Localised strategies and principles of good governance for the Sustainable Development Goals: where do the local authorities in Turkey stand?

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Abstract: The Sustainable Development Goals have been set by the representatives of all nations on the Earth, for people, planet, prosperity and peace. It is accepted that cross-sectoral nature of the SDGs requires collective responsibility, multi-level collaboration among all stakeholders, with the participation of people, for whom these goals exist. This article has revealed that, among the 30 metropolitan municipalities in Turkey, where localisation of the SDGs and multi stakeholder local governance is rare, just a few of them have aligned their targets partially with those of the SDGs. Local authorities in Turkey do great jobs regarding many aspects of the 2030 Agenda; however, their works need a torch, in the form of a localised strategy of the SDGs, better governance and a sustainable, institutional mechanism for monitoring the progress. The motto of 'leave no one behind!' cannot be realised without full engagement of local authorities in this challenging process.

Keywords: 2030 Agenda; local authorities in Turkey; local governments; localisation of the SDGs; localised strategies; local governance; partnership and participation; principles of good governance; Sustainable Development Goals; SDGs; Turkey.

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1   Introduction

It has been more than five years since the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted by the leaders of the 193 member states of the United Nations (UN) in 2015, when the period for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was over. Some of the targets in the MDGs have been achieved to a large extent while some of them have not been accomplished at all as the gap both between the developed and developing countries, and the inequality in the same countries is deepening. According to Ki-moon (2021), former Secretary General of the UN, the process of the MDGs was the most effective campaign against poverty in human history. Although, local and regional governments are not among the signatories of the SDGs at the UN, they are key actors in achieving them as more than half of the world population lives in urban areas. Nearly 65% of the SDGs targets directly fall under the realm and authority of local governments while they have indirect role for the remaining part of the targets (Cities Alliance, 2015). It means that SDGs will not be fully achieved unless engagement and coordination with local and regional governments is ensured (Cities Alliance, 2015). Umbrella organisations of the local governments such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) have strived to engage its members to dealing with the SDGs since 2013, when the SDGs were under construction. However, it is not possible to claim that all local governments around the world have high level of awareness about these significant goals.

Sustainable development is a goal that needs holistic approach and long-term thinking. Ensuring that a country achieves development without jeopardising the future generations' capability to meet their needs requires cooperation among all stakeholders, e.g., different tiers of government, NGOs, private sector and in general people (Mutiarani and Siswantoro, 2020). Therefore, any attempt conducted by actors individually and independently may not yield the required results. Any step taken with the objective of achieving the SDGs has to be part of a great strategy, designed and prepared with the participation of the relevant stakeholders at national level. It is no doubt that national strategies need to be localised as local governments are the closest entities to the people, who consume sources more than those in the rural areas. Any national strategy for the SDGs is doomed to failure unless local governments are included fully in the process as active actors. Local governments emerge as indispensable and critical actors for two reasons. First, many of the SDGs are directly or indirectly under their remit of responsibility. Second, as the closest statutory bodies to the local people, they have great capacity of raising awareness about the participation of people in the fight for achieving the SDGs, which is certainly essential (Thinyane, 2018).

In this article, we will discuss the position of the Turkish local governments vis-à-vis the SDGs and analyse their strengths and weaknesses. We will also examine the strategic plans of 30 metropolitan municipalities in Turkey, to check if the SDGs have been incorporated and localised. Good governance, a central and essential concept for central and local governments, is also a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs as it is the case for many public policies (EU Commission, 2018). Local governments in Turkey, in general, are highly experienced in terms of providing social services for the disadvantaged groups, such as the low-income groups, the handicapped, the children, the elderly and the women. However, their strength is hindered by the low level implementation of the principles of good governance, namely partnership, participation, coordination, transparency, accountability and multidimensionality. Services are not provided as steps that are all on the same direction towards a defined target, which is part of a strategy. Not

only for social services, but also in other policy areas, lack of strategy and planning, which is carried out thoroughly in partnership with relevant stakeholders, and weak implementation of the principles of good governance, is a great handicap for the local governments in Turkey. The article will start by explaining two important components of the SDGs at local level: localisation and local governance.

2 Why is the localisation of the SDGs important?

Out of the 17 SDGs adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, only the SDG 11 on 'Sustainable cities and human settlements' is directly related to subnational level, and it was included in the agenda thanks to the enormous efforts of UCLG and Global Task Force (2021), a partnership platform of umbrella organisations of local and regional governments New Urban Agenda, which can be considered as a roadmap for implementing this goal, was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016, and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2016 (UN, 2016). However, we cannot think that cities do not have competence or responsibility for the remaining 16 goals. According to the UN statistics, more than 55% of the world population lives in cities, and it is projected that around 70% will have been living in urban areas by 2050, which will increase the burden on cities tremendously (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). That is why, in the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, it is emphasised that "cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost" (UN, 2015a). Thinking that the entire SDGs focus on ending poverty, tackling climate change, fighting injustice and inequality, who can claim that these problems are not observed in cities? These goals and targets are very much related to each other, and there are links and interactions among them, which requires an integrated approach (Le Blanc, 2015; Måns et al., 2016).

In fact, cities bear more responsibility than rural areas as the city dwellers' activities in cities cause some of these problems more than those in rural areas, such as climate change, the severe effects of which are felt most in cities. Today, cities consume more than two-thirds of the world's energy; cause over 70% of the global carbon emissions; pollute seas and oceans as 75% of large cities are located on coast, and they are the nexus for the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and recently Covid-19 (UCLG, 2017; Papa, 2020). Therefore, local and regional governments are indispensable, critical actors in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and the national governments need to work in partnership and coordination with them as well as other stakeholders. Unless, a partnership culture or regime is instituted in a country, it is hard to expect full achievement of the SDGs, as they are tough and challenging goals, which require joined up efforts and resources.

The global pandemic of Covid-19 is a good example in terms of revealing the critical role that cities need to play in the implementation of the SDGs (Kuhlmann and Franzke, 2021). Cities all around the world have become the hotspots for Covid-19 due to "density, connectivity, crowded living conditions, and exposed occupations" while rural areas suffered from this communicable disease much less than cities (Why Has Coronavirus Affected Cities More than Rural Areas?, 2020). The global Covid-19 death

toll has been nearly 4.7 million as of September 2021, and it is predicted by the World Bank that the pandemic might push around 150 million people into extreme poverty due to closures of enterprises (Rohwerder, 2020; World Bank, 2020b, WHO, 2021). This unprecedented pandemic, which has led to a great economic crisis, has had devastating effects in health, economic, psychological and social dimensions. During the pandemic, it has been observed that income inequality and other types of inequality have deepened all around the world, and vulnerable groups have become more vulnerable. According to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (2020), the pandemic has hit all the three constitutive elements of the human development, namely income, health and education. While the pandemic poses great challenges for the implementation of the SDGs, it also reveals the necessity of partnership among different tiers of governments at local, regional and global levels (Munasinghe, 2020; Covid-19 and the SDGs, 2021).

The SDGs have been designed for all member states of the UN, regardless of their size, level of development, capacity, and they are global in nature (Biermanna et al., 2017). Therefore, their approach towards the SDGs naturally needs to vary depending on their priorities and needs. The main problems for one country may not be even minor problems for another country, and the same fact is valid for different cities of the same country. For example, the priorities, needs and approach of Istanbul, which is the economic and industrial capital of Turkey with a population of around 16 million, cannot be same with those of a small, unindustrialised city in Turkey, with a population of less than 100 thousand. Thus, not only national strategies but also local strategies specifically designed for cities are essential, which require continuous coordination and cooperation among different tiers of governments and stakeholders from the inception phase to the implementation and evaluation phases (Kanako et al., 2020).

Different cities have different features, such as the size, economy, geography, culture, society, challenges, opportunities, etc. The SDGs, including the goal on 'Sustainable cities and human settlements' do not mean same things for all cities. While the goal of 'ending poverty' or 'clean water and sanitation' is a priority for a city; the goals of 'gender equality' and 'affordable and clean energy' might be priorities for another city since different cities have different strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, cities need to prepare their own local sustainable development strategies, or at least incorporate the SDGs into their existing strategic plans, as it was recommended in the UN resolution on the SDGs (UN, 2015b).

In a report, prepared by the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, an initiative of the UN, it is recommended that a local approach to the post-2015 agenda needs to be adopted, which can be managed by "disaggregating data by place, and giving local authorities a bigger role in setting priorities, executing plans, monitoring results and engaging with local firms and communities" (UN, 2015a). Disaggregating data is crucial not only within a country but also within a city. Since most of the upper high-income groups live in cities, the urban poverty and other outcomes related to income level such as infant mortality is hidden due to aggregated statistics (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004). On the other hand, the disaggregated data needs to be coordinated before the service provision begins; in other words, data should not be stored in independent 'silos', which prevents the harmony in the services provided for people (Woodbridge, 2015). Thanks to its proximity to people, local governments can better contact people suffering from multiple deprivation, collect data about them and act in a more efficient way accordingly.

What we mean by 'localising the SDGs' or 'localisation of the SDGs' is the implementation of the goals at local level according to the local priorities set by local and regional authorities, which have responsibilities regarding the SDGs either directly or indirectly together with the national governments (UCLG, 2014). As the targets have been set for national level, and they are country-led, under the coordination of the central government, targets specifically set by each city is essential, which can encourage and motivate cities better in their efforts for achieving the SDGs. However, in order to set targets for each city, the present situation needs to be known through data collected and processed by staff with sufficient knowledge and expertise in each city separately. In other words, local needs can be analysed only through local data that serve as a basis for local action (Satterthwaite, 2003). After an assessment of the current outlook; specific, realistic, measurable and time-bound targets, on the basis of relevant indicators can be set, which need to be monitored again in each city (Global Task Force, 2014). If these steps can be taken by all cities in a country, and if the entire process of the implementation of the SDGs is done in line with the principles of governance namely partnership, participation, coordination, transparency and accountability, achievement of the 2030 Agenda might be easier.

Concerning the localisation of the SDGs, umbrella organisations of the local governments such as UCLG, Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and Global Task Force, have published several reports that include some toolkits and recommendations for local governments. Especially UCLG seems to have a pivotal role in organising campaigns on raising awareness among local and central governments' leaders. Its publication titled The Sustainable Development Goals: What Local Governments Need to Know shows how all of the 17 SDGs relate to the local and regional governments, and it lists the most relevant targets of each goal (UCLG, 2015). However, being cognisant of the SDGs and their targets is not enough for local governments. Not only achieving the SDGs, but achieving an ordinary task requires minimum capacity, which might be comprised of sufficient staff and income, necessary knowledge and expertise, and relevant equipment. How can a local government tackle the challenges listed in the SDGs if its capacity is not enough?

It goes without saying that before launching the works on the SDGs, substantial efforts are needed for building capacity for local governments, maybe with the assistance of the central government. Innovative models are needed in order to "strengthen the capacity, governance, service delivery, and financial ability of local governments to meet the SDGs" (Role of Local Governments in the Effective Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). It is also expected that more financial assistance is provided directly to the local and regional governments by the international financial institutions such as International Monetary Fund, World Bank and European Investment Bank. In terms of building capacity, intercity cooperation both in the same country and among different countries might be helpful. Some of the challenges that are faced especially in the cities such as housing, waste management, transportation and mobility etc. are subjects of the targets in the SDGs, and these realms require high technological expertise. In that case, transfer of technological knowledge from the cities having it to the cities that need it is essential (ICLEI, 2015).

To give an example about localisation of the SDGs, the first SDG titled 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere' is a goal for which many local governments play a key role as the closest bodies to the people suffering from urban poverty. However, local

circumstances and local needs must be analysed in order to successfully tackle these issues as different solutions are required for different contexts (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013). If the root cause of poverty in a neighbourhood is joblessness, a local government can open free vocational courses for those dwellers in their neighbourhood and act as intermediary between the employers and job seekers, as it is the case in Istanbul (İBB Bölgesel İstihdam Ofisi, 2020). Istanbul Artistic and Vocational Course (ISMEK, 2020), has served more than two million people in around 200 centres since it was opened in 1996, and by providing jobless people training, it has contributed a lot to poverty alleviation and social exclusion in Istanbul.

Mobilising local resources and removing local blockages on the basis of local choices, which are formed according to the needs and demands of the city dwellers, seems to be more efficient than any action taken at central level without analysing the circumstances onsite. Successful programs for the SDGs can be achieved on the basis of high-quality data about the local circumstances and local people, which help the city officials analyse the needs and risks. In fact, what makes local governments as powerful and favourable actors in dealing with the SDGs is its proximity to people, which means that they can see, hear and observe people's needs and demands onsite. What is more, they can mobilise local communities in terms of implementing some of the SDGs that require active involvement of people, which is the biggest strength and opportunity of local governments as long as they keep their close contact with people (Thinyane, 2018). However, if that contact is lost, then local governments, especially those in metropolitan areas, start to resemble central governments and lose their influence and efficiency. In this section, we will discuss this close contact between local governments and people as well as the relevant bodies under the title of good local governance.

3   Good local governance and the SDGs

It would not be an exaggerated claim to say that good governance is in the soul of 2030 Agenda, from the initial preparations that started in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 to the implementation at all levels by states. The goal setting process of the 2030 Agenda, was carried out under the auspices of the UN, in an inclusive and participatory approach, which let numerous interested NGOs and governments at all levels contribute to the preparations; unlike the MDGs, which were elaborated mainly in the UN Secretariat (Sachs, 2012). In other words, it is a bottom-up and stakeholders-oriented approach, that places the concept of partnership, which is mentioned as the 17th goal at global level, in the centre of the entire process. In fact, governance is the 16th goal in the Agenda 2030, by giving special reference to accountability and participation: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." This goal has a target of ensuring "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels", with an indicator of the "proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group" (UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2020). In order to ensure, this target and its indicator, local governments need to implement the localised agenda of the SDGs in accordance with the governance principles. Especially transparency and accountability are two principles that are supposed to be operationalised at local context as the indicator of the target requires the perception of governance in the eyes of people.

Bottom-up and inclusive processes are essential for applying the 2030 Agenda. If the entire process for ensuring the achievement of the SDGs is built on democratic values, which already include the principles of good governance such as partnership, participation, coordination, transparency, accountability and multidimensionality, the real potential of cities can be realised more smoothly. However, it is observed that, except some highly democratic countries, in general, the engagement level of local governments in the national governance system is low, and the vertical as well as horizontal partnership mechanisms do not work well (Okitasari, 2019). The main reason why principles of governance and fit-for-purpose institutional governance mechanisms are presented as prerequisites for the achievement of the SDGs is that the goals and targets become more challenging for national, regional or local actors if they stand alone in their efforts (OECD, 2016). That is why in the report titled The Future is Now, Science for Achieving Sustainable Development, prepared by a group of independent scientists, it is clearly expressed that "the success of the 2030 Agenda thus depends on the cooperation of governments, institutions, agencies, the private sector and civil society across various sectors, locations, borders and levels" (UN, 2019). It means that governance at global, national, regional and local level is essential, which includes all stakeholders including people, whose actions will have great effect on the achievement level of the SDGs. In some developing countries, the private sector along with the NGOs, follow the progress of the SDGs through some platforms that are assisted by the UNDP, as it is the case in Turkey (Business for Goals, 2020).

It is sure that governance is not one-way road, which requires joint efforts of all stakeholders, especially those of the NGOs. As a simple logic, in an equilibrium where a powerful actor enjoys full control over weak actors, it is not realistic to expect the strong party to call for sharing its power with the other actors unless there are external conditions. Even legal requirements may not be enough for urging official bodies to consult and cooperate with the NGOs, which are deemed to represent the interests of different groups in the public and have close contact with them. Tertiary sector with sufficient capacity in terms of the number of volunteers, part time and full time staff, annual income, knowledge and experience, is essential for ensuring real, effective and efficient partnerships with statutory bodies at local, regional and national levels (Hege and Demailly, 2017). For an effective partnership between local governments and the NGOs concerning the SDGs, especially the NGOs need to have awareness and certain expertise about sustainable development. Otherwise, what happens in cities in the name of partnership or cooperation turns into simple realisation of a legal requirement or window-dressing activity, which only serves improving the image and the prestige of local governments. However, the surveys on the NGOs' awareness concerning the SDGs show that more efforts are needed in this issue. According to a perception survey on Agenda 2030, the awareness among the NGOs regarding national SDGs implementation plans is low all around the world, and more than half of the respondents were unaware of these plans (Together 2030, 2016).

NGOs can play a critical role by urging the local governments to produce and share data concerning the SDGs including the share of budget expenditures allocated for realising the targets. As it was discussed above, we need data concerning the indicators of the targets set for the SDGs in order to analyse present situation in a city. Without fresh, reliable, valid and transparent data, no evaluation or progress is possible as we are supposed to know where we are in order to be able to arrive at our destination. In other

words, NGOs, which are usually supported by the communities, have power to mobilise people, and they can use this power to hold local governments accountable for what is done and what is not done regarding the 2030 Agenda. In an urban setting, where NGOs play active role, the principles of accountability and transparency can be ensured in a relatively easy way. In addition to that, NGOs can play a collaborative role in urging local and national governments translate the goals and the targets of the 2030 Agenda in their legislation, although this is not urged by the resolution that included the SDGs (UN, 2015b). The research community in a city, especially researchers and scientists, can also contribute to the process of the SDGs in terms of measuring progress in different targets and helping local governments "align the goals with existing governance arrangements, and integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions" (Biermanna et al., 2017). Therefore, especially universities and research centres need to be involved in partnerships that are expected to be coordinated by local governments in the frame of the SDGs, as the measurement of progress might be deemed as part of governance (Pinter et al., 2017).

It is not excusable for local governments to avoid partnership with the civil society organisations under the pretext that they do not have enough capacity or expertise to be collaborators for realising the SDGs. Then, the situation turns into a vicious cycle of chicken and egg problem: local governments do not collaborate with NGOs for the reason that they are weak, and NGOs keep on being weak as no partnership is established with them. After all, NGOs have close contact with the grassroots where local governments may not be able to reach easily, and they can function as a reliable bridge between those who provide public services and those who use them (Hege and Demailly, 2017). Unless people's participation is ensured, it is not realistic to expect that the SDGs are fully achieved, and their participation can be encouraged and improved thanks to NGOs. Therefore, any effort and expenditure spent for empowering NGOs serves directly the achievement of the SDGs.

Participation of the public in the works carried out in the frame of the SDGs is much more significant than the participation conducted for any other issue. What makes participation so critical is that some of the targets of the SDGs need active involvement and actions of people, especially urban dwellers who consume natural resources and energy disproportionally more than the public in the rural areas (Mayday 23: World Population Becomes More Urban than Rural, 2007). It is the responsibility of the local governments to set the required systemic mechanisms that ensures participation of people. If we expect participation of people in the fight for achieving the SDGs, empowering people is necessary through education, awareness raising campaigns and social movements (UN, 2019). It is common sense that people tend to respect, obey and internalise the rules, that involve their active involvement, rather than the rules, set in a top-down approach, without any democratic process. It is observed that the most successful anti-poverty programs are those that ensure the involvement of the people for whom these programs are designed and implemented. When people have influence on these programs about what is done, and how it is done, it usually contributes to the success of the program, as the assessment of need is performed in a more effective way (Satterthwaite and Mitlin, 2013).

Partnership is essential not only at local or national level, but also at international level for the achievement of the SDGs. In addition to umbrella organisations for local governments such as UCLG, which has high capacity in terms of expertise, knowledge and experience on sustainable development, Metropolis (global network of metropolitan

areas), ICLEI, Eurocities (a network of cities in Europe), etc., there are some subject specific initiatives, aiming exchange of knowledge and experience in different challenges faced by the local governments such as climate change (Compact of Mayors), disaster risk reduction (Resilient Cities), water and sanitation (Africa Water and Sanitation Local Authorities Network – AWASLA) and public transportation (CIVITAS). The Compact of Mayors, a global coalition of mayors "committed to reducing local greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing resilience to climate change" is a good example for cooperation among cities. The cities in that platform use the carbon climate registry (cCR), "a free global reporting platform for local and subnational governments which facilitates structured reporting on climate change mitigation and adaptation" (ICLEI, 2015).

4   General overview of local governments in Turkey regarding the SDGs

Turkey, a developing country, situated as a bridge between the continents of Asia and Europe, ranks 59 out of 189 countries according to the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2019). With a population of around 84 million and a GDP of around 750 million USD, it is the 19th biggest economy in the world (World Bank, 2020a). As a country close to the level of the developed countries, Turkey performed relatively well in the implementation of the MDGs, which were especially set for the least developed and developing countries, except the ongoing dramatic inequality between the urban and rural areas, which is visible in most countries. Turkey had integrated the MDGs into its 10th national development plan covering the period between 2014–2018, which is the highest-level strategic plan of the country (Turkish Ministry of Development, 2016). In the latest national development plan, covering the period between 2019–2023, there is a clear reference to the SDGs, and the aim of integrating the SDGs with all macro level sectoral and institutional plans is emphasised (Presidency of Strategy and Budget of Turkey, 2019). However, despite the special recommendation of the OECD to Turkey regarding the integration of all targets of the SDGs into national agenda, it has not been realised yet (OECD, 2016).

In the report prepared by the ad hoc commission on local governments, which was established for contributing to the National Development Report of Turkey, the links between the SDGs and national legislation on local governments in Turkey are clearly revealed, by reserving separate paragraphs for each goal (Turkish Ministry of Development, 2018). Turkish Statistic Institute (TURKSTAT) has been assigned the role of producing national indicators on the basis of the SDGs and their targets. TURKSTAT revealed its latest bulletin in February 2020, covering the period between 2010 and 2018, showing the progress of Turkey regarding the SDGs on the basis of 83 indicators that were developed nationally (TURKSTAT, 2020). However, the number of national indicators is not enough to show a clear picture of Turkey vis-à-vis the SDGs. For example, the SDG 11, 'Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' has 15 global indicators while TURKSTAT has just four indicators, which do not let us grasp the reality and understand to what extent Turkish cities meet that goal. In this section, we will focus on the implementation of the SDGs at local level by checking first if the integration of the SDGs at local level has been achieved. We will analyse the strategic reports, covering the period between 2020–2024, of all 30 metropolitan cities in Turkey,

representing around 80% of the population, and try to understand the level of awareness about the SDGs in Turkish cities, from the planning phase to the implementation.

Turkey is a highly centralised unitary state, and the local governments in Turkey, which are officially named as 'local authorities' or 'municipalities' have less competence, when compared to most European countries. The level of competence can be understood from the share of local governments in total public expenditures and GDP, which is around 12% and 5% respectively in Turkey, while the EU 28 average is 24% and 11%, respectively (Güzel and Yılmaz, 2018; OECD and European Commission, 2018). Despite low expenditure share, thanks to the law on municipalities, local governments are able to provide services, such as provision of healthcare, education and cultural activities, although they are not mandatory like waste management or water supply (TBMM, 2004). Except the Goal 11 (To make cities and human settlements safe and sustainable) and Goal 6 (To provide access to water and sanitation for all), which are directly under the competence and responsibility of local governments in Turkey, the other 15 goals are related to cities at varying levels as they are all cross-sectoral and transversal, and most of them match with the tasks of the municipalities in Turkey (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019). The only two exceptions that are not directly related to local governments, not only in Turkey but also in the world, is Goal 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and Goal 14 (Converse and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources) for the cities that do not have access to seas or oceans. As it was stated in the Agenda 21, adopted in the Rio Conference on Sustainable Development in 1992, most of the environmental problems can be traced back to local communities, and local governments can mobilise local communities with the purpose of implementing environmental programs (UN, 1992).

The efforts for the localisation of the MDGs in Turkey in the aftermath of its commencement in 2000 were not extensive. The program, which was initiated in partnership with the UNDP (2006), covering the period between 2006 and 2010, under the title of Localizing UN Millennium Development Goals in Turkey through the Local Agenda 21 Governance Network is one of the few examples. One reason for that fact is that the MDGs were limited in terms of the scope it covered, and Turkey was already in a relatively good position when compared to most developing countries. In other words, the burden regarding the MDGs on the central governments of relatively developed countries was not as much as that regarding the SDGs, which cover many areas requiring partnership among all relevant bodies. In the aftermath of the adoption of the Agenda 2030 in 2015, we have not observed significant steps neither from the central government nor the local governments, although they were planned to be done (OECD, 2016).

The umbrella organisation of local governments in Turkey, the Union of Municipalities in Turkey (UMT, 2019), of which each and every local authority in Turkey has to be a member as a legal requirement, has not taken significant and concrete steps regarding the localisation of the SDGs and the alignment of the SDGs with municipal plans, except few seminars, publications and a database of the local projects, which is just mentioned in the activity report, but not disclosed. UMT is officially responsible for coordinating the works of local governments' works for the preparation of the Voluntary National Report on the SDGs in 2019 (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019). However, its task regarding the SDGs should not be limited to the contribution to one single report. In fact, there is a good practice of interactive website in Germany, which "provides stakeholders with suitable indicators to display and review SDG implementation in German cities, districts and communities and to collect corresponding

data" (CEMR-PLATFORMA, 2019; SDG-Indikatoren für Kommunen entdecken, 2020). It is expected that UMT takes a more active role in the process of raising awareness, advocacy, capacity-building (empowerment), coordination, communication and mobilisation of local authorities, by encouraging exchange of good practices and by disclosing available disaggregated data to help monitor the progress through a website.

It is observed that in Turkey, local governments do some works that can be evaluated in the frame of the SDGs, their targets and indicators. In fact, not only in Turkey, but also in Europe, most mid-sized and metropolitan local authorities already carry out some works, most of which can be integrated into the SDGs (CEMR-PLATFORMA, 2019). In the second Voluntary National Report of Turkey, presented in 2019, it is stated that the projects, which were implemented by the municipalities in Turkey, were mostly related to the SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities). The activity report of the UMT mentions 100 projects of 37 municipalities in Turkey, which can be evaluated in the frame of the SDGs and their targets (UMT, 2019). However, two questions come to mind in that context: to what extent can local governments achieve the SDGs without knowing what they are, and why do not the top level officials at local governments place the SDGs at the centre of their plans although nearly five years have passed since they were adopted? The simple logic answers these questions that being aware of targets and indicators helps actors achieve their works or projects in an effective and efficient way. In that regard, the targets and indicators can be likened to road signs and projectors.

We can also infer that the SDGs are not at the agenda of most metropolitan cities in Turkey, which has population of more than 750.000 representing around 80% of the total population in Turkey, by analysing their strategic plans that cover the period between 2020–2024. These reports, by nature, include the reference principles, concepts and understandings that guide the projects and works carried out in a city, as well as pointing the destination that cities aspire to arrive after five years. When we check these reports, we see that out of the 30 metropolitan cities in Turkey, 21 of them did not even mention the SDGs, while six of them, namely Adana, Van, Mersin, Konya, Denizli and Erzurum mentioned the expression of the SDGs only once in their strategic plans without translating them into their local goals, or in other words, without localising them. There are four metropolitan municipalities: Balıkesir, Eskişehir, İstanbul and İzmir, which seem to have aligned their goals with the SDGs in their strategic plans to a certain extent. Just few municipalities out of the remaining 51 cities have aligned their plans to the SDGs (Wright, 2018). In fact, just checking strategic plans may not be sufficient to arrive at a conclusion that the SDGs with their targets have fully been localised.

We also do not know where Turkish cities stand as we do not see progress reports prepared by the local authorities in Turkey on the basis of indicators, that shows their position vis-à-vis the targets of the SDGs. We need "transparent reporting on goals and successes with indicators using straightforward paths of communication between the citizens and local administrations", which is missing in Turkey according to a survey conducted by Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR-PLATFORMA, 2019). Further research is required to make sure that aligning the SDGs with local strategic goals is not just a public relations step or a window dressing action, but a serious political action that is adopted and implemented at high level.

On the other hand, when the strategic plan of the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation is analysed, it is seen that it has integrated the SDGs into its goals to a large extent. This ministry is relevant for all municipalities in Turkey, as the General Directorate of Local Administrations is under this ministry, which is responsible for coordinating the relations of the local governments with the central governments institutions and checking if local governments' strategic plans are in line with the national strategic plans (General Directorate of Local Administrations, 2018). We understand that the ministry adopts the SDGs but ignores its task of oversighting the alignment of local plans with the national plans, some of which already refer to the SDGs although all targets have not been incorporated. When we read the activity report of this General Directorate, which is the contact point between the central government and local governments, we do not see any activity regarding localisation of the SDGs (Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation, 2019).

Although it is limited, there are some efforts of local governments in Turkey for integrating the SDGs into their agendas and works on raising awareness regarding the SDGs. Few municipalities in Turkey have prepared their voluntary local review reports; however, none of them has been presented to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In fact, globally just 30 cities have presented their voluntary local reviews (UN Voluntary Local Reviews, 2020). The Municipality of Esenler (2017), a district municipality in Istanbul with a population of around 500,000, issued a report titled 2030 Sustainable Local Development Goals: The Practices of Esenler, which indicates the links between the local projects and the SDGs. It is also worth mentioning the conference titled 2030 Sustainable Development Goals organised by the Association of Turkish Health Cities, in October 2019, as an effort for raising awareness about the SDGs among its members. Finally, as an initiative of an association on local governments, 21 municipalities have agreed to cooperate regarding the achievement of the SDGs at local level in 2019 (Cooperation Among Municipalities on Sustainable Development, 2019).

5   Conclusions

The world seems to be committed to implementing the SDGs as it has started to feel the devastating effects of inhumane exploitation of natural resources and excessive egoism in the sense of irresponsible production and consumption patterns, which has started to endanger the next generations. Each and every goal in the SDGs is intertwined with each other, and all aspects of sustainable development are integrated into the SDGs. As the problems that the world faces are not caused by one nation, one actor, one institution or one stakeholder, so the solutions cannot be managed by just central governments, local governments, business community, research community, NGOs or people. It is understood from the nature of global problems, the SDGs and the UN resolution incorporating these goals that, the world needs solidarity-driven multi-stakeholder partnership at local, regional, national and global levels for the full achievement of the SDGs, which have been designed for people, planet, prosperity and peace. Local governments have certainly pivotal role and responsibility for implementing the SDGs, as more than half of the people live in cities, and as they are the closest statutory bodies to people.

Table 1   Metropolitan cities in Turkey mentioning the SDGs in their strategic plans

Metropolitan city	*Not mentioned*	*Mentioned 1–3 times*	*Mentioned 4–6 times*	*Mentioned 7–9 times*
Adana		X		
Ankara	X			
Antalya	X			
Aydın	X			
Balıkesir		X		
Bursa	X			
Denizli	X			
Diyarbakır	X			
Erzurum		X		
Eskişehir				X
Gaziantep	X			
Hatay	X			
İstanbul				X
İzmir		X		
Kahramanmaraş	X			
Kayseri	X			
Kocaeli	X			
Konya		X		
Malatya	X			
Manisa	X			
Mardin	X			
Mersin		X		
Muğla	X			
Ordu	X			
Sakarya	X			
Samsun	X			
Şanlıurfa	X			
Tekirdağ	X			
Trabzon	X			
Van		X		

It is observed that, except few municipalities in Turkey, the SDGs have not been localised, and no visible cooperation and coordination exist among local governments, NGOs and central government. Lack of effective horizontal and vertical governance is not limited to the issue of the SDGs, but it is a common problem seen in the national context of Turkey, which needs to be evaluated at a macro level by touching on the indicators such as the socio-political culture, the position of the voluntary sector, democratic values, legislation, educational standards, etc. Strategic plans and activity reports of cities in Turkey reveal that much of the services provided by the local

governments in Turkey contribute in a way or another to the achievement of some targets in the SDGs. However, lack of a localised strategy, that is prepared and conducted with the relevant stakeholders, as well as non-operationalised principles of good governance emerge as great barriers to the full realisation of these goals. Insufficient institutional capacity and scarce financial resources in local authorities are also two factors that lead to this negative picture. It is observed that the SDGs are not at the agenda of most cities in Turkey, which necessitates more awareness raising activities and campaigns organised by umbrella organisations of local governments such as UMT and General Directorate of Local Authorities. It is assumed that local governments must be fully cognisant of strategic value of the SDGs and their targets in order to be able to align their plans and activities in line with them.

Most local governments might believe that the achievement of the SDGs is the responsibility of central governments, which are accountable to the UN in a non-mandatory way. Then, it is also the role of the central governments, and maybe the NGOs, research and business community, and even people, to encourage or urge local governments to fully engage in the SDGs and to work in coordination with all relevant stake holders by reminding that all actors need to take collective responsibility to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In a way, these goals need to be kept at the local and national agendas. In that regard, relatively less developed tertiary sector in terms of staff, income, knowledge, experience and volunteers, as well as weak participation of people into decision-making mechanisms in Turkey hinder effective local governance. Despite that, the voluntary sector, including the science community, together with citizens, can bear more responsibility and assist the local governments in Turkey for the localisation of the SDGs, and the implementation of the governance principles. As it is the case for other problems caused by many actors and stakeholders, our local, national and global problems can be solved by adopting a multi-stakeholder partnership approach. The motto of 2030 Agenda, 'Leave no one behind!' can only be realised by including all stakeholders, and by establishing working inclusive partnership mechanisms at all levels in Turkey, and all around the world.

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