

# Localization of Sustainable Development Goals in Palestinian Local Government Units LGUs

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs), which fill the gap between the national level SDG commitments and the local application of these SDGs in a conflict-affected setting. However, the Palestinian LGUs have poor access to data, weak institutional capacity, and lack of resources despite their centrality. The research aimed to identify these barriers and comment on the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building programs in enhancing SDG integration. Qualitative descriptive design was used to collect the data using interviews, surveys, and focus groups involving 20 key stakeholders. Results indicated both structural and technical issues, as well as the transformational influence of inclusive cooperation and education. The research suggests systematic assistance and enhanced alliances. The novelty of its application is that it puts localization of SDG into the context of Palestinian political and governance realities. The implications indicate the necessity of locally specific development policies.

**Keywords:** *SDG localisation, Palestinian LGUs, capacity-building, partnerships, governance*

## **Introduction**

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) form the core of the global agenda of sustainable development and have been established with the aim of solving pressing social, economic, and environmental problems faced by countries around the world (Trends, 2017). The 17 interrelated goals are an elaborate roadmap of realizing inclusive growth, environmental safety, and prosperity of all (Prabhakar, 2025). Nevertheless, a gap between this ambitious global framework and its practical implementation at the local level is a major challenge of many countries (Loewe and Rippin, 2015). Localization as a process of adaptation and integration of SDGs into local governance and community development has become one of the crucial approaches to eliminating the gap between global goals and local realities (Reddy, 2016). It makes sure that the actions toward sustainable development are participatory, inclusive, and based on local settings (Bilsky et al., 2021).

In the modern-day arguments of sustainable development, the process of translating the international goals into the national and local systems is invaluable. This type of localization is especially important to sub-national entities in protracted conflict regions whose social equity and political stability are tenuous. Such a process is of greater significance in Palestine, which as a conflict-torn society, has been characterized by deep-seated development differences.

Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs) in this case are the primary way of government-community interaction, which makes them the focus of service delivery and place-based planning. The LGUs, however, are very limited in terms of resources, institutional capacity, and persistent politics, thus fail to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their development plans comprehensively (Ali et al., 2021; Khaldi, 2023).

In addition, relevant literature in SDG localization predominantly focuses on the experiences of stable or developed countries and pays very little attention to the experiences in conflict areas or entities

with complicated systems of governance, such as Palestine (Barakat and Milton, 2020). Such a gap shows that the research of context-specific approaches, the definition of Palestinian LGU-specific barriers, and the creation of custom mechanisms that can help integrate SDGs into the local context is needed (Jarrar, 2025). The current body of literature also highlights the relevance of multi-stakeholder involvement, collaboration, and capacity-building efforts (Vayaliparampil et al., 2021). However, insufficient knowledge exists on the efficient implementation of these factors in the context of Palestinian local governance to generate significant progress toward SDGs (Hussein, 2024).

Filling these gaps, the proposed study aims to make a contribution towards the emerging study of SDG localization in conflict-affected settings by specifically examining the case of Palestine (Muratoglu and Wassar, 2024). It will examine the situation, the issues, and the opportunities of Palestinian LGUs in regards to the implementation of SDGs, and provide viable recommendations that can be used to improve their capacities and collaboration (Khaldi). Finally, the knowledge about these dynamics will not only guide the local development processes but also serve as a good lesson to other conflict-sensitive settings in their pursuit of sustainable development (Paudel et al., 2023).

The main research problem is that Palestinian LGUs have minimal capacities and support systems to localize the SDGs in their entirety, which is aggravated by data lapses, financial limitations, and political issues (Raad, 2022). As revealed by Athlone and Chaaban (2019), the existing body of literature exhibits a significant research gap in the analysis of context-specific localization in Palestine, which hinders the development of effective national policies and development interventions. Correspondingly, the current study aims to provide empirical evidence on the following questions:

- (1) What are the main barriers faced by Palestinian LGUs in integrating SDGs into their development plans?
- (2) How can multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building initiatives enhance the localization process within the Palestinian context?

## **Literature Review**

### **Localization of Sustainable Development Goals**

The localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) entails adapting, implementing, and tracking the 2030 Agenda to the local levels to make it suitable to the community's needs (Oosterhof, 2018). It was first presented in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a method of implementing national development strategies at the local level (Kandpal and Okitasari, 2023). Nonetheless, the localization has taken on a more comprehensive meaning with the SDGs since it involves not only bottom-up action, but it also involves integrating local needs, aspirations, and capabilities into national strategies, thus acting as a connector between global aspirations and local realities (Bilsky et al., 2021). The ambiguity and alternative definitions of the concept on the global and national scales symbolize a core problem of SDG localization (Jain et al., 2021). The national adaptation has been the focus of localization, but there should be alignment of national development plans to SDGs, and it is not sufficient without the genuine ownership and involvement of the locals (Mohieldin et al., 2022). In fact, the effectiveness of the localization processes will be determined by the extent to which local governments and stakeholders are able to incorporate the SDGs into their local governance systems and development strategies in a manner that the global agenda is transformed into local outcomes and consequences (Ansell et al., 2022).

The role of local governments in the localization process is strategic because of the scope of their duties in various sectors and their location in the local communities (Vasstrm & Normann, 2019). Sectoral cooperation is the key to solving multifaceted global problems. This type of collaboration is usually structured in the form of multi-stakeholder initiatives and depends on the creation of common platforms, which facilitate the mobilization of resources, coordination of various actors, and addressing governance gaps left by the fragmentation of institutional arrangements (Masuda et al., 2022). Alongside this national-scale capacity, local governments are indispensable in the creation of local agendas, the achievement of community engagement, and the adoption of context-sensitive actions that reflect a holistic and inclusive

philosophy in line with the SDGs (Joyce, 2025). Accordingly, local governments not only play the role of implementers but also act as drivers of sustainable development (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

Localisation is a process that requires sound, multi-level governance strategies, with ongoing and mutually supportive interactions among global, national, and local actors (Croese et al., 2021). Past experiences with similar initiatives, such as the MDGs, have shown that localizing the SDGs is not a technical or linear exercise, but a multidimensional political process that requires enabling conditions of cooperation, accountability, and capacity building (Croese & Duminy, 2023). The development of partnerships and encouraging the involvement of various local stakeholders will contribute to the retrieval of knowledge, resources, and innovation that can be crucial to achieving integrated development outcomes (Attah et al., 2024).

The localization framework identifies the importance of capacity building and awareness raising as an essential part of the process (Robillard et al., 2021). Different studies note that the lack of knowledge and technical skills of local actors may hinder the adaptation of the SDG targets to the local context or the tracking of progress (Moallemi et al., 2020). It is essential to develop the technical and institutional capabilities of local governments and other stakeholders involved to enable them to take leadership positions in sustainable development through training, knowledge exchange, and data accessibility (Atisa et al., 2021). An example of capacity development of localization is the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA) and other organizations that allow the localization of technical gaps and ownership (Salvador & Sancho, 2021).

To conclude, the literature has a consensus view on the view that localization is a dynamic and multidimensional process that is necessary to achieve the promise of the 2030 Agenda (Amato et al., 2024). It necessitates political will to strengthen local governments, institutional changes to incorporate sustainability into local development agendas, and participatory governance to involve various stakeholders (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019). Finally, the effectiveness of SDG localization depends on the possibility to reconcile global ambitions with local realities with the help of strong capacities and collaborative governance systems (Atisa et al., 2021). This underscores the need to keep advancing subtle solutions that can deal with local issues but also support the global sustainable development (Robillard et al., 2021).

### **Main Barriers Faced by Palestinian LGUs in Integrating SDGs**

The lack of effective access to reliable, disaggregated data is one of the main limitations that prevent the effective incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the functioning of Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs). According to Ali et al. (2021) and Mohieldin et al. (2022), most indicators relevant to the local authorities are not systematically generated or prepared by LGUs themselves, which creates a huge gap in data. This kind of deficit jeopardizes evidence-based planning and monitoring, and as a result, localization of SDG objectives (Khaldi, 2023). Diokno-Sicat et al. (2020) also come to the same conclusion and state that the absence of localized data makes LGUs unable to align their development goals with national and global SDG objectives, which undermines their ability to track progress and identify key areas of intervention.

The coordination and governance problems regarding institutional coordination further complicate SDG integration. Although the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) fulfills the role of the technical focal point of national reporting on SDGs, it is noted that LGUs are not included in data collection and decision-making processes (Hayter & Link, 2020). Such exclusion threatens the validity of SDG implementation on the local level and contributes to the failure of the 2030 Agenda. This disconnect undermines local ownership in SDG work and points to institutional issues within Local Government Units (LGUs), including insufficient financial and human resources and a shortage of technical expertise, which inhibits the effective incorporation of SDGs into local strategies and budgets (Diokno-Sicat et al.,

2020). The inefficiency of localization is further undermined by the lack of coordination across levels and the fragmentation of roles (Paudel et al., 2023).

The political limitations, such as Israeli occupation, considerably hinder the ability of local governments (LGUs) to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Hayter & Link, 2020). The Palestinian municipalities operate within a limited scope of jurisdictional authority and control over land and resources, which restricts sustainable urban planning and provision of services (Robillard et al., 2021). These governance issues are further aggravated by political instability, which reduces the capacities of local governments to engage in long-term development projects in line with the SDGs (Herrera, 2019). Such structural barriers contribute to discontinuous and unbalanced development on the local level (Paudel et al., 2023).

Another significant barrier is financial constraints and resource limitations. In contrast to the MDGs, which were funded mainly by the government and charities, the SDGs need direct involvement of the private sector, as well as the diversification of funding sources (Atisa et al., 2021). Nevertheless, Palestinian LGUs experience challenges in accessing sufficient finances and are restricted in their ability to mobilize local resources. Donor dependency may cause the mismatch between the priorities of funding and local needs (Khaldi, 2023). Ali et al. (2022) note that political and economic instability also discourages investment by the private sector, restricting the availability of sustainable finance to support local SDG efforts.

Another obstacle is the low level of awareness and the ability of local officials and communities regarding the SDGs (Ansell et al., 2022). The lack of knowledge and understanding of the SDG concepts and their applicability to local governance is reflected in surveys of LGUs that show poor advocacy and minimal mainstreaming into local policies (Trends, 2017). This is similar to the finding of Prabhakar (2025), who opines that SDGs are merely abstract goals without proper capacity-building and awareness programs, which are out of touch with local realities. The Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA) is the key organization that fills this gap by facilitating education and training initiatives to increase the awareness of local stakeholders about SDGs and their involvement (Ali et al., 2021).

To conclude, the literature acknowledges that there is a complex of barriers to localize the SDGs in Palestinian LGUs: data gaps, institutional fragmentation, political and territorial constraints, financial constraints, and capacity gaps (Reddy, 2016). The challenges need to be addressed through simultaneous institutional reforms, stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration, better data systems that are adapted to local environments, and capacity-building programs (Bilsky et al., 2021). Unless these barriers are systematically overcome, Palestinian LGUs can fail to play an important role in the 2030 Agenda of sustainable development (Khaldi, 2023).

### **Role of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Capacity-Building in Enhancing Localization**

It is commonly accepted that multi-stakeholder partnerships are key mechanisms to promote the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Paudel et al., 2023). The SDG implementation is a complex process that needs the coordination of different actors in the public, private, and civil societies to pool resources, expertise, and shared responsibility (Raad, 2022). According to the literature reviewed, effective collaborations feature transparent leadership, goal-setting, financing, management, and monitoring frameworks that allow to organize fragmented actions across industries and governmental levels (Oosterhof, 2018). Therefore, multi-stakeholder partnerships are important platforms for integrating local priorities with national and global sustainability goals (Kandpal & Okitasari, 2023).

Local governments play an especially central role as intermediaries in such partnerships (Bilsky et al., 2021). Local governments have the capacity to fill the gap between various stakeholders and the community due to their broad sectoral mandates, legitimacy, existing networks, and experience that they have accumulated (Jain et al., 2021). The localization process thus relies heavily on the ability of LGUs to enable partnership and to combine various interests in sustainable development processes (Mohieldin et al., 2022). Such intermediary position highlights the political and managerial centrality of local

governments in promoting multi-stakeholder interactions to deliver integrated developmental outcomes (Vasstrm & Normann, 2019).

Although the role of partnerships is recognized, the process of partnership management is not easy, especially in situations where there is institutional fragmentation and a lack of resources, such as in Palestine (Masuda et al., 2022). The lack of coherent roles played by stakeholders and duplication of mandates, on the other hand, can make coordination difficult and may require intermediate roles and participatory governance processes to foster collaboration among players (Joyce, 2025). Accordingly, multi-stakeholder partnerships need to be designed and facilitated intentionally to break sectoral silos and political barriers; otherwise, collaborative action may fail to be effective or even long-lasting (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

Another crucial aspect that increases the efficiency of partnerships and the localization process as a whole is capacity-building (Croese et al., 2021). Research shows that low awareness and technical capacity among the local stakeholders may hamper the implementation of the SDGs-compatible participation and policies (Croese & Duminy, 2023). One of the organizations that has been critical in filling these gaps is the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), which has facilitated training, technical assistance, and awareness-raising activities to LGUs and local actors (Ali et al., 2021). The reinforcement of institutional capacities helps local governments and partners to plan, manage, and monitor SDG initiatives more effectively, thereby improving localization outcomes (Khaldi, 2023).

Moreover, capacity-building is not only building technical skills but also establishing ownership and accountability among various actors (Attah et al., 2024). Since localization is a political exercise, capacity initiatives allow the generation of widespread support and commitment through the meaningful involvement of local stakeholders in setting goals and making decisions (Robillard et al., 2021). The development of capacities at various levels helps to make exchanges between global, national, and local levels, thus making local needs and realities part of the SDG implementation and international frameworks (Moallemi et al., 2020).

Finally, the literature highlights that the symbiotic relationship between multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building is a central enabler of SDG localization (Atisa et al., 2021). Partnerships provide a platform to collaborate and mobilize resources, but capacity-building enables the local actors to be effective in the participation and sustain development initiatives (Salvador & Sancho, 2021). It is crucial to overcome the issues linked to coordination and limited capabilities through integrated approaches that cultivate partnerships, as well as build local competencies (Amato et al., 2024). This two-track is crucial in enabling Palestinian LGUs to achieve their intermediary role and in order to convert the 2030 Agenda into effective local practices (Ali et al., 2021).

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The research design used in the study is a qualitative descriptive research design, consultative, and participatory research design to investigate the challenges experienced by Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs) in the process of integrating SDGs into their development plans and how multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building can support the process of localization. The study is based on the logical approach adopted in the SDGs localization plan development in Palestine, where stakeholder mapping, literature review, and consultation meetings with the potential stakeholders, including the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), have been conducted.

### **Sample of the Study**

The sample size of the study is (20) key stakeholders, who are actively involved in the SDGs localization framework in the Palestinian local government sector. It will consist of LGUs (municipalities and village councils) representatives, APLA and MoLG officials, statisticians of PCBS, representatives of

civil society organizations and international partners engaged in the implementation and monitoring of SDGs. The sample was purposive in the sense that it was aimed at capturing a wide range of viewpoints that are relevant to issues and opportunities of SDG localization in Palestine.

### **Instruments of the Study**

Triangulation and the overall comprehension of the research were achieved by using several tools to collect data: (1) semi-structured interviews with local government authorities and stakeholders; (2) focus group discussions aimed at the identification of capacity-building needs and experience with partnerships; (3) a survey tool developed to estimate awareness, perceived barriers, and capacity gaps among LGU employees; (4) document analysis of the existing local development plans, SDG progress reports, and institutional frameworks applicable to Palestinian LGUs.

### **Validity of the Instrument**

The instruments were designed using the existing international frameworks and guidelines on SDG localization and consultation of local experts and review of relevant national documents, such as the Palestinian SDG progress reports and localization strategies to achieve content validity. A panel of experts (APLA and a team of consultants (Pillars and Taazeez Consulting)) reviewed the instruments to ensure their relevancy, clarity and cultural appropriateness in the Palestinian context.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

Reliability was guaranteed by piloting the survey and interviewing protocols on a small group of the LGU participants who were not in the main sample. The wording, sequence and clarity of the questions were refined using feedback. The survey instrument was tested by internal consistency statistics to determine the reliability of the scales used to measure the perceived barriers and capacity-building effectiveness. The qualitative data collection was done consistently through standardized interviewing guidelines and data collector training.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected throughout a number of months in collaboration with APLA and other institutional partners. The face-to-face and online interviews and focus groups were conducted based on the availability and the COVID-19 guidelines. The LGU personnel were given survey questionnaires electronically and in paper form. Document analysis was done through the collation of secondary data in institutional reports and government publications. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation were followed in all data collection activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic content analysis was employed to transcribe and analyse qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. The results revealed common themes regarding capacity-building requirements, partnership dynamics, and obstacles to SDG integration. The NVivo programme or other qualitative analysis programmes were employed to enhance the rigour of the classification process. The statistical analysis of quantitative survey data was performed using SPSS or other statistical software, descriptive statistics describing the barriers and capacity gaps, and inferential statistics examining the relationships among variables. Qualitative and quantitative results were triangulated to give a solid and comprehensive insight into the localization process in Palestinian LGUs.

### **Findings**

#### **Findings on Main Barriers Faced by Palestinian LGUs in SDG Integration**

This section highlights the main barriers faced by Palestinian LGUs in SDG integration. The results of this section constitute an answer to the first research question. The findings of this section are illustrated on Table (1) below:

**Table 1: Summary of Main Barriers Faced by Palestinian LGUs in SDG Integration**

<b>Barrier Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Impact</b>
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<b>Data Limitations</b>	Lack of local-level, disaggregated, and reliable SDG data	Hampers monitoring and planning
<b>Capacity Constraints</b>	Insufficient technical expertise and human resources	Limits SDG mainstreaming and implementation
<b>Institutional Fragmentation</b>	Weak coordination and unclear roles among stakeholders	Reduces efficiency and coherence in SDG efforts
<b>Financial Resources</b>	Limited funding is dedicated to SDG activities	Restricts project planning and sustainability
<b>Awareness and Stakeholder Ownership</b>	Low awareness of SDGs among local officials and communities	Affects motivation and engagement
<b>Policy and Planning Gaps</b>	Absence of explicit SDG integration frameworks	Hinders systematic alignment of strategies

Table (1) above reveals that Palestinian LGUs have several barriers to SDG integration. First, poor availability and quality of data, which is among the identified key barriers, is the unavailability of comprehensive, disaggregated, and reliable data at the local level. The report notes that the LGUs do not have any local-level indicators and data collection processes that can be linked to SDG targets, and this makes it difficult to monitor and plan efficiently. This data gap restricts evidence-based decision-making and the integration of SDGs into local development strategies. Second, technical and human capacity, LGUs have a common problem of capacity constraint, including a deficiency of technical expertise and human resources to understand, implement, and monitor SDGs. The capacity-building initiatives are still at an early stage, and the majority of the local leaders are not conversant with the SDG frameworks, contributing to the challenge of mainstreaming SDGs into the planning process. Third, poor institutional structures and coordination systems. Institutional frameworks of SDG localization remain in their early stages of development, which results in a lack of coordination and roles among stakeholders. The coordination between the government agencies, local authorities, donors, and civil society is still poor, which leads to duplications and gaps in the SDG-related work. Lack of integrated institutional mechanisms lowers the effectiveness of SDG integration efforts. Fourth, financial and resource limitations, due to limited financial resources that are specifically set aside to cater to SDG-related activities at the local level, progress is hampered to a great extent. The redistribution of current budgets is not enough to facilitate SDG integration and LGUs do not have specific funds to rely on, which limits the design and implementation of SDG-based projects.

Fifth, the absence of local stakeholders' awareness and ownership. SDGs are not well understood by many local officials and members of the community, or they do not appear to be directly applicable to local development priorities. This limited awareness influences the possession and the incentive to integrate SDGs into local planning.

Sixth, the absence of local stakeholder awareness and ownership, policy and planning gaps. The integration of SDGs is not always explicit in current local development plans, and there are no specific frameworks or guidelines on how to integrate SDGs at the LGU level. This gap does not allow systematic alignment of local strategies with SDG targets.

The above-mentioned main barriers are all interconnected, and they all challenge the successful localization of SDGs in Palestinian LGUs. It is important to deal with these obstacles by implementing holistic capacity-building programs, better data collection/management, coordination between institutions, strategic funding, and mobilizing local stakeholders. These measures are important to institutionalize SDGs into local development agendas systematically and sustainably.

### Findings on Enhancing Localization through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Capacity-Building

In this section, the outcomes of encouraging localization by multi-stakeholder partnership and capacity building are highlighted. The findings of this section respond to the second research question as discussed in Table (2) below:

**Table 2: Contributions of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Capacity-Building to SDG Localization**

Area of Enhancement	Description	Expected Outcomes
<b>Inclusive Collaboration</b>	Engaging government, civil society, private sector, academia, and international partners	Broader resource mobilization and shared ownership
<b>Capacity Development</b>	Training on SDG concepts, data management, and policy analysis	Better-informed decision-making and implementation
<b>Resource Mobilization</b>	Aligning external funding and technical assistance with local needs	Increased financial and technical support
<b>Knowledge Sharing and Learning</b>	Platforms for the exchange of best practices, success stories, and lessons learned	Accelerated innovation and replication
<b>Strengthened Institutional Frameworks</b>	Formalized partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)	Improved coordination and accountability

According to Table (2) above, localization of SDGs in Palestine focuses on the multi-stakeholder partnerships that include government, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, academia, and international organizations. These collaborations that are more inclusive could mobilize a variety of resources, expertise, and local knowledge, which allow a more detailed and context-specific implementation of the SDGs. Effective partnership models enhance a common ownership, accountability and responsibility, which is essential to addressing the fragmentation that is witnessed in the current institutional structures.

Capacity-building programs are necessary to help overcome the shortage of technical skills, knowledge deficiency, and awareness of LGU officials and other stakeholders. The initiatives aim at increasing the SDGs awareness, training in data collection, monitoring, and policy design, and empowering local actors to create and implement SDGs-aligned strategies. With specific training, workshops, and information-sharing platforms, LGUs will be more ready to incorporate SDGs into their planning cycles, track their progress, and report results efficiently.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships have the capacity to mobilize financial, technical and human resources to take transformative actions. The partnership with foreign donors, the UN agencies, and the development partners can open the funds and technical support that cannot be sourced by the local governments on their own. Through the development of formal partnership mechanisms, LGUs are able to tap into external assistance in terms of capacity building, pilot projects and new methods that meet the needs of the local setting.

Learning and innovation can be accelerated by platforms that promote dialogue, knowledge exchange, and sharing of best practices among the stakeholders. Such platforms allow local governments to use international experience, adopt successful models, and scale up effective measures. These initiatives also foster openness, confidence, and long-term participation of all stakeholders in SDG localization.

Incorporation of multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building programs can play a significant role in improving the localization process in Palestine by promoting inclusive cooperation, empowering local capacities, resource mobilization, and knowledge sharing. Such initiatives will help to address the current institutional and technical constraints, which can allow LGUs to effectively use SDGs

to the local priorities and contexts. The development of these partnerships and capacities is a core pillar of sustainable and effective local SDG outcomes.

## **Discussion**

### **Discussion of Findings on the Main Barriers Faced by Palestinian LGUs in Integrating SDGs**

The initial investigation of the first research question reveals that Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs) face a complex set of challenges that hinder the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their development plans. The major barriers to this include: (1) data limitations, (2) capacity limitations, (3) institutional fragmentation, (4) financial resource shortages, (5) stakeholder awareness, and (6) policy gaps. The combination of these limitations shows that although the conceptualization of SDG localization on the national level is supported, the implementation of the SDGs on the local level is highly limited by structural and contextual constraints.

The absence of disaggregated SDG data at the local level was one of the most notable findings. This is in accordance with the findings of Mohieldin et al. (2022) who state that local governments in developing countries have an inadequate data collection process that fails to be aligned well with SDG indicators. On the same note, Ali et al. (2021) and Khaldi (2023) state that the lack of proper and timely data means that LGUs cannot develop adequate plans or track progress and, therefore, a gap exists between the national SDG plans and local development realities. Such a gap negates evidence-based decision-making, which is also reflected by Diokno-Sicat et al. (2020). The consequences of this discovery are far-reaching: without enhancing data infrastructure, LGUs will still act in a reactive manner instead of a proactive one, which will undermine the long-term SDG results.

The limitation of capital became one of the major barriers. The research concluded that many LGUs lack adequate human resources and technical skills to plan, initiate, and track SDG projects. This finding supports the results of the studies by Robillard et al. (2021) and Moallemi et al. (2020), which indicate that the lack of capacity of local actors negatively affects the implementation and monitoring of SDG-related activities. In the view of the researcher, this challenge is not only a technical deficiency but the result of institutional disregard and underinvestment in local governance capacity. Atisa et al. (2021) also make it clear that capacity-building is not only a technical necessity but also a political necessity, which provides LGUs with the agency to be more actively involved in the sustainable development processes.

Another major barrier was that of institutional fragmentation, as identified in the study. The inefficiency of the SDG work is restrained by the absence of coordination and the definition of roles among the stakeholders. This result is consistent with the literature (Paudel et al., 2023; Hayter & Link, 2020), which identifies a lack of integrated governance frameworks as a significant barrier to SDG localization. In addition, Croese and Duminy (2023) argue that localization should be regarded as a political process that needs robust intergovernmental connections, inclusive governance, and participatory systems, which are usually lacking in the structure of LGUs in Palestine. Nonetheless, this conclusion partially contradicts the positive perspective of Bilsky et al. (2021), who believe that local governments can become efficient brokers in the SDGs implementation. The intermediary capacity of LGUs in the Palestinian context is limited due to overlapping mandates and the lack of autonomy.

These institutional problems are also worsened by financial limitations. The results indicated that LGUs do not have specific funds allocated to the activities of the SDG but use scattered and frequently donor-based financial systems. This conclusion coincides with Khaldi (2023) and Ali et al. (2022), who state that the financial insecurity and the reliance on external support restrict the capacity of LGUs to plan and sustain SDG-related projects. Besides, LGU jurisdiction and access to resources are limited by political instability and Israeli occupation, which, according to Robillard et al. (2021), is one of the greatest structural barriers. This peculiar political aspect of financial constraint that is frequently overlooked in general SDG localization research highlights the complexity of the development planning in Palestine.

Poor awareness and ownership of the stakeholders were also revealed to impede the integration of the SDGs. Most local authorities and community members do not know about SDGs or consider them to be irrelevant to the local priorities. This observation correlates with Prabhakar (2025) and Ansell et al. (2022), who state that awareness deficits cause the absence of advocacy, low local ownership, and poor SDG mainstreaming. As the researcher perceives, this inactivity is a causal and an effect of the low capacity and divided governance. It shows that technical and political obstacles overlap to make the SDGs secondary to the local development discourse.

Lastly, the lack of clear policy frameworks to integrate the SDGs was mentioned. SDGs are not mentioned in local development plans, and LGUs have no clear guidelines on how to align their strategies with the 2030 Agenda. This result concurs with the literature that criticizes the absence of institutionalization of the SDGs in the local area (Jain et al., 2021; Croese et al., 2021). Although national alignment can be present, as long as there are no structures that help to transform national priorities into local implementation plans, SDG localization is superficial and incomplete.

The results of the current study show that there is a complex set of barriers to localization of the Sustainable Development Goals in Palestinian local government units, such as a lack of data, limited capacities, ineffective governance, financial constraints, and limited awareness of the population. These results are in line with the existing scholarly views (Ali et al., 2021; Mohieldin et al., 2022; Robillard et al., 2021), according to which localisation is a complex process which requires systematic investment, a long-term engagement of stakeholders, and coordinated reforms. The implications of the findings are therefore both practical and policy-wise: the marginalisation of Palestinian local government units in the discourse of sustainable development is one of the outcomes of the fact that these structural and capacity-related limitations are still present. To overcome the above barriers, therefore, it is necessary to consider an integrated approach that places more emphasis on the establishment of strong data systems, institutional coordination, capacity strengthening, and comprehensive stakeholder involvement. These are the necessary steps in the event that LGUs can be reconceptualized as driving forces of local development and as efficient agents of the Sustainable Development Goals implementation.

#### **Discussion of Findings on Enhancing Localization through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships and Capacity-Building**

The findings of the second research question indicate that multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building initiatives cannot be overlooked as the most important enablers of SDG localization in the Palestinian case. This conclusion aligns with the literature, as it is repeatedly emphasized that inclusive and collaborative governance frameworks are necessary to translate the 2030 Agenda into local practice (Paudel et al., 2023; Kandpal & Okitasari, 2023).

Another important conclusion is that the inclusive cooperation of the government, civil society, the private sector, academia, and international organizations contributes to the broader mobilization of resources and the development of the shared ownership of the SDGs. The finding is supported by the results of Bilsky et al. (2021), who highlight that multi-stakeholder partnerships provide the stage for coordinating global agendas and local demands, and, therefore, supporting the context-sensitive implementation of development policies. In addition, Vasstrøm and Normann (2019) posit that the mediating role of the local governments is the key to the coordination of various partnerships and the reduction of the gap between the state and the community. Such partnerships mitigate the problem of lack of coordination and compartmentalization, which may negatively affect the SDG planning in the Palestinian case.

According to the literature, capacity-building is one of the essential tools in promoting the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to empirical data, targeted training programmes, aimed at the improvement of SDG literacy, data management, and policy-analysis skills, support evidence-based decision-making and the quality of implementation at the local level. This finding

supports the claim of Moallemi et al. (2020) that technical expertise and institutional knowledge are the cornerstones through which local governments can take the lead on SDG efforts. This focus is echoed by Robillard et al. (2021) and Atisa et al. (2021), who note that it is essential to invest in local capacities to enable stakeholders to gain the competencies needed to engage in participatory governance and sustainable development. The current study thus asserts that without significant capacity-building activities, the potential of even the most advanced partnership models is unlikely to be realised.

The results also show that strong partnerships play a significant role in helping the local governments to mobilise financial and technical resources, often involving international donors and development partners. This finding is consistent with Khaldi (2023), who states the sharp resource limitations experienced by local authorities in Palestine and describes collaborations as a strategic way of ensuring external assistance. Literature is also similar in this analytical view. As Raad (2022) and Masuda et al. (2022) point out, partnerships are needed to overcome fiscal weakness and provide focused technical support, as well as implement small-scale pilot initiatives that take into consideration the local priorities. Taken together, they undermine the conceptualisations that reduce localization to a purely local activity (Guha and Chakrabarti, 2019) on the grounds of emphasising the significance of vertical collaboration and external support.

Evidence indicates that the digital platforms that facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange significantly enhance localization through innovation, allowing the copying of effective governance models and adaptive learning. Croese et al. (2021) agree that the long-term cross-sectoral communication and the exchange of lessons between municipalities and development agencies are a part of the SDGs outcomes that are more effective. Salvador and Sancho (2021) also demonstrate the role of such organizations as APLA in the exchange between Palestinian LGUs, which promotes capacity building and harmonization of policies. The study shows that these learning networks not only increase technical competence but also instil trust, transparency and collaborative culture, which is essential to sustainability.

Moreover, the research points to formal institutional structures, especially Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), as the key instruments to increase accountability and coordination in multi-stakeholder partnerships. The finding is consistent with Joyce (2025), who recommends that roles and responsibilities be well-defined to prevent overlaps and fragmentations. LGUs can achieve this by institutionalizing such partnerships through formal systems, which guarantee continuity and institutional memory and thus the sustainability of SDG efforts even after donor projects end or political changes.

The results of the current research emphasize the idea that multi-stakeholder partnerships and capacity-building efforts are mutually complementary approaches to SDG localization, each of which can help the process move forward when implemented together. This finding is aligned with the wider literature (Atisa et al., 2021; Mohieldin et al., 2022; Ali et al., 2021) that shows that strong capacities and integrated governance are imperative in transforming the global development agenda to local contexts. The policy implications of such findings are that policymakers and development practitioners should take a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, they should develop inclusive partnerships; on the other hand, they should invest in the institutional and technical capacities of LGUs. As a researcher, it is important to empower the local governments by engaging them as well as developing their competencies to ensure that the localization of SDGs in Palestine is not only effective but also sustainable and contextually based.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper was focused on the localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Palestinian Local Government Units (LGUs) and especially, the identification of the principal obstacles to SDG integration, as well as the assessment of the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships and

capacity-building programs to further localization. Considering the social and political conditions that are peculiar to Palestine, the study aimed to provide the context-specific knowledge that can be used to implement the SDGs more efficiently in the local context. The research aimed to fill an evident gap in the available body of literature, which does not pay much attention to conflict-affected areas, such as Palestine, when discussing SDG localisation, and to provide practical guidance to local and national stakeholders involved in sustainable development planning.

The key results of the research showed that there is a complex network of interconnected obstacles that work against the ability of Palestinian LGUs to localize the SDGs to the full extent. These are inadequate access to local data that are disaggregated and reliable, inadequate technical and human capacity, fragmentation of institutions, financial limits, inadequate awareness and ownership by stakeholders, and lack of specific policy frameworks. Moreover, the results indicated that the multi-stakeholder collaborations and specific capacity-building activities are capable of promoting SDG localization to a great extent. Integrative cooperation at the inter-sectoral level facilitates better mobilization of resources and the possibility of shared responsibility, whereas permanent learning and formalized coordination instruments support building institutional resilience. These results do not contradict the findings of the international research that underlines the paramount significance of local ownership, collaborative governance, and adaptive capacity-building to support the 2030 Agenda.

The study had several limitations, despite its contribution. First, although the study used a triangulated qualitative research design supplemented with surveys and focus groups, the sample of 20 stakeholders was rather small and purposively selected, which might not reflect the full range of experiences of all Palestinian LGUs. Second, the fact that several instruments (interviews, surveys, document analysis) were used contributed to validity. Still, the lack of longitudinal data did not allow for evaluating the progress over a period of time or determining the causal relationship. Furthermore, political sensitivities and logistical issues surrounding carrying out research in a conflict-prone region such as Palestine could have limited access to some information or resulted in reserved answers by respondents. These constraints indicate that further investigations based on larger samples and mixed methods may improve a better understanding of SDG localization processes in analogous fragile contexts.

The empirical results indicate practical and policy implications. The enhancement of SDG localization in Palestine requires systemic changes that entail institutional capacity-building, investment in effective data systems, the development of inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, and continuous financial sustainability. The national-level actors, especially the Ministry of Local Government, ought to always assist local government units (LGUs) in developing clear guidelines and establishing integration structures and bodies, and organizations like APLA should persist in their central roles in training, advocacy, and knowledge exchange. At the same time, international partners and donors should make the interventions more aligned with the local priorities, and progress toward more consistent and long-term partnerships that are no longer based on fragmented interventions. The research shows that localization is not merely about matching the local plans with the global goals; it is a highly political and context-specific process that necessitates empowerment, coordination, and long-term investment.

The current study contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a resource-constrained and conflict-sensitive environment, which has not been the focus of the discussion on sustainable development. The research has an empirical contribution to the understanding of localization processes by foregrounding the experiences of Palestinian local governmental units (LGUs) operating in an environment of territorial fragmentation, occupational rule, and chronic underfunding. The study contributes to the discussion of localization in fragile settings utilizing a dual framework of barrier identification and enhancement strategies synthesizing both theoretical literature and field-based observations. The findings are of use in national development projects in Palestine and are an important source of information to other regions facing similar structural and political issues as they move towards localization of global development agendas.

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