

## The Municipality of Kópavogur, Iceland: A DATA DRIVEN APPROACH TO IMPLEMENT THE SDGS

### Key highlights

- Kópavogur is the first municipality in Iceland to formally adopt the SDGs and is therefore seen as a national frontrunner.
- The municipality takes a data-driven approach to localising the SDGs and will form indices to monitor implementation progress of the SDGs.
- Kópavogur has succeeded in building internal awareness with its staff and is working towards strengthening local ownership of the strategy among private sector and civil society stakeholders.

The SDGs were formally adopted as part of the municipality's comprehensive strategy in 2018. 15 SDGs and 36 targets have been prioritised for Kópavogur, based on a review of the 65 SDG targets prioritised by the Icelandic national government and guided by the 92 targets identified as important for local governments by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Prioritisation of SDG targets for Kópavogur**



Source: Municipality of Kópavogur (2019)

Kópavogur's strategy is broad-based and will be followed up by yearly strategic action plans, as well as by the implementation of specific policies and legal directives from the national level. It includes a mission statement, a vision and values according to which the municipality will work with stakeholders to achieve the prioritised goals (Figure 2). Increasing staff awareness has resulted in positive action where divisions and institutions of the municipality have started working with the SDGs. Specifically the schools and they are considered an important channel to reach and involve inhabitants. Kópavogur's aim is to ensure the quality of life of residents, improve efficiency and participate in the global effort towards sustainability.

The Kópavogur strategy is seen as a way to break policy silos, using the SDGs and their targets as a platform to

explore synergies between the interconnected goals. This constitutes a new way of working for the municipality, which does not have a tradition of developing holistic master plans, but rather separate visions for each policy sector. Many existing strategies only have subjective goals and are not linked with action plans, performance measures or the budget process. In this regard, the Steering Group for implementation has encountered some resistance when it comes to moving away from a sector-based planning approach.

The approach that the municipality takes to localise the SDGs is data-driven. To make the data efforts of Kópavogur actionable, the IT office has developed an innovative management and information system, MÆLKÓ, where all local databases are integrated into one data warehouse. The main function of MÆLKÓ is to link performance indicators with tasks and goals. Kópavogur plans to use MÆLKÓ to calculate composite SDGs indices for the municipality, and to link these to the local administration's specific projects and programmes to estimate their contribution to the SDGs.

Kópavogur has developed a Child friendly city index in cooperation with UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs as part of the implementation of the UN's Convention of the rights of the child. The index won a Child Friendly Initiative Inspire Award recently at a UNICEF summit.

In early 2019, Kópavogur successfully submitted data and relevant supporting documents to meet the ISO 37120 standard for sustainable development of communities, the first ISO standard developed for communities by the World Council of City Data. The ISO 37120 data compiled by Kópavogur includes data on 97 KPIs, collected over a 2.5 months period, which will help the municipality to track its sustainability performance. ISO 37120 further allows Kópavogur to compare itself to other certified cities around the world to shine light on areas of strength and weaknesses of the municipality.

Together with the Social Progress Imperative, the municipality developed a "Social Progress Scorecard" with around 50 context-specific indicators, and has

recently updated the scorecard in cooperation with two other municipalities in Iceland.

**In Iceland, the important role played by local authorities in the implementation of the 2030 agenda has been formally acknowledged by the Prime Minister.** The Ministry of Regional Policy, Transport and Local Government further supports this. The ministry has also expressed interest in supporting municipalities on the SDGs.

**Figure 2. The Kópavogur model for implementing the SDGs**



Source: Municipality of Kópavogur (2019)

## FORWARD LOOKING POLICY RESPONSES

**Combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to implement the SDGs.** There is an opportunity to combine the technical, top-down approach taken to prioritise the SDGs with more inclusive, bottom-up processes in the implementation phase of Kópavogur's holistic strategy.

**Step up the municipality's stakeholder engagement efforts.** Possible actions include developing a stakeholder engagement strategy to co-design actions for implementing the SDGs in Kópavogur and building a data dashboard to visualise progress by the municipality toward the SDGs, including different actors' contributions.

**Use the SDGs to respond to concrete challenges in the municipality.** Taking a long-term view, municipal planning in Kópavogur must take into account sustainability, accessibility and affordability of housing and transport options in the municipality beyond the use of private cars.

**Use the MÆLKÓ management and information system as a tool for policy dialogue and planning.** The MÆLKÓ data platform and software could be used to bring stakeholders together to discuss the strength and weakness of the municipality.

**The national government upholds importance of municipalities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, however, there is (as of yet) no formal support mechanism at the central level.** Beyond that, the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, which is the official body representing Icelandic municipalities, has established a platform for climate issues and the SDGs at the municipal level to share experiences and build collective knowledge on experiences with the SDGs, involve municipalities and strengthen the cooperation on the SDGs between the local authorities and the national government.

**Companies in Kópavogur have also started to address sustainability and, in some cases, the SDGs.** This is in line with the trend of an increasing number of Icelandic companies seeing sustainability as a condition for lasting success. This trend builds on the work of the national umbrella organisation promoting CSR and sustainability in Iceland, Festa, which is active in promoting the SDGs in all its work and the Marketing Office as the main body promoting cooperation between local enterprises and the municipality in Kópavogur.

**The civil society is also very active on the SDGs in Kópavogur.** On a local level, Kópavogur's Scout club has been very pro-active on the SDGs, developing interactive games and booklets to teach their members about the goals. At national level, the UN Association of Iceland is highly active when it comes to promoting engagement among citizens, the private sector, civil society and local authorities.

**Create a Task Force at national level to strengthen vertical coordination and inter-municipal collaboration on the SDGs.** The lack of comparable data to measure progress on the SDGs at local level is a key issue identified that should be prioritised.

**The SDGs can further help to provide a budgeting tool to prioritise resources allocated to different actions supporting the strategy.** There is need to build further awareness about the transformative element of the 2030 Agenda and of the SDGs as a holistic framework cutting across sectors and breaking policy silos to achieve common goals.

**Use the SDGs as a tool to leverage private sector contributions towards achieving the goals.** A platform for businesses to exchange experiences around the SDGs should be created.

**Use the SDGs as a tool for "public service motivation" and attracting new staff to services like pre-school education and social welfare.** Connecting the work in the municipality with a wider purpose can help to attract purpose-driven individuals to less financially remunerated jobs.