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United States' Stance toward United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals: The Case of New York City

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in Language and Culture

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In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

"وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ"

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of New York City in implementing locally the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the background of an uneven U.S. federal response. While the SDGs were adopted as a universal framework in 2015, their implementation depends heavily on national and subnational governance. The U.S. federal government has shown inconsistent engagement across administrations, lacking a coordinated national strategy. In contrast, New York City has positioned itself as a global leader in SDG localization, notably becoming the first city to submit a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) to the UN in 2018. Through initiatives like OneNYC 2050, NYC has aligned its policy goals with the SDGs, offering a valuable case study of urban leadership in global sustainability governance. Using a qualitative case study methodology, including content analysis and data from stakeholder interviews, this research explores the extent to which NYC's engagement with the SDGs reflects, complements, or challenges the broader federal stance. The study contributes to discussions on multilevel governance, policy transfer, and the potential of cities to drive global sustainability efforts in the absence of strong national coordination.

ملخص

تبحث هذه المذكرة في دور مدينة نيويورك في إضفاء الطابع المحلي على أهداف الأمم المتحدة للتنمية المستدامة (SDGs) في سياق استجابة فيدرالية أمريكية مجزأة. وفي حين تم اعتماد أهداف التنمية المستدامة كإطار عمل عالمي في عام 2015، إلا أن تنفيذها يعتمد بشكل كبير على الحوكمة الوطنية والمحلية. وقد أظهرت الحكومة الفيدرالية الأمريكية مشاركة غير متسقة عبر الإدارات، حيث تفتقر إلى استراتيجية وطنية منسقة. في المقابل، وضعت مدينة نيويورك نفسها كمدينة رائدة عالميًا في توطين أهداف التنمية المستدامة، ولا سيما أنها أصبحت أول مدينة تقدم مراجعة محلية طوعية إلى الأمم المتحدة في عام 2018. ومن خلال مبادرات مثل مبادرة OneNYC 2050، قامت مدينة نيويورك بمواءمة أهداف سياستها مع أهداف التنمية المستدامة، مقدمةً بذلك دراسة حالة قيّمة للقيادة الحضرية في مجال حوكمة الاستدامة العالمية. باستخدام منهجية دراسة الحالة النوعية، بما في ذلك تحليل المحتوى والبيانات المستمدة من مقابلات أصحاب المصلحة، يستكشف هذا البحث إلى أي مدى يعكس التزام مدينة نيويورك بأهداف التنمية المستدامة أو يكمل أو يتحدى الموقف الفيدرالي الأوسع نطاقًا. وتساهم الدراسة في المناقشات حول الحوكمة متعددة المستويات ونقل السياسات وقدرة المدن على قيادة جهود الاستدامة العالمية في غياب تنسيق وطني قوي.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AB 32	California's Global Warming Solutions Act
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DOE	Department of Energy
E4D	Education for Development
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
EERE	Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GHSA	Global Health Security Agenda
HEA	Higher Education Act
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HVAC	Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MLG	Multilevel Governance
NYC	New York City
NYCHA	New York City Housing Authority
NYSERDA	New York State Energy Research and Development Authority

ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OWG	Open Working Group
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
REDI	Resilient and Equitable Decarbonization Initiative
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UN SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIP	The U.S. Institute of Peace
VLR (s)	Voluntary Local Review(s)
VNR (s)	Voluntary National Review(s)
WHO	World Health Organization

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Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations espoused the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a life-changing international agenda comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets aimed at eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, promoting environmental sustainability, and fostering peace and prosperity for all. Although the SDGs are universally applicable, their implementation is deeply shaped by national and local governance structures, political will, and institutional capacity.

In the United States, support for the SDGs has varied significantly across administrations. While the Obama administration endorsed the agenda in principle, it did not establish a comprehensive national implementation strategy. The subsequent Trump administration deprioritized global governance initiatives, contributing to a fragmented federal response. The Biden administration has reaffirmed U.S. commitment to multilateralism and sustainability, yet national coordination and reporting on the SDGs remain limited. This inconsistency raises important questions about the U.S. government's broader stance toward the 2030 Agenda.

Amid this uneven federal engagement, New York City has emerged as a leading subnational actor in advancing the SDGs. In 2018, it became the first city globally to submit a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) to the United Nations, positioning itself at the forefront of SDG localization. Through strategic planning initiatives such as OneNYC 2050, NYC has aligned its sustainability agenda with the global goals, integrating SDG targets across policy areas including equity, climate resilience, and economic development. This makes NYC a compelling case study for examining how local governments can lead global sustainability efforts, especially when national support is limited or inconsistent.

This dissertation investigates the interplay between federal and local approaches to SDG implementation in the United States, focusing on how New York City has interpreted, localized,

and reported its progress. The central research question guiding this study is: To what extent does New York City's engagement with the SDGs reflect, complement, or challenge the broader U.S. federal stance? Sub-questions include: What strategies has NYC employed to implement and monitor the SDGs? How does NYC's approach compare to that of other U.S. cities and international counterparts? What insights can be drawn for multilevel governance and urban sustainability?

The SDGs represent the culmination of decades of international efforts to address global challenges through coordinated, multilateral action. Building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs offer a more comprehensive and universal framework that applies to all countries. Unlike the MDGs, which primarily focused on developing nations, the SDGs acknowledge the interconnected nature of economic, social, and environmental challenges across all national contexts (UN, 2015). Scholars such as Sachs (2012) and Fukuda-Parr (2016) highlight this evolution as a shift toward a multidimensional and inclusive development agenda, emphasizing sustainability, equity, and governance.

In the U.S., the absence of a unified federal strategy has contributed to a fragmented SDG implementation landscape. Research by Kharas and Rogerson (2020) and analyses by the Brookings Institution underscore the lack of centralized coordination, systematic reporting, or institutional mandates to advance the 2030 Agenda nationally. Despite this, a growing body of literature recognizes the critical role of cities and subnational actors in driving SDG progress. Scholars such as Acuto et al. (2018) and Bulkeley & Betsill (2013) argue that cities possess unique advantages in addressing sustainability challenges, including close proximity to constituents, policy flexibility, and a culture of innovation.

The emergence of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), modeled after national-level Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), has further institutionalized the role of cities in global

governance. According to UN-Habitat (2020), VLRs help localize the SDGs by contextualizing global targets, enhancing accountability, and fostering peer learning. New York City's leadership in this space has drawn praise from organizations such as the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Local2030 coalition for integrating SDG indicators into planning, performance measurement, and community engagement.

This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of multilevel governance and policy transfer. Hooghe and Marks (2003) define multilevel governance as the dispersion of authoritative decision-making across multiple territorial levels—a particularly relevant lens for analyzing the SDGs within federal systems. Additionally, Dolowitz and Marsh's (2000) concept of policy transfer offers insight into how global norms are adapted within local institutional contexts.

By examining New York City's unique position as both a global city and a subnational government actor, this dissertation contributes to scholarship on SDG localization, urban sustainability, and the evolving role of cities in global governance. The findings aim to inform future efforts to align local and national sustainability strategies and enhance multilevel coordination in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda.

This study adopts a qualitative, case study-based research strategy to look at the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the municipal level, with New York City (NYC) serving as the primary case. The case study method is appropriate given the in-depth focus of the research, which aims to uncover how a major city incorporates global sustainability aims into local governance structures, planning, and accountability tools. A qualitative approach allows for the exploration of meanings, institutional practices, and participant perceptions.

The research draws on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data included statements by key informants, including NYC government officials involved in sustainability planning. The latter were selected because of their involvement with initiatives such as the OneNYC 2050 strategic plan, the Voluntary Local Review (VLR) process, and inter-city sustainability networks. Their views provided valuable insights into the official motivations, challenges, and strategies associated with SDG localization in the city.

Secondary data includes publicly available policy documents and reports, notably NYC's VLRs (2018, 2019, and 2021), the OneNYC 2050 plan, and related municipal planning resources. Additional documents analyzed include the United Nations SDG indicator framework, national-level SDG statements from the U.S. government, Brookings Institution, different U.S. departments, Green Climate Fund, City of New York reports, and publications from international officialdoms such as the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and other UN agencies. These sources provide a broad foundation for assessing the alignment between NYC's local policies and global SDG targets.

The study employs a combination of content analysis, and comparative policy evaluation. Content analysis is used to examine NYC's policy and planning documents to identify explicit references to SDG targets and indicators. This includes coding references to specific goals, tracing their recurrence across different policy documents, and analyzing stated application strategies.

Comparative policy evaluation is used to assess NYC's SDG implementation efforts in relation to broader international practices. While the primary focus remains on NYC, references are made to other cities' VLRs and global frameworks to position NYC within the developing backdrop of urban SDG governance.

In summary, this methodology provides a thorough and multidimensional approach for analyzing how New York City has adopted the SDGs locally. By combining practical document analysis and theoretical insight, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the devices, discourses, and practices supporting urban sustainability governance in the context of a global development agenda.

This dissertation is organized into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter one, entitled "Understanding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals", explores the historical origins of the SDGs, their central objectives, and the wide-ranging process through which they were developed. It also examines the instruments designed to implement this ambitious agenda, including multilateral partnerships, national strategies, and local action.

Chapter two is dubbed, "Evaluating U.S. Participation in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". It critically examines the extent and nature of U.S. participation in the SDGs, exploring how the federal government has engaged with the goals. It traces the evolution of U.S. involvement, evaluates key initiatives and gaps, and considers how political and institutional factors have shaped the American response. By assessing the opportunities and challenges of U.S. commitment, this chapter offers understanding to the broader implications of national leadership, or the lack thereof, in advancing global sustainable development.

Chapter three is entitled "American States and Cities Sustainability Plans and Policies: The Example of New York City". It explores the growing role of American states and municipalities in framing and implementing sustainability plans and policies, with a special focus on New York City as a groundbreaking example. The chapter examines how New York City's initiatives, including its OneNYC plan and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), represent new governance approaches, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven policymaking. By analyzing NYC's

experience, this chapter sheds light on how local actions can drive sustainable transformation and influence broader national and global agendas.

For now, the main focus will be on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), examining their origins, core objectives, and the devices through which they are executed. This will provide a substance for understanding how the SDGs work as a global framework for sustainable development.

Chapter One

What are the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals?

Sustainable development has emerged as a vital necessity in the 21ˢᵗ century, demanding a comprehensive approach that links and balances economic, social, and environmental aspects. This chapter provides an extensive overview and basic definitions of this notion, with a particular focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which outlines 17 ambitious and interconnected sustainable development goals. The chapter also details the latitude of the 2030 Agenda, searches the roots and progression of the SDGs and scrutinizes the indispensable methods of enactment for attaining this agenda successfully.

1.1. An Introduction to Sustainable Development

The concept of "sustainable development" has deep historical roots, with concerns about living in harmony with nature and ensuring resources for future generations. Prior to the 1987 Brundtland Report, while these ideas existed, a widely accepted definition of sustainable development was lacking. Early notions principally focused on the preservation of natural resources, the defense of ecosystems, and the accountable supervision of assets. These early ideas laid the groundwork for further notions developed by various experts, culminating in the Brundtland Report, which provides the most comprehensive and inclusive framework.

Scholar Scott Campbell, Associate Professor of Urban Planning in the University of Michigan, judges sustainable development as "the long-term ability of a system to reproduce". Campbell's criterion reflects the key principles of sustainability, emphasizing reproduction and balance. It addresses the ability of social, economic, and ecological systems to duplicate, revitalize and operate effectively over the long term, while emphasizing the need for balance among these interconnected systems (304).

The World Commission on Environment and Development, frequently denoted as the Brundtland Commission, describes sustainable development in its report *Our Common Future,* as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 41). The definition emphasizes intergenerational equity, which encompasses two crucial aspects: addressing the current needs of humanity and preserving resources for future generation. Similarly, Bertrand Zuindeau, a French mathematician and expert in sustainable development, articulates a closely aligned view "Current development should not harm the interests of future generations" (qtd. in Koglin 9).

1.2. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Broad Definition

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a broad set of development goals approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations as a universal call for action to eliminate poverty, protect the planet, retain and strengthen peace and prosperity. They originate from the progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were active during the time period 2000 to 2015. In September 2015, the General Assembly of the United Nations, together with the Heads of state and Government from 193 countries have agreed on and adopted an extensive set of universal and transformative goals and targets. These Goals were established as a framework to guide global efforts towards sustainable development, advocating for a collaboration to more sustainable and enduring future.

The UN document, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", exhibits a declaration of the 17 SDGs and their associated targets, along with supplement and evaluation measures (Gupta and Vegelin 440). The SDGs were further detailed with169 targets. Moreover, to realize these goals, a global measurement system, known as indicators, was created and encompassed by the UN General Assembly in 2017. It aimed to

assess the progress toward fulfilling the agenda by providing reliable and testable evidence on the continuance and triumph of the procedure (Casalngua 1).

The SDGs exhibit the range and ambition of the new international agenda and identify the urgent need for bold and transformative actions to achieve a sustained growth ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 1). Furthermore, they offer "a pathway by which the peoples of the world may enlarge their spheres of cooperation" (WCED 11) and "seek to realize the human rights of all (…). They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental" (1). These statements highlight the attempts to promote human rights for everyone and mirror the perception of the three mainstays of sustainability and the connotation of keeping an equilibrium among these dimensions. The SDGs address the needs of both current and future stakeholders, aiming to encourage and inspire the operationalization and integration of Sustainability into organizations worldwide.

1.3. SDGs' Origins

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged from a long and extensive consultative process aimed at addressing urgent social, economic and environmental matters while certifying the privileges and comfort of people and preserving the planet. Their origins can be traced back to the early 2000s, when the international community recognized the need for a more holistic approach to development. This evolution was significantly influenced by various global efforts that underscored the relationship among these challenges, ultimately leading to the comprehensive vision embodied in the SDGs.

1.3.1. The Stockholm Conference 1972

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, universally known as the Stockholm Conference, occurred in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5th to 16th, 1972. It was the

first global conference to address environmental issues, discuss the state of the environment and economic development and underscore their intertwined relationships. The conference marked a significant shift in the global approach to development signaling that development could not simply be about achieving economic growth; rather it should take into account the safeguard of natural resource and biodiversity.

The Stockholm Conference gave birth to in three crucial verdicts; the first was Stockholm Declaration, the second was the Stockholm Action Plan and the third was a set of five decisions. "The Stockholm Declaration" established international political goals and legal principles that have underpinned environmental discourse and law-making (…) By stressing that environmental issues are inherently political, not just scientific and technical, (…) and therefore need political negotiations and decision-making" (Engfeldt and Lars qtd. in Chasek 7).

The Declaration integrated environmental protection into development policies and laid the foundation for future environmental governance. It established the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to monitor global environmental issues and set in motion a series of environmental treaties. The Stockholm Conference marked the emergence of a new approach for sustainable development aimed at balancing environmental concerns alongside economic growth.

1.3.2. The Brundtland Report 1987: The Rise of Sustainable Development

The UN report "*Our Common Future*", also known as the Brundtland account, baptized after the chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland, of the WCED was released in 1987. The report introduced the most comprehensive definition of sustainable development. The Brundtland Report was revolutionary as it investigated the factors contributing to environmental degradation and sought to understand the relationships among social equity, economic growth and environmental challenges, acknowledging the importance of achieving a balance between

economic growth, the conservation of natural resources, and the alleviation of poverty by formulating policy solutions that address all three dimensions.

1.3.3. The Earth Summit 1992: Laying the Foundation for Sustainable Development

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, formally called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), build upon the work of the Stockholm Conference and the Brundtland Report; was a landmark event that profoundly influenced international environmental policy. The conference gathered political officials, envoys, experts; agents of the media and non-governmental establishments (UN Conferences) aimed at consolidating the concept of sustainable development in the international agenda.

Besides, it introduced Agenda 21, a comprehensive action plan for sustainable development at the global, national, and local levels across various sectors. This Agenda addresses interconnected challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and economic inequality. The Earth Summit also adopted the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, a set of 27 principles guiding global sustainable development. The conference was basically a crucial moment in the history of environmentalism, marking a significant step toward global cooperation on environmental protection.

1.3.4. The United Nations' Millennium Summit: Launching a New Global Agenda

The Millennium Summit was organized by the General Assembly in the beginning of the 2000. As stated in these words, "The Millennium Summit affords an opportunity for reflection" ("We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the Twenty-first Century" 3), it represented a significant moment for profound consideration on the attainments of the United Nations. It also conversed the position of the United Nations at the beginning of the 21st century (3). In this summit, member states adopted The Millennium Declaration endeavoring to "free our fellow

men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty" ("UN Millennium Declaration" 4). The aim is achieving a better life by 2015.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) comprise a set of eight specific goals with associated targets and indicators aimed at addressing the most pressing global issues such as eradicating poverty, reducing hunger, achieving universal primary education and enhancing healthcare. They originate from the UN Millennium Declaration and "represent the latest effort in a long process of development goal setting" (Waage et. al 993).

Their construction was expressively well-versed by the ideologies exemplified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ingenuities of the Development Decade during the 1960s, and a sequence of UN meetings summoned in the latter half of the 20th century. Although the MDGs succeeded in mobilizing global efforts, the progress towards them has been described as "patchy" (Manning 8), and "uneven" (MDGs Report 2010 4). They have faced common challenges regarding unclear ownership and leadership internationally and nationally along with issues of equity. Additionally, there were significant coverage gaps that prevent achieving synergies among the interconnected goals (Waage et. al 992).

1.3.5. The Rio+20 Conference (2012): Shaping the Future of the SDGs

The MDGs have brought about widespread changes in approaches to development and have succeeded in attaining few targets. However, the agenda has not yet been fully implemented due to the encountered challenges with the conceptualization and execution of the MDGs (Waage et. al 991). Therefore, and with the 2015 MDGs deadline, many concerns aroused on whether this framework is the appropriate one for international development after 2015. In response to these concerns, the international community came together at the Rio+20 Conference, which was hosted by Brazil in Rio de Janeiro from 13 to 22 June, 2012 to assess the implementation of

previous agreements, address emerging challenges, and renew political commitment for sustainable development (Latek 2).

The conference resulted in a non-binding document titled "The Future We Want," which reaffirmed commitments to sustainable development and outlined a pathway for a green economy. It also established The Open Work Group (OWP), which was tasked with developing a set of sustainable development goals to succeed the MDGs (Latek 2). The conference also declared that the progress toward these goals would be guided, assessed and evaluated by the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) (Pingeot 7).

1.4. Comparing the MDGs and SDGs: Changes in International Development Urgencies

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) epitomize momentous advantages in tackling international crises and refining the welfare of people universally. The MDGs are the forerunner of SDGs, they were launched in 2000 and expired in 2015, and as their era concluded, a new development agenda, namely the SDGs, were introduced and adopted in 2015 as a successor to the MDGs. In spite of the fact that both frameworks share the same vision, they have unique approaches to tackling those issues.

To begin with, the MDGs are less comprehensive in scope and focus. The MDGs had eight goals, concentrating on decreasing great poverty in all its formulas. In contrast, the SDGs have a broader scope including 17 goals that emphasize the interlinkage of social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development (Kanuri et. al). In addition, a key difference between the MDGs and the SDGs is partnership and participatory. The "MDGs had no concrete role for the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)", whereas the SDGs identify the significance of encompassing a great number of stakeholders, comprising the civil society and the private sector (Kumar et. al 3).

Another distinction concerns the operationalization scale. "The SDGs apply to low-as well as high-income countries, [meanwhile the] MDGs had a focus on developing countries with funding came from rich countries" (Kanuri et. al). Besides, the SDGs aim to a more integrative approach to development. The MDGs often addressed separate objectives such as maternal health, hunger, and gender equality. In contrast, the SDGs promote a holistic and interconnected approach, fostering synergy and collaboration across the 17 goals to establish a unified and integrated development agenda (Kumar et. al 4). To conclude, both sets of goals reflect the evolving priorities and aspirations of the global community alongside the collective commitment in the pursuit of a sustainable future.

1.4.1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Targets and Indicators

The 17 sustainable development goals shroud many features such as ending poverty all over the world, engage in pressing activities to fight climate change and its influence, ensure reasonable admission to excellent education for all,…etc. They are outlined in the United Nations' document: "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and in the United Nations SDGs Action Platform.

1.4.2. SDGs' Targets

The SDGs were broken down in 169 targets, all "are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable (…). Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances" (qtd. in "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 13). The targets serve as the essential components of the goals, while the 17 primary goals provide clear categories outlining humanity future endeavors. The targets present a comprehensive list of the challenges human beings face and foster personal

engagement. It is through these targets that the Global Goals become truly tangible and impactful.

Each goal normally has eight to twelve objectives, which are either result targets, situations to be achieved, or techniques of execution goals. The numbering structure of aims uses numbers and lower case letters. The latter refer to means of implementation targets, whereas numbers refer to outcome targets. For example, SDG 2 has eight targets. The first five are outcome targets and are branded as Targets 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5. The last three aims are implementation targets and are categorized as targets 2.a, 2.b.

1.4.3. SDGs' Indicators

In the decision 70/1 of 25 September 2015, by which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was accepted, the General Assembly decided that "the Sustainable Development Goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed using a set of global indicators" ("Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 32). The global indicators also known as the follow-up and review system is a global framework devised by the IAEG-SDGs and agreed on by the Statistical Commission at its resolution on 6 July 2017. The framework was developed to monitor and evaluate progress on SDG goals and their associated targets along with the means of implementation, within and across countries (32).

The system is described as "simple yet robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated" ("Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 31). It identifies emerging challenges and ensures accountability, transparency, and shared experiences among countries, stakeholders and communities in order to facilitate mobilization of necessary actions to accelerate implementation. The follow-up and review mechanism is guided by an annual progress report on the SDGs. The latter is produced by the

Secretary-General in collaboration with the United Nations system and reviewed by the annual

High-level Political Forum (33).

The SDGs indicators should be high quality, timely and reliable disaggregated by "income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics relevant in national contexts" ("Work of the Statistical Commission Pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 4). The 17 SDGs with their 169 associated targets are measured by 232 unique indicators. Each target has typically from one to five indicators. For instance, Goal 1 has a total sum of seven targets evaluated through thirteen indicator. As the table below indicates, target 1.1 has only one indicator.

The SDG 1	Targets	Indicators
End poverty in all its forms everywhere	1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than $1.25 a day	1.1.1 Proportion of the population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural)

1.4.4. Detailing the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development admits that Goal 1 of the SDGs exemplifies the most serious international test and an unconditional obligation for achieving sustainable development ("Plan of Implementation of World Summit on Sustainable Development" 3). Goal 1 is to finish poverty in all its appearances all over the world. By 2030, it follows to exterminate great poverty for all people everywhere, which is calculated as individuals living on less than $1.25 a day. It also targets to diminish the number of people, men, women and children of all ages, living in poverty in all its forms. It equally targets to guarantee that all sections of society have equal rights to economic resources along with admissions to indispensable facilities and to

build flexibility to climate-related risky events and other shocks and catastrophes ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 15).

This objective shall be attained through the formation and execution of nationally tailored social protection systems, encompassing foundational elements "floors" that seek to provide a minimum level of support and improve the overall well-being of individuals and communities. By 2030, the primary aim is to expand significantly these systems so that a considerable number of impoverished and vulnerable individuals receive adequate assistance and coverage. Likewise, it is essential to mobilize resources from multiple sources, like strengthening development cooperation and to create a policy framework at the national, regional and international levels based on poverty alleviation and gender-sensitive development strategies ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 15).

Goal 2 is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. By 2030, the goal is to guarantee that all people, particularly the poor and vulnerable have year-round access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food. This covers eliminating all kinds of malnutrition and addressing the nutritional needs of all people. The goal also aspires to double agricultural production and earnings of small-scale food producers, especially women, indigenous peoples and family farmers through equal access to land, resources, expertise, financial services, and markets ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 15).

In addition, it attempts to build sustainable food production systems and resilient agricultural practices that preserve ecosystems, adapt to climate change, and improve land and soil quality. Preserving the genetic diversity of seeds, plants and animals, increasing investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research, technology, and gene banks especially in emerging

countries, addressing trade and market restrictions are also key elements of this goal ("4ᵗʰ SDG Youth Summer Camp–SDG Resource Document").

Goal 3 is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. By 2030, it aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio, end preventable deaths of newborns and children and eradicate epidemics such as AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and tropical diseases. It also seeks to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, which are chronic conditions not caused by infectious agents, including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 16).

Additionally, it aims to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse and reducing by half deaths and injuries from road accidents worldwide is also a priority. Substantially, it focuses on achieving a universal health coverage, providing a universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, and decreasing the number of deaths and illnesses caused by pollution and dangerous substances ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 16). This goal includes further fundamental aspects concerning strengthening the implementation of WHO framework Convention on tobacco control, promoting vaccine and medication research and development, raising health financing, and improving global health risk management ("4ᵗʰ SDG Youth Summer Camp–SDG Resource Document").

Goal 4 centers on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. By 2030, the goal is to ensure that all girls and boys receive complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, which results in relevant and effective learning outcomes. It seeks to provide all children with equitable access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education, ensuring they are prepared for primary education. The goal also underlines equal access for men and women to affordable and

high-quality education in technical, vocational and tertiary including universities. It intends to boost the number of youth and adults with pertinent technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Further, the goal aims to reduce gender inequities in education and assure equal access to education and vocational training for underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations. By 2030, it targets achieving literacy and numeracy for all youth and a substantial proportion of adults and guarantees that all learners acquire the essential knowledge and competencies to promote sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles.

Still, to ensure equitable and quality education, the goal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that account for children's disabilities and gender sensitivity, as well as providing safe, non-violent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all. By 2020, it aims to considerably expand the number of scholarships to developing countries and to increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training notably in least developed countries and small island developing States and this by 2030 ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 17).

Goal 5 stresses achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This is through ending and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, manipulation, or any type of abuse for personal purposes in public and private spheres. It also aims to end harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage as well as female genital mutilation. The goal highlights acknowledging and appreciating unpaid care and domestic labor through public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, beside encouraging shared responsibilities within households and families ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 18).

It also guarantees women's complete and efficient engagement and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of political, economic, and public spheres. It also aims to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed upon in international agreements. The goal advocates for reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to land ownership, control over property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources. Besides, it improves the use of enabling technology especially information and communications technology, to promote women's empowerment. As it underlines the significance of adopting and reinforcing sound policies and enforceable legislation to promote to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls at all levels ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 18).

Goal 6 is about securing availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. The goal emphasizes attaining universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for everyone. It also aims to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all with a particular focus on the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable circumstances. Additionally, it targets to improve water quality by reducing pollution, minimizing the release of dangerous chemicals and materials. The goal seeks to increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and assure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water shortage, thus diminishing the number of people suffering from lack of water ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 18).

It also demands the implementation of integrated water resources management at all levels, including through trans-boundary collaboration where applicable. By 2020, the target is to protect and restore water-related ecosystems such as mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. The goal also underscores the importance of expanding international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs,

including developed technologies for water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling, and reuse. Lastly, it stresses on supporting and strengthening the participation of regional communities in developing water and sanitation management ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 19).

Goal 7 focuses on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy services for all by 2030. The goal aims to significantly increase the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix and double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency. Similarly, it seeks to enhance international cooperation in order to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology. It also encourages investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology. Furthermore, the goal demands broadening the framework and upgrading technology for providing modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, particularly least developed countries, small island developing States and land-locked developing countries consistent with their respective support programs ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 19).

Goal 8 is about promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. It aims to maintain per capita economic growth taking into account the specific circumstances of each nation, targeting at least 7 percent GDP growth per year in the least developed countries. The goal advocates for a multifaceted approach to bolstering economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, with a focus on labor-intensive sectors ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 19).

The goal seeks as well to promote development-oriented policies, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, while encouraging the formalization and growth of

small enterprises through access to financial services. Through 2030, it aims to improve global resource efficiency in consumption and production, to separate economic growth from environmental degradation. The goal also strives to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all people with equal payment. It further aims to reduce the proportion of unemployed, and uneducated youth by 2020 ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 19-20).

Goal 8 urges for immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and eliminate all forms of child labor by 2050. In addition, the goal seeks to protect labor rights and promote safe working environments for all. The goal emphasizes promoting sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. It also focuses on strengthening domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all. The goal also calls for Increase Aid for Trade, support for developing countries, particularly least developed countries, through the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF). Last of all, it aims to develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment by 2020 and implement the Global Jobs Pact made by the International Labor Organization (ILO) ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 20).

Goal 9 focuses on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. The goal aims to develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all. It also focuses on promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization through increasing and doubling the industry's share of employment and gross domestic products (GDP) in least developed countries by 2030. It seeks to boost access to financial services including affordable credit for small-scale businesses and other enterprises

notably in developing countries ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 20).

In addition, it targets to upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries by 2030 and to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action according to their capabilities. The goal also emphasizes enhancing scientific research, upgrading the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, mainly developing ones by 2030 and these through encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 20-21).

Likewise, it demands facilitating sustainable and resilient infrastructure development through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and Small Island developing States. It also focuses on supporting domestic technology development, research, and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for industrial diversification and value addition to commodities. Finally, it aims to substantially increase access to information and communications technology and striving to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020 ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 21).

Goal 10 aims is to reduce inequality within and among countries. It aims gradually achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average, as it focus on empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all, regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic

status. The goal seeks to ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation and action in this regard. In addition, demands the adoption of policies, especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies to achieve greater equality ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 21).

It also focuses on improving the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions, in addition to enhancing representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions. The goal also aims to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, implementing the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements and encouraging official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment to countries in need for it. Finally, the goal aims to reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent by 2030 ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 21).

Goal 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030. This entails assuring access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all, upgrading slums and sustainable transport systems prioritizing road safety. Efforts is directed toward enhancing urbanization and human settlement planning and management, protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage, reducing deaths, economic losses and environmental impact of cities. The goal also seeks to provide universal access to safe, green and public spaces, support economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Finally, it aims to increase the number of cities implementing policies for inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change and resilience to

disasters. The least developed countries will receive financial and technical support for sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 21-22).

Goal 12 focuses on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns by 2030. This is through implementing an efficient consumption and production frameworks, achieving effective use of natural resources and reducing food waste and losses. The goal aims to manage and reduce chemicals and wastes releases taking into account human health and the environment, as well as reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse. It also promotes public procurement, spreads awareness about sustainable development, and supports developing countries in adopting sustainable practices and monitoring their impacts mainly on tourism. Lastly, the goal advocates for rationalizing inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies to reflect their environmental impacts and protect the poor and affected communities ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 22-23).

Goal 13 underscores the urgent need to combat climate change and its impacts. This entails reinforcing resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related consequences and natural disasters all over the world, integrating climate change measures into national policies and strategies, improving education, and spreading awareness on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The goal seeks to mobilize $100 billion annually by 2020 from various sources to address the needs of developing countries for mitigation actions, and to fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund. It also promotes capacity-building mechanisms for effective climate change planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing states, concentrating on women, youth and local and underrepresented communities ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 23).

Goal 14 is about conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The goal aims to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems including restoration efforts and minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification. It also seeks to regulate harvesting and restore fish stocks by ending illegal, unreported, unregulated and overfishing practices. It equally advocates for the conservation of at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas and the prohibition of certain forms of fisheries subsidies ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 23).

By 2030, it aims to increase economic benefits for small island developing states and least developed countries from marine resource. The goal additionally attempts to increase scientific knowledge and develop research capacity, provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets and enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources through implementing international law, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 24).

Goal 15 aims to protect, restore, and promote the reasonable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, and prevent biodiversity loss. By 2020, the goal seeks to conserve and restore the terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems, mainly forests, wetlands, mountains, and dry lands in accordance with international agreements. It also aims to promote sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and significantly increase afforestation and reforestation globally ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 24-25).

By 2030, the goal directs efforts to combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil including land affected by desertification, drought and floods. It seeks to conserve mountain

ecosystems, reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species. The goal also emphasizes ending poaching and trafficking of protected species and calls for integrating ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning as well as mobilizing and increasing financial resources to conserve biodiversity and ecosystems ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 25).

Goal 16 aims to promote peaceful and 25 inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. The goal focuses on reducing all forms of violence and related death rates, ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and torture of children, promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensuring equal access to justice for all. It also seeks to reduce illicit financial and arms flows, combat organized crime and substantially reduce corruption and bribery ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 25).

The goal advocates for the development of effective, transparent and accountable institutions, along with inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Besides, it aims to provide legal identity for all, secure public access to information, protect fundamental freedoms, and strengthen relevant national institutions to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime. Lastly, it promotes and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 25-26).

Goal 17 emphasizes strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. It encompasses targets related to finance, technology, capacity building, trade, policy and institutional coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, data, monitoring, and accountability. These targets seek to reinforce domestic resource mobilization,

provide additional financial resources for developing countries and aid in attaining long-term debt sustainability. The goal also advocates for enhancing t regional and international cooperation on science, technology and innovation, promoting the development and transfer of environmentally sound technologies and supporting capacity-building in developed countries ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 26).

Goal 17 also promotes a universal, rules-based and equitable multilateral trading system, it aims to enhance global macroeconomic stability and policy coherence for sustainable development, encourage multi stakeholder partnerships and respect each country sovereignty. Last of all, it seeks to increase the availability of high quality, timely and reliable data, develop measurements of progress on sustainable development and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 27).

1.5. The SDGs' Agenda

The SDGs Agenda represents a comprehensive framework for global development for the next fifteen years. It lays out 17 Sustainable Development Goals and is best understood through its interrelated aspects. The post-2015 agenda, which laid the initiatives, the 2030 Agenda as an outcome, document of the consultations and negotiations processes and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which outlines the required means of implementation. These three elements together provide a flexible roadmap to successfully implement the SDGs agenda and achieve sustainable development in its economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

1.5.1. The Post-2015 Development Agenda

The post-2015 development agenda was a comprehensive paradigm initiated by the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) to succeed the MDGs after their expiration in 2015, and became "the universal framework guiding global and national efforts to support human

development in conjunction with environmental durability, from 2016" (Latek 1). The agenda aimed to be ambitious and global in nature, reflecting diverse contexts (Kaczmarek 6). Its formulation was "a complex, time consuming and, at times, fragmented process", and characterized by open and extensive consultations and negotiations employing a multi-stakeholder approach that engaged governments, civil society, businesses and academics (Evans et. al 4).

The post-2015 consultations were launched by the UNSG and ran from July 2012 to May 2013, when the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLP) submitted its report, "A New Global Partnership" (Fukuda-Parr 9), which outlined key issues, proposed goals and emphasized the transformational shifts of the development agenda (2). Following the Post-2015 consultations, intergovernmental negotiations in the OWG began in March 2013 (10) bringing together representatives from various countries to develop a proposed list of SDGs, targets and indicators. This complex process culminated in the 2030 Agenda, a transformative framework centered on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

1.5.2. From Vision to Action: Implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marked a pivotal moment in global governance, reflecting a long inclusive process of intergovernmental negotiations. As Secretary General Ban Ki Moon described it, the SDGs are "people's agenda" (Kanuri et al.). In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly along with 193 Heads of State and Government unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for SD, as "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 1), and "a charter for [sustainability] in the twenty-first century" (12).

The agenda is "of unprecedented scope and significance" as it is applicable to all countries and brings together, for the first time, the world leaders to pledged common action and engage in a collective journey to set the world on a path towards sustainability and resilience ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 3). This comprehensive framework entailed 17 Sustainable Development Goals with their associated targets and indicators, aimed at addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges by the year 2030. It also outlined the required means of implementation to achieve these goals for everyone, everywhere, ensuring that no one is left behind.

1.5.3. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda was adopted during the Third International Conference on Financing for Development that was held in Ethiopia from 13 to 16 July 2015. It is labelled as "a global framework for financing development post-2015" ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 1), and described as "an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 10). It "supports, complements, and helps to contextualize the 2030 Agenda's means of implementation targets" (28).

The Addis Ababa Agenda addresses the challenges of financing and aims at creating an enabling environment to achieve sustainable development in its three dimensions. It recognizes that many countries, particularly developing countries, still face significant challenges such as inequality, vulnerability to economic crises, conflicts and other persistent obstacles to sustainable development ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 2). It also outlines the appropriate incentives and the required actions, emphasizing the importance of national strategies, international cooperation, and multi-stakeholder partnerships (4), to guide the development of concrete policies to overcome these challenges.

Additionally, this universal framework points to priority action areas, including mobilizing domestic resources, enhancing private business and finance and strengthening debt management. It further highlights the critical role of science, technology, and innovation in driving development, alongside the need for robust data collection and monitoring mechanisms to track progress. Ultimately, the Addis Ababa Agenda aims to create an "ambitious, comprehensive, holistic and transformative approach" ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 4) to financing for development, ensuring that all countries can effectively contribute to and benefit from sustainable development initiatives.

1.6. SDGs' Means of Implementation

The internationally agreed development goals (SDGs) require a comprehensive and transformative approach to be attained, which combines the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development with various means of implementation. Hence, the concept "means of implementation" is a crucial component in the development process as it outlines the necessary resources and strategies needed to meet these objectives successfully. Besides, progress towards this approach necessitates a revitalized Global Partnership supported by accountable and efficient sound policies and governance at all levels ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 5).

In this regard, the different UN Agendas, the 2030 Agenda for SD and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, emphasize the significance of collaboration across various levels of governance and demand strengthening policy coherence at domestic and international levels. They underscore the primary responsibility of each country towards achieving its own economic and social development as it is stated in principle 7 of the Rio Declaration: "States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the

Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities" ("Rio Declaration" 2).

1.6.1. Financing Sustainable Development at the International Level: Mobilizing Public and Private Domestic Resources

Domestic public resources are vital for financing sustainable development initiatives, generated through taxation, public enterprises, and government revenues. Countries are encouraged to enhance their tax systems, modernize policies, and improve revenue collection by broadening the tax base and integrating the informal sector. Transparency and accountability in public financial management are essential, advocating for sound fiscal policies that align spending with national development priorities. In addition, the private sector is crucial for economic growth and innovation; fostering a conducive environment for private investment through stable regulatory frameworks is necessary. This includes supporting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) by improving access to finance and skills training. Besides, international private investment complements domestic efforts, particularly in sectors essential to sustainable development ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 10-11).

1.6.2. International Development Cooperation

International development cooperation plays a vital role in complementing the efforts of countries to mobilize public resources domestically, especially in the poorest and most vulnerable nations. Thus, it necessary to advocate for increased official development assistance (ODA) commitments, particularly to least developed countries (LDCs), and emphasize the need for ODA to be predictable, transparent, and aligned with national priorities. Likewise, strengthening partnerships between donor and recipient countries is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of international support, promoting mutual accountability, and ensuring that aid is utilized

effectively to achieve development goals. Moreover, it is vital to recognize South-South cooperation as a complement to traditional North-South cooperation, encourage developing countries to share knowledge, resources, and best practices to support each other's development efforts ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 16- 22).

1.6.3. Trade as an Engine for Development

It is vital to underscore the significance of international trade as a mechanism for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty. This can be achieved by creating a fair and equitable multilateral trading system that facilitates access to markets for developing countries, particularly least developed countries, by addressing trade barriers and ensuring that trade policies are aligned with sustainable development goals. Besides, it is crucial to highlight the expansion of trade finance to facilitate international trade, especially for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Besides, countries can leverage their comparative advantages and integrate into global value chains through promoting inclusive trade practices, thereby enhancing their economic resilience and contributing to sustainable development ("Addis Ababa Action Agenda" 23- 26).

1.6.4. Capacity-Building, Science, Technology, and Innovation

Effective governance and sustainable development are deeply intertwined, requiring tailored capacity-building initiatives that address specific national needs, especially for vulnerable countries. This involves strengthening institutional frameworks and enhancing human resources in areas like public finance management and gender-responsive budgeting. In addition, promoting science, technology, and innovation is crucial for driving economic growth and addressing global challenges. This includes investing in research and development, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and ensuring technology access for marginalized groups to promote inclusive development. By combining these strategies, countries can enhance resilience,

achieve sustainable development goals, and improve the quality of life for their populations ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 26-27).

1.6.5. Systematic Issues

Addressing systemic issues in global economic governance is fundamental to creating an equitable and sustainable world. Policy coherence for sustainable development reflects a call to action for countries to consider the broader implications of their policies. The creation of a more inclusive and representative global governance structure necessitates broadening the voice and participation of developing countries in international decision-making processes. This is not just a matter of fairness; it is about ensuring that the perspectives and needs of all countries are taken into account in shaping policies that affect their futures. The recognition of the need for sound regulation of financial markets is particularly pertinent in light of past financial crises, underscoring the importance of resilience in the face of global economic challenges ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 27).

1.6.6. At the Domestic and Regional Levels

In the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at domestic and regional levels, it is essential to reaffirm that every State has full permanent sovereignty over its wealth, natural resources, and economic activities. This sovereignty enables nations to tailor their approaches to the SDGs, taking into account diverse national realities and capacities while respecting local policies and priorities, as well as committing to fundamental changes in production and consumption patterns ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 6- 8).

The localization of the SDGs becomes crucial, involving local authorities and stakeholders in adapting and monitoring these goals to improve urban quality of life and promote green economic opportunities. Effective localization requires clear leadership, evidence-based decision-

making, and collaboration among local governments, national authorities, and non-governmental partners. By mapping the SDGs to existing local policies and ensuring that social, economic, and environmental considerations are balanced, local governments can address pressing issues such as poverty eradication, housing insecurity, and access to essential services. A further crucial mean is "to mainstream SDG targets into existing development plans and programs" (Kanuri et. al).

Mainstreaming SDG targets involves incorporating them into current development frameworks, potentially revising them, reassessing and enhancing existing plans and strategies to achieve outcomes that are more ambitious. For instance, SDG Target 4.1 states "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes''. The target ensures equal access to education. Some developed countries which have already met this goal, might consider adjusting it to concentrate on enhancing the quality of primary and secondary education.

In the end, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private collaborations, will enhance the capacity for financial planning and mobilization of resources, thereby facilitating the successful implementation of the SDGs in a manner that respects the territorial integrity and political independence of States (Kanuri et. al).

The following table presents a comprehensive overview of the diverse stakeholder groups involved at both national and local levels. These stakeholders come from multiple sectors, including government, civil society, the private sector, and development partners. Each group plays a crucial role in shaping, supporting, and implementing the broader development agenda. Their collaboration and engagement are essential for ensuring inclusive, sustainable, and effective development outcomes.

Table 3: Stakeholder Groups at National and Local Levels

Stakeholder groups	
Category	**Example**
National governments	Professional staff within ministries
Civil society organization	Non-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples' organizations
Sub national governments	State/ provincial governments, or other forms of regional governments
Local authorities	Local councils and elected representatives

The SDGs' objectives define and capture everything necessary to change the world for the better by the year 2030. These objectives focus profoundly on eliminating poverty and hunger in all forms, so that every person can live in a world where they are treated with dignity and equality in a clean and healthy environment. In addition, they seek to protect and preserve the planet from destruction, through sustainable consumption and production, management of natural resources, and taking urgent action on climate change. They further aim to make sure that there is economic growth alongside social and technological advancement in a natural context, with all people living prosperous and satisfying lives. Moreover, they hope to achieve a peaceful, just, and inclusive world free from the fear of violence and injustices ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 1-3).

In a broader context, it seeks to create a world where all individuals can access quality education, healthcare, and social support systems while all forms of human rights are adequately protected. With strong commitment to ensuring that, no one will be left behind, particularly focusing on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable populations. These goals strive to be

universal and designed to all countries while simultaneously being integrated, meaning that social, economic, and environmental aspects are combined and treated as one interactional system for sustainable development ("Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" 1-3).

In summary, the Sustainable Development Goals present a far-reaching and ambitious framework to tackle the world's most critical challenges. Rooted in principles of equity, sustainability, and global cooperation, the SDGs aim to foster a more just and resilient world. Achieving these targets will require commitment and collaboration across all sectors of society, including governments, private enterprises, non-profits, and individuals. As we progress toward 2030, the focus must shift from high-level goals to meaningful local actions, ensuring that the promises of the 2030 Agenda are fulfilled for all people, everywhere.

Building on the earlier exploration of the SDGs' origins, objectives, and tools for implementation, it is also essential to examine how individual countries, such as the United States, and specifically New York City, have responded to and integrated the global agenda into local development strategies.

Chapter Two

Reviewing US Participation in the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda

The adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 signified a global commitment to addressing a diverse array of interconnected issues, ranging from poverty eradication and climate action to fostering peace, justice, and robust institutions. As a major global economic power and a key player in international development efforts, the United States holds a significant influence over the advancement of these goals on the world stage. Nonetheless, U.S. engagement with the SDGs has been complex and varied, shaped by changing administrations, shifting domestic priorities, and evolving foreign policy agendas.

This chapter provides a thorough review of how the United States has interacted with the Sustainable Development Goals, assessing how well national strategies, initiatives, and international responsibilities align with the 17 targets. It examines notable accomplishments as well as shortcomings in implementation, drawing attention to successful efforts at both federal and local levels while identifying areas that require increased focus and cooperation. The goal of this evaluation is to measure America's contribution to global sustainable development and to uncover ways to enhance its role in achieving these worldwide objectives in the future.

2.1. The US Response to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

In September 2015, at the UN General Assembly, 193 countries, including the United States, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "a global development agenda that lays out 17 SDGs [designed] to address critical sustainability issues such as poverty, climate change, inequality, …" (Kanuri et al. 1).

The evolution of priorities within the US different administrations have shaped the Federal policies and influenced its role in fostering international cooperation for achieving sustainability. This title examines the different approaches of the Obama, Trump and Biden

Administrations, in aligning with multilateral solutions to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. In addition, underscores key policy shifts, initiatives, and commitments under each administration, underlining the varying degrees of leadership, contribution, and influence of the US on the international sustainability efforts.

2.1.1. Obama Administration

Pipa states that in his speech at the UN "Remarks by the President on Sustainable Development Goals" in 2015, President Obama has committed the United States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, embraced their universality and emphasized the significance the United States attributes to fostering international development (47). According to The Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, President Obama "has elevated sustainable development to a core pillar of American foreign policy" by issuing the unprecedented *US Global Development Policy in 2010.* This policy was implemented through *The Presidential Policy Directive* (PPD), which embodies the principles and targets that later were affirmed by the international community in the 2030 Agenda, and outlines the required operational model for U.S. Government agencies (Office of the Press Secretary).

Furthermore, President Obama announced new executive order on Climate-Resilient International Development, mandating agencies to incorporate climate resilience into their international programs and investments through *the Global Climate Change Initiative* (GCCI) ("President Obama's Development Policy") and "to foster low-carbon growth and reduce emissions from deforestation and land degradation" through the Clean Power Plan. He also launched numerous development initiatives and engaged in several international partnership such as *Feed the Future*, to ensure food security, increase agricultural productivity and enhance nutrition. *Power Africa* is another initiative by President Obama, designed to enhance energy

access in sub-Saharan Africa by promoting investment in energy generation and distribution (Office of the Press Secretary).

Conforming to global efforts to address healthcare, education, and climate change, the Obama Administration, with global donors and other partners, worked through various programs "to provide "fast start" climate finance approaching $30 billion" ("President Obama's Development Policy"). His administration allocated $7.2 billion to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, and assisted $127 million to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (Office of the Press Secretary).

2.1.2. Trump Administration (2017-2021)

Stokes and Schwinn state that President Donald Trump's first presidency "left a profound mark on American domestic policies and global relations, especially through his ultra-nationalistic "America First" doctrine" (Stokes and Schwinn qtd. in Saliya 2), his foreign policy "prioritized the interests of the United States over global cooperation" and sought to revitalize the economy and create "stronger national identity" (4). In addition to these shifts in domestic and foreign policy, Vidura claims that Trump's presidency "brought about a notable change in US environmental and sustainability policy". Specifically, he moved to rollback many climate-focused policies which were established by his predecessors such as the Clean Power Act initiated by President Obama, issue a series of executive orders and withdraw from multilateral climate agreements mainly The Paris Climate Agreement, prioritizing "national sovereignty over universal cooperation against global warming" (Kolçak and Özdemir 8-9).

Furthermore, Pipa asserts that Trump Administration did not reject the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet it basically ignored them diminishing their significance to the domestic policy of the United States (47). Accordingly, Bomberg indicates that

shortly after starting his tenure, Trump began deregulating an unprecedented number of policies intended to reduce emissions, protect wildlife, ban harmful pesticides, and limit pollution in water, land, and air (628). He proposed policies to improve fossil fuel production, promote and expand oil and gas extraction on contentious regions such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) (Kolçak and Özdemir 9; 11). These deregulation aimed at achieving energy independence, stimulating economic growth and creating jobs prioritizing economic growth over environmental protection (10).

Additionally, Trump Administration significantly impacted federal agencies and institutions charged with environmental protection such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as it "has been directed to shift focus from climate mitigation to supporting fossil fuel-centered national energy guidelines" (9), and also "sought to strip agencies' budgets and resources used to fund science, experts and research" (Bomberg 630). Besides affecting domestic agencies, his foreign policy also impacted international cooperation and aid, where he "cancelled funding for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Green Climate Fund, which provide financial assistance for developing countries' efforts to address climate change" (642).

2.1.3. Biden Administration

Pipa declares that the Biden Administration reaffirmed its commitment to the UN global sustainability framework, indicating "a willingness to incorporate the SDGs into its international development priorities and strategies" (51), and elevating "sustainable development as a core pillar of … National Security Strategy (NSS) and of American power" ("U.S. Strategy on Global Development" 4). This reflects an effort to re-establish credibility both domestically and internationally (Brown et al.) Accordingly, Bomberg asserts that during his first week, President Biden "signed a flurry of executive orders

overturning Trump's regulatory action on a range of issues, and announced the cancellation of controversial oil pipelines and a moratorium on all new oil leases on federal land" demonstrating his commitment to promote environmental sustainability (633).

Furthermore, President Biden addressed the climate crisis by issuing an executive order to tackle it both at home and abroad. This involved rejoining The Paris Agreement and "creating a new presidentially appointed position, the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, to elevate the issue of climate change". The executive order also established "The White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy", charged with coordinating and implementing the President's domestic climate agenda, and constituted "The National Climate Task Force" consisting of 21 leaders from federal agencies and departments to promote a comprehensive government strategy in addressing the climate crisis. ("Executive Order 140008" 7619-7620; 7622-7623).

To further reach net-zero emissions, President Biden launched the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022. The IRA allocates new federal funds to reduce carbon emissions, lower healthcare costs, support the Internal Revenue Service, and enhance taxpayer compliance (Kumar et al.). In addition to these environmental actions, Bomberg highlights that President Biden emphasized the importance of government agencies and announced a "return to science" along with "the restoration of their prestige and respect" (631).

Furthermore, President Biden pledged to restore the nation's international relationships and enhance multilateral engagement by rejoining UN bodies, including the UN Human Rights Council, and reversing the U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO). He also doubled the U.S. international affairs budget (Savoy), directing funds towards healthcare and

food security. Through the *American Rescue Plan (ARP)* for COVID-19 relief, the U.S. donated more than 692 million vaccine doses to 117 countries and invested over $20 billion to enhance food production, provide crucial support to combat malnutrition, and foster more resilient food systems through international initiatives such as *Feed the Future* (Office of the Press Secretary).

Finally, the Biden Administration faces significant domestic challenges due to deeply rooted political polarization and inconsistent policy implementation, mainly Trump administration's environmental and climate policy. This polarization manifests in the growing partisan divisions that impede bipartisan legislative progress. For instance, the contradictory approaches to environmental challenges highlight this division. The Trump Administration sought to undermine environmental regulation and the institutions that support environmental and climate protection such as EPA. In contrast, the Biden administration emphasizes a "return to science", restoring the agencies' prestige and implementing new environmental protections regulations Bomberg 631). Despite this political polarization "the Biden Administration signals a clear pivot away from the previous administration's organizational ethos and priorities, replacing it with a respect for agency autonomy and a far more ambitious, science-based embrace of climate and environmental protection" (632).

2.2. Domestic Implementation

Biermann et al. state that "The SDGs aspire for universal application and are thus global in nature", they are interconnected and offer a set of integrated objectives to achieve the desired version of sustainability for all (28). While national government have agreed upon and implemented the SDGs, measuring their progress at the national level, cities play a vital role in advancing development. This importance is further emphasized by SDG 11, as cities are actively adopting and contextualizing the SDGs to fit their specific circumstances (8). Both The

Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Secretariat and Prakash et al. assert that "Cities are the locus of worldwide consumption and production", "Home to more than 54 percent of global population and responsible for 70 percent of global carbon emissions, they are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost" (11; 1). Moreover, Biermann et al. highlight that when countries and local governments embark on the SDGs, they need to consider several factors such as the level of development and the existing policies (28). Therefore, successful domestic implementation depends on evaluating the existing situation, identifying key priorities for action and setting a new agenda that aligns with the domestic or local context.

The challenges and opportunities for SDGs implementation are particularly evident in the US cities. As highlighted in SDSN's 2017 U.S. Cities SDG Index, America's cities, home to a large portion of domestic population and hubs of economic activities, are at a critical juncture in their progress towards implementing the SDGs and achieving sustainable life. The cities are experiencing severe challenges particularly income and job inequality, water shortage and drought, health inequity, persistent poverty, unemployment, and violent crime (Prakash et al. 1). These challenges necessitate focused attention and are directly aligned with the SDGs that the US works on. While the US lacks an official declaration of prioritized SDGs, did not submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR), which is a standard procedure for countries to communicate their priorities concerning the SDGs, federal and local initiatives and strategies highlight key areas (Pendrak et al.).

For instance, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) the US focuses its attention on addressing health inequities and improving healthcare access particularly in underserved areas (CDC' Office of Health Equity). SDG 5 (Gender Equality) is being progressed legislations and key institutions such as *The White House Gender Policy Council* which focuses on promoting woman's right, combat sexual abuse and gender-based violence, reducing wage gap and promote woman involvement in international events (Executive Order 14020 1-2). Additionally, to advance SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Biden administration elevated domestic manufacturing to create decent jobs in emerging industries. For SDG 13 (Climate Action), the US aligns its efforts with goal 13 through reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, cutting energy costs and tackling the climate change crisis (The White House).

2.2.1. Implementing the SDGs at the Local level

The United Nations Development Group defines localization as "the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable development goals and targets" (6). Kanuri further explains it as "the process by which local authorities and local stakeholders will adapt and implement these targets within cities and human settlements" and points that it may be initiated by "national government, local government, civil society and academia" (15; 23). Additionally, the localization process is vital, local governments adopt global targets based on pre-established global or national standards (40). Nevertheless, these goals must be modified to align with local context and relevance by establishing a local SDG agenda that addresses the city's specific challenges and development priorities. This agenda will be set by local authorities in collaboration with civil society and other stakeholders, where they select, adapt and prioritize the global goals and targets, emphasizing the use of empirical data and evidence-based decision-making (33).

Pipa et al. indicate that the US notably lacks incorporation of the SDGs within its international assistance efforts (12). Furthermore, Pipa highlights that the SDGs did not receive high-level political attention within US domestic policy leadership and continue to receive limited recognition as a relevant and valuable framework for addressing domestic challenges (47; 50). Despite that, different segments of American society have embraced the SDGs as a mean to promote social, economic and environmental priorities, establishing an environment for intersectoral partnership providing an opportunity for the US to reestablish its leadership and strengthen its credibility (12; 15). Accordingly, various actors within the US, including states, city governments, civil society organizations and universities have adopted the SDGs and demonstrated notable leadership in the implementation process (15). Both the 2017 and 2018 US Cities SDG Index reports underscore this growing commitment of local authorities, highlighting the emphasis that mayors and other local government leaders are placing on integrating sustainability principles into their jurisdiction and advancing development through a variety of initiatives adjusted to their local contexts.

Pipa et al. declare that "Cities, including New York and Los Angeles, and the state of Hawai'i have become prominent leaders in the global development community". New York City (NYC) has proactively engaged with the SDGs through its *Voluntary Local Review* (VLR), which has "created a global movement among local and regional governments to adopt and report on their achievement of the SDGs" (14), aligning local policies with global goals. The city also launched notable projects such as *Brooklyn Grange* founded in 2010, as "the leading rooftop farming and intensive green roofing business in the US", that contributes to local food production and green space. *The Nursery at Public Records* "a multifunction space and platform founded in New York in

2017" that seeks "to promote a connection between nature and urban life through events and plant-focused exhibitions" (Okada et al.).

In Hawai'i, *Hawai'i Green Growth,* a public-private partnership focused on balancing environmental, community, and economic health through the *Aloha+ Challenge,* a local framework fostering collaboration among diverse partners to achieve community-based goals by 2030. Announced by the state of Hawai'i and the U.S. Department of State, the challenge addresses six priority areas: clean energy transformation, local agriculture, natural resource management, solid waste reduction, green workforce and education, and smart sustainable communities (Hawai'i's Voluntary Local Review of Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals2; 4).

Additionally, several US Universities, including Arizona State University (ASU), have been in the forefront of adopting the SDGs, leveraging their intellectual capital and training the next generation of leaders (Pipa et al. 17). ASU has established itself as a global leader in advancing the SDGs. The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, a global performance table that assess universities' commitment to the SDGs, recognized ASU as No. 1 in the United States and top 10 ranking globally for its efforts to address the most pressing challenges through its initiatives such as *Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory*, an entity focuses on finding solutions to climate change, clean energy and equitable communities (Reinhart).

2.2.2. The US Contribution to Global Sustainability Efforts

In considering the USA contribution to global sustainability efforts, The President's Council on Sustainable Development denotes that:

> United States has both reason and responsibility to develop and carry out global
> policies that support sustainable development. Because of its history and power,

the United States is inevitably a leader and needs to be an active participant in

cooperative international efforts to encourage democracy, support scientific

research, and enhance economic development that preserves the environment and

protects human health. (PCSD)

Additionally, Pipa et al. assert that the US commitment to the SDGs is crucial to

the global community and achieving the goals by 2030 is heavily reliant on the

unwavering leadership of the US. Moreover, the SDGs offer an opportunity to address

several America's key challenges, and to establish and reinforce both its leadership and

credibility (12; Prakash et al. 3).

2.2.3. The US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

The US Environmental Protection Agency, formally known as EPA, is a federal agency

and an autonomous regulatory body. It was established by President Richard Nixon on December

2nd, 1970 as "a response to the evident problems of industrial emissions and public health, and

subsequent Congressional legislation aimed at reducing pollution" (Hecht and Fiksel 75) and to

consolidate environmental responsibilities through unifying "a sundry of governmental

departments, bureaus, councils, and other offices" (Bohannon et al. 781). As Andrews reveals,

what makes EPA "in many respects a unique agency in the overall structure of United States

governance [is precisely its formation] by presidential initiative rather than congressional

legislation" (223).

In his article "THE EPA AT 40: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE", ANDREWS

implies that EPA is a domestic agency with a core mission and responsibilities centered on

national environmental protection within the US (224-225). The agency focused on addressing

the most immediate and visible threats to human health and the environment, particularly

chemicals, pollution control and remediation with an emphasis on "waste water treatment, air

quality, and waste management" (Bohannon et. al 781). Hecht and Fiksel assert that to address

these problems, EPA has followed a reactive, regulatory and media- specific approaches, with a

heavy relines on command-and-control regulations, end-of-pipe solutions and risk assessment

(75; 78). Andrews and Bohannon et al. state that these approaches have been implemented

through several programs that EPA initiated such as the Clean Water Act to restore and maintain

the integrity of the nation's waters and the Clean Air Act to regulate emissions and set air quality

standards (227; 781).

2.2.4. The Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act, officially known as the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, was

enacted in 1972. Kapp et al. explain its evolution, stating that the Federal Water Pollution Control

Act was established in response to both "growing public concern for controlling water pollution

in the environment, which latter was amended in 1977 and became known as the Clean Water

Act (CWA)" (979), and a recognition of the constraints of state-level regulations to adequately

address the issue (Hines 5). In relation to its historical context, Hines defines the act as an

ambitious and a key piece of US federal legislation (2) and emphasizes its significance,

underscoring its purpose to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity

of the Nation's waters" (FEDERAL WATER POLLUTION CONTROL ACT 3).

The CWA encompasses numerous provisions that "were carefully constructed and

interconnected to work together to create a coherent and unified federal approach" (Hines 38) to

fulfil the ultimate objective of "eliminating the discharge of all pollutants into the navigable

waters and creating an interim level of water quality to provide for the protection of fish,

shellfish, and wildlife and recreation" (Kapp et al. 979). A key provision is the National Pollutant

Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). The NPDES is a new permit system that regulates the

discharge of pollutants into the nation's waters, requiring "all dischargers of pollutants to apply at

least secondary treatment or "best practical technology" (BPT) to their wastewater streams by specified deadlines" (Hines 33).

Furthermore, Kapp at al. also indicate that the Clean Water Act mandates the Water Quality Standards (WQS) and requires states to administrate them (980). The WQS are regulatory benchmarks established to protect the integrity of water bodies by assessing and regulating water quality. This framework define the acceptable levels of pollutants and the designated uses of water, such as fishing or swimming, along with criteria to protect those uses (980).

Finally, The Clean Water Act (CWA) has had a significant impact on water quality management in the United States. Although, it established a framework for regulating pollutant discharges and emphasized the importance of water quality standards, it still faces several challenges and ongoing issues, mainly, the persistent problem of nonpoint source pollution.

2.2.5. The Clean Air Act

The Clean Air Act (CAA) is a comprehensive federal law was enacted in the United States in 1963 to "improve, strengthen, and accelerate programs for the prevention and abatement of air pollution" (Public Law 88-206 392). The CAA core purpose is to protect public health and prevent any environmental damage by reducing and eliminating air pollution through encouraging "state, local governments and air pollution control agencies to conduct research and create control programs" (Kapp et al. 976). The Clean Air Act has been amended several times notably in 1967, 1970, 1977 and 1990 to strengthen regulations and address new issues.

To begin with, the 1967 statute, commonly referred to as The Air Quality Act, marked a significant step towards enhancing federal authority to regulate air quality. Nevers states that the 1967 legislation allowed local governments to designate air quality regions across the country, set and enforced pollution control standards (1) and established the National Ambient Air Quality

Standards (NAAQS) for stationary sources to "monitor ambient air" (Kapp et al. 976). Moreover, the Clean Air Extension of 1970 maintained the original 1963 CAA objectives, but also underlined a new approach focused on raising "the consciousness of the American public and American business regarding the importance of pollution control" (Nevers 2). Accordingly, Kapp et al. point that the 1970 CAA introduced six 'criteria' pollutants to elevate the efficacy of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and protect the public health and the environment. These pollutants include: Carbon monoxide, Nitrogen dioxide, Ozone, Sulfur dioxide, Lead and Particulate matter" (976). The CAA also developed a New Source Performance Standards (NSPS) to "regulated emissions of any new sources of air pollution entering an area", introduced two categories of air-quality standards; the first impose restrictions to safeguard public health and the second enforce limits to preserve public welfare and established the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants, requiring a maximum achievable control technology (MACT) for 189 pollutants that may increase fatalities or serious illness, as determined by the EPA (976).

Lastly, the 1977 and 1990 amendments significantly improved US air quality management, extending compliance timelines and addressing ozone depletion, while expanding hazardous pollutants scope (977). Nevers declare that the 1970 Clean Air Act amendments not only reduced air contaminations and improved air quality, but also influenced the current consensus that air pollution control should be a top priority for the federal government (4).

However, Hecht, Fiksel and Walker state that over decades the Environmental Protection Agency has evolved its focus, approaches and programs due to the scientific advancements, public concerns about emerging environmental threats, political and economic factors and mainly the influence of sustainable development. By embracing the sustainable development principles, EPA has adopted new proactive, integrated, preventative and source reduction approaches that

resonate with these principles (78-79; 2). To manifest these approaches, the agency launched

many programs, such as 'Smart Growth' to promote sustainable urban development and

'Brownfields Program' to encourage the cleanup and redevelopment of contaminated properties

(Walker 5). As it engaged in various domestic and international cooperation to support global

sustainability efforts particularly on issues like climate change (FY 2022-2026 EPA Strategic

Plan 9).

2.2.6. The Brownfields' Program

The Brownfield Program is an action agenda launched by the administrator of the US

Environmental Protection Agency, Carol Browner, on January 25, 1995. The program details the

actions and initiatives that EPA undertook to "empower States, communities, and other

stakeholders in economic development to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess,

safely clean up, and sustainably reuse Brownfields" (Sullivan 4) and also aimed "to eliminate

sources of contamination while at the same time stimulating economic

redevelopment" (Griffiths 371). Sullivan states that the program "provides grants to assess and

clean up brownfields" (2) which are defined in Public Law 107-118 as "real property, the

expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential

presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant" (2361). The Brownfields Program

operates through a multi-faced mechanism with grants serving as a key provision. As Sullivan

declares, these "grants serve as the foundation of the Brownfields Program and support land

revitalization efforts by funding environmental site assessment, cleanup, and job training

activities" (4-5).

Greenberg and Issa assert that in 1993, the Brownfields Program began with awarding 22

grants to local governments for surveying potential brownfields and developing cleanup and

reuse plans. Over time, the program evolved into a competitive grant system, allocating funds to

various recipients, including local and state governments, by 2002, the program had distributed grants of about $200,000 each to 436 local governments, often in economically distressed neighborhoods. Furthermore, the USEPA expanded the program by implementing a showcase program, a revolving loan fund, and job development and training programs for successful local brownfield sites (84-85).

The Brownfields Program has been remarkably efficient in recovering sites for productive use, influencing local economies and communities (83). According to the National Governors Association, the program succeeded in revitalizing more than 40,000 site in a short time (8). The redevelopment of these properties can create new jobs for local residents, elevate tax base and local tax revenues, improve public health and improve the region's quality of life by enhancing recreational opportunities, environmental quality and other services (Sullivan 2).

2.2.7. The US Agency for International Development (USAID)

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy to promote economic development, healthcare, democracy, and humanitarian aid in developing nations (Oliver). The agency functions under the premise that advancing global security and prosperity is aligned with U.S. purposes, and that foreign aid can be an effective way to achieve these objectives. Since its creation, USAID has supported a variety of initiatives, from disaster relief and public health to economic growth, democratic governance, and environmental sustainability (Oliver).

Furthermore, Tarnoff stated that USAID plays a crucial role in managing substantial financial resources, with responsibility for more than $20 billion in appropriations in FY2015, representing a significant portion of the International Affairs budget and foreign assistance funds. The agency's extensive operations span across numerous countries, providing assistance to 125 countries in FY2013 and maintaining a field presence with over 60 country and regional missions

(1). Subsequently, these roles are guided by strategies found in key documents such as the President's Policy Directive on Global Development and the USAID Policy Framework. The agency works with bilateral and international donors, the private sector, and traditional recipient governments and NGOs (2). Finally, USAID also supports scientific research and innovation to address development problems (7).

2.2.7.1. Health

USAID's social development programs are designed to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities by focusing on critical sectors such as health, education, and governance. In the domain of health, USAID has played a central role in combating major global health challenges, including HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, through initiatives that provide essential medical supplies, train healthcare professionals, and reinforce overarching health systems (Tomja 452-453). In this regard, the ongoing Ebola outbreak in West Africa is still a major focus for the world, drawing in attention and resources to control the spread and aid the affected nations. It is important to mention that the United States and its worldwide partners have made significant progress in addressing this crisis, which peaked in September 2014 (Rhodes and Boland 1-2).

Tomja pointed that for many years, the United States has been committed to African people's health, cooperating with African nations to provide assistance and training to their healthcare and scientific specialists to address common health issues. This collaboration has also led to the creation of National Public Health Institutes in several African countries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, leading to improved health outcomes, lower death rates, and facilitated access to essential healthcare services (452-453).

2.2.7.2. Agriculture and Food Security

      Through a series of strategic agricultural initiatives that are intended to enhance the livelihoods of underserved populations in low-income countries, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has significantly improved the fields of nutrition and food security. The Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project is an important initiative that aims to improve the nutritional status of mothers, infants, and young children. This project is based on the 25-year leadership of USAID in maternal and child nutrition, with an emphasis on interventions that have been proved to be effective during pregnancy and the first two years of life. In addition, USAID has provided support to agricultural programs in Ethiopia that encourage market-oriented dairy production. This has resulted in a 72% increase in household incomes for those who have adopted these practices in comparison to non-adopters, thereby increasing both food and non-food expenditures. The adoption of innovative rice production technology in Gambia, which was supported by USAID, resulted in a 13% increase in real incomes for households and increased employment in agricultural labour. This benefit was notably felt by lower-income families.

      Furthermore, in order to mitigate any potential adverse effects on food security and the production of high-value crops, USAID implemented agricultural technologies in Uganda that increased the yields of local food crops and agricultural exports (5). Ultimately, USAID's objective is to establish a more productive and healthier workforce by addressing the interconnected relationship between food access, income generation, and nutritional health. These initiatives serve to underscore USAID's commitment to integrating nutrition and food security objectives into agricultural development.

2.2.7.3. Biodiversity

Our health, wealth, food, fuel, and other services depend on biodiversity conservation, which is the process of safeguarding and maintaining the planet's abundance and diversity of species, habitats, ecosystems, and genetic variation. This process is essential for ecological balance and supports various development sectors ("USAID and Biodiversity").

Notably, food security is dependent on natural resources, and biodiversity is critical to agriculture and ecosystem functions such as soil fertility, pollination, and pest management. However, irresponsible farming practices and misuse of wild animals can have a negative impact on biodiversity. On the other hand protecting biodiversity promotes economic growth and poverty reduction, especially in rural areas where millions rely on forests, fisheries, and farming for living, for example 2.6 billion people rely on fisheries for food and money, and seafood is the world's most traded food product ("USAID and Biodiversity"). Furthermore, biodiversity conservation helps to combat climate change by protecting habitats that store carbon and defend against natural disasters such as floods. Sustainable resource management also can help to prevent conflict and instability by protecting local rights and encouraging community-based management. In this regard, USAID invests more than $200 million a year in biodiversity conservation initiatives across 60 nations ("USAID and Biodiversity").

For instance, in Guatemala USAID is attempting to stop deforestation and protect the Maya Biosphere Reserve's biodiversity by enabling developed nations to buy carbon offsets equivalent to carbon saved through prevented deforestation, sustainable forestry and the Rainforest Alliance's Gate Carbon program seek to lower carbon emissions while also bringing in additional funds for local populations. Additionally, according to USAID's Fisheries Improved for Sustainable Harvest project in the Philippines, productive fisheries with robust local government can reverse the fall in fish catches. Fish value climbed by 73% and capture per fisher

grew by nearly 20% between 2004 and 2008 because of the project, which also restored fish stocks and raised food supplies and incomes for coastal families ("USAID and Biodiversity").

2.3. From Global Goals to National Action: What the SDGs Mean for U.S. Policy

To understand how the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) affect U.S. policy, it is important to explore how these global objectives align with American priorities, both at home and abroad. The SDG framework offers a roadmap for more inclusive, coordinated, and future-focused governance, opening the door for policy partnerships and innovative solutions that respond to shared global challenges.

When the UN adopted the SDGs in 2015, it marked a worldwide commitment to tackling some of the most urgent issues of our time: poverty, inequality, climate change, and public health, among others. While the goals are not legally binding, they have influenced many aspects of U.S. policy—from environmental regulations to social equity programs and international aid strategies (Brookings Institution, *American Leadership in Advancing the SDGs*).

Within the U.S., the SDGs provide a useful lens for rethinking how we address long-standing domestic issues. For instance, Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) point to areas where further progress is needed. Advancing these goals would involve investing in healthcare access, expanding clean energy infrastructure, and strengthening social safety nets. Integrating SDG targets into policymaking at the federal, state, and local levels could help build a more sustainable, equitable society.

Internationally, the SDGs offer the U.S. a platform to demonstrate leadership on sustainability and global cooperation. Goals like Climate Action (Goal 13) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) align closely with U.S. foreign policy tools, such as development aid, multilateral diplomacy, and strategic partnerships. By aligning foreign policy

with the SDGs, the U.S. can not only promote democratic governance and environmental protection abroad but also reinforce its credibility as a global leader in sustainable development (Brookings Institution, *The SDGs: A Second-Half Opportunity*).

One of the most urgent policy areas influenced by the SDGs is climate and environmental protection. Goals like SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life below Water), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) highlight the interconnectedness of environmental systems. For the U.S., this means adopting more ambitious climate policies, expanding investment in renewable energy, and taking stronger steps to protect ecosystems and biodiversity. These actions are vital not just for meeting global commitments, but for ensuring, the country's environmental and economic resilience in the face of growing climate threats (Brookings Institution, *The State of the Sustainable Development Goals*).

The SDGs also have significant implications for U.S. global health policy. Initiatives like the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) contribute directly to Goal 3 by fighting disease, improving health systems, and ensuring access to care. Continued U.S. investment in global health efforts supports progress overseas while also enhancing worldwide preparedness for health emergencies with far-reaching impacts (Brookings Institution, *American Leadership in Advancing the SDGs*).

2.4. Building a Shared Future: U.S.-UN Collaboration on the SDGs

The partnership between the United States and the United Nations has played a pivotal role in advancing global efforts toward sustainability. Together, they have helped shape the international agenda on critical issues like climate change, poverty, and inequality. As the world faces increasingly complex and interconnected challenges, their continued collaboration holds the potential to drive innovation and strengthen the global push toward a more sustainable future.

Looking ahead, it is essential to consider how the U.S. and the UN can evolve their relationship to further support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This means finding ways to deepen multilateral cooperation, better align domestic and international policy efforts, and leverage U.S. leadership to promote sustainability and equity worldwide. By examining current trends, opportunities, and challenges, we can begin to outline a path forward for this vital partnership.

One of the key areas for future collaboration lies in enhancing local engagement. While federal involvement with the SDGs has been inconsistent, U.S. cities, like New York, have taken the lead in forming direct partnerships with the UN. This kind of "municipal diplomacy" is becoming an important tool in global governance, offering a bottom-up approach to achieving international goals.

A particularly promising initiative is the rise of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). Launched by New York City in 2018, VLRs allow cities to track and report their progress toward the SDGs using local data. Dozens of cities around the world have since adopted this model. Expanding VLRs to more U.S. cities and states would not only boost national contributions to the SDGs but also create a more accurate picture of how local communities are advancing sustainability (New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs, *Leading Locally*).

Another major opportunity lies in the exchange of knowledge and technical assistance. The UN can support U.S. cities and states by offering expertise, data standards, and guidance— especially for those communities that want to incorporate sustainability into their planning but lack the resources or expertise. In turn, U.S. local governments can share their own innovations in areas like climate resilience, data integration, and community-driven development. This two-way exchange helps elevate best practices globally (UN-Habitat, *World Cities Report 2024*).

Yet, some significant challenges remain. One of the biggest is the fragmented nature of policymaking in the U.S., where local, state, and federal goals often do not align. This lack of coordination can lead to missed opportunities and inefficiencies. Additionally, smaller and rural communities frequently lack the funding and staff needed to engage fully in international sustainability work (Hanmer & Hendrie).

To address these issues, future U.S.–UN cooperation must prioritize broader and more accessible funding mechanisms, such as federal grants tied to SDG performance, and encourage the creation of state-level strategies that connect local efforts to global goals. It will also be essential to engage civil society and the private sector more deeply, ensuring that sustainability initiatives are inclusive, durable, and community-focused.

Ultimately, the future of U.S.-UN sustainability collaboration will depend less on federal action alone and more on the energy and creativity of local leaders. Across the country, cities and states are stepping up to fill the gaps, setting their own sustainability goals and aligning them with the global agenda. Strengthening this bottom-up momentum through coordinated frameworks, mutual accountability, and shared vision will be key to reaching the SDGs, both in the U.S. and around the world, by 2030.

The next chapter of this report turns to one of the most compelling examples of this local-global alignment: New York City. As a global hub with ambitious sustainability goals, NYC shows how local governments can drive meaningful progress from the ground up.

Chapter Three

Sustainability Strategies in U.S. States and Cities: The New York City Experience

In the face of mounting environmental challenges, economic inequalities, and the growing urgency of climate change, subnational governments across the United States have emerged as key actors in advancing sustainability. While federal leadership on sustainable development has fluctuated over the years, many states and cities have adopted policies and strategies aimed at building more resilient, inclusive, and environmentally responsible communities. These local efforts often align with, or even exceed, global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting a bottom-up approach to sustainable governance that responds directly to the needs and priorities of diverse communities.

Among U.S. cities, New York City stands out as a pioneer in urban sustainability planning. With its ambitious environmental policies, robust data tracking, and commitment to equity, the city has positioned itself as a global leader in sustainable urban development. Initiatives such as *PlaNYC* and *OneNYC* illustrate how a densely populated, economically dynamic metropolis can develop integrated strategies that address climate resilience, social inclusion, public health, and infrastructure modernization. These initiatives reflect not only the city's unique challenges and opportunities but also its intent to align local policy with international goals, including the SDGs.

This chapter explores the broader landscape of sustainability strategies among U.S. states and municipalities, using New York City as a central case study. It examines how the city's approach exemplifies broader trends in American subnational sustainability policy, highlights innovative practices, and identifies lessons that may be transferable to other urban and regional contexts. By analyzing New York City's experience, the chapter aims to shed light on the critical role cities can play in driving sustainable development and shaping a more equitable and resilient future.

3.1. UE States and Cities Advancing the SDGs; Policies and Practices

The 2030 Agenda underlines the imperative to adopt an inclusive and localized approach to the Sustainable Development Goals SDGs. Localization is defined as the process through which global, national, and subnational sustainability objectives are translated into locally tailored strategies, encompassing goal setting, implementation, and progress assessment. This process entails integrating sub-national contexts into the pursuit of the 2030 Agenda, from defining targets to selecting appropriate implementation methods and monitoring indicators (Jonga 130).

The SDGs were designed to be adaptable across various scales, enabling localization to ensure inclusivity and alignment among diverse governmental authorities and societal stakeholders toward shared objectives. Although the applicability of the SDGs may vary across cities, they can be strategically prioritized and adjusted to align with local conditions.

Urban centers in the United States, irrespective of size, display common purpose such as ensuring public safety, quality education, employment opportunities, affordable housing, accessible healthcare, environmental sustainability, and efficient transportation infrastructure (Mesa et al.6) These cities strive to foster equitable growth, benefiting both newcomers and established residents, with these priorities remaining consistent regardless of demographic, economic, or geographic differences. By embracing the SDGs, cities can enhance existing development frameworks, facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement among residents, government entities, and global urban networks (6). While federal adoption of the SDGs remains absent in the United States, states and local governments have become major leaders in localizing these worldwide goals (United Nations 14). Through three primary strategic approaches: policy alignment mechanisms, Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships, and targeted sustainability projects (Sellers et al. 42).

3.1.1. Institutional Alignment through Voluntary Local Reviews **VLRs**

Many states have adopted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), a framework pioneered by New York City in 2018 that enables cities to assess and report their progress on SDG implementation (New York Mayor's Office 12). Cities implement VLRs through a structured three-phase methodology that translates the SDGs into local action, starting with a comprehensive diagnostic stage where city officials analyze all municipal programmes and policies to identify which specific SDG targets they address. For instance, a public housing initiative might contribute to SDG 11 "sustainable cities", while a job training program aligns with SDG 8 "decent work".

This diagnostic phase generally employs standardized indicator frameworks established by the UN to guarantee measurement consistency (UN DESA 7). This phase often reveals critical gaps, such as New York city's discovery that despite overall progress, marginalized neighborhood councils, business associations, and university researchers in structured dialogues to review findings and co-create implementation phase translates these insights into concrete policy changes, exemplified by Los Angeles redirecting transportation funds to low-emission transit after its VLR highlighted misalignments with SDG 13" Climate Action" (LA Mayor's Office 8).

VLRs are more than just reporting tools; they serve as dynamic governance tools that in first place, enhance transparency through public dashboards tracking metrics like affordable housing units constructed or carbon emissions reduced. Furthermore, enabling strategic budgeting by identifying underfunded SDG targets, in addition to that, fosters peer learning through standardized reporting formats and demonstrates local commitment to global agendas functions particularly valuable for smaller cities like Ithaca, New York, which adapted the VLR framework to address hyper-local priorities like food security while maintaining UN compliance

(National Leagues of Cities 24). This three-stage approach balances global standardization with local flexibility, offering cities a proven pathway to institutionalized SDG implementation.

3.1.2. Strengthening SDG Implementation through Intersectoral Collaboration

Multi-stakeholder partnerships, defined as institutionalized collaborations between public sector entities, private corporations, civil society organizations, and academic institutions, have emerged as critical governance mechanisms for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in urban regions.

These cooperative structures, which capitalize on the comparative advantages of many societal actors, are especially effective at solving crosscutting sustainability concerns that transcend traditional administrative boundaries. The Los Angeles Sustainable Development Goal Cities Initiative exemplifies this approach through its tripartite governance structure that incorporates municipal agencies, University of California Los Angeles research teams (UCLA), and technology sector partners. This initiative developed an innovative public performance dashboard – a digital platform providing real-time visualization of seventy-eight indicators across all seventeen SDGs - This digital platform has informed the reallocation of $90 million in capital expenditures towards underserved communities (Los Angeles Sustainability Office 15). Furthermore, the Minneapolis Climate Partnership demonstrates another successful model through its legally binding memoranda of understanding with corporate entities including 3M Company and Xcel Energy, achieving a 33% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions while simultaneously creating unionized employment opportunities in the renewable energy sector (Minneapolis Climate Collaborative 9).

These partnerships frequently encounter power imbalances, in which businesses exert greater influence than community organizations. For instance, Seattle's Green New Deal initially experienced this challenge; however, it resolved it by allocating seats to local organizations on its

decision-making committee (Levin et al. 42). Indeed, Successful partnerships employ equitable

power-sharing systems, such as the Climate Task Force in New York City, which allocates equal

leadership responsibilities to community advocates and city officials (New York City Mayor's

Office 23).

3.1.3. Targeted Sustainability Projects: Achieving SDGs through Focused Interventions

Targeted sustainability projects are defined as discrete, time-bound initiatives addressing

specific SDG indicators that enables cities to manifest measurable progress while building

political support for broader policy reforms *(*SDSN*, USA Sustainable Cities* 14).

Unlike the legislative approaches, these focused interventions allow for testing innovative

solutions in smaller scales before expanding them across the city *(ICLEI USA* 7*)*. The Boston

Carbon Free Roxbury initiative illustrates this strategy's potential by combining geothermal

district heating systems; which use stable underground temperatures to regulate building

climates, with renewable energy micro grids, resulting in 92% reduction in operational emissions

for participating buildings (Boston Climate Action 17) and 34% decrease in resident energy costs

(MIT Energy Initiative 8).

These outcomes, which were closely documented through environmental and economic

metrics, served as the evidentiary foundation for a $200 million expansion to three additional

neighborhoods - Mattapan, Dorchester, and East Boston - that were selected based on comparable

climate vulnerability and infrastructure readiness (Boston Climate Action 23). The project's

transition from successful pilot to strategically targeted expansion demonstrates how focused

interventions can accelerate SDG implementation while ensuring equitable benefits for

vulnerable communities.

3.2. New York City's Plan to Achieve the SDGs by 2030

New York City has developed a comprehensive plan to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, reflecting its commitment to sustainable urban development and social equity. The city's strategy is primarily embodied in its long-term vision, OneNYC 2050, which integrates the SDGs into local policies and programs to address challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, housing, and public health (NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability). This plan positions New York City as a global leader in sustainability by aligning local actions with the global 2030 Agenda.

OneNYC 2050 outlines ambitious targets across multiple sectors, emphasizing resilience, equity, and sustainability. For example, the city aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, with significant milestones set for 2030 to curb pollution and increase renewable energy use (NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability). The plan also prioritizes affordable housing development, improved public transportation, and expanded access to quality education and healthcare, all of which are critical components of the SDGs related to poverty reduction, health, and well-being (NYC Voluntary Local Review 2019).

A key feature of New York City's approach is the integration of data-driven decision-making and community engagement. The city employs advanced data analytics to monitor progress on SDG-related indicators and adjusts policies accordingly, ensuring that efforts are both effective and equitable (NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability). Additionally, the plan includes extensive public participation processes, recognizing that achieving the SDGs requires collaboration with residents, businesses, and civil society organizations (NYC Voluntary Local Review 2019).

The city's commitment to inclusivity is evident in its focus on addressing disparities faced by marginalized communities. Initiatives under OneNYC aim to close gaps in income, education,

and environmental quality, aligning with SDG 10 on reducing inequalities (NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability). Furthermore, New York City actively collaborates with local and international organizations to share best practices and leverage resources, amplifying its impact beyond municipal boundaries (UN-Habitat).

New York City's OneNYC 2050 plan aims to achieve the SDGs by 2030 through an integrated focus on sustainability, equity, and resilience. The city not only commits to measurable targets but also fosters inclusive governance and innovation, positioning itself as a model for urban sustainability worldwide (NYC Mayor's Office of Sustainability; NYC Voluntary Local Review 2019).

This section will examine New York City's strategic framework for SDG achievement, with particular attention to its key initiative, OneNYC, and its subsequent evolution into OneNYC 2050. The discussion will also explore how the city integrates principles of sustainability and equity within its municipal governance, by analyzing the inherent goals, key indicators, and practical implementation mechanisms of New York's ambitious plan. This section aims to demonstrate how local governments can effectively translate global development objectives into actionable, place-based strategies that simultaneously address specific local needs and broader global responsibilities (City of New York, *OneNYC 2050: Building a Strong and Fair City*).

3.2.1. The OneNYC Plan: Conformity to Specific SDG Targets

The OneNYC 2050 Plan, launched under Mayor Bill de Blasio's administration, represents a seminal strategic agenda for New York City, explicitly designed to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This comprehensive plan addresses the city's most pressing urban challenges, including poverty, housing insecurity, entrenched inequalities, and the escalating impacts of climate change, while simultaneously fostering long-term economic vitality. Its integrated approach, focused on social equity, sustainable economic growth, and

robust environmental sustainability, conforms to numerous SDG targets, reflecting a holistic understanding of urban sustainability (NYC Mayor's Office, *OneNYC 2050* 10).

Direct and demonstrable alignment between OneNYC and the SDGs is evident across multiple goals, notably SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). For example, the plan's ambitious commitment to expanding affordable housing directly supports SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), striving to ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all city residents, a critical component of urban resilience (United Nations 9). Furthermore, OneNYC's stance on climate action, encompassing substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and the promotion of renewable and sustainable energy sources, directly mirrors SDG 13's global mandate to combat climate change and its associated impacts (City of New York, *PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done* 2022).

The OneNYC 2050 framework is characterized by its integration of specific, measurable targets and indicators that translate global goals into tangible local action; a prime example is the commitment to reduce the city's carbon footprint by 80% by 2050, a highly ambitious goal consistent with both local environmental objectives and the more encompassing SDG targets related to sustainable consumption and production (NYC Mayor's Office, *OneNYC 2050*, p. 30). Additionally, the plan's deep integration of equity-driven initiatives, such as enhanced access to healthcare services and comprehensive workforce development programs designed to address structural barriers, reflects SDG 10's emphasis on reducing socio-economic inequalities (NYC Mayor's Office, *OneNYC 2050* 22).

Launched in 2019, OneNYC 2050 represents an evolution of prior municipal sustainability frameworks, building upon foundational efforts like PlaNYC 2007 and the original OneNYC 2015. Crucially, it draws its strategic objectives from the SDG framework, providing a globally

recognized structure for local action. The plan is structured around eight strategic pillars, ranging from "A Vibrant Democracy" to "A Livable Climate," which broadly correspond to, and operationalize, core SDG themes such as poverty eradication, clean energy transitions, social equity, quality education, and environmental protection (City of New York).

3.2.2. Policy Integration: Aligning OneNYC 2050 with SDG Targets

New York City's OneNYC 2050 plan exemplifies a sophisticated approach to localizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is done through institutionalized policy integration, which systematically links municipal programs to 54 specific SDG targets, for instance, the city's ambitious affordable housing program directly addresses SDG 11.1 (adequate, safe, and affordable housing) by connecting its goal of 300,000 affordable units to neighborhood-level affordability metrics (New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development 2021).

This technical alignment is reinforced by robust governance structures that incorporate SDG monitoring within routine municipal operations. The Mayor's Office of Climate and Sustainability conducts annual audits using SDG-aligned indicators, fostering vertical accountability across city agencies (PlaNYC, 2022). However, the OneNYC 2050 plan also reveals inherent tensions within neoliberal urban governance, while it effectively measures tangible outcomes like renewable energy adoption (SDG 7.2), it systematically excludes informal housing data from its SDG 11 monitoring (Marcuse, 2018). This selective implementation underscores both the potential and limitations of market-driven approaches to achieving sustainable development.

3.2.3. The Role of NYC's Voluntary Local Reviews

New York City's Voluntary Local Reviews VLRs play a crucial role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level by providing a transparent and

accountable framework for reporting progress directly to the United Nations. Initiated in 2018, NYC was the first city globally to submit a VLR during the UN High-Level Political Forum, setting a precedent for local governments to actively engage in the global sustainability agenda (NYC Mayor's Office of International Affairs). The VLR process is modeled after the Voluntary National Reviews submitted by countries, but it specifically focuses on the unique challenges and achievements of local jurisdictions, thereby recognizing the essential role cities play in implementing the 2030 Agenda (UN-Habitat).

The VLR serves multiple functions. Primarily, it allows New York City to map its existing strategies, programs, and data to the SDGs, ensuring that local policies align with global goals. For instance, as it is mentioned before, the city's comprehensive strategic plan, OneNYC 2050, is directly linked to the SDGs and forms the basis for the VLR reports, which highlight progress on issues such as climate action, economic equality, education, and justice (NYC Voluntary Local Review 2019). This alignment helps translate local actions into the common language of the Global Goals, making the city's efforts understandable and comparable on an international platform (NYC Mayor's Office of International Affairs).

Moreover, the VLR process fosters collaboration sharing among stakeholders. It commits the city to provide forums where experiences and lessons learned can be exchanged, enhancing collective learning and innovation in sustainability practices, this collaborative aspect is vital as it encourages other local and regional governments worldwide to join the VLR movement, creating a global network of cities committed to sustainable development (NYC.gov; UN-Habitat). By publicly reporting both successes and challenges, NYC's VLR promotes transparency and accountability, which are essential for continuous improvement and trust-building with residents and international partners.

In addition to reporting, NYC's VLR initiative includes engagement activities such as site visits for the UN diplomatic community, showcasing practical examples of the city's work on specific SDGs. These activities demonstrate the integration of sustainability efforts across various sectors (NYC Mayor's Office of International Affairs). The voluntary nature of the VLR also allows flexibility for cities to tailor their reporting to local contexts while contributing to a global dialogue on sustainable development.

Indeed, New York City's Voluntary Local Reviews are instrumental in localizing the SDGs by providing a structured yet adaptable framework for measurement, reporting, and collaboration. They enable NYC to lead by example, inspire other cities, and contribute to the global effort to achieve the 2030 Agenda (NYC.gov; UN-Habitat; NYC Voluntary Local Review 2019).

3.3. New York City's Progress in Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

As one of the world's largest and most densely populated cities, New York City faces significant challenges in addressing climate change and reducing its environmental impact. Recognizing the urgent need to curb greenhouse gas emissions, the city has implemented a series of ambitious policies and initiatives aimed at transforming its energy consumption and infrastructure. This section examines New York City's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, highlighting key strategies, legislative actions, and measurable outcomes that demonstrate the city's commitment to a sustainable and resilient future.

The city aims to reduce its GHG emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to 2005 levels, a goal known as "80×50" (Office of the New York City Comptroller). This target aligns with broader state goals under New York State's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, which mandates a 40% reduction by 2030 and an 85% reduction by 2050 from 1990 levels (NYSERDA; Brooklyn Law School Guides).

The majority of New York City's emissions approximately 68% originate from its buildings, which use fossil fuels for heating, cooling, and cooking, and often have energy-inefficient systems (Office of the New York City Comptroller). To address this, the city passed the Climate Mobilization Act in 2019, including Local Law 97, which sets strict emissions limits on large buildings over 25,000 square feet and requires green infrastructure such as solar panels and green roofs for new constructions (Office of the New York City Comptroller). These laws are expected to reduce emissions from the city's largest buildings by 40% by 2030 and 80% by 2050.

Progress has been mixed but promising. According to the city's 2015 greenhouse gas inventory, emissions were 14.8% lower than in 2005, largely due to cleaner electricity generation and fuel switching from oil to natural gas (Level Infrastructure). However, direct energy consumption in buildings has not decreased as rapidly as hoped, with some recent years showing leveling or slight increases in emissions per building area, particularly from heating (Level Infrastructure). Despite these challenges, the city remains on track to meet its interim target of 40% reduction by 2030, supported by ongoing policies and technological adoption such as electric vehicles and heat pumps (NYSERDA).

City government operations have also demonstrated leadership by reducing their own emissions by approximately 26% since 2006, with a 6% reduction between fiscal years 2022 and 2023 alone, helped by emission reduction projects and favorable weather conditions (NYC Greenhouse Gas Inventory Methodology 2023). The city continues to expand renewable energy supply, increase electric vehicle adoption, and improve energy efficiency across sectors to drive further reductions (NYSERDA).

3.3.1. New York City's Achievement in Increasing Renewable Energy Use

As one of the world's largest and most influential cities, New York City has embarked on an ambitious transition toward renewable energy as part of its broader climate and sustainability

goals. Guided by its comprehensive OneNYC 2050 plan, which aligns with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the city is implementing groundbreaking policies and projects to shift away from fossil fuels. These efforts target reducing emissions across buildings, transportation, and the power grid, improving air quality and creating economic opportunities. Through a combination of stringent and supportive local legislation, large-scale clean energy initiatives, and strategic investments in modern, green infrastructure, NYC is making notable progress in increasing its renewable energy use, thereby demonstrating significant leadership in urban climate action.

The City is driving its renewable energy transition through progressive policies that complement infrastructure projects. A cornerstone of this effort is Local Law 97, part of the landmark Climate Mobilization Act, which sets strict emissions' limits for the city's largest buildings ("Climate Mobilization Act"). This law mandates a shift towards energy efficiency and clean power by requiring building electrification, thereby increasing demand for renewable electricity and supporting OneNYC 2050's carbon-neutral future and contributing to SDG 13 (Climate Action). Complementing this, the Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) mandates that municipally owned properties, including hospitals and schools, transition to renewable energy by 2030-2035, ensuring equitable access to clean power (NYSERDA). Further, the 2024 Tier 1 Renewable Energy Standard solicitation, administered by NYSERDA, has awarded contracts to large-scale projects, emphasizing community benefits and investments in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These integrated policies not only foster environmental sustainability but also advance social equity by reducing energy burdens on vulnerable populations.

Building on these foundational policies, NYC champions programs to make renewable energy accessible and equitable. Recognizing that rooftop solar is not feasible for everyone; a key success is the rapid expansion of Community Solar projects ("NYC Solar"). These installations,

often on large rooftops or unused land, allow residents and businesses to subscribe and receive bill credits for the solar power generated, saving money without installing panels themselves. Programs like **"Solarize NYC"** further lower costs by helping groups of homeowners or businesses install panels collectively. These initiatives ensure the benefits of the clean energy transition reach renters, low-to-moderate income households, and those with unsuitable roofs, embodying *OneNYC 2050*'s commitment to equity and inclusivity within SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Beyond these building and community-focused efforts, decarbonizing the Power Grid through Statewide Renewable Expansion is a core strategy for New York City, complementing building-specific efforts by fundamentally transforming its energy system. This transformation leverages aggressive state mandates, primarily New York's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), which requires 70% renewable electricity by 2030 ("New York State Climate Act"). The policy drives massive investments in large-scale projects supplying cleaner power directly to the city's grid.

Central to this strategy are offshore wind farms like Empire Wind 1. Located off Long Island, for which NYC has committed to purchasing 100% of its output to power government operations (Office of the Mayor, "Largest Municipal...Wind Procurement"). In addition, there is Sunrise Wind, which will deliver 924 MW of clean energy to the state grid, benefiting all city residents and businesses (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), ("Sunrise Wind Project"). Simultaneously, the state has executed contracts for 26 land-based renewable projects including solar, wind, and hydro that will generate over 2.5 GW of power for the statewide grid, enough for more than 670,000 homes, including many in NYC (NYSERDA). Crucially, the New York Power Authority (NYPA)**,** a key public entity, is accelerating this grid transformation through its own major initiatives.

NYPA's 2025 Renewables Strategic Plan outlines developing over 3 GW of renewable capacity through an initial portfolio of 37 projects across solar, wind, and hydroelectric power (NYPA). Complementing this generation, NYPA is investing $100 million in transmission upgrades, such as the Smart Path Connect project, specifically enhancing capacity to deliver renewable energy to downstate areas like NYC (NYPA). Additionally, NYPA is committed to phasing out small natural gas power plants within the city by 2030, replacing them with cleaner renewable energy sources and battery storage systems, directly cutting local emissions (NYPA). These combined offshore and land-based initiatives systematically reduce NYC's reliance on fossil fuels, making grid-wide decarbonization fundamental to achieving SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

3.3.2. Improving Access to Affordable Housing and Healthcare Energy Use

New York City is actively pursuing its sustainable development goals through a comprehensive strategy that significantly improves access to both affordable housing and vital healthcare infrastructure. Recognizing the interconnectedness of social equity, environmental sustainability, and resilient urban development, the city has launched numerous initiatives designed to enhance the quality of life for all residents. These efforts underscore NYC's commitment to creating a more equitable and sustainable future in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals mainly SDC 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

A cornerstone of NYC's strategy for affordable housing is the Housing New York initiative, launched in 2014 and ambitiously expanded, aiming to finance 300,000 affordable homes by 2032 through a combination of preservation and new construction (City of New York, *Housing Our Neighbors* 8). Complementing this, zoning reforms such as Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA) and Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) encourage new development to

include permanently affordable units, ensuring that growth benefits diverse income levels (New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, "Housing New York").

Furthermore, the city integrates sustainability into affordable housing through measures like Local Law 97, which drives energy efficiency retrofits in large residential buildings, reducing energy burdens for residents, and programs like ElectrifyNYC, offering support for clean energy upgrades in homes (New York City, "ElectrifyNYC"; "Climate Mobilization Act"). Public entities like the NYC Energy Efficiency Corporation (NYCEEC) also provide crucial financing for green projects in affordable housing (NYCEEC).

In parallel, New York City is vigorously improving its healthcare infrastructure. The NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) Revitalization focuses on modernizing aging facilities, expanding essential services, and strengthening community health centers to ensure equitable access to care across all neighborhoods (New York City, "Health + Hospitals"). This includes dedicated efforts to enhance primary care, mental health services, and overall public health infrastructure, bringing vital medical support closer to vulnerable populations. These improvements are critical for achieving SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by ensuring that healthcare is accessible and high quality for all New Yorkers.

Crucially, energy initiatives are enhancing the resilience and sustainability of both affordable housing and healthcare infrastructure. The state's Build Public Renewables Act (BPRA) mandates that municipally owned properties, including public housing and hospitals, transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030-2035, guaranteeing cleaner and more stable power for these essential facilities (NYSERDA). The New York Power Authority (NYPA) further contributes by developing new renewable energy capacity and upgrading transmission infrastructure to reliably deliver clean power to downstate areas. NYPA is also committed to phasing out local fossil fuel plants within the city, directly improving local air quality around

communities and healthcare centers (NYPA). These integrated efforts provide critical support to achieving SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and bolstering the resilience of NYC's social infrastructure against climate change impacts.

3.3.3. NYC Leading by Example and Investing in the Future

New York City demonstrates leadership by integrating ambitious investments in affordable housing and healthcare access with critical sustainability goals. The cornerstone "Housing Our Neighbors" plan aims to create or preserve 300,000 affordable homes, actively incorporating Mandatory Inclusionary Housing policies and promoting deep energy retrofits**.** This dual approach tackles the urgent need for shelter while simultaneously reducing emissions from buildings, the city's largest greenhouse gas source (City of New York, *PlaNYC* 18). Parallel investments ensure equitable healthcare; NYC Care guarantees access to comprehensive services for uninsured residents, while the public NYC Health + Hospitals system is proactively decarbonizing its energy-intensive facilities and enhancing climate resilience, directly linking public health infrastructure to the city's environmental future (NYC Health + Hospitals, "Building a More Resilient...").

NYC is making transformative, long-term investments in clean energy infrastructure and systemic decarbonization to secure a sustainable future The city is aggressively scaling renewable energy procurement, particularly offshore wind and solar. It is also mandating building electrification through Local Law 97, representing massive long-term investments aimed at securing a clean energy future, reducing the city's carbon footprint, and creating green jobs, all while navigating the complex challenges of equity and affordability inherent in such a profound transition (City of New York, VLR 2023 38-42).

3.3.4. NYC's Interlocking Challenges: Affordable Housing, Healthcare, Clean Energy and Emissions Reduction

New York City faces significant, interconnected challenges in its efforts to improve access to affordable housing and healthcare, increase renewable energy use, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The high cost and scarcity of land pose fundamental hurdles for new developments and necessary retrofits, particularly when integrating energy efficiency upgrades or on-site renewable solutions like solar panels, which add considerable upfront expenses (City of New York, *PlaNYC* 17). While the city aggressively pursues large-scale clean energy, its dense urban environment and existing grid infrastructure present complex logistical challenges in integrating vast amounts of power from sources like offshore wind farms and expanding limited rooftop solar capacity, necessitating substantial investment in transmission infrastructure (City of New York, *VLR 2023* 42).

These efforts are further complicated by the sheer scale and age of the city's building stock, including affordable housing and healthcare facilities, requiring costly deep retrofits for electrification and efficiency (City of New York, *PlaNYC* 21). Moreover, the city must navigate the complexities of decarbonizing its transportation, energy, and waste systems, ensuring a just transition for impacted workforces, all while managing the compounding pressures that extreme weather events place on its energy grid and critical infrastructure (City of New York, *VLR 2023* 45; *PlaNYC* 32).

3.4. The Future of US-UN Collaboration for Sustainability

The urgency of the climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and persistent inequality demands unprecedented global cooperation. As the world's largest economy and a founding member of the United Nations, the United States holds a pivotal role in shaping the international sustainability agenda. The future effectiveness of US-UN collaboration will be a critical determinant in

achieving the ambitious targets set by the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, requiring sustained commitment, innovative partnerships, and enhanced multilateral frameworks.

The future of US-UN collaboration builds upon a foundation revitalized by the Biden administration's re-engagement with key multilateral frameworks. Most significantly, the US rejoined the Paris Agreement on day one of the administration and substantially increased its financial pledges to critical UN climate funds, notably the Green Climate Fund (GCF), signaling a decisive return to global climate leadership (The White House, "FACT SHEET: United States Highlights..."). This renewed commitment provides essential political momentum and financial resources necessary for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally.

Building on this renewed foundation, sustained high-level US participation in core UN sustainability forums is vital. Active involvement in the UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs), in the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and in initiatives like the Summit of the Future allowed the US to help set ambitious global agendas, negotiate critical agreements, and demonstrate ongoing commitment to multilateral solutions for shared challenges like climate adaptation and resilient infrastructure development (United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*).

Deepening future collaboration hinges on the US leveraging its influence to drive systemic financial reform alongside the UN. A critical pathway is championing changes within international financial institutions (IFIs) to unlock vastly increased, affordable finance for sustainable development and climate action in developing nations, aligning with the UN Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus plan (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilized...*). Concurrently, collaboration must accelerate the global deployment of clean energy, pairing US technological expertise and

investment with UN programs like Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL) to ensure equitable access and transition pathways.

Complementing financial and energy initiatives, strengthening data cooperation through platforms like the UN World Data Forum is essential for robust SDG monitoring and accountability. Furthermore, US-UN partnerships must foster innovation in critical areas such as sustainable agriculture, circular economy models, and digital inclusion, mobilizing private sector investment alongside public funds (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilized...*). Successfully navigating persistent geopolitical tensions while maintaining unwavering US commitment to multilateralism will be paramount for maximizing the impact of this vital partnership in the decisive decade ahead.

This chapter explored the differing strategies used to implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the United States, highlighting the contrast between federal-level engagement and localized efforts in New York City. The findings indicate that, while the federal government's approach to the SDGs has been inconsistent and, at times, limited, New York City has proactively embraced the goals through initiatives like its OneNYC 2050 strategy and the Voluntary Local Review (VLR) process.

New York City's commitment illustrates how local governments can effectively drive global sustainability agendas through innovation and integrated planning. In the absence of sustained federal leadership, municipalities have emerged as vital platforms for translating global objectives into local action. The NYC model demonstrates the potential of city-level governance, collaborative policymaking, and inclusive stakeholder participation in advancing the SDGs. Realizing the full promise of sustainable development in the United States will require alignment and cooperation across all tiers of government, with cities continuing to play a central role in achieving the targets set out in the 2030 Agenda.

Conclusion

The adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 represented a defining moment in global development cooperation, articulating a comprehensive vision for a just, equitable, and sustainable world by 2030. With 17 goals and 169 targets, the 2030 Agenda is, by design, universal and aspirational—calling for action by all nations, regardless of income level or political context. While many governments around the world have responded with national strategies, institutional reforms, and international commitments, the United States has maintained a more complex and often ambivalent stance toward the SDGs. Within this national context of uneven engagement, New York City (NYC) emerges as a compelling counter-narrative: a city that has not only embraced the SDGs but has positioned itself as a global exemplar of local-level sustainable development.

This study has explored the nuanced relationship between the SDGs and U.S. governance through the lens of NYC. It has shown that although federal attitudes toward the SDGs have shifted across presidential administrations—from cautious endorsement under President Obama, to outright disengagement during the Trump era, to re-engagement under President Biden—the U.S. has lacked a consistent, institutionalized approach to the 2030 Agenda. Challenges such as concerns over sovereignty, political polarization, and fragmented governance have hindered the federal government's ability to mainstream the SDGs across policy sectors. Moreover, the absence of a national SDG strategy and the United States' failure to submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR) to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum signals a broader reluctance to integrate global development goals into domestic policy.

Amid this national vacuum, New York City has forged its own path. Through the development and implementation of the OneNYC 2050 strategic plan and a series of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), NYC has translated global goals into locally actionable policies. These

efforts have been bolstered by a commitment to measurable outcomes, stakeholder engagement, and institutional accountability. NYC's alignment with SDG targets in areas such as climate action (Goal 13), reduced inequalities (Goal 10), sustainable cities (Goal 11), and gender equity (Goal 5) underscores its commitment not only to local progress but also to international norms and values.

What distinguishes NYC is not only its early adoption of the SDGs but also its role in reimagining what localized sustainable development can look like in a high-income, highly complex urban environment. By engaging civil society, fostering cross-sector partnerships, and embedding SDG principles into city budgeting and planning mechanisms, NYC exemplifies multilevel governance in action. Its VLRs serve as both tools for accountability and instruments of soft power—demonstrating to other cities and national governments that localized efforts can be globally significant.

The juxtaposition between federal hesitation and local innovation offers important insights into the evolving geography of sustainable development governance. In an increasingly urban world, where cities house more than half the global population and drive the majority of economic and environmental trends, local governments are becoming indispensable actors in the SDG ecosystem. NYC's experience affirms that subnational entities can lead, even in the absence of top-down mandates. This decentralized approach to SDG implementation also holds promise for other U.S. cities, many of which share similar challenges and opportunities.

Yet, while NYC's progress is laudable, it also reveals the limitations of relying solely on local leadership. Persistent inequalities, environmental threats, and economic vulnerabilities demonstrate that sustainable development requires both vertical and horizontal integration. A coherent federal framework—aligned with city-level innovation and supported by civil society— is essential for ensuring that SDG implementation is comprehensive, inclusive, and enduring.

In conclusion, the case of NYC suggests a possible future in which sustainable development in the United States is driven from the bottom up. The city's model demonstrates that even amid federal ambivalence, meaningful progress toward the SDGs is possible through visionary local governance, strategic planning, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. For the U.S. to truly realize the promise of the 2030 Agenda, it must build upon such localized momentum—fostering collaboration across all levels of government and aligning domestic priorities with global goals. The journey toward sustainable development is as much about political will and institutional innovation as it is about metrics and indicators. NYC's story affirms that leadership at the city level can illuminate the path forward, not only for the nation but for the global community striving to achieve the SDGs.

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