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Session 3 – The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and NNIP Partners

Led by Seema Iyer – Baltimore & Tom Kingsley - Urban Institute

Notes by Sara McTarnaghan

Present: Megan Johanson, Community Research Partners; Tom Kingsley, Urban Institute; Gina Lovasi, Drexel University; Crystal Li, Living Cities; Seema Iyer, BNIA-JPI; Ryan Gerety, Ford Foundation; Megan Goulding, USC Price Center for Social Innovation; Sara McTarnaghan, Urban Institute

**Key resources shared:**

* Sustainable Development Solutions Network:[**http://unsdsn.org**](http://unsdsn.org)
* SDG Philanthropy Funders: [**http://sdgfunders.org/home/lang/en/**](http://sdgfunders.org/home/lang/en/)
* Baltimore SDG report: [**http://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/sustainable-cities/**](http://www.ubalt.edu/about-ub/sustainable-cities/)
  + Citiscope coverage: [**http://citiscope.org/story/2017/how-baltimore-using-sustainable-development-goals-make-more-just-city**](http://citiscope.org/story/2017/how-baltimore-using-sustainable-development-goals-make-more-just-city)
* SDGs and Indicators**:** [**https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs**](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs)

**Discussion notes:**

**Tom:** Personally, has a renewed interested in international work. In later part of last century, UN system started working under framework of Millennial Development Goals. The MDGs have been phenomenal in terms of sparking interest in work on issues such as reduction of child poverty rates and child mortality rates. Advances in these areas accompanied by enormous increases in urbanization rates. While the MDGs did not make those accomplishments happen, feels strongly that having the MDG framework helped moved things along. In 2013-2015, the development community came together to expand and update these goals. 17 SGDs adopted by UN. Each of the goals has target indicator (169 overall). These goals were adopted in 2015, with indicators adopted in 2016. However, cities and countries do not have all of the data to report on these agreed upon indicators, but it is an effort to help country by country start tracking data and moving forward.

A big difference is that MDGs were all oriented towards developing countries, but SDGs almost all world countries. US signed on. A small effort underway to identify cities, and figure out how the US can begin to sign on to and become a part of this effort to track goal achievement under 17 SDGs.

SDSN - Sustainable Development Solution Network. Developed an effort and report in 3 cities to dive in and work interactively with people locally to get these things going. Baltimore as leading example.

Invites Seema to share she accomplished here and brainstorm how other cities can be involved.

**Seema**: US signed on to SDGs. Unlike MDGs, SDGs has one urban goal (goal 11) around cities. SDSN has been working with cities around the world to localize the global goals to local cities. NYC was the first. In that case, used unified Plan NYC plan and mapped the strategies of plan to NY to SDGs. Baltimore was the second city. San Jose was third.

Local leadership matters. In NY, the mayor's office took it on and it became a key part of a mayoral priority. In Baltimore case, it was bizarre timing. Sachs choose Baltimore because his wife is from Baltimore. After huge civil unrest, current mayor decided not to run again, which led to contested mayoral election.

Unlike NY, there is not one unified plan in Baltimore. We have 36 plans and consent decrees that effectively set goals already for some of our work. Tried to figure out where any of the targets already have the goal established through these plans. For example, we have a goal in Baltimore to increase tree canopy from 20 to 40 percent which fit into the air quality SDGs. However, for other goals and targets it was not as neat.

Put together three working groups: people, planet and property (with overlap across groups). We put together indicators we had already been tracking, take vacant and abandoned housing, for example. While we identified indicators for all, we didn't get to point where we could set goals for everything.

The groups compiled a summary report that went to the new mayor in 2016. We don't know if there will be too many plans associated with it.

It is a very much a campaign, most of our cities don't know what the UN is and what it means to our cities. If it wasn't ambivalence it was ignorance. It was about raising awareness. If we use an SDG framework in already existing plans, will that bring us more resources to achieve them in time frame we want.

SDGs gave us a good framework around peace, justice and equity (SDG 16). We identified three indicators totally new to us through a justice indicator roundtable: (1) average caseload for public defenders; (2) percent of time spent in jail because you couldn't pay your bail; (3) percent of funding for legal aid representation per 10,000 families living in poverty.

BNIA focused on SDG 16, worked with National Center for Smart Growth on climate change. All 17 goals are online with 3-4 indicators online. We have a report to show people what we did and what we can show people from there.

One of the things it has opened up for the network, is that BNIA what was not the natural connection to UN. They had contacted their local UN association council - Americans that are supportive of the UN. DC has a local chapter. DC chapter referred to professor of U of Baltimore; University of Maryland - identified BNIA as the relevant partner. We thought we’d be an ancillary part of whole project. But they needed people who know how to mobilize communities around indicators to get to sustainable communities. We ended up being the lead even though U didn't think we would be. US State Department doesn't know what we do. Working with State Department more than I ever have in the past.

**TOM:** NNIP doesn’t have an agenda of what NNIP would like to do in relation to SDGs, but I have felt that SDGs offer framework for cities which this is very similar to our origin.

**SEEMA:** We are always looking at small area data, but this was an opportunity to track citywide indicators where appropriate. For example, SDG 1 is end childhood poverty. In Baltimore, we have a financial literacy program in communities, they have a key indicator that called liquid asset poverty. 56 percent of all Baltimoreans don't have 3 months worth of cash saved. Which helps create tactical and actionable issue to track. So, we included that indicator. Showed us how to engage partners in one key indicator and one key goal (not every partner has to do everything?

**Gina: I**s that to focus on being updatable over time?

**Seema:** Yes, make sure we can sustainable track indicators either through ones that are already in our system or our agencies are collecting.

**Tom:** I would encourage Philly, LA, Columbus and other cities to take advantage of idea of neighborhood indicators and build an agenda around neighborhood level indicators to mobilize community agenda. Neighborhood indicators as agenda to mobilize community change.

**Gina:** In Philly, there would be a lot of interest, Mayor Kinney is articulating goals, would be interested to see what if any overlap there is.

**Seema**: I also think it must have that federal push. Cities will need a federal push and funding to take this work on.

**Gina:** This could be an opportunity to collect our cities to global cities and relate to global network.

**Seema:** We had a meeting a State Department; Chief Statistician for State Department, wanted to reach back out to us. What are the indicators for state department? What could you tell them?

**Ryan:** Has this introduced you to conversations with other cities internationally?

**Seema:** We are getting contacted by cities around the world; One of our staff people, we got invited to Quito. One of the things that showed up internationally — is people want to go to understand data intermediaries.

**Ryan:** What you said about engaging people around process around defining indicators is very important. Role of civil society is to hold governments accountable.

**Gina**: Seems like having local goal specificity.

**Ryan:** Did it change conversation to have preset goals? That these our rights according to this body? Does that change anything?

**Seema:** It’s hard. We have 35 % child poverty nobody wanted to stake a claim that it would go down to 30% by 2020. Easier with goals like tree canopy. But for some goals it’s difficult. For ex, we couldn't provide a broadband measure. Technically we are at 99% access, there is broadband everywhere but people can't afford it, so that's not a real measure. Starting a conversation about getting information and measurement might spark a whole plan around it.

Cities are not going to change what they are doing because of SDGs or Habitat 3, but want to use it to advance public priorities. I come from a city that has a ton of consent decrees - it is a federal unfunded mandate; it is a hard space to set visionary goals and how are they related.

For example, if the SDGs were included as part of consent decrees moving forward it would do something to be actionable.

**Tom**: What about other cities? is there interest in doing something similar.

**Megan**: In cities where they were selected for the first round: Is it a goal of shared language, if it isn't really changing anything?

**SEEMA:** Identified 3-5 indicators for each goal, next step to take it to a goal by 2030, tracking 54 indicators, but setting the ultimate goal. Got a grant for a few new indicators. But getting to a goal by 2030 is a political process.

**GINA:** It might help us to organize and identify gaps in the indicators that you are tracking. But we would have to consider what would be the benefit of making this something we would lead with.

**Seema:** It is a way to talk across and translate what we are doing into an international context.

One of the things that we should do as NNIP, we should update a shared indicators report and organize under the SDGs. That’s a shared indicator that would track to these things.

**Tom:** What about LA?

**Megan**: Possibly. Interested in applying global frameworks to local work we are already doing. Being able to talk across a framework, and here's what it means in LA. I like the idea, something that I’m interested in and the center would be interested in.

**Seema:** Stanford is the San Jose site, brought it into the classroom and are looking at three goals around climate action, air quality and sustainable consumption. They are trying to create a database tracking indicators around climate change. For educators, a lot of opportunities to get students engage.

**Megan**: We have a lot of students interested in international development who do month-long labs abroad. For those students in work in indicators and bring it on the lab together.

**Seema**: SDSN’s site has a lot of resource for educators.

**Gina**: Also valuable to share lessons about actions and what will move these indicators.

**Seema**: Yes, would be interesting to see what actions and best practices have been in US in all of our cities that have mirrored this global trend. What I like about is that it is incredible flexible. Under a fulbright, I’ll be looking at some comparisons between Bangalore and Bombay.

**Ryan**: You were talking about three indicators around peace and justice? is there a policy agenda?

**Seema**: Yes, all connected to policy agenda. For example, what is the fight for $15 in Baltimore if we don't even know how many people are working a living wage. Now working with bail reform advocates.

**Ryan**: Does this help create a sense in the city that this is where we are and this is where we ought to be? Opportunity to break silos?

**Seema**: Helps us get more bedfellows to help us direct our actions.

I think shared indicators is going to be a good topic, and could be a good cross-site project.

**Megan**: Don’t we as NNIP partners do a survey every year that includes this info?

**Tom**: Could do a mapping of shared indicators we have already. Maybe the SDGs identified a gap that we should be tracking.

**Seema**: Peace and justice indicators got us talking to to legal advocates, and different cities. Worked more with legal aid teams and Maryland legal volunteers than i’d ever had before.

**Gina**: For cities planning to work this way, it would be helpful to know which indicators under any of the NNIP sites that seem relevant?

**Seema**: SDGs already have a suite of indicators globally - 169. We choose 54, 45 were on the list and 9 were locally selected (like the liquid asset poverty).

**Gina**: Would be helpful to map the Global indicators, and NNIP ones.

**Tom**: Columbus isn't really doing this type of indicator work?

**Seema**: We had to go up to citywide level. For some issues, makes more sense for us to measure at city level (for example opportunities public defenders).

**Megan**: Could be interesting way to flip what things we are looking at.

**Seema**: CIC - Community Indicators Consortia. They are an international group that we could tap into.

**Gina**: Also, helpful to identify the things we ought to be measuring but we can’t or aren’t.

**Ryan**: Seems like the most important thing was the process. City agencies could just pick a random thing.

**Seema**: Yes, also tricky that it is framed under “Sustainable”. That was off-putting for some. But also, helped make progress, we can now map the STAR rating system onto SDGs.

**Seema**: Will share Baltimore goals and global goals.

**Megan**: Relevant to look at that and identify which ones map to indicators we are already collecting in Columbus.

**Seema**: Also, there are foundations that are now funding in relation to SDGs.

**Megan**: Might be hard to go out and get new funding to collect new indicators.

**Seema**: May be worth seeing if you have existing relationships with funders who have signed on to get them to fund new indicator work.  [SDGfunders.org](http://sdgfunders.org)

**Ryan**: That was an effort to align funders and have collective impact. Should lead to areas where we see we can't actually measure this or don't have good solution strategies.