



# Localizing the SDGs in Baltimore: Challenges and Opportunities of the USA Sustainable Cities Initiative

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## 2.1 Introduction

In the same year that the member countries of the United Nations adopted the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), the city of Baltimore was in the grips of challenging times. In late April 2015, the death of a young black man, Freddie Gray, while in police custody set in motion civil and racial unrest at a level not seen in Baltimore and many US cities since 1968. In the wake of significant physical and emotional distress in the city, many community-based organizations, foundations, and civic groups, including a newly formed non-profit in response to the unrest called One Baltimore, galvanized into action by bringing people in Baltimore together to reflect on what happened, to help everyone heal from not only the acute trauma of the unrest but also the chronic conditions that led to such an uprising. However, within a few months, then-mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake announced that she would not be seeking reelection in 2016, which heralded an unprecedented field of 14 different candidates vying for the Democratic primary nomination and the attention of the voting electorate in Baltimore.

With this backdrop, when the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

(SDSN) selected Baltimore as one of three cities to participate in the launch of the USA Sustainable Cities Initiative (USA-SCI) in September 2015, it was clear that there would be many challenges to overcome to take advantage of a yet-unknown set of potential benefits. The objective of the USA-SCI program was to bring the global agenda down to the local level of the American urban environment by piloting a process of “localizing” the SDGs in three cities: New York, NY; San Jose, CA; and Baltimore, MD. The approach was conceived to initiate collaborations among academic institutions and non-profit organizations in each of these cities to support the development of city-level development strategies that align with the 17 SDGs.

For Baltimore, the invitation to be a part of USA-SCI represented a moment of opportunity to be at the forefront of a global conversation. However, with such traumatic events stemming from the death of Freddie Gray and a vacuum in local executive leadership, the localization process in Baltimore relied on leveraging and highlighting the strength of local stakeholders involved in sustainable development. Much of what would become the SCI-Baltimore initiative sought to raise awareness about the newly adopted SDGs among the strong civil society sector in Baltimore consisting of non-profits, philanthropy, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups.

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One of the key partners chosen for the localization effort was the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) at the University of Baltimore, which is the local member of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP). Since 2000, BNIA has served as the “data intermediary” for Baltimore, focusing on acquiring and disseminating local data to neighborhoods and other multi-sector stakeholders. Having the local community indicators project be a part of the SDG localization process became critical to ensuring Baltimore saw the effort to fruition for reasons which will be discussed in this chapter. First, given its long-standing mission to improve quality of life in distressed communities, BNIA already had deep connections with local governmental agencies as well as neighborhoods impacted by the unrest without seeming like an intrusive outsider during a sensitive time in the city. Second, BNIA was able to quickly align existing, locally relevant indicators to the SDG targets and identify gaps in data that allowed stakeholders to focus on ways to measure equity and justice.

Over the course of a year the USA-SCI effort in Baltimore yielded a wealth of insights and ideas for furthering inclusive, coordinated sustainable development efforts in Baltimore. This chapter provides a glimpse of how the process of localization unfolded in Baltimore and how the challenges and opportunities became clear over time which serves as a resource for local stakeholders in other US cities, providing a summary of current achievements of SCI-Baltimore and recommendations for achieving long-term, equitable sustainable development benefits for Baltimoreans by aligning local efforts with the SDGs.

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## 2.2 Baltimore and the USA Sustainable Cities Initiative

As one of the oldest cities in the USA, Baltimore is a vibrant and diverse community that nevertheless faces significant development

challenges, such as depopulation, inequality, poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure degradation. For example, in 2017, 32.9% of children in Baltimore lived below the poverty line, in comparison to the national average of 20.3% (American Community Survey). Similar to a number of other cities, revitalization tends to be concentrated around the downtown area and, in the case of Baltimore, it includes the scenic waterfront of the city’s historic harbor. High-rise office buildings in the historic downtown have been converted into luxury living spaces for millennials and wealthy empty-nesters. A short distance away from the city center, however, are over 16,000 vacant houses along with significant abandoned industrial sites and strikingly empty storefronts. As American manufacturing declined, so went the jobs in Baltimore as the city continues to adapt to the new, post-industrial age.

In 2012, the Department of Public Works reported the level of lead in Baltimore’s drinking water at the Environmental Protection Agency “action level” of 15 ppb, indicating the water unsafe for children and pregnant women to consume through drinking and cooking. Furthermore, Baltimore Harbor continues to experience unhealthy levels of pollution due to the city’s beleaguered sewer system, which is causing damage to the natural ecosystem and restricting people’s access to the water.

Beginning in September 2015, the SCI-Baltimore team (described below) worked to develop the institutional infrastructure for engaging multi-sector stakeholders who could provide substantive input into the establishment of quantitative targets and indicators as part of an ongoing effort to localize the SDGs and integrate their comprehensive principles into the city’s development activities. The primary activities of the process, described in this chapter, were (1) convening local stakeholders, (2) stock-taking of existing plans and policies, and (3) choosing indicators for tracking the SDGs in Baltimore.

## 2.3 Convening Baltimore Stakeholders

### 2.3.1 The Core Project Team

The University of Baltimore (UB), which had participated previously in the regional consultations<sup>1</sup> held during the development of the SDGs, was selected by SDSN as the “host” for the SCI-Baltimore program.<sup>2</sup> The College of Public Affairs and the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) provided resources and expertise to the initiative by planning and serving as lead convener for a series of consultative discussions that aimed to (a) build and contextualize knowledge of the SDGs, (b) inform a stocktaking exercise of current development plans and actors, and (c) develop and refine a set of proposed indicators for measuring development achievements aligning with the SDGs. The entire project team leveraged existing relationships and the community in Baltimore to convene key stakeholders in the service of the initiative’s goals and to operationalize credible indicators that reflect community concerns. In addition to the resources of the University of Baltimore, the core team included two additional partners: University of Maryland (UMD) and Communities Without Boundaries International (CWBI). UMD’s National Center for Smart Growth played an integral role in the review of potential SDG

indicators for Baltimore context and supported outreach to stakeholders focused on environmental sustainability activities. CWBI, a nongovernmental organization that supports community dialogue in locations worldwide, augmented the discussions convened by UB by hosting meetings for community leaders to provide feedback on SCI-Baltimore activities, to reflect on technical discussions about targets indicators, and to consider their roles in SDG implementation.

### 2.3.2 SCI-Baltimore SDG Executive Team and Working Groups

Over the course of the year, several events were convened to consult local organizations, experts, and authorities on the stocktaking exercise and indicator development and to establish a community of practice to coordinate numerous local sustainable development activities and to promote SDG achievement over the long term. The Baltimore SDGs Executive Team (SDG-ET) brought together representatives from key organizations who the project team knew had knowledge of sustainable development strategies and sustainable development data for Baltimore in order to advise on the overall SCI-Baltimore process, review the relevance and appropriateness of SDG targets and indicators that were revealed by the preliminary stocktaking exercise, and brainstorm additional organizations and initiatives to include in the SCI-Baltimore effort. Consequently, an expanded list of “SDG partners” were convened as working groups to discuss proposed SDG indicators for Baltimore that could be used to set appropriate and realistic targets and track them over time. In each of these meetings, participants were familiarized with the SDGs, the stocktaking exercise on existing plans that address these goals in Baltimore/Maryland, and proposed indicators that can be measured and tracked annually to benchmark current conditions in Baltimore. SDG partners participated in the working groups in the area of “People,” “Prosperity,” and “Planet,” as defined by the

<sup>1</sup>United Nations Association of the USA (2014). Recap of “Maryland Inter-Generational Consultation on UN Development Goals” <http://www.unanca.org/news-events/news/363-recap-of-q-maryland-inter-generational-consultation-on-un-development-goals>

<sup>2</sup>In July 2014 the city of Baltimore designated the university as one of eight “Anchor Institutions” that provide vital resources and support for the city’s sustainable growth. UB was chosen as an Anchor Institution for its history of providing innovative and accessible education to a diverse population in an urban setting and for its positive economic impact including over \$275 million in direct investment. The University of Baltimore fosters research and education in highly relevant areas such as public policy evaluation and global affairs and houses research centers including the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance.

SDG's 5 P approach (including Peace and Partnerships) in order to apply their technical expertise. The working groups then came together in plenary discussions to integrate their perspectives toward a set of indicators that would help Baltimore track progress toward the global targets. SDG partners were also provided ways to promote the SDGs within their networks. This included:

1. Attending any of the convenings of the SCI-Baltimore process and use #SDGBaltimore to broadcast via social media how those discussions related to the SDGs.
2. Taking the "*Which Goals Are You?*" Quiz<sup>3</sup> to help working group members personalize their understanding of SDG priorities and then using this information in organizational discussions, community consultations, and other public events.
3. Informing the project team and the SDG-ET of additional community-based forums that working group members could attend or should be present at to further raise awareness about the SDGs and the SCI-Baltimore process.

### 2.3.3 Expanding Inclusion Through "Listening-to-the-Listening"

For sustainable development efforts in Baltimore to be truly inclusive, the project team determined to expand its engagement effort by integrating the SCI-Baltimore initiative into the many community initiatives underway in the city. In the spring of 2015, Baltimore experienced the ramifications of civil unrest in ways not experienced since 1968. Consequently, Baltimoreans entered into a period of soul-searching and reform-minded discussion – formally, informally, and via social media. With a non-incumbent mayoral election, various constituent organizations had been focus-

ing in 2016 on the preparation of key priorities to ensure that new leadership be informed of and responsive to communities' needs. Several local convenings were underway or are being planned, and so rather than creating a wholly separate process for the SCI-Baltimore initiative, the project team determined it would be more effective and efficient to connect SCI-Baltimore to these ongoing discussions. This approach allowed SCI-Baltimore to promote a coordinated effort that built on community concerns and priorities voiced in real time. This effort became known as a "listening-to-the-listening" approach to community engagement. To put this idea into action, SDG partner organizations compiled a list of community initiatives that SCI-Baltimore could link to and work alongside. In many cases, given its role as the local data intermediary, BNIA staff were already involved in these ongoing processes.

The project team connected with these community initiatives and attended associated events scheduled to take place in Baltimore. Working group members were also provided a running calendar of events so that they could participate and help raise awareness about the SDI-Baltimore initiative. Those who attended the events were tasked with documenting data on local development concerns, priorities, targets, and indicators that they heard and mapping those to the SDGs. Information from these community initiatives helped inform the project team's effort to take stock of existing city plans.

The "listening-to-the-listening" approach benefited the SCI-Baltimore effort by enabling the team to record and synthesize the diverse community concerns and desires being articulated by the public. The set of proposed indicators compiled for Baltimore also captured the sentiments of this synthesis.

### 2.3.4 Update to Baltimore's Sustainability Plan

Perhaps the most important and most similar concurrent effort was the update to the city's 2009 Sustainability Plan, which coincidentally

<sup>3</sup>"Which Goals Are You?" is an interactive quiz for users to better understand which of the 17 Global Goals they may be most passionate about. <http://employers.global-goals.org/>

also began in early 2015. In large part as a response to the civil unrest that erupted in Baltimore in April of that year, the Baltimore Office of Sustainability (BOS) and Sustainability Commission were committed to ensuring local voices and particularly marginalized communities were included during the planning process for a more inclusive and equitable plan. In 2016, BOS launched the “Every Story Counts” campaign that gathered stories from residents who helped improve sustainability through their day-to-day actions in neighborhoods throughout Baltimore. The Sustainable Plan update also signed on and trained Sustainability Ambassadors to serve as outreach partners to collect more stories through the campaign as well as test and disseminate a survey that reached 1200 respondents.

In many respects, given the time and the subject matter, the SCI-Baltimore process and the Baltimore Sustainable Plan update should have been highly complementary if not fully integrated. Instead, the tension between local and global initiatives became acute rendering the need for more nuanced and deliberative approach by the SCI-Baltimore team to broker any kind of alignment. By way of example, below was one of the unforeseen initial reactions by BOS to the SCI-Baltimore process:

The Sustainability Goals for our office are a bit different than the Sustainable Development Goals. We are incorporating elements of the STAR Community Rating System<sup>4</sup> into the structure of our plan and moving forward with extensive community outreach and input sessions over the next few months. I don't know if it makes sense to [incorporate] the SDG's ... because it might confuse the process we're doing with the Baltimore City Plan update (Communication with the Baltimore Office of Sustainability, April 2016).

<sup>4</sup>Many US cities like Baltimore have been part of the partnership that includes ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, the US Green Building Council, the Center for American Progress, and the National League of Cities to address the needs of US cities, towns, and counties seeking a common framework for sustainability. The STAR Community Rating System was initially released in the fall of 2012 and not updated to respond to the UN SDGs until June 2016.

In response to this hesitation to combine efforts, BNIA and SDSN staff made back-of-the-envelope mapping between the STAR Community Rating System and the SDGs in 2016. This informal exercise and ongoing conversations between BNIA and the Baltimore Office of Sustainability spurred the Baltimore Community Foundation (BCF) to support efforts to identify alignment between the strategies in the new Sustainability Plan and the localization of the SDGs. After the SCI-Baltimore localization process had ended, in 2017, BCF provided a grant to BNIA to ensure clear linkages in terms of language, SDGs, and indicators to the city's Sustainability Plan which was ultimately adopted in January 2019.<sup>5</sup>

In the final version of the plan, the relevant SDGs are highlighted at the beginning of each chapter for each of the local goals (see Fig. 2.1). While this incorporation does send a clear signal to anyone reading the plan about the policy- and action-related connections to the SDGs, no further linkages were featured between the quantitative targets in the local plan to the global goals.

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## 2.4 Stocktaking of Sustainable Development Plans, Initiatives, Goals, and Targets

One of the main objectives of the SCI-Baltimore process was to take stock of existing plans and initiatives in the city relating to sustainable development. With research assistance from SDSN and based on input from the local stakeholder convenings, a broad range of plans and documents were reviewed to assess whether their targets and goals were already aligned with the SDGs. Certainly, the city's 2009 Sustainability Plan figured prominently in the review, but several other city and statewide plans were also relevant such as the Baltimore Climate Action Plan, the Journey Home Plan (Homelessness), and Maryland Port Administration Environmental

<sup>5</sup>“The 2019 Baltimore Sustainability Plan” <https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/plans/sustainability-plan/>





**Fig. 2.1** Example of connecting local strategies to the global goals. (Source: The 2019 Baltimore Sustainability Plan, Chap. 5, “Human-Made Systems”)

Strategy.<sup>6</sup> As mentioned previously, the stocktaking effort identified (a) partner organizations that could share tacit knowledge on development in Baltimore and collaborate on the SDG achievement effort and (b) indicators and measure data for SDG target tracking. The information yielded through the stocktaking effort grew with each consultative event as SDG partners convened and pooled information on their work and the work of others in the city, making the stocktaking exercise a “living” process to promote efficiency by building a coordinated SDG effort from existing sustainable development knowledge, resources, and activities.

Of course, given the comprehensive and interconnected nature of the SDGs, the breadth of stocktaking made clear that Baltimore was regulated and guided by many, many plans created by city and state governmental agencies in response to legislative and executive mandates. For example, the Maryland Department of Transportation annually prepares the Air Quality Attainment Report to ensure the regional compliance with the 1963 Federal Clean Air Act. Every 6 years, the city of Baltimore prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to remain eligible for program funding from the Economic Development Agency (EDA). By 2016, the UN Sustainable Development Goals

did not yet figure into existing regulatory mandates for cities nor did that come with substantial monetary resources to address the scale of the needs. Without these, for a distressed city like Baltimore, the SDG localization initiative hardly seemed worth the extra effort for executive branches of the government.

## 2.5 Developing the Preliminary Set of SDG Indicators for Baltimore

The second key objective of the SCI-Baltimore initiative was to identify locally relevant and useful indicators that could be used to set and track progress toward SDG-aligned targets. These indicators, developed out of the stocktaking exercise, considered stakeholder data needs for their own SDG-aligned development efforts and incorporated community aspirations. Community buy-in and collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders are essential to the success of the SDGs. By establishing indicators to measure progress toward development outcomes, accountability and transparency of public programs and non-profit initiatives is maintained, and results can be more effectively achieved. Support for expanded and improved data collection will bolster the city’s existing efforts to eliminate poverty and homelessness, increase opportunities for employment and education, and protect the environment.

<sup>6</sup>See Appendix 1 (Existing Plans and Indicators) of the full report “Baltimore’s Sustainable Future: Localizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Strategies and Indicators.” <https://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/sustainable-cities/>

### 2.5.1 Indicators for Baltimore—The *Vital Signs* Report

Defining and tracking indicators with community buy-in, of course, was not a new concept in Baltimore. Since 2000, the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance (BNIA) at the University of Baltimore has served an alliance of groups and individuals in Baltimore dedicated to well-informed decision making for change. Since 2002, BNIA has published the annual *Vital Signs* report,<sup>7</sup> a compendium of over 100 community-based indicators for every Baltimore neighborhood. BNIA annually updates and provides the most current data as a part of *Vital Signs* and expands on existing data and indicators through a learning network of other cities engaged in the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP). Through ongoing and continuous consultation with neighborhood residents, leaders from across Baltimore, and data provider partners, BNIA designed its core functions based on Baltimore's need for a common way of understanding how its neighborhoods and overall quality of life are changing over time. The work illuminates changing conditions and provides a mechanism to hold Baltimore and all others who work, live, play, and invest in its neighborhoods accountable for positive growth.

For Baltimore, the SDGs provided a framework for evaluating the strength of the set of indicators included in *Vital Signs*. The exercise of mapping the *Vital Signs* indicators to the SDG targets presented gaps in both frameworks; the SCI-Baltimore initiative offered a means to address both local and global missing elements.

### 2.5.2 Preparing SDG Targets and Indicators of Success in Baltimore

Based on years of experience with local issues and local data, BNIA was in a good position to focus the SCI-Baltimore initiative on a proposed Baltimore SDG Index. To develop the global tar-

gets for the 17 SDGs and a series of progress indicators to track, indicators were evaluated according to these guiding principles:

- The data aligns with SDG targets *and* represents local priorities.
- Indicators reflect existing/parallel processes envisioning Baltimore's future.
- Data is accessible and actionable and from a valid, reliable source.
- Baseline measures are recurring in order to be tracked over time.
- Measures can help address disparities through disaggregation by race and by gender.

A total of 56 indicators across the 17 SDGs have been identified through a series of SDG Executive Team and working group meetings, where indicators were reviewed, added, and removed from the selection, and through the listening-to-the-listening effort. All of the indicators drew from open data sources including the aggregation of data in Baltimore's *Vital Signs* report. The proposed indicators outlined in the pages below can be used by decision makers and stakeholders in Baltimore to set quantitative values for local targets that align with the Global Targets, and they can be used to track progress toward achieving those targets leading up to 2030.

To gauge the relevance to the community and other stakeholders, the resulting set of 56 indicators were then presented to and scored by those representatives at the Opening Session for Baltimore Data Day 2016. For each proposed progress indicator, the following information was collated: baseline measure, baseline year, data source, participant score from Baltimore Data Day, and a graphic that visualizes 3–5 years of baseline data and a potential trend line based on the existing trajectory out to 2030. After the 56 indicators were selected, several local and regional organizations signed pledges to support the specific SDGs and indicators that reflected their work and values.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance-Jacob France Institute, *Vital Signs* Full Report, [http://bniajfi.org/vital\\_signs/fullreport/](http://bniajfi.org/vital_signs/fullreport/)

<sup>8</sup>See Appendix 3 (Baltimore SDG Letters of Endorsement) of the full report “Baltimore's Sustainable Future: Localizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Strategies and Indicators.” [https://www.ubalt.edu/about\\_ub/sustainable-cities/](https://www.ubalt.edu/about_ub/sustainable-cities/)

### 2.5.3 Review of Baltimore SDG Indicators at Baltimore Data Day

Beginning in June 2016, the SCI-Baltimore project team solicited public feedback via an online survey of the final 56 indicators that had been identified through SDG-ET and working group meetings. The survey was promoted via social media as well as through a media press release issued by the University of Baltimore. Additionally, the team obtained feedback via the project website, which provides details on these indicators for public review. As another example of leveraging existing local processes, the results of the indicators compilation were prepared for Baltimore Data Day, an annual workshop hosted by the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance to help local communities expand their capacity to use technology and data to advance their goals. At the seventh Annual Baltimore Data Day in 2016, community leaders, non-profit organizations, governmental entities, and civic-minded technologists came together to see the latest trends in community-based data, technology, and tools and learn how other groups are using data to support and advance constructive change.

An Opening Session on Sustainable Development, held on July 21, 2016, one day prior to the annual Baltimore Data Day workshop, provided an in-person opportunity for SCI-

Baltimore partners and participants to provide additional feedback on the set of indicators. More than 130 people registered for the Sustainable Development Opening Session of Baltimore Data Day, which was hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond's Baltimore Branch.<sup>9</sup> The general public was invited to provide comments on posters for each of the SDG indicators, using stickers to answer this question for each indicator: "Do you think a change in this indicator addresses the sustainable development goal?" (yes, no, maybe). The public engagement with the posters themselves provided visual ways for audience members to see how relevant the indicators were to participants. See adjacent photo example. The poster responses combined with the online survey results provided key feedback as to which indicators are deemed important to a broad spectrum of Baltimore stakeholders.

Responses were positive overall, with an average score among them of 4.2/5. Individually, the majority of proposed indicators scored either a 4 or a 5 on the scale provided. There were a few that scored 3 or less, and based on that feedback, the project team

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<sup>9</sup>The Opening Session on Sustainable Development also featured keynote speeches by Professor Jeffrey Sachs and former Maryland Governor Parris Glendening.



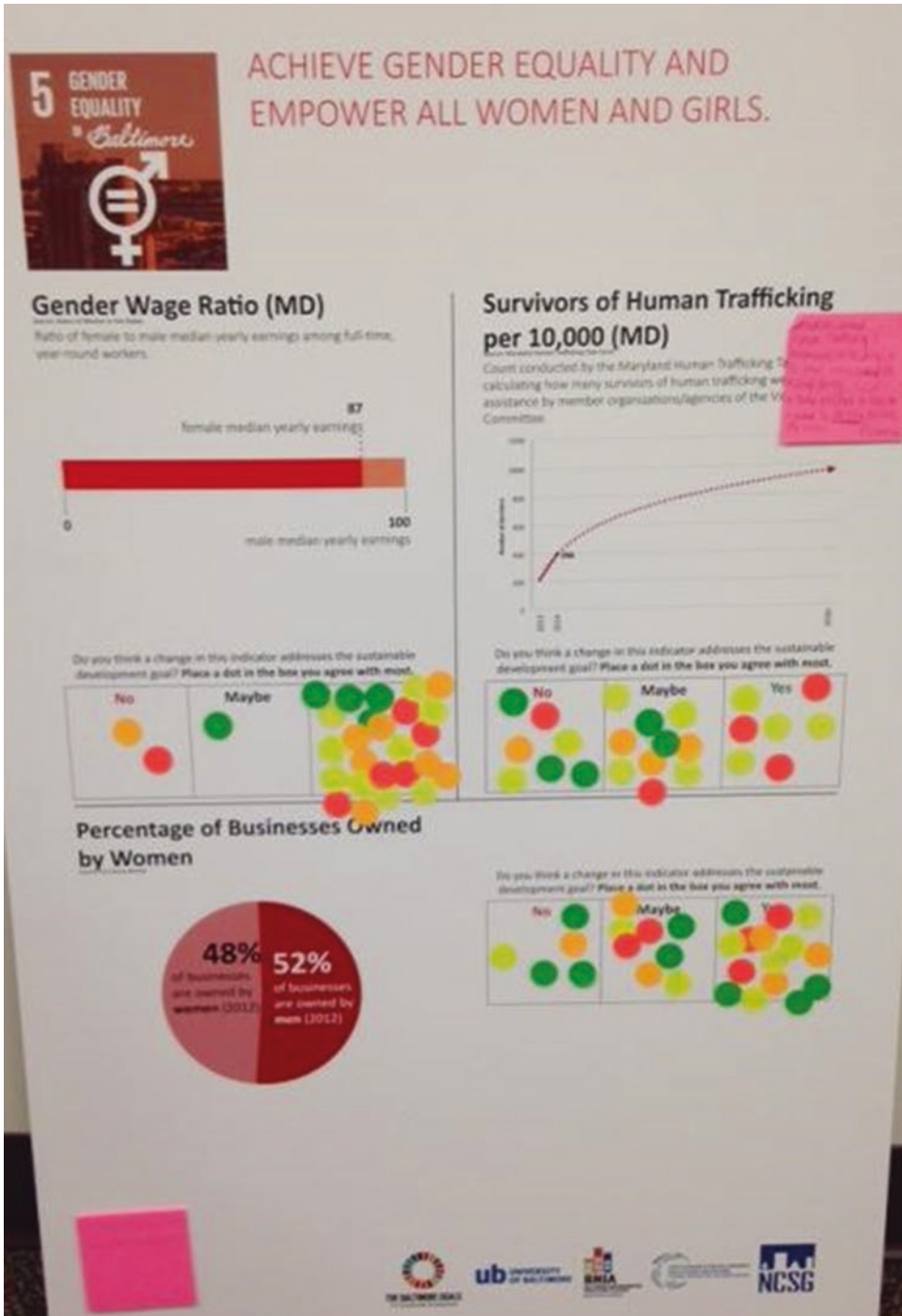


Fig. 2.2 Figure proposed SDG indicators for Baltimore in an interactive display at Baltimore Data Day (2016)

**Table 2.1** Indicators receiving low relevance scores by attendees at Baltimore Data Day, 2016

Goal	Indicators receiving low feedback scores
5 Gender Equality	Survivors of Human Trafficking per 10,000 Residents
7 Affordable and Clean Energy	Total Electricity Consumption per Capita
9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Number of Utility Patent Grants
11 Sustainable Cities	Number of Days with Air Quality Index “Good”
13 Climate Action	Number of Excessive Heat Code Red Days
16 Peace and Justice	Percent Registered Voters Who Voted in the General Election

recommended that they should potentially be removed from the final list or revised (Table 2.1).<sup>10</sup>

### 2.5.4 New Local Indicators for SDG#16: Peace and Justice

Given the timing of the SCI-Baltimore initiative after the period of unrest in the city, review of the SDGs made clear that there were no quantitative measures to track progress toward a more just city. The Maryland Access to Justice Commission was reconstituted in 2015 as an independent entity to promote legal awareness, equal access to justice, and fair outcomes for all Marylanders who encounter the civil justice system. The commission focused on SDG Goal #16 and helped BNIA convene the Justice Indicators Roundtable for the SCI-Baltimore initiative to discuss methods for measuring and tracking progress toward a more just and equitable city. These discussions produced several proposed measures that would promote SDG #16 targets that are critical to achieving progress in Baltimore. However, some requisite data is not yet publicly available for calculating and monitoring these indicators. The proposed indicators are as follows:

<sup>10</sup>“Data Day Scores” were calculated as follows. Feedback for each indicator was weighted accordingly: yes = 5, maybe = 3, and no = 1. Scores were summed for each “dot” or “vote,” and that sum was divided by the total number of votes.

- *State/Local Public Funding for Legal Aid for Eligible Clients:* Cost is often a prohibitive factor restricting a person’s access to legal representation. This indicator is intended to capture availability of affordable legal counsel. Maryland Access to Justice Commission is in the process of procuring data to calculate this indicator.
- *Length of Time in Jail Pretrial for Misdemeanor Offenses:* Criminalization of poverty is a major problem. This indicator will track the prevalence of civil or misdemeanor cases that result in increased severity of legal consequences due to a defendant’s inability to post bail or pay fines. BNIA continues to work with the State’s Attorney’s office to calculate this indicator.
- *Civil Legal Aid Attorney Ratio:* To calculate this ratio, the number of full-time-equivalent civil legal aid attorneys employed in Baltimore would be divided by the number of people in the state with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.

### 2.5.5 New Local Indicators for SDG#1 (Poverty) and SDG#3 (Health)

In addition to the indicators proposed to be calculated for Goal #16 (noted above), two other key indicators require dedicated resources to be calculated for Baltimore. These indicators were identified through consultations with the SDG-ET and working groups and the listening-to-the-listening effort. With funding from an international granting foundation, BNIA was able to prepare new indicators for Baltimore in 2017.<sup>11</sup>

- *Percent of Residents Earning a Living Wage:* A living wage is the hourly wage, a wage that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living. In 2016, the living wage for a single adult in Baltimore is \$12.33. Using a living wage methodology established by the

<sup>11</sup>Seema D. Iyer (2017) Localizing the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Baltimore: Next Steps Towards Implementation <https://www.unsdsn.org/news/2017/12/20/localizing-sdgs-in-baltimore-next-steps>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the results show that households with two adults were far more likely to earn more than the living wage than households with only one adult. For one-adult households with children, the impacts are even more severe. Only 13% of one-adult/one-child households earn more than the living wage; only 6.4% of one-adult/two-children households earned more than the living wage. The SCI-Baltimore initiative identified this indicator as relevant to setting and tracking SDG#1 targets for Baltimore.

- *Life Expectancy by Race*: Life expectancy (the average number of years a newborn can expect to live), assuming he or she experiences the currently prevailing rates of death through their lifespan, would be the premier indicator for tracking the health of Baltimore residents. BNIA worked with the Baltimore City Health Department to calculate life expectancy by neighborhood and disaggregated this data by race. In 2017, white Baltimoreans (76.1 years) lived an average 6 years longer than black Baltimoreans (70.9 years). This indicator is relevant to setting and tracking SDG#3 targets for Baltimore.

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## 2.6 Efforts to Promote Lessons Learned from Baltimore

The lessons from the SCI-Baltimore SDG localization effort helped put Baltimore on a worldwide platform, in large part through the connections and promotion by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). Beginning as early as 2016, representatives from the localization team were invited to attend meetings at the United Nations, the State Department, the Brookings Institution, and national organizations interested in supporting the SDGs such as the Council on Foundations. The city's Office of Sustainability was invited to participate in Habitat III in Quito in 2016, although was unable to attend. The new Baltimore mayor, Catherine Pugh, participated on a 2018 panel called "Localizing the SDGs: Achieving the Global Goals Through U.S. Cities" at the winter meeting

of the US Conference of Mayors, with Mayor Buddy Dyer of Orlando and Mayor Mitch Landrieu of New Orleans. Additionally, several news outlets featured the efforts in Baltimore to global audiences.<sup>12</sup>

The work on development of localized indicators from Baltimore also figured prominently in the development of the US Cities Index (Espey et al. 2018). However, while Baltimore may have been at the forefront immediately after the SDGs were adopted in 2015, the city can hardly be seen as a beacon just 3 years later. With a new federal administration deprioritizing federal efforts to track the SDGs nationally and a lack of continued resources to support localization, only tepid connections to the global goals can be seen in Baltimore today.

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## 2.7 Conclusions

For Baltimore to be one of the first cities to participate in USA-SCI represented a moment of opportunity to be at the forefront of a global conversation. Given the historical moment, however, the project team had to thread the SCI-Baltimore initiative into local issues, process, and realities to raise awareness about the global goals and to make translations about their relevance locally. The work of the initiative, therefore, was much more about listening, educating, and "mapping" to more familiar frameworks than about the technical needs for calculating the proposed set of local indicators. Some positive and long-lasting benefits have accrued to Baltimore. The global goals have been incorporated into the city's 2019 Sustainability Plan, and several new indicators particularly regarding equity and justice have been calculated for Baltimore. There are also examples of Baltimore stakeholders participating in other programs<sup>13</sup> created to respond to the

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, "How Baltimore Is Using the Sustainable Development Goals to Make a More Just City" by Carey L. Biron, Citiscope (March 2017).

<sup>13</sup>Baltimore is one of only 8 US cities in the European Union's International Urban Cooperation (IUC) program activities to foster city-to-city knowledge-exchange for sustainable development (SDG #17—Partnerships).

SDGs. More comprehensive and more target-based connections to the global goals, however, seem unlikely today.

### 2.7.1 Generalizations

From the Baltimore experience, three key issues arose that could both hinder and help other North American cities from focusing on the SDGs.

1. *Lack of resources and leadership at all levels of government to support adoption of the SDGs.* The vacuum of local leadership precisely during the moment of localization in Baltimore is of course a rather obvious impediment in the localization effort. What was less overt but equally important was the lack of Federal and State leadership among US and Maryland agencies engaged in urban policy. The US State Department and particularly the Office of the Chief Statistician under the Obama administration certainly helped keep the data collection and voluntary reporting at the forefront through the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development Initiative. However, many of the key agencies that cities interact with more routinely, such as HUD, EPA, or DOJ, were not disseminating similar messages or guidance about how to align the SDGs to local priorities either from a regulatory perspective or via resource allocation and funding.
2. *Lack of support for or awareness of the SDGs from urban entities with similar missions.* With the UN adoption of the SDGs in 2015, what may have been a seminal moment globally had hardly made an impression on local organizations or professionals involved in US-based sustainability movements. The fact that Baltimore's own Office of Sustainability (BOS) was leery of adopting a "non-local" approach to sustainable development was certainly an unforeseen barrier to localization. Staff from BOS were well-connected to networks such as the STAR Community Ratings and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), but at the time, guidance

on the SDGs had not yet permeated within these spheres.

3. *Local indicator projects are in the best position to help translate the relevance of the SDGs to urban communities.* BNIA was not the first partner chosen by SDSN to help spearhead the SCI-Baltimore initiative; however, having the local community indicators project be a part of the SDG localization process became critical to ensuring Baltimore saw the effort to fruition. Given its long-standing mission to improve quality of life in distressed communities, BNIA already had deep connections with local governmental agencies as well as neighborhoods impacted by the unrest which helped ensure inclusive working group participation and an effective listening-to-the-listening approach. BNIA was also able to quickly align existing, locally relevant indicators to the SDG targets and identify gaps in data that allowed stakeholders to focus on ways to measure equity and justice.

### 2.7.2 Recommendations

Having gone through an intensive process to localize the SDGs in Baltimore, any attempts in other cities would benefit from these internal and external supports to help convey the potential benefits for aligning with the global goals:

1. *Message needs to come from the top.* The ambitious and comprehensive nature of the global goals will need to be addressed by all levels of government, with most of the responsibility resting with the executive offices and agencies (Kingsley 2017). Clear and reinforced language within existing regulations and funding resources could help agencies better understand that tracking the SDGs fits within ongoing workloads and reporting practices. This would require incorporating language within agency-promulgated rules and regulations and in rare cases within legislation. This important task requires leadership from within

government and potentially advocacy from constituencies.

2. *Existing networks promoting urban sustainable development need to be involved.* The SDGs represent a new framework for thinking about and quantifying sustainable development; however, they do not represent new issues for US cities. For many years, grass-roots efforts have grown in the USA to address urban sustainability, so making clear connections between existing priorities within organizations involved in any/all aspects of sustainability will ensure buy-in from stakeholders already at the forefront of sustainable development in North America.
3. *Local data is critical for tracking the SDGs.* Having an existing repository of local data collected by community indicator projects like BNIA enabled speedier collection of baseline data relevant to the global goals. In fact, based on a recent report by the Urban Institute, whereas 66% of the SDG targets could be measured using national datasets alone, 81% of the targets were measurable if supplemented with local data (Greene and Meixell 2017). Of course, local indicators projects provide far more to urban communities than just the data alone; they offer training and education to multi-sector stakeholders as well as continuous integration of new local datasets that arise from local policies and administration. They are nimble enough to help map local realities to global issues using the common approach of the quantitative targets, which is precisely what the SDG localization process in Baltimore helped reveal.

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