

Article

Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh: An Inclusive Framework under Local Governments

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Abstract: To accelerate the implementation of SDGs at the national level, policymakers and practitioners are focusing on localisation, where the local government (LG) can play a critical role. This paper examines the LG's capacity and its existing link with the implementation of SDGs at the local level in Bangladesh, and it offers an inclusive framework for the SDGs' localisation. The data was gathered through an in-depth interview of 10 chairmen of the Union Council (lowest tier of LG) in Northern Bangladesh's Nilphamari district. An SWOT analysis of the local government was conducted to determine the organisation's effectiveness and capacity in light of its vulnerabilities, threats, strengths, and opportunities. The data indicate that while the majority of LG representatives have some knowledge, participation, and perceptions about the SDGs, they demonstrate a great desire to gain additional knowledge and participation. The study ascertains SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger), and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) as the most locally important SDGs relevant to the LG's actions, based on the opinions of the surveyed respondents. The LG's strengths were identified in their familiarity with local problems and the environment, as well as the presence of potential local stakeholders, while their weaknesses included a lack of capacity, resources, funding, and a lack of decentralisation and empowerment of the LG. This study develops an inclusive framework for the localisation of the SDGs under the leadership of LGs based on the findings. To expedite the localisation of the SDGs in Bangladesh, the framework recommends forming an SIC (SDG implementation committee) by including all key local stakeholders, and asking the national government to increase local competence and resources through an appropriate decentralisation of the LG.

Keywords: SDGs (sustainable development goals); localisation; local government; stakeholders; inclusive framework; Bangladesh



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1. Introduction

The United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a noteworthy agenda adopted in 2015. Countries are extremely concerned about the current debate and discussion about the Sustainable Development Goals on a national and global scale. Global leaders and national policymakers are currently emphasising the importance of localising the SDGs in order to accelerate the progress toward each SDG target. Localising the SDGs refers to the process where the national government relinquishes its involvement in implementing SDG-related actions and initiatives at the local level. Additionally, this

concept pertains to the empowerment of local governments that provide services such as food security, water supply, sanitation, drainage, and waste management; this includes numerous other areas in which local governments can influence the quality and accessibility of national government-provided services, such as welfare, health, education, and transportation [1]. Thus, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) must be pushed by ‘localising’ the Sustainable Development Goals, as regional and local governments play a critical role in implementing the development programmes and measures [2–4]. According to the international development community and national governments, local governments are the best equipped to facilitate and mobilise local development stakeholders (particularly the NGO and private sectors), local communities, and national and international organisations, which would be performed in order to achieve inclusive sustainable development within their respective localities [4]. To achieve the SDGs, it is critical to engage many societal players, including the local governments, government agencies, commercial sector, and civil society [5,6]. Subnational and local governments are responsible for directly or indirectly providing services in collaboration with the central government or other stakeholders in a variety of sectors connected to the SDGs [2]. Thus, the local government plays a critical role in achieving the global agenda for sustainable development by 2030, particularly in underdeveloped nations.

Bangladesh is a growing country in South Asia that is making strides in terms of economic growth and development. The country was a strong performer in the previous UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where some local governments participated on a pilot basis [7]. However, in order to attain the SDGs by 2030, Bangladesh would need breakthroughs in aspects such as policy and strategy to accelerate the local implementation of the SDGs. Local governments are critical to the achieving of the SDGs; however, the present local governments in Bangladesh lack independence due to the national government’s dominance, bureaucratic intervention, and lack of adequate decentralisation [8,9]. Additionally, local governments lack the resources, knowledge, and capacity necessary to achieve the SDGs on a local level. Nonetheless, being a significant local organisation, local governments address a number of local development concerns. The capabilities and obstacles of local governments in achieving the SDGs locally by 2030 must be evaluated. However, there is a significant lack of research on LGs’ capabilities and SDG localisation. As a result, this paper examines the link between local governments (LGs) and SDGs, exploring the SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity and thread) of the LG in Bangladesh and developing an inclusive framework for effectively localising SDGs. Additionally, this study evaluates the capacity of an LG by examining their knowledge and engagement, current role, existing support mechanisms, and strategies for achieving the SDGs. Thus, this study fulfills the research gap and provides some new insights, especially in regards to the capacity of LGs for SDG implementation in the case of Bangladesh. Thus, we propose that it would be beneficial for the Bangladeshi national government, as well as similar governments elsewhere, to speed up the localisation of SDGs by adopting the suggested framework and actions.

To investigate the localisation of the SDGs under the leadership of LGs, we developed a theoretical framework based on the relevant literature. The theoretical frameworks are addressed in Sections 2.1–2.3: Section 2.1 discusses SDG adoption and implementation; Section 2.2 highlights SDG localisation and links with the LGs; Section 2.3 identifies Bangladesh’s initiatives toward the localisation of SDGs based on experiences from the MDGs. Section 3 explains the methodology that was applied to conduct the study. After this, we provide our findings and debate regarding the knowledge and perspective of local government personnel, their capacity, and the selected local government’s SWOT analysis. At the conclusion of the conversation, we offer an inclusive framework for SDG localisation under local governments in Bangladesh, based on the findings. Finally, we provide a conclusion of our paper with some policy implications for the localisation of SDGs.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. SDGs: Adoption and Implementation

The UN adopted the SDGs in 2015 as a replacement for the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), combining the agendas of development and ambition to address environmental challenges. The historic Millennium Declaration, also known as the MDGs, was launched by the UN in 2000. The goals included decreasing extreme poverty and hunger, increasing gender equality, and lowering child mortality. The MDGs are a set of eight goals, 18 targets, and 48 indicators that were adopted in 1990 and designed to track the progress made toward the MDGs by 2015. After the MDGs, the international community made another milestone in September 2015 in New York, where 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets were adopted by the UN member states, and a deadline was assigned (2016–2030) to achieve the goals by 2030. Thus, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is seen as an extension of the MDGs [10]. Instead of high-level technocrats creating MDGs, the SDGs were created through widespread engagement with all stakeholders based on six elements: dignity, people, planet, prosperity, justice, and partnership [10]. In this way, the 2030 Agenda stimulated national commitment and stressed responsibility-sharing and non-state participation [11]. Participants from the public and corporate sectors as well as the civil society must be involved in the decision-making, implementation, and monitoring of SDG actions and initiatives [12–14]. The intricacies and interdependencies of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals require an integrated, holistic, and coherent approach to policymaking. To accelerate the implementation of the SDGs, all governments must include the goals into their national development plans and programmes [15].

The governance of sustainable development is another major part of the 2030 Agenda. Appropriate governance could help implement the SDGs by addressing the diverse stakeholder challenges faced at various levels [16]. However, SDG governance must foster a climate of collective action, ensuring that all players are responsible, while addressing the complicated inter-goal trade-offs and integrating the actions into the national context [17–19]. Furthermore, governance for sustainability considers complex state-society relations while formulating and implementing SDGs [20,21]. Thus, considering the importance of governance, it has been referred to as the “fourth pillar of sustainable development” [13,22].

Sustainable development is an agenda and guiding philosophy that seeks to address economic, social, and environmental issues [4]. With the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs are seen as an integrated solution to global problems that may be reached via political and societal implementation at all levels. After the MDGs concluded in 2015, the UN designated a 15-year period from 2016 to 2030 for countries to implement the SDGs to eradicate poverty and ensure human well-being on a global scale [12,23]. The Sustainable Development Goals are a people-centered agenda that ensures no one is left behind. Due to the fact that all of the SDGs are intrinsically linked to the function of the local and regional governments, the development of the SDGs has placed a greater focus on the localisation of the post-2015 Agenda [2,24,25]. Localisation approaches call for the translation of the SDGs onto a local level, which enables more reciprocity between the global and local levels by focusing on human rights and realising the SDGs’ promise for change [26]. Local attention and efforts are important to the achievement of the 2030 global sustainable development agenda [27,28]. The localisation of the SDGs could speed up the execution of local targets. The SDGs must be localised by 2030, according to the UN and many other global and regional organisations [3]. Thus, localisation is critical in the acceleration of locally implementing the SDGs.

2.2. SDG Linkages with Local Government

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a greater role for the LGs in the implementation of the SDGs, as every goal has some targets that are directly or indirectly linked to the local and regional governments [29,30]. More specifically, the achievement of the SDGs would depend on their role in delivering basic services and the ability of local and regional governments to promote integrated, inclusive, and sustainable territorial

development. Therefore, local and regional governments are considered to be at the heart of the 2030 Agenda [24]. For achieving the SDG targets, some development pathways, such as technology, lifestyle changes, innovations, and decentralised governance (national to local government) are crucial, which leads to synergies and trade-offs for enhancing target achievement [29–31]. Thus, LGs are considered an important player in the implementation of the development agenda along with their roles as policymakers, catalysts of change, and a government that is best placed to link the global goals with local communities [32,33].

Various SDGs that have potential links with the local government are discussed here. SDG 1 (No poverty) takes a multi-dimensional view of poverty and therefore requires multi-level, coordinated responses. Local governments are in the best position to identify persons living in poverty and target the resources and services needed to assist them in escaping their predicaments. SDG 2 (Zero hunger) relates to food security and the eradication of hunger, where local governments can support agricultural production and local economic growth by strengthening transport infrastructure and markets to promote local food chains. SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) is linked with SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), where providing clean water and sanitation is essential to lowering infant, child, and maternal mortality. Local governments can play a crucial role in recognising local needs and problems and thus coordinating the prevention and response efforts [34]. SDG 4 (Quality education), particularly at the primary level, is a direct responsibility of the local governments in many countries. Local governments are well-placed to identify and tackle the barriers of school attendance in their local communities [32]. In the case of SDG 5 (Gender equality), local governments can serve as a model for gender equality and women's empowerment by providing non-discriminatory services to people and implementing fair employment policies. Local governments are in the vanguard of the efforts that identify and combat violence and harmful actions against women.

To ensure SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy), local governments can readily identify the gaps in disadvantaged populations' ability to access affordable electricity in their communities. They can assist in expanding access to electricity and renewable energy sources in public institutions (government offices, schools, etc.) and private residences. Through local economic development policies and resource mobilisation, local governments can produce bottom-up growth and employment for SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Local governments have the ability to encourage safe and secure working conditions in local factories. Local governments can incorporate small-scale industries and start-ups into their local economic development policies, taking into account local resources, requirements, and markets in order to achieve SDG 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure). SDG 10 (Reduced inequality) ensures equal opportunity, and LGs can play a critical role in the political inclusion of minorities and historically marginalised groups, as well as providing non-discriminatory public services. In the context of SDG 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), LGs, particularly city administrations, should adopt strategic urban plans to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers and provide essential services in areas where slums already exist. City governments are responsible for promoting green transportation and green public spaces, such as parks, squares, and gardens. Local governments can contribute to SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) by promoting the need for sustainable production and consumption to the public and by providing the public with the knowledge and tools necessary to reduce their environmental impact. SDG 13 (Climate action) is also connected to LGs due to the fact that they deal with climate-related threats and natural disasters on a local level. LGs can incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation into its planning to protect vulnerable communities. SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land) draw attention on conserving and sustainably managing life in the oceans and on land, respectively. Local and regional governments, as service providers (particularly in the areas of water, sanitation, and solid waste management), can influence the public's behaviour and assure biodiversity protection through community-based engagement. SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institution) encourages local governments to improve their effectiveness and accountability to their constituents.

They are capable of implementing participatory decision-making and ensuring effective governance at all levels [4]. Finally, SDG 17 (Partnership for the goals) calls for collaboration, and the LGs are well-positioned to foster and support the collaboration between public agencies, commercial sector, and civil society in order to advance the SDGs locally. Thus, most of the Sustainable Development Goals are inextricably linked to local and regional administrations [24]. To implement the SDGs, however, LGs must adopt appropriate national, legal, and political frameworks, as LGs continue to face a greater reliance on the national government and a lack of decentralization, especially in Bangladesh.

2.3. Bangladesh Effort toward SDG Localisation: Experience from the MDGs

Bangladesh is considered one of the innovators and successful achievers of the MDGs [4,35]. According to the report of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), the country has recorded remarkable progress in the areas of: poverty alleviation; ensuring food security; primary school enrolment; gender parity in primary and secondary level education; lowering the infant, under-five, and maternal mortality rates; improving immunization coverage; and reducing the incidence of communicable diseases, as shown in Table 1 [7,35,36]. The achievement of the MDGs that have been carried out in Bangladesh is due to the application of the “whole of society” approach in the preparation and implementation processes of national development plans and policies [37]. The government has applied this approach throughout the SDG preparation and implementation processes.

Table 1. Targets and achievements of Bangladesh in the MDGs.

MDGs	Target	Status/Achievement	Status of the Goal
Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	29% [People below the national poverty line]	24.8%	Goal met
Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education	100% [Net enrolment ratio in primary education]	98%	Goal met
Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	1.0 [Ratio of girls to boys in primary education]	1.04	Goal met
Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality	48 [Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)]	36	Goal met
	31 [Infant (0–1 year) mortality rate (per 1000 live births)]	29	
Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health	143 [Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)]	176	Substantial progress
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Other Diseases	Halting [HIV prevalence among population (%)]	<0.1	On track
	0.6 [Deaths from malaria per 100,000 of the population]	0.34	Goal met
Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability	20% Forest area	13.4%	Substantial progress
	100% [percentage of population using improved sanitation]	73.5%	
Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development	Further develop an open, rule-based, predictable, and non-discriminatory trading and financial system	-	Needs attention

Source: Adopted from [7,35,37].

For example, Bangladesh has submitted its proposal for the Post-2015 Development Agenda to the UN by taking inputs from multiple stakeholders, including national experts, the private sector, CSO (civil society organisation) representatives, and development partners [37]. However, the successful implementation of the SDGs in Bangladesh will largely be influenced by its integration into the national plans and localisation context [38]. The SDGs are considered to be an integrated agenda in which the goals are linked to

one another [4,39]. Therefore, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development emphasises the need for an inclusive and localised approach to the implementation of the SDGs [4]. Bangladesh has already completed Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) in 2017 and 2020 and has integrated the SDGs into the national development plans and policy strategies. The implementation of the SDGs on a macro level is in full swing, with supportive policies and an enabling environment, as designed in the national action plan [38,40]. After the adoption of the SDGs, Bangladesh performance has not been satisfactory in the case of all SDGs. Table 2 shows that only SDG 1, 4, and 13 have been found to be on track, while some others such as SDG 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9 are moderately improving. The rest of the SDGs are found to lag behind. Thus, we assert that the steps and measures are insufficient, as localisation is still far behind due to the existence of weak local government structures, political and administrative interference, and a lack of inclusiveness to leave no one behind and reach those farthest behind, which is the aim of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [4,38].

Table 2. Bangladesh’s performance on SDGs from 2015 to 2021 [41].

SDG	Bangladesh’s Performance on SDGs from 2015 to 2021				
	On Track/Maintaining Achievement of SDGs	Moderately Improving	Stagnating	Decreasing	Information Unavailable
SDG 1	✓				
SDG 2		✓			
SDG 3		✓			
SDG 4	✓				
SDG 5		✓			
SDG 6		✓			
SDG 7		✓			
SDG 8			✓		
SDG 9		✓			
SDG 10					✓
SDG 11		✓			
SDG 12					✓
SDG 13	✓				✓
SDG 14			✓		
SDG 15				✓	
SDG 16			✓		
SDG 17			✓		

✓ it indicates the status or performance of the SDGs whether they are on track or moderately improving or stagnating or decreasing or information unavailable.

Despite the success toward achieving the MDGs, the country has been actively engaged in the SDG delivery and implementation processes, but challenges are still prevailing. In 2017, Bangladesh participated in the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York and presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR). However, the VNR of the country was largely a Voluntary “Governmental” Review (VGR), comprising mostly the government’s activities and very little about the contributions of the non-state actors (NSAs), including the private sector, non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), and civil society organisations (CSOs) in the implementation of the SDGs [42,43]. Therefore, a successful and rapid implementation would not be possible without the integration of the SDGs at the local level with all potential stakeholders. To follow up and review SDG implementation, the government of Bangladesh organised a national conference entitled the “SDGs Implementation Review” (SIR) for the first time from 4–6 July 2018, which brought together the representatives of different ministries, NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), development partners, academia, and the private sector [40]. This conference reviewed the identified challenges in SDG implementation, charted the future course of action, and suggested emphasising local implementation involving local stakeholders. Following the nature of the SDGs, the

government has adopted a “whole of society” approach, including all relevant stakeholders to implement and attain the SDGs.

On a national level, the high-level SDG Implementation and Review Committee and national SDG monitoring, with 40 specified indicators, are in operation. To facilitate the local implementation of the SDGs, the General Economics Division (GED) of the Government of Bangladesh (a lead government unit for the coordination and implementation of the SDGs across ministries) has been developing a framework for localisation in consultation with the above-mentioned committee at the level of Upazilas, where an Upazila Nirbahi/Executive Officer (UNO) would coordinate the implementation of the localisation model through the involvement of government agencies and local government bodies [38]. The LG is a critical stakeholder, as not only does it ensure improved access to basic services, but also provides an effective platform for the poor, farmers, women, and indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making and development processes [4]. Consequently, enhancing local governance in rural Bangladesh may be the only realistic option for converting government ideas into inclusive economic growth and prosperity strategies. To accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals, development priorities and programming must be contextualised, and the local government is best positioned to implement policies and programmes that improve the delivery of services and address poverty, inequality, climate vulnerability, and gender equality.

3. Methodology

This study is based on primary data collected from key stakeholders involved in local governance in northern Bangladesh’s Nilphamari district. The data were gathered from ten chairmen from ten Union Parisods (before it was known as the Union Council), which are the lowest tiers of local government administration in Bangladesh (see Table 3). Additionally, we included a diagram (Figure 1) to illustrate the local government structure in Bangladesh. Each Union Parisod has a chairman who is elected by the local populace for a five-year term. Our main respondents were the ten chairmen (presidents) of the ten selected Union Parisods, and the researcher conducted an in-depth interview with each of the chairmen from the selected Union Parisod using a set of semi-structured questions. These chairmen are considered as the primary respondents in our study. The major data collected from the chairmen included their knowledge and participation in the SDGs, perceptions of the SDGs, current programmes of their Union Parisod, capacity of their Union Parisod, LG involvement in the policy process, and finally, the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threads of local government). Additionally, we conducted small interviews with the secretary of each Union Council, one UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer or Upazila Executive Officer), who serves as the head of the Upazila Administration, and one Upazila Chairman, who serves as the head of the Upazila Parisod (also known as Upazila Council). All of these additional interviewees are considered co-respondents in this study. These additional interviews assisted to validate the data collected from the 10 target respondents and the SWOT analysis of the LG, which ensures the data’s credibility and reliability. Therefore, co-respondents’ data were not analysed, as their input was only used to verify and support the collected data provided by the chairmen. However, during the discussion, we have used their comments in the text as necessary. In aggregate, our ten primary respondents (R1-R10) provide basic information about their understanding and engagement in relation to the SDGs, present function, existing capacity, SWOT of the LG, and the possible needs of the LG to be an active performer of the SDGs implementation, among others. Based on the comments of the responder, we conducted an SWOT analysis, which is one of the most effective methods for enhancing an organization’s effectiveness by addressing its weaknesses and threats while maximising its potential strengths and chances. This paper provides an inclusive framework for localising the Sustainable Development Goals in order to accelerate Bangladesh’s 2030 vision for sustainable development. Figure 2 provides a description of the descriptive process diagram of the study’s methodology.

Table 3. Structure of the local governments (LGs) in Bangladesh.

Level of LG	Location	Name	Headed by	Method of Election
Rural area				
Uppermost Tier	District	Zila Parisod (District Council)	Elected Chairman	Indirect Election
Middle Tier or Central Point	Upazila	UpazilaParisod(UpazilaCouncil)	Elected Chairman	Direct Election
Lowest Tier	Union	Union Parisod (Union Council)	Elected Chairman	Direct Election
Urban area				
Mega-City	City Corporation	City Corporation	Elected Mayor	Direct Election
Small Town/City	Paurashava (Municipality)	Paurashava (Municipality)	Elected Mayor	Direct Election

Source: Modified from [9,44].

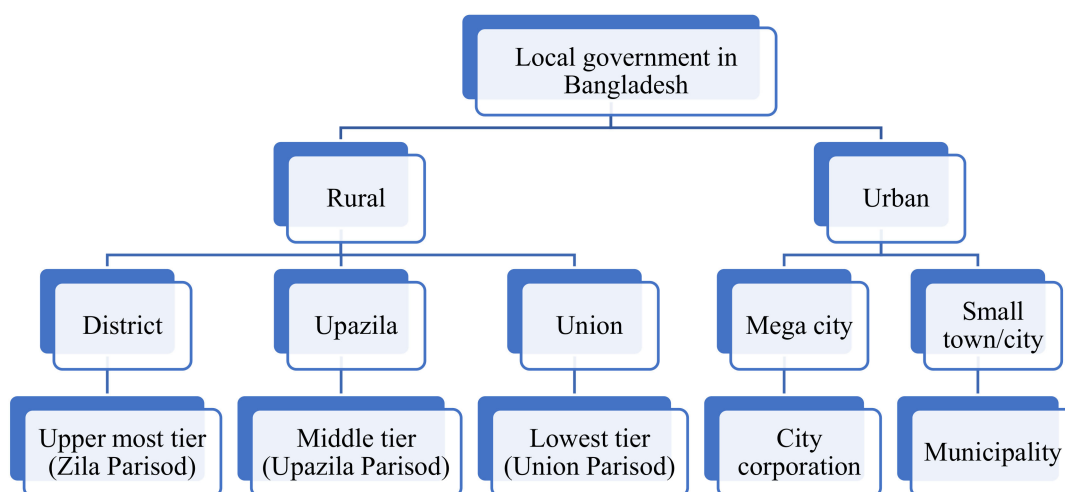


Figure 1. Structure of the local governments in Bangladesh.

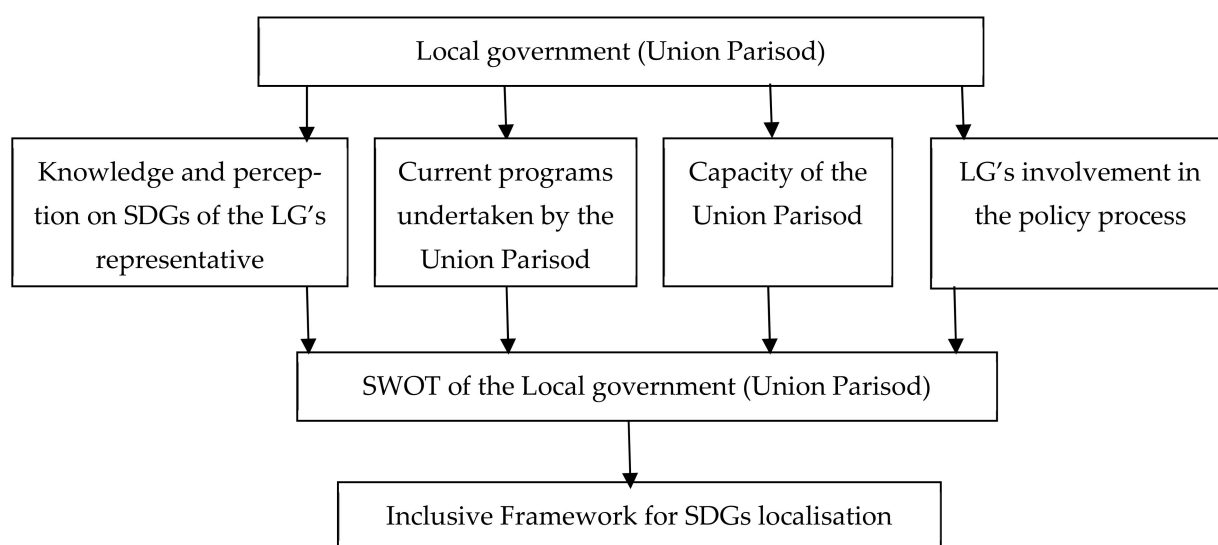


Figure 2. A summary of the descriptive process diagram of the method of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Knowledge and Perception of the Respondents Relating to the SDGs

Knowledge is a necessary component to the performing of any action. As our respondents are major members of the local government (Union Parisod), their information can help to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs in their community. Table 4 summarises the findings of the surveys of the selected Union Council chairmen's knowledge and participation concerning the SDGs. The chairman is the head of the lowest tier of local government and is thus responsible for rural action; as such, their knowledge of the SDGs is critical. According to this study, almost all chairmen are familiar with the SDGs. However, the majority of chairmen claimed that they were implementing some programmes related to some of the SDGs, there was a lack of documents in relation to how many SDGs they were implementing. It indicates that the Union Parisod is informally working on the SDGs, as formal localisation is not happening at this level. They have participated in a number of projects organised by the Upazila Parisod, such as seminars, workshops, and campaigns to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. We observed that the majority of Union Parisod have not organised such a programme. Only one Union Parisod was found to have organised a village-level SDGs awareness programme. Nevertheless, the Union Parisod has close contact with the Upazila Parisod and routinely participates in various programmes conducted by the Upazila Parisod. The investigation revealed that all chairmen had studied SDG-related documents and were eager to learn more about the goals. Consequently, their current knowledge of the SDGs can be utilised to localise them and accelerate their achievement at the local level. Additionally, knowledge sharing and dissemination, including sharing useful lessons learned with other countries, stakeholders, and local communities, can benefit local governments by enhancing knowledge sustainability and accelerating SDG localisation efforts [3]. As a result, development efforts will receive increased attention by focusing on SDGs at a local level.

Table 4. Knowledge and participation of the respondent, relating to the SDGs.

Knowledge and Participation Relating to the SDGs	Yes	No
Familiarity with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	10	0
Participated in SDG-related programmes	10	0
Workshop	2	8
Awareness raising	6	4
Seminar	2	8
Organised awareness-raising programmes relating to SDGs in your organization	2	8
Read SDG-related documents	10	0
Newspaper	3	7
Policy documents	6	4
Leaflets	4	6
Seen or observed SDG-related programmes	6	4
TV (4)	4	6
Video presentation (2)	2	8
Willingness to study more about the SDGs	10	0
Willingness to attend any programmes related to the SDGs	10	0
Willingness to make your village's people more familiar with the SDGs	8	2
Specific measures applied to promote local development	1	9

This study also identifies the perception of the head of the Union Parisod (chairman) relating to SDGs, which is presented in Table 5. According to the report, all of the chairmen agreed that the SDGs were vital to the development agenda, local community, and environmental protection. The majority of respondents agreed that the government was committed

to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. All respondents acknowledged that the local government could make a substantial contribution to achieving the SDGs, and the majority of respondents were not satisfied with the current SDGs programmes. They opined that the government actions undertaken by the LG were not sufficient for the achievement of SDGs. We purport that the government's current strategies are insufficient for meeting the needs of the people and that the current programmes are not enough for achieving SDGs locally (R5). For example, one of the programs of the Union Parisod is to provide 30 kg of rice per family per month under the VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) initiative. However, most of the Union Parisods are unable to cover all of the vulnerable families under the VGD programme. Thus, to improve the local function of the SDGs, the national government must provide more attention on strengthening the capacity and support mechanism of the LGs so that more actions on the target-specific SDGs can be locally implemented.

Table 5. Perception of the respondents, relating to the SDGs.

Perception Relating to the SDGs	Yes	No
SDGs are a crucial development agenda for any country	10	0
SDGs are considered important for local communities and LGs	10	0
SDGs are important for environmental protection	9	0
The government is committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030	8	0
Local government can significantly contribute to achieving the SDGs	10	0
The SDGs should be taught in schools/Universities	8	2
Satisfaction with the programme currently undertaken at the local level for the SDGs	4	6
Government should give priority to the LGs to speed up SDG achievement	10	0
The government actions are sufficient for SDG achievement	4	6

Based on the opinions of the survey respondents, this study identifies, as shown in Figure 3, which of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are currently the most significant at the local level. SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger) and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation) were the most important SDGs, as 10 out of 10 respondents provided positive responses for these SDGs. The other locally important SDGs identified by the respondents include SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 5 (Gender equality), and SDG 13 (Climate action). The findings of the study are in line with the study [4] that recognizes SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 13, and SDG 16 as the major SDGs where local governments can play a crucial role.

4.2. Current Programmes Undertaken by the Union Parisod

Table 6 provides an overview of the current programmes undertaken by the Union Parisods (the lowest tier of the local government) in Bangladesh. Almost all of the chairmen agreed on the present list of SDG-related programmes in Table 4. Moreover, the secretaries of the UPs also verified the programmes that were being locally implemented. Most of the programmes handled by the LGs are related to some SDGs. The programmes under Union Parisod jurisdiction are particularly focused on SDG 1, as poverty is prevalent in rural Bangladesh. Consequently, eradicating poverty in all forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the world's most pressing issue and a necessity for achieving sustainable development. LGs in Bangladesh place a premium on this issue, and one of the Union Council's key programmes is to offer food assistance to underprivileged groups (30 kg of rice per month) in the name of the VGD (vulnerable group development) and VGF (vulnerable group feeding) initiatives. The Union Parisod (UP) also provides some health services through the development of clinic infrastructure, purchase of medicines for

community clinics, delivering of newborns, supply of sanitary napkins to students, and dispatchment of ambulances in emergency situations. In addition, the council promotes agricultural development by offering assistance and services to farmers. This form of LG offers numerous training and employment options to women and youths without work. Thus, it can be stated that the Union Council's present programmes are strongly related to SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 6, SDG 10, SDG 12, and SDG 13. Although all of the SDGs are more or less important at the local level, some SDGs such as SDG 1, SDG 2, and SDG 6 have a huge scope for LGs (R3). As a result of these findings, it is obvious that not all SDGs are best suited for the local governments. There is a need to prioritise only certain SDGs for implementation by local governments.

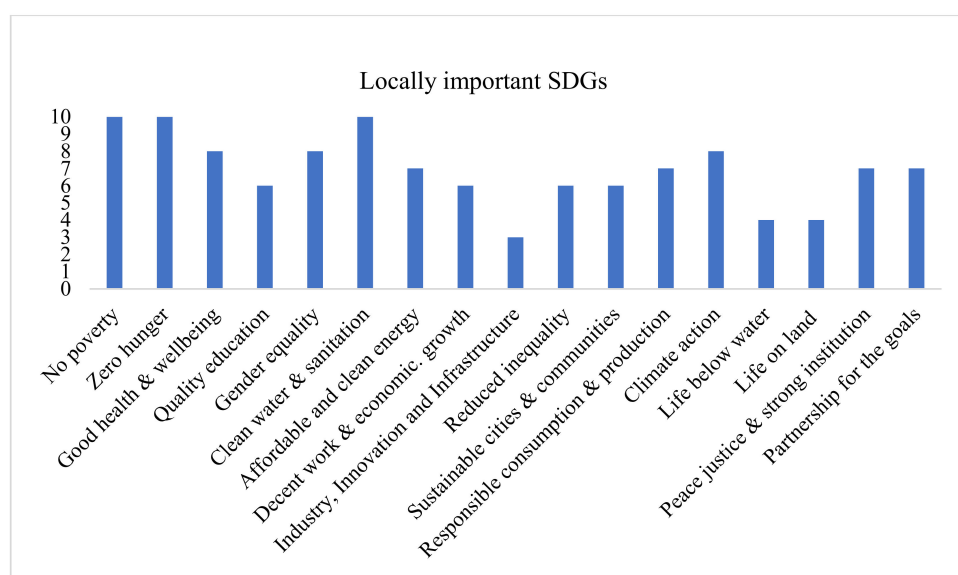


Figure 3. The locally important SDGs, identified by the respondents' perception.

Table 6. Major programmes undertaken by the Union Parisods in Bangladesh.

Type of Programmes	Description of Programmes	Relation with SDGs	Yes	No
Poverty reduction	• Vulnerable group development	SDG 1 and SDG 2	10	0
	• Widow allowance		10	0
	• Allowances for the disabled and elderly		10	0
	• Child allowance		09	1
Health services	• Clinical infrastructure development	SDG 3	08	0
	• Purchase of medicine		02	8
	• Delivery of newborns		07	3
	• Sanitary napkin supplies for students		08	2
	• Ambulance calls for emergencies		06	4
Education	• School infrastructure development	SDG 4	10	0
	• Student service corners		08	2
	• School visits		09	1
	• Working as a member of the Upazila Education Standing Committee		10	0
Water and sanitation	• Clean water supply	SDG 6	10	0
	• Provision of sanitation		10	0
Agricultural service	• Purchase of Agri products from farmers	SDG 12	10	0
	• Incentives (seed and fertilizer) for farmers		10	0
	• Suggestions for the farmers' problems		10	0

Table 6. Cont.

Type of Programmes	Description of Programmes	Relation with SDGs	Yes	No
Training and employment	• Training women for self-employment	SDG 10	09	0
	• Training women for small and cottage-based industries		06	4
	• Training for unemployed youth		09	1
	• ICT training		08	2
Roads and communication	• Road infrastructure	SDG 9	10	0
	• Box and culvert development		10	0
	• Drainage construction		06	4
Environmental actions	• Clearance certificates for environment	SDG 13	05	5
	• Monitoring of local mills and factories		08	2
Other programmes	• Birth registration	-	10	0
	• Union digital centres		10	0
	• Emergency response		10	0

4.3. Capacity of Local Government

A Union is the lowest tier of local government in rural Bangladesh, which is constructed of nine wards (a ward is a small demographic area under a Union where an elected member/councillor works for the people). The major human resources personnel in a Union Parisod are one elected chairman, nine elected ward councillors, and three other ward councillor positions reserved for women (Table 7). A chairman is a major member of the Union Parisod who is accountable for all union-related duties. Union Parisods establish various committees to ensure the Union's smooth operation. In addition to its developmental operations, a Union Parisod is involved in conflict mediation among the population, awareness programmes, and emergency preparedness. Under the direction of the chairman, the Union Parisod also maintains relationships with other local stakeholders for the benefit of the Union. There is a secretary who is responsible for the official recording and preparation of monthly meeting minutes. There are ten security personnel known as gram police (village police) that work for the security of the Union. However, the majority of chairmen stated that they required more personnel for better operations and management at the local level. Thus, it is crucial to enhance the local governments' capacity, making it more functional in relation to SDGs.

Table 7. Common resources under a Union Parisod.

Resources	Types	
Personnel (number)	Chairman	01
	Ward Councillor (nine wards)	12
	Secretary	01
	Accountant cum computer operator	01
	Security (Gram police/village police)	10
Digital Centre	Union Digital Centre (UDC)	
Sources of income	Holding tax	
	Ijarah or contract of public property	
	Income from the rural market	
	Income from license provision	
	Income from various certificate provision	
	Other taxes	
Office/building	Union Parisod building	

The latest Local Government (UP) Act from 2009 has created an opportunity to ensure a greater participation of the public in the development planning and implementation processes. According to the UP Act of 2009, there is a provision for 13 Standing Committees

(SC) to support the Parisod in ensuring transparency, accountability, and public participation in planning and implementation to ensure better governance and service [4]. Thus, LGs are involved in the development policy process. Specifically, the Union's chairman is a member of many committees created by the Upazila Parisod. The chairman engages in numerous programmes at the Upazila and district levels, where they are able to express their viewpoint depending on local needs. There are plenty of opportunities to provide opinions in the different programs arranged at the Upazila and district level for policy suggestions (R5). Table 8 presents some of the involvement of the Union Parisod/chairman in policy processes.

Table 8. Union Parisod/Chairman involvement in policy processes.

Local Government Involvement in the Policy Process	Yes	No
Opportunities to become involved in the policymaking process with the national government	10	0
Access to local MPs (Members of parliament) any time when needed	10	0
Access to the DC (Deputy Commissioner) any time when needed	09	0
Access to a UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) any time when needed	10	0
Attend the meeting arranged by the Upazila Parisod	10	0
Attend the meeting arranged by the Deputy Commissioner	09	0
Government should formulate policy based on LGs' suggestions	10	0

An SWOT analysis of the Union Council was conducted to advance local governments toward speeding up the implementation of SDGs. Table 9 summarises the SWOT analysis of the selected Union Council's local government organisation. The majority of chairmen held similar perspectives regarding the organization's strengths, shortcomings, opportunities, and problems. The primary strengths of the LGs were deemed to be in their ability to function at the local level, their familiarity with problems, and their familiarity with the people and environment, while the involvement of local citizens and the presence of local stakeholders were viewed as opportunities. Additionally, the LGs' vulnerabilities were highlighted as a lack of local capacity/resources, problem-specific statistics, and political will for decentralisation and empowerment. For example, one chairman stated that if the national government decentralised local government and provided proper allocation of resources, the LG would more effectively implement the SDGs (R7).

The majority of respondents identified political and public administration meddling as threads running through local governance, as demonstrated by the data. In addition, the Upazila chairman concurred with such observations as proof of a lack of decentralisation. These findings are nearly identical to an earlier study [45], which identified a lack of appropriate decentralisation, and political and public administration meddling as the primary impediments to the improvement of local government autonomy and acceleration of SDG implementation. Additionally, there is a lack of mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development within local contexts, necessitating the need for an exploration of viable options for assisting local governments in successfully implementing the SDGs [46]. It is believed that the local government not only improves access to vital services, but also gives a platform for the poor, farmers, workers, and women to participate in decision-making and development processes that benefit them.

To achieve the SDGs, it is necessary to contextualise the development objectives and programmes with the local government, which is deemed as the best placed administration for implementing policies and programmes that address poverty, reduce inequality, mitigate climate vulnerability, and promote gender parity. Bangladesh has been widely recognised as a successful achiever of the Millennium Development Goals, with local governments playing a critical role [35]. The government of Bangladesh must address the LGs' current issues in order to localise the SDGs within the framework of local governments. To

accomplish the goal of promoting SDGs at the local level, it is crucial to overcome flaws and deficiencies by assigning sufficient resources and funds, capitalising on possible strengths and opportunities, and properly decentralising the LGs.

Table 9. SWOT for the local government organisation (Union Parisod).

Dimension of SWOT	Local Government Attributes	Yes	No
Strengths	• Work at the local level	10	0
	• Know the problems	10	0
	• Familiar with the people and environment	10	0
Opportunities	• Local people involved	10	0
	• Community resources	9	1
	• Existence of local stakeholders (Local organisation/institution/NGOs/CBOs)	10	0
Weaknesses	• Lack of local capacity	10	0
	• Lack of resources	10	0
	• Lack of statistics focused on the problem	5	5
	• Lack of sufficient support from the national government	6	4
	• Lack of decentralization and empowerment	10	0
Threats	• Natural disaster	8	2
	• Misuse of funds	2	8
	• Inefficiency	6	4
	• Political interference	6	4
	• Public administration interference	8	2

4.4. Inclusive Framework for SDG Localisation

The study's findings indicate that a number of SDGs are critically significant at the local level and are highly relevant to local governance. However, the current structure of the local government has several flaws and problems that make it less able to implement SDGs at the local level. For example, an SWOT analysis reveals that local governments (Union Parisods) have a shortage in terms of their capacity and resources, statistical data on local issues, support mechanisms from the national government, and political will for decentralisation and empowerment, among other challenges. While chairmen of Union Parisods/Councils are aware of local issues, they do not have a comprehensive list of issues backed up by statistics. Thus, this study suggests the compilation of problems into a list and categorising them according to the relevant SDG. Statistics on issues are required, such as how many poor people live in the neighbourhood, how many require sanitation facilities, etc. The availability of disaggregated data could allow for equity-focused actions. It is also critical to ascertain the percentage of people who have received assistance from the Union Parisod. In the case of poverty, if 50% of the poor do not receive assistance from the Union Parisod, the chairman can make additional efforts to enroll the remaining 50% in an assistance programme. Additionally, this study proposes that the remainder of poor people could be managed through the expansion of LG assistance programmes from the national government and external agencies, as well as through the engagement of local stakeholders. This could be executed under the inclusive framework of SDG localisation proposed by this study; we recommend the formation of SDG implementation committee (SIC), comprising members from all significant local stakeholders (see Figure 4). Inclusive and bottom-up governance methods require the participation of multiple stakeholders, including the local government, residents (particularly youths), the local head, and other social and non-government organisations [47]. Moreover, there is a need to increase LGs' capacities and empower them to materialize the SDGs at the rural level [48]. Local government is not correctly functioning due to a lack of local capacity and empowerment, as observed. The empowerment of local governments, which is essential for effectively implementing development projects, has stalled in Bangladesh due to a lack of political will and bureaucratic intervention. Therefore, toward this end, the comprehensive decentralisation and empowerment of the Union Parisod have been highlighted for building local capacity

and for implementing the SDGs under LG leadership (Figure 3). More importantly, the Union Parishad must champion inclusive and innovative solutions that build local capacity and resources, as well as needs-based service delivery methods and, eventually, the local implementation of specific SDGs. LGs can promote localised nature-based solutions and local technology innovations to overcome problems and achieve targets related to the SDGs [49,50]. However, a substantial gap continues to exist in the adoption of integrated approaches and models for the implementation of the SDGs at the local level [51]. Moreover, there is a need to establish a framework for the localisation of SDGs, which can serve as a tool for promoting the implementation of the SDGs, thereby helping planners and policymakers [52]. As a result, this study offers an inclusive framework for SDG localisation within the framework of local governments, including the participation of all major local stakeholders, the formation of an SDGs implementation committee (SIC), and the strengthening of LGs. The Union Parishad should develop a detailed plan and actions by SIC to achieve SDGs locally. This framework calls for the strengthening of LGs through appropriate decentralisation and empowerment, proper support mechanisms from the national government, and increase of local capacity to materialise SDGs. However, the national government can also be established a body/unit to nationally and locally oversee the sustainability standards and progress of the SDGs [53]. Thus, strengthening local governance in rural Bangladesh may be the most effective strategy for the implementation of SDGs at the local level and may ensure that the policies promote equitable growth and prosperity.

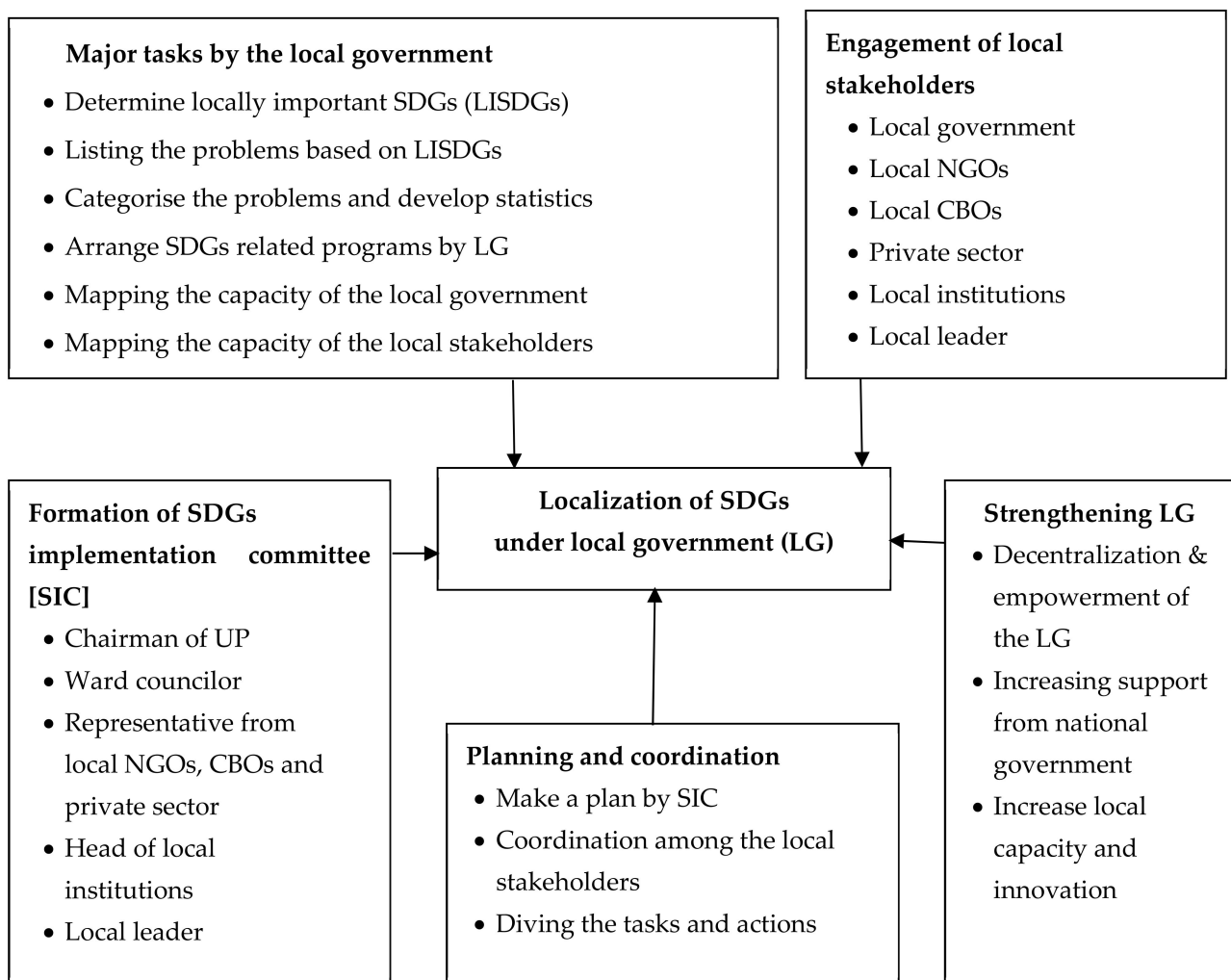


Figure 4. The inclusive framework for SDG localisation under local governments.

5. Conclusions

According to the international development community and practitioners, local governments are the key agencies that promote the mobilisation of local stakeholders and resources for inclusive sustainable development; the United Nations emphasises the significance of an inclusive and localised approach to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for this reason. Many Asian Pacific countries, such as Australia, the Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Thailand have reported their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The VNRs also highlighted governance and policy coherence, which emphasized the SDG localisation approach in place and called for specific attention on effectively localizing the SDGs in the countries.

Union Parisods are one of the key local government agencies that provide services to the public at the village level in Bangladesh. We discovered the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threads of local governments in regard to SDG localisation and provided an inclusive framework to materialise SDGs under the local government. Thus, this paper could be useful for both the national and local governments of Bangladesh to translate and implement SDGs locally through Union Parisods. However, in order to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh, there are a number of concerns and challenges that must be addressed in the local government. The lack of problem-specific statistics, deficiencies in resources, authority, and capacity are among the Union Parisod's most pressing obstacles. Creating a problem-specific database for the locality should be the Union's top goal moving forward. Moreover, setting up an SIC (SDG implementation committee) by including all relevant stakeholders within the Union Parisod could be an important step for enacting better plan of actions to solve the problems. However, the success of SDG localisation in Bangladesh largely depends on the national government's initiatives and willingness to properly decentralise and integrate national initiatives at the local level. We mentioned that localisation approaches need to enhance the capacity of the local government and other local stakeholders to optimise investment, reduce local vulnerabilities, and promote the SDGs. Successful localisation can be obtained through building local capacity, mobilising resources, and engagement of local stakeholders. Moreover, grassroots participation is required to achieve SDGs, especially in impoverished and marginalized communities. The SDGs can be achieved faster if all stakeholders, including local and regional governments, are effectively engaged. The all-inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda requires different tasks and multi-stakeholder participation, which are aspects that the local government can play a significant role in. To realise the 2030 Agenda, local governments must overcome the current obstacles through such inclusive strategies that leave no one behind. It is also necessary to strengthen local governments' capabilities through the utilisation of its strengths and opportunities, and by overcoming the weaknesses and threads to localise SDGs. Finally, an adequate decentralisation of the LG, participation from all stakeholders, and coordination among the groups are required objectives in order to accelerate SDG implementation in Bangladesh. This research could be useful for policymakers to begin and promote the localisation of SDGs under Union Parisod in Bangladesh. However, future research on the financial and resources needs of the LGs, as well as other stakeholders' perceptions, should be conducted to ensure the effective localisation of SDGs under LGs in Bangladesh.

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