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## Challenges involved in the Localization of the Sustainable Developments Goals in El Salvador Between 2015-19 and for Implementing the 2030 Agenda

### Desafíos involucrados en la localización de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible en El Salvador entre 2015-19 y para la implementación de la Agenda 2030

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#### ABSTRACT

Since becoming a signatory of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, El Salvador has endeavored to incorporate these international commitments into its programmatic framework, its Five-Year Development Plan (2014-2019). The United Nations subscribed a support frame to enhance these efforts, based on the creation of a national sustainable development agenda in El Salvador. This involves coordination with the global development goals and indicators outlined in the SDGs in order to integrate social policies and national development plans. However, these efforts entail the identification of territories as specific units for implementing this national agenda, and measurement of the progress made towards fulfilment. This article examines the main difficulties and challenges involved in the localization of the municipalities for the 2030 agenda in the country.

**Key words:** SDG, 2030 Agenda, localisation, local government, El Salvador.

#### RESUMEN

A partir de la subscripción a la Agenda 2030 de Desarrollo Sostenible en el año 2015, El Salvador ha realizado esfuerzos para incorporar estos compromisos internacionales en sus marcos programáticos, así como una alineación a su Plan Quinquenal de Desarrollo (2014-2019). Para potenciar este esfuerzo, Naciones Unidas suscribió un marco de apoyo especializado a partir de la creación de una agenda nacional de desarrollo sostenible en El Salvador. Lo anterior supone la coordinación para la integración de las políticas sociales y los planes de desarrollo nacional con las metas e indicadores globales de desarrollo propuestos en los ODS. Sin embargo, estos esfuerzos

implican identificar a los territorios como unidades específicas para la implementación de esta agenda nacional y su correspondiente medición sobre el avance en su cumplimiento. Este artículo tiene el propósito de explorar las principales dificultades y desafíos de la localización de la agenda 2030 en los municipios salvadoreños.

**Palabras claves:** ODS, Agenda 2030, localización, El Salvador.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2015-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out an action plan aimed at people, the planet, prosperity, universal peace and justice, as well as strategic alliances. It is the embodiment of combined efforts to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which need to be implemented in the form of 169 targets in the economic, social and environmental spheres.

The main areas of progress made in El Salvador include the definition of a road map, institutional arrangements for fulfilling the Agenda, the signing of a cooperation agreement with the United Nations, the construction of a National Agenda for Sustainable Development for the medium term (2015 - 2019), raising of public awareness of the SDGs, and the involvement of various sectors. Efforts have also been made to prioritise progress in some key objectives within the framework of the United Nations accelerated implementation programme.

President Sánchez Cerén's government initially prioritised the following nine goals: SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 16 and SDG 17. A further objective was subsequently prioritised in May 2019; SDG 7. However, the process for prioritising goals and targets, adjusting and reviewing indicators as part of the alignment of multi-level planning instruments is presented for the SDGs to be achieved in the short term, without having taken the specific conditions of the regions and their localisation process in the 2030 agenda into consideration.

In May 2019, the government of El Salvador

presented a statistical report on the progress made in the indicators for the targets associated with the SDGs at the end of its administration. However, the document contains no clear alignment between the National Agenda for Sustainable Development and the territorial development plans of the Salvadoran municipalities; and as such, the new government of President Nayib Bukele which took office in June 2019 - 2024, must consider the challenges involved in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the territorial level. This study examines the main asymmetries in the municipalities resulting from the prioritisation of the SDGs at the national level.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA IN EL SALVADOR

The 2030 Agenda followed the Millennium Development Agenda, in terms of the need to continue international efforts to improve the living conditions of the world's population. Accordingly, the Agenda for Sustainable Development was approved in September 2015 with the consent of 193 States, including El Salvador. This entailed a political commitment to meet 17 major goals over the next 15 years.

Over the last decade, El Salvador has made significant progress in achieving some Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and this has laid the foundations for the strategic adoption of the new development agenda (UNDP 2013). The most significant areas of progress in the MDG included: the "reduction of extreme poverty in households by 49% (2000-2015), the reduction of infant mortality by 58% (2000-2014), the reduction

of maternal mortality by 20% (2007-2015) and a 17% increase (2000-2014) in the net rate of primary education” (GOES 2017). According to the UNDP World Human Development Report, “between 1990 and 2015, El Salvador was one of the Latin American countries with the most significant improvements in its Human Development Index, which rose from 0.529 to 0.680, an increase of 0.151” (UNDP 2016). These achievements were also reflected in the Voluntary National Review Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNDP 2017) presented that year at the United Nations in New York.

### **Post-2015 survey process**

In 2012, El Salvador was selected as one of the countries to carry out an unprecedented series of surveys to identify the main topics of multisectoral interest to the population. Thousands of people from different social groups and territories participated in this study. The role played by local governments, organised civil society and the university was fundamental in this task of making the agenda more accessible to the population.

The methodology applied to these consultation processes had four basic objectives: “to raise awareness of the importance of participation in these processes, to turn the post-2015 agenda into an input for territorial human development, to involve groups with a limited presence in debates in the country, and to create awareness about the shared responsibility of various sectors of society in constructing of the “country we want” (SETEPLAN 2014). The result of this process was the post-2015 consultation document, entitled “The future we want”, which was an instrument that provided inputs in the establishment of the SDGs with 192 other countries at the United Nations.

El Salvador was as a constant part of the processes involved in the creation of the development agenda, accepted this global framework of goals and targets, and set about adapting this global roadmap to the conditions in the country, by beginning the process involved in the construction of the National Agenda for Sustainable Development. As part of this process, El Salvador was selected as one of the 15 countries to participate in the accelerated implementation programme of the United Nations SDG. In response to this political commitment and the processes involved in establishing the national development agenda, the government of El Salvador undertook for its implementation a series of activities led by the Technical and Planning Secretariat of the Presidency (SETEPLAN) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MRREE).

SETEPLAN decided that in order to make progress in the implementation of the National Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Government had to “establish national coverage in two stages: a short-term agenda (until 2019) and a long-term national agenda (until 2030), the definition of which will require the leadership and combined efforts of government administrations (2019-2024 and 2024-2030) and society in general” (SETEPLAN, 2015). The short-term National Agenda for Sustainable Development was a commitment made by the government of President Sánchez Cerén (2014 -2019), after the approval of the global agenda in September 2015. Meanwhile, the long-term agenda (2019 - 2030) will cover the terms of office of subsequent governments, and how these should be aligned with and complement the outstanding issues from the previous administration.

In this context, after a technical analysis involving cooperation between multiple government agencies and United Nations experts, objectives have been prioritised and

the indicators that can be measured have been revised. In addition, other complementary indicators constituting the national framework for monitoring the SDGs have been established.

### Prioritisation of the Goals

As Álvarez (2016) points out: *“all countries, regardless of their development model, need to focus on specific goals and indicators to achieve their growth, and the international community must support their aspirations”*. Based on this assumption, in 2019 El Salvador prioritised ten <sup>1</sup> of the 17 SDGs, as well as 27 targets in SDGs 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15 and 14.

The prioritised goals were : No Poverty (SDG 1); Zero Hunger (SDG 2); Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3); Quality Education (SDG 4); Gender Equality (SDG 5); Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7); Climate Action (SDG 13); Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16); and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17). This prioritisation was based on 5 criteria used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and SETEPLAN, which are: “statistical capacity for the measurement of indicators, the availability of resources and sources of cooperation, priorities linked to the Five-Year Development Plan (FDP - 2014 - 2019), integration in the institutional agenda through the level of engagement with the agenda, and national priorities in the surveyed period” (GOES 2017).

SDGs 1 and 2, which are closely related to each other, start from the same perspective of national development due to the conditions of socio-economic vulnerability in the country, which remain a major challenge in social policy. Improving poverty rates facilitates aspects such as access to education, transportation, a decent life, and therefore adequate and safe

<sup>1</sup> SETEPLAN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had initially prioritised nine SDGs, and this situation was even outlined in the Voluntary National Review Report, and SDG 7 was included in this prioritisation in May 2019.

food, and it is therefore essential to measure poverty not only as a function of income, but also in an overall context (Di Paola 2015). In addition, the multidimensional poverty in El Salvador is considered the source of various social problems such as crime and public safety issues, and it must therefore be addressed.

In goals 3, 6 and 13, the environmental relationship created by health, water and climate are very important in a country with a small and vulnerable territory. This is not only related to domestic interests and needs, but also to the international agreements to which El Salvador is a party, such as the Paris Agreement of 2015. Regarding health and well-being, the plans includes a reduction in infant mortality and bringing diseases under control, which considering the basis of this relationship, are usually linked to environmental conditions. *“There is no life without water or land, there is no development, only the option of falling into the deepest poverty. There can be no well-being on a dead planet”* (Rijnhout and Meymen 2008).

As for SDG 5, concerning gender equality, *“the Government is committed to the gender equality approach, and has defined it as one of the central points of the 2014-2019 FDP, and has worked to strengthen the institutional framework and governancetopromote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on grounds of gender”* (GOES 2017). In this area, women’s political rights, participation in public office, and the institutions that support them have been reinforced.

Finally, the FDP also included the area of public safety involving State institutions, and in this respect the prioritisation of SDG 16 is a further commitment to eliminating corruption in public institutions and providing robust support for the rights and guarantees of all. As part of the international commitment, and complying with cooperation between states

to achieve those objectives, while also bearing in mind that “in order to engage in relations appropriately, it is necessary to understand that national or domestic policies have effects and impacts on other territories and citizens beyond their borders” (Martínez and Martínez 2016), El Salvador is also prioritising SDG 17, concerning Partnerships for the Goals, on the understanding that isolated efforts will not yield greater results, and that cooperation of all kinds is necessary and provides an opportunity to fulfil the goals in the agenda.

### **Management of territories**

Within the framework of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is essential to consider the territories as management units for the various strategies and programmatic actions that enable fulfilment of the SDGs based on their strategic possibilities.

As territorial management is a key factor in achieving the SDGs, it is essential to strengthen the capacities of the agents in the territory, to provide them with a broad and strategic perspective based on the local level, and a vision of the current challenges. They must be able to identify the priorities and urgent issues, and the structural paths that enable what the 2030 Agenda describes as “leaving no one behind” to be achieved (CEPAL 2019). This need is reinforced by the fact that the prioritised objectives are wide-ranging, and given the diversity of the actors involved, some coordination and harmonisation of the work must take place, and it cannot be implemented other than with appropriate territorial management.

During the survey process after 2015 regarding the localisation of the agenda in El Salvador, the municipal governments stated that there were inequalities and disparities

between municipalities. There is also little harmonisation of joint efforts in this process of territorial management, since isolated projects, which are almost always sector-specific, are frequently undertaken instead of comprehensive development processes with a long-term vision.

In the same context, Elías (2014), argues that if territorial management processes are to be translated into changes in favour of territorial development, they must have specific characteristics, such as horizontal management, based on encouraging participation by institutions, organisations and individuals; with indirect support policies aimed at creating opportunities; selectiveness, defining the productive profiles of each territory based on its specific characteristics; territoriality, visualising the national economy as a series of territorial economies, and coordination in the production of policies with the various stakeholders.

As a result, in the words of Leyton (2018), *“it is essential to consider the territorial dimension when analysing the challenges involved in implementing the SDGs.”* Maintaining a territorial approach at the centre of the strategy for implementing the SDGs is a key factor in achieving the targets set out in the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, *“it favours cooperation schemes that adapt to the demands of residents and development agents; in other words, the territory’s natural diversity and politics”* (Sepúlveda 2008).

In accordance with the above, an agenda of SDGs must consider the territorial dynamics involved in its implementation. Based on this assumption, Amaya (2020) calls for a multisectoral approach in the territorial management of a joint initiative, as a result of the influence exerted by new stakeholders, including companies, civil society and NGOs, in a context in which the role of the public

sector is crucial as a facilitator of a sustainable development agenda within the contemporary process of the management of territorial development.

Finally, a multi-level approach to sustainable development is necessary in the process involved in localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and this must consider the territories as managers of these actions, based on the engagement and participation of the various stakeholders involved in their implementation.

## Objectives

The overall objective of the research was to contribute to establishing and reinforcing a critical opinion on the localisation of the SDGs in territories, as well as the leading role of municipal governments.

The specific goals were: a) Examine the main asymmetries that territories face in the process

of implementing the SDGs and b) Identify the main actions of the municipal governments of El Salvador aimed at fulfilment of the SDGs within the framework of the 2030 agenda. The aim was to achieve a territorial characterisation of the SDGs prioritised by the 2014-2019 presidential administration, providing a descriptive perspective on the current situation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was an exploratory study, and the objectives are consistent with such assumption. A structured questionnaire with a suggested response format was used to obtain the information. To that end, a sample of 37 municipalities were selected from a universe of 262 (14.12%), which is the total number of municipalities in El Salvador. The sample was representative as it ensured that at least two municipalities came from each of the country's 14 departments, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Study sample

| Department   | Municipality            | Department   | Municipality           |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Ahuachapán   | San Lorenzo             | Morazán      | San Carlos             |
|              | Ahuachapán              |              | Perquín                |
|              | Ilobasco                |              | Ciudad Barrios         |
| Cabañas      | Sensuntepeque           | San Miguel   | Sesori                 |
|              | San Isidro              |              | San Miguel             |
|              | Comalapa                |              |                        |
| Chalatenango | Chalatenango            | San Salvador | Mejicanos              |
|              | Concepción              |              | Uyutuxtepeque          |
|              | Quezaltepeque           |              |                        |
|              | Cojutepeque             |              | Guadalupe              |
| Cuscatlán    | Suchitoto               | San Vicente  | San Cayetano Istepeque |
|              | San Bartolomé Perulapia |              |                        |
| La Libertad  | Comasagua               | Santa Ana    | Texistepeque           |
|              | Nuevo Cuscatlán         |              | Santa Ana              |
|              | San Juan Talpa          |              | Metapán                |
| La Paz       | Olucuilta               | Sonsonate    | Caluco                 |
|              | San Luis Talpa          |              | Nahuizalco             |



| Department | Municipality | Department | Municipality |
|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| La Unión   | El Carmen    | Usulután   | Alegría      |
|            | Polorós      |            | San Dionisio |
|            | La Unión     |            | Usulután     |
|            |              |            | Jiquilisco   |

Source: compiled by the authors

Thirty-seven surveys were applied, in accordance with the number of municipalities selected. The application of 42 surveys was initially planned based on the selection of 42 municipalities (3 municipalities per department). However, no response was received from some municipalities when the instrument was applied, which limited the study to 88.09% of the total sample initially anticipated.

### Instruments

A structured survey with suggested responses was designed for the study. It consisted of 70 questions breaking down each of the SDGs prioritised by the national government according to their previously stipulated means of implementation. The questions were structured and formulated in a manner consistent with the targets in each of the SDGs.

### Limits of the study

A limitation of the study involves the general analysis of 9 of the 10 SDGs prioritised in the National Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 16 and 17).

Bearing in mind that no methodology or process for territorial localisation of the SDGs has as yet been adopted by El Salvador, a strict extrapolation of the territorial findings based on national indicators is not possible, and the study characterises the territorial situation based on the existing mechanisms for implementing the SDG agenda at the national level.

### Procedure

The municipal officials responsible for territorial planning or development in the 42 municipalities initially envisaged in the study were contacted electronically and in person, as appropriate. Only 37 of them replied and decided to answer the survey instrument. The municipalities were subsequently classified by the department where they were located, and the variables were filtered according to the SDG to which each question referred. A comparison was made between the results obtained and the baseline provided by SETEPLAN for the national SDG monitoring system, and respective conclusions were produced from it. Only data referring to the municipal powers stipulated for in the Municipal Code of El Salvador were taken.

### RESULTS

The results obtained based on the applied survey are presented below and broken down according to 9 SDGs prioritised in the National Agenda for Sustainable Development of El Salvador for the period 2015-2019.

#### Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

For SDG 1, bearing in mind that from a multidimensional perspective, poverty is linked to many other areas, an important finding was that most significant challenges facing municipalities, when overcoming the poverty

gap is the provision of basic services, primarily drinking water. One of the biggest challenges involves increasing people's access to water resources, with 48.64% of the municipalities identifying this problem. ANDA, the body responsible for the supply and distribution of drinking water in El Salvador, reported in 2017 that it reached 96.6% of the population in urban areas and 42.7% in rural areas, but despite efforts by the government to improve this situation, it remains a challenge to be overcome. In addition, there is the problem of vulnerable areas within municipalities, with 83.78% of municipalities confirming that this is a real and serious problem, even though 87.09% of local governments have taken various measures to counter this situation.

Regarding the above, the Salvadoran Ecological Unit reports that *"El Salvador improved from number 1 in 2009 to number 11 in 2016 on the list of the world's most vulnerable countries"* (UNES 2017). The ability to provide a robust response to these problems is beyond the municipalities' budget capacity, and an overall response and early activation by the Civil Protection bodies and mitigation measures are required with the Ministry of Public Works.

In this context, it can be stated that the municipalities in the sample can identify problems that affect their inhabitants; but they lack the capacity to undertake specific measures to counteract or mitigate them. Some of the municipalities' responses aimed at reducing poverty levels are based on measures to improve basic education and entrepreneurship but cover their territories in a limited extent. The labour markets demand competitive personnel, and not merely people who have completed their basic education. The challenge in this respect is to reduce levels of technological illiteracy, in order to provide the skills that the labour market requires. The productivity indicator in SDG 1 is closely related

to SDG 4 relating to education.

Finally, the municipalities are limited in their actions by their territorial scope, their situation of permanent electoral campaigns, their lack of adequate resources and personnel, and their high level of dependence on the central government, which makes direct measures difficult.

## **Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture**

In El Salvador, the National Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONASAN) is by executive decree the institution with the closest links to SDG 2. Its primary task is to *"coordinate institutional efforts in this area at the national level, arrange interventions, define the policy and strategic plan and promote inter-institutional coordination"* (CONASAN 2018). The fact that CONASAN is the governing body of the country's Nutritional Food Security (SAN) means there is an organic institutional framework for initiatives and policies associated with food and nutrition security, and the Corporation of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador (COMURES) is part of this body.

The survey showed that 48.8% of the municipalities have their own measures in place aimed at contributing to food security. Among them, 27.4% engage in these activities, by encouraging production, and 24.32% of the municipalities have measures in place to reduce levels of malnutrition among children through school meals. In other words, the actions depend to a large extent on the central government through the Ministry of Education (MINED). Nevertheless, *"these strategies focus on ensuring access to food production and pay limited attention to nutrition"* (PMA 2017).

This study of the municipalities showed that only 48.64% (19) of the municipalities had



a municipal food security policy, and in the same sphere, 45.94% of the municipalities encouraged agricultural production within their boundaries, 27.01% provided basic food baskets, and 10.81% provided inputs for planting agricultural products. By producing a national approximation of these statistics, a study by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization found that 49.4% of Salvadoran households face some sort of food insecurity. This is a high prevalence rate for the problem, as almost half of the households expressed concern about food due to a lack of financial or other resources (FAO 2016).

El Salvador has made considerable progress in reducing food insecurity and chronic malnutrition; however, there are still *“persistent challenges: natural disasters, slow economic growth, high levels of public debt and the fiscal crisis”* (PMA 2017), which are obstacles to progress in this area. Meanwhile, in the regulatory sphere, article 4, subsection 9 and 17 of the Municipal Code, related to municipal competences, refers to guaranteeing development and ensuring the supply of food, but it does so in terms of promoting agriculture, trade and supplying products for consumption, which are rather weak terms regarding the need for specific municipal food and nutrition security policies linked to broader development plans.

A challenge identified in the study refers to the need for diversified agricultural production, and avoidance of monocultures, in order to ensure food supplies to local markets, which guarantee nutrition in the long term. These efforts must go hand in hand with food security strategies to fight against the effects of climate change, bearing in mind that the municipalities surveyed do not have any type of strategy for dealing with this environmental situation.

### **Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

Article 4 subsection 5 of the Municipal Code emphasises that the municipality is responsible for the promotion and creation of health programmes. However, this mandate must be aligned with the primary responsibility of the Ministry of Health (MINSAL), which is to guarantee all aspects of human health.

In the study, the coverage of maternal and children’s health in the sample selected was high in 40.54% of the municipalities, and fair in 37%. This is consistent with the 2019 Statistical Report on fulfilment of the SDG, mainly in the targets for reducing the mortality rate among mothers, new-borns and children under 5 years of age, considered in the report to have been met (SETEPLAN 2019).

Meanwhile, the municipalities surveyed declare they have taken measures in the health sphere, particularly to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. For example, 37.84% of the municipalities reported that they carried out health awareness campaigns on a regular basis. The most prevalent diseases in the municipalities were dengue, zika and chikungunya, with prevalence rates of 65%. These are largely seasonal, and depend on the levels of proliferation of mosquitoes, which are considered vectors of these tropical diseases.

The municipal sample in this study also mentioned problems related to drug addiction, with 54% of the surveyed municipalities carrying out preventive programmes. Another health risk factor is pollution. For example, 40.54% of the municipalities carry out recycling campaigns to reduce the levels of pollution from plastic and metal waste. However, the ongoing lack of resources, the absence of an effective solid waste policy, and low levels of public awareness and interest from the private sector to act with the central government are a

constant challenge.

#### **Goal 4: Inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**

According to the Multiple Purpose Household Survey by the Ministry of Economy (DIGESTYC 2018), illiteracy is still present among the population, at rates of 8.5% among men and 12.2% among women. The illiteracy rate is 16.4%, in rural areas and 6.7% in urban areas.

The study revealed that 59.45% of the municipalities surveyed carry out literacy campaigns for older adults in partnership with the Ministry of Education, and 81% of the municipalities surveyed report that they have physical areas or infrastructure to provide services for young children.

One hundred percent of the total number of municipalities studied reported that they are making efforts to enhance their inhabitants' technical skills and training, 37% focusing on developing new skills. However, these skills must be developed in a manner consistent with the demands of the labour market, and as such, these initiatives must be aimed at reducing the digital gap and expanding technological skills.

For higher education, indicator 4.3 of the SDGs mentions equal access to university education, but *"at least 25,000 students attempt to gain access to the country's only public university every year, and only 38% of those succeed in gaining admission, and the rest must seek another alternative if they want to continue"* (YSUCA 2010). In recent years, the central government has designed measures such as the online university operated by the University of El Salvador, which has prioritised young people from the 50 most violent municipalities. It opens new opportunities for overcoming the challenges involved in accessing public higher education and engages in initiatives for free

education for students from public secondary schools.

#### **Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

Seventy two percent of the total number of municipalities surveyed stated that they have inclusive programmes that reduce discrimination against women and children. However, the national indicator for measuring this SDG target focuses on reducing discrimination by establishing and applying regulatory instruments. The country has five laws that establish this framework for action.<sup>2</sup> However, according to Amnesty International (2018): *"Since 2015, feminicidal violence has escalated alarmingly, resulting in 574 deaths in 2015 and 524 in 2016. One woman was murdered every 16 hours in June 2016."* The existence of regulatory frameworks is therefore insufficient to eradicate the various forms of gender violence against women.

Another aspect to consider is that the municipalities have made initial efforts to create mechanisms that contribute to guaranteeing equitable participation of people on equal terms. Their main actions focus on equal access to public employment. In the present study, 15 of the 37 municipalities (40.5%) have implemented awareness-raising campaigns to encourage the sharing of household chores. In sexual and reproductive health, a challenge that has yet to be resolved is the continuation of education on sexual and reproductive health in the territories, mainly due to limitations in access to information.

<sup>2</sup> The current laws in this area are: 1) the National Policy for Women, 2) the Law on Equality, Equity and Eradication of Discrimination against Women, 3) the Explanatory preamble of the Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women, 4) the Special Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women, and 5) the Law against Domestic Violence.

## **Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**

In the study, 17 municipalities reported that over 75% of their municipality's total populated territory had access to drinking water, in amounts to between 50% and 75% in 16 municipalities, and less than 50% in 4 municipalities. These results differ from the SETEPLAN report (2019), which states that around 90% of the country has access to drinking water and adequate sanitation.

The municipalities with the most access to drinking water were those in urban centres or in large housing complexes which are mostly urban, while the municipalities with the least access to drinking water are those that are in rural areas. However, 21 of the 37 municipalities surveyed are taking some type of action to reduce pollution levels, especially in water, and various measures are being taken in each municipality, including: physicochemical analysis to assess the state of the water, cleaning, reforestation and environmental sanitation campaigns, and periodic monitoring which is sent to ANDA, the institution responsible for the supply of drinking water in the country, among other initiatives. However, 3 of the 21 municipalities have no specific measures in place to increase the efficient use of water resources.

The study of the municipalities showed that another problem that the country is facing regarding water is the lack of an institutional framework and effective regulatory mechanisms, leading to increased soil degradation and pollution, and absence of a general water law. In the survey, 20 of the 37 municipalities have no regulatory or programmatic instrument (a municipal ordinance, water resources management policy or other instrument) ensuring access to and care of water. The powers of the

municipality are limited by article 4, paragraph 10 of the Municipal Code, to the regulation and development of natural resources in accordance with legislation in force, which means that management of the water supply is not a municipal responsibility, but promotion and care of it is encouraged.

## **Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its effects**

The municipalities surveyed have implemented measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, including regular cleaning schedules in rivers and sewers (37.84%), identifying high-risk rills and areas (18.90%) and establishing appropriate protection systems (16.20%). 64.90% of the municipalities have planning and management strategies, plans and initiatives related to climate change.

Based on the above, the channel through which the municipalities have raised awareness of the importance of climate change among their inhabitants have primarily been campaigns and talks (75.70%). At the national level, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) is the institution responsible for monitoring the progress made towards this SDG. According to the SDG fulfilment report (2019), El Salvador fell from first position in 2009 to position 110 in the 2018 climate risk index (Germanwatch, 2018). However, according to the National Report on the State of Risks and Vulnerabilities presented by MARN (2017), 88.7% of the territory of El Salvador is considered a high-risk area and 95.4% of the population lives in these areas.

## **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

According to the Global Peace Index, El Salvador was ranked 113th in 2019, 3d. places above its position in 2018. Despite this slight improvement, the country remains one of the

most violent in the world. According to figures from the National Civil Police in 2018, a total of 44,334 homicides were reported in El Salvador between 2007 and 2017 alone (UNDP 2018).

At the municipal level, between 2013 and 2015 San Salvador headed the list of the 20 municipalities with the highest number of homicides (213), followed by Soyapango (93), and Mejicanos was in third place with 92 homicides (FUNDAUNGO 2016). In terms of the geographical area, estimates suggest that 64.6% of the homicides nationwide in 2017 were committed in rural areas, and 54.3% of the victims in those cases were aged between 15 and 29 years old (UNDP 2018).

In March 2016, El Salvador presented a list of the first ten municipalities to be prioritised in the Safe El Salvador Plan (SESP). These areas were selected based on the number and rate of homicides. The list is headed by San Salvador with 336 homicides, Ciudad Delgado with 84, Cojutepeque with 59, Colón with 98, Jiquilisco with 70, Mejicanos with 112, Santa Ana with 106, Sonsonate with 33, Soyapango with 138, and Zacatecoluca with 96 (FUNDAUNGO 2016).

As of July 2018, 50 of the existing 262 municipalities had been prioritised. The SESP consisted of five areas and one hundred and twenty-four urgent priority actions in the short, medium and long term, to fight against violence and crime, ensured access to justice, and provide care and protection for victims. The Plan consisted of a framework of results, targets and resources that defined the actions of all the sectors involved (CNSC 2016). However, only 14 of the 37 municipalities participated in this plan. These municipalities in turn have strategic structures for consultation and technical and political dialogue, known as Municipal Violence Prevention Councils (MVPC).

Since this was a plan created by the government in office between 2014 and 2019, the new

administration of President Nayib Bukele (2019 - 2024) will decide on the approach for fighting against social violence and crime at the central government level, and on how the territories will be coordinated within this approach.

In this same context, the reduction of the rates of violence in the country requires an inter-institutional effort, specifically involving the General Office of the Prosecutor of the Republic (FGR), the National Civil Police (PNC) and the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), especially as regards complaints received from the public. In the survey of the municipalities, 48.6% stated that the level of coordination between the municipalities and these institutions to encourage citizens to report acts of violence is high, while 37.8% of municipalities said it is medium, and 13.5% said it was low.

The perception that the municipalities surveyed suffer from crime in their territories is between medium and high for 86.4%. The reason for this response may be related to the municipality's geographic location and its prioritisation in the SESP.

Transparency and accountability are also linked as an area of application of SDG 16. 89.20% of the municipalities report that they have adequate mechanisms for access to public information. However, this is contradicted by the fact that the municipalities themselves state that since the Law on Access to Public Information (LAPI) came into force in 2010, only around 100 requests for information have been received from citizens in 73% of the municipalities surveyed. However, in 78.3% of the municipalities, the degree of civic participation in institutional development issues related to the fight against corruption is at the medium to high level.

### **SDG 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goals**

SDG 17 is a goal involving synergies and combining joint efforts to achieve its

objectives, based on strengthening the means for implementing the agenda and strategic partnerships for sustainable development. Achieving this goal therefore implies a multi-actor approach, involving the participation of the central government and other national institutions, the private sector, civil society and academia. However, this vision must also be implemented at the local level.

Although this objective is superficially related to providing resources that contribute to achieving development plans, there is clearly a role for effective tax collection, international cooperation management and the mobilisation of domestic resources by the municipalities. In the study, 59.45% of the municipalities reported that the current system for collecting municipal taxes is appropriate according to the provisions of the Municipal Code, which specifies that municipalities must formulate their budget based on the established rates, taxes and special contributions.

Most of the municipalities surveyed (62.2%) receive no support from international cooperation and all of them (100%) acknowledge

that they need to attract higher levels of financial investment, although 81% agree that the main strategies for attracting greater investment must be based on increasing the skilled workforce and providing economic and legal security for investors. However, 64.86% of the municipalities are affected by the volatility of the world economic system.

According to the survey, 72% of the municipalities reported that they do not have a strategic plan and are even farther away from having one linked to the SDGs. They are unclear as to the type of partnerships to establish to achieve them, although they have made some initial efforts as regards territorial planning. The partnerships that can be established would therefore enable sharing of all the experiences and good practices that can greatly enhance fulfilment of the SDGs based on municipal contributions.

A synthesis of the findings from the present study regarding the asymmetries of the territories and their main identified mitigation actions can be seen in the following table.

**Table 2.** Findings

| <b>SDG</b> | <b>Asymmetries /challenges identified</b>   | <b>Main actions of municipalities identified</b>  |
|------------|---|---|
| SDG 1      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>48.64% of the municipalities identify the provision of basic services, and primarily drinking water as a problem.</li> <li>83.78% of municipalities identify the problem of vulnerable areas within municipalities.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The municipalities in the sample are capable of identifying problems that affect their inhabitants; but they lack the capacity to undertake specific measures to counteract or mitigate them.</li> </ul>   |
| SDG 2      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>49.4% of Salvadoran households face some sort of food insecurity.</li> <li>Almost half of the households expressed concern about food due to a lack of financial or other resources.</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>48.8% of the municipalities have measures in place aimed at contributing to food security.</li> <li>27.4% of the municipalities engage in activities of encouraging production</li> <li>24.32% of the municipalities have measures in place to reduce levels of malnutrition among children through school meals.</li> <li>48.64% of the municipalities have a municipal food security policy.</li> <li>45.94% of the municipalities encourage agricultural production within their boundaries</li> <li>27.01% provide basic food baskets.</li> <li>10.81% provide inputs for planting agricultural products.</li> </ul> |



| SDG    | Asymmetries /challenges identified   | Main actions of municipalities identified  |
|--------|--|--|
| SDG 3  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The coverage of maternal and children's health in the sample selected is high in 40.54% of the municipalities, and fair in 37%.</li> <li>Problems related to drug addiction.</li> <li>Pollution.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37.84% of the municipalities report that they carry out awareness-raising campaigns on a regular basis.</li> <li>54% of the surveyed municipalities carrying out preventive programmes.</li> <li>40.54% of the municipalities carry out recycling campaigns to reduce the levels of pollution from plastic and metal waste.</li> </ul>  |
| SDG 4  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Illiteracy is still present among the population, at rates of 8.5% among men and 12.2% among women. The illiteracy rate is 16.4%, in rural areas and in urban areas it is 6.7%.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59.45% of the municipalities surveyed carry out literacy campaigns for older adults in partnership with the Ministry of Education.</li> <li>81% of the municipalities surveyed report that they have physical areas or infrastructure to provide services for young children.</li> <li>100% of the total number of municipalities studied reported that they are making efforts to enhance their inhabitants' technical skills and training. 37% focus on developing new skills.</li> </ul>   |
| SDG 5  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient regulatory frameworks to eradicate the various forms of gender violence and violence against women.</li> <li>A challenge that has yet to be resolved is the continuation of education on sexual and reproductive health in the territories, mainly due to limitations in access to information.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>72% of the total number of municipalities surveyed state that they have inclusive programmes that reduce discrimination against women and children: main actions focus on equal access to public jobs employment with 51%, and the requirement for female quotas in municipal elections of 27%.</li> <li>15 of the 37 municipalities (40.5%) have implemented awareness-raising campaigns to encourage the sharing of household chores.</li> </ul>  |
| SDG 6  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 75% of their municipality's total populated territory has access to drinking water, access amounts to between 50% and 75% in 16 municipalities, and less than 50% of the population have access in 4 municipalities.</li> <li>20 of the 37 municipalities have no regulatory or programmatic instrument</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21 of the 37 municipalities surveyed are taking some type of action to reduce pollution levels, especially in water, and various measures such as: physicochemical analysis to assess the state of the water, cleaning, reforestation and environmental sanitation campaigns, and periodic monitoring which is sent to ANDA.</li> </ul>   |
| SDG 13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>88.7% of the territory of El Salvador is considered a high-risk area and 95.4% of the population lives in these areas.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, including regular cleaning schedules in rivers and sewers (37.84%), identifying high-risk rills and areas (18.90%) and establishing appropriate protection systems (16.20%).</li> <li>64.90% of the municipalities have planning and management strategies, plans and initiatives related to climate change.</li> <li>75.70% of the municipalities have put into place campaigns and talks in order to raise awareness of the importance of climate change among their inhabitants.</li> </ul> |

| SDG    | Asymmetries /challenges identified  | Main actions of municipalities identified  |
|--------|---|--|
| SDG 16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>48.6% of the municipalities stated that the level of coordination between themselves and the General Office of the Prosecutor of the Republic (FGR), the National Civil Police (PNC) and the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), encourage citizens to report acts of violence is high, while 37.8% of municipalities said it is medium, and 13.5% said it was low.</li> <li>The perception that the municipalities surveyed suffer from crime in their territories is between medium and high for 86.4%.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14 of the 37 municipalities participated in the Safe El Salvador Plan (SESP). These municipalities in turn have strategic structures for consultation and technical and political dialogue, known as Municipal Violence Prevention Councils (MVPC).</li> <li>89.20% of the municipalities report that they have adequate mechanisms for access to public information.</li> <li>In 78.3% of the municipalities, the degree of civic participation in institutional development issues related to the fight against corruption is at the medium to high level.</li> </ul> |
| SDG 17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>62.2% of the municipalities receive no support from international cooperation.</li> <li>100% of the municipalities acknowledge that they need to attract higher levels of financial investment, although 81% agree that the main strategies for attracting greater investment must be based on increasing the skilled workforce and providing economic and legal security for investors.</li> <li>64.86% of the municipalities are affected by the volatility of the world economic system.</li> <li>72% of the municipalities report that they do not have a strategic plan and are even further from having one linked to the SDGs.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59.45% of the municipalities report that the current system for collecting municipal taxes is appropriate according to the provisions of the Municipal Code, which specifies that municipalities must formulate their budget based on the established rates, taxes and special contributions.</li> </ul>  |

Source: compiled by the authors

## CONCLUSIONS

This study must be considered a non-exhaustive approach to describing the territorial conditions that pose challenges for territorial localisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and consequently, for the implementation of strategies and actions contained in the governmental roadmap. The asymmetries in the territories and the limitations of their capacities must be taken into account. Some considerations are discussed which despite not being exclusive to one SDG, enable us to produce an introduction reflecting on this aspect of analysis.

The budget assigned to the municipalities by the central government through the Municipal Economic and Social Development Fund (FODES) seems to be insufficient to cover the financing of the sustainable development

agenda. For this reason, municipal financial management capacities must first be enhanced as well as economic investment measures which increase mobilisation of local resources in their territories. Secondly, mechanisms to make resources efficient must be coordinated to increase productivity and collection rates of municipal taxes.

The success of the localisation of the 2030 Agenda will depend on their adaptation based on the situation in the territories, because as identified in the study, there are various circumstances that show that the municipalities have different levels of capacities. A major challenge could consequently focus on strengthening the institutional framework by creating a mechanism to structure the territorialisation of sustainable development from the Central Government to the municipalities.

An outstanding challenge in the implementation of the SDGs is to specify the effective involvement of the municipalities and the active population, reinforcing public participation processes as an instrument for constructing development. Various mechanisms are currently focused in this direction and applied in most municipalities, since they are set forth in Articles 115 and 116 of the Municipal Code. In conclusion, in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the challenge at the local level is to be able to ensure effectiveness and transparency in the mechanisms for public participation, as instruments in the construction of endogenous development.

At the territorial level, each SDG has its own challenges in its localisation, since each municipality, depending on its economic, social, productive and cultural characteristics, will have more or fewer problems in relation to some SDGs. The fact is that there is yet no multilevel governance mechanism that enables strategies to be coordinated from national planning towards local planning. In short, the relationship of the municipalities in the sphere of their territorial governance directly affects the 17 SDGs, not only because of the powers provided for in the Municipal Code, but also affects the management of policies and programmes that provide a greater scope for action than the regulations in place.

Lastly, it should be noted that El Salvador has made progress in defining its targets, indicators, and in building a baseline for the SDGs but strategies aimed at advancing towards the achievement of those objectives during the term of office of the new government between 2019 and 2024 still need to be planned.

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