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Multi-level governance and implementation challenges in localising sustainable development goals: Evidence from Botswana

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Abstract: To strengthen the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Botswana has mapped relevant SDGs and targets to existing development plans, including Vision 2036. However, despite significant policy alignment between national development plans and the SDGs, the localisation outcomes are notably slow – epitomising the challenges faced by middle-income countries in the Global South. That is, the extent to which these frameworks in the Global South translate into effective local implementation remains unclear. This paper assesses the governance structures needed to ensure the effective localisation of the SDGs. While Botswana is used as a case study, the issues highlighted apply to many other countries in the Global South. The study utilises triangulation methodology, integrating published community-based monitoring system (CBMS) data and systematic document analysis. The analysis reveals that successful SDG localisation requires a clear governance framework that goes beyond national alignment with global goals. The analysis also reveals a clear governance framework for localising SDGs in Botswana. However, the case of Gabane suggests several challenges to SDG localisation that help explain the identified localisation gap. The study finds an apparent lack of community participation in implementing the SDGs. This has rendered local communities' inclusion and participation difficult. Additionally, the study identifies gaps in monitoring and evaluation, primarily due to a lack of community-level data. It is recommended that deliberate steps be taken to build local governance autonomy, capacity, and participatory systems.

Keywords: global south; sustainable development; local governance; decentralisation; community

1. Introduction

Botswana has relatively robust governance structures and statistical systems that should ideally enable the effective localisation of the SDGs and the tracking of progress [1]. The Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) ranks Botswana fifth among 54 African countries in terms of overall governance, confirming its previously strong performance [2]. Botswana is a good example of aligning national frameworks with the SDGs. Botswana has mapped relevant SDGs and targets to existing national development plans (e.g. National Development Plan 11) and Vision 2036 to facilitate implementation [3]. Vision 2036 serves as the main framework for localising SDGs. This background makes Botswana a logical model for how a strong institutional setting can support localised efforts. Notwithstanding this institutional setting, evidence suggests that high-level national commitments have not translated into ideal outcomes. For instance, despite the alignment of national frameworks (Vision 2036 and NDP 11) with the SDGs, the localisation of the SDGs remains uneven [4].

Effective localisation is often hampered by non-alignment with diverse local contexts [5]. However, research (e.g. Croese et al, [6]) mostly treats SDG localisation as a technical and administrative process that depends on technical and administrative processes, institutional efficiency, planning and coordination structures. Regrettably, this approach places too much emphasis on the central government structures at the expense of the local government system. Specifically, while Botswana's current SDG governance system mirrors a Multi-level Governance (MLG) model and comprises the National Steering Committee (NSC), Technical Task Force (TTF), and a Secretariat, it is challenged by weak inter-agency links [7]. Treating localisation as an administrative process managed by national institutions renders SDG localisation impotent by hindering local authorities from tailoring interventions to local needs [8]. Based on these outcomes, the current study seeks to establish how the untapped role of local governance actors under an MLG governance structure has shaped local-level SDG outcomes.

To achieve this, using a triangulation method, the study aims to: (i) establish whether national targets and/or commitments translate into local outcomes—the “localisation gap”; (ii) assess the extent to which existing governance structures hinder effective localisation of SDGs; and (iii) compare Botswana's outcomes with peer middle-income Global South countries.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology; Section 3 outlines the key findings; Section 4 provides a discussion of the findings, and Section 5 concludes the paper.

1.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework adopted for the paper draws on multi-level governance theory, institutional capability perspectives, and community-level governance. This approach allows for a methodical assessment of how the global SDG goals fit into the largely centralised governance system. That is, the dynamic interaction among national policy guidance, intergovernmental coordination, and local operationalisation determines the SDG outcomes. Specifically, **Figure 1** shows that SDG localisation is conceptually an outcome of the interaction among governance structures, institutional capability, and locality-specific factors. That is, this dynamic interaction between national policy guidance, inter-governmental coordination and locality operationalisation determines the SDG outcomes.

To translate the SDGs into local outcomes, as shown in **Figure 1**, Botswana's Vision 2036 and National Development Plan 11 (NDP 11) unequivocally include the 17 SDGs. The potency of the MLGs in the mediation between central and local authorities influences successful implementation. This entails delegating authority, resources, and responsibilities to subnational levels. Guha and Chakrabarti [9] identify four governance challenges, viz.: coordination, fiscal decentralisation, political leadership, and deliberative democracy, emphasising a “whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach” for achieving the SDGs. Furthermore, Faguet [10] asserts that successful decentralisation requires careful consideration of, inter alia, local contexts and institutional structures. Although Botswana's decentralisation policy and implementation expanded the number of districts from 16 to 31, SDG localisation

remains hampered by budgetary centralisation and persistently limited fiscal autonomy [11]. In turn, a positive localisation outcome mirrors the interplay between local institutional capacity and consideration for locality-specific factors.

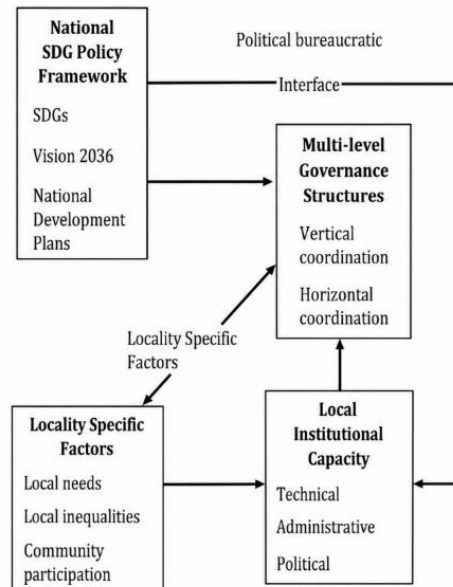


Figure 1. Theoretical framework-visual overview.

Source: Authors' compilation.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Research design

This study uses a triangulation method. This approach uses various methods to study the same phenomenon [12]. Triangulation has the advantage of improving the credibility and validity of research findings [12,13]. The analysis adopted in this study combines a quantitative and qualitative approach. First, the paper relies on a quantitative approach to identify gaps in the localisation of SDGs and then uses qualitative evidence to ensure the results are robust. The quantitative approach uses community-level data to derive SDG results. Through a systematic review of relevant documents, a qualitative approach is used to examine the implications of a centralised, multi-level governance structure and its implementation for SDG outcomes.

2.2. Quantitative component

2.2.1. Data sources

The quantitative analysis draws on the Community-Based Monitoring System dataset developed by the Partnership for Economic Policy (PEP) in collaboration with the University of Botswana. The dataset is available on the PEP website: <https://portal.pep-net.org/public/project/20068>. The dataset covers the village of Gabane in Kweneng District and was collected between February and April 2018. The survey captured 2,693 households and 6,842 individuals. The CBMS framework tracks 21 indicators aligned with eight SDGs, providing micro-level data that makes it suitable for assessing Gabane village's localisation outcome. There is limited

district-level data on the SDGs in Botswana, and this dataset is the most comprehensive available.

2.2.2. Analytical strategy

The analysis focuses on selected indicators under SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. The choice of indicators is based on the availability of local quantitative data—which would allow comparison between Gabane CBMS and Statistics Botswana’s domesticated SDG indicators. To establish the differences between national and Gabane village outcomes, the study compares national SDG targets, national baseline statistics and observed village-level outcomes.

Gap values reflect percentage-point differences between national benchmarks/values and the Gabane case. The analysis distinguishes between percentage changes and percentage-point differences to ensure consistency. The objective is not to generalise/establish Gabane outcomes nationally. Instead, the village serves as an analytical case to illustrate how national commitments translate into community-level outcomes. The case provides an empirical lens for examining governance effectiveness at the point of implementation.

2.3. Qualitative component

The study employed a systematic review to examine governance and implementation mechanisms for the localisation of the SDGs in Botswana.

2.3.1. Search and selection approach

Data extraction for this study was done using Google Scholar, Scopus, UN portals and Botswana government portals. Relevant search terms such as “SDG localization OR localisation” AND Botswana; SDG AND Botswana; Botswana and Sustainable; SDG AND Africa AND Localization OR Localisation; “local governance” AND “Sustainable Development Goals”; “Decentralization or Decentralisation” AND SDGs AND Botswana were used in the search. The search period covered 2010 – 2025.

The Inclusion criteria for the review were based on documents that: (i) focus on Botswana; (ii) Discuss governance, institutional arrangements or coordination of SDGs localisation; (iii) Published 2010-2025 (Pre 2015 literature is only included when it provided contextual or baseline information on governance, coordination, financing, or data systems that continued into the SDG period.); (iv) English language; (v) Primary research, policy analysis or official reports.

The exclusion of irrelevant papers was based on papers limited to other countries, purely technical SDG indicator work without a governance context, or non-English materials. During the first selection process, all authors reviewed only the titles and abstracts to determine each article’s relevance to the review. The SCOPUS database was chosen because of its extensive coverage of scholarly publications and quality assurance. Also, for quality assurance, the Google Scholar articles screened are those cited by SCOPUS-indexed publications.

Figure 2 presents a PRISMA flow diagram depicting the screening and selection process used in the paper.

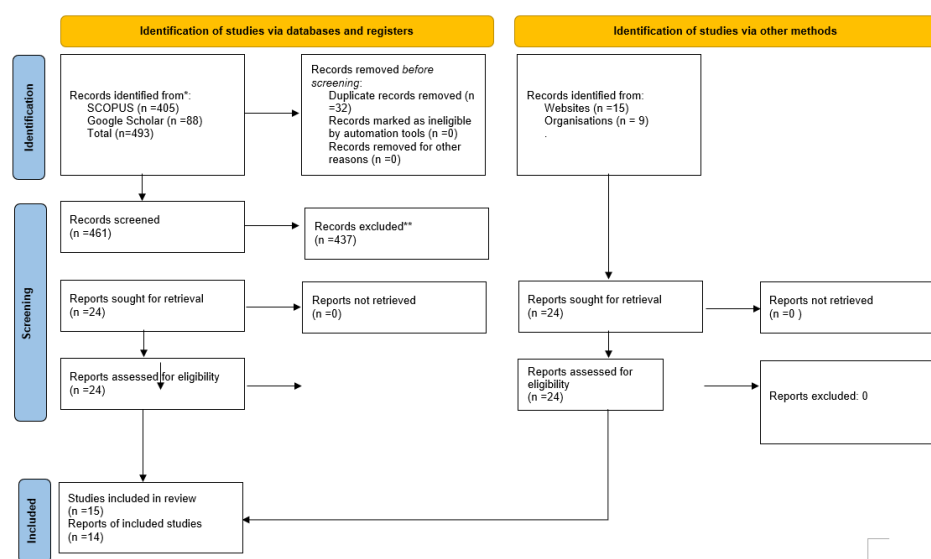


Figure 2. PRISMA flow chart.

Source: BMJ [14].

3. Results and discussion

This section presents empirical findings from quantitative and qualitative analysis (a systematic review).

3.1. Quantitative results

3.1.1. SDG localisation as a community-level challenge: Evidence from Gabane

The findings in **Table 1** highlight the importance of treating SDG localisation as a community-level governance process rather than a uniform national one.

Table 1. Gap between national policy commitments and actual CBMS Outcomes.

Goal	SDG indicator	Baseline	National statistic	Gabane	GAP‡
Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere	1.1.1. Proportion living below the international poverty line	5.8 %	5.8 %	12.77 %	(7) %
	1.2.1. Proportion living below the national poverty line	16.3 %	13.9 %	16 %	(2) %
	Population living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	n.a.	20.84 %	2.42 %	18 %
Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition & promote sustainable agriculture	The population faced with “extreme hunger”	n.a.	26.2 %	7.9 %	18.3 %
	Population faced with “moderate hunger”		27.1 %	39.52 %	(12.4) %
	Underweight children (<5 years)	n.a.	12.1 %	6.13 %	6 %
	Severely underweight	n.a.		4.28 %	7.8 %
Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives & promote well-being for all	3.1.1. Complications during pregnancy/ childbirth	0.127 %	0.18 %	9.5 % (of total deaths)	(7) %
	3.2.1. under-5 mortality rate	2.8 %	2.7 %	3.6 %	(0.8) %

Table 1. (Continued).

Goal	SDG indicator	Baseline	National statistic	Gabane	GAP‡
Goal 4: Ensure inclusive & equitable quality education & promote lifelong learning opportunities for all	4.2.2. Pre-school attendance	n.a.	46 % (2022)	50.14 %	(4) %
	4.1. Primary school enrolment		98.5(2018)	98.6 %	(0.1) %
Goal 6: Ensure availability & sustainable management of water & sanitation for all	6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services	94.9 %	78.4 %	100 %	(5) %
	6.2.1. Access to Sanitary Toilet Facilities	n.a.	68.5 %	99 %	(31) %
Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable & modern energy for all	7.1.1. Households with access to electricity	71.5 %	73.9 %	92 %	(20) %
Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive & sustainable economic growth, full & productive employment & decent work for all	8.5.2. Unemployment (broad)	n.a.	25.9 %*	29.44 %	(3.5) %
	8.6.1. The proportion of young people (15-24 years) NEET**	n.a.	38.5 %	7.8 %	31 %

Notes: ‡Gap = Target/national- minus observed village rate; *disaggregated by sex, age, and persons with disabilities; **NEET = Not in Education, Employment or Training, expressed in relation to the total population; Figure in parentheses are negative.
Source: Authors' compilation.

Generally, **Table 1** highlights Botswana's significant progress in institutionalising the implementation of the SDGs and achieving numerous targets [3]. Furthermore, records place Botswana's SDG index score at 61.9 (above the regional average of 51.9), ranking the country 115th out of 165 countries. The score and ranking have improved to 64.5 and 109/165, respectively [15]. However, as per **Table 1**, the case of Gabane highlights the following gaps in achieving the prioritised goals (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8):

Goal 1-poverty and inequality: The case of Gabane suggests uneven territorial distribution of welfare improvements. In fact, for all dimensions considered here, Gabane village outperforms the national statistics. Female-headed households represent a large share of the poor population.

Goal 2-food security: higher figures are recorded at the national level compared to the village level. The figures are also high, suggesting vulnerability despite Botswana's status as a middle-income nation.

Goal 3-health: The CBMS results reveal mixed performance across health indicators. Gabane data show maternal deaths accounting for 9.5 per cent of total recorded deaths. While the village-level indicator is not directly comparable to the national ratio, the figure signals continued maternal health vulnerability at the community level. National under-five mortality declined to 27 per 1000 live births. Gabane reports a rate of 3.6 per cent of total deaths attributable to children under five. Although the numbers appear to align with national trends, the data structure differs. This limits precise comparison. However, the indicator confirms that preventable child mortality remains a policy priority.

Goal 4-education: Higher rates are recorded for all dimensions at the village level than at the national level, and access to basic education performs well, especially for primary education enrolment. Early childhood development remains weak at both the

national and village levels. The positive outcome signals a high return on investment in teacher training and development over the past 50 years [1,3,16].

Goal 6-water, sanitation and energy: Infrastructure access remains relatively strong. This is symbolic of strong localisation, since it is the mandate of local authorities (district councils) to deliver and manage water and sanitation.

Goal 7-access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy: Accessibility in Gabane far exceeds the national target by 20 %. This signals the village's local authority and national energy priorities. That is, the Government of Botswana's policies create an enabling environment for local authorities.

Goal 8-Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth: The quantitative results reveal uneven localisation of the SDGs at the local community level. Infrastructural indicators such as water, sanitation, electricity, and school enrolment are strongly aligned with national targets, indicating successful national investment in basic infrastructure delivery. However, indicators of poverty, youth unemployment, and hunger reveal larger gaps between national benchmarks and village-level outcomes in Gabane. Youth issues have been highlighted by a more pronounced unemployment problem and a high rate of "Not in Employment, Education, or Training" (NEET) status. This suggests that while Botswana is successful in enhancing infrastructure delivery, there is a problem with the localisation of national policy at the socio-economic level.

The quantitative analysis points to data gaps and outdated data (at both national and local levels) as major limitations to the localisation of the SDGs in Botswana. Poor data have been documented as signalling weak governance structures [17]. In turn, this hinders monitoring frameworks and institutional training, thus leading to a lacklustre tracking of SDG progress.

In conclusion, while Botswana took steps to domesticate the SDGs in 2018, there are instances in which national targets and/or commitments do not translate into local outcomes. This is likely due to the following observed challenges:

(i) In some instances, there are no clear targets in terms of baselines or pledges. This hampers the monitoring and evaluation of progress, hence the prioritisation of areas.

(ii) There are no data collected for certain indicators, despite having committed to domesticating them.

(iii) For all the indicators tabulated, there is a wide national target and/or national figure- Gabane village gap. This highlights that, for the case of Gabane, the national SDGs realities do not translate into local-level realities.

3.2. Qualitative analysis (systematic review) results

The subsection starts by outlining the documents included in the review in 3.2.1. This is followed by subsections 3.2.2–3.2.4 that highlight the three (3) key MLGs set up in Botswana and the potency of MLGs in mediating between central and local authorities.

3.2.1. Study characteristics and governance structure focus area

The document review presented in **Table 2** highlights the key limitations in Botswana's existing governance structures.

Table 2. Study characteristics and governance structure focus area.

References	Year	Type	Main governance focus	Key findings
Musekiwa & Mandiyanike [18]	2019	Journal article (CJL G)	Policy integration and coherence	The SDGs are explicitly linked to the four Vision pillars; however, implementation responsibilities remain fragmented.
Statistics Botswana – Baseline Brief [19]	2018	Government statistical brief	Capacity and institutional Strength	Only 34.8% of the domesticated indicators had baseline data; district-level disaggregation was virtually absent.
Ministry of Finance & UN – SDG Roadmap [20]	2022	Policy roadmap	Inclusion & participation	Sets six priority pillars (data, institutional arrangements, research, advocacy, ownership, planning). No detailed sub-national SOPs.
UNDP – SDG Status Update [1]	2023	Technical brief	Integration & coherence	The domestic tax share for SDG financing fell from 87% (2018) to 53% (2022), increasing donor reliance.
Hambira et al. [21]	2025	Journal article (Sustainability)	Capacity & institutional strength	Highlights weak regulatory updates, limited inter-agency coordination, and inadequate monitoring of biodiversity indicators.
Siphambe et al. [22]	2020	Regional analysis	Inclusion & participation	Kgotla is recognised as a potential community platform but not systematically linked to SDG planning.
University of Botswana SDG Hub reports [23,24]	2020-2023	Internal reports	Inclusion & participation	Demonstrates successful academia, civil society, and government collaboration but lacks statutory authority.
National Planning Commission – NDP 11 [25]	2023	National development plan	Multi-level governance	Claims full alignment of all 17 SDGs with national targets; however, monitoring frameworks are still sector-specific.
Diagnostic Study for NDP 12 [11]	2023	Government diagnostic study	Capacity & institutional strength	Lists nine systemic problems (implementation capacity, data, financing, civil society engagement).
National Performance Monitoring & Evaluation Manual [7]	2020	Government manual	Multi-level governance	Introduces a theory-of-change approach and stakeholder feedback loops; implementation remains at the pilot stage.
Vision 2036 Task Team [26]	2016	Policy document	Decentralisation & local autonomy	Sets “devolution” as a pillar but notes that “implementation remains centralised”.
Voluntary National Review Report [3]	2022	Technical report	Policy integration & coherence	Highlights the need for a “budget by SDG” approach and better alignment of public finance law with SDG budgeting.
Gaborone City Prosperity Index [27]	2023	City-level assessment	Inclusion & participation	Shows a lack of SDG indicator integration into municipal performance dashboards.
Musekiwa and Mandiyanike[18]	2019	Journal article	Decentralisation and local autonomy	Traces the legacy of centralised planning that still influences current coordination patterns.

Source: Authors’ compilation.

The key analytical connections between governance structure and localisation are summarised into five (5) broad categories, viz: (i) Multi-level Governance: overlapping of mandates, centralised system, sector-specific monitoring frameworks hinder coordination between national, regional and local levels, (ii) decentralisation and local autonomy: A centralised governance legacy and decision-making in implementation of Vision 2036 hinder local governance autonomy and implementation (iii) inclusion and participation: lack of SDG indicator in Gaborone city performance dashboard, SDG targeted budgeting undermine citizen, civil society and multi-stakeholder engagement in SDG localisation (iv) capacity and institutional strength: lack of disaggregated data and outdated regulatory frameworks undermine

governance through poor data and limited accountability (v) policy integration and coherence: SDG budget and implementation responsibilities are not explicitly included in national plans and budgets. The lack of integration may lead to resource duplication and misalignment.

The section synthesises the results of the qualitative analysis and links them to the paper's theoretical framework.

3.2.2. Centralised governance structure vs. multi-level coordination weaknesses

Table 3 and **Figure 3**, respectively, show that Botswana has a high-level governance scaffold (NSC-TTF-Vision, 2036) but faces institutional fragmentation and lacks clear, enforceable subnational mandates. Effective localisation calls for multi-level governance among stakeholders at the national and sub-national levels. Robust multi-level governance structures prevent fragmentation between national strategies and local implementation [14].

Table 3. Governance architecture.

Governance Structure	Functions
National Steering Committee (NSC)	Established by the MFED, co-chaired by the Secretary for Economic & Financial Policy and the UN Resident Coordinator. Provides overall policy direction but lacks a legally mandated implementation mandate [20].
Technical Task Force (TTF)	Operational arm of the NSC, tasked with technical guidance, monitoring and reporting. Its terms of reference are broad, and reporting lines to line ministries are ambiguous [20].
Vision 2036 & NDP 11	Explicitly map each SDG to the four Vision pillars (Sustainable Economic Development, Human & Social Development, Sustainable Environment, Governance, Peace -Security) [4]. However, the mapping is largely narrative; quantitative targets are scattered across sectoral plans.
University of Botswana (UB) SDG Hub	Functions as an "ACE" (Amplify Connect Empower) platform linking academia, civil society, private sector and government [24]. Demonstrated capacity for knowledge exchange, but has no statutory status, limiting its influence on formal budgeting.
Traditional Kgotla system	Recognised as a community -level deliberative forum, mentioned in several policy drafts as a venue for citizen input [11]. Yet no formal mechanism links Kgotla outcomes to district planning cycles.

Source: Authors' compilation.

In addition, **Figure** shows the institutional and coordination structure for implementing and monitoring the SDGs at the national and sub-national (local) levels. Botswana has created an institutional framework coordinated by an SDGs National Steering Committee (NSC) and a Technical Task Force, which mainstream the SDGs across sectors through Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). The National Planning Commission (NPC) oversees overall coordination. The national SDGs communication strategy advocates for, sensitises, and raises awareness about the SDGs among all stakeholders. Some key components include interpersonal communication through the kgotla and outreach interventions using Setswana (the main local language), with possible translation into other native languages [28]. At the sub-national level, the structure facilitates the participation of everyone in implementing the SDGs [20]. The Kgotla (a traditional public meeting place) is used for village consultations, education, and planning. However, we find that while the structure is clear on paper, there are coordination issues and a siloed approach amongst key stakeholders. Furthermore, the country has not built on this innovative approach to engaging the community in the localisation and implementation of the SDGs.

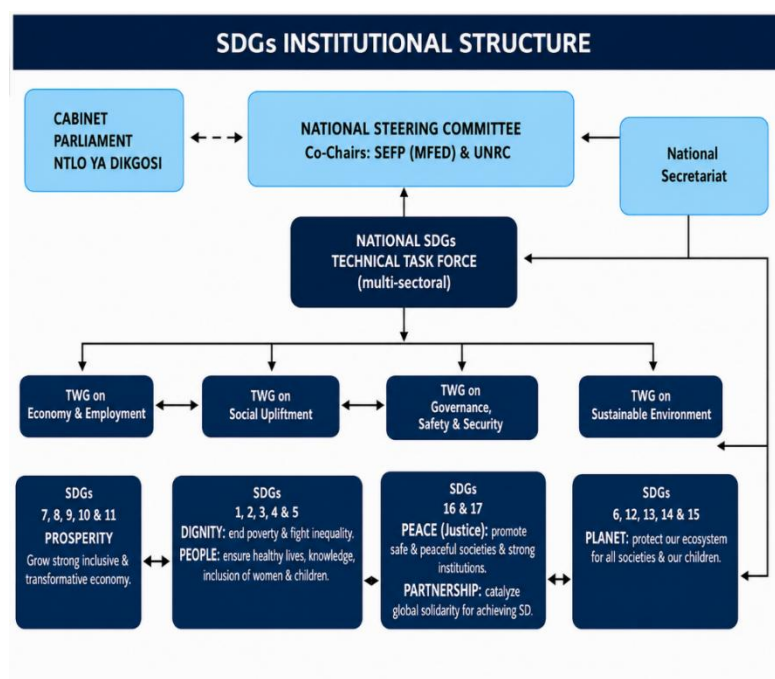


Figure 3. SDGs institutional and coordination structures.

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development and United Nations [28].

3.2.3. Institutional capacity constraints and implementation gaps

Table 4 shows that while coordination is addressed conceptually (roadmap, NSC), it is operationally weak; the lack of clear, mandated interagency protocols hampers joint planning, budgeting, and monitoring. These issues hamper localisation by undermining an inclusive and participatory governance system. Citizen participation and multi-stakeholder engagement are key to creating legitimacy and accountability in the localisation of the SDGs [29]. As emphasised by [8] effective localisation requires ‘decentralisation’ and ‘local autonomy’.

Table 4. Coordination mechanisms.

Issue	Evidence
Overlap of ministerial mandates	MFED (finance), the Ministry of Local Government, and sector ministries each claim ownership of SDG budgeting and reporting, resulting in “siloeed” planning [23,30].
Inadequate inter-agency data sharing	The Diagnostic Study for NDP 12 lists “poor communication between central government and districts” as a barrier [11].
Absence of district-level coordination bodies	No statutory “District SDG Coordination Committee” despite the roadmap’s call for “local ownership and coordination” [20].
Positive examples	The UB SDG Hub demonstrates a functional multi-stakeholder coordination platform, albeit informal [23].
International guidance	The UNDP “SDG Status Update” recommends a “single point of entry” for SDG financing and reporting, which is missing in Botswana’s current set-up [3].

Source: Authors’ compilation.

Table 5 reveals data scarcity, which hampers monitoring and evaluation—especially at subnational levels. This limits evidence-based decision-making and hampers accountability for district-level actors. This weakens local capacity and institutional strength through poor data and limited accountability [17]. Data limitation is frequently identified as a major impediment to effective monitoring and evaluation

[31,32]. A diagnostic report by [11] highlights gaps in sector- and district-level data, which restrict baseline building and impact assessment. The report also notes that ministries rely on old surveys or partial administrative records. This weakens problem analysis and produces strategies built on incomplete evidence. These gaps slow SDGs implementation progress.

Table 5. Data and monitoring.

Indicator	Situation
Baseline coverage	34.8 % of domesticated Tier I/II indicators had baselines in 2018 [3]. By 2023, coverage rose to 63.4 % (UNDP brief) [3], still short of the 100 % target.
Disaggregation	District-level data are scarce; most indicators are reported only at the national level. The 2022 Population & Housing Census introduced Washington Group disability questions, providing the first disability-disaggregated dataset [1].
Monitoring framework	The National Performance Monitoring & Evaluation Manual (2020) proposes a theory of change and stakeholder feedback loops, but implementation remains at the pilot stage. [7].
Dashboard availability	No publicly accessible national SDG dashboard: data are fragmented across ministries and the Statistics Botswana portal.
Data Quality issues	Data gaps for several environmental and gender indicators (e.g., biodiversity, GBV) are repeatedly highlighted [11,21].

Source: Authors' compilation.

3.2.4. Political-bureaucratic dynamics

The results in 错误!未找到引用源。 signal the limited authority of local authorities. For effective localisation, there is a need for a governance framework that explicitly integrates SDGs into national budgets [8]. As argued by [32], budget constraints undermine progress on the SDGs. Botswana also faces these challenges. The country lacks a budget targeted at the SDGs, including gender-specific budgeting. Hence, it becomes difficult to trace and map budget expenditure against indicators. It should also be noted that Botswana relies on development partners for parts of the SDGs agenda, especially climate adaptation, health and social protection. Variability in partner support affects long-term planning. To improve resource mobilisation and find alternative sources of financing, Botswana completed an assessment of the financing landscape in May 2022 [33]. Furthermore, the government and its development partners embarked on developing and operationalising an SDG financing strategy via an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) (ibid).

Table 6. Local institutional capacity.

Dimension	Evidence
Domestic fiscal contribution	Declined from 87 % of total SDG financing (2018) to 53 % (2022), increasing reliance on external donors [3].
Budget transparency	SDG expenditures are embedded in sectoral line-items; a “budget-by-SDG” approach is not institutionalised [3].
Public-private partnership (PPP) readiness	The roadmap cites PPPs as a strategic lever but provides no concrete financing framework or risk-sharing model [20].
Local revenue autonomy	Districts depend heavily on central transfers; local tax bases (property rates)

Source: Authors' compilation.

In conclusion, the SDG localisation challenges are deeply entrenched in the governance structures, not merely the implementation mechanisms. To enhance localisation, there is a need to build capacity, strengthen intergovernmental coordination, and advance political empowerment at the local level. Otherwise, SDG localisation may end up as a symbolic process.

3.3. Lessons for Botswana

Though Botswana has taken bold steps to localise SDGs, gaps still exist. **Table 7** outlines the governance-structure shortcomings identified for Botswana and suggests benchmark countries.

Table 7. SDG governance comparison-Botswana vs. peers.

Governance issue	Capacitation	Benchmark	Botswana-implication
Capacity & Institutional weakness: NSC lacks a legally mandated authority	Set up a single legally mandated entity	Kenya's NSC has legal authority to approve SDG budgets & policies [34].	Legislate to give NSC authority over all governance structures (ministries, district councils & traditional authorities)
Inclusive & participatory: TTF operates in isolation	Institutionalise inter-ministerial technical task forces	Ghana's SDG Implementation Coordinating Committee (ICC) and Technical Committee include 10 key ministries, the President's office, civil society, and donor agencies, with the NDPC as the secretariat [35].	Technical Task Force (TTF) should include line-ministry leads, the Ministry of Local Government, traditional-leadership representatives & a permanent secretariat for data management, reporting & follow-up.
Inclusive & participatory: SDG stakeholder engagement is weak	Adopt an all-inclusive approach	South Africa's National Development Plan is on paper, but implementation lacks formal multi-stakeholder platforms [6].	To guarantee policy coherence & shared ownership, create a National SDG Platform that commits to regular dialogue among key stakeholders (ministries, local authorities, NGOs, academia, the private sector, and Kgotla elders).
Policy integration & coherence: the "budget by SDG" approach is not institutionalised [9].	Use performance-based budgeting linked to SDG indicators	The Philippines' SDG Budget Tracker aligns each line-item of the national budget with SDG targets; for monitoring, quarterly performance tables are published [36].	Botswana should adopt a budget-by-SDG system in which ministries report expenditures against agreed-upon SDG indicators, feeding into the Integrated Results-Based Management (IRBM) system.
Capacity & institutional strength: Lack of publicly available SDG data	Strengthen data sharing and joint monitoring mechanisms	Kenya's SDG Data Coordination Unit aggregates data from the National Bureau of Statistics, line ministries, and development partners and publishes an open-data portal [37].	Introduce a central SDG Data Hub within Statistics Botswana to standardise definitions, provide district-level dashboards, and allow real-time updates from the CBMS and the 2022 Census.
Policy integration & coherence	Provide clear sub-national mandates and fiscal transfers	Ghana's decentralised financing framework assigns a set proportion of the national SDG budget to Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), with performance-linked payouts [35].	Legislate a minimum SDG-dedicated fiscal transfer to its 31 district councils, tied to achievement of locally-defined SDG results.
Inclusive & participatory: exclusion of the council structure in SDG implementation	Integrate traditional governance structures	In Tanzania, Village Development Committees & Kijiji councils are formally recognised in the nationalised SDG coordination law, affording them a voice in planning and monitoring [38].	Have councils as part of SDG stakeholder bodies, with seats on district SDG task forces and a role in data verification.
Capacity & institutional strength: Inadequate training on SDG	Build capacity through joint training programmes	Ghana's SDG Academy & UNDP-sponsored "SDG Learning Labs" provide continuous training for civil servants, local officials, and civil society actors [39].	Launch a National SDG Academy hosted by the University of Botswana, delivering certified modules on results-based budgeting, data analytics and community engagement to ministry staff and district officers.

Source: Authors' compilation.

Comparison with peer middle-income countries, summarised in **Table 7** reveals additional governance and implementation structures that Botswana can draw lessons from to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs. By relying on Vision 2036 and

NDP 11 to provide a strategic and coordination framework, Botswana's localisation takes a consensus-driven and systematic approach. While the approach aligns with Botswana's centralised governance structure, it fundamentally differs from Kenya's legally binding framework and Ghana's fiscal transfer mechanism. The centralised framework implies that ministries delegate power to districts and councils. Therefore, to carry out their mandate, councils depend on a centralised budgeting system, with ministries governing allocations devoid of SDG-targeted budgeting. Ultimately, localisation is contingent on the cascading of resources from ministries to districts and councils. The lessons from peers (e.g., Kenya's NSC coordination arrangement, data coordination via a coordinating unit, Tanzania's multi-stakeholder platform, and Ghana's decentralised budgeting) indicate that Botswana would greatly benefit from legislative restructuring, capacity building, and the institutionalisation of agreements between Statistics Botswana and local authorities. For instance, Kenya's empowerment of its National Steering Committee (NSC) offers a useful legal mandate that could potentially overcome policy and/or legal mandate weaknesses faced by Botswana's National Steering Committee (NSC). Ghana also offers Botswana a lesson in monitoring SDG-dedicated budgeting. Furthermore, another governance structure worth noting is the concept of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which play a pivotal role in ensuring the inclusion and participation of communities and vulnerable groups [40]. Relatedly, Tanzania promotes inclusion and ensures local delivery through traditional governance structures, such as *kijijii*. Furthermore, regularising target-setting and monitoring at the district level establishes clear lines of responsibility for SDG outcomes [40]. The other weakness identified in localising the SDGs in Botswana is the lack of disaggregated district- and village-level SDG data. This negatively affects the localisation of the SDGs and policy targeting [22]. Consequently, due to these weaknesses, local government engagement and SDGs-targeted budgeting are weak.

4. Discussion

The study used a triangulation approach to assess whether the multi-level governance (MLG) structure in Botswana harms or benefits the localisation of the SDGs. This study finds that the potency of the MLGs in the mediation between central and local authorities is hampered by: (i) centralised governance structure vs. multi-level coordination weakness. The result here is consistent with [41], who conclude that barriers to SDG localisation include, *inter alia*, weak multisectoral coordination and centralised decision-making. The dominance of the national governance structure level in SDG planning and coordination crucially shapes local implementation outcomes. The integration of national policies (e.g., Vision 2036) into national plans (e.g., NDP 11) has not materialised in successful vertical coordination with local authorities (such as the *kgotla* system). On the contrary, localisation follows a top-down approach—in which decisions on national priorities, fiscal allocation, and reporting lines are made unilaterally by national authorities on behalf of local authorities. That is, the so-called asymmetric decentralisation system is adopted for political, administrative and fiscal incentives [42]. To ensure effective decentralisation, [10] asserts that it requires careful consideration of, *inter alia*, local contexts and

institutional structures. While Botswana's decentralisation policy from 2014 to 2022 expanded the number of districts from 16 to 31, SDG localisation remains hampered by budgetary centralisation and persistently limited fiscal autonomy [11]. In turn, a positive localisation outcome mirrors the interplay between local institutional capacity and consideration for locality-specific factors. In Botswana, this undermines localisation. (ii) Institutional capacity constraints and implementation gaps: The results reveal that uneven institutional capacity (in terms of technical, administrative, and political endowments) slows SDG implementation. This constrains the integration of the SDGs into local-level planning (e.g., the District Development Plan (DDP)). (iii) Political-bureaucratic dynamics: Compared with public servants, local-level political leaders have close ties to their communities but little authority over development priorities and resource allocation. Therefore, the former possesses more power and makes decisions on behalf of communities and the leaders. Ultimately, consistent with [41], implementation is ineffective for localisation and boils down to just ticking boxes. The literature [43] identifies that continuous community engagement, improved collaboration (between local authorities and the community), and adequate resource allocation are essential for SDG localisation.

The key limitation of the study includes the reliance on a CBMS dataset, which is cross-sectional and restricted to a single locality (Gabane). The findings, therefore, illustrate localisation dynamics rather than national performance. Thus, generalising the results to other localities in Botswana would, by ignoring their peculiarities, defeat the purpose of localisation. The time lag between data collection and the current SDGs reporting cycle also constrains temporal inference.

To overcome these data limitations, the study can be extended by (i) identifying and assessing resource needs, including possible financing sources, and (ii) combining fiscal data (such as district-level budget allocations) with CBMS surveys to directly test whether a decentralised budget harms or supports decentralisation (iii) avoiding the use of CBMS database outcomes from one village such as the case of Gabane here). Thus, generalising the results to other localities in Botswana defeats the purpose of localisation by ignoring their peculiarities.

5. Conclusion and policy recommendations

The study sought to assess governance structure and implementation challenges in localising SDGs in Botswana. To achieve this, emphasis was placed on multi-level governance dynamics, institutional capacity, and local realities. The findings reveal two key constraints concerning SDG localisation in Botswana, namely: Localisation is constrained to a lesser extent by the lack of policy commitment. Second, the quest to localise is largely constrained by how governance structures and institutions are arranged and designed—thereby limiting meaningful local ownership and adaptive implementation. Based on the study's findings, the following policy measures are suggested to localise the SDGs. First, strengthen policies to promote efficient resource use by establishing robust cross-sectoral governance frameworks. Furthermore, explicitly align policies in various ministries with SDG targets to prevent duplication. Second, to deal with over-centralisation, the Botswana government should empower local governments with financial autonomy and decision-making authority. This also

ensures that the SDGs are well tailored to community needs. Additionally, strengthen coordination among levels of government by ensuring unity between national policies (e.g., Vision 2036, NDP 11) and district- and local-level priorities.

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