



Los Angeles: Measuring Its Ambition to Achieve the SDGs

3

Tony Pipa

3.1 Introduction

On February 15, 2018, in a speech at Occidental College, Mayor Eric Garcetti announced in a public speech that the city of Los Angeles would pursue achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mayor Garcetti's pronouncement was unusual for several reasons. The SDGs, a set of 17 ambitious goals to end poverty and promote equity, strengthen peace and security, and enhance environmental sustainability, were agreed by countries at the United Nations as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ While the agreement is voluntary, with no legal force of compliance, the expectation of leadership and accountability clearly rests with the federal government. Los Angeles city government has no specially designated role and was not party to the agreement.

One of the goals, SDG 11, focuses on the importance of cities to sustainable development, committing to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." The targets from this goal include adequate and affordable housing, accessible

transportation, participatory planning, improved resilience against catastrophe, protection of cultural heritage, and reduction in environmental impact of cities. The main intent of this goal is to focus the attention of national governments on the implications of urbanization and the importance of managing it well in order to achieve sustainable development. It also provides the basis for a discourse between the different levels of government in managing that growth sustainably.

Mayor Garcetti's vision for Los Angeles, however, extends beyond the dimensions outlined in SDG 11. It commits Los Angeles to implementing the SDG agenda in total and places the city in the central role of protagonist – prioritizing, managing, and measuring the social, economic, and environmental progress its leadership can deliver for its neighborhoods and citizens.

The targets and metrics of the SDGs agreed upon at the UN are set at the national level. Applying them to Los Angeles thus requires adaptation and judgment. The time frame – achievement of the goals is to occur by 2030 – extends beyond the electoral cycle. The Los Angeles commitment could extend through the tenure of three more mayors.²

Mayor Garcetti's commitment placed Los Angeles in rare company nationally. Such a pub-

¹*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/Res/70/1, UNGAOR, 70th Session (2015)

T. Pipa (✉)
Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, USA
e-mail: TPipa@brookings.edu

²Mayor Garcetti is term-limited to two terms and started serving his second 4-year term in 2017.

lic and specific mayoral commitment to the SDGs is uncommon in the USA and immediately put Los Angeles in the forefront of local implementation globally. Mayor Garcetti committed the city to the SDGs in a public speech to his constituents, rather than a global forum of international leaders, the more usual platform for local leaders to endorse the SDGs.

Adopting the SDGs is easy. The aspirations that illuminate the agenda are attractive to any locality and make for soaring political rhetoric: an end to poverty and its related indignities; an increase in quality jobs, needed infrastructure, and affordable housing; and a reduction in inequality, all while ensuring a sustainable environment for future generations.

Serious implementation to achieve the SDGs is much more difficult. The 17 goals cover the full breadth of development, with 169 targets, most of them time-bound and outcome-oriented. The agenda exposes interdependencies among different dimensions of development and requires progress on multiple fronts simultaneously. Charting progress toward its goals with publicly visible data exposes the full breadth of a government's successes and shortfalls. The SDGs also set expectations at a level that goes beyond the capability of a local government's resources, requiring city officials to attract and align the contributions of multiple major stakeholders.

The commitment to pursue the SDGs reflects an ambitious political vision for Los Angeles. Since the SDGs were designed for national implementation and measurement, cities interested in the SDGs as the basis for local progress must blaze their own trail as they align community plans against the goals. This case study reviews the first year of LA's implementation of the SDGs. It explores the incentives for pursuing the goals and analyzes the steps that Los Angeles has taken to align with the SDGs and measure its social, economic, and environmental progress. It surfaces lessons for other cities considering the use of the SDGs as a blueprint for community progress and ends with recommendations for LA's next steps.

3.2 Background: City of Los Angeles

Los Angeles is the second largest city in the USA, with a population of more than four million people within its city limits. It is one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the USA. Its city government manages a budget of \$9.9 billion³ and employs approximately 64,000 people. In 2017 it was estimated to have the third largest metropolitan economy in the world, roughly equivalent to the size of Turkey's economic output.⁴

While a growing, thriving city, Los Angeles also faces tough urban challenges. Homelessness in the city and county increased by 75% over the 6 years leading into 2018, with the city ranking near the bottom in sheltering its homeless relative to its US peers.⁵ The city's poverty rate in 2017 topped 20%,⁶ more than eight percentage points above the country's poverty rate. In 2018, it reported a record 87 consecutive days straight of unhealthy ozone levels,⁷ and it has a history of ranking first globally for traffic congestion in an annual ranking of gridlocked cities.⁸

The city government does not have primary managerial control for public services with regard to major parts of the SDG agenda. Los Angeles County, within which the city sits, adopted a budget of \$32 billion for 2018–2019 and operates the public hospitals and clinics. The

³City of Los Angeles, Open Budget. 2019. Retrieved from <http://openbudget.lacity.org/#!/year/default>

⁴How the Economic Power of American Cities Compares to Countries (2017, November 12). Retrieved from <https://howmuch.net/articles/the-economic-size-of-metro-areas-compared-to-countries>

⁵Holland, G. (2018, February 1). L.A.'s homelessness surged 75% in 6 years. Here's why the crisis has been decades in the making. *The Los Angeles Times*

⁶US Census Bureau, Population Estimates 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/losangelescalitycalifornia>

⁷Barboza, T. (2018, September 21). 87 Days of Smog: Southern California Just Saw Its Longest Streak of Bad Air in Decades. *Los Angeles Times*

⁸Los Angeles Tops INRIX Global Congestion Ranking (2018, February 5). Retrieved from <http://inrix.com/press-releases/scorecard-2017/>

Los Angeles County Department of Health Services is the second largest municipal health system in the country. The Los Angeles Unified School District oversees public education in the city but also serves 26 other cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County and even employs its own police force separate from the Los Angeles Police Department. Multiple levels of governance create challenges for driving shared progress on key social determinants.

3.3 Committing to the SDGs

The commitment by the city of Los Angeles to pursue the SDGs was a convergence of several factors, including opportunistic philanthropic leadership, a globally minded mayor who prizes evidence-based policy, and the city's designation as host of the 2028 Summer Olympic Games. The US federal government, as of 2019, has issued no plan to implement the SDGs and is providing no leadership, encouragement, nor resources to any stakeholders for SDG implementation. The effort by Los Angeles to commit to and adapt the SDGs for their own local purposes has been bottom-up, generated and supported by local stakeholders, offering a value proposition aligned with local political and programmatic priorities.

3.3.1 Key Factors

Philanthropic Leadership: The idea surfaced with the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, a family foundation with interests both local (e.g., ending homelessness in Los Angeles County) and global (e.g., the worldwide elimination of trachoma). Ed Cain, then Vice President for Programs, had previously served as a country Resident Coordinator within the UN system. He realized that, unlike the predecessor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs are to be universally applied by both high-income and low-income countries, no matter the level of development.

In conjunction with other local philanthropies, the Hilton Foundation had supported *A Portrait*

of Los Angeles County,⁹ a report based on quantitative community indicators that was launched in November 2017 by Measure of America. Measure of America used a methodology based on the UN's Human Development Index to explore how the county's residents were "faring in terms of well-being and equity," publishing a ranked index for the 106 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The portrait contained a "Global Goals Dashboard," a distilled version of the SDGs with associated indicators specific to Los Angeles County. For the foundation, the experience highlighted that collaboration with its counterparts on tough social issues could be enhanced if they agreed upon and used a common framework.

Impressed with the relevance of the findings and interested in exploring the potential for the SDGs to help the city drive social and environmental priorities, the foundation's leadership approached the Mayor's Fund for Los Angeles, an independent and non-partisan organization that pools and leverages private financial resources to help the city take on challenging priorities. Together, the Mayor's Fund and the foundation found receptivity from key city officials, such as the city's Chief Sustainability Officer and its Deputy CIO, who helped elevate the idea to the mayor.

Mayoral Leadership: They were engaging a mayor with a strong international outlook, intent on establishing Los Angeles as a leader on the global stage. Just a few months before the launch of *A Portrait of Los Angeles County*, Mayor Garcetti had named Ambassador Nina Hachigian as the city's first-ever Deputy Mayor for International Affairs, to oversee a newly created Office of International Affairs. The mayor's international perspective, grounded in his experience as a Rhodes Scholar and former professor of diplomacy and world affairs, facilitated a willingness to connect the globally agreed SDGs with his local political agenda to make life better for his city's residents.

⁹Measure of America. *A Portrait of Los Angeles County*. (2017, November). Retrieved from <https://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/PoLA%20Full%20Report.pdf>

A Unifying Event: Around the same time the International Olympic Committee awarded the 2028 Summer Olympic Games to Los Angeles. The expiration of the SDGs in 2030 aligns nicely with the timing of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, allowing the city to promote its efforts to ready the city for the Olympics as a simultaneous exercise in advancing sustainable development.

Data-driven Decisionmaking: The mayor also possesses a strong orientation for using data and goals to drive progress. He had made an SDG-like commitment in 2017 to decrease the number of unsheltered Angelenos by 50% in 5 years and functionally end homelessness in 10 years. This pledge demonstrated the mobilizing effect of aligning policy and budget against a publicly accountable goal. The mayor's political focus has helped produce a county bond for \$355 million annually for services and programs, a city bond for \$1.2 billion for supportive housing, and an executive directive to expedite the process of standing up temporary shelters.

Implicit Alignment: Indeed, the city's policies and plans already mirrored many of the priorities reflected in the SDGs. In April 2015, the mayor had released *Sustainability City pLAn*, which sought to integrate and measure environmental health, equity, and economic near-term and long-term outcomes. The city was also in the closing stages of finalizing *Resilient Los Angeles*, a plan developed in conjunction with Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative. The city had made a commitment in 2017 to update all of its 35 community plans within 6 years through neighborhood-level consultations, and the Mayor's Dashboard was already providing real-time data measuring the city's performance across a number of issues and sectors.

University Support: The pieces fell into place with the addition of university partners. Occidental College offered financial resources, faculty involvement, and assistance from students. Ultimately faculty and students from ASU, UCLA, and USC would also participate. These university teams provided capacity for mapping existing city policies and metrics against the SDGs, undertaking labor-intensive analysis that

might otherwise have taxed city staff. With a supportive mayor, the Hilton Foundation provided funds to the Mayor's Fund for a staff person in the mayor's office to take on the responsibility for coordinating the city's efforts on the SDGs.

3.4 Aligning to the SDGs

What does "implementation" of the SDGs entail? For the countries that agreed to the 2030 Agenda, the UN resolution emphasizes the importance of "cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by national financing frameworks," as well as regular review of progress using "a set of global indicators."¹⁰

The goals, targets, and indicators are set at the national and global levels. Using the data as a basis, countries develop strategy and financing frameworks according to their national circumstances. They then annually report national data to the UN Statistical Commission based on a standard set of indicators. Countries also voluntarily make Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the United Nations, offering a self-assessment of national progress and presenting their plans to reach the SDGs.

However, officially determined and universally accepted SDG targets for local purposes do not exist. There is also no formal set of indicators or official forum for reporting local SDG progress.

Cities are thus faced with the prospect of creating their own proxies for the national targets and indicators, especially as it relates to their own specific context and the data that they have available. There is no straightforward "trickle-down" from the national to the local – cities must make decisions at every juncture. For example, Los Angeles could set target 1.2, a 50% reduction in poverty, at the nationally mandated poverty line or a poverty line that is more in line with the cost of living in the city.

¹⁰*Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/Res/70/1, UNGAOR, 70th Session (2015), pp. 28

In addition, cities face jurisdictional issues. Depending on local and national governance structures, they may not have primary public administration responsibilities for certain parts of the SDG agenda.

Cities are thus faced with a more complicated task. They are judging the extent to which targets are relevant to local circumstances while assessing the city's capabilities to achieve them. They must also choose the indicators that will measure their progress. These tasks are in addition to strategy, budgets and financing, and ongoing reporting.

From a pragmatic perspective, in the absence of a national mandate or the prospect of federal funding, the incentives and pay-off must outweigh the investment of the city's time and resources. Otherwise it is likely to lose interest in using the SDGs as a blueprint.

With these considerations, implementation of the SDGs for cities can generally be viewed along five lines of effort: (1) awareness, (2) alignment, (3) analysis, (4) action, and (5) accountability.

General awareness about the SDGs in the USA remains fairly low and generally benefits from a champion (in this case the Hilton Foundation) or a campaign to enable greater attention to the advantages that the SDGs might provide. After awareness captures the attention of key leadership, a process of alignment situates the city's priorities, strategies, policies, directives, initiatives, and activities within the aspirations and intent of the SDGs. It also identifies the indicators that the city will use to measure its progress toward the targets it has determined to be relevant to its circumstances. Subsequent analysis enables the city to build from that foundation, identifying where policy gaps or opportunities exist and have important implications for its ability to successfully reach the targets. Ideally that will lead to prioritizing and taking new action, through policy or budget proposals, public-private initiatives, new types of financing, and citizen and stakeholder engagement. Publishing reports or real-time data that measure progress provide accountability. These five lines of effort are often iterative, constituting a mutually reinforcing cycle as a city refines and deepens its activities.

The process of implementation entails (1) decisions about the relevance of the SDG targets to a local context, (2) the extent to which the city will customize the framework for its own purposes, and (3) the indicators and data sources it will use to assess progress. This is where Los Angeles focused much of its effort in 2018.

The process includes choices about policy ambition and choices about metrics that indicate progress. While these are related, they are not the same.

3.4.1 Policy Alignment

Policy alignment takes place on a continuum. For some cities, an existing strategy may act as the cornerstone, which the city maps to appropriate targets and priorities within the SDGs. The SDGs are thus viewed through the lens of current city priorities.

Alternatively, a city can start from the perspective of the SDGs and conceivably create a development strategy with targets and goals taken directly from the framework. In such a scenario, the SDGs act as the template for the city strategy.

The approach by Los Angeles falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum, mapping existing plans and policies to *and* from the SDGs.

This took place against the backdrop of translating the agenda to the city level, with Los Angeles judging the relevance of a specific target to its local context, and deciding whether it makes sense to make an adjustment.

Los Angeles city staff made it a core principle to be holistic and comprehensive in its approach. Each of the 169 SDG targets was tested against the city's plans and activities. The university student teams did this through a desk review and analysis that included the city's sustainability plan, its resilience strategy, department plans and activities, and the city's budget.

As a first step, they tested the applicability to the city of each target as written and agreed in the United Nations resolution. This identified a subset of 69 SDG targets that needed no change

in language or quantitative ambition to be applicable to Los Angeles.¹¹

For the remaining 100 targets, the teams adhered to several principles to guide the analytical process: (1) make the fewest changes possible to render the target applicable, (2) remain as faithful as possible to original intent, and (3) reflect the city's values, realities, and defined ambitions, demonstrating a strong commitment to inclusiveness and leaving no one behind.¹²

Victory was not automatically declared on any target. For example, SDG target 1.1 focuses on ending extreme poverty. Using the global standard of \$1.90/day as outlined in the SDGs, the city has a strong case for claiming it has achieved the target. However, given the emphasis on grounding the exercise in the city's reality, the team recommended substituting an income level (\$33/day) that would be reflective of extreme poverty in Los Angeles.

This means ambition sometimes exceeds the SDGs. For example, the ratios for the recommended Los Angeles targets on maternal mortality and preventable child deaths under five are far lower than the SDG targets: for maternal mortality (target 3.1), Los Angeles is aspiring to 5 per 100,000 live births, versus the SDG target of 70 per 100,000 births; for under five mortality (target 3.2), Los Angeles is aspiring to 4 per 100,000 live births, versus the SDG target of 25 per 100,000 live births.

Setting ambition at these higher levels facilitated the creation of a Los Angeles-specific Leave No One Behind agenda. African-American women, for example, experience much higher rates of maternal mortality in Los Angeles than Caucasians. To reach the recommended ratio, Los Angeles will need to disaggregate data among demographic groups and develop specific strategies to meet the needs of African-American women.

¹¹Some of these targets incorporate international agreements or conventions to which Los Angeles is not a party, but by which the city can still abide.

¹²“Leave No One Behind” is often used as a shorthand for the imperative implicit in the SDGs that countries and stakeholders must reach their most vulnerable populations in order to achieve many of its targets.

Ultimately 156 targets comprise the recommended Los Angeles SDG framework. Thirteen targets were set aside, most of them means of implementation targets focused on resource or knowledge exchange between developed and developing countries, where legal structures or original intent was not meaningful to Los Angeles. The team recommended adding one target not a part of the SDGs, a target focusing on equity for LGBTQI, to extend the equity dimensions of the SDGs to populations important to Los Angeles (in similar fashion it made slight language modifications to expand the inclusivity of some targets).

As of February 2019, policy owners within Los Angeles city government are validating each recommendation relevant to their areas of responsibility. Their agreement on the policy recommendations will be critical for credibility, to ensure that the proposed framework is an accurate representation of Los Angeles ambition and context (e.g., does the proposed measure of \$33/day accurately reflect a level of extreme poverty for Los Angeles?). Those policy owners will also provide important guidance and expertise on choosing appropriate indicators to measure the city's progress and performance.

3.4.2 Indicator Alignment

As a globally agreed and vetted agenda, the SDGs offer the promise of comparability in measurement. Their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were hailed for their positive impact in helping a diverse set of stakeholders, including countries, aid agencies, philanthropies, and implementing partners, agree upon and use a standard set of metrics related to the specific targets.

The breadth and depth of the SDGs pose significant challenges in this regard. The official global indicators used at the national level, developed by the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) after significant consultation, are classified into three tiers. These denote their level of readiness and availability.

Tier I indicators reflect an internationally accepted methodology, with data produced by 50% of countries. The indicators in Tiers II and III have weaknesses either in methodology or availability, or both. As of December 31, 2018, two full years into implementation of the SDGs, just 45% of the official indicators for use at the national level are classified as Tier I.¹³ This is after the international community has been working on the MDGs for 15 years, spent 3 years developing the SDGs, and has been engaged in implementation for 2 years.

Adapting SDG measurement to the local level increases the degree of difficulty. Data quality challenges similar to those experienced with the UNSC indicators not only exist locally, but for most municipalities, they will be more pronounced. These challenges are complicated by the reality that no officially determined SDG metrics exist for local purposes and that localization of the agenda can take many forms. A key issue relates to the balance between standardization and customization: To what extent is it important that the common language of the SDGs translates into common measurement across different cities?

The points of reconciliation among standardization and customization depend in part upon audience and objective. A city may focus its efforts one way if it places high value on the ability to compare progress against counterpart cities across the world. It may take other approaches if it sees the SDGs as a common denominator among different levels of government at the county, state, and national levels, or if it is primarily interested in using the SDGs as a common platform to mobilize action among community stakeholders.

As the city of Los Angeles selects indicators to measure progress toward the proposed 156 targets of its localized framework, there are multiple options from which to draw. Its Mayor's Dashboard provides regularly updated data on close to 200 indicators, measures, metadata, and

charts. In 2018, the city entered into an agreement with the World Council on City Data (WCCD) to become one of eight local data hubs for sharing information based on WCCD's open data standards. There may also be the opportunity to localize selected national SDG indicators, especially if local data can be disaggregated from the same sources the US government is using to report national metrics to the UN through its online reporting portal.

The WCCD partnership offers promise in providing a common basis for comparison to other cities. In 2014, after years of consultation with cities worldwide, the organization was instrumental in publishing ISO 37120, a standard set of 46 core and 54 supporting indicators and related methodologies to measure the sustainable development of communities. Certification against the ISO standard requires third-party verification, ensuring a rigorous application of the methodology and a high quality of reporting. This enables a high degree of comparability for cities reporting against the standard.

Though the ISO standard was developed before the SDGs, WCCD recognized that the indicators cover similar social, economic, and environmental dimensions. WCCD now publishes an annual report of reporting cities with the ISO indicators mapped against the SDGs.

The alignment draws an association between each indicator in ISO 37120 to any SDG target where that indicator might provide relevant insights. Thus indicators may be used more than once, and more than one indicator may be associated with an SDG target.

While this approach helps draw an aggregate picture of progress, its usefulness in helping a city measure performance against particular SDG targets, especially for managerial purposes, seems limited. This is not surprising, as the ISO certification was not designed specifically for this purpose.

The set of 100 ISO indicators also leave gaps in coverage over the entire breadth of SDG targets. A rough analysis suggests that ISO indicators can provide a direct measure that corresponds to the specificity of a target, at a level equivalent

¹³IAEG-SDGs. *Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators*. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/>

to the UNSC indicator at the national level, for about 15% of the agenda.

Los Angeles was one of the first cities worldwide to achieve platinum certification by WCCD for ISO 37120. While its continued reporting will be critical in measuring its progress against comparable cities in the world and identifying counterparts with whom to share best practices and innovations, the indicators constitute only a subset of the wide range Los Angeles will need in order to measure its progress on the targets in its proposed framework.

Given the intense localization of its SDG approach, Los Angeles will need to craft or identify unique indicators as it seeks to measure its performance with maximum rigor. Several key principles could help improve comparability as choices on data metrics and methodology are made: (1) apply WCCD indicators where directly corresponding, (2) identify relevant indicators that utilize data from nationally available sources (e.g., census bureau data), and (3) identify indicators with internationally or nationally accepted methodology and data.

3.5 Generalizing the Experience of Los Angeles

Taken together, the factors underpinning the city's commitment may seem unique to Los Angeles, an unusual mix of political, substantive, and personal interests. Yet the considerations mirror those of any city weighing the value proposition of the SDGs against the investment of time and resources in adapting them. Five key principles emerge based on the Los Angeles experience:

- *They offer a global outlook to local priorities.* Being an Olympic city is just one manifestation of the global purview of Los Angeles. Situating its local experiences and aspirations within an internationally recognized and agreed framework reinforces this outlook. Cities seeking to demonstrate a global perspective are likely to be similarly attracted, given the chance it offers to articulate how local progress demonstrates a measure of responsibility for global solutions. In today's interconnected world, the SDGs also give Los Angeles a common language to share aspirations, challenges, practices, and performance with counterpart cities across the world.
- *Political and technical comfort with goals and data is necessary.* Los Angeles' commitment to the SDGs builds upon existing data collection and reporting systems and even publicly announced benchmarks. Its pursuit of the SDGs puts the city in the forefront of counterparts nationwide creating evidence-based policy. At the same time, the SDGs invite public accountability and transparency, so elected and senior officials must demonstrate a willingness to expose their credibility and reputation based on their progress in reaching the targets.
- *Partnerships enable the agenda.* In many respects, local implementation of the SDGs entails complexities that are not present at the national level that at minimum require an investment of staff and time. The commitment by Los Angeles benefited from an injection of capacity, resources, and leadership offered by the Hilton Foundation, as well as the various university partners. These were instrumental in helping Los Angeles get underway. While the city has committed to covering the staff expense past the Hilton Foundation's 2-year commitment, further expanding the participation of external stakeholders will play an important role in accelerating and advancing progress toward the goals.
- *Mayoral leadership sets the tone.* Awareness of the SDGs in the USA remains fairly low. Mayor Garcetti's full-throated and public support for taking on the SDGs, and the ability of him and other senior city officials to articulate

the value proposition for Los Angeles, reinforces the value of the commitment to staff, residents, and external partners. It positions the city to take advantage of the mobilizing effect that can result from credible pursuit of outcome-based, time-bound goals.

3.6 Recommendations: Maximizing Value from the SDGs

The proposed LA SDG framework is holistic, ambitious, reflective of the city's values and priorities, and serious about focusing the city's attention on its most vulnerable populations and communities. The extent to which it will receive special attention, or be used by the mayor and senior officials as a tool or guidance for budget and policy decisions, remains unclear.

The city has opted not to create a special high-level SDG committee or internal task force. Its internal organization against the SDGs resembles a hub-and-spoke configuration, through which its chief SDG coordinator engages policy owners as appropriate throughout the city government.

It seems unlikely that the city will seek to create a comprehensive SDG-specific strategy to accompany a finalized framework. The proposed framework already contains and affirms many of the mayor's priorities, articulated through other processes and policies. Indeed, one might view all of Mayor Garcetti's executive directives, taken in total and combined, as the core of the city's SDG strategy.

Yet moving from alignment against the SDGs to analysis and action can create significant value for the city.

- *Analyze policy gaps and opportunities:*

Deeper analysis of the localized framework, by using evidence to map past trends and develop future scenarios, can identify areas where progress is likely to be insufficient, key challenges are going unnoticed, or opportunities for scaling high-impact interventions are hidden. Work undertaken in late 2018 by faculty and students

from USC's Institute on Inequalities in Global Health to view the city's approach to homelessness through the lens of human rights provides a promising example. Universities and community-based organizations might also work with the appropriate city staff to use the multi-disciplinary aspects of the SDGs to surface new perspectives and develop integrated initiatives to advance progress on clustered issues, such as those related to homelessness.

The city presented a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) in 2019. A VLR is a report, notionally to the UN, of a city's specific contributions to the SDGs. Pioneered by New York City in 2018,¹⁴ the format is based on the approach taken by countries' official reports on their SDG progress, presenting Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the UN. The process of preparation provides an immediate opportunity to stimulate and incorporate such analysis. Publishing and publicizing the localized framework, once finalized, offer opportunities to community organizations and universities to undertake outside research relevant to city priorities.

- *Develop a platform for coordinated governance:*

While city government leadership will be instrumental, achieving the LA SDGs will depend upon strong shared city governance, with multiple segments of Los Angeles society contributing. Global experience with the MDGs and SDGs has demonstrated that specific, time-bound targets, with the right political attention and accountability, can have a mobilizing effect with businesses, investors, universities, civil society, and faith-based organizations. Los Angeles might explore models or platforms to enable public-private governance that generates and elevates multi-stakeholder efforts to advance specific priorities or the agenda overall. Hawai'i Green

¹⁴New York's Office for International Affairs (2018, July). *Voluntary Local Review: New York City's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/international/downloads/pdf/NYC_VLR_2018_FINAL.pdf

Growth, for example, manages a public dashboard that measures Hawaii's progress and facilitates major public-private partnerships that contribute toward the state's SDG-aligned goals.

An immediate opportunity is to develop a platform for community organizations and citizens to be engaged in providing indicators and data relevant to the proposed LA SDGs. In creating its public dashboard, the city is adapting the open-source platform originally developed by the US chief statistician's office as the US reporting portal and could explore ways to integrate third-party community-level data. Another effort could engage the creative community in Los Angeles to develop storytelling and communications to reinforce and raise awareness of the city's commitment. Partners such as the Hilton Foundation and Occidental College can also act as champions to engage their networks and encourage collaborative action.

- *Use key SDG targets as a common denominator among different levels of government:*

In related fashion, the government of the city of Los Angeles does not have the statutory authority to achieve all the aspirations outlined in the proposed LA SDG framework. The proposed benchmarks and targets clarify the city's aspirations and can provide the basis for exploring coordinated action, or at least coordinated measurement, on select priorities to leverage respective authorities and resources among city, county, and state or federal government. The recent emerging cooperation between the city and county governments in reducing homelessness serves as a model. An executive directive by the mayor or a city council ordinance adopting the LA SDG framework would add credibility and weight to such efforts.

- *Explore new financing opportunities:*

Financial institutions, money managers, investors, and pension funds are exploring how the SDGs, as a globally vetted and agreed-upon framework, provide a standard framework for analyzing environmental, social, and governance

factors. Firms like PIMCO are looking to structure SDG-specific product offerings, and the ratings agency Moody's recently published an assessment of the impacts of a Norwegian municipality's commitment to the SDGs on its future capital spending and borrowing.

- *Provide opportunities for engagement by residents:*

While overall awareness of the SDGs is low, support for the SDGs by the general public, once educated, is consistently positive. A recent poll by the UN Foundation found significant resonance among millennials. Other cities and municipalities have found the SDGs to be a compelling motivator for citizens and local groups to contribute toward the city's well-being.

The commitment made by Mayor Garcetti places Los Angeles in a leadership role among US cities taking on the SDGs. It seems unlikely that the proposed LA SDG framework, once finalized, will constitute the singular strategy used by the mayor and city council to define LA's future. Nevertheless, the city's investment in localizing the SDGs provides a comprehensive basis, one that is data-driven and outcome-focused, that can be a tool for enhancing and expanding solutions to improve the city's well-being. The challenge will be to take maximum advantage.

Tony Pipa is a senior fellow in Global Economy and Development at the Brookings Institution, where he researches place-based policies to improve social progress in the USA and globally, including use of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level. He also studies the future of US multilateral aid and the applicability of lessons from international development to improving rural development in the USA. During the Obama administration, he served as chief strategy officer and held several other senior policy positions at USAID. He served as US Special Coordinator for the Post-2015 Agenda at the Department of State, leading the US delegation at the UN to negotiate and adopt the SDGs. Prior to his government service, he directed the NGO Leaders Forum at Harvard University and was the founding CEO of the Warner Foundation. He serves on the board of directors of [StriveTogether](#) and the Advisory Council of the [Center for Disaster Philanthropy](#). He attended Stanford University, graduated from Duke University, and earned a Master of Public Administration at the Harvard Kennedy School.