COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY ANALYSIS OF SDG LOCALIZATION

SAUDI ARABIA

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Saudi Arabia is a unitary monarchy divided into 13 regions, each of which is headed by a prince belonging to the royal family. Each region has a regional council headed by an emir, appointed by the king, who has the rank of minister. Each region contains a number of governorates. In total, there are 118 governorates, containing a total of 285 municipal councils.[1]

Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Review (VNR).[2]

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The **Saudi Vision 2030** and related implementation programs, such as the **National Transformation Program 2020 (NTP 2.0)**, provide the foundations underpinning the integration of sustainable development goals into the national planning process.[3]

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

High-level political direction on SDG implementation is provided by the **Council of Ministers**, while coordination is ensured by the **Ministry of Economy and Planning**. The **Council of Economic and Development Affairs** is tasked with the implementation of Vision 2030, and a **Strategy Committee** proposes strategies for achieving it.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

The 2018 VNR was prepared following a participatory approach, led by the **Ministry of Economy and Planning** and engaging stakeholders from public institutions, the private sector and charitable societies and associations. The data collection and analysis was carried out by a **technical working group** under the leadership of the Ministry of Economy and Planning.

1.3 MONITORING

The **Ministry of Economy and Planning** is the body in charge of SDG reporting and data collection from other ministries and relevant stakeholders, while the **General Authority for Statistics** is responsible for building the indicators which measure progress made towards the realization of goals. Adapting the SDGs to the realities of Saudi Arabia is work in progress and further alignment and integration is expected to be achieved as the SDGs targets and indicators become incorporated into the government's detailed action plans and programs under the Vision 2030 framework.

2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG LOCALIZATION

The role of LRGs in SDG implementation is not clear: the consultation process was given no visibility, except for the **Future Saudi Cities Programme**,[4] linked to the Saudi Vision 2030. Also, the **National Spatial Strategy 2030** has been updated in cooperation with the UNDP. The strategy will support the realization of Vision 2030 at the level of the regions and municipalities. Furthermore, the updated strategy integrates the SDGs as well as the New Urban Agenda's objectives into the strategy's

1. UCLG, 2021, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/hlpf_2021.pdf
2. See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20230SDGs_English_Report972018_FINAL.pdf (2018)
3. In addition, Saudi Arabia has developed several strategies and plans that are bound to promote the SDGs. Among these are the National Environmental Strategy, the National Strategy for Conservation of Biodiversity, the Vegetation Restoration Strategy in Riyadh region, the National Plan for Management of Natural Disasters, the National Marine Disaster Management Plan and the National Chemical and Bacteriological Incidents Management Plan.
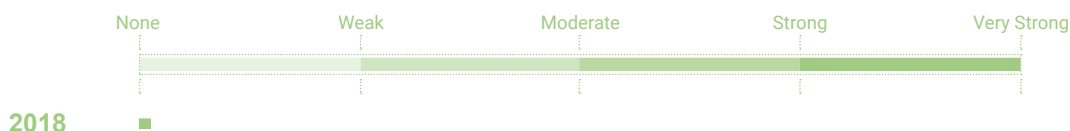4. The Future Saudi Cities Program, led by the Ministry of Municipalities, has paved the way for a revision of the regulatory framework relating to LRGs. UCLG, 2021, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/hlpf_2021.pdf

policies for spatial development.[5] Promoting the SDGs at the subnational level is mentioned as part of the major challenges identified in the 2018 VNR, but there is no evidence of any LRG involvement in the reporting process nor in national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation.
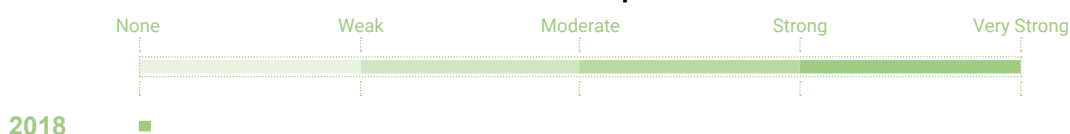
Regarding monitoring efforts, the 2018 VNR stresses that "particular attention will be paid to the adaptation and implementation of The SDGs at the subnational level and establishing systems for tracking and using SDG-related indicators in local decision making processes. The Ministry of Economy and Planning, as the coordinator for SDG implementation, will continue to offer capacity building support to relevant institutions, especially at the subnational level" (see VNR, 2018, p. 165).

2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

▶ **In the VNR process**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2018 ■

▶ **In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation**

None	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong

2018 ■

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNR and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

There are many references to provincial governments in the 2018 VNR, and less to municipal councils, and only very limited examples of locally-led initiatives for SDG implementation. However, in the review of the progress made towards SDG 11, a subsection is dedicated to **Riyadh** (see VNR, 2018, p. 115-118).

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

▶ With UNDP support, the **Riyadh** Urban Observatory has engaged in discussion with local actors to promote the integration of the SDGs and their related indicators in the Observatory's toolkit for monitoring and reporting on implementation in the city of Riyadh. Riyadh Urban Observatory monitors and assesses development trends and the impact of rapid growth of Riyadh. It seeks to develop sustainable urban monitoring systems, which will be used to support planning, link indicator results to policy and to promote and facilitate partnerships among sectors. The general framework of urban indicators has been developed based on the local vision of the Metropolitan Development Strategy for Riyadh (MEDSTAR), objectives of the National Transformation Program 2020 and 2025 and the global vision, as seen through the resource guide of the Global Urban Observatory, including the SDGs. Riyadh has been nominated as a local world cities' data center for SDGs 2030.

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

Al Madinah published a VLR in 2023.[6]

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Saudi Vision 2030 specifically addresses municipal finance.[7]

5. Saudi Arabia, faced with increasing urbanization rates, launched its National Spatial Strategy 2030 and Future Saudi Cities Programme (in partnership with UN-Habitat) to tackle urban sprawl reduction; promote spatially balanced planning and development; improve public transportation in and between major cities; promote national investment towards less-developed regions; and empower middle and small-sized cities and settlements as regional growth hubs. A major challenge will be the devolution of greater responsibilities to local governments. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf
6. See: https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/field-document/al_madinah_2023.pdf
7. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: Over the last ten years, there has been evidence of the role of local authorities expanding somewhat. The country's shift towards more deconcentration of administrative powers includes the establishment of regional authorities and the enhancement of the institutional capacity of local agencies. Elections — albeit limited to half the membership of local councils — were held in 2005, 2011 and 2015.[8] The local councils have been given nominal planning and development responsibilities and are specifically responsible for public health, the management of public space, and the issuance of building permits. However, they do not enjoy the same financial autonomy: the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs has dominated the formulation and implementation of urban policy. Although local councils prepare local master plans and monitor their implementation, ministries still have the power to overrule local decisions. Similarly, central government transfers still account for 70% of local expenditures. Only a handful of cities — **Riyadh, Jeddah**, and the holy cities of **Makkah** and **Madinah** — are granted the capacity to manage local finance and maintain a local budget. Some cities, however, are seeking revenue from municipal land property to raise additional financial resources, and have been experimenting with PPPs to attract private investment.[9]

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Saudi Arabia granted female citizens the right to participate in local politics in 2015: since then, 21 women have won seats in Saudi municipal councils.[10]

3.2 COVID 19

Not applicable.

4. SDG INDICATORS[11]

5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments		1.2 (2018)
6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%)	Urban	-
	Rural	-
6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%)	Urban	-
	Rural	-
11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%)		16.2 (2018)
11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%)		91.2 (2015, Riyadh)
11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted)		60.1 (2016)
11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%)		100 (2020)

8. In 2005, local elections in 178 municipalities were held for half of the seats in the municipal council. The last local elections were held in 2015 in 284 local councils, the first-ever elections open to female voters and candidates. UCLG, 2018, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/Towards_the_Localization_of_the_SDGs.pdf
9. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf
10. See: Hatoon Al-Fassi, 2017, "Is Female Suffrage in the Gulf Important?," LSE Middle East Center Blog, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2017/12/16/is-female-suffrage-in-the-gulf-important/
11. The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage. More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/sau