programs, collaborations, exchange trips, constructive competitions; organise educational workshops for the youth, helping them increase their knowledge and feel engaged in the decision-making of their own municipality. Relate municipal and regional development strategy goals to the SDGs. Continue participating in initiatives that bring together local, regional and national level representatives to align actions, exchange ideas, meet and discuss joint activities and initiatives. Organise an annual National Stakeholders Forum for experts to receive updates on the national implementation goals and developments and on the newest practices and knowledge. Organise regular meetings of all different administrative levels to ensure proper alignment and update according to new developments and challenges.

## Frontrunner

**Vision:** Long-term systematic approach to communication about the 2030 Agenda with the goal to educate society. Policymakers and citizens are aware of the SDGs and are actively engaged in communicating progress that is of relevance to the municipality and the community. Actors representing different sectors are inspired and committed to work together for a sustainable local or regional development. Policies, strategies and action plans are developed in coherent alignment between national, regional and local levels. These strategic documents also feature clear definition of roles and responsibilities, allocation of resources and monitoring and evaluation of the SDG processes. Municipalities and regions have initiated the reporting process on progress made, for example, Local Voluntary Reviews. The budgeting and monitoring of SDG implementation is performed at the local and regional levels.

**Actions:** Establish a network for SDG implementation coordination at a local/regional level, which maintains a regular dialogue and alignment with the national body for SDG coordination. Ensure that the leadership and coordination lies at a high political level, for example Prime Minister's Office at the national level, Governor or Vice-Governor at the regional level, Mayor at the local level. E-learning and awareness raising campaigns for promotion of progress on the SDGs are targeting key groups of actors, including young people, the private sector and less politically active citizens. Promote sustainable business models by providing incentives in tax legislation and public procurement. Establish regional sustainable development partnership platforms and facilitate ongoing dialogues. Use existing practical tools or develop context-specific tools of relevance for e-learning and implementation of SDGs, easily used by civil servants, businesses, civil society leaders. Develop a personalised approach to communication and to how information is delivered to people. Make people feel responsible, give them a personalised view on climate and well-being of the planet. Look for and speak with five people (family, friends, colleagues) - to understand why so far "SDG information" (and similar brands/labels before that) have not reached them and they have not adopted the right choices in their daily life.



## CHALLENGE - CROSS-SECTORIAL AND MULTILEVEL COOPERATION

### Context:

Insufficient cross-sectorial and multilevel cooperation between and within national, regional and local authorities and stakeholders was highlighted as a core challenge and obstacle for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region countries. The SDGs are not fully integrated nor institutionalised in national policies and are not clearly communicated to regional or local levels. The issue of integrating the SDGs into a coherent framework for national, regional and local sustainable development were also highlighted as a major challenge for sub-national actors. Clearer and more targeted national level legislation is needed to make local regulations more efficient. More proactive action is also required for regional and local policymakers to ensure the coherence of national policies and to avoid that priorities in one sector create challenges and hamper progress in another.

There is a need to promote an administrative culture for cross-sectorial collaboration and systematic dialogue among policy communities. This is essential, according to the OECD PCSD framework, in order to build capacity for policy coherence and integration to achieve sustainable development. “Bringing together officials from different policy fields to examine interlinkages between policies can be a way to foster a more collaborative administrative culture, develop shared frameworks of understanding on sustainable development issues, and manage policy change”<sup>2</sup>.

### OECD questions

Fostering an administrative culture that contributes to enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development requires addressing the following basic questions:

- What measures (management, performance incentives) are used to encourage collaboration and greater mobility of civil servants among ministries?
- What mechanisms are in place to help increase the informal flow of information across ministries, institutions and sectors?
- How are sustained collaborative relationships promoted among senior-level officials across the government?

### Challenge

Participants of the *Programme* stressed the core challenges associated with cross-sectorial and multilevel cooperation:

- The current way of policy development and planning is sector-divided and fragmented. It is difficult to engage people to cooperate between sectors and between different policy-making structures - Horizontal challenge;
- Insufficient co-operation between national and local/regional governance levels results in a fragmented policy structure, as well as a lack of commitment to the SDGs at sub-national levels - Vertical challenge;
- Coherent national-level legislation is needed to make local regulations more efficient. Culture of shifting the blame on other institutions or actors instead of cooperating prevents an effective dialogue and development of integrated approaches;
- The progress towards a more coherent policy-making system is hampered due to a lack of institutional coordination and cooperation. This prevents an agreement on indicators, progress assessment methods and obstacle measurement in the performance and evaluation of SDG implementation.

<sup>2</sup> OECD Toolkit for PCSD (2015) p.25 [http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE\\_Toolkit\\_Generic.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE_Toolkit_Generic.pdf)

## Recommendations

1. Develop municipal and regional plans with a cross-sectoral strategic focus - Holistic plans for solving “wicked problems”;
2. Establish clear responsibilities and division of tasks for coordination between political leaders and institutions on local, regional, national and international levels;
3. Create platforms for cooperation with existing horizontal and vertical structures. Build on existing structures and use more effectively what we already have - organisations, platforms, activities, projects etc. – and strengthen the horizontal and/or vertical components;
4. Establish committed partnerships for following-up on local and regional plans for sustainable development with partners from all governance levels, civil society organisations, universities and research institutes, private sector, chamber of commerce and any other relevant institutions;
5. Stimulate stakeholders’ interest to become involved in the SDG process - show them the benefits;
6. Create multi-stakeholder master plans and regional plans which are designed around clear cross-sectoral goals and adopt integrated approaches aligning national challenges to local and regional contextual needs;
7. Work with top-down and bottom-up initiatives to find synergies and to develop joint visions between sectors and stakeholders;
8. Adopt cross-sectoral methods and facilitate cross-sectoral and multi-level cooperation within the steering document of the organization. Create partnerships for data collection on different governance levels: research partnerships, city-to-city partnerships, local-regional-national partnership, open data projects, etc.

## Ways forward

### Beginner

**Vision:** Mapping and engagement of all relevant actors on local, regional and national levels across sectors and within different national agencies. All ministries are part of the work, responsibilities are identified, and coordination is located at a high level in the institutional framework. The connection between municipal and regional authorities and the ministries responsible for the different sectorial work are strong and the establishment of common strategies and knowledge is promoted. Support for local actors on how to adopt integrated approaches is ensured. Resources and funding are distributed adequately to back this integrated work.

**Actions:** Develop several workshops with the aim to map the contributions of different sectors to the SDGs in alignment with national and sub-national strategies and action plans. Make use of the workshops to build a network of involved stakeholders in local, regional and national administrations which will follow up on the commitments and SDG progress. In the development of the platform, a clear and structured work plan must be elaborated. The work plan should clearly define how to structure the actions, including whether initial stages should be concentrated within public institutions or the academia and research institutions. Also, the involvement of NGOs civil society and businesses should start already at the initial stages. Identification of stakeholders working on SDGs and interested in networking and knowledge transfer within ministries and municipalities, would help to make the best use of existing organisations’ competence such as associations of municipalities. Regularly organise workshops with a thematic focus that introduce good practice examples, identifies obstacles to cooperation and potential for mutual support. Provide the room for brainstorming and co-creating a step-by-step agenda consisting of realistic practical goals. Involve representatives from regional and/or national level representation to the EU and the national/federal government in the process as well as the communication department of the municipal or regional authority.

## Frontrunner

**Vision:** Dialogue between sectors and between local governments and central government is maintained and best practices of local and regional governments' work on SDGs are shared with the citizens of a given locality as well as internationally. Encouragement to commit to the 2030 Agenda by sharing concrete good practices is provided to other municipalities and regions within a given country, as well as to neighbouring countries.

**Actions:** Continue seminars with local and regional governments with a focus on challenges and needs related to your context with concrete examples of localisation of SDGs. Establish a municipal network which regularly meets for exchange of information and experience. Share and develop concrete ideas on how to further localise SDGs. In cooperation with other institutions such as the associations of municipalities and regions, ensure the provision of methodological assistance to stakeholders and to institutions who wish to engage in SDGs. Encourage local governments to start local initiative groups in each municipality on the SDG's relevant to them and on how to move towards their implementation in their field.



## CHALLENGE-COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

### Context:

Lack of long-term perspectives in political decision making and lack of commitment and unclear definition of responsibilities were highlighted among the main challenges for sustainable development in the Baltic Sea Region countries. Unclear and overlapping priorities and responsibilities within public institutions and overall, in current decision-making processes were highlighted as challenges by sub-national experts. The incapability of local governments to prioritise beyond short-term policy cycles, the concentration on economic goals to the detriment of environmental and social aspects as well as the rarity of long-term thinking – especially at local and regional levels – were also stressed as challenges for sub-national stakeholders. Horizontal cooperation is still the main challenge for the localisation of the 2030 Agenda, which causes scattered responsibilities and a culture of shifting the blame to other institutions rather than inspiring cooperation.

Allocation of enough personnel and resources to take responsibility of the SDG implementation within agencies dealing with sustainable development, while maintaining an understanding and focus on other core issues such as finance and economic sustainability were highlighted by stakeholders as crucial elements to ensure Agenda 2030 implementation.

To commit to sustainable development at the highest level is, according to the OECD PCSD framework, is essential in order to create institutional capacity and policy coherence to localise sustainable development. OECD notes that “clear government commitment to the SDGs is essential to support the development of a concrete national strategy and subsequent action. Strong leadership and clearly stated and articulated commitments at the highest political level is a precondition to coherence for sustainable development. Political commitment needs to be expressed at the highest levels and backed by policies, instructions, legislation, and incentives that allow taking sustainable development forward”<sup>3</sup>.

In achieving the 2030 Agenda, governments need to ensure that policies in all sectors and levels are aligned to the SDGs and their associated targets. This entails overcoming “silo” thinking and the tendency to “short-termism”. It also requires a clear leadership to establish integrated priorities and longer-term policy objectives. At the same time, it is necessary to balance them with short-term problem-solving objectives that cannot be neglected. This cannot be solely the responsibility of local and regional governments, but it also requires specific initiatives by governments in terms of leadership, guidance and adequate resources.

### OECD questions

Guiding questions from the OECD PCSD framework to build commitment and responsibility:

- Is there a clear commitment at the highest political level to the implementation of SDGs and formulation of a national strategy?
- Is there a political statement spelling out the government’s commitment to PCSD?
- Is this commitment effectively communicated across levels of government?
- Has it made a public commitment endorsed at the highest political level to integrate sustainable development into specific sectoral policies with clear links to the SDGs?
- Has the government identified priority areas for PCSD and developed action plans?

## Challenge

Participants of the *Programme* expressed that challenges associated with commitment and responsibility included:

- Difficulties in transforming city strategy and sub-targets to all divisions, affiliate companies etc. in the city;
- The incapability of local governments to prioritise long-term decision making over short-term goals and economic profit;
- Lack of horizontal and vertical cooperation resulting in blaming others instead of promoting a culture of co-operation;
- Lack of coherence between different policy sectors and ministries;
- Often a solution to a national level problem creates challenges on a local level and negatively affects other sectors;
- Ministries, political parties and industry sectors that are involved in the SDG process are not able to reach common ground due to lack of policy coherence as well as to insufficient communication between public institutions, private sector's lobby and society at large;
- Politicians' role varies greatly in different countries and organisations, thus preventing adequate policy coherence;
- Scattered responsibilities and lack of consensus on the implementation of the SDGs due to different mindsets and historically different economies and approaches prevent the establishment of common goals, clear strategies and commitment;
- It is a challenge to combine sustainable development with "general" economic development;
- There are no personnel responsible for working with the SDGs to ensure that they are aligned with financial priorities.

## Recommendations

1. Approach issues of sustainable development in the planning and project development processes through the elaboration of genuine workplans which clearly articulate the distribution of roles and responsibilities;
2. Find inspiration in best practices and success stories;
3. Establish institutional frameworks for SDG implementation on regional and local levels in coordination with the national key actors and institutions;
4. Ensure that a reliable infrastructure for SDG implementation is put in place, making best use of existing resources and engaging policymakers;
5. Integrate the SDGs into steering documents and budgets, ensuring that resources are adequately allocated in accordance with the SDGs;
6. Strategies and action plans should be prepared with the involvement of cross-sectorial stakeholders and approved by city councils to ensure high degree of political commitment;
7. Ensure that the plans for implementing the SDGs are provided with adequate financial incentives;
8. Create platforms for different players to connect, discuss and share experience, ideas, and possible solutions within their sectors and for the benefit of the local communities.

## Ways forward

### Beginner

**Vision:** Raised awareness of relevant stakeholders and sectors and identified their roles for SDGs implementation through mapping exercises, concrete projects and activities. Working towards the integration of SDG priorities in legislative- and decision-making procedures at regional and local levels.

**Actions:** Disseminate information, learn from best experiences and activities with other regions and municipalities, which will help increase efficiency when taking first steps in SDG implementation. Adopt strategic frameworks connecting the local and regional priorities to the SDGs, ensuring integrated approaches covering all relevant sectors and stakeholder groups. Organise roundtables for professionals and politicians to discuss the value of the SDGs to the specific municipality or region and consider how to prioritise.

### Progressing

**Vision:** Increased awareness and enhanced commitment of politicians and professionals to SDGs to follow up on the integrated approaches needed.

**Actions:** Map the stakeholder constellations: who are the experts, politicians and other stakeholders that we need in order to make a solid action plan. Build a task force or a working group which is mandated from a high level (human resources, finance, coordination model and structure). Make a checklist of how the SDGs are currently implemented in existing strategies and how they could be better mainstreamed within different sectors. Benchmark and peer review with other cities and regions which have similar challenges, for example, in the Baltic Sea Region. Make the best use of the existing international networks for good practices already in use. Organise communication workshops on SDG implementation and integrated approaches for politicians and decision makers and encourage high-level commitment to SDG-related strategies.

### Frontrunner

**Vision:** The structures, resources and monitoring systems are in place to accomplish the SDG implementation. Actions are taken to develop a strategy for information and integration of the SDGs in the main organisations. Follow-up of the local or regional strategies is ensured through a multi-stakeholder and multisectoral coordination group tasked with monitoring progress and developments.

**Actions:** Motivate regional and local actors to participate in existing platforms for exchange of experience, joint strategic actions or cooperation within and between countries. Define clear tasks and roles for the multi-stakeholder group to follow up on the SDG commitments. Identify which indicators are relevant for the measurement of set goals.



## CHALLENGE - INVOLVING STAKEHOLDERS

### Context

Involving multi-sector stakeholders is a key element in the successful implementation of the SDGs and a transition to sustainable development. However, building adequate structures for multi-stakeholder engagement, including citizens, businesses, civil society organisations in collaboration with public authorities has proven a challenge. The SDG framework, with its complex and integrated nature increases the overall level of complexity. To a large extent, many stakeholders and organisations are already working with SDGs without being aware of it. In other cases, the SDGs are used as a mere “checklist” and as a tool to continue to work as usual instead of being adopted to strengthen the integrated agendas of municipalities and other organisations. Therefore, there is a substantial need to translate local and regional strategies and targets into understandable goals for all sectors. Moreover, there is a need to increase the involvement of major stakeholder groups, including the private sector, in the implementation process.

Priority-setting is the primary concern in the participatory process to stimulate multi-stakeholder action for sustainable development. This, according to the OECD PCSD framework, is essential to create institutional capacity and policy coherence for sustainable development. OECD notes that “sustainable development involves trade-offs among economic, social and environmental objectives and value judgments which cannot be determined by governments alone. The implementation of the SDGs will require effective communication and participatory approaches. Governments and key stakeholders, acting individually and collectively, identify common challenges, set priorities, align policies and actions. This includes also a mobilisation of the resources for sustainable development. These activities will allow for an aggregated and coherent set of actions at the local, national, regional and global levels by governments, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector and civil society organisations”<sup>4</sup>.

Cities, regions and sub-national governmental structures in general can act as important platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue, engaging local citizens, organisations and businesses in the development of new and innovative sustainable development strategies. Multi-stakeholder engagement is also important in the light of the long-term nature of the 2030 Agenda, which requires to transform stagnated politics and policy cycles and to establish a clear vision for sustainability looking to 2030 and beyond.

### OECD questions

Guiding questions from the OECD PCSD framework to address in order to build cross-sectorial and multilevel cooperation:

- What mechanisms are in place to involve and promote active participation of the government departments, parliamentarians, civil society, business and industry, academia, in the preparation of national strategies for achieving the SDGs?
- How have other countries, international organisations and stakeholders been involved and helped inform the design of plans for enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development?

<sup>4</sup> OECD Toolkit for PCSD (2015) p.17 [http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE\\_Toolkit\\_Generic.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE_Toolkit_Generic.pdf)

## Challenge

Among the challenges highlighted by the participants of the *Programme* are:

- How to “translate” city strategies and sub-targets to all divisions, affiliate companies and other stakeholders in the city?
- Difficulties in engaging citizens in discussions and SDG implementation;
- How to engage people in the process and how to work with civil society?
- Stakeholders are often already working with the SDGs without being aware of that. Therefore, they often do not know about the SDGs and do not communicate them.

## Recommendations

1. Initiate a multi-stakeholder process involving experts of different fields to develop masterplans of local and regional sustainable development aligned to the 2030 Agenda;
2. Create opportunities for peer cooperation between comparable cities, municipalities, regions and countries with similar structures and challenges to help solve SDG challenges in a practical way;
3. Be aware and account for the different needs, standpoints and ideas when developing plans for the implementation of the SDGs. Create an open and multi-stakeholder process, involving experts from different fields, and actively engage them in preparing a masterplan for SDG localisation;
4. Institutionalise the SDGs and assess the need for resources already in the planning phase of action plans, that way ensuring the commitment of stakeholders and institutions to be engaged in the implementation phase. Steering committees, partnerships or structures in place should include NGOs, universities, the private sector as well as the public authorities;
5. Make use of online tools for engagement and collaboration on SDGs which are simple to use;
6. Engage local stakeholders in workshops, projects and initiatives that facilitate face-to-face interactions and the establishment of connections between people and between institutions working on similar issues;
7. Establish, with the support of associations of municipalities and regions, region-wide multi-stakeholder forums and seminars for implementation of the SDGs, where municipalities and regions can learn from each other and develop partnerships;
8. Pay special focus to youth - children and young people, including young professionals - they are the drivers of change and, as decision-makers of tomorrow, they need to acquire the necessary skills and competences. In addition, sustainability education in schools can empower students to make a concrete impact in their own households and communities.

## Ways forward

**Vision:** A solid, sustainable multi-stakeholder network/dialogue as a prerequisite for advancing the work on sustainable development. The national government has established a regulatory framework encouraging local level to be able to carry out their functions in relation to the SDGs. Regional and local levels started developing their own integrated strategies aligned to the 2030 Agenda, involving all relevant actors in finding joint viable solutions to contextual challenges. Financial frameworks are adapted accordingly to ensure that adequate resources are allocated for implementation.

**Actions:** Approach the ministry responsible for SDG coordination with a request to provide methodological support, recommendations and relevant legal framework to proceed with a strategic engagement of stakeholders and the integration of SDGs into regional and local level planning/steering documents. Share knowledge with decision-makers and colleagues. Include SDG principles while updating local/regional steering documents. Keep municipalities up to date regarding the implementation of the SDGs. Define roles and responsibilities for stakeholders in the implementation and follow up processes including the allocation of adequate resources and mandates for the different stakeholder groups. Ensure that there is a multi-stakeholder steering committee/working group/task force/coordination body which will oversee overseeing the implementation and the monitoring of the local strategies and actions in alignment with the integrated approach required by the SDG framework.



## CHALLENGE - MONITORING AND EVALUATING ACHIEVEMENTS

### Context

Monitoring and evaluating the achievements of the SDGs is a proven challenge. There is a need to develop a system of planning, monitoring, and evaluation and to define the correct indicators for local and regional realities that will help them monitor the process and identify any gaps or challenges in the SDG implementation. Currently, the monitoring systems are designed for national governments to report on global and macro-regional arenas. However, many indicators are of little use for regions and municipalities when addressing their challenges.

Strengthening the existing monitoring mechanisms used to inform policymaking is, according to the OECD PCSD framework, essential to create institutional capacity and policy coherence for sustainable development. OECD notes: "A key element for enhancing coherence for sustainable development is informed decision making. This requires three complementary actions: (i) putting in place monitoring systems to collect evidence about the diverse effects of policies; (ii) developing analytical capacity to make sense of the data collected; and (iii) establishing mechanisms for reporting back to parliament and the public. The ability to easily access and utilise up-to-date information on the performance of policies is crucial for accountability, learning and effective decision-making. Not only is such information important to assess how policies are performing, but also for policy makers in refining or re-prioritising policy objectives and instruments."<sup>5</sup>

### OECD questions

Monitoring mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure that policies can be adjusted in the light of their potential negative effects on sustainable development, new information, and changing circumstances. Achieving this entails addressing the following questions:

- Are monitoring and reporting systems in place? Are they evidence based and sourced from official and other reliable and impartial sources?
- Is there transparent reporting to parliament and the public on policy coherence, and on the impact of sectoral policies on sustainable development?
- Are resources and capacity adequate to analyse policy coherence for sustainable development?
- Is there a mechanism for assessing the performance of sectoral policies, regarding sustainable development?
- How are policies adjusted as new information on negative effects appears during implementation, or as circumstances and priorities change?

### Challenge

Challenges associated with monitoring and evaluating achievements which emerged during the *Programme* included:

- Defining correct indicators to monitor our process, highlighting real achievements while at the same time illustrating the existing gaps and challenges;
- Finding resources to oversee the implementation of the SDGs on local levels;
- Establishing a coherent and recognized system of planning, monitoring and evaluation;
- Lack of systematic SDG programme with locally applicable and relevant indicators;
- Crowdsourcing and making best use of existing data to measure achievements on the SDGs on a local level.

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<sup>5</sup> OECD Toolkit for PCSD (2015) p.26 [http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE\\_Toolkit\\_Generic.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/gov/pcsd/ONLINE_Toolkit_Generic.pdf)

## Recommendations

1. Establish institutional frameworks for SDG monitoring and progress evaluation with relevance to regional and local levels;
2. Engage sub-national stakeholders to identify what indicators are relevant for them and how they can be measured in the most resource and cost-efficient way;
3. Develop partnerships for data collection on different governance levels: research partnerships, city-to-city partnerships, local-regional-national partnerships, open data projects, etc.;
4. Encourage crowdsourced data collection.

## Ways forward

### Beginner

**Vision:** A “system of planning, monitoring, and evaluation” is developed and correct indicators to monitor our process reflecting real achievements and showing existing gaps are defined.

**Actions:** Analyse and develop an effective monitoring system which is of use to the municipalities and regions. Existing methodologies and data are easily accessible. Ensure that the monitoring does not account for solely short-term economic benefits. It must also address the long-term strategic objectives defined in the existing frameworks and the integrated approach of the SDGs. Monitor regularly.

### Frontrunner

**Vision:** Established sound monitoring and evaluation systems.

**Actions:** Assess the effectiveness of the monitoring system in place and its concrete contribution to the evaluation of SDG progress also in coordination with the national governments and relevant statistics offices. Utilize the data and results to report to the national government as well as to spread good practices, for example, through Local Voluntary Review reports. Set an example for other municipalities and regions within your country and in the Baltic Sea Region showcasing the benefits of local SDG implementation and monitoring. Develop a strategic plan on monitoring and evaluation procedures for long-term strategies and medium-term programmes of socio-economic development as well as on financial incentives for SDG implementation.

