

Briefing Paper 3

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Localising the SDGs: Community Ambassadors

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The Sustainable Development Goals: “Leave No One Behind Pledge”

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise 17 objectives and 169 indicators designed to foster “peace and prosperity for people and planet...” (UN, 2015). These goals address critical global issues such as poverty alleviation, inequality reduction, and climate change mitigation. Central to these goals is the “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) principle, a global pledge to prioritise the dignity and advancement of the most marginalised communities (UN Women, 2017).

Achieving these goals necessitates a unified effort across both national and local levels, employing a broad range of resources and initiatives to unlock the transformative potential of the SDGs and effectively implement the LNOB principle. However, data from the 2019 Voluntary National Review process revealed that the UK has encountered challenges in documenting progress at local levels for many of the goals (UKSSD 2019). An integrated multi-stakeholder approach is essential to foster transformative agendas at the local level (UN, 2022).

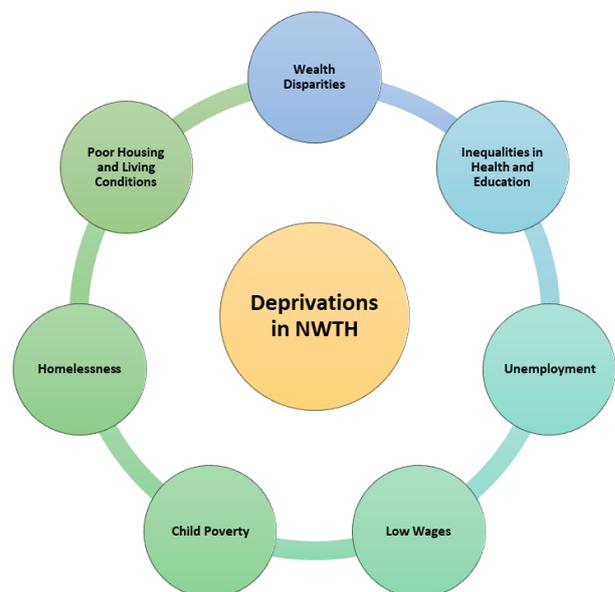
Why Newham and Tower Hamlets

The London Boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets (NETH) were selected for our study due to their unique characteristics, which present both

significant challenges and opportunities in advancing the SDGs.

Despite being vibrant hubs of cultural diversity, economic activity, and artistic expression, both boroughs are characterised by pronounced disparities and multiple dimensions of deprivation, which have been further exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis (The Guardian, 2021; Newham Council 2020, Tower Hamlets Council, 2020). This juxtaposition of dynamism and deprivation makes NETH emblematic of the complex interplay between urban development and inequality.

The initial phase of our research, drawing on local data and statistics from 2019, revealed a landscape marked by significant deprivations across these boroughs, aligning with the UNDP



framework's identification of capability deprivations as a critical barrier to achieving the SDGs. This analytical groundwork underscores the importance of empowering local communities in NWTM, utilising targeted engagement strategies to address and mitigate these capability gaps (Lennox et al., 2020; Tiwari, 2021).

Localising the SDGs: Phase One

The project's first phase, "Putting Newham and Tower Hamlets on the SDG Map" (Lennox et al., 2020), aimed to establish a foundational system for tracking SDG progress within Newham and Tower Hamlets. This phase involved developing a mapping toolkit that adapted the SDG framework for sub-national use, significantly enhancing its relevance and practicality at the local level. Using this contextualized SDG mapping toolkit, the study employed a Red, Amber, or Green (RAG) rating system to analyse borough-level secondary data, enabling the identification of negative, neutral, and positive trends and pinpointing areas requiring targeted interventions. The research highlighted the challenges of monitoring SDG advancement within the boroughs, underscoring the need for improved tools and methods in local SDG implementation.

Localising the SDGs: Phase Two

Moving to phase two, "Building a Robust Methodology for Newham and Tower Hamlets Communities" (Lennox et al., 2023), the sub-national SDG framework was used to monitor the engagement of local organisations in NWTM with the SDGs. This phase involved mapping the work and experiences of six local organizations against SDGs 3, 10, and 12. Data collected through 15 semi-structured interviews and one focus group session highlighted several ways

local organisations in NWTM are working within the various domains of the SDGs, including initiatives addressing mental health, social inclusion, and responsible consumption. However, the challenges in monitoring SDG progress at the local level, such as resource constraints and limited knowledge about the SDGs, underscored the need for tailored support to advance SDG implementation in the region.

Localising the SDGs: Phase Three

The most recent phase of our project, funded by the UEL East London Scholars Award (2023), focused on addressing the resource and knowledge gaps that previously hindered local organisations in Newham and Tower Hamlets from engaging effectively with the SDGs. This phase concentrated on SDGs 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), with the aim of empowering partnering organisations to monitor and enhance their contributions towards these goals. The overarching goal was to deepen the understanding and integration of the SDGs within local contexts, supporting the "Leave No One Behind" principle at the community level.

To achieve this, our strategy centered around three key actions:

1. Partnering for Progress:

We collaborated with 2 local organisations to address challenges stemming from limited resources and a lack of SDG awareness. This partnership aimed to build the capacity of these organizations to effectively engage with and contribute to the SDGs.

2. Mapping and Tracking:

Pioneering Futures Since 1898

We developed and implemented a robust tracking framework to illustrate the interconnected nature of the SDGs. This involved documenting the activities of local organisations and establishing mechanisms for continuous progress monitoring toward SDGs 3, 10, and 12.

3. Community Engagement and Awareness:

We enhanced community understanding of the SDGs and collected data aligning local actions with global goals through the deployment of 4 student ambassadors. This approach not only raised awareness but also embedded the SDGs more firmly into local initiatives. This dual approach served not only to raise awareness but also to embed the SDGs more firmly into the fabric of local initiatives.

WHY SDG 3, 10 and 12



The research focuses on SDG 3, 10 and 12 as it has been highlighted, through previous phases of this research, that these are most relevant to the boroughs considering the deprivations prevalent in NWTH. For example, Newham Community Project focuses on providing mental health services due to the cultural stigma surrounding mental health treatment in Newham. This exemplifies how local organisations cater activities and projects to the community and borough they are working in.

It could be observed that Newham Community Project are now achieving SDG 3 as they are improving mental health and well-being prospects in the borough. However, as mentioned previously, the SDG indicators are predominantly 'global' measurements. An example of an indicator for mental health in SDG 3 is "3.4.2

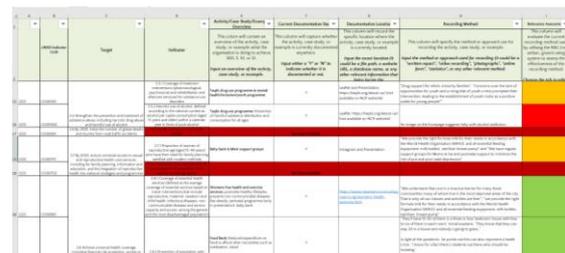
"Suicide Mortality Rate", this is a difficult measure to determine the significance of mental health services within a local area. This means although local organisations are achieving the SDGs, they are left behind.

Methodology

The study adopted a multi-stakeholder approach, led by 4 student ambassadors who were embedded amongst the 2 local partner organisations to help build community awareness of three relevant SDGs (SDGs 3, 10 and 12) and identify strategies that can adapt the SDGs to the specific context and needs of NWTH.

Student ambassadors gathered data through field work within local organisations and collating archival documentation, such as annual reports, websites, social media, and case studies. The role of student ambassadors in the final phase has been identified as pivotal in bridging data collection gaps and enhancing the alignment of organisational activities with SDG metrics.

The data collected was RAG assessed (where **red** may indicate an outdated or ineffective method, **amber** may suggest room for improvement and **green** may signify an appropriate and effective method) on how relevant and effective recording methods were in accordance with the contextualised SDG framework on an excel spreadsheet.



Thematical and narrative analysis of data determined the extent to which local organisations were able to implement, record and showcase

ways in which they are achieving the SDGs. The research provided a comprehensive understanding of the engagement of local community organisations with the SDGs in NETH, and yielded a rich dataset that can assist and support local organisations with implementing the SDG framework.

Local Partner Organisations

Newham: Newham Community Project



Founded in 2008, Newham Community Project is a registered charity dedicated to uplifting the vulnerable population of Newham, London. As well as being one of London's most culturally diverse boroughs, Newham also faces several challenges related to poverty and inequality. The Newham Community Project utilises the richness of multiculturalism to make Newham a fairer and more inclusive place. The organisation's initiatives focus on providing basic needs as well as education and sporting activities. By collaborating with the community, Newham Community Project can make a difference to marginalised groups such as students with No Recourse to Public Funds, ethnic minorities, and low-income families.

Tower Hamlets: Bethnal Green Nature Reserve



The Bethnal Green Nature Reserve in East London focuses on ecological research and community engagement. It offers a residency for researchers annually and actively involves the public in addressing urban environmental and social challenges. Originally a WW2 bombsite, the Reserve has been maintained since 1977 by locals, volunteers, and staff, fostering a diverse ecosystem. Individuals can participate by becoming site caretakers, which involves activities such as respecting paths, observing wildlife, litter picking, tending the garden, composting, and sharing knowledge. Opportunities also exist for habitat management and volunteering in community gatherings.

Initial Findings

Our researching findings revealed illustrative examples of how both organisations are effectively achieving the SDGs.

The Newham Community Project:

At the Newham Community Project, several initiatives illustrate their commitment to the SDGs. Their food bank operation is a prime example of aligning with SDG 12.3, which aims to halve food waste. This initiative helps to divert surplus food from retailers to those in need, strengthening community bonds and addressing nutritional needs. Another noteworthy initiative is their partnership with the 78th Newham Scouts, supporting SDG 12.5 by involving youth in sustainability through 'skills for life' workshops that promote recycling and conservation.

SDG 12.3 Halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains.

Food Bank

The food bank initiative is community-led and relies on donations from local businesses (NCP Website, 2022). This reduces food losses at the production level.



Hovis Bakery Donation (News EU, 2021)



Food Bank Consumers (AFP, 2022)

Around 2000 households line up for the food bank every week (Gulf Today, 2021), all food donated is consumed, therefore preventing food waste at the consumer level.

SDG 12.5 Substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

Scouts

2010 NCP formed the '7th Newham Scouts Group' Available to ages 6-18 It is now the largest Scout group in Newham

An international programme providing young people with 'skills for life'. The SDGs inspire many activities organised for Scouts (Scouts for SDGs, 2024).

Whilst NCP have some examples of these activities available on social media, it would be beneficial to see more.



7thnewhamscouts 93 w Try your ideas. You might surprise yourself.

Scout session: Robot Wars! #upcyclingideas #robotwars #diyrecyclecrafts #innovations #designideas #scoutbox #ukmuslimscouts (2022)



Bethnal Green Nature Reserve Trust:

The Bethnal Green Nature Reserve Trust also demonstrates a strong commitment to the SDGs through multiple initiatives. Their Phytotherapy Medicinal Garden and Mobile Apothecary projects are key examples to promoting SDG 3.4, enhancing mental health and well-being by connecting the community with nature's healing properties. The Forest Friday program supports SDG 3.2 by providing children with engaging outdoor educational activities that improve well-being and instil environmental stewardship.

While our research identified significant progress by the two local organisations towards the SDGs, their efforts were not always fully captured within the current SDG framework, primarily due to limited documentation and recording methods (ss shown below). For example, strategic recording practices sometimes lack visibility and relevance to SDG indicators, as shown in the examples below. Enhancing these methods is crucial to ensure that the true extent of local achievements is accurately documented and recognized within the global framework.

SDG 3.4 Reduce by 1/3 premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention, treatment and promotion of mental health and well-being.

2014 Phytotherapy Medicinal Garden
Providing outreach and learning opportunities.

2019 Mobile Apothecary Outreach
Empowers individuals and the local community by fostering knowledge, skills, and confidence in using herbs for daily food and medicine.
Promotes mental health and well-being by welcoming people from all walks of life to enjoy and take care of the reserve.



Trustees 5
Volunteers 350
BGNRT Gov website (2023)

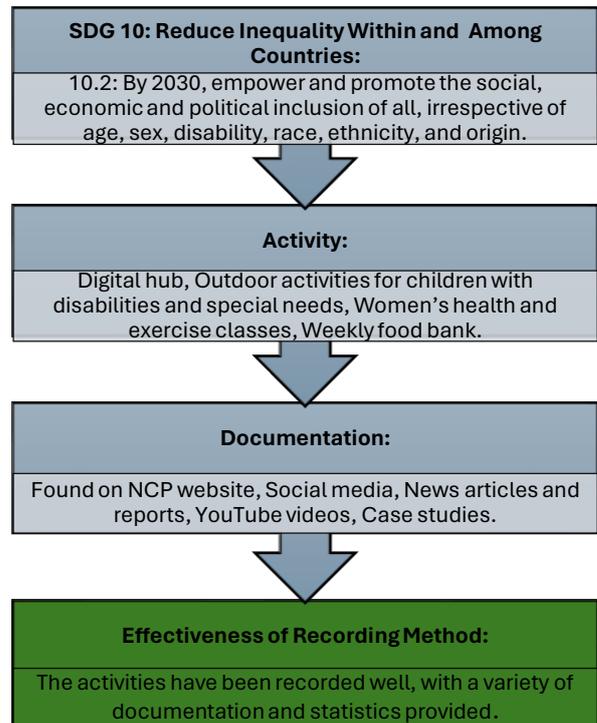


SDG 3.2 End preventable child deaths for newborns and children under 5 years of age.
Rangers Kindergarten, Stephen Hawking School, and Forest Friday

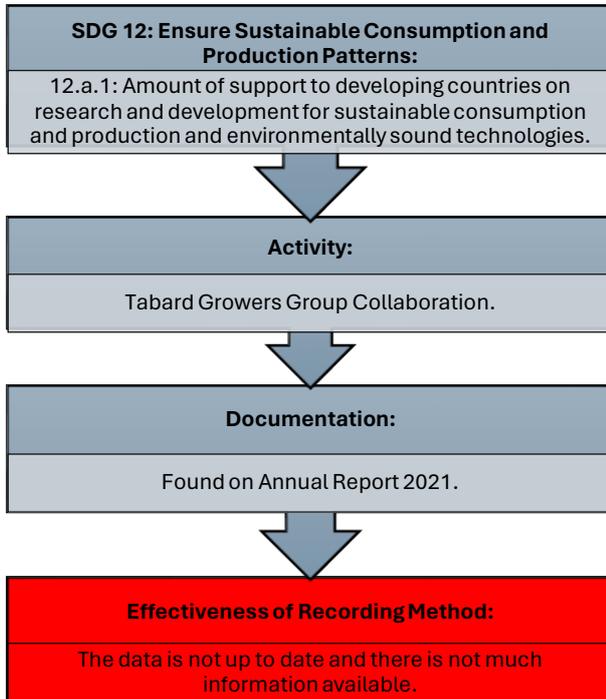


Imagery: BGNRT Website (2024)

The Newham Community Project:



Bethnal Green Nature Reserve Trust:



Future Research

This project has provided valuable insights into the progress of local organisations in NWTH towards achieving the SDGs. One notable limitation is the variability in documentation available between each project phase. We observed a disparity in the types of data accessible, with a predominance of qualitative or visual data such as case studies and photos, while quantitative data remains limited. This imbalance poses challenges in conducting comprehensive assessments and comparisons across different initiatives, hindering a holistic understanding of progress towards the SDGs.

Our findings highlight the need for improved methods of capturing and measuring data, particularly in areas where quantitative indicators are scarce or inadequately aligned with local contexts. Including how to capture data effectively and what methodologies would be most appropriate for accurately assessing progress in areas where traditional metrics may fall short.

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Further Information

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