

Briefing Paper 2

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Localising the SDGs: Building a Robust Methodology for Newham and Tower Hamlets Communities.

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Mapping the Experiences of Local Organisations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global agenda for promoting sustainable development, ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and (2016). Achieving these prosperity goals necessitates a combined effort at the macro and micro levels to fully realise their transformative potential and meet the "leave no one behind" aspirations of the SDGs. Unfortunately, progress towards the SDGs in the UK has been limited. particularly in the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets (NWTH) and concerning SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing), SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), and SDG 12 (Responsible production and consumption), which the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated (The Guardian, 2021; LB Newham, 2020; LB Tower Hamlets, 2020, UKSSD, 2019).

The Capability Approach (CA) lens proposed by Sen (2004) provides a valuable framework for understanding micro-actors' role in shaping individual and collective development (Biggeri et al., 2018). This research project, funded by UEL-ELISA, sought to build upon previous research (Lennox et al., 2020; Tiwari, 2021) to explore the relevance of the SDG tracking mechanisms for local community organisations in NWTH and the various ways in which local organisations are achieving the SDGs at the grassroots level.

The study involved a team of two academics, two research assistants, and eight students, with the following objectives:

- To investigate the relevance of the SDG tracking mechanisms for local organisations in NWTH.
- To map the critical progress, gaps, and challenges in achieving the SDGs at the grassroots level.
- To explore how the SDG framework can enable the SDGs to be implemented and monitored locally.



Why Newham and Tower Hamlets Communities?

NWTH were chosen for this research project due to their diverse population and significant wealth and inequality disparities. Despite their strengths, both boroughs face challenges such as poor living conditions, high unemployment, economic exclusion, and inequalities in education, health, and opportunities.

Newham, the home borough of UEL, has a young population contributing to its dynamic culture and



economy. Similarly, Tower Hamlets has a rich history as a former dock and manufacturing area that has developed rapidly. However, both boroughs have high poverty rates and low-paid employees, with Newham being one of the most deprived boroughs in London and Tower Hamlets having the city's worst unemployment and child poverty rates.

The SDGs provide a globally recognised framework for sustainable and inclusive development that can help address these challenges. By using the SDGs as a universal yardstick for global development, this research project aims to identify gaps, opportunities, and challenges NWTH communities face in achieving the SDGs by 2030.



Methodology

The study adopted a mixed methods approach to gain insights into the engagement of local organisations in NWTH with the SDGs. To achieve this, six local organisations' work and experiences were mapped against SDGs 3, 10, and 12. Data was collected through fifteen semi-structured interviews and one focus group session held between July 2022 and October 2022.

To identify key themes and patterns in the data, researchers plotted the findings within a contextualised SDGs mapping framework, which was developed earlier in the overarching research project. This provided a visual representation of each organisation's level of engagement with the SDGs, revealing areas of progress and any gaps or discrepancies.

In addition, statistical analysis was used to analyse the findings further and determine the extent to which the SDGs are implemented and achieved at the borough level. By using qualitative and quantitative methods, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of local community organisations with the SDGs in NWTH. This approach yielded a rich dataset that can inform policymaking and community development in the region.

The SDGs Framework

In the previous phase of this overarching research project (Lennox et al., 2020; Tiwari, 2021), the SDGs were contextualised, and a framework was created for the sub-national level application. The framework was developed into an Excel spreadsheet, enabling statistical data analysis. Indicators unsuitable for the borough level were identified and modified to align with the goals and targets to ensure accurate measurement.

The framework uses a Red, Amber, or Green (RAG) system to rate the data, identifying negative, progress, and positive trends. This approach effectively identifies areas that require targeted interventions, enabling local actors and policymakers to focus their efforts on specific areas. Additionally, the toolkit highlights where further work is necessary to customise the SDG framework, making it more applicable to cities and their boroughs.

This approach ensures that the SDGs are effectively implemented and monitored locally, facilitating progress towards achieving sustainable development goals. The toolkit provides a comprehensive means of measuring progress, enabling local actors to make informed decisions and take action to address areas that require improvement.



Initial Findings

The initial findings of this research project highlighted several ways local organisations in NWTH are working within the various domains of the SDGs. However, the results also revealed that many workers face similar challenges and inequality barriers as the individuals they support following the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

3.4. By 2030, promote mental health and wellbeing.

"Mental health issues are presenting themselves, and that is not just the people coming for help. But anxiety and stress in the workforce. With volunteers and staff often living in the same world, same stresses and poverty... In the pandemic, residents were dramatically impacted... The biggest thing we try to do is encourage organisations to work together to make the most of time, space and equipment. (Participant 16).

10. 2. Empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status.

"We are very keen to recruit more volunteers from within the community services we provide... For example, we had one lady in the ESOL classes who has never volunteered, never worked, and so felt really discouraged... She started volunteering with us and now she has gained confidence, has a job and continues to happily volunteer" (Participant 11).

12.3. By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest loss.

"We ensure no food is wasted. No wastage. We will ensure that even the food that is left over is then shared with other communities doing similar work to us. We have a WhatsApp group to share food on that group and other organisations will collect it" (Participant 13).

Challenges in Tracking the SDGs

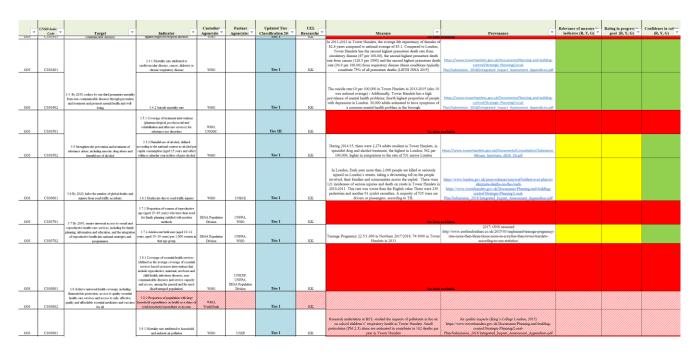
Tracking progress towards the SDGs also presented some challenges, as our research revealed:

- Firstly, at the initial stages of the research, the team attempted to engage with twelve local organisations in NWTH. However, many organisations faced capacity limitations that prevented them from fully committing to the study, despite expressing interest in participating.
- Secondly, for the organisations that partook in the study, it was identified that they were working within the SDG domains. However, their ability to practically track their progress was hindered by the limited resources they had access to or a lack of understanding of the SDGs' relevance.
- Finally, many SDG tracking mechanisms are not applicable at the grassroots level, raising questions about how the SDGs can be effectively implemented in different contexts. This can contribute to persistent poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

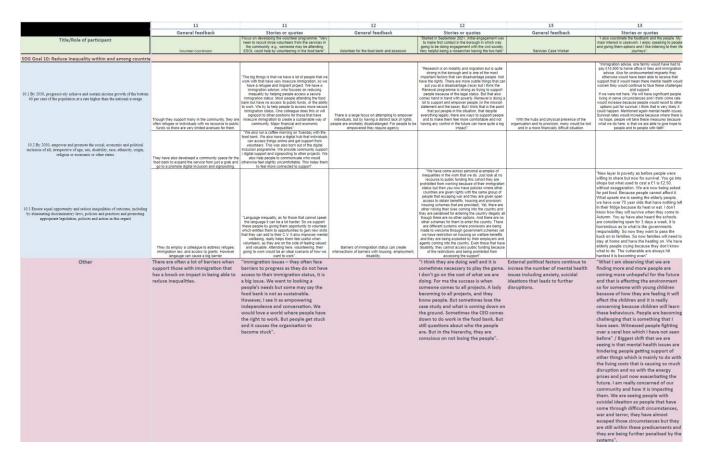
These challenges highlight the need for more comprehensive and localised approaches to SDG tracking that consider each community's unique context and conditions and provide tailored support to organisations to implement and monitor progress towards the SDGs effectively.



SDG Framework



SDG 10 - Mapping of Participants' Responses





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Further Information

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