Chapter 4

Translating Global Goals to Local Contexts

Abstract

This chapter examines the translation of generic global goals into local action. It first discusses the translation of global goals into national agendas and the challenges of localizing the goals. Localizing the goals is essential for ensuring that the SDGs reflect local needs, norms, and values, thus ensuring that local actors find them relevant and meaningful. The chapter argues that cocreation is a key vehicle for the localization of the SDGs and identifies the key benefits that arise from using cocreation as a localization strategy. Cocreation can foster the will and capacity for local governments and communities to advance the cause of sustainability. Cocreation can help communities integrate the sustainable development goals, identify hidden resources, build support networks, create social accountability, etc.

Keywords: Governance by goal setting; global goals; national agendas; local needs; localization; cocreation

The SDG Cascade: From Global Goals to Local Action

The 2030 Agenda imagines nothing less ambitious than ending global poverty, fostering sustainable development and reversing the march toward the destruction of our natural environment. The fact that the world community was able to come together to agree on these 17 goals was miraculous. Yet looking back from the present day, the hard work was only just beginning in 2015, and the scorecard after the first decade of implementation reveals that we still have a long way to go.

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) represent a strategy of "governance by goal setting" (Biermann, Kanie, & Kim, 2017). The goals themselves are "legally nonbinding," and nations maintain a large measure of freedom in deciding whether and how to implement them. As a result, actual goal achievement depends on international, national, and local efforts to effectively translate global goals into action. Besides the basic need for political support and access to

adequate financing, the SDGs demand a pattern of highly distributed collaboration – one that cascades downward from the global to the national level and then from the national to the local level.

The SDG cascade has received a great deal of careful attention by global policymakers and the 2030 Agenda has been praised for prioritizing the means of implementation of the goals. The UN Development Group (UNDG) has supported SDG implementation by developing "Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Coherence" (MAPS) missions that promote widespread stakeholder consultation to inform implementation strategies. It has also created a "rapid integrated assessment" tool to help nations identify national readiness for SDG implementation.

In addition to this important work, cocreation can support the SDG cascade from global goals to national and local implementation. As argued in Chapter 3, this role for cocreation is already anticipated by Goal 17, which emphasizes partnership as a means of implementation. In particular, transnational multi-stakeholder partnerships are envisioned as potential mechanisms for translating global goals into local action. Although there are many types of partnership with agendas ranging from policy development to implementation, resource mobilization, advocacy, or operations, some of them come more close to what we refer to in this book as "cocreation."

Partnerships are not always effective (Pattberg & Widerberg, 2016). Research on partnerships finds that they are challenging to manage and that local groups, in particular, may lack resources to participate effectively (Banerjee, Murphy, & Walsh, 2020). Thus, it is important to understand where and how cocreation can support the implementation of the SDGs and to what effect.

Although cocreation can support SDG implementation at all levels of the cascade from global to local, it is a strategy ideally suited to the "localization" of the SDGs. The most challenging but rewarding work of implementing the SDGs often takes place at the local level where local governments interface with local businesses, civil society organizations, and citizens on very concrete problems. Localization of the SDGs requires that global SDGs be translated into local contexts in ways that make them appear recognizable, urgent, and meaningful. Highly general goals must resonate with concrete local problems and policy agendas and local communities must embrace and support the goals. The strategy for achieving the SDGs at the local level must not only be meaningful to local participants but should appear to be feasible in the local context.

From the Global SDGs to National Agendas

A first step in the SDG cascade is the formulation of national agendas for addressing the goals (Kanie & Biermann, 2017). Of course, even prior to 2015, nations had elaborate laws, institutions, and programs with relevance to SDG implementation. Many nations have therefore begun their implementation efforts by mapping how these existing laws, institutions, and programs align or misalign

with the SDGs and assessing whether new initiatives are necessary. Synergies and tradeoffs in national goals must be identified and national-level priorities, indicators, and benchmarks must be developed. A road map for achieving the SDGs is an important product of these efforts and can be essential for setting the framework for cocreation at both the national and local levels. Multistakeholder consultations have become a prominent feature of the development of national agendas, and these consultations offer opportunities for cocreation, particularly in the setting of national priorities.

Reviews indicate that participating nations have made planning efforts to align the SDGs with existing national laws and programs, and most have developed strategies for prioritizing the SDGs and for monitoring progress toward their achievement. Many countries have applied "policy-target alignment analysis" to identify supportive conditions for SDG implementation. Fewer countries, however, have made progress in mainstreaming the SDGs or in implementing those conditions (Allen, Metternicht, & Wiedmann, 2018, 2021). Research finds that even the most advanced countries on the SDG index – Scandinavian and Northern European nations – are making insufficient progress on implementation (Lanshina, Barinova, Loginova, Lavrovskii, & Ponedelnik, 2019).

While nations have been adept in aligning their efforts with existing laws, institutions, and programs, they have been less adept at developing new integrated strategies for achieving the SDGs and in devising evaluation strategies. They also vary in their ability to mainstream and implement the SDGs based on their own institutional strengths and political styles. Japan, for example, is excellent at visioning and goal setting, but weaker at incorporating local government in SDG efforts, while Indonesia has a weaker system for coordinating implementation and reporting but is more effective at integrating national and local efforts (Morita, Okitasari, & Masuda, 2020; Oosterhof, 2018).

As many commentators have noted, national governments prioritize some goals over others. Early analysis suggests that national governments cherry-pick the SDGs, basically stressing goals that align with longer-term agendas or institutional legacies (Forestier & Kim, 2020). Moreover, both developed and developing countries have tended to prioritize poverty and economic development goals over environmental goals. Although many countries indicate an appreciation for the transformational nature of the SDGs in their Voluntary National Reviews (Allen, Metternicht, & Wiedmann, 2021), cherry-picking of some goals over others threatens the whole-of-government approach to action and implementation implied by the SDGs (Banerjee et al., 2020). To meet the transformational promise of the 2030 Agenda requires greater integration and alignment of goals and action (Griggs, Nilsson, Stevance, & McCollum, 2017, p. 214).

National policymakers are encouraged to set priorities by considering the interaction among the SDGs, to create coherent and integrated policy, to beef up institutional capacity, and to engage in policy innovation. Much of the advice on how to approach the interaction of goals is technocratic and relies on various types of modeling excercises to identify opportunities for synergy. While such exercises are useful, integration tends to be problematic because it always takes

place in the context of highly developed institutions, communities, and political groups with their own distinctive agendas. This is not to say that existing institutions, communities, or groups are unmalleable and unyielding to modeling analysis. Rather this situation means that the work of integration must proceed *through* interaction, negotiation, and exchange of ideas between existing institutions and groups.

Many countries have used multistakeholder collaboration in their national SDG planning, but engagement with civil society has been much weaker (Allen et al., 2018; Siddiqi et al., 2020). Yet there is an opportunity and an imperative here. Governments seeking to mainstream and implement the SDGs can widen their perspective by engaging more directly with local-level institutions and civil society actors (Forestier & Kim, 2020). To do this is to work together on the development of indicators that measure progress toward the SDGs. National-level measures need to be more sensitive to how well indicators capture the impact of local efforts (Hansson, Arfvidsson, & Simon, 2019).

While the translation of the global SDGs into national plans is critical for success, so is the translation of national plans and priorities into local action. While national agencies have resources and expertise for undertaking the SDGs, their efforts are often concentrated and centralized in a limited number of organizations in capital cities at a great distance from the on-the-ground problems that call for SDG action. By contrast, there are millions upon millions of localities with resourceful and motivated actors who given the right impetus can greatly expand the resources and efforts to realize the SDGs. Hence, if successful, the translation of national plans and priorities into local action can multiply initiatives on many fronts at once. This multiplier effect explains the importance of localizing the SDGs.

The Achilles' Heel of Agenda 2030: Localization

Agenda 2030 aims to be transformational. Yet to be truly transformational, this agenda must be institutionalized at all levels of society – it must go beyond government policies and programs and become embedded as a wider societal agenda. To do that successfully requires wide engagement beyond national government institutions. For example, the Network of Mediterranean Engineering Schools (RMEI) succeeded in mainstreaming gender equality values by fostering collaborations that included not just ministers but also university, industry, and professional associations (Zabaniotou, 2020).

Although Agenda 2030 clearly expresses the value of partnerships, the partnerships that it has spawned often have feet of clay, in that they are not building strong links to local communities and civil society organizations (Jönsson & Bexell, 2020). In spirit, the partnership model – as embodied by SDG 17 – clearly signals a desire for bottom-up participatory governance. However, a review of partnerships associated with the SDGs found limited bottom-up participation and inclusion (Enechi & Pattberg, 2020). The limited resources and capacity of local

stakeholders to participate and perceptions of conflicts between local, national, and international agendas have made localization the Achilles' heel of the SDGs.

Ongoing processes of decentralization have contributed to making local action much more important in many countries (Herrera, 2019). Increasingly, cities have taken a leading role in fostering climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, which are particularly important given growth and population density (Fenton & Gustafsson, 2017). Cities are focal sites that combine the scale, the agency, and the motivation to make major investments in collaboration for sustainability (Ofei-Manu et al., 2018).

A key challenge is that local SDG implementation is *multilevel* and *multisectoral*. Although implementation may be spatially localized, it is still often embedded in wider national or global flows of resources, ideas, and power and cuts across the boundaries of policy sectors. This multilevel and multisectoral interaction must be harnessed and accommodated in order to have successful local implementation. Local cocreation efforts are likely to be more successful when international organizations and national governments support the capacity of local network development and assist local stakeholders in organizing and knowledge development (Kauffman, 2016). Experience with earlier Local Agenda (LA) 21 processes found that local capacity is an important variable in achieving implementation success. Cocreation can help local communities to align the necessary resources and capacity and build the political support necessary for localization of the SDGs.

Although the concept of localization can refer both to translating global goals into national goals, or national goals into local goals (Jönsson & Bexell, 2020; Lanshina et al., 2019), we focus here on the latter. To date, SDG localization has had mixed success. An examination of Voluntary National Reviews of Asian and Pacific Countries finds that about half incorporated local governments into their SDG planning efforts, but the results were weaker in terms of giving local governments a more "holistic" role in the SDG process (Oosterhof, 2018). Moreover, a recent UN report indicates that local involvement with the SDGs remains nascent at best in many countries (Flores & Samuel, 2019).

Weymouth and Hartz-Karp (2018) suggest four key steps in engaging local governments and stakeholders:

(1) Develop an inclusive and participatory local process
(2) Establish a realistic local agenda based on evidence and public engagement
(3) Establish goals for implementing the agenda
(4) Monitor progress toward achieving local goals

A general condition for making all four of these steps work is that local governments and stakeholders must be able to mobilize sufficient resources, capacity, and political support.

The strategy of localization for achieving sustainability extends back at least to the UN's adoption of Local Agenda 21 in 1992 (Oosterhof, 2018). Local Agenda (LA) 21 encouraged local governments to work with their communities to develop

sustainability plans. Many point to both positive and negative lessons of LA 21. One valuable lesson is that these local processes are more successful when there are strong local champions who encourage their development (Barrutia & Echebarria, 2011). Another lesson is that these local processes are more successful when they are supported by higher-level governments, such that lower-level and higher-level governments coproduce outcomes (Barrutia & Echebarria, 2011; Fidelis & Pires, 2009). While LA 21 participation was intended to be broad based, its achievements were often quite limited in scope (Wittmayer, van Steenbergen, Rok, & Roorda, 2016). These findings suggest that it is important to develop strategies for scaling up positive results.

LA 21 raised a number of issues that vex all innovation projects. Conceived as a safe process for local governments – that is, one that supplemented but did not challenge existing local planning processes – it focused on new demonstration projects that did not encroach on local agendas or threaten local power (Wittmayer et al., 2016). As a result, however, these demonstration projects also had limited scope and impact (Geissel, 2009). In Germany, LA 21 initiatives produced few tangible results because they focused on relatively small projects at the margins of mainstream institutions and policies. In Portugal, weak local partnership development limited their long-term results (Fidelis & Pires, 2009). These findings indicate that it is important for the strategy of localization to secure support from existing local institutions in order to mainstream the SDGs into their policies and programs. A positive example come from Ghana, which has mainstreamed the SDGs into the local planning process by Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies to incorporate the SDGs into their medium-term development plans (Duah, Ahenkan, & Larbi, 2020).

The stress on the importance of localization reappears in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDG strategy of localization was criticized for being too closely aligned with the priorities of development agencies and leading donor countries and of neglecting national and local governments and civil society (Howard & Wheeler, 2015). Although national governments were signatories to the MDGs, there was a lack of broad-based ownership for implementing the goals.

Consequently, and as a way to seek legitimacy for the new goals, broad consultations were conducted worldwide from 2012 and onwards (Dodds et al., 2017; Kamau et al., 2018). These consultations concluded that inclusion of local stakeholders was important for building wide commitment to the SDGs. As a result, the SDG agenda focuses action on more local and integrated collaborative efforts and has provided a number of resources to facilitate "localization." One important resource is the *Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs*, a guide produced by a partnership between UNDP, UNHabitat, and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments. Paralleling the National Voluntary Reviews, the SDG Platform for Localization, *Local2030*, encourages Local Voluntary Reviews.

Lessons about localization can also be drawn from other international efforts. The results of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, for example, suggest that the management of social–ecological systems is more effective when multilevel

networks develop that can help integrate and bring to bear different information and perspectives (Berkes, 2009). This often means bridging between the scientific knowledge of experts and the lay knowledge of local residents. Such networks require coordination and facilitation across levels by agents who specialize in this process. Building support from local stakeholders is understood to be a critical aspect of localization strategies (Reddy, 2016), and many types of local civil society groups – including resident or neighborhood associations – can become involved in the localization of the SDGs (Abd Rahman & Yusof, 2020).

An example of successful bridging between levels comes from community forestry in Nepal. Although this initiative was created by national legislation, its effectiveness has been attributed to the active mobilization of an NGO called *Forest Action*. Concerned that the national government was undermining the community basis of forest management, *Forest Action* engaged in active participant research at the community level and advocated for the mobilization of communities. However, the point here is not just that communities need to mobilize, but that there needs to be top-down support for community-based mobilization as well. Another point is that community-based action does not just organically occur. It needs to be skillfully organized (Fischer, 2017).

An important challenge for localization is that awareness of the SDGs has been limited, particularly among citizens and nonstate actors. Studies have found weak awareness both in developed (Hege & Demailly, 2018) and less developed contexts (Jönsson & Bexell, 2020). Low levels of awareness of the SDGs have been an important barrier to the creation of multistakeholder partnerships at the local level (Banerjee et al., 2020; Lindborg, 2019). Informational campaigns can prepare the way for enhanced local participation.

Although politics, institutional capacity, and regulation present challenges everywhere to ambitious SDG implementation, in some parts of the world political corruption, limited fiscal, administrative and technical capacity, and weak regulatory oversight act as barriers to SDG implementation. Such conditions may also present significant barriers to effective community and citizen participation in SDG implementation. However, if designed in ways that are sensitive to these challenges, cocreation can support a strategy of SDG localization.

Cocreation as a Strategy of SDG Localization

Effective localization relies not only on translating global goals into local action but also depends on successful mobilization of local institutions and communities and the marshalling of resources, capacities, and commitments. We identify 10 ways that a cocreation strategy can support the effective localization of the SDGs.

Cocreation Can Contextualize the SDGs

A challenge for SDG implementation is that global goals, targets, and indicators must be translated in ways that make sense to local governments and stakeholders (Lindborg, 2019). The very universality of the SDGs makes it imperative to

translate them into locally meaningful strategies that respond to local issues (Akbar, Flacke, Martinez, Aguilar, & van Maarseveen, 2020). Otherwise, local stakeholder groups will be inclined to ignore global goals and to resist externally mandated policies and programs. Localization can thus be thought of as a strategy of contextualizing, customizing, or embedding global goals.

The local contextualization of sustainability strategies should not be conceptualized as a mechanical top-down process requiring local governments and communities to implement global agendas. Rather, it calls for a more interactive process that acknowledges the importance of social learning in goal adaptation (Rist, Chidambaranathan, Escobar, Wiesmann, & Zimmermann, 2007). Cocreation can facilitate this interactive process of contextualization, helping local stakeholders customize SDG strategies that work for the local community (Kauffman, 2016). The process of translating global goals into local action often involves rephrasing and reinterpreting the SDGs and integrating them with existing local agendas and narratives.

In many parts of the world, natural resources are governed by customary systems, and such systems tend to produce community ownership of resources (Segura, Molnar, & Ahuja, 2020). When legally reinforced, community-managed resource governance has been found to lead to effective resource management (Mistry et al., 2016). Cocreation has an especially important role to play in helping local communities incorporate the SDGs into these local resource management systems. The key element of cocreation as a strategy of contextualization or customization is that citizen and stakeholder groups have the opportunity to deliberate on how global goals fit with local agendas.

> *Contextualize the SDGs*: Use cocreation to contextualize global goals so that they reflect local needs, norms, and values in order to ensure that local SDG action is relevant and meaningful.

Cocreation Can Encourage Societal Ownership of the SDGs

Successful localization of Agenda 2030 will depend on fostering a sense of local ownership of the SDGs. However, this is not merely a matter of delegating authority or discretion for implementation to local governments. A more transformative and integrative commitment to sustainable outcomes is likely to occur with a more pervasive societal ownership of sustainability strategies. Survey evidence from Australia and the United States, for example, finds that citizens favor a "partnership" arrangement with local government over an arrangement where citizens are merely passive recipients of government-delivered services (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2018). However, civil society generally looks to the government to initiate, coordinate, and support local collective action for SDGs (Banerjee et al., 2020). Cocreation can facilitate societal ownership of the SDGs by fostering these partnerships between government and civil society.

Effective mobilization and facilitation of local stakeholders is an important pathway to societal ownership of the SDGs (Biekart & Fowler, 2018). For example, a local peat restoration program sponsored by the Indonesian government discovered that trust building and community participation were the critical factors for ensuring local support, which ultimately led to the program's success (Moallemi et al., 2020). Support from local residents was also a crucial factor in the small community of Feldheim, Germany, which succeeded in transitioning to 100% renewable energy. The success of this program has been attributed to the fact that citizens and the local government developed coownership over the transition project (Young & Brans, 2017).

Many other examples of the importance of building societal ownership for sustainability projects can be found in different policy sectors and regions. For example, a land restoration project known as Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration has been used to address poverty and food insecurity while increasing environmental resilience. Cocreated with farmers from Niger, the project has proven to be a successful model of engaging local stakeholders in sustainable development (United Nations, 2020). Similarly, a codesigned and cocreated project among Vietnamese farmers increased their sense of ownership over the issues of climate change adaptation (Phuong et al., 2018).

Local projects sponsored by transnational partnerships often fail because they lack local legitimacy (Beisheim, Liese, Janetschek, & Sarre, 2014). Thus, establishing legitimacy with local stakeholders is essential for project success. A sustainability project in the North Rupununi region of Guyana (Project COBRA) engaged communities in participatory scenario-building exercises in an effort to develop community-owned solutions. A key lesson of this project was the importance of working with local leaders with high community legitimacy who were guided by their interest in supporting their communities (Mistry et al., 2016).

Cocreation may also build societal ownership by aligning local SDG action with existing national and local institutions. In many countries, indigenous traditions of collective decision-making align well with strategies of cocreation. Studies have found, for example, that more equitable development of water allocation can be achieved when cocreation strategies pair with indigenous traditions that already embrace deliberative decision-making (Herrera, 2019). Cocreation, however, can also be aligned with administrative structures. In Thailand, for example, citizen participation in local economic policy making was successfully organized in accordance with already established provincial, district, and subdistrict levels of government (Roengtam, 2020).

Build Societal Ownership: Use cocreation to encourage local communities to support and take responsibility for achieving one or more SDGs.

Cocreation Can Build Local Capacity for Change

One of the challenges for the localization of LA 21 and the MDGs was that local communities lacked the capacity to effectively carry out the global agenda. One of the advantages of cocreation is that it moves away from thinking about the community as a client or consumer or a mere beneficiary of externally provided goods. Instead, it envisions communities as competent and resourceful actors capable of effective action while simultaneously recognizing the potential for further empowering these actors to take part in sustainability transitions (Howard & Wheeler, 2015). For example, in Cape Town, South Africa, a Wellbeing Innovation Lab has built capacity by helping local residents become more skilled in analyzing community challenges (Habiyaremye, 2020).

Local capacity is built, in part, by cultivating active citizenship, and positive outcomes from citizen engagement have been found even in less democratic contexts (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). However, it is important to recognize that citizen participation can also lead to negative outcomes where governments make citizen participation appear tokenistic, unrepresentative, or manipulated (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012, p. 2403). Such outcomes can even occur in democratic settings that encourage citizen participation, as they did in a smart city project in Trondheim, Norway (Gohari, Baer, Nielsen, Gilcher, & Situmorang, 2020).

A cocreation approach departs from some traditional citizen participation strategies in that it can lead to the development of joint power among stakeholders and across levels of governing (Rosen & Painter, 2019). In this fashion, cocreation can build capacity by facilitating the collective agency of communities. We caution, however, against thinking of cocreation as an organic process of community self-organization – one that occurs merely by removing the barriers to participation. A study of the development of nature-based solutions in several European cities (Hamburg, London, and Milan) via cocreation between local stakeholders and public authorities found that they need strong facilitation to make them work (Mahmoud & Morello, 2021). Facilitators – who can come from the public or private sector or from the local community itself – provide the supportive conditions under which effective cocreation can prosper (Hargreaves, Nye, & Burgess, 2008). For further discussion of convening and empowering partners in cocreation, see Chapters 5 and 6.

Develop local capacity for change: Use cocreation to reenvision local affected and relevant actors as resources for and partners in SDG achievement.

Cocreation to Foster Social Accountability for the SDGs

The development literature has found that citizen participation not only builds an active sense of citizenship but also helps to ensure a degree of state accountability (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Newell & Wheeler, 2006). A study of a rural

development project in Indonesia found many challenges to the participation of marginalized community members, but also found that they were capable of engaging in productive deliberative contestation with local governing elites (Gibson & Woolcock, 2008).

Where citizen mobilization is specifically oriented toward holding governments and other service providers accountable for services and fiduciary responsibilities, it is often referred to as "social accountability" (Butler et al., 2020), which has been particularly important for health-related programs (Flores & Samuel, 2019; Nepal & van der Kwaak, 2020). Social accountability may take a number of specific forms, including citizen monitoring and social audits (Flores & Samuel, 2019; Saner, Yiu, & Nguyen, 2020; Thinyane, Goldkind, & Lam, 2018).

An EU-sponsored project – IMAGINE – offers an example of how cocreation might contribute to social accountability. This project seeks to support a sustainability transition in urban energy use and is premised on the idea that such transitions must work directly with local stakeholders and residents. Reviews of cities where the project has been carried out suggest that cocreation with local citizens has served as a check on local politicians when the politicians sought to limit or weaken the project (Richard & David, 2018).

Successful social accountability generally depends on the willingness of governments to engage with citizens and stakeholders (Butler et al., 2020; Danhoundo, Nasiri, & Wiktorowicz, 2018). It may be enhanced when these forms facilitate citizen oversight at different levels of government. For example, Tanzania's "Bwalo Forums" have helped provide social accountability at different levels by mobilizing citizen oversight across different levels of government (Butler et al., 2020).

Social accountability requires active mobilization of civil society organizations, which is essential for overcoming the limits of the knowledge of individual citizens (Mdee & Mushi, 2020). To achieve a collective citizen voice, social accountability also depends on the successful mobilization of diverse stakeholders. Local grassroots organizations are often important interlocutors in mobilizing these marginalized populations (Flores & Samuel, 2019), and even children have been found to fruitfully contribute to social accountability (Walker, Cuevas-Parra, & Phiri Mpepo, 2019). Collective mobilization can be supported by partnerships and social movements (Danhoundo et al., 2018) or institutions that support "multidirectional communication" (Butler et al., 2020).

It is important to acknowledge here, however, that there may be a tension inherent in the idea of initiating cocreation for the purpose of achieving social accountability. A study of German and French NGOs found that they were cautious about committing to partnerships with governments or the private sector because they are concerned that it will jeopardize their watchdog role and that their voice within the partnership might not be great enough to exercise accountability (Hege & Demailly, 2018).

Although cocreation may not take on the explicit form of a social accountability mechanism, it facilitates the collective mobilization, shared knowledge, and awareness that may be necessary to encourage follow-through on sustainability efforts. Indeed, while the concept of social accountability is sometimes

criticized as being limited to narrow "tactical tools' like scorecards, cocreation offers a more "strategic" approach to social accountability (Mdee & Mushi, 2020). For an extended discussion of cocreation, evaluation, and social accountability, see Chapters 11 and 12.

Create social accountability: Use cocreation to enable local communities to critically monitor, scrutinize, and respond to efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Cocreation Supports Learning and Knowledge Creation

Cocreation processes can be used to both solicit valuable input and support for sustainability from citizens and stakeholders, but can also foster prosustainability attitudes and behavior change among participants. In the area of sustainable consumption, for example, changing household routines are commonly stressful for residents, and transformative change often depends on social learning (Sutherland, Hordijk, Lewis, Meyer, & Buthelezi, 2014). Studies have shown that facilitated cocreation projects can produce the learning necessary to support behavioral change (Schröder et al., 2019). The creation of so-called "action teams" organized in the UK to address the production of household waste provide an example in the domain of sustainable consumption. These action teams produced important reductions of household waste of nearly 20%, and in some cases considerably more, while producing useful local knowledge that was shared among a large group of residents (Hargreaves et al., 2008).

Achieving the SDGs requires a great deal of knowledge production. Research on "citizen science" has mapped a number of ways that citizens can participate in the cocreation and coproduction of data relevant to SDG implementation. Such cocreated data can be used to provide basic information on critical issues (e.g., biodiversity or plastic pollution) and to monitor progress toward SDG implementation (Fritz et al., 2019). Capacity building for knowledge creation can help to build long-term support for transformational change (Ziervogel, Enqvist, Metelerkamp, & van Breda, 2021). Cocreating knowledge can facilitate mutual learning and trust, as shown in urban environmental projects in Berlin and Rotterdam (Frantzeskaki & Kabisch, 2016).

The cocreation of knowledge may take place early in the process of developing a response to the SDGs. For instance, in Douala Cameroun, cocreation was used to design a transdisciplinary workshop to address urban health issues (Weimann et al., 2020). A number of participatory approaches to knowledge generation are relevant to cocreation strategies. Participatory Rural Appraisal has demonstrated it is possible to engage local citizens and stakeholders in the cocreation of knowledge for rural development. Participatory mapping is a technique of collecting, assembling, integrating, and interpreting geospatial information based on community input, which is particularly useful where local data are scarce (Akbar et al., 2020). These types of knowledge cocreation often serve a dual mission –

they bring local knowledge to bear in a collective fashion by crowdsourcing community knowledge while also making this knowledge available to the wider community, thus spurring and informing action for sustainability.

Citizen participation in monitoring and evaluation of SDG progress can be one form of knowledge cocreation. Citizens can participate in the monitoring process since such monitoring based does not require sophisticated data analytics. For example, citizens have contributed to the monitoring of SDG indicators and an international survey found that Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 15 (Life on Land) were the most common targets for citizen monitoring (Shulla, Leal Filho, Sommer, Salvia, & Borgemeister, 2020).

Support learning and knowledge creation: Use cocreation to encourage local citizens and stakeholders to jointly share and create data and knowledge and engage in mutual learning about sustainability.

Cocreation as Bottom-Up Goal Integration

Cocreation can facilitate the types of community linkages that build SDG goal integration from the bottom up. As one interviewee put it in a study of local Irish SDG implementation: "The SDGs created possibilities for linkages between organizations in different sectors where maybe we wouldn't have thought about those linkages before […] it has created real opportunities for us to kind of maybe come together" (Banerjee et al., 2020, p. 7). For these organizations, the SDGs provided a reason to come together and to collaborate.

In the city region of Greater Geraldton in Western Australia, deliberative polls were used to solicit public views on sustainability challenges. Local politicians were surprised that the representative sample of residents who participated in the deliberative polls advanced an even more ambitious sustainability agenda than had been originally imagined by local government. What was notable about the agenda that emerged from the polls is how it broke down existing government silos in seeking to pursue several goals at once (Weymouth & Hartz-Karp, 2018).

Local partnerships and participatory strategies that support cocreation provide the potential for cross-sector problem-solving (Westman & Broto, 2018). For example, local participatory strategies inherent in "social forestry" have been found to help communities manage the tradeoffs between resource use, poverty amelioration, and environment sustainability (Hiratsuka et al., 2019).

Encourage bottom-up goal integration: Use cocreation to enable local communities to discover synergies between sustainability goals as well as to forge connections between otherwise siloed efforts.

Cocreation to Spot Leverage Points

Conflicts among local actors often run deep and are not easily overcome by a few workshop sessions. Facilitating a working consensus, much less transformative learning, can be an uphill battle, and those most inclined to support the kind of transformational changes necessary to achieve sustainability goals may also be the least empowered actors. Under these conditions, upending deeply entrenched unsustainable practices can be a major challenge. However, in this kind of situation, cocreation can be highly valuable as a strategy to identify opportunities for constructive change (Van Zwanenberg et al., 2018). When actors appear intractably opposed, a positive strategy for supporting movement toward sustainability is to identify "leverage points" – that is, points around which intervention in social systems are more likely to produce transformational change (Abson et al., 2017). Cocreation can be a strategy for engaging communities in identifying leverage points (Rosengren, Raymond, Sell, & Vihinen, 2020).

Spot leverage points for change: Use cocreation to identify opportunities for transformational change and to move entrenched practices.

Cocreation Can Build Support Networks

Research on participatory community building for sustainability finds that overlapping and reinforcing community networks are often crucial for supporting change even where it is difficult (Mistry et al., 2016). Cocreation can be used to help build prosustainability networks. For example, in the Western Cape, South Africa, a transformation lab or "T-lab" concept was used to engage local citizens in rethinking the local food system. In addition to supporting innovation, an important goal of the T-lab was to build relationships among a range of local actors who were working on food system issues in relative isolation from one another. The project succeeded in fostering the development of a new network of activists who engaged in the development of a food charter with the local government (Pereira, Drimie, Zgambo, & Biggs, 2020).

In this example, cocreation was used to construct new networks and prochange alliances, but it is often valuable or necessary to build on preexisting social networks, a process that may be particularly important in low-income neighborhoods (Gustafsson & Ivner, 2018). Organizing a new network or alliance may be difficult for some low-income residents, but they may be able to mobilize effective action by piggybacking on an existing network or alliance, persuading them to expand their agendas to include some of their key concerns.

Build support networks: Use cocreation to facilitate connections between change agents who otherwise might operate in isolation and forge alliances for change.

Cocreation Can Identify Hidden Resources

Cocreation can also be used as a strategy for identifying a community's hidden resources for addressing sustainability challenges (Lam, Zamenopoulos, Kelemen, & Hoo Na, 2017). This point is an addendum to the idea of using cocreation to build capacity, but it emphasizes that many skills and resources already exist without necessarily being recognized as useful or valuable for pursuing sustainability. Cocreation workshops can help stakeholders identify available resources and skills available either within their own community or externally (Bloomfield et al., 2018; Ziervogel et al., 2021).

Skills and resources are often hidden because citizens and stakeholders do not envision how these resources might be utilized, combined, or pooled to achieve sustainability goals. Cocreation can serve an arbitrage role of helping communities to identify opportunities for matching, sharing, pooling, and assembling community resources or tapping into existing external resources (Pelenc, Bazile, & Ceruti, 2015). A study of Chinese urban decarbonization partnerships, for example, found that they produce cross-sector relationships that are valuable both for problem-solving and for pooling resources and capacities (Westman & Broto, 2018).

> *Identify hidden resources*: Use cocreation to identify, enlist, and combine the many resources and skills that already exist in the local community.

Cocreation Can Support Local Innovation

In many cases, there is a need for low-cost, contextually appropriate innovations to produce sustainability, and an ambitious agenda of SDG localization should consider how it can unleash and harness a "plurality" of grassroots or social innovations (Pesch, Spekkink, & Quist, 2019). As stressed by research on sustainability transitions, these innovations often arise through the cultivation of multistakeholder collaboration, through the mobilization of local residents, citizens, and stakeholders, and through local codesign and cocreation (Echaubard et al., 2020; Smith & Stirling, 2018; Wittmayer et al., 2016). Cocreation of sustainability innovations appears to become particularly important as local innovations become more complex and effect more people (Maase & Dorst, 2007). By helping to create bridges between different agendas, cocreation can also facilitate the diffusion and scaling up of local innovations (Selvakkumaran & Ahlgren, 2018). For a deeper dive into cocreated innovation, see Chapter 7.

> *Support local innovation*: Use cocreation to stimulate collaborative innovation and build conditions for diffusion and scaling of innovative solutions.

Conclusion

To succeed as a strategy of "governance by goal setting," the SDGs need to cascade downward from the global to the national to the local level. In this chapter, we have identified "localization" as an Achilles heel of the SDGs and suggested that cocreation can serve as a central strategy of SDG localization. Fig. 4.1 summarizes the range of actionable lessons that we draw from cocreation as a localization strategy. Although many different approaches and strategies of cocreation are possible, the overall point is that cocreation can foster the will and the capacity for local governments and communities to advance the cause of sustainability.
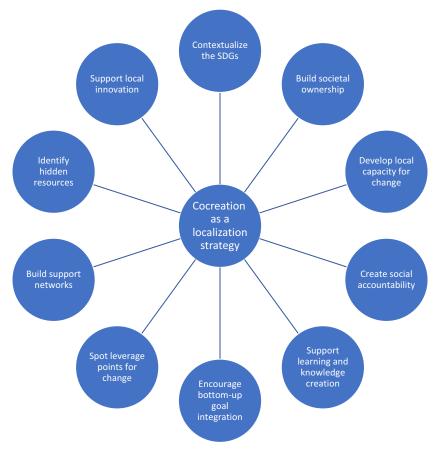
Fig. 4.1.   Cocreation as a Strategy of Localization.