

SDG localization through **Civil Society Organizations** in Lebanon

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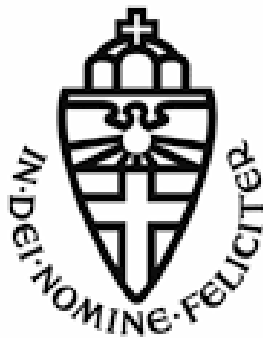
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Preface

The following research paper on 'SDG localization through Civil Society Organizations' was written as a Master's thesis for Spatial Planning at Radboud University, Netherlands.

The two years of studying and learning about social, economic, political and ecological issues allowed me to shed new perspectives on the dire situation Lebanon is currently facing. Gaining in-depth understandings of worldwide issues, and approaches to address them, raised my curiosity about the same methods' applicability in the context of Lebanon. The process that piqued my curiosity both globally and within Lebanon, was SDG localization. Consequently, the thesis takes two main 'ingredients' for its formulation: (i) the globally articulated SDGs; and the (ii) Lebanese context for localization. These were the main building block on which the rest of the ideas stand. After understanding these two aspects, I was able to form more detailed ideas on the direction of the research.

Early ideas of the research were formed in January 2021. After the establishment of the general direction of the research, I started conducting it in March 2021. The research went through major changes regarding its methodology, changing from Serious Gaming to the Delphi-method, but I was able to finish in December 2021.

After understanding that in Lebanon, only Civil Society is in position to advance sustainable development, I set the purpose of the research to be advancing Civil Society Organizations capacity to address localization, by introducing carefully picked manipulations. These manipulations are meant to change organizational functioning in a way that draws on the current national situation and allows them to address localization more effectively. In addition, they take into consideration the current main barriers to localization and attempt to address them as well.

Unfortunately the situation in Lebanon got significantly worst throughout the year. I was not able to visit and conduct my research in person, and with further degradation of the environment, the research methodology had to be changed to allow data gathering in a different form. However, I have taken part in a four-month internship in a Lebanese development organization called Beyond Group Consulting. They gave me an opportunity to get a close look and study the current situation of CSOs and SDG localization in the country. Based on the gathered information, I was able to conduct my research on advancing SDG localization in Lebanon.

Abstract

In 2015, the UN General Assembly set up 17, interlinked, global goals called SDGs, in order to achieve a more sustainable future for the World. A core part of the blueprint is the localization process of the identified goals and targets, which takes into consideration local needs when formulating goals. All around the World, governments play a crucial role between the global and local level, translating the SDGs into locally relevant goals and targets. The UN acknowledges their role in the process and attempts to accommodate this institutional setup to advance localization efforts. However, in countries like Lebanon, where the government is neglecting sustainable development and the needs of its people, the same processes cannot function properly. In Lebanon's case, Civil Society and Civil Society Organizations took up the role and started working towards a sustainable future. This research takes a look at how a country with an incapable government, in this case Lebanon, can advance its sustainable development, and still use internationally articulated data and tools. The objective was to identify barriers to the localization process, and formulate manipulations to CSOs operations that can help them address these barriers, and develop effectively without the help or involvement of the government. Throughout 2021, Lebanon continuously degraded and fell into the most serious crisis of its modern history. The research methodology had to adapt to the shifting environment. The Delphi-method was used, where experts of the field were invited and asked about their views on the articulated manipulations and their possible effects. Through their discussions, consensus was facilitated and built throughout the rounds. Based on their joint views, I was able to answer the research questions. The findings show, that the three formulated manipulations have varied beneficial effect on CSOs ability to localize. Being 'location specific' and 'using SDGs as a categorization system' were both deemed beneficial, while an 'adaptable role' raised some concerns. Ultimately all manipulations were found beneficial. Furthermore, except for the 'financial crisis', manipulations were deemed advantageous in addressing the four identified barriers to localization. Finally, the proposed theoretical setup of a CSO, the City-CSO, where all three manipulations are present in a single organization, was deemed valid, feasible and beneficial to the advancement of sustainable development in Lebanon. With the strengthening of CSOs, I hope that more agency can get in the hands of the Lebanese civil society. To conclude, I hope that highlighting the unique situation of Lebanon can inform international organizations, and allow them to question and diversify the processes and approaches they use to help advance sustainable development.

Keywords: *SDG localization, Lebanon, Civil Society Organizations, City-CSO, Delphi-method*

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Introduction

1.1. Research Problem Statement

1.1.1. The global fight for sustainability

The term 'sustainable development' is a globally contested, intrinsically ambiguous term. True sustainability is commonly understood as the end state, the conjoint point of the three pillars of sustainability: *Economy, Society, and Environment*, while sustainable development depicts the road towards it (Monkelbaan, 2018). However, the concept is widely contested, resulting in numerous definitions. The most commonly used was developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development, in their 1987 'Our Common Future' report: "...development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (p. 43) (WCED, 1987). It has been criticized in academic circles for its normativity, subjectivity, ambiguity, and for not explaining what sustainable development *is*, but what it should result in (Monkelbaan, 2019). The academic debates around the definition of sustainable development focused originally on the difficulty of translating it to context-specific policy, and whether it represented philosophical or economic concepts. As Meadowcroft points out, these debates missed the important *political* point, that sustainable development as a concept was not developed as a social science concept or operational rule that would allow the easy formulation of policies. Instead, it is a normative perspective to help formulate environmental and development policies (Meadowcroft, 2007).

The fight for a sustainable future has been ongoing on for decades (Robinson, 1972). In 2015, the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed upon by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. This transformational agenda was set to answer global problems facing our society, such as climate change, poverty, gender inequality, and more (UN, 2015). The SDGs work as a framework for an international development agenda. However, the degree to which countries, organizations, and individuals adhere to its principles differs greatly. The three sectors, within which action for sustainable development can be initiated, are Government (public); Economy (private); and Society (voluntary). Most actors know about Climate Change, but not its root causes. Not understanding the issue and the possible ways forward lead to inaction. Therefore, understanding sustainability goals, principles and the paths towards them are necessary for actors to reach a sustainable and resilient future.

Three domains of action: Government, Market, and Civil Society

"Sustainable development is above all about governance" (Meadowcroft et al., 2012, p.8). Governance for sustainable development can be understood as socio-political governance processes to attain sustainable development. It includes political decision-making, policy formulation and implementation, public debate, and the various interplay between public authorities, private businesses, and Civil Society (CS) (Meadowcroft, 2007). It was stated in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, that "good governance within each country and at the international level is essential for sustainable development" (WSSD,

2002, p. 8). 'Good governance' is bound to a wide range of criteria, including efficacy and efficiency, the rule of law, participation, accountability, transparency, respect for human rights, the absence of corruption, toleration of difference, and gender equity (UNDP, 1997; Plumptre and Graham, 1999).

Besides traditional direct regulatory interventions (DRI), governments have taken up the challenge to address sustainability issues in an interdisciplinary manner, through collaborations with other governments, businesses, and civil society. They practice new roles to manage governance tools as initiators, assemblers, enablers, or supporters. Predominantly governmental interventions consist of statutory regulations, direct subsidies, taxes, other economic instruments or their combinations. These are criticized to have limited effect in changing human behaviour, which is a key aspect in the advancement of society along a sustainable path. Governments can collaborate with businesses or civil society to set up negotiated agreements, partnerships, networks, and more. These collaborations are also possible between different vertical scales of government, where they share knowledge, best practices, and work towards shared agreements (Van Der Heijden, 2014).

The SDGs have put considerable emphasis on the diverse role of the private sector in their implementation, going beyond 'business as usual' (Cummings, Seferiadis, Haan, 2019). Their role is further discussed and cemented on both domestic and international private businesses and finance, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Addis Ababa Action Agenda, 2015). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development and DNV GL conducted a survey, according to which companies view SDGs as a guiding strategic opportunity to promote their licence to innovate, operate and grow (WBCSD, 2018). Research shows that working towards SDGs can open up new market possibilities, worth USD 12 trillion in the four major economic areas only, which makes up 60% of the real economy (BSDC, 2017). It is clear that the role of the private sector is extremely relevant, and its transformation according to the SDGs can lead to a greener, more inclusive, and circular future.

With the 2030 Agenda, all UN member states have committed to involving CS in pursuing the SDGs. However, according to reports (like the Voluntary National Review), this effort has been lacking even in countries where CS holds a firm status. Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) are non-profit organizations where civil society members unite to represent a commonly shared value. Their role in the arena of sustainable development can be summarized as follows: (i) be the voice of the poorest, most marginalized citizens to ensure their voice is heard; (ii) advocate for change; (iii) collect data and monitor progress; (iv) act as watchdogs and agents of accountability and, (v) be service delivery providers (Corella et al., 2020). The challenges CS faces range from CSOs' agency to advocate change and participate in decision-making processes, to the government's lack of initiative to create a more inclusive process on legislative and policy levels. These issues differ greatly according to the relevant local level, therefore their exploration and research in different environments are necessary to identify and combat challenges that CS can face.

1.1.2. Sustainable Development in Lebanon

The fight for a sustainable future needs to be fought through the collaborations of the three sectors. However, this is not the case in all countries. This thesis focuses on the situation of Lebanon and the unique role of Civil Society in working towards the SDGs.

Lebanon has had countless hurdles throughout its history: civil war, terrorism, invasion, occupation, military intervention, and political intimidation. The current level of political bankruptcy and economic ruin is unparalleled in Lebanon's modern history. Although reasons are numerous, there's no more compelling one than the sectarian power-sharing arrangement and corrupt politicians' failure to enact much-needed political and economic reform (Saab, 2021). The resilience of this sectarian political system established in the 1943 National Pact and enshrined in the Ta'if Accords in 1989, allows the political and religious elite to keep themselves in positions of power (Karam, 2018). Throughout the years, the government has developed multiple documents, addressing sustainable development and the SDGs, none has seen meaningful actualization (e.g. Voluntary National Review, 2018).

Lebanon's economy is in a similarly dire state, having the second-highest inflation rate as of 2020 (Trading Economics, 2020). Multiple major contributors have led to its current state, from which I mention the most recent and relevant ones. First, rampant corruption and the inability of the state to act in the interest of its people. Second, the war in Syria and Iraq led to the massive immigration of more than a million refugees, putting immense stress on the economy (Macro Trends, 2021). Third, the current pandemic further crippled the economy (The Borgen Project, 2021). Finally, and most recently, the explosion on August 4th, 2020, directly impacted hundreds of thousands of citizens (Nassar & Nastaca, 2021).

We can conclude that nor the Lebanese political sphere, nor its economy, has the ambition or power to take up a leading role and start the fight for a sustainable future. The only constituency that aspires for a change in Lebanon is the Civil Society. It is taking up the fight and combating issues the sectarian government neglects to address. They are the only agents of change (Saab, 2021). This is apparent in the prominent role of CSOs in the country. Their actions are twofold: (i) civil society and NGOs support, pressure, and challenge the normal functioning and enactment of new laws within the Lebanese government; (ii) CSOs supplement or substitute the role of the state in moments of crisis, e.g. refugee crisis, trash crisis, environmental accidents, and more. However, by doing so, they unintentionally contribute to the stability of the current political system and deliberately allow the government to remain weak. This leads to the lack of proper national institutions to be built around these issues (Karam, 2018).

Since the government cannot be trusted to play its role, and the business sector is too weak to initiate, this thesis aims to contribute in furthering sustainable developments in Lebanon by exploring the feasibility and viability of local City-CSO's and their potential for implementing SDGs at the local level. Countless NGOs, led by Lebanese entrepreneurs, are attempting to bring development to their people through voluntary initiatives around the country. I argue that an answer for a possible path towards a sustainable future lies in the hands of the Lebanese people. James Meadowcroft describes the role of civil society in governance for sustainable development perfectly and underlines the need for educated citizens:

"But who is to do this 'steering'? In a fundamental sense, governance for sustainable development implies a process of 'societal self-steering': society as a whole is to be involved in the critical interrogation of existing practices and to take up the conscious effort to bring about change. Thus it involves not only actions and policies to orient

development along certain lines, but also the collective discussion and decision required to define those lines.” (Meadowcroft, 2007)

1.2. Research aim and questions

Research Aim

The aim of the research is to better understand the suitability of the Lebanese socio-political context for SDG localization by CSOs, identify the main barriers that are limiting their work and development, and propose manipulations to their organizational structures to better fit the national framework and allow for improved localization processes. In addition, this thesis presents a theoretical proposition for a so called ‘City-CSO’, where the identified manipulations are used together in a single organization. This new form will be tested and its benefits to the localization of SDGs will be explored.

Main Research question

- ❖ “To what extent does the designed City-CSO present a valid, beneficial, and feasible approach to SDG localization in Lebanon?”

Secondary Research questions

- ❖ “To what extent can a ‘location specific CSO’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”
- ❖ “To what extent can a ‘CSO with flexible role’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”
- ❖ “To what extent can a ‘CSO with SDGs as a structuring system’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”
- ❖ “What are the effects of the formulated three manipulations on the barriers to localization?”

1.3. The societal and scientific relevance

Societal relevance

If the CSO can contribute to awareness raising of local citizens on relevant SDGs, then CS can contribute to sustainable development more accurately and in a more localized manner. Their awareness in one field of sustainability can ripple down and lead to self-education on related topics. Since the development is always on a local scale, the spread of information between individuals and networks could be faster. This could combat the current distrust in international organizations within local citizens.

It further attempts to raise awareness about the effectiveness and impact of smaller local initiatives on the community. Realizing the fact that through local effort and knowledge, combined with global principles and information, CS and stakeholders could achieve meaningful change through small victories. It would presumably promote the idea that CS can work towards sustainable living effectively, without the government.

In addition, if the CSO manipulations and the formulated City-CSO are effective, I assume that it allows for its adoption in any settlement of the country. Having the same 'theoretical framework' (SDGs) as guiding principles, allows them to scale, coordinate and communicate with each other more easily. Furthermore, it can help the development of sustainable ideas and their implementation in a localized way leading to more targeted projects, answering local needs.

Finally, by developing organizations within a locale, communities familiarity with each other and their knowledge of their environment can both promote and help the development of sustainable ideas and initiatives. By basing operations on international values of the SDGs, they can be conducted on a higher standard. These points could help improve social inclusion in community decision-making processes.

Scientific relevance

Through its structuring and operation, the designed CSO attempts to localize globally defined SDGs to complement local sustainable development through CS knowledge of the locale and therefore formulate local SDG indicators and targets, and formulate local initiatives based on these global principles. Then, these can contribute and inform future local developments more accurately. Due to the lack of a national/governmental scale to the localization process in Lebanon, my approach attempts to bridge the gap between international and local scale and directly develop through CS and advance the localization of the SDGs.

Also, it explores a Civil Society initiative for sustainable development and its effect on citizens in a unique environment, where the political domain is not exercising its roles and the economy is experiencing a financial crisis. Therefore, the thesis can contribute to the scarce literature of the topic, especially in the case of Lebanon and neighbouring countries, who are facing similar issues.

Finally, the designed CSO attempts to answer national barriers to localization with its unique manipulations of its structure. If the articulated manipulations prove to combat national and local barriers to localization, further research can be conducted on their effectiveness in countries facing similar struggles.

Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Review of academic literature

In order to be able to measure the effects of manipulations on barriers of localization and CSOs in Lebanon, a detailed analysis of the existing environment has to be done. First, I elaborate on SDG localization efforts from governmental and civil society perspectives around the world and articulate their relevance to position the research within the global discourse. I briefly touch on the relevance of localization to our current pandemic and present cases of localization efforts around the world. Second, after clarifying these globally articulated topics, I narrow my focus to Lebanon and its Civil Society. I discuss the Lebanese Civil Society and CSOs past and current relevance in the development of the country. Third, to understand the environment within which Lebanese CSOs operate, their policy context was analysed. Namely, their enabling environment and Lebanon's institutional arrangements. Fourth, I elaborate on the four identified barriers to localization and argue for their relevance. Finally, in the theoretical framework, I discuss the position of CSOs in the localization process in Lebanon. I elaborate on why the given research method was taken and how it can contribute to their development.

2.1.1. SDG localization

The SDGs are a globally defined set of 17 goals and 169 targets that were formulated through the cooperation of UN Member States, Civil Society, and other stakeholders. It paves the way towards a sustainable future. Due to the global scale in which they were defined, they cannot be implemented without national, regional or local considerations. Formulating these goals and targets while taking into consideration the local context is what we call 'SDG localization' ([Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, 2016](#)). It is essential for achieving global, national, and sub-national sustainable development goals. The local context can inform the identification of goals and targets, the way of implementation, and monitoring processes. The concept and importance of localization was already taken into account in the formulation of the SDGs. All goals include targets specifically addressed to local and regional governments, signifying their importance. Up to 65% of the SDG is in fact not fully achievable without the cooperation and co-design with local actors ([Kanuri, Revi, Espey & Kuhle, 2016](#)). SDG localization has two primary processes: (i) *Planning and implementing SDGs* and (ii) *monitoring progress*. These processes vary from settlement to settlement, and no comprehensive 'one-case-fits-all' plan can be formulated. However, certain common elements were identified by the report 'Localizing the SDGs: Regional Governments Paving the Way', that can guide the processes. These steps are: defining a vision, mapping existing governance structures, adopting a policy, enacting laws, and creating and/or adapting institutions. Furthermore, it identifies three main challenges of local governments: (i) *difficulty to prioritize the SDGs over other agendas*, (ii) *the need for additional support, capacities or trained staff*, (iii) *insufficient financial resources* ([Messias, Vollmer, Sindico, 2018](#)).

Cities play a crucial role in localization. Increased urbanization presented new challenges but also opportunities to address sustainable development. As basic service providers

(water, education, health, etc.) they are able to significantly contribute to the SDGs. They can transform holistic and abstract goals into concrete, pragmatic strategies. They can link local knowledge with holistic ideas and formulate effective approaches to achieve them and integrate them into the local context ([Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, 2016](#)). On the mission to achieve sustainable cities, contributing to global development, various networks, partnerships, and coalitions are being formed between various levels of government, cities, etc. to enhance development around the world, share information and best practices ([Kanuri, Revi, Espey & Kuhle, 2016](#)). Focusing on the cities sustainable development is a good strategic choice. They are urban junctions where an immense amount of resources and services flow through. Compared to rural areas, their impact on the environment is significantly larger. Their importance was highlighted in the 2012 report of the 'High-Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda': "Cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost." ([UN, 2013](#))

Actors of localization

In this chapter, I briefly introduce a few possible approaches taken towards addressing localization of the SDGs.

The significance of local levels of decision-making was addressed in very early strategies for sustainable development. In the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, the Agenda 21 non-binding action plan was formulated. One of its major objectives was to promote local governments' development of their own Agenda 21 plan ([UN, 1992](#)). However, its adoption is varied across nations as implementation of it is voluntary. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Division for Sustainable Development is responsible for monitoring and evaluating processes of these plans and make them available on their website (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.html>).

The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments is a global initiative started by Kadir Topbas, Mayor of Istanbul. It helps to bring together major global networks of local governments to enhance policy processes and advocacy on a global scale, with particular focus on the SDGs, climate change agenda, and Habitat III. Besides promoting the importance of the local government level, they managed to achieve remarkable feats such as: campaigning for the stand-alone SDG 11, supported adequate financing on local levels, and most importantly for localization, they called for the localization of 'implementation and monitoring of the 2030 agenda'. With this, they put significant agency and responsibility in the hands of local governments, but also allow them to implement SDGs more effectively ([UCLG, 2020](#)).

These approaches and initiatives focus on leading localization through regional and local governments, with the help of nation or international institutions. Countless other similar initiatives exist around the world, like the 'Basque declaration' or the 'New Leipzig charter', which discuss sustainable development from an urban perspective. However, it is important for the paper to address the possible roles Civil Society Organizations can play in localization processes.

Multiple international studies, such as the 'Civil Society and the 2030 Agenda' ([Corella, Nicolas & Veldkamp, 2020](#)) have showcased the relevance of involving civil society into the localization process. They discuss the crucial role CSOs can have in the development,

especially in places with weaker governance. The identification and structuring of CSOs' role in localization of the SDGs can differ between nations. However, they all share core values and general characteristics of a CSO. The African Civil Society Circle (ACSC) identified four roles of CSOs: (i) Voice of the Poorest and Most Marginalized Citizens, (ii) Agents of accountability, (iii) Service delivery agent, and (iv) Data collection, reporting, and monitoring (Democracy Development Programme, 2016). In another example from Africa, Somalia formulated three major roles: Awareness raising and advocacy; Planning and implementation; and monitoring and evaluating progress (Somali Institute for Development Research and Analysis, 2019). These are more holistic and encompassing groupings, that allow smaller goals to be accurately placed within them. In a case from Southeast-Asia, in Malaysia the four roles were identified as service delivery, human-rights, environmental roles, and think-tanks (Khoo & Tan, 2019). We can clearly see that although they might differ in their names, they mainly all cover the same roles. In addition, these roles are very similar to the roles of a CSO outside of SDG localization, suggesting no significant innovation in the field by CSOs. It would be beneficial to research how innovative CSOs are in addressing newly formulated global issues, and how much are they sticking to formerly articulated roles of theirs and try to formulate those to fit current challenges.

As we saw in the previous paragraphs, the main discourse around localization of the SDGs, is centred around the role of the government. Various localization reports, guides, etc. promote a participatory way of planning and the involvement of stakeholders, including Civil Society and CSOs. However, Civil Society and CSOs role as initiators, leaders, planners, facilitators, etc. in the localization process is still understated and undervalued in my opinion. CSOs need to discover new arenas and ways of involvement, rather than trying to fit formally identified processes to current issues. On the other side, the government should allow civil society to have more agency and involve them in all stages of development, with various capacities.

SDG localization cases

The following three cases of SDG localization around the World, showcase the degree to which civil society can take part in the development efforts and localization processes. Each case presents a different approach to localization.

In Malaysia, to face challenges presented by human rights interpretation of the Malaysian government, civil society and CSOs in particular created a CSO-SDG Alliance to address these issues from a bottom-up approach. Leadership and the shift from a confrontational strategy to engagement and cooperation were leading factors of the initiative. Through this alliance, CSOs have organized themselves and allowed all interested CSOs to join the cause. Combining all these different CSOs under one 'umbrella CSO' allowed for an effective localization of human rights SDGs. CSOs with different priorities, target groups, and services can identify different goals and targets, closest to the actions they carry out. This allows each organization to deal with issues which they have the most expertise and specialization in (Khoo & Tan, 2019). This case represents a situation in which civil society took the lead, while the government failed to do so, and through joint power managed to bring about change in the SDGs.

In the case of Somalia, the National Development Plan (NDP 2017-2019) adopted the SDGs as its guiding principles. The government acknowledges the relevance of civil society's role

and attempts to develop a framework in which all layers of stakeholders are represented to advance the localization of SDGs. The government promotes CSOs efforts to raise awareness, share knowledge and experience, and adopt multi sectoral approaches to planning, implementation and monitoring ([Somali Institute for Development Research and Analysis, 2019](#)). In this case, the government acknowledged the role of civil society and actively worked on involving them in the localization process.

Finally, in the case of One-Central Coast, Australia, the local government took the localization efforts a step further. They formulated the development framework based on civil society reports called 'Community Strategic Plan 2018-2028'. It "sets the priorities and confirms strategies and activities that best achieve the community's desired outcomes for the future." It comprises 5 key themes (Smart, green, belonging, responsible, liveable) within which 12 focus areas are further described. They contribute to SDG localization efforts through connecting relevant SDGs to the 12 locally-generated focus areas. These are then further broken down, and community indicators are included to allow measurement of advancements throughout the years ([Central Coast Council, 2018](#)).

Although the government has the agency to make the localization process more inclusive and efficient, we saw that through the joint effort of CSOs a country can still localize SDGs through civil society.

Localization and COVID-19

Time has always been a critical element in addressing sustainable development and climate change, and unfortunately we are running out of it. The Covid-19 pandemic has made efforts significantly harder, but also highlighted the importance of local governments in various fields such as immediate crisis response, emergency relief operations, and their role as local service providers. There is a pressing need to 'build back' better and with more focus and agency given to subnational governmental bodies. Pytrik Oosterhof, in a report on SDG localization, identified three main goals that need to be addressed in a post-Covid development situation. First, promote multi-level governance and decentralization that foster localization to enable system alignment. She emphasizes the importance of local data collection and monitoring in the scaling of the localization process. Second, investments into human, finance and other resources are needed at a local level. With the availability of bottom-up, local knowledge and data, governing investments at a local scale can prove advantageous. Finally, she addresses the need to cooperate with a vast array of stakeholders, to further improve the efficiency in which localization can take place ([Oosterhof, 2020](#)). These principles clearly align with the previously articulated ways of advancing the efficiency of localization.

To conclude, we identified four main argument around SDG localization process and the role of CSOs within it. The dominant geographical scale within which localization is the most apparent and needed, are cities. They are an agglomeration of resources, therefore localization can have major impacts, affecting various elements and relations within it. In the current process of localization, national and local governments are the main actors and facilitators. However, we saw from the cases that CSOs can localize effectively too through civil society. Although they can act by themselves, cooperation between organizations, and mainly governmental bodies, is highly beneficial for them. We saw that different levels of cooperation can emerge, and depending on it, the role of CSOs can greatly change. Finally,

the roles CSOs are playing in localization efforts are resembling their traditional processes. It would be highly beneficial, if CSOs would research new forms of involvement and develop new processes to localize SDGs.

2.1.2. The Definition of Civil Society and CSOs

Before discussing the Lebanese Civil Society, I address the applied terminology in the paper. Alongside the state and the market, Civil Society constitutes the third sector. It can be described in many ambiguous ways, but for this paper, I am using the CIVICUS definition, which describes it as: *“the space between the family, state, and the market, where people come together to pursue their interests”*. This puts CS in a broader context, allowing for a wider interpretation.

The term ‘non-governmental organizations’ or ‘NGOs’ was used by many international organizations, to describe the non-business and non-state actors they worked with. However, it is a contested terminology, as it limits the possible variety of organizations that engage in development work. Today the term ‘Civil Society Organization’ or ‘CSO’ is used instead, to capture the wider range of groups (UNDP, 2006; UNDP China, 2013). According to the EU, CSOs include “all non-state, not-for-profit, non-violent and non-partisan structures, which people organize to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic” (Corella, Nicolas & Veldkamp, 2020). In this paper I propose a new form of organization within civil society and conduct an experiment to test its operation. Using the terminology ‘CSO’, allows me to put my organization along a wide variety of CSOs, and help analyse it according to guidelines reports, research, and other documents developed for CSOs betterment.

2.1.3. Overview of Lebanese Civil Society

Between 1960 and the start of the civil war in 1975, the country saw the establishment of non-sectarian organizations in response to state division, adopting non-sectarian and non-political agendas. In 1975, with the outset of civil war, government agencies were paralysed (1975-) and the central government collapsed. Civil society stepped up and compensated for their absence by delivering crucial services for the Lebanese people. This ultimately led to CSOs conceptualizing their role as complementary to the governments. A drastic change was occurring in the CS arena. The international environment led CSOs to gain increased awareness, knowledge, and self-consciousness, while globalization introduced new guiding principles such as participatory democracy, sustainable development, governance, accountability, and transparency. These helped elevate the state of CSOs, and allow them to become catalysts for change. Representing national civil societal needs, they started to become nodal points of democracy in Lebanon. Since the public lacks a general trust in its government, this emancipation of CSOs allows CS to lead and steer the country in its desired direction. Although the global trend is towards a ‘light’ state, articulating a more central role for civil society, in Lebanon they cannot seize this opportunity. Multiple factors hinder their work: “the ineffectiveness of the state in transferring its role to other sectors, the absence of national priorities and future vision, the interference of the political leaders who twist the efforts of the CS to serve their interests, lack of follow up, the weakness of decentralization, the regression of voluntarism, and the emergence of chauvinism within the civil society arena” (Assi, 2006).

To be able to accurately implement the CS aspect of the research, Lebanese civil society strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations were collected ([Annexe 1](#)). By addressing, analysing, and capitalizing on these characteristics, I can tune the functioning of the developed CSO to best serve current CS needs.

2.1.4. Overview of Lebanese CSOs

The record of the first voluntary associations in Lebanon dates back to the 16th century. However, the point of significant growth of civic groups did not happen until the 19th century. Between 1923 and 1950 CSOs flourished in Lebanon, but they were highly affiliated with religious institutions. Under the presidency of Fuad Chehab (1958-1964), the number of organizations around the management of social and economic issues raised dramatically. These CSOs no longer worked under a religious institution. After the civil war broke out in 1975(-1990), the focus of civil society organizations shifted to dealing with and responding to the crisis of governance on a local level. The war came to an end with the Ta'if Agreement and introduced a new form of CSO, who instead of substituting government roles, attempted to complement and work alongside them. The lift of Syrian power and their withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, meant a new era for CSOs. They gained back their role in the policy and political arena and enlarged their scope of work ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#)).

CSO typology

Regarding CSOs in Lebanon, we can distinguish two types. Associations are the primary type, defined by the 1909 Ottoman Law on Associations as: “a group composed of several individuals who unite their information and efforts permanently and the goal of which is not to divide profit”. The other type of CSOs are Civil Companies, subject to the Law of Obligations and Contracts of 1932. The key difference is that these companies seek profit to be shared among partners ([ECNL, 2018](#)). To further distinguish CSOs, four defining characteristics of the organization need to be considered. First, the distinction between ‘Al-mujtama al-ahli’ and ‘Al-mujtama al-madani’. Al-madani, implies a willingness to bring about structural change and work towards a more unified civic community. On the other hand, Ahli builds on historical families and sectarian ties. Second, the difference between ‘formal registered’ and ‘informal’ groups. Third, politically affiliated or non-affiliated groups. Political parties and elites usually create their own organizations to provide social services. These are usually well funded, contrary to public ones. Finally, the distinction between faith-based and secular CSOs. Faith-based organizations gain significant resources to develop, however, mainly within their religious base ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#)). I argue that there is a pressing need to align the objectives of these civic groups and leave behind sectarian and religious divisions between them. A realignment of core values is needed for CSOs to be able to address societal issues more effectively.

Only estimations can be made on the current work and number of CSOs in the country, as there are no accurate, accessible official records. However, according to the latest, April 2014 records of the Ministry of Social Affairs, more than 8000 CSOs were active in Lebanon ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#)). Through a large sample study of over 800 active CSOs, a study mapped their functioning along seven function types shown in Figure 1. The beneficiaries of these initiatives are mainly the youth, children, women, and general citizens, while the poor, elderly, workers, and refugees are given less attention.

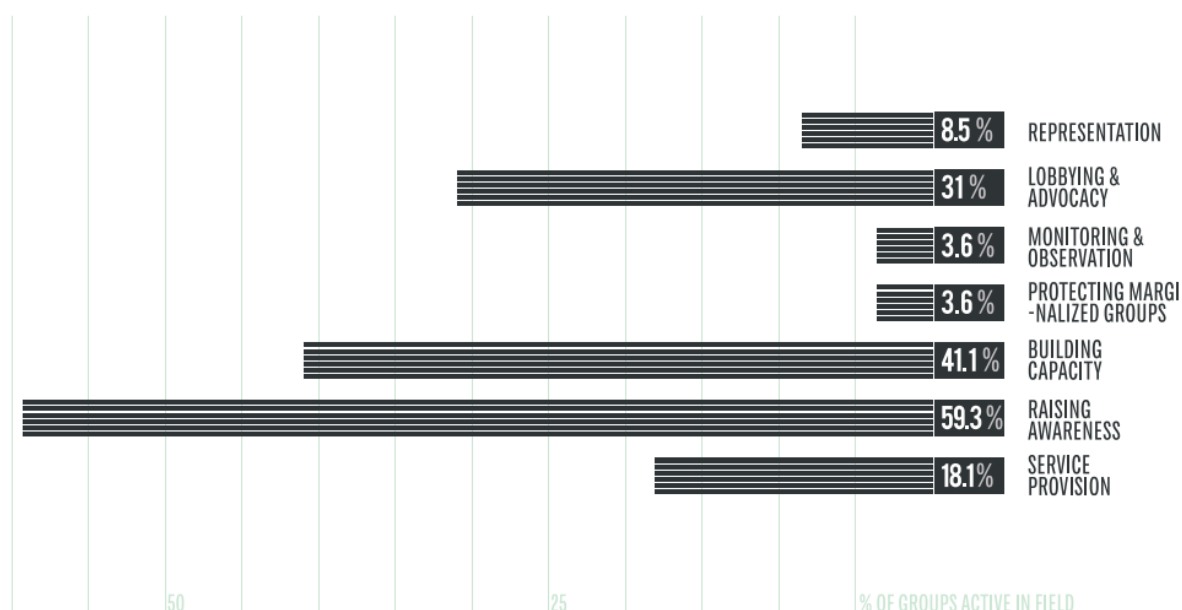


Figure 1: Distribution of CSO functions ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#))

Finally, to address challenges these CSOs face, we can distinguish between external and internal threats. Three external threats were identified by participants in the study of ‘Mapping civil society organizations in Lebanon’. The challenge of interaction with the political system (30.8%), regarding security threats (28.2%), and finally the unfavourable legal framework (23.3%). These clearly show that the main cause of issues is the government. Regarding internal challenges, the issue is usually a lack of resources, being financial (60.5%) or human (27%) resources. The size of organizations reflects this. 80% of Lebanese CSOs have less than 10 employees and more than 75% work with less than 20 volunteers ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#)).

CSO Sustainability Index

Before concluding with recommendations for CSOs, I take a look at their overall sustainability level and how it changed recently. I used the ‘2019 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index’ report for Lebanon ([USAID, 2020](#)). According to the paper, in 2019 several recorded dimensions of sustainability changed, but overall remained stable. The legal environment and financial viability deteriorated, while advocacy (due to the unification effect of current crises), CSOs public image, and general awareness around them increased. What stayed stable during these trying times are CSOs’ organizational capacity, service provision, and sectoral infrastructure. Estimates were made of active CSOs in 2019, putting their number between 8500 and 14,000. But without official governmental assessment, these remain approximations ([USAID, 2020](#)).

Recommendations

To conclude the section on CSOs in Lebanon, I collected the most crucial recommendations given by the US AID 2020 assessment on needed developments in their functioning ([USAID, 2020](#)). It provides guiding principles for establishing or imagining a fair environment for CSOs in Lebanon. However, almost all recommendations include the government as an actor, and CSOs individualistic development is less articulated. Considering the current

political system, it is worth posing the question ‘how effective these governance approaches can be in a country where the government represents the largest threat to sustainable development?’

- Advocating for parliaments’ adoption of anti-corruption laws (access to information, whistle-blower protection)
- Enacting an administrative decentralization law driven by social cohesion and local development
- Support the Ministry of Interior in digitizing the CSOs registry and make it publicly available
- Support the Ministry of Interior in reforming its selection process and funding for CSOs
- Provision of technical assistance to CSOs
- The openness of the policymaking process to CSOs
- Improvement of communication and interface between CSOs and policymakers
- Leveraging CSO policy engagement at the local level
- Promotion of transparency in aid and funding procedures

2.2. Policy context

2.2.1. Enabling environment for CSOs in Lebanon

To understand, and put Lebanese CSOs situation into context on an international scale, first I take a look at the enabling legal and regulatory environment of CSOs in DAC (Development Assistance Committee) donor countries (24 countries). The assessment was developed by UNDP China in 2013 to help promote cooperation with civil society ([UNDP China, 2013](#)). It presents twelve key ‘good practices’ that have been identified to promote CSOs capabilities. These can guide policymakers to draft better legislation for managing CSOs. To simplify and make the points presentable, I grouped them into three major topics. First, the laws and regulations affecting CSOs interaction with and independence from the government. These include increased legal rights of CSOs (1., 3.), easier, faster and cheaper bureaucratic procedures (2., 4.), and an independent multi-stakeholder decision-making body that can create CSO laws and regulations (12.). Second, practices facilitating CSOs operations and participatory planning. Such as promotion of civic participation in public policy development, implementation and evaluation (5.), increased level of free speech (6.), and CSO operational support in teaching, research and more (7.). Finally, they present regulations related to funding procedures. They propose easing the access to foreign and public funding, fundraising, and civic donations, while increasing accountability and transparency on both sides of the agreements (8., 9., 10., 11) ([UNDP China, 2013](#)). These practices are indicating a progressive, decentralized, and bottom-up direction of cooperation with CSOs. After clarifying the international perspective on how the enabling environment of CSOs should develop, I am going to discuss the current state of the Lebanese enabling environment.

An Enabling Environmental National Assessment was conducted by the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) in Lebanon, to analyse the field CSOs play in. Five dimensions were deemed mandatory in defining the enabling environment of CSOs: *formation* (of CSOs); *operation* (factors influencing its ability to pursue objectives); *access to resources*

(funding); *freedom of expression*; and *right to peaceful assembly*. Four additional dimensions were specified by ANND to give further depth in the specific national context, and credibility to the assessment: *CSO-State government cooperation*; *cooperation and coalition among organizations*; *taxation regime*; and *access to information* (Daif, 2014). In the following, I present the key points of information from the document required to understand the Lebanese environment for CSOs.

The August 3rd, 1909, Ottoman Law on Associations remains to this day the principal law governing the functioning of CSOs in Lebanon. Freedom of association is a constitutional right. However, certain categories of CSOs were deprived of their liberal notification regime and were placed under an authorization regime, limiting their rights ('Youth and sports associations', 'Foreign associations', 'Trade unions and syndicates', 'LGBTQI'). The operation of CSOs is quite liberal and suffers from no heavy obligations or procedural requirements. The main issue is the weakness of the state. The lack of control by the government allows mismanagement and lack of transparency of organizations, letting corrupt and fraudulent organizations to function in the country. Furthermore, the functioning of the administrative body highly depends on the acting Minister in office. This means that a change in leadership can dramatically shift the landscape for CSOs. This reflects the harmful practices derived from the sectarian political system.

Human rights conditions have always been a point of contention. Freedom of expression is crucial for CSOs, and partially, it is provided in Lebanon, contrary to neighbouring Arab countries. The issue that rises is the ambiguous way in which their governing laws are defined. It allows for the cornering, fining, and detaining of journalists by the government, based on "legal justice". The right to peaceful assembly is a constitutional right. Lebanon has an international obligation, after adhering to UDHR and ratifying ICCPR. However, three issues still face CSOs. First, there are restrictions on where the assembly can take place. Second, too big of liability is put on the organizers, who can face criminal penalties and sanctions. Finally, the presence and actions of security forces at assemblies can disregard basic human rights and act inadequately. These actions should be reprimanded and Law Enforcements capacities in this regard should be increased. Furthermore, access to information has been a long-standing issue in Lebanon. Only certain types of information are available to the public, while some are explicitly prohibited or inaccessible. The Freedom of Information (FOI) law took effect in February 2017, however, the government failed to establish an oversight body to guarantee a transparent process.

Public authorities do not conceive cooperation as an option, there is no real partnership between the two bodies. The majority of CSOs consider cooperation to be non-existent or impossible, which reflects their lack of trust in public institutions. Another major factor contributing to the lack of cooperation is the weak capacity of organizations. There is a need for capacity building and developing better internal governance structures for CSOs. A more specialized and organized civil society can initiate and advocate cooperation more effectively. Lebanon saw a significant increase in the number of joint campaigns in recent years. However, individualism and organizations' lack of understanding of the benefits creates huge obstacles. Groups are often directed by a "ruling elite", for whom networking presents the threat of losing their authority over their people. This organizational structure creates competition over resources between groups, further hindering the possibility of joint development.

Regarding their funding, CSOs considerably benefit from the current taxation regime, e.g. VAT, revenue taxes, and tax exemptions on private investments. However, the private sector is not properly informed and incentivized to invest. While no critical aspect hinders access to foreign funding, issues arise from governmental funding routes. Increased clientelism prohibits the fair distribution of funds between CSOs. In addition, political and personal affiliations play a big role in getting access to resources (Daif, 2014).

If we compare the analysis of the country's enabling environment with the internationally defined 'good practices' we can identify where progress is lacking. It is clearly visible that the key issue in the case of Lebanon is the state. Very few issues are present solely because of CSOs operation. The conservative, sectarian system does not allow the new progressive form of development, unless it has the needed control over them, so when they attempt to speak against the government and demand changes, they have the agency to shut them down. Although CSOs daily operations are considerably less hindered, their formation, assembly, funding procedures and almost any bureaucratic state procedures are obstructed by ambiguous and old laws, sectarianism, clientelism, political affiliations, and more state practices. Although from some aspects, the Lebanese enabling environment for CSOs is quite progressive, it is far from in line with the internationally articulated direction. Further research is needed into the topic and the role of the economic sector, but it can be said with confidence that the current government is the main issue in advancing in the field and allowing CSOs to fulfil their full potentials.

| Comparison of the international and Lebanese enabling environment of CSOs | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Good Practices | Elements | In Lebanese environment |
| 1. Laws and regulations affecting CSOs interaction with and independence from the government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> increased legal rights of CSOs easier, faster and cheaper bureaucratic procedures independent multi-stakeholder decision-making body | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> decreased legal rights of CSOs relatively fast bureaucratic procedures weak state institutions dependence on acting minister |
| 2. Practices facilitating CSOs operations and participatory planning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> promotion of civic participation increased level of free speech CSO operational support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited freedom of expression ambiguous governing laws restricted civic participation restricted access to information lack of cooperation |
| 3. Regulations related to funding procedures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> easing the access to foreign and public funding increasing accountability and transparency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> beneficial taxation regime lack of private investors clientelism, political affiliations |

Figure 2: Comparison of the international and Lebanese enabling environment of CSOs

2.2.2. Institutional arrangement

Institutional arrangements are positioned in the institutional environment, which is a broader socio-economic framework. This environment consists of formal institutions (constitutions, laws, state decisions, regulations) and informal institutions (norms of conduct, traditions, religious precepts). These jointly create an environment which determines the operation of various organizations. The institutional arrangement of an organization therefore refers to the set of rules or agreements that regulate certain groups activities to reach their objectives (Eaton, Meijerink, Bijman, 2008). An analysis of the Lebanese institutional arrangement is required to understand what and how different national laws, regulations, etc. affect CSOs operation.

The national institutional arrangement of Lebanon presents an example of consociational democracy in the Middle East. It is described as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. It comprises eleven officially recognized religious sects (Shia, Sunni, Maronite, Jew, Druze, etc.). Within this system, they are each given a legislative and executive branch, and full judicial autonomy according to their demographic weight and geographic distribution. This institutional framework, where religion and politics coexist to form a governmental body, is called confessionalism. Although it faces serious criticism, it also allowed the country to reach certain levels of freedom, civil rights and pluralism, making it an exception regarding neighbouring Arab countries (Calfat, 2018). Today, Lebanon is divided into eight administrative governorates, or 'muhafazat'. These are further divided into 26 sub-regions (qadaa) and 1018 municipalities (baladiyya). Through new efforts to decentralize the political system, municipalities are now financially independent. However, the central government still exercises decision-making power therefore all activities must be coordinated with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. Although some agency has been transferred to the hands of local municipalities, the Planning Code of Lebanon still only gives them consultative power, while the Directorate-General for Urban Planning handles reviews and implementation of urban plans (UCLG, 2019).

After briefly describing the national institutional arrangement, I narrow my focus to the 'formal institutions' regulating CSOs operation. The key civil society laws governing Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon were collected in the 'A handbook of key laws from 10 countries in Europe and the MENA region' (ECNL, 2018). Eight Civil Society laws were deemed as the main structuring laws of CSOs. I analysed these to have a clear understanding of the environment within which Lebanese CSOs operate. The relevant laws and their implications are presented in 'Table 1'.

| Civil Society Law | Implications |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Article 13 of the Lebanese Constitution | "The freedom of opinion, expression through speech and writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association, are all guaranteed within the scope of the law." (Lebanese constitution: Lebanon, 1926, rev. 2004) |
| 1909 Ottoman Law on Association | Derived from the French association laws, it is quite liberal considering neighbouring Arab countries, but still |

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | diverges from the French law in requiring associations to notify their establishment to the state. The government is known to take advantage of the system, by for example delaying or not providing the receipt of notification without which associations cannot take full advantage of certain benefits. |
| Decision No. 369 LR of 1939 | It places Foreign Associations under the authorization regime, requiring authorization from the Council of Ministers. However, they work without a clear set of criteria, therefore allowing them to deny authorization based on political affiliations (Daif, 2014). |
| Circular No. 10/AM/2006 and 15/AM/2008 | Clarifying the procedures for establishing associations and the procedure of acquiring receipts of notification. In addition, giving full freedom for associations to elect their own administrative bodies |
| Public Utility Organizations (PUO), Decree No. 87 of 1977 | “Defines how an association that provides public benefit services can become recognized as a public utility organization by the Council of Ministers; the decree also details the benefits such associations can be afforded”. The criteria to meet PUO status are: (i) a non-profit status, (ii) founded to serve a social and public service objective, (iii) inclusive and sustainable, (iv) members must have at least 2 years of experience in pursuing the CSO’s mission |
| Section II of the Criminal Code | On associations regarding secret and undeclared associations and purposes that violate the law. For example, any association “...may be ordered to cease its operations if its directors, management staff, representatives or employees commit on its behalf...” (Lebanese Criminal Code, Section II, 2015) |
| Law of Obligations and Contracts of 1932 (for civil companies) | Offers the basis of Lebanese Civil Law, including civil companies. It includes common provisions for civil and commercial companies. |
| Important to note | Youth and sports associations, religious associations, syndicates, trade unions, and cooperatives are defined and governed by other pieces of legislation as they are treated differently than a normal CSO in Lebanon |

Table 1: Lebanese Civil Society Laws (ECNL, 2018)

Although Lebanon provides a somewhat democratic environment for CSOs, the outdatedness and the ambiguous way in which some of these documents are written, allows

the leading elite to exercise power and authority over organizations based on their own interpretation of the aforementioned laws. Therefore, we can state that considering its international environment, Lebanon is providing a relatively good institutional arrangement for CSOs to operate. However, taking into account the crucial role CSOs play in Lebanon, both historically and presently, this institutional environment needs to be amended to promote further CSO development.

2.3. Barriers to localization in Lebanon

Based on the secondary research on sustainable development, SDGs, localization, civil society, CSOs and their national context within Lebanon, I was able to identify major barriers to the localization process by CSOs in Lebanon.

Four major barriers have been identified to be significant issues regarding the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon: (i) Social Inclusion, (ii) Lack of governmental capacities & initiatives, (iii) Lack of robust statistical system and database of SDG targets and indicators, and (iv) the current Financial crisis.

2.3.1. Social inclusion

I have discussed in previous chapters how localization efforts are still primarily approached from a top-down perspective. However, the importance of civil society and CSOs is growing drastically. Both international and national administrative bodies are transferring power and are developing closer relations with them regarding development in general. A socially inclusive environment constitutes a place where people have the resources, capabilities and opportunities to: (i) participate in education and training activities, (ii) work in employment, unpaid or voluntary work, (iii) engage and connect with people through local, cultural, civic and recreational programs, and (iv) have a say in decision-making procedures affecting them (Trezona, 2018). These are especially important when we talk about localization, since the effectiveness of localization is hugely dependent on the participation and engagement of local civil society. Therefore, there is a need to address social inclusion in the development of localization processes.

While most developed countries are showing effort to promote these principles, it is not the case in Lebanon. First, participation in education and training activities are limited due to the large influx of refugees, putting a stress on the education system. An example of limits in training activities is the growing number of CSOs in the country attempting to secure training activities for their members to achieve a state where big international donors can work with them. This competition between CSOs can drastically limit their work. Second, regarding the economic state of Lebanon, based on what I have discussed already, it is clear that there are limitations to working in employment (financial crisis, COVID-19, refugee crisis). Although opportunities to participate in unpaid and voluntary activities are present, citizens lack of resources gravely limits their possibilities to dedicate free time to unpaid work (Beyond reform & development, 2015). Third, there are not many limitations to freedom of assembly in Lebanon. However, due to the acting political elite and their ambiguous interpretations of current national laws, it allows them to intervene when they deem it necessary. Finally, the most influential element in Lebanon is the lack of power in CS's hand to influence decision-making procedures affecting them. Although the government has recently invited

CSOs to investigate how they could add to the transparency of governmental procedures, the status quo still presents a terrible state for the Lebanese people to participate. The sectarian political system fundamentally links decision-making to various religious groups, defining them as the main stakeholders, rather than basing a stakeholder analysis on those affected and affecting the decisions ([Beyond reform & development, 2015](#); see [chapter: Enabling environment for CSOs in Lebanon](#)). To conclude, we can state that relying on the government to meaningfully work towards social inclusion is absurd. Therefore, social inclusion in Lebanon needs to be addressed through Civil Society Organizations.

2.3.2. Lack of governmental capacities & initiatives

I have talked about the inaction of the current political elite in Lebanon in previous chapters. Here I will briefly address the consequences of their inaction in the country's sustainable development process. Since the issue is not treated as a priority at all, there is a very limited administrative capacity around it. This results in weak inspection and enforcement processes, and hinders the ability of non-governmental organizations to effectively communicate with the government. Furthermore, Lebanon lacks the necessary environmental policies that could direct the country to a sustainable path. As discussed in the literature review, CSOs historically play a crucial role in assisting and substituting governmental roles, especially in case of a crisis (e.g. the trash crisis in 2015-2016). This resulted in a relation between CS/CSOs and the government, where the former contributes to the stability of the political system ([Karam, 2018](#)). Partially because of the current financial crisis, but mainly as a result of the government's view on the topic, it lacks in fiscal instruments to finance sustainable development efforts. Finally, there is a general lack of awareness around sustainable development in Lebanon. Communication and outreach efforts by governments are basically non-existent. Consequently, national and international CSOs play the key role of raising awareness, joining under umbrella organizations for eased communication, transparency and to unite under common goals.

2.3.3. Lack of robust statistical system and database of SDG targets and indicators

In order for sustainable development efforts to be effectively developed over time, there needs to be a robust statistical system and database which can be used to evaluate and monitor them, then use the accumulated data to help plan and implement future ones better. In addition, as we discussed the importance of localization in the literature review, it is crucial to generate these data on a local scale, so that they can reflect local needs, rather than generalized national ones. Sadly, these processes are only at their beginning stage in Lebanon, and just as processes discussed before, it is mainly done by private institutes, CS and CSOs. Therefore, it is clear that there is a pressing need of capacity building and provision of technical assistance regarding these processes and the articulation of SDG targets and indicators on a local level. When these are present on a local level, localities together can inform regional SDG targets and indicators, which then can inform the national ones ([Lebanon VNR presentation, 2018](#)). From the side of state institutes, there is a lack of relevant, up-to-date data, which is the biggest hindrance in the proper implementation and monitoring of SDGs. Even when a policy is successfully passed, political and bureaucratic obstacles delay execution such as the Access to Information Law in 2017. Even after implementation, according to various reports, the response rate of public administrations regarding the Access to Information law, was only around 30%, showcasing the lack of

proper implementation and follow-up of laws ([Chehayeb, 2021](#)). As we can see, policies aimed at advancing the SDGs face numerous challenges from the governments' side. First, planning and implementation lack a comprehensive and inclusive approach. Different geographical, ethnic, etc aspects are not taken into consideration. Second, they work a lot with foreign development agencies, yet they do not show transparency towards citizens, therefore weakening state accountability and responsibility in the peoples eyes. Third, while aspirations and set goals are high, the state issues them without clear strategies for implementation and care for details. It does not identify clear targets. Therefore, finally, there is a tendency of ministers to adopt strategies with quick results. This results in policies that do not take into consideration long-term consequences and focuses on short-term gains ([Samad, 2016](#)). To conclude, access to data, especially if it is available on a local scale, would affect the development of comprehensive policies with long-term goals and clearly identified sets of goals.

2.3.4. Financial crisis

Since the end of 2019, the Lebanese economic sphere has been going through the worst decline in its history. The economic and financial crisis has led to civil protests and unrest all around the country. 1500 Lebanese pound used to equal 1 US dollar, which in March 2021 reached a threshold of 10000 on the black market. This economic decline is still ongoing and increasing, mainly due to the refugee crisis and the port explosion of August 4th 2020 ([Karaki, 2021](#)). Lebanon relies on importing most of its goods. Due to the central bank's financing of the bank, importing fuel, food, medicine and providing subsidies, the foreign currency's assets have dropped 32 percent since mid-November of 2019. Lebanon now has the third highest dept-to-GDP ration in the world with 152% dept-to-GDP, placing after Japan and Greece. There are estimates that put the losses of the Central Bank at 40 billion dollars. The nationwide protests against corruption and economic mismanagement in October 17th, 2019, forced bank closures, restrictions on withdrawals and other financial restriction measures were implemented. In reaction to this, and in hopes to save their assets, people were rushing to try and withdraw their foreign currency. This has put the banks on the front lines of the fight of this crisis. This crisis the banks are situated in, came because they were lending to the government by investing in Eurobonds and the treasury bills, making significant profits. However, the lending was funded by the banks' agents, and efforts to diversify their assets were not made. Therefore, when the government fell into the financial crisis, the banks were immensely affected ([Elia, 2020](#)).

As mentioned in the introduction, the current situation leaves the private sector in an extremely weak position, unable to work towards sustainable development. CSOs work is hindered by their reliance on funding from international organizations. And finally, governmental efforts are basically non-existent due to the corrupt political system, the lack of priority taken on the topic, and the weakness of local municipalities (they are highly reliant on the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities in decision-making). It is clear, that none of the three domain can work effectively towards SDG localization in Lebanon.

2.4. Theoretical framework

The shifting roles of Lebanese CSOs

Currently, Lebanese organizations are facing countless challenges. They are assisting refugees in their integration within the local community, they aid and provide resources to the youth, women, and people with disabilities. Furthermore, they were first respondents after the Beirut Blast on August 4, 2020, and have been assisting the fight against COVID-19 since its rise. They are fulfilling all these roles while being limited and restricted by the government and the banking system ([Lebanon Support, 2021](#)). After the Beirut Blast, and the numerous crisis the country is currently facing (COVID-19 response, currency devaluation, economic crisis, shortage of medicine, shortage of gas, etc), many organizations' priorities shifted from their original focus, towards humanitarian aid and relief programs. This is seen as a necessity, especially after the collapse of the government. These organizations have to fill in the governments' role in service delivery and provision. We can see a trend of these organizations shifting their original, local point of focus towards more national support, reacting to the rising challenges. A great example of this shift was apparent after the Beirut Blast, where national organizations from around the country started doing relief work for those affected by the incident ([Lebanon Support, 2021](#)).

I have discussed before in detail the relevance of CSOs in the political, social and environmental development of Lebanon ([see: Overview of Lebanese CSOs](#)). In the face of current challenges, and the sudden shifts in organizations primary focuses, it is important to study and understand the role of CSOs in it. They have been agents of change historically. Therefore, researching the position and possible development options of these organizations is crucial to help them develop and be able to contribute better to current challenges within the difficult environment of Lebanon.

There are three main sources of information regarding research into CSO development in Lebanon. First, existing CSOs, CSO networks and umbrella organizations are conducting research into developing their own organizations and in general the environment they work in. For example the Arab NGO Network for Development, with the membership of more than 250 CSOs in 12 Arab countries, identifies one of its main objectives as enhancing the availability of research related to the role of CSOs in the region ([ANND.org](#)). Second, international organizations, usually conduct local context analysis to gain insight into organizations operations and better understand how to intervene. These are often done through local CSOs in Lebanon, as they are more reliable partners than the government itself. A great example is USAID's BALADI CAP ('Building Alliance for Local Advancement, Development & Investment') program in Lebanon. It supports local stakeholders (CSOs, NGOs, FBOs, municipalities, etc.) with the aim to improve their resilience in providing transparent and quality services. Each of their projects are tailored to local needs, which means researching local priorities and engaging with locals to gain relevant insight. These initiatives generate important and relevant data for organizations development ([baladi-lebanon.org](#)). Finally, academic research also tackles CSOs organizational development. However, compared to their relevance in the country, the amount of research on them is lacking or outdated. Therefore, it is crucial and highly beneficial to add to this literature.

Methodology

3.1. Research strategy

I sat out to investigate how certain manipulations to civil society organization's operation could capitalize on the current Lebanese environment to advance the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals on local scale and contribute to sustainable development overall. To do so, I applied a qualitative, ethnographic research approach through the Delphi-method. Originally, a serious gaming approach was taken to allow the observation of people's experiences on the ground (Sayer, 2000). However, due to the circumstances in Lebanon (economic crisis, pandemic, etc.), in-person research could not be conducted, therefore the methodological approach had to be changed. The Delphi-method was used to build consensus around articulated topics through multiple round questionnaires and gather the views of participating experts.

3.1.1. Secondary research

First, a secondary research was conducted. On a global scale, it explored the concepts of sustainable development, SDGs and their localization efforts by various actors, civil society, CSOs, and finally social inclusion. These concepts were deemed relevant in order to base further national topics on. Therefore, the secondary research proceeds by investigating the Lebanese Civil Society, CSOs, and the policy context of these organizations, namely their enabling environment and institutional arrangement. The collected information tailored the development of the City-CSO and helped define barriers presented to their development in the national context of Lebanon.

3.1.2. Primary research

The primary research focused on four main steps: (i) identifying the main barriers to localization of SDGs in Lebanon, defining the manipulations to CSO operations, and forming the idea of the City-CSO through desk research; (ii) the validation of the barriers and manipulations through expert interviews; (iii) reaching a consensus around the manipulations effect on localization and the barriers, and forming an expert opinion feedback around the City-CSO through the Delphi-method; (iv) and finally reflection on the results provided by participants to formulate answers to the research questions.

The developed City-CSO was defined through an essay in the paper. Based on the previously conducted secondary research, it explores the barriers to sustainable development in Lebanon and describes how it attempts to combat them through specific manipulations. Theories informing its formulation are explained and planning/implementation/monitoring/evaluating processes are briefly described in a way to show the hypothesized effect of the manipulations on these processes.

This unconventional way of research methodology and experimentation is justified by the current state of the country. It is extremely difficult to conduct meaningful research, especially from abroad, that can result in legitimate and new information. This is why I resorted to providing an essay of an idea, based on significant secondary research, and aim

to test it with more conventional methodological ways. Albeit its reliability is far from ideal compared to conventional, in-person, and on-the-ground research methods, the additional steps that were taken to validate it aims to combat this very aspect of the research. The ideal or preferred way of experimentation will be detailed further in the discussion section.

3.1.3. Why this approach

Two major challenges formulated my approach to conducting this research: (i) the lack of reliable national data, and (ii) the limiting environment of the current state of Lebanon.

The general lack of data from the government's side, prompted the need to look at various sources to compile enough information to build the research on. Even so, the reliability of the collected data could not be guaranteed. This is why I decided early on, to include an expert interview in the methodology, to verify the collected data. This would allow me to put the following research approach on a reliable and stable theoretical basis.

The current state of Lebanon poses certain limitations and threats to conducting research locally (described before in detail). Rather than gathering empirical data from the ground, I had to resort to online data gathering and testing. This shaped my approach to the research. Instead of locally testing certain manipulations to CSOs operations, I decided to formulate a hypothetical organization, based on my previously gathered data, and devise a way to test it online. To give validity to the manipulations and formulated organizational format, they are not only based on the gathered data, but written in an essay format, where I describe them in detail, with all relevant aspects articulated, such as its own theoretical background, organizational processes and detailed description of how the manipulations could affect operations. By articulating the idea in depth (an essay of the City-CSO), I try to combat the lack of in-person and local research, that would have given me sufficient amount of data and provided validation to it. In the methodology section, I explain how the national state affected my research methodology of testing the formulated City-CSO in depth.

3.2. Research methods

3.2.1. Desk research

As a secondary research approach, desk research was used to gather qualitative data on the aforementioned relevant topics. This allows putting the following primary research on a stable theoretical basis, contributing to a comprehensive research thesis ([van Thiel, 2014](#)). Due to the lack of accessible data from official Lebanese sites, I gathered secondary data from a vast array of sources. Data was collected from international organizations, local and international CSOs, news agencies, social platforms, and governmental sources when possible.

The gathered data was used to understand the environment within which Lebanese CSOs function and attempt to advance sustainable development. This was used as a basis to identify and formulate the national barriers to localizations and manipulations to CSOs. However, the data can rarely be considered completely reliable and valid in Lebanon. Therefore, besides diversifying the sources of information, I decided that further validation of the gathered data was necessary before continuing the primary research.

3.2.2. Expert interviews

I decided to conduct expert interviews to verify the validity of my identified 'Barriers to localization of SDGs in Lebanon', and of the approach taken with the identified manipulations of CSOs operations. In addition, where it was applicable, I tried to expand the barriers with the input of the interviewees. This was needed, as I mentioned before, because of the nature of data acquirable in Lebanon through various sources. Expert interviews allow for gaining information and exploring a concrete field of action, and in this case the validation of existing data. I interviewed members of the Beyond Group Consulting firm in Beirut, Lebanon. They are a for-profit, civil society oriented consultancy firm. They advocate for 'meaningful change' in civil society by working in the fields of: (i) public policy and management, (ii) organizational learning and development, (iii) innovation and technology integration. Eight members were scheduled to participate, but again, due to the extreme circumstances, only two members were able to attend. However, these two are founding members with extensive knowledge on the field. Both interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

Interviewees were first introduced to the research. Then, through a semi-structured interview, with many open-ended questions to allow them to freely elaborate on the articulated topics, they were asked about the identified barriers and manipulations. A qualitative thematic analysis was done on the gathered information. I categorized and organized their comments respectively. In case they did not fit under any of my categorization, new 'groups' were formulated, expanding on the already gathered data.

3.3.3. The Delphi-method

For primary research, the Delphi-method was used. The methodology is not only a namesake of the old Greek temple and city. This method, helps everyday inquirers reach or justify an important decision. However, instead of consulting Apollo, they consult a group of experts who can provide accurate and diverse answers to the given questions, which then can be combined to formulate a consensus (Marchais-Roubelat & Rubella, 2011). The original goal of the researchers (Olaf Helmer, Norman Dalkey, Ted Gordon and other associates) was to develop a method that can reliably build consensus on a topic through the pooling of expert opinions (Dalkey et al, 1969; Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). Since then, the method has been used extensively for various research and development purposes. Therefore, many variations of the methodology exist, e.g. decision or technological Delphi method. Limestone and Turoff (1975) laid out a general definition to cover all possible types:

"Delphi may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem" (p.3).

Few important characteristics of the method needs to be highlighted. First, it is suited to deal with issues for which accurate data are not available or too difficult to obtain. Although it started out by providing forecasts and estimates, today it is widely used even in complex societal issues where information is less accessible or reliable. This aspect of the method was crucial to my case, because information in general is extremely difficult to come by in Lebanon. Second, although the objective is to build consensus around an issue, it is essential that this agreement is not forced. Room for disagreements needs to be provided, so that difference in opinions can further inform the problem at hand. This was provided in

this research, by giving sufficient space for experts to express their opinions freely (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Finally, anonymity is key to achieve valid results. It allows participants to freely express themselves without any of the social pressures that are associated with group discussions. In a highly volatile environment like Lebanon, where religious and political affiliations are highly determinant factors, this was of paramount importance (Rowe, Wright, Bolger, 1991).

Although it has many variable aspects as a research methodology, it also has a clear basic structure how to conduct it. All Delphi method consists of at least two (or until consensus is achieved) consecutive rounds of standardized questionnaires, where information is gathered from expert participants. The first round is usually meant to allow experts to freely elaborate on the topic at hand. Here, they can comment on the current state of the question at hand and generate new information, which the researcher can analyse with the aim of generating new, specific items. These items are then added to the subsequent round for experts to further elaborate on. Subsequent rounds are informed by the analysis of previous ones, focusing on achieving a consensus around the questions at hand. In-between rounds, the researcher provides a 'controlled opinion feedback'. This contains the summary of all participating experts answers. Before the next round, participants are provided this data to help better formulate their answers and work towards an agreement on the issue (consensus). The process is repeated until their responses stabilized or a certain level of agreement has been achieved. The final product of the study is a 'statistical group response'. It contains all the individual expert opinions. The researcher can analyse and draw conclusion on the research question based on this final document (Yousuf, 2007).

Although the surveys are intended to be conducted as an interview with the guidance of the researcher, due to the crises in Lebanon, participants were unable to attend a live interview. This was taken into consideration, and introductory material and the questions themselves were formulated in a way to provide complete understanding of the topic at hand.

Pitfalls

The Delphi method received many criticisms during its use in the past decades. During the development of the methodological framework, it was important to take a look at previous cases, identify possible pitfalls of the methodology and address them to avoid repeating previously identified issues. In this chapter, I collect the main lessons (pitfalls) that are relevant for my research (Linstone & Turoff, 1975).

"The simplification urge"

The setting of an experiment can alter the behaviour, and therefore contribution/answers, of the participants. The Delphi method heavily relies on subjective probability assessment, which can be affected by the researcher. Therefore, it was crucial to keep the working environment unbiased, contain only relevant information for participants, and allow them to freely express themselves. In addition, careful attention has to be paid to the formulation of the survey questions so that participants answers are not altered by outside factors. Finally, there are differences in communication between various cultural groups. Forcing participants into a conventional Delphi format, may result in limited and biased findings. Therefore, the experiment was tailored to the topic and the invited experts to bolster the validity and accuracy of the attained data.

“Illusory expertise”

During the Delphi method, we rely on experts to forecast the future they imagine in accordance to the content of the research. Therefore, almost everything relies on the hands of these specialists. However, an expert is not necessarily the best forecaster. Since experts focus on a certain element of a bigger system, they are more likely to make decisions based on their specialities, disregarding the bigger system. In addition, a group of experts, each knowledgeable on a sub-system, will not necessarily mean they form an expert group around the full system. Relations between elements have to be taken into account and understood. To combat this, the relation between consecutive elements of the questionnaires were made very clear, so participants are always aware of the topic and its elements, of which they have to comment on. This way, they always had a connection to the core purpose (or ‘big picture’) of the study.

“Sloppy execution”

The most common weakness of a Delphi method, is its superficial analysis of the responses. Connections have to be present for the reader, to see the links between respondent's answers and the reached conclusions. Otherwise, the results are completely disconnected from the reality of the research. Inaccuracies from the side of respondents usually relates to their impatience towards the research process. Since the methodology takes several turns and requires the experts to read the material and give detailed information through multiple surveys, answers are sometimes hastily or inadequately given. This further stresses the importance of having a clear and straight-to-the-point questionnaire built up and tested ([Linstone & Turoff, 1975](#)). To address these issues, I have spent considerable time to structure the questionnaire as a whole, and each of its parts separately, to give a wholistic understanding of my aim to participants.

Expert panels

In the Delphi method, we seek the opinions of experts. Therefore, participants are picked through non-probability sampling. Although the goal of the research is to build consensus around an issue, it is beneficial to identify diverging views to help inform the outcome. Experts should have a varied background to allow a more diverse set of perspectives. Dividing participants into panels, based on their differences in views, allows the comparison of their perspectives. This can further inform or add to the research findings by highlighting differences in expert opinions ([Yousuf, 2007](#)).

‘Civil Society panel’

Civil society actors are key elements in the country's sustainable development. Volunteers, professionals, academics, entrepreneurs, etc. are all fighting for change through their own ways. They also represent the only constituency willing to fight for change, despite the demoralizing situation the country is in. I deem their participation as experts in the discussion relevant due to their knowledge on particular development issues and their place within the fabric of Lebanon. Their main bias is their complete distrust in the government. This could lead to instantly disregarding any option that considers the government as agent of change.

‘Lebanese Civil Society Organization members panel’

They are key actors in the country's sustainable development. They can contribute with their expertise in SDGs, localization processes, networking, international partnerships, etc. On the other hand, they can also be experts in different types of operations within different types of

organizations, being for example advocacy, capacity building, or awareness raising. Therefore, in this panel, I include all members of Lebanese CSOs who participate in operations within the organization in a capacity which relates to sustainable development. Based on an organization's religious or political orientation, various biases can emerge. Religious and political groups tend to be biased towards opposition groups. Initiatives have been increasingly inter-religious, but these tendencies are still going strong. Because these orientations can highly influence a debate, solely based on the persons' orientation, I decided to only invite participants from non-sectarian and non-religious organizations. By doing so, I hope to keep the focus on the relevant issues and avoid political and religious inputs to be more than constructive opinions.

'International Development Agents panel'

Unfortunately, I was unable to get in touch with international actors in the region due to the national circumstances of Lebanon and the immense amount of work on the hand of these actors. For future research, I suggest their inclusion in the process, as they can provide a "fresh look" at long-lasting issues and propose international solutions or suggestions to them.

'Lebanese Government officials panel'

In order to gain a political perspective on the topic of localization, it would have been imperative to involve governmental officials in the research process. However, this is currently impossible in Lebanon. The government is collapsed and due to the numerous crisis the country is going through, all governmental officials and workers are occupied or unable to reach. But it would be a false assumption to think it would be easier to communicate with the government if it did not face its current issues. They have proved time after time that a sustainable development of the country is not amongst their priorities. For future research in the topic, I highly suggest checking for reply-rates of national and local governmental officials, as these could provide information on where in the country could sustainable development programs possibly be initiated.

Data collection and analysis

Two subsequent rounds of online questionnaires were conducted with seven participants (two civil society members educated in relevant fields and five long-time CSO members). Due to the time and resource limitations of this study, I have decided to leave out the initial, more informative round of the Delphi method. An in-depth analysis of the environment for localization in the country has already been conducted and detailed in the paper. Furthermore, expert interviews validated and added to the identified barriers. These mappings provide sufficient and reliable bases for the survey to be built on. Therefore, the first round, which is usually meant to discover possibilities, identify additional points, etc. was skipped.

Although the surveys are intended to be conducted as an interview with the guidance of the researcher, due to the crises in Lebanon, participants were unable to attend live interviews. This has been taken into consideration, and introductory material and the questions themselves are formulated in a way to provide complete understanding of the topic at hand.

The first questionnaire began by introducing participants to the research and the topic in depth. The rest was divided into three parts based on the three research questions. In the

first part, I aimed to measure their views on the manipulations' assumed contributions to the localization process through open-ended questions and scale measurements. In the second section I measured their views on the manipulations' effectiveness on addressing national barriers to the localization process. This was done exclusively through open-ended question to allow complete freedom of opinion sharing. Finally, after they gained familiarity with the topic and the relevant aspects of it for the research, they were introduced to the idea of the City-CSO and asked about it through scale-measurements and follow-up open-ended questions. The strict structure and build-up of information through-out the questionnaire allowed for the questions themselves to be open-ended, and allowed participants to express their opinions freely and in length. This was crucial in order to acquire as much data as possible, since participants were limited in number.

Based on the qualitative content analysis of the gathered information, a controlled opinion feedback was formulated, providing a 'group response' to each articulated question of the first questionnaire. Based on it, I formulated the second questionnaire, focusing on disagreements of participants.

In the second questionnaire, the controlled opinion feedback was provided for participants as base information to inform their answers for subsequent questions. The aim of the second round was to build consensus around topics where disagreements were high. The 3-part structure was kept from the first round to ease understanding. However, questions are mostly scale-measurements focusing on the previously articulated disagreements, with open-ended question there only to expand their opinions with additional comments. Based on the final individual results of the second round, a statistical group response was formulated though qualitative content analysis. This provides the basis and information to answer the research questions.

3.3. Conceptual framework

To gain an overview of the research approach, I formulated a conceptual framework that showcases the relations between the research elements and explains the process of the papers' development.

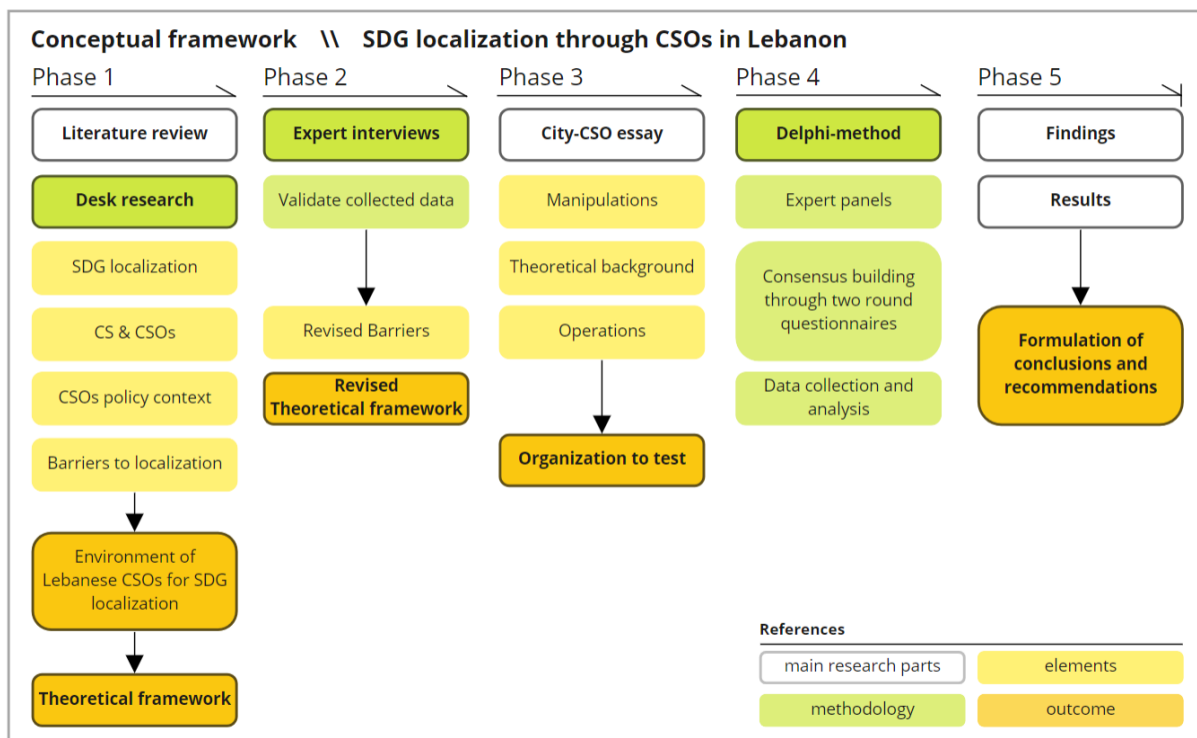


Figure 3: Conceptual framework: SDG localization through CSOs in Lebanon

3.4. Reliability and validity

3.4.1. Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which using given or designed instruments lead to the same answer after repetition. I will examine the three dominant aspects where reliability matters most in my research (Flick, 2018).

Reliability of collected data

The general lack of information provided by state institutions in Lebanon makes it difficult to base data on multiple national sources. Furthermore, these provided datasets are usually outdated or unreliable. Information collected through the secondary research phase were all backed with clearly documented references, using triangulation of sources. To further increase reliability, the primary focus was given to information sources other than the corrupt Lebanese government. To assure the reliability of the data from the primary research, expert interviews were conducted to validate the defined barriers and manipulations. Therefore also triangulating the research methods. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The next form of collected information comes from the Delphi-method. All of these were documented in detail. However, due to the extremely difficult situation Lebanon and its citizens are currently facing, the number of participants were very limited. Therefore, it is suggested to conduct the research again, when the national situation allows for more participants (and from all identified panels) to attend.

Reliability of researcher

The researcher has to be able to separate subjective views on local issues and capture their essence as reflected in reality. If the experiment can be conducted by a different researcher, and results in the same answers, it can be deemed reliable. To address this issue, detailed documents were formed to show how the interviews are structured and why. The interviews supporting documents showcase a clear line of connection between the defined topics of the literature review and the formulated interview questions. This allows researchers to trace back the meaning of the interviewees answers to given questions.

Reliability of developed instrument and generated information

The reliability of the expert interviews will always depend on the participating experts and their personal biases. The developed interview structure builds up an understanding in the participants around the formulation of the topic at hand and the point of their contribution. This way, they can answer the posed questions accurately without drifting away from the core ideas. To address their personal biases, their background was detailed, so it can be taken into consideration.

Pretesting and retesting is a typical method used by researchers to assure surveys reliability. Also in the Delphi method, pretesting is a valid approach. However, test-retest reliability is irrelevant since participants are expected to revise their responses between rounds ([Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004](#)). Further reliability can be demonstrated if the performance of participants was similar between the panels. To some degree this was achieved, since all participants were willing to suggest new approaches, provide critical comments, and challenge the proposed ideas. However, due to the lack of participants, and the absence of two panels, this form of reliability has to be re-evaluated in future research, where all panels are present with adequate number of participants. Therefore, it is desirable to repeat the experiment to check the reliability of results ([Linstone & Turoff, 1975](#)).

3.4.2. Validity

First, the construct validity of the research needs to be elaborated upon. It means the establishing of correct operational measures. This translates in my case to the identification and validation of the variables that form the environment within which the barriers are articulated, the manipulations are formed, and the City-CSO is built. They have to accurately represent the Lebanese environment for SDG localization to derive relevant data from participants in the following questionnaires ([Flick, 2018](#)). Expert interviews were conducted to validate the measures. The Delphi-method can further guarantee construct validity by asking the experts to validate the variables within the questionnaire ([Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004](#)).

Second, the internal validity of the research has to be explored. This refers to the extent to which research findings are free of bias. The characteristics of participants and researchers need to be discussed and documented for the transparency of the results. A detailed reasoning was presented before both the expert interviews and the expert panels for participants of the Delphi method. These give adequate reason why certain individuals and panels were picked for the research and describes their possible biases. In addition, I collected and examined a short description of each participant's background. The validity of the final group response is measured in terms of "degree of consensus" among the experts ([Linstone & Turoff, 1975](#)). The personal bias of the researcher was addressed by clear and

transparent documentation of the collected data and a clear line of reasoning throughout the paper, supported by academic articles.

Finally, the external validity (transferability) describes the extent to which findings can be generalized. From the very beginning, the research is based off of the specific Lebanese environment for civil society organizations. Although similarities could possibly be drawn between other countries, the current events in Lebanon make it a unique case. Therefore, in case of translation to other environments, the conducted analyses has to be repeated. Due to the limited number of participants, it can be argued that the sample is not representative of the population. I was unable to solve this sampling bias, but it is recommended to increase the number of participants and include all articulated panels in future research.

The City-CSO: a theoretical proposition for a CSO to address the Lebanese environment for SDG localization

4.1. Introduction

The only reliable domain to fight for sustainable development in Lebanon right now is its civil society. However, they lack educated and informed decision-making power, which hinders them in meaningfully participating or initiating projects for sustainable development. Since the government cannot be trusted to play its role, and the business sector is too weak to initiate, civil society has to be empowered, so it can play its role in the country's sustainable development. Therefore, a need for forming local communities based on global values and goals is present. Once set, they can then meaningfully participate in, shape and solve local issues based on global values, according to their own personal and localized ways.

In this chapter, I present a model for a new kind of CSO that will help in addressing the barriers that were formulated based on the extensive analysis and literature review. I am proposing three manipulations to CSOs operations. Due to reliability issues of governmental data, much of the information came from different national and international organizations. Therefore, to validate the identified barriers and my approach taken with the manipulations, I conducted expert interviews with members of the Beyond Group Consultants.

4.2. Manipulations of CSOs for localization

In order to achieve change in the aforementioned environment to localization, I introduce 'Manipulations' to it and see how they affect the current status quo. These manipulations will be tested through the Delphi method. I have identified three major manipulations: (i) Location specific CSOs, (ii) No specified role of CSOs, (iii) Categorization by SDGs.

4.2.1. Location specific CSOs

Countless CSOs, led by Lebanese entrepreneurs, are already attempting to bring development to their people through voluntary initiatives around the country. They identify topics of interest (disaster relief, advocacy work, voice of marginalized people, etc) within which they fight for positive change around the country (or internationally). It significantly eases a CSOs operation to always deal with issues within the same topic and instead conduct an analysis on the area and its people affected by the given plan. In such a system, CSOs operation is centred around an issue or a topic, and people are regarded as carriers of local knowledge to help solve the issue at hand. However, is this really what is best for the people of Lebanon? Does this structure provide a good environment for bottom-up development? I argue that a form of CSO where 'the people' are the 'topic' and the CSO is the carrier of 'Global knowledge' can provide a better environment for bottom-up sustainable development in Lebanon. I call this structure a 'City-CSO' (C-CSO). Rather than picking an issue to be at its core, it puts a local society at its centre (a town, city, settlement, region), and identifies issues based on their specific needs. It allows the forming of local communities into City-CSOs, whose principles are based on global values and goals (SDGs). These C-CSOs (led by the people), can shape and solve local issues according to their specific

circumstances. This way, the knowledge accumulation is not in the hands of national and international organizations, but in the hands of the community. One could argue that the massive variety of possible issues that the C-CSO would have to address, could pose a threat to its validity and question whether it can actually solve issues locally. However, formulating the organization around the locality does not mean they can not work with other organizations. What it means, is that the topics of issues are not limited by the organization, but by the participating members of that community. It provides space for citizens to articulate their issues and try to find answers to it cooperatively. I believe this provides a better approach for a bottom-up and decentralized development through CSOs.

Furthermore, I argue that a location specific CSO can help make it more inclusive to the given community. I discussed how community members with specific KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities) could specialize in certain SDGs, therefore 'finding their place' in the organization. Since all initiatives are articulated within the same locality, participants will always have a place to inform these initiatives with their personal life experience of the locale. This can reaffirm their role and position in the project and in the organization without having to have certain KSAs.

Finally, as discussed in the literature review, the field of CSOs in Lebanon is vast. If citizens want to contribute, they have to identify an organization that matches their interest and even if they find one, it does not necessarily reside in their vicinity. If this is done by many members of the same community, it is clear that their initiatives would take them all around the country in different directions. On the other hand, with a C-CSO, citizens can get familiar with a singular CSO that is within their own community, and work their way out from there. I argue that this could significantly ease participation and their willingness to take action.

4.2.2. No specified role of CSOs

By not specifying a role for the City-CSO, I aim to involve anyone of the community who wishes to make a difference through an initiative. The goal is not to create a final product that is as professional as if done by specified agencies, but to give an opportunity for any member of the community to address their issues/ideas and "do what can be done" for it. This idea works together with the last chapter, stating that residents of a community can get familiar with a singular CSO and 'develop' it together. The setback of this approach is the limitation to the developed initiative itself. The approach highly depends on available resources, the community and the participation of professionals, stakeholders, and/or government. Based on these factors, the C-CSO and the initiator(s) of the idea have to define early on the approach and extent of the idea. By setting realistic targets, however small they might be early on, they could achieve meaningful small wins. On the long term, according to John Bryson ([Bryson, 1988](#)), these 'small wins' could inform and structure the community's long-term vision of their future (further discussed in 'Theories informing the City-CSO').

These short-term victories not only structure the direction the community wants to take, but also slowly accumulates local data through them. Therefore, there needs to be an easy and comprehensible system to allow small communities to collect and store this information, so they can be used for future projects. For this purpose, I use the Sustainable Development Goals. I elaborate on this idea in the next chapter.

4.2.3. Categorization by SDGs

I assume, that the implementation of the SDGs into the structuring of CSOs could provide great benefits to the current environment of localization. I argue for four major advantages, which I will describe now briefly.

I believe that the SDG-based categorization could function as an excellent awareness raising and sustainable development tool alongside the City-CSO, to develop local communities. It could (i) structure information by providing a comprehensive framework for knowledge accumulation and simplify comprehension, so participants would not have to face an immense load of information. Second, it could (ii) allow participants to 'specialize'. For example, a rural farmer could specialize in 'life on land' (SDG 15), since he has expertise and local knowledge. Therefore, he/she could contribute to the localization of SDG 15 and most importantly, position themselves in the grander picture of sustainable development. In the long term, this could create representative groups around all SDGs within the C-CSO, contributing to more and more effective localized initiatives. Since projects are articulated in the participating citizens' locality, even if they do not have relevant knowledge about SDGs, they can still meaningfully participate with personal KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities), because they know their locale. This can reinforce participants of their place and importance in the organization. By "specializing" in certain subsystems, they can become more invested in decisions made around that SDG, incentivizing them to participate actively, and trust the outcome more. Third, (iii) SDGs can be used to inform any given initiative. (even if C-CSO is not the initiator). It can be seen as a form of stakeholder analysis, where the identified SDGs of a project can help identify those needed to be involved in the development process. In addition, since members and participants can specialize in given SDGs over time, they can be mobilized if their SDG were deemed relevant for the initiative. Over time, this allows for each project to have an experienced base of participants, picked by identifying relevant SDGs. Finally, I assume that in the long term, categorization by SDG can help the organization's (iv) scalability and approach to multi-stakeholder initiatives. I argue that the long-term development of C-CSOs could lead to the formation of similarly structured 'Umbrella-CSOs' (regional, national). Since all C-CSOs would operate based on global principles (SDGs), the scaling of these issues to regional and national levels would be possible through the pooling of local knowledge and best practices. C-CSOs would slowly accumulate local knowledge around the country that can be used to inform regional or national developments. Furthermore, as I discussed before, citizens with 'improved-KSA' can act as representatives of given SDGs, therefore representing local needs in these Umbrella-CSOs. This system of representatives from each C-CSO, based on global SDGs, could provide legitimacy to national and regional strategies formulated outside the local C-CSO.

4.2.4. Theories informing the City-CSO

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the main theories that I have used to inform and structure my designed City-CSO.

I have already mentioned the relevance of the UN SDGs to the developed idea, but I will briefly mention its importance within the C-CSO. It provides global values and principles to shift local nationalist approaches that are highly religious and sectarian to more environmentalist and sustainable ideas. The C-CSO raises awareness and allows

development based on these principles, by formulating the organizational structure and processes to accommodate it. This will be further explained in the operation of the C-CSO.

John Bryson's Strategic planning: Big wins and small wins (Bryson, 1988), argues that for a strategic approach to be successful, it requires an interactive and incremental loop of 'short-term victories' informed by a 'long-term vision'. In my case, this translates to the incremental integration of knowledge into society, while informing them of the overall goals of sustainability. The short-term victories allow citizens to feel the process of development, while the long-term plan (in this case we talk about a Municipal Sustainability Plan) can be formulated over time by informing it with various local initiatives. Working in this manner can contribute to creating a cohesive, goal-oriented local community.

The Municipal Sustainability Plan (MSP) addresses a municipality's urban and regional efforts for sustainable development. This is important, as it provides a long-term, yet concrete and understandable goal for residents (James & Lahti, 2004). It differs depending on the approach, but essentially it creates subsystems for an urban and regional environment, along which they need to develop sustainably. In Lebanon, these are highly unlikely to be developed by municipalities. This is why I designed the C-CSO to be able to fill this need with communities and over time be able to create a holistic vision for the city and its region. Furthermore, by using a similar subsystem-based idea to build the C-CSO, I aim to promote possible collaboration between the municipality and its local C-CSO.

The definition and approach to a strategic plan for sustainability are informed by the 'Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development' (FSSD) and the 'ABCD' back-casting visioning (Robért, Borén, Ny & Broman, 2016). One of the main benefits of the paper is the clear definition it gives of sustainability and the sustainability principles. This allows participants to comprehend sustainability principles relevant to their formulated visions. Furthermore, the 'ABCD' process provides an operational procedure to develop a sustainable strategy for any institution, organization, or group. They offer a comprehensible approach to understand sustainable development and strategy building. This is key, since participants will be locals with little to no knowledge in the field. It can facilitate small projects by empowering locals with the capability to build these strategies and ultimately 'train' them to be able to contribute to building an MSP. The FSSD and ABCD inform different sections of the various operational processes of the C-CSO. By combining a traditional form of operation with the FSSD & ABCD, plus the idea of 'SDG categorization', I formulate a new approach to operating with CS.

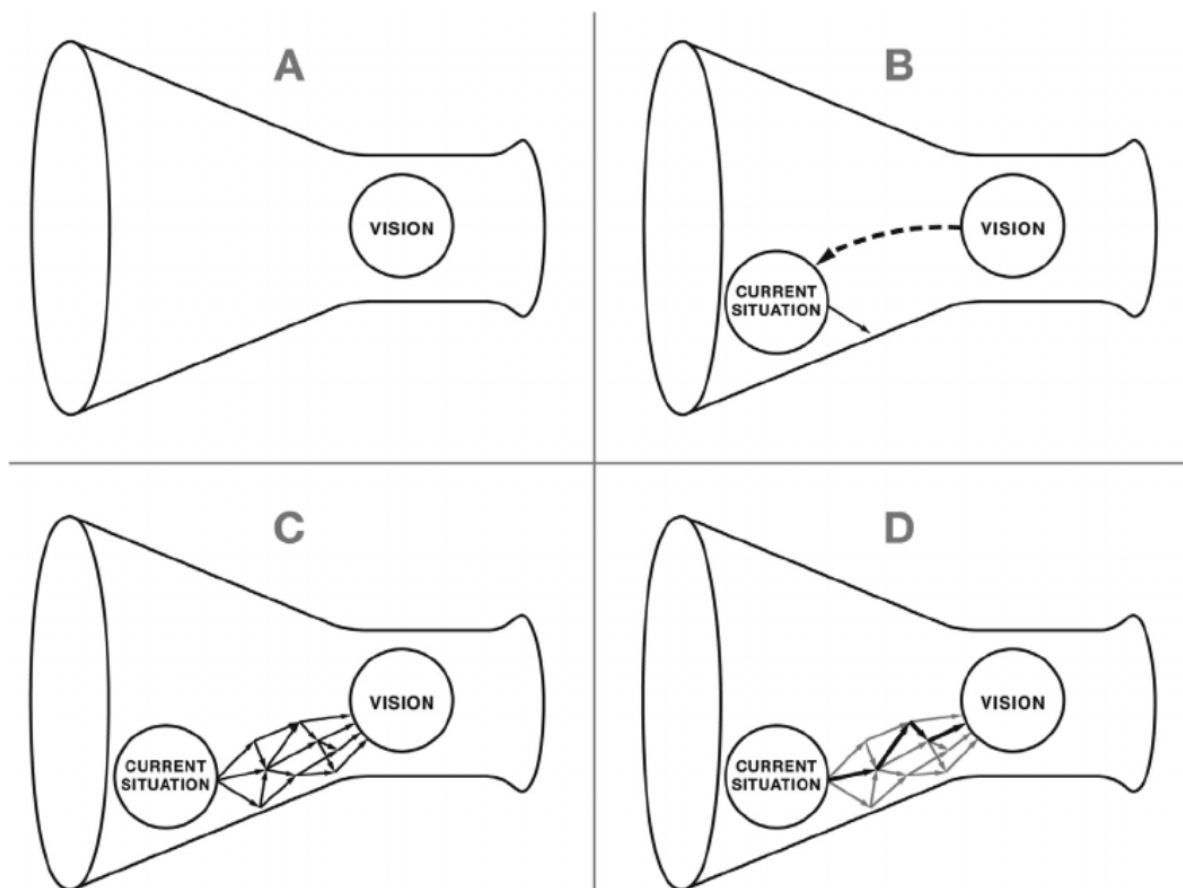


Figure 4: The ABCD back casting method steps (Robért, Borén, Ny & Broman, 2016)

Many smaller inspirations have informed the development of the City-CSO, however the aforementioned theories are the major formulating ideas.

4.3. Operation of City-CSO

The two guiding ideas, stemming from the manipulations, regarding the operation of the City-CSO are that (i) there are no fixed roles of the C-CSO, and (ii) SDGs are used as a categorization tool. I discuss the major fields (planning & implementation, monitoring & evaluation) within which the C-CSO is designed to function, however their concrete roles and the degree to which they participate in these processes can differ greatly depending on the given projects. Therefore, these designed processes do not aim to provide a detailed guide, but create a structure that allows the organization to participate in any section of a project, while also being able to develop one themselves if needed. This allows the C-CSO to participate in a wide array of activities in its region.

4.3.1. Planning process

Before a planning process can begin, a member of the local civil society, the municipality, an organization, etc. has to approach the C-CSO and present an idea, issue, or any form of initiative. These are not limited by any means (CSO roles), however, depending on the organization's capabilities, efforts to achieve it may differ in size, approach, etc.

After the idea is presented, the core administrative branch of the CSO can conduct a brief quality criteria analysis on: how can they help; is it needed; its feasibility; and any unique

aspect of the idea that needs to be discussed early on. This is meant to function as a screening system, since the organization's capacities are limited (especially early on), ideas need to be weighed. If we think in long terms, this stage of the process can evolve and besides the initial briefs, it could already match SDGs to ideas and allow a more concrete and informed approach to them. Second, relevant stakeholders, affected civilians, the municipality and volunteers are identified and invited to participate in the development process. With interested parties present, the 'SDG matching' can be done. Based on areas the idea touches on and affects, relevant SDGs are matched to it. Third, the data gathering phase can begin. If the organization is old enough to have individuals or a group specialized in the articulated SDGs, they can conduct the data gathering. By repeatedly allowing them to fill this responsibility, the groups' legitimacy can grow, while the gathered data can also be more and more informed and precise due to their accumulated experience. Fourth, the plan or strategy is formulated. Tasks, objectives, risks, responsibilities, assumptions (budget, personnel, etc), and more are discussed until they all agree to the initiative. Religious and ethnic disagreements are a common thing to hinder any decision-making process in Lebanon. However, by basing most processes on global principles (SDGs) and in a completely open participatory way, I believe these arguments can be more easily avoided and/or challenged when need be. Finally, the planning process concludes with consultation rounds. Based on the replies, the idea can be set back to previous stages for reconceptualizing and adjusting, or it can be deemed accepted and proceed to the implementation process.

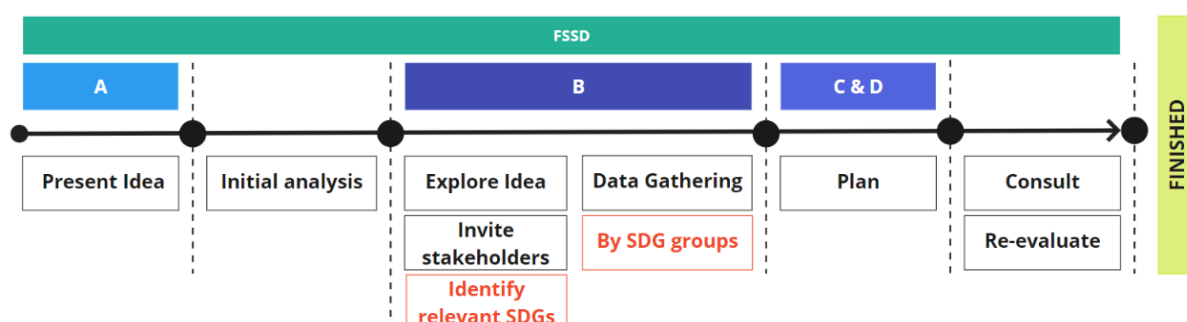


Figure 5: City-CSO Planning process

4.3.2. Implementation process

A finished plan goes through three steps until completion. First, an accurate articulation of the project's needs is required, informed by all participating actors. Time, budget, resources and all relevant aspects can be better discussed in cooperation and responsibilities can go to those best capable of dealing with them (e.g. SDG sub-groups). Second, a detailed schedule is formulated. It contains the project divided into tasks, responsibilities, allocated resources, dependencies, etc. Both through its creation and after, the schedule needs to be consulted since its quality can greatly contribute to the success of the initiative. Finally, the implementation process can begin. It is very important to have clear communication through the process, set up monitoring processes, control the budget and regularly report progress.

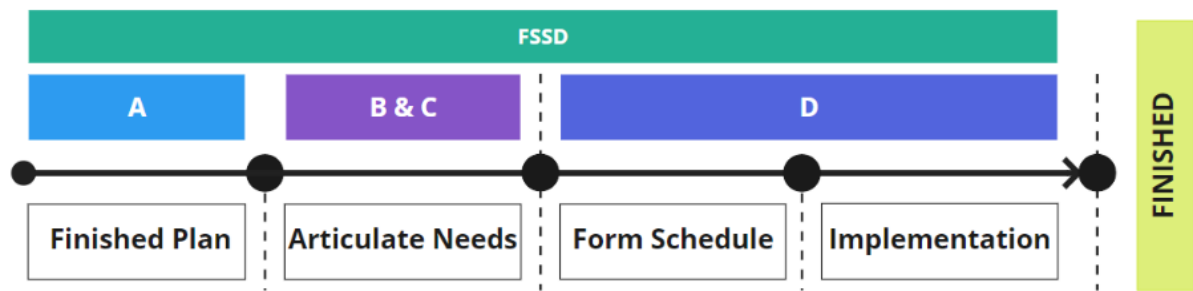


Figure 6: City-CSO Implementation process

4.3.3. Monitoring & Evaluating (M&E) process

Since M&E are very resource intensive, smaller municipalities struggle to maintain them. However, through the C-CSO (also presently through different CSOs) civil society can contribute by both developing M&E processes, and more importantly executing them. Furthermore, SDG sub-groups within the C-CSO can take up the responsibility of M&E processes of their topic, further solidifying their role and influence.

The monitoring framework therefore is very straightforward and simple, to allow its development by anyone for any process in the region (with the assistance of the administrative branch of the C-CSO). First, an actor (CS, SDG subgroup, municipality, etc) identifies a target. Second, just as in the planning process, relevant SDGs, stakeholders, CS and the municipality are invited to inform the development of the monitoring process. Next, participants identify the variables to monitor, their frequency of measuring, parameters, etc. Third, a 'monitoring plan' is formulated. It includes the roles of actors, their responsibilities, the phases of development, its timeline, etc. During the monitoring process, status reports are made, and issues are analysed and recorded. Finally, as an end result, a dataset of the monitored process is made that can be used to promote future sustainable development or tune the monitored process.

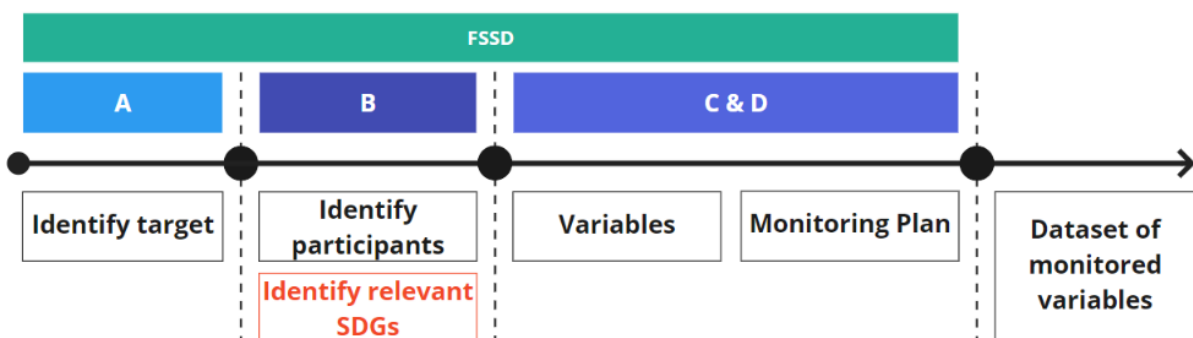


Figure 7: City-CSO Monitoring process

The evaluation process is divided into two parts based on what they evaluate. It can either look at ongoing processes to better them, or evaluate the outcomes of a project to gather relevant data, to inform future projects, or use it to learn. I believe these M&E processes are

crucial elements in early development of the C-CSO, since they are easier to develop and execute by CS alone, than planning or implementation might be.

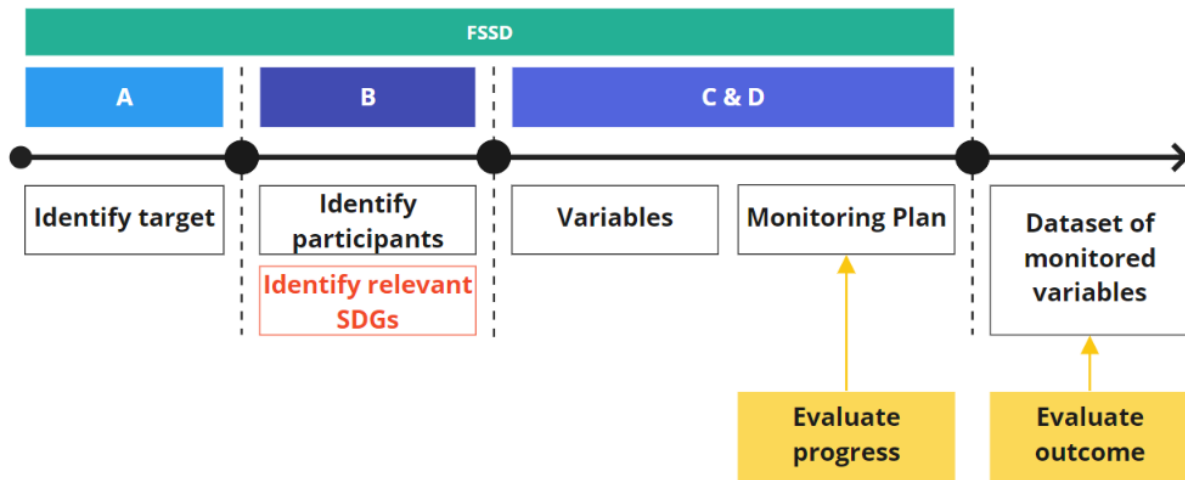


Figure 8: City-CSO Evaluation process

4.4. Funding of the organization

It is important to address CSOs funding sources, as organizations already face struggles in Lebanon. I will briefly touch on the topic to build legitimacy around the designed City-CSO.

The Law on Associations, discussed before, does not address permissible sources of funding. The main sources of funding for CSOs come from self-funding, governmental and foreign funding. Since CSOs are not allowed to generate profit, they are exempt from paying any income-tax and VAT. Tax benefits also favour donors, by deducting contributions from the tax on their profit (ECNL, 2018).

In practice, a given CSOs funding options greatly depend on their activities. For different initiatives, they gain funding from different organizations. This can both provide financial stability (fix donor) and irregularity (less funding allocated for a given topic). In the case of a City-CSO, these struggles for investors would probably persist just as in other CSOs. However, I argue for two positive points that I assume favour its localized approach. One, since the C-CSOs work is geographically fixed, residents around it can develop a closer relation to their work and consider contributing in higher numbers. Second, the organization does not have a fixed topic of action. With its variety of initiatives, funding sources can have a wider range of possible contributors as well as smaller, local sponsors.

I believe a national tax incentive scheme, e.g. 1% deductible income tax for charitable organizations, would greatly pair with the C-CSO idea. If local CS is convinced and involved in C-CSOs development, they could contribute with the deductible 1%. It capitalizes on its localized approach and provides an incentive for these organizations to promote inclusivity and at the same time gain monetary support from their surrounding CS. I assume that this feedback loop can be very beneficial for sustainable development in smaller communities.

4.5. Conclusion

If the City-CSO can achieve a series of meaningful 'small wins', I assume it could greatly contribute to the creation of a cohesive, goal-oriented local Sustainability Plan and community. The comfortable, voluntary basis of participation allows for greater involvement of locals, especially if they start seeing the effect of the projects. This loop of integrating people, forming SDG groups, responsibilities, and developing incrementally can allow for raising awareness in citizens through hands-on experiences. I believe that once the advantages of developing sustainably are presented in numerous ways, and these advantages are evident to a growing number of the local population, decision-making can improve, and a more secular way of discussion may emerge.

Assuming future operation in a worst-case scenario, the C-CSO works by itself. It attempts to gain as much attention from locals, businesses, and institutions as it can, to slowly build up a community. Leadership in this case plays a much bigger role in 'adaptive' and 'political-administrative' functions ([Meijerink et al., 2015](#)). In the best-case scenario, after the initial development of the C-CSO, the municipality joins the initiative and starts developing alongside 'its people', contributing to a joint development of a local Sustainability Plan.

Results & Discussion

I have discussed previously, the relevance and shifting role of CSOs in Lebanon. I articulated that it is beneficial to conduct academic research on these organizations to forward their organizational development and help them accommodate to the current environment the country presents. In this chapter I collect and organize the gathered results from the conducted Delphi-method rounds, then interpret the results and explain their possible implications on the field of SDG localization and CSOs. The indicated numbers are the results of the 5-point Likert scales of the given question.

5.1. Manipulations to CSO operations and their contribution to localization

5.1.1. Location specific CSO

I defined a 'location specific CSO' as an organization that puts a local society at its centre, and identifies issues based on their local needs. Participants were provided with a detailed description of the manipulation, on which they could reflect. The articulated benefits can be separated into two groups:

- (i) Benefits due to the proximity to the community
 - Can better locate and identify local grassroots initiatives, and link them together (e.g.: work similarly to an umbrella organization, facilitating cooperation)
 - Better position to design and guide local interventions (e.g.: include local stakeholders, use local data, ability to oversee)
 - Make use of local knowledge, skills and abilities (e.g.: local traditional methods, culture, history)
 - Enable easier participation and engagement, empowering locals (e.g: Current gas shortage limits transportation. There is no need to travel long distances to participate in initiatives.)
 - Joint initiatives could help break sectarian barriers and bring people from various religions together. However, a participant highlighted, that being in the centre of a diverse community, if an intervention is viewed as unjust by any group, tension may arise between them
- (ii) Benefits due to generation of local and tailored information
 - Helps identify local needs, challenges, priorities, so the SDGs can be contextualized, and local targets and goals can be identified (e.g.: identify and address who are the most disadvantaged in the locality)
 - Better position to link local SDGs to national goals & targets
 - Easier to monitor and measure impacts of initiatives

The manipulation was found beneficial to localization in the first round (4.00). Two sources of contention were investigated in the second round. First, the ability of a location specific CSO to 'address sectarian barriers by joining people behind a common goal' received only agreements or neutral responses (3.57). Second, the variety and diversity of matters needed

to be handled in a locality was judged to be too wide. However, there was a consensus in the second round, that proximity of the CSO to its target community can help address these issues (4.00).

We can identify changing views of participants throughout the two rounds. First, from initial views of the manipulation being able to help in identifying local grassroots initiatives, it grew into functioning as a 'bridge', helping in linking local actors, facilitating discussions and partnerships. Second, from the identified difficulties due to diverse communities, participants articulated the need to taking into account every local group (religious, political, ethnic) to structure initiatives better and reach a common goal. A clear development of ideas can be seen in both cases.

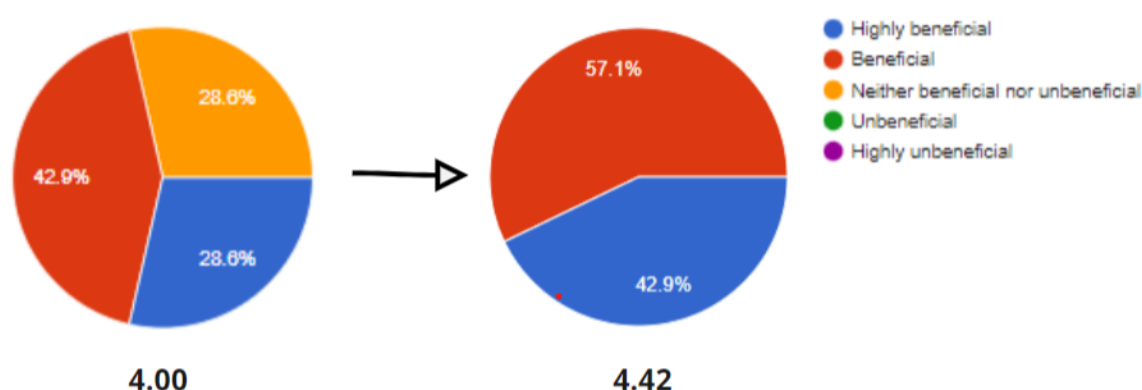


Figure 9: View on benefit of location specific CSO

In the conclusion of the second round, the manipulation of a 'location specific CSO' was found more beneficial to SDG localization than in the first round (4.00 → 4.42). From the development of opinions and consensus, the following lessons can be drawn:

- 1) *Proximity and the generation of local, tailored data are the main elements of the manipulation benefiting SDG localization*
- 2) *There is a need for a CSO that can facilitate inclusive and participatory joint initiatives of grassroots organizations*
- 3) *Proximity and knowledge of the organization's community (which the manipulation helps to provide) can greatly benefit the addressing of the variety of issues the Lebanese environment presents*

5.1.2. Flexible role of CSOs

A flexible role of a CSO means that initiatives are pliable to the needs of locals. The goal is to be able to address any local issue to the best of the organization and community's ability. The articulated benefits of the manipulation are the following:

- Adaptability helps respond to the emerging issues in the volatile environment of Lebanon (highlighted by almost half the participants) (e.g.: 2015 garbage crisis → local collection methods)
- Higher possibility of partnership with other organizations

- (e.g.: can adapt to other organizations orientation and develop joint initiatives)
- Benefits addressing the barrier of ‘Social inclusion’:
 - approaches to solving problems can be more collaborative due to the understanding of the locale and its communities
 - creates greater space for participation, inclusion and co-creation by being able to identify and address local communal challenges
 - encourage participation of local communities by achieving a series of ‘small wins’

The articulated disadvantages are:

- Already high number of CSOs addressing various types of issues. Runs the problem of repeating or conflicting existing initiatives or studies
- Makes monitoring harder, if new actors join frequently
- Historically, adaptability made CSOs highly dependent on foreign funding
- Adaptability should remain within the main focus of the CSO and not applied loosely

Participants deemed the manipulation to be somewhat beneficial to SDG localization (3.57). Three sources of contention were investigated in the second round. The manipulations effect on both the possibility of acquiring foreign funding, and on making monitoring processes more difficult received varied views (3.14 and 2.57). On the other hand, there was an overall agreement, that it can prove beneficial if the adaptability is used within the main focus of the organization (4.14)

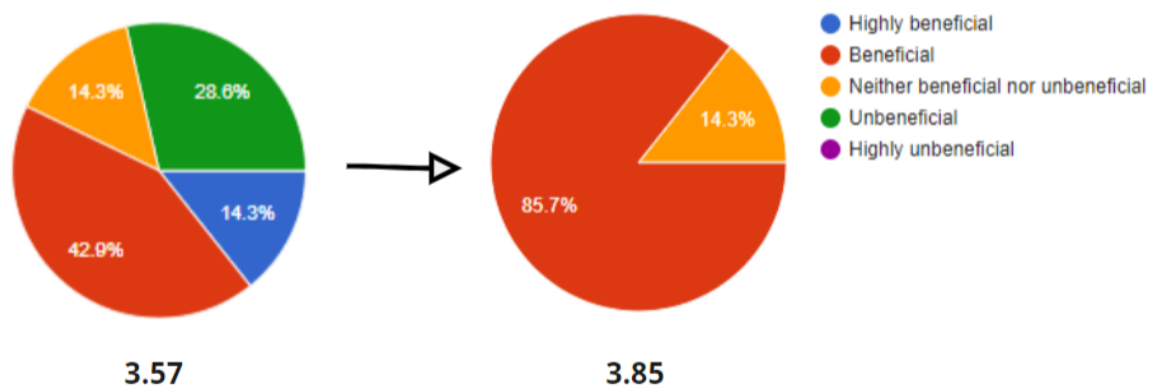


Figure 10: View on benefit of CSO with flexible role

The second round results helped reaffirm existing doubts in the manipulation, and confirmed the articulated benefits. Although consensus could not be achieved over two issues (funding & monitoring processes), overall consensus on the effect of an adaptable role on SDG localization increased slightly (3.57 → 3.85). Based on the outcome, the following lessons can be drawn:

- 1) *The high number of existing CSOs reaffirms the need for an organization that facilitates cooperation between existing groups and develops cooperatively (just as highlighted with the first manipulation). Furthermore, it shows that there are plenty of existing organizations for a City-CSO to work with locally*
- 2) *The negative effects of dependence on foreign funding (e.g.: competition, rigidity of CSOs) has been highlighted multiple times. Therefore, as mentioned and addressed*

in the City-CSO essay, it is crucial to develop local funding methods to achieve a level of independence from international funding

- 3) *It was confirmed that adaptability within the whole organization would not be beneficial. Therefore, organizations require a clearly defined main objective, or 'image of CSO', so people do not confuse flexibility with ambiguity and unprofessionalism*

5.1.3. SDGs as a categorization system

Categorization by SDGs means the structuring of organizational processes, participants and more by the 17 SDGs, to allow for a guided approach to initiatives and ease the use of globally formed SDG related information and tools. Benefits articulated in the first round can be grouped into two parts:

- (i) The categorization helps coordination both locally and nationally
 - Allows better monitoring and evaluation processes (e.g.: use of international SDG tools)
 - Provides a more focused approach to attaining SDGs
 - Easier engagement between organizations, experts, and stakeholders. Especially advantageous when CSOs work in different areas
 - Increased coordination can lead to increased impact of initiatives
 - Combined with the second manipulation, it could lead to an agile organization that can still focus on key areas of interest
- (ii) Positive effects on local communities
 - Increase awareness around the SDGs (Local communities lack varied knowledge around SDGs. This categorization could educate and familiarize people with specific goals, provide better understanding of SDGs in their local context, and encourage them to work for them)
 - Better approach to identify relevant local actors, stakeholders, organizations

Besides the numerous benefits, three points of contention were articulated in the first round and probed in the second. Each point was mostly agreed upon, showing that they are relevant and needed to be addressed.

- In order for the manipulation to function properly, CSOs need to abide by it, coordinate based on it, and update it when necessary (4.28)
- Competition over funding could disrupt the functioning of the manipulation (4.14)
- Lower community participation due to some people not relating positively to UN's work. Some consider UN interventions are vague and do not tackle serious issues (3.57)

Even though the manipulation was found unanimously beneficial, the surrounding consensus decreased over the two rounds (4.42 → 4.14). This is reinforced by the overall agreement between participants around the articulated issues the manipulation can present. This means the identified barriers are significant ones, and if addressed appropriately, the manipulation can be widely beneficial to SDG localization.

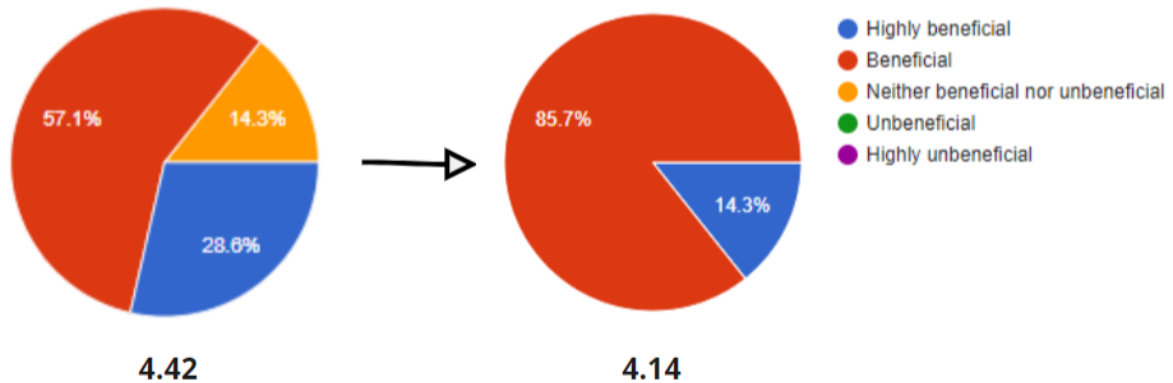


Figure 11: View on benefit of CSO with SDGs as structuring system

Due to the clearly identified disadvantages, explicit lessons can be drawn from them:

- 1) *Better informed, targeted, and coordinated approach to initiatives, combined with more impactful results (benefits of the manipulation) could change people's view on UN and increase participation (drawback of the manipulation)*
- 2) *Need to develop a system to allow an easy implementation of SDG categorization into existing organizations structure to help facilitate cooperation between CSOs*
- 3) *The need to investigate local community funding methods was yet again highlighted, further stressing its significance*

5.2. The manipulations effect on national barriers to localization

Four main barriers to SDG localization were identified in Lebanon based on the preliminary research (see chapter: 2.3. Barriers to localization in Lebanon). Through the same Delphi-method, I have investigated the possible effects the manipulations could have on them. The first round was aimed at generating expert opinion on how the three manipulation could address the individual barriers. The second round focused on contesting the outcome of the first round (the group opinion), and scoring the overall benefit of the manipulations on the barriers. The indicated numbers are the results of the 5-point Likert scales of the given questions.

5.2.1. Manipulations effect on 'Social inclusion' barrier

The manipulations effect on social inclusion was viewed overwhelmingly positive in the first round. No negative effect was highlighted by any expert. Therefore, in the second round only open-ended reaffirming and a scoring questions were asked. Two participant pointed out that the effect of a combination of manipulation would be beneficial. Cases of both individualistic and joint benefits were articulated. I present the expert opinions categorized as such:

(i) Individual manipulations benefits:

Manipulation 1 – Location Specific:

- Helps identify issues of the locality by understanding local needs better due to proximity

- Allows the community to directly shape priorities by providing easier access to the articulation and formulation of initiatives
- Contributing to higher awareness and inclusion by integrating local practices and culture

Manipulation 2 – Adaptable role

- Allow flexible approach to solve the diverse issues local communities face

Manipulation 3 – Categorization by SDGs

- Help organize and institutionalize the concept of SDGs

(ii) Joint benefits:

Manipulation 1 & 2

- Direct and pliable approach to engagement with community (helpful in diverse communities)

Manipulation 1 & 3

- Community building through working towards common goals

Manipulation 2 & 3

- Allow locals to participate through diverse ways (e.g.: identify local actors by SDG categorization, then adapt inclusion process accordingly)

Manipulation 1 & 2 & 3

- Contributing to higher participation and representation (articulated by three participants)

As the results indicate, and as two participant highlighted, the manipulation of a location specific CSO had the most benefits linked to. One participant's comment grasps why:

"[A] local approach in my opinion would be the best since that is where the issue is mainly concentrated, at a local level and in smaller communities."

We can see that benefits span through all manipulations and their combinations. While no negative aspect was highlighted in the first round, one point of contention was articulated in the second:

"I believe that the effect on social inclusion cannot be looked at without taking into consideration the role of the government (local and national) and key actors (political, religious, etc.) in the locality. In Lebanon, these could stand against any social inclusion effort done, no matter what the used approach."

This implies that the government has to be investigated not only from the perspective of what services it cannot provide, but how and what processes in the functioning of CSOs and the localization of SDGs does it limit or obstruct. This means the expansion of the currently articulated barriers. The conducted preliminary research on CSOs policy context (see Chapter 2.2) can provide the basis for researching further barriers. The final score, on the manipulations possible effect on the barrier of social inclusion was found highly beneficial (4.57). Three main lessons can be drawn from the results:

- 1) *There is a need to study and understand the relations between manipulations and their possible combined benefits*

- 2) *The role of the government and key actors (political, religious, social) in influencing social inclusion is relevant. Therefore, the ways of their interference has to be understood, so CSOs can take them into account*
- 3) *The barrier is most present on the local scale, in local communities, therefore the manipulation of location specificity is key to address it*

5.2.2. Manipulations effect on 'Lack of governmental capacities & initiatives' barrier

The effects of the manipulations on the barrier are mixed. Due to the barrier being a long-standing issue rooted in the political system, many points articulated by the experts relate to the relation of any CSO and the government, irrespective of the manipulations. Therefore, I will present them separately, as effects due to CSOs work and due to the applied manipulations. Interestingly, all negative points expressed are existing issues while the positive ones are related to the manipulations possible effects.

(i) Effects due to applied manipulations

Manipulation 3 – Categorization by SDGs:

- Would make processes and interventions more formal
- It would ease cooperation with INGOs and international donor organizations (common frameworks and tools, more formal and coordinated approaches)

Manipulations 1 & 2 & 3:

- If the manipulations can assure an inclusive process, it can allow stakeholders to co-create interventions, tackling issues from a micro to a macro level
- Increase sense of responsibility in the community
- Create more aware and responsible individuals, political figures and groups who can contribute to change in the future

(ii) Effects of CSOs work

- CSOs can fill governmental roles. However, this is a contested idea, as articulated and seen historically, it can lead to the government fully relying on CSOs in given issues (e.g.: environmental protection). When probed in the second round, participants confirmed this issue (4.14)
- Local governments could restrict the space CSOs work in if they are seen as competitive or as taking the place of the government. This problem was agreed upon by most participants (4.00)
- Any effort by organizations can only effect the barrier on the long term. This issue divided the experts (3.14)

The manipulations effect on the barrier was mixed, with one participant deeming in highly unbeneficial, while the rest considered in neutral, beneficial or highly beneficial to SDG localization (3.57). The following final implications and lessons can be drawn from the gathered information:

- 1) *No negative aspects were related to the manipulations. This shows that while manipulations could help address the barrier, existing issues are predominant*

- 2) *The time it would take for CSO efforts to impact the barriers is unknown, expert views are very mixed. I believe this shows the ambiguity of the Lebanese environment. No-one knows for sure what, how, and when could help in the current situation*
- 3) *The SDG categorization could positively affect the acquiring of foreign aid (which has been highlighted in previous paragraphs to be a relevant issue), by easing cooperation and making organizational processes and interventions more formal*

5.2.3. Manipulations effect on 'Lack of statistical systems and databases for SDG related information' barrier

The expert opinions generated in the first round clearly identified the major element contributing to the upholding of this barrier: the Lebanese government. All negative points articulated regarding this barrier were related to the government and their practices:

- The government refuses to encourage and support data gathering processes
- It erects obstacles to independent data gathering
- They instigate a 'fear of data' and distrust towards data gathering in citizens

When further investigated in the second round, participating experts unanimously agreed that this issue is present and pressing, and that the government is its main actor (4.42). An expert highlighted one of the benefits gained by politicians due to these practices:

"...this barrier is also due to some political interests in which they can build upon their own interests and take decisions that help them gain more benefits and profits."

This is especially relevant in a sectarian system such as the Lebanese, where separate political and religious groups fight to gain power within their constituencies and maintain their roles in the power-structure. Because governmental positions are distributed between religion-based political parties, each group has a reason to erect obstacles in data gathering within their own scope of work to limit the other's insight and increase their own powers. However, experts highlighted the possible positive effects the manipulations, especially categorization by SDGs, could have on the barrier.

- The combination of the three manipulation could allow for the generation of information and statistic at a local level. It would allow the monitoring of progress, documentation of challenges and lessons, and provide a basis for research & development. The only issue raised was that a wide scope of work, due to an 'adaptable role', could harm the creation of reliable data
- The manipulations could contribute to better coordination, helping to avoid duplication of efforts and targeting of same groups
- Finally, the 'SDG categorization' could help make use of existing international frameworks and tools, and help gain international aid for improving the used systems

The analysis helped identify the main source of conflict and showcased a number of ways how the manipulations could affect it positively. Overall, the manipulations effect was found beneficial in addressing the barrier, with only one participant finding it unbeneficial (3.70). Based on the gathered information, three conclusive points can be highlighted:

- 1) *Local and national government is the main reason for the existence and maintenance of this barrier*
- 2) *'Categorization by SDGs' could mean a way to bypass the government and develop relations with international organizations. This way CSOs could contribute to the lifting of the barrier more effectively*
- 3) *The existing 'fear of data' in citizens needs to be separately addressed by CSOs, so the much-needed early outreach and initiatives can be impactful*

5.2.4. Manipulations effect on 'Financial crisis' barrier

The current financial barrier was identified as one of the main barriers hindering the localization of SDGs in Lebanon. However, most participant highlighted that they do not see significant relation between the barrier and the manipulations. They argue that the issue is a core institutional and political problem that can not be addressed meaningfully by CSOs. However, when this question was probed in the second round, participants views were mixed (3.28), some mentioning impactful ways for CSOs to address it:

- A location specific CSO could allow forms of community funding methods
- An adaptable role could allow an easier involvement of the diaspora
- While the combination of manipulations could increase awareness about rights of citizens and empower them at local level, to allow them to hold institutions accountable and even propose alternative solutions to challenges
- And identifying local basic needs to see what solutions can be found to help local communities

The mixed views regarding the manipulations possible effect on the barrier is reflected in the final result, where participants found it neutral or somewhat beneficial (3.71). The takeaways based on the reviews are the following:

- 1) *The financial crisis is a core institutional and political barrier. CSOs can address it to a degree, but cannot solve it*
- 2) *Yet again, the idea of local, community funding methods are brought up. It is possible that they could play a significant role in SDG localization*

5.3. Feedback of the City-CSO

In the final segment of the Delphi-method I introduced the participants to the theorized idea of the City-CSO. The City-CSO encapsulates in its structure the previously articulated three manipulations. Through the experiment, I investigated the opinion of the experts regarding the proposed organization's validity, feasibility, and benefit to the localization of SDGs, aiming to reach consensus. First round questions were aimed at generating an overall score, and collecting views around the three investigated aspect. In the second round, the main points of contentions were tested, and a final score was reached.

5.3.1. City-CSO Validity

The validity of the organization means that it bares the quality of being logically built up through gathered research and contextual data, presenting a well-founded approach to SDG localization. Based on the initial information provided to participants about the organization's functioning, they deemed it a valid idea (4.42). The following remarks were added:

- Without linkages to national level development, it might lead to a disconnection between local and national level. This can make cooperation more difficult. The issue was unanimously agreed upon in the second round (4.00)
- People generally are not familiar with or even “convinced” by the SDGs. A lot of people are wary of INGOs, UN, and any foreign funding organization. Therefore, applying UN frameworks in CSOs work might create resistance in citizens. When examined in the second round, the issue was reaffirmed (3.85)
- Adaptability on a very local scale can be both beneficial (help address the varied local challenges to which no specific CSOs can be formed) and challenging (hard to find expertise to consult)
- Needs to be able to tackle issues on the short term to prove its effectiveness to locals and contribute to higher participation
- Needs incentives early on for locals to participate

The two main articulated issue (disconnection of layers; doubt in SDGs) was reaffirmed in the second round, showcasing that further detailing of the idea is needed. With every identified challenge, the organization can be tuned to address it through its manipulations, structure, approaches, etc. When asked again in the second round, participants found the organization to be a valid idea (4.00). The articulated issues were clearly agreed upon by experts, contributing to the lowering of the score. However, within two rounds, clear obstacles have been identified which can be addressed to improve the organization's structure. Based on them, we can conclude that:

- 1) *The City-CSO needs to develop early on in a transparent, inclusive, and impactful way, so locals can see its possible short term impact on their locale and get familiarized with international processes and tools. These can lower their distrust in them and contributing to higher participation*
- 2) *There is a need to link local developments to national targets and goals to avoid a disconnection between the two, which would hinder cooperation and long-term development*

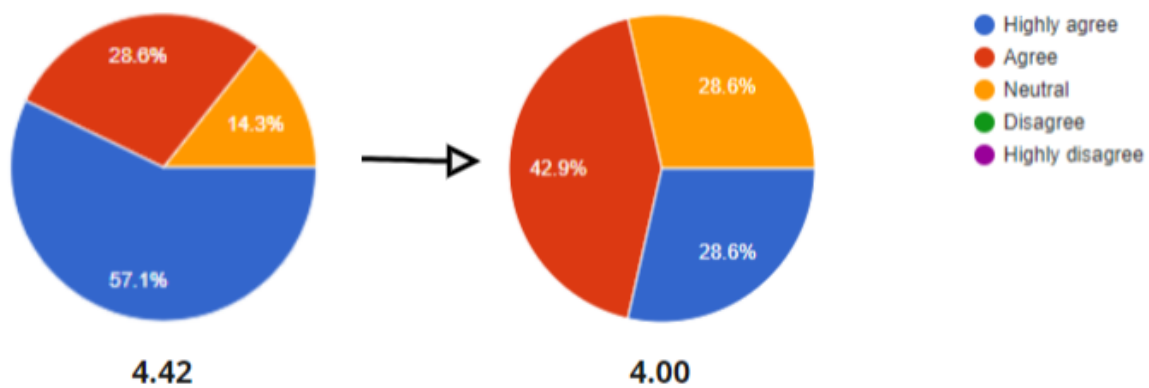


Figure 12: View on validity of City-CSO

5.3.2. City-CSO Feasibility

The feasibility of the organization shows the degree to which the City-CSO can be actualized in the current Lebanese environment. With only a few neutral responses, the idea was found feasible in the first round (4.42). However, remarks were overwhelmingly negative, with the only positive point affecting its feasibility was the use of international practices to advance localization. Although it was deemed feasible, it received a considerably lower score in the second round, after participants were provided the group response (4.00). The following issues were found to possibly hinder the City-CSOs feasibility:

- Fear of leading to a disconnect of local level from the national (as with validity)
- Lack of data, lack of follow up, difficulty of acquiring funding, and the current financial meltdown
- The division in citizens already built in the country by the political regimes (e.g. within local communities, it can spark tension when initiatives are not benefiting all, but certain groups)
- Even international organization find difficulties using SDGs to specialize and categorize, therefore it can be a challenging system to adopt by smaller CSOs

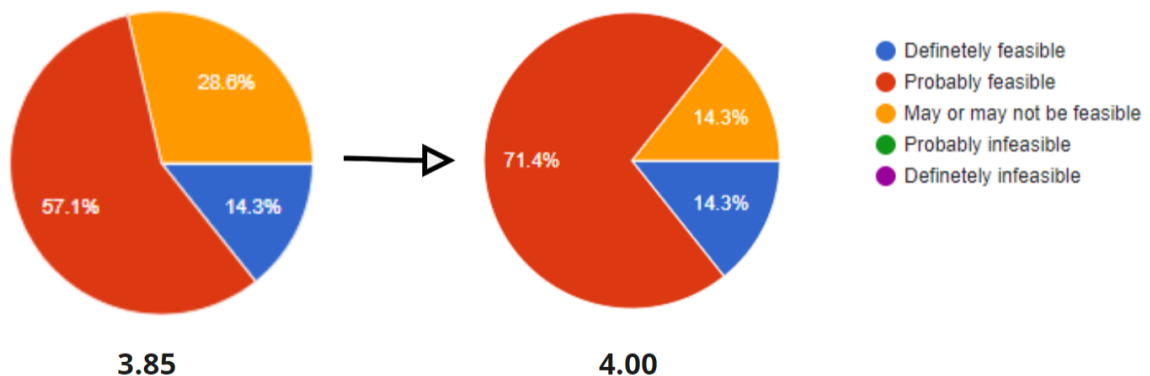


Figure 13: View on feasibility of City-CSO

The issue of religious and political division in citizens was investigated in the second round, but it found mixed results (3.42). It seems to be extremely difficult to accurately assess and take into consideration the current volatile Lebanese environment, in order to confidently evaluate the City-CSOs feasibility. Therefore, conclusive remarks can not be drawn with high confidence. However, some previously articulated points have been reaffirmed

- 1) *It is important to address the organization's funding for it to be feasible*
- 2) *Division of citizens can be a source of tension on a local scale*

5.3.3. City-CSO Benefit

The benefit of the idea shows to what degree can the City-CSO contribute to the generation of positive effects and to the mitigation of barriers in the process of SDG localization. The experts opinions were overwhelmingly positive. This is reflected in the initial score (4.71), where every single participant found the approach beneficial in some ways. The following remarks were articulated:

- If the lack of awareness around SDGs and international organizations is addressed, the approach can be very beneficial to localization
- The manipulations allow the CSOs work to be more on an international standard, helping in acquiring foreign aid
- CSOs have a certain 'legitimacy', benefiting their work (e.g.: most aid and funding after the Beirut blast were donated to CSOs and deliberately not to the government)
- Successful examples of localization can help encourage others
- Long-term sustainable planning (3-4 years) is generally lacking in CSOs, therefore it is very much needed to have integrated systems to help them
- The idea of bringing people together for achieving the shared goals of the SDGs is beneficial (in an environment where ideologies divided the interests of people)

After participants received the group response of the first round (regarding all other aspects of the City-CSO as well), the view on the approach's benefit lowered significantly. However, it was still found beneficial, with no expert finding it unbeneficial (4.00). The decline can be attributed to participants learning of the City-CSO in more depth throughout the rounds (controlled opinion feedback). They have realized certain barriers of the idea (e.g. funding), but found its unique approach to still have new and beneficial consequences in the Lebanese environment.

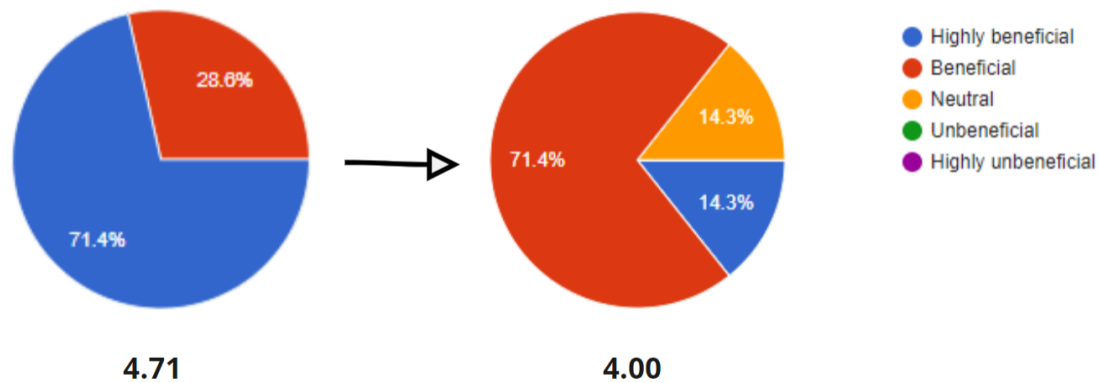


Figure 14: View on benefit of City-CSO

Conclusively, asking participants about the potential benefits of the organization generated new insights and possible contributions of the City-CSO:

- 1) *The manipulations can benefit funding and the organization's relation with international organizations, by:*
 - a) *Raising awareness around SDGs in locals*
 - b) *Allow the organization to work on an international standard level*
 - c) *Capitalizing on CSOs legitimacy in Lebanon*
 - d) *Providing long-term sustainable plans*
- 2) *Successful examples of people working together to localize SDGs can trickle down to raise awareness and encourage others to start similar initiatives*

5.3.4. Conclusive lessons learned of the City-CSO

The goal of the experiment was to reach consensus regarding the three aspect of the City-CSO: validity, feasibility, and benefit. Although scores have generally lowered through the rounds, responses show subtle steps towards achieving consensus (meaning the deviation between participants answers). The City-CSO's validity faced the most mixed reviews. It generated clear obstacles to be tackled, from which only one is intrinsic to the City-CSO (possible negative effects of an adaptable role), others relate to the Lebanese environment. If these hurdles can be addressed in the future, the idea of the City-CSO can be confidently called valid.

The consensus around the organization's feasibility increased throughout the experiment. The two main issues were already mentioned before: the division in Lebanese citizens, and the possibilities for securing funding for the organization. As seen previously (second and third manipulation), the acquiring of funding is deemed critical in the functioning of a CSO. Therefore, to help the City-CSOs feasibility, this issue needs to be investigated in depth. Overall, the idea was found feasible, even in the current volatile environment of Lebanon

Finally, although consensus around the City-CSOs benefit decreased, almost only positive remarks were mentioned by experts. While its possible positive effects on acquiring funding was highlighted, I believe the idea of the organization working as an example for other CSOs

to encourage them, can be the most influential benefit if the new organizational approach proves useful. Overall, the organization was found to be beneficial to the localization of SDGs in Lebanon.

5.4. Implications of the results

In this chapter I will discuss the overarching implications of the previously articulated results on the field of SDG localization in Lebanon through CSOs. The individualistic benefits and contributions of manipulations and the City-CSO were discussed previously.

First, funding is a core political and institutional issue that significantly hinders the work of Lebanese CSOs and therefore SDG localization. This has been highlighted through the research and in experts answers numerous times. It is the most frequently articulated issue. The results imply that since CSOs cannot rely on the government for aid, they have to discover new funding methods and improve processes with international organizations. The manipulations were found beneficial in both aspects. It was articulated, that being 'location specific' and having an 'adaptable role' could greatly benefit the possibility of developing local funding methods. On the other hand, 'categorization by SDGs' can ease cooperation with international organizations and make CSO processes and interventions more formal. Therefore, they can contribute to securing funding through improving international methods and developing new local ones. With a stable and more secure funding method, organizations can develop with higher standards, contributing to better initiatives and localization.

Second, there is a lack of trust in citizens towards data gathering, data analysis, international organizations and the effectiveness of foreign initiatives. The "fear of data" in citizens was propagated by the government itself to limit the effectiveness of national and international programs, and the possibility of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. This allows them to exercise control over initiatives and hinder the possibility for third party monitoring. The lack of local data and the distrust by citizens greatly limits the possibility to develop meaningful local programs. This consequently limits the effectiveness of foreign initiatives, leading to further distrust in citizens. Experts found the manipulations to have beneficial effect on the articulated issues. 'Categorization by SDGs' can help initiatives to be better informed, targeted and coordinated, by using international SDG data and tools. While 'location specificity' and an 'adaptable role' can help in accurately identifying local issues, target groups, and approaches, to achieve better and localized results. As mentioned when probing the City-CSO, if the organization can develop early on in a transparent and inclusive way with impactful initiatives, it could lower distrust in citizens, raise awareness, and promote the development of similar initiatives. Therefore, the implications on SDG localization are increased trust in data and international organizations, awareness and participation of citizens, and contribution to better informed, targeted and coordinated initiatives.

Third, local, regional and national level coordination of CSOs and their work is lacking. Currently, there are vast amounts of local CSOs around Lebanon with very few facilitator or umbrella organization to aid their cooperation and coordination. In addition, the vast amount of local initiatives lack links to regional and national objectives. The articulated benefits of the manipulations and the City-CSO could play a significant role in this issue according to

experts. If 'categorization by SDGs' can be implemented in existing CSOs, it could help facilitate coordination and cooperation between organizations by providing a common structure to their actions. A CSO with an 'adaptable role' can be flexible in its approach and role in initiatives, therefore can facilitate cooperation between local organizations by assuming different roles. Finally, by having a higher level of cooperation, and a common structure (SDGs), the translation and linking of local information to regional and national can be done more easily. Making use of the already high number of CSOs in Lebanon, these manipulations could be highly beneficial to SDG localization.

Finally, it was made clear that **ALL previous issues are consequences of the lack of a stable and functioning government.** Funding is lacking or is mismanaged due to extremely high levels of corruption, the state of CSOs enabling environment and policy contexts, and the current financial crisis (which was deemed a political and institutional barrier). The distrust in citizens towards data and international organizations is propagated by the government. They spread a general "fear of data", obstruct and block monitoring and evaluation processes and paint a negative image of international initiatives. Finally, the Lebanese government does not provide regional and national level coordination for sustainable development. Very few national targets and goals are set to which local initiatives can connect or relate. Not only they not facilitate joint programs, they erect barriers to social inclusion, and promote the division of citizens according to their political and religious orientation. These issues are core institutional problems. The previously articulated contributions of the manipulations on the three main issues (and the individually articulated benefits of each manipulation) can help the development of CSOs, allowing them to be more independent of the government and counteract governmental influence on people and organizations. Therefore, contributing to the improvement of SDG localization in Lebanon.

Conclusion

The SDGs are a globally defined set of targets and goals that guide governments and organizations towards a sustainable future. In order for their application, the defined goals and targets have to be localized. This means the consideration of local factors when defining the goals and targets. Three main actors can be identified as actors of localization: governments, private actors, and civil society. All around the World, governments play the most prominent role in the process. I have chosen the case of Lebanon to investigate their localization process. It presents a unique environment where the government does not exercise its role, and Civil Society Organizations have stepped in to fill the gap. An in-depth analysis of the Lebanese CS and CSOs, their state and role both historically and currently, and their policy context was conducted to understand their position and role in Lebanon. Based on the secondary research on sustainable development, the SDGs, localization, civil society, CSOs and their national context within Lebanon, I collected the main barriers that limit the localization processes in Lebanon.

After gaining an understanding of the complete environment for SDG localization, I articulated three manipulations to CSOs operations to investigate their effect on the organization's ability to address localization. The manipulations are: (i) location specific; (ii) flexible role; and (iii) categorization by SDGs. Based on these manipulations, and additional theoretical backgrounds, I presented a theoretical proposition for a CSO structure, called City-CSO. It attempts to bridge the gap between the global targets and goals, and local efforts for development while addressing the identified national barriers to localization.

First, the identified barriers were validated by experts to counteract the lack of data found in Lebanon. Second, through the Delphi-method, I tested the manipulations effect on localization and on the barriers to localization. Finally, the City-CSOs validity, feasibility and possible benefit was tested. Based on the information provided by the experts, conclusive answers were formulated to the research questions. I discuss the findings in the following chapter.

6.1. Synthesis of the findings

In this chapter I provide conclusive answers to the posed research questions based on the research findings.

6.1.1. Secondary research questions

“To what extent can a ‘location specific CSO’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”

Both as an organizational manipulation and in its power to address localization barriers, the manipulation was found beneficial, with consensus raised through the rounds (4.42). The main identified benefits to the localization of SDGs are its possible role as a bridge and facilitator between different local CSOs; the generation of local and tailored information; and the ability to identify and target local issues with relevant local actors in mind. With its additional benefits highlighted when probing the barriers to localization (discussed later in

this chapter), the manipulation of 'location specificity' was deemed very beneficial to SDG localization.

“To what extent can a ‘CSO with flexible role’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”

Experts deemed the manipulation beneficial to the localization process (3.85). They were divided around the idea of the manipulation making the acquisition of foreign funding and the conducting of monitoring processes difficult. However, there was a solid agreement that it would be beneficial to keep adaptability within the main focus of the organization, and not use it loosely. Beside these three points of contention, multiple possible benefits were highlighted. An adaptable role can help respond to emerging issues in the ambiguous environment of Lebanon, increase the possibility for partnerships, and greatly benefit social inclusion through collaborative approaches, inclusive and participatory processes and more. Therefore, if the question of how to appropriately implement flexibility into an organization's structure is addressed, the manipulation can contribute to SDG localization meaningfully.

“To what extent can a ‘CSO with SDGs as a categorization system’ contribute to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon?”

The manipulation received overwhelmingly positive remarks in the first round and had the most clearly identified benefits and hurdles. All articulated issues were addressed and confirmed by experts in the second round. Therefore, although overall view on its benefit decreased (barriers were identified that need to be addressed in future research), thanks to the clear understanding of the manipulation, consensus was achieved and experts deemed it unanimously beneficial to the localization process (4.14). Its main identified contributions were on local and national level coordination, and on local communities (increased awareness, knowledge, inclusiveness, and a better approach to identify relevant actors and stakeholders). Thanks to the clarity of the outcome, concrete lessons could be drawn, which can further enhance the manipulation's effectiveness. To conclude, categorization by SDGs has clear benefits to the process of SDG localization.

“What are the effects of the formulated three manipulations on the barriers to localization?”

All three manipulations had some contribution to the four identified barrier, either individually or in combinations. In the following, I will present the summarized contribution of each manipulation to individual barriers. Additional effects were collected through the experiment, which do not directly relate to the manipulations. These, the detailed description of each benefit, and the identified lessons are all presented in detail in the Results & Discussion section.

Experts deemed the manipulations possible effect on the ‘**social inclusion**’ barrier highly beneficial (4.57). While all manipulations had individualistic benefits, ‘location specificity’ generated the most possibilities.

| | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Location specific | Flexible role | Categorization by SDGs | Joint benefits |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|----------------|

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help identify local issues • Allow community to shape priorities • Higher awareness and inclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow flexible approach to address current diverse problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize and institutionalize the concept of SDGs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible engagement with local community • Community building through shared goals • Diverse options to participation • Contribute to higher participation |
| Likert scale - 4.57 | | | |

Table 2: Manipulations effect on 'Social Inclusion' barrier

The second identified barrier was the '**lack of governmental capacities & initiatives**'. Due to the history of the issue, and the fact that it is rooted in the political system, articulated opinions were mixed. Most negative remarks were related to the everyday functioning of current CSOs. The articulated effects of the manipulations were all positive ones. Overall, the manipulations were found partially beneficial in addressing the barrier (3.57).

| Location specific | Flexible role | Categorization by SDGs | Joint benefits |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identified benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identified benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make processes more formal • Ease cooperation with international organizations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow co-creation of initiatives • Increase sense of responsibility • Develop aware and responsible individuals to be agents of change |
| Likert scale - 3.57 | | | |

Table 3: Manipulations effect on 'lack of governmental capacities & initiatives' barrier

Since the '**lack of statistical systems and databases for SDG related information**' barrier was identified as a core, government generated barrier, it is difficult for CSOs to have meaningful impact on it. The government contributes to the upholding of the barrier by refusing to support data gatherings, erect obstacles to the process, and generate a sense of 'fear of data' in citizens. However, investigating the manipulations effect on the barrier helped identify these issues and presented options to affect them positively. Therefore, the overall effect of the manipulations was found beneficial (3.70).

| Location specific | Flexible role | Categorization by SDGs | Joint benefits |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identified benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No identified benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help make use of existing SDG frameworks and tools • Easier to develop existing organizational systems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation of data at local level • Allow monitoring processes • Allow documentation of challenges and lessons • Contribute to better |

| | | | |
|---------------------|--|--|--------------|
| | | | coordination |
| Likert scale - 3.70 | | | |

Table 4: Manipulations effect on 'lack of statistical systems and databases for SDG related information' barrier

Although the **'financial crisis'** is a major barrier, due to it being rooted in the political system, participants did not see a significant relation between the manipulations and the barrier. They argued that meaningful impact can not be achieved by national CSOs. However, positive aspects and ideas were still articulated, highlighting the possibility for local-scale impacts of CSOs. Despite the mixed reviews, the manipulations were found somewhat beneficial in impacting the barrier (3.71).

| Location specific | Flexible role | Categorization by SDGs | Joint benefits |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow the development of various community funding methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow easier involvement of the diaspora | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No identified benefit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness about rights of citizens Help hold institutions accountable Help identify local needs Propose alternative solutions to the governments |
| Likert scale - 3.71 | | | |

Table 5: Manipulations effect on 'Financial Crisis' barrier

6.2.2. Main research question

"To what extent does the designed City-CSO present a valid, feasible, and beneficial approach to SDG localization in Lebanon?"

Although consensus around the City-CSOs validity decreased over the two rounds, it was still deemed a sound approach by participants (4.00). They identified and confirmed two major barriers to its validity: the possible disconnection of local and national level developments, and the general distrust towards international organizations in citizens. With these barriers addressed, the organizational form presents a valid approach. Participants found the organization to be feasible (4.00) with a high level of consensus. While their remarks were overwhelmingly negative, they shed light on the main barriers of its feasibility: funding, and the division of citizens. However, since Lebanon presents a reasonably free environment for establishing CSOs, feasibility is less obstructed in the short term, which might indicate why agreement could be reached with such high level of consensus and despite the negative comments. Therefore, if the articulated barriers can be addressed by organizational structures and approaches, the City-CSO can be a feasible organization not only on short term, but on the long run too. Finally, although the overall view on the City-CSOs benefit decreased, consensus was achieved, and the organization was found beneficial to the localization process of SDGs in Lebanon (4.00). Contrary to the previous feasibility, expert's comments were focusing solely on the manipulations possible positive

effects. This indicates that if the articulated barriers are addressed and the City-CSO can function properly, the possible benefits of its approach are wide and impactful. Therefore, we can conclude that if the articulated benefits are capitalized on, and the identified barriers are addressed, the City-CSO can present a 'valid' approach as an organization and enhance SDG localization in Lebanon; it is 'feasible' in the current Lebanese environment; and would 'benefit' SDG localization.

6.2. Implications for theory and practice

By analysing the environment CSOs work in and identifying the barriers they face in localizing SDGs, I provide a set of manipulations to their organizational operations to help them adjust and find their place in the current problematic environment. This allows them to contribute better to the localization process in Lebanon. The individual manipulations and the City-CSO can be both further researched to learn in-depth benefits of individual manipulations, correlations between each other, and their relation to given environments. If further research confirms the findings and their benefit in practice, they can be applied to existing CSOs or be used to inform the formulation of new ones. This way, the field of CSOs can get empowered, and they can fulfil their role as lead agents of SDG localization and sustainable change in Lebanon.

The implications of the findings on existing theories and research approaches is twofold. First, the research approach adapts to a situation, where conducting research is extremely difficult. Lebanon presents numerous barriers to conducting research accurately, meaningfully, or conducting it at all. There is lack of electricity and gas, limiting possibilities for participation. There are dangers to doing experiments on site, especially for a foreigner and in a topic challenging the role of the current government. And there are political and religious divisions between citizens that can prove difficult to handle. This research began by attempting a Serious Gaming approach, but due to some of the previously articulated issues, it had to be changed. The final approach taken was a theoretical experiment that aimed to investigate expert opinions on an envisioned organization through the Delphi-method. In order for it to work on a theoretical basis, extensive analysis of the environment had to be conducted. This theoretical approach can be beneficial in situations similar to Lebanon, where on-site research and experimentation is difficult to conduct. Second, the proposed idea contests the globally articulated theory of SDG localization and its linear path of development strategy (Global level, to national, to local). In developed countries with strong governments the approach is logical. However, trying to force this method on countries such as Lebanon, that lacks a democratic and functioning government, can significantly hinder sustainable development and the localization of SDGs. Therefore, this research proposes the idea of 'skipping' the national level and developing a system that allows the connections to happen between the global and local scale directly. In this case, I suggested the use of CSOs, since they already play a crucial role in localization in Lebanon. The approach and its need in different countries can be investigated, and a similar technique can be applied to identify and improve the role of relevant actors

6.3. Recommendations

As closing remarks, I will share what I believe to be the direction future research should take.

International research into SDG localization

The globally articulated way of localization follows a linear path from a global scale, through national, to local. However, without the proper functioning of the national (governmental) level, global efforts are much harder to reach the local scale. Research has to be conducted on how to best 'skip' the national level in certain countries, and allow for a better support straight from global to the local level. This would allow for increased sustainable development and put significant pressure on local and national governments to follow the needs of their constituencies.

The role of civil society and CSOs in the SDG localization process in countries where the government is not fulfilling its role, needs to be investigated. In these cases, just as in Lebanon, the globally articulated way of localization, where governments are the lead agents of change, can not function properly. As the preliminary research indicated, the role of CSOs in localization changes due to trying to fulfil governmental roles, without its organizational structure adjusting. Therefore, CSOs in these situations need to be investigated, so their operations and structures can be informed and adjusted according to the national context, and allow them to better contribute to SDG localization independently of the government.

SDG localization In Lebanon through CSOs

From the three major sectors in Lebanon, the government is the main source of conflict and the private sector is failing. I argued that civil society is where we should look for solutions to advance sustainable development, due to their prominent role in the country's issues both historically and presently. As the main actors of change, they are filling in the roles of the government. This shift in leading actor of localization needs to be studied so development and progress can continue in Lebanon. The articulated manipulations and their effects were found beneficial to advance CSOs contribution to sustainable development. Further manipulations can be identified and tested in the future. In addition, as experts highlighted, there is a need to connect these organizations and initiatives, linking local to the national level. Since the government is unable to provide the national level coordination, research has to be conducted on how civil society can create such national level coordination for sustainable development in order to allow better development with limited involvement of the government.

Continuing this research

Building on previous discussions, I recommend conducting the research using the Serious Gaming approach, or a similar research method that allows the capturing of the complex environment and interactions Lebanon presents. I believe it would provide much more insight into the organization's day-to-day struggles with the system. It would allow for the presentation and testing of the manipulations in an interactive game setting, which can help participants conceptualize it better and discover their potentials or disadvantages. The casual game-setting would allow role-playing, helping ease communication between diverse groups, which could prove highly beneficial in Lebanon. While the Delphi-method allowed for consensus building around the articulated topics based on expert opinions, a Serious Gaming approach would allow an interactive discussion between participants that can generate more ideas, discover them in more depth, and provide faster resolution.

I would recommend investigating the articulated manipulations in relation to each other. In this research, I tested and analysed them individually and briefly as a whole, creating the

City-CSO. However, the manipulations have direct effects on each other, where a benefit of a manipulation could directly deal with a disadvantage of another (e.g.: *'public's current negative view on international organizations could limit participation'* counteracted by *'awareness raising around SDGs'* achieved by the SDG categorization manipulation). Each possible combination of manipulation can be studied to discover how they can influence each other's functioning.

The real life application of the City-CSO and manipulation needs to be tested in the future. Using the information gathered in this research, an experimental organization can be set up and a physical test of the formulated City-CSO can be tested. I believe, a few months long testing period would provide significant amount of information regarding the organization's future potential in the localization of SDGs in Lebanon. Based on the gathered data, more in-depth conclusions and recommendations could be drawn to help develop CSOs. If the conclusion shows beneficial results, the manipulations can be implemented to existing organizations to improve their localization efforts. If the City-CSO proves valid and beneficial as an organizational form, it can be provided as a framework for upcoming CSOs. By incorporating the findings of the research into the practical field of localization, the environment for localization of SDGs in Lebanon can improve.

6.4. Limitations of the research

Three main limitations of the study can be highlighted: (i) the limitation of the chosen research method; the (ii) difficulties the Lebanese environment presented in regard to conducting the research; and finally the (iii) geographic boundaries within which the results can be used.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the original methodology to investigate the formulated research questions was a Serious Gaming approach. It allows for the recreation and representation of the real environment CSOs work in, puts participants in that game environment, and allows them to 'play through' the theorized functioning of the City-CSO. However, due to difficulties in conducting the research in person (critical situation in Lebanon), or even through the internet, on online gaming platforms (no stable electricity and internet), the methodological approach had to be adjusted. I believe an in-person, workshop-like, serious gaming approach is favoured to the picked Delphi-method, due to the way of generating more in-depth, situational data.

Further limitations presented themselves throughout the development and execution of the Delphi-method. The lack of national studies, research, and data made it very difficult to put the research on solid theoretical ground. Additional steps had to be taken throughout the research to ensure its validity (e.g.: expert interviews). Regarding the methodology itself, the current situation of the country made it extremely difficult to find participants to any of the four identified expert panels. Members of only two out of the four panels of experts were able to attend. Even panels to which participants were found, lacked significantly in number. Consequently, the low number of participation limited the attainable data and its validity. In future studies, all identified panels have to be represented in adequate numbers.

Finally, since the research was based in the context of Lebanon, results can not be directly translated to other countries. However, in countries with similar situation, where the

government is not acting towards the attainment of the SDGs, and shows no intent to do so, the approach taken in this research to investigate the development of other potential 'actors of change' is valid. Within Lebanon, both the articulated manipulations and the City-CSO can be applied to any settlement, as they are based solely on national, contextual information.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Lebanese Civil Society analysis (Assi, 2006)

| | Lebanese Civil Society |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strengths | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Effectiveness in delivering services to marginalized groups in comparison to that of the government • Non-violence within the CS arena • Freedom to engage in advocacy activities criticizing the government • Responsiveness to the interests and needs of women, empowering and promoting the self-governance of women • Success in informing and educating citizens on public issues • Promotion and provision of alternative means, outside the state, for communities to raise their level of material development • Civil society actors' ability to articulate societal concerns • Engagement in addressing poverty issues and promoting poverty eradication |
| Weaknesses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread corruption at the societal level • Limited existence of CSO umbrella bodies • Scepticism in and common violations of the law • An inhibited decentralization where the central government has the upper hand • Citizens' membership in CSO: volunteering rather than joining an organization • Generally disabling socioeconomic conditions • Lack of trust among citizens • Lack of tolerance • Impact on the national budgeting process • Holding private corporations accountable when CSOs are benefiting from private sponsorship • Limited citizens' engagement in collective community action • Weak public trust in CSOs • Failure of the media sector to play its role in supporting civil society initiatives |
| Recommendations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the initiative independent of any political or party interference • Include as many organizations in the process as possible • Involve the media and educational institutions in the process • Implement training and familiarization sessions for CSOs in Lebanon • Create a task force in every region to coordinate and directly follow-up on results at the local level |

| | |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classify CSOs according to typology, and organize focus group meetings by specialization to evaluate and diagnose the situation of each type separately • Conduct field studies on the practices of civil society, sectoral studies in parallel to the perception of people and stakeholders, as well as research on the positive or negative influence of politics and political interference |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The following additional documents are present amongst the 'supplementary materials':

Appendix 2: Expert interview outline and transcripts

Appendix 3: Delphi-method first round questionnaire and materials

Appendix 4: Controlled opinion feedback

Appendix 5: Delphi-method second round questionnaire and materials