



**Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research
Programme
Research Report**

**Why Global Policies Sink or Soar:
The Localization of SDG 11 in Toronto and Metro Manila**

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September 1st, 2026

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**Centre for International
Experience**



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Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank the Laidlaw Foundation and the University of Toronto Scarborough Laidlaw Scholars Programme for giving me the opportunity to pursue this research and supporting me throughout the process. I am especially grateful to Professor Nicole Bernhardt for serving as my research advisor and for her invaluable guidance, mentorship, and thoughtful feedback throughout every stage of this project. I would also like to thank my peers for their insightful discussions, encouragement, and constructive feedback, which strengthened this research. Finally, I would like to thank my family, whose experiences inspired this project long before it began. Having been born in Manila and later immigrated to Toronto, I witnessed how housing shaped our family's opportunities and stability. Their resilience, sacrifices, and unwavering support motivated the questions at the heart of this research and continue to inspire me every day.

Abstract

This report examines how Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) has shaped municipal housing policy in Toronto and Metro Manila, and how political and institutional factors influence its translation from global commitment to local implementation. This research conducts a comparative qualitative document analysis of 16 core policy and reporting documents. The documents were coded inductively, organized into six policy pathways, and traced through an SDG Translation Chain from invocation to feedback. A Visibility-Translation Matrix then separates how directly the SDGs are named from how deeply their commitments become embedded in institutions.

Three findings emerge. First, explicit SDG language does not necessarily indicate meaningful localization. Toronto's pathways often use the language of rights, dignity, affordability, and complete communities while embedding related commitments in binding instruments; the Metro Manila case makes SDG language more visible upstream, but responsibility becomes harder to trace as implementation is divided across institutions. Second, localization weakens when authority, resources, and territorial responsibility do not match the geography of the housing problem. Third, broad commitments to adequate housing can narrow into measurable administrative outputs while lived outcomes receive less systematic attention. The comparison does not rank the two cases. Instead, it shows how the same global commitment changes across institutionally distinct systems. This report argues that localization should be judged not by how often an SDG is named, but by what it changes, who remains responsible, and whether that responsibility can still be traced through implementation, monitoring, and feedback.

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1. Introduction

Global development commitments are often presented as evidence of progress. Governments adopt them, place them in policy documents, and report on their implementation. Yet, adoption is not the same as realization. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do not implement themselves. Their influence depends on what happens after they enter domestic institutions: how they are interpreted, given authority, translated into policy, supported by resources, implemented, and reviewed. This movement from a global commitment into local systems of governance is commonly described as SDG localization (Ortiz-Moya & Reggiani, 2023). The important question is not simply whether a government endorses a global goal, but what becomes of that goal once institutions are required to act on it.

Housing makes this problem especially visible. Goal 11 is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," and Target 11.1 specifically addresses access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, as well as slum upgrading (United Nations, 2015). Housing, however, is rarely governed by one institution. In the Canadian context, Smith (2022) shows how homelessness and housing responses are produced through multilevel governance involving actors across governments and local institutions rather than a single authority. The documents examined here show a comparable division of housing functions across both cases: funding, land-use planning, regulation, infrastructure, program delivery, and monitoring move through multiple public and private actors before reaching a household. At each stage, the meaning of the commitment can be maintained, narrowed, or lost. This report asks: how have the Sustainable Development Goals shaped municipal housing policy approaches in Toronto and Metro Manila, and how do political and institutional factors influence these approaches under the Sustainable Development Goal framework? Rather than asking only whether SDG 11 appears in policy documents, the analysis follows what happens to its commitments as they move through authority, policy instruments, implementation, monitoring, and feedback.

Toronto and Metro Manila provide deliberately institutionally distinct settings for this question. Toronto is a single municipal government operating within Canadian federalism and substantial provincial authority over housing and land-use planning. On the other hand, Metro Manila is a metropolitan region composed of multiple local government units (LGUs) operating alongside national departments, metropolitan institutions, housing agencies, infrastructure

bodies, and financing institutions. Its decentralized structure has long raised problems of coordination between politically autonomous LGUs and metropolitan governance (Manasan & Mercado, 1999). These cases are not institutionally equivalent, nor are they intended to be. Their difference is part of the comparison. Rather than using one case as the standard for the other, the report asks what the same global commitment reveals when it passes through two different systems (Wong, 2014).

The central argument is that the visibility of SDG language should not be treated as evidence of meaningful localization. What matters is whether a commitment changes the institutions through which housing is governed: whether authority is clear, policy instruments and resources support action, responsibility remains identifiable, and monitoring can lead to a response.

Key Terms

SDG localization: Following Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023, 2025), the integration of SDG commitments into local strategies, review, monitoring, and ordinary decision-making. This study traces that integration further into authority, instruments, implementation, and feedback.

Policy translation: Drawing on Yanow's (1996) interpretive approach to policy meaning, the process through which a broad commitment is interpreted and carried through institutions. In this study, it is operationalized through the seven stages of the SDG Translation Chain.

Institutional embedding: A study-specific term for the point at which a commitment becomes attached to durable rules, mandates, procedures, budgets, or accountability mechanisms. It builds on Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani's (2025) distinction between SDG review and integration into ordinary municipal decision-making.

SDG visibility: A study-specific coding measure of how directly a policy document names the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda, or SDG 11.

Translation depth: A study-specific coding measure of how far a commitment can be traced through authority, instruments, implementation, monitoring, and feedback.

Translation break: A study-specific analytical term for the stage at which the connection between the original commitment and downstream action becomes weak, unclear, or stops changing decisions.

Jurisdictional fit: A study-specific analytical term, informed by multilevel governance research (Smith, 2022), for the match between the scale of a policy problem and the authority, territory, resources, and responsibility of the institutions expected to address it.

2. Existing Research and the Research Gap

The research draws on three related literature: SDG localization, housing governance and evaluation, and comparative politics, with additional insight from comparative urban research.

Together, they explain why global goals depend on local institutions. This raises the central question of this study: what happens as a global commitment is translated into a local outcome?

2.1 From Global Goals to Local Institutions

The SDGs are broad and non-binding, so their influence depends less on formal enforcement and more on how they are interpreted and put into practice. Guiry (2024) argues that states may adhere to the SDGs because of legal influence, political legitimacy, reputation, national interest, and moral responsibility. These pressures help explain why governments adopt and publicly affirm the goals. They do not, however, show whether those commitments change how policy is made or carried out.

The distinction becomes clearer at the local level. Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023) find that Voluntary Local Reviews can improve coordination across policy areas, support the integration of the SDGs into municipal strategies, and build sustainability knowledge within local administrations. Yet, they find less evidence that review alone changes underlying structures of governance. A city can show alignment with the SDGs without changing who has authority, where resources go, or what follows when implementation fails. Their later work similarly argues that review becomes more useful when it is connected to ordinary municipal monitoring and decision-making rather than treated as a separate reporting exercise (Ortiz-Moya & Reggiani, 2025). The distinction is simple but important: recognizing a goal is not the same as reorganizing policy around it.

2.2 Housing Governance, Rights, and Evaluation

Housing demonstrates this distinction because it is both a policy output and a lived condition. Governments can count units, approvals, projects, funding, or households assisted. These measures are necessary, but they do not fully establish whether housing is adequate in the standards used in international human rights law. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, n.d.) identifies security of tenure, services and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy as core dimensions of adequate housing. This provides a legal basis for treating housing as more than a unit count: a policy can produce housing while leaving important dimensions of adequacy unresolved.

As Van Wagner and Flynn (2024) explain, municipalities can help realize the right to housing because local decisions about planning, regulation, public land, and services directly

shape housing conditions. At the same time, municipalities remain limited by legal and fiscal powers held elsewhere. Janzen et al. (2023) raise a related question about evaluation, “who decides what counts as progress?” A policy may meet an indicator while still failing to capture the experiences of the people it is intended to serve. For housing policy, this means that evaluation should consider not only whether governments met administrative targets, but also whether those measures reflect the conditions experienced by people.

2.3 Comparative Politics and Comparison Across Difference

Comparing Toronto and Metro Manila may appear to show an 'apples-to-oranges' comparison. Their legal systems, resources, institutional arrangements, and urban conditions differ substantially. However, the purpose of this research is not to treat the cases as equivalent or to determine which one performs better. Their differences are part of what makes the comparison useful. Wong (2014) argues that comparison should move beyond a narrow set of European and North American institutions, because different contexts can show how the same policy problem changes under different political conditions. One case should not serve as the standard against which the other is measured. This approach is also present in comparative urban research. Robinson (2016) argues that cities can be compared even when they differ substantially because comparison can help develop better explanations of how urban processes work. In addition, Gillespie and Mitlin (2023) similarly argue for comparing across differences and for using experiences from the Global South to reconsider assumptions about the Global North. This is particularly relevant to the SDGs: the goals are universal, but the institutions asked to implement them are not. The value of comparing Toronto and Metro Manila lies in asking what each makes visible about the other.

2.4 Research Gap: From Alignment to Translation

Existing research explains why governments support the SDGs, how local review can strengthen policy integration, why municipal institutions matter to housing, and why evaluation should remain connected to communities. For example, Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023, 2025) show how local review can support integration and monitoring but may remain separate from ordinary decision-making; Van Wagner and Flynn (2024) identify planning, regulation, public land, and services as municipal sites through which housing rights can be realized; and Janzen et al. (2023) show how community-based evaluation changes who participates in defining success. These studies identify important pieces of the process, but they do not, by themselves, show how

one global commitment travels across all of them. What remains less clear is what happens between commitment and outcome: where authority is assigned, whether a commitment changes a policy instrument, who becomes responsible for delivery, how progress is monitored, and what happens when implementation weakens. These intermediate stages are where a global commitment can acquire institutional force or lose it. This report addresses that gap through two questions: does visible SDG language correspond to deeper institutional translation, and where does responsibility become unclear as the same commitment moves through different systems of governance? These questions shape the method that follows.

3. Methodology

This study uses comparative qualitative document analysis to trace how SDG 11 moves through housing governance. The method is interpretive: categories such as explicit, indirect, embedded, and interrupted require judgment. The aim is therefore not to present coding as pre-determined, but to make clear how each conclusion follows from the documentary record.

3.1 Research Design and Document Selection

The core corpus contains 16 public documents: eight for Toronto and eight for the Philippines and Metro Manila. They were selected purposively to capture different stages of the housing-policy process, including legislation, municipal strategies, planning rules, operational manuals, implementation frameworks, and progress reporting. The corpus was not limited to documents that explicitly mention the SDGs. Doing so would make visibility a condition for inclusion and would miss policies in which SDG-related commitments remain present even after the language itself becomes less visible. The documents therefore follow the policy process from higher-level commitments toward authorization, local planning, implementation, and monitoring. Supporting academic and policy sources were used only to establish context or clarify an implementation gap; the pathway findings remain grounded in the 16 core documents. The full corpus and the analytical purpose of each document are listed in *Appendix A*.

3.2 Inductive Coding and Research Decisions

The documents were coded inductively. Initial codes focused on recurring features of the policy process: SDG references, the definition of the housing problem, legal authority, policy instruments, responsible actors, resources, implementation, monitoring, accountability, affected groups, and governance constraints. The coding gradually changed the direction of the analysis.

Some documents used explicit SDG language but showed limited evidence of institutional change; others rarely named the SDGs while carrying related commitments into binding rules or operational procedures. A document, however, is not treated here as transparent proof that institutional change occurred. Yanow (1996) treats policy texts as artifacts through which institutional meanings are communicated and interpreted, while Ahmed (2007) shows how organizational documents can signal commitment without ensuring corresponding changes in practice. I therefore coded documentary evidence of institutional change only where the record established or reported a concrete change in authority, rules, procedures, resources, assigned responsibilities, monitoring, or accountability. Statements of alignment alone counted as visibility, not institutional change. Where a document reported implementation, I treated it as evidence of reported implementation rather than proof of lived outcomes. Visibility and translation depth were therefore coded separately.

Here, visibility records how directly the SDGs appear in the policy record, while translation depth asks how far a commitment can be traced into authority, instruments, implementation, monitoring, and feedback. Coding rules are set out in *Appendix B*. Major classification decisions were also recorded so that changes in judgment could be explained rather than hidden; *Appendix C* summarizes those decisions and distinguishes reconstructed decisions from any contemporaneous notes available in the research record.

3.3 SDG Translation Chain

The coding showed that the distance between a global commitment and a local outcome is made up of several institutional stages. A commitment can be recognized without clear authority, authorized without an effective instrument, implemented without sufficient resources, or monitored without producing a response. To follow this movement consistently, the study developed the SDG Translation Chain shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. SDG Translation Chain used to trace each policy pathway.

Invocation identifies where the commitment first appears; Interpretation asks how the housing problem is defined; Authorization identifies who has the power to act; Instrumentation identifies the policy tool; Implementation asks who delivers it and with what capacity; Monitoring asks what is measured; and Feedback asks what follows when targets are missed or harms are identified. The chain does not assume that policy moves smoothly through all seven

stages. Its purpose is to locate where the connection between commitment and action is maintained, weakened, or lost.

3.4 Visibility-Translation Matrix

Tracing the pathways raised a second problem: SDG visibility and institutional depth did not always move together. The Visibility-Translation Matrix separates these dimensions so that explicit language is not mistaken for deeper localization.

	Lower translation depth	Higher translation depth
High SDG visibility	Explicit but shallow	Explicit and embedded
Low SDG visibility	Weak or unrelated	Implicit but embedded

Matrix 1. Visibility-Translation Matrix.

A policy may name the SDGs repeatedly while leaving authority or implementation largely unchanged. The same could be said in reverse: explicit SDG language may disappear even as its commitments become embedded in planning rules, legal protections, or administrative procedures. The matrix is therefore a classification tool, not a measure of policy success. The coding rules behind each category are provided in *Appendix B*.

3.5 Policy Pathways

The Translation Chain and Matrix were applied through six policy pathways: T1 rights-based strategy and municipal implementation; T2 inclusionary zoning and affordable development; T3 rental replacement and tenant protection; PH1 national SDG localization and local shelter planning; PH2 socialized housing and 4PH delivery; and PH3 flood risk, resettlement, and livelihood protection. These labels were created for this study and are not official government program names. Each pathway groups documents around a shared housing problem or theme so that the analysis can follow relationships between commitments, institutions, and policy instruments rather than treating each document as an isolated unit. *Appendix C* provides the classification summary, and *Appendix D* contains the stage-by-stage pathway maps.

3.6 Limitations

The study is limited by its reliance on public documents. These sources show how governments define problems, assign responsibility, design policy instruments, and report implementation. They are less able to show how residents experience those policies. The analysis therefore distinguishes between what a policy states, what the documentary record shows was

implemented, and what can reasonably be concluded about outcomes. A program is not treated as effective simply because it is operationally detailed, and participation is not treated as meaningful simply because consultation is mentioned.

The documentary record is also uneven across the two cases. The Metro Manila pathway contains more national and metropolitan material than consistent implementation records from individual LGUs. This partly reflects the institutional structure being studied, but it limits claims about variation across local governments. Where the corpus does not show consistent local delivery, long-term affordability, resident choice, lived outcomes, or corrective action, the analysis treats the evidence as insufficient rather than inferring that those outcomes occurred. The method is therefore strongest at tracing institutional design and responsibility, and more limited in establishing lived effects.

4. Findings: Six Housing-Policy Pathways

This section applies the Translation Chain and Visibility-Translation Matrix to the six pathways. It establishes how each commitment moves through institutions, how it is classified, and where the main break occurs. The full stage-by-stage coding table is provided in Appendix D; the broader meaning of these patterns is developed in Section 5.

4.1 T1 - Rights-Based Housing Strategy and Municipal Implementation

T1 traces the relationship between the federal commitment to adequate housing and Toronto's municipal housing strategy, rights framework, implementation plans, and reporting.

Invocation NHSA explicitly links housing, dignity, sustainable communities, and the SDGs.	Interpretation Toronto reframes the commitment through housing rights, affordability, inclusion, and dignity.	Authorization City Council and municipal housing institutions receive strategy and delivery roles.	Instrumentation HousingTO, the Charter, implementation plans, programs, and the Data Hub.	Implementation City divisions act, but major delivery depends on land and senior-government funding.	Monitoring Targets, dashboards, and progress reports track actions and delivery.	Feedback Reporting and proposed independent review exist, but correction is not automatic.
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T1. Rights-based housing strategy and municipal implementation pathway.

The National Housing Strategy Act (NHSA) is explicit at Invocation. Its preamble states that a national housing strategy "would contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations" and connects housing to human dignity, sustainable and inclusive communities, and the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing (National Housing Strategy Act, 2019). At the municipal level, however, HousingTO and the Toronto Housing Charter carry this commitment mainly through the language of rights, dignity, affordability, security, and inclusion (City of Toronto, 2019, 2020). The pathway becomes more developed through municipal strategies, assigned responsibilities, targets, programs, and public reporting.

Yet feedback is less defined, and the documents do not clearly establish which municipal changes can be attributed specifically to SDG 11 rather than to existing housing-rights or planning priorities. T1 is therefore classified as indirect visibility with relatively high translation depth: implicit but embedded. Its main break lies in attribution and corrective feedback, not in the absence of policy instruments.

4.2 PH1 - National SDG Localization and Local Shelter Planning

PH1 traces explicit national SDG commitments through development planning and toward local shelter planning, including the linked roles of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD), and local government units (LGUs).

Invocation NEDA explicitly frames housing, inclusive urbanization, resilience, and SDG 11.	Interpretation National plans connect SDGs to livable communities, housing, and development results.	Authorization NEDA, DILG, DHSUD, regional bodies, provinces, and LGUs receive linked roles.	Instrumentation Results matrices, development plans, shelter plans, indicators, and local programs.	Implementation LGUs must connect plans to land, budgets, staffing, and projects.	Monitoring National and local indicators and progress reporting are expected.	Feedback The core corpus does not show a consistent corrective process across LGUs.
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PH1. National SDG localization to local shelter planning pathway.

National frameworks connect the SDGs to housing, resilience, inclusive urbanization, and local development, while NEDA, DILG, DHSUD, regional institutions, and LGUs are given linked planning roles. Results matrices, development plans, and shelter-planning tools give the pathway a clear structure for localization (NEDA, 2022). The break appears as planning moves toward implementation. LGUs may be assigned responsibility without equal access to land, funding, staffing, or administrative capacity, and the selected documents provide less consistent evidence of what follows when local delivery falls short. PH1 is therefore classified as high visibility with lower-to-moderate translation depth. The SDG relationship is easy to see, but the continuity from planning to resourced local delivery is harder to establish.

4.3 T2 - Inclusionary Zoning and Affordable Development

T2 examines how Toronto turns a broad affordability commitment into a binding planning requirement.

Invocation Affordability, inclusion, and complete-community goals; SDG language is indirect.	Interpretation Part of the housing problem is defined as insufficient affordable housing in growth areas.	Authorization Provincial law enables and limits municipal inclusionary-zoning power.	Instrumentation Toronto requires affordable units in specified development contexts.	Implementation City Planning applies the policy through development approvals and private projects.	Monitoring Affordable units and compliance can be tracked through approvals.	Feedback Municipal adjustment remains tied to provincial rules and development conditions.
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T2. Inclusionary zoning and affordable development pathway.

SDG visibility is low: the relevant documents speak mainly about affordability, housing choice, and complete communities. The commitment becomes concrete at Authorization, where provincial law permits inclusionary zoning while also defining the conditions under which Toronto can use it (Ontario Regulation 232/18, 2018). The City then applies affordable-housing requirements through eligible development approvals. T2 is classified as low visibility with higher translation depth, or implicit but embedded. Its main break is jurisdictional. Toronto has a meaningful policy instrument, but it does not control the provincial framework that determines its reach, and the wider housing market extends beyond the City's boundary. The pathway therefore reaches deeply into municipal policy without giving the City authority over the full geography of the problem.

4.4 PH2 - Socialized Housing and 4PH Delivery

PH2 traces national commitments to socialized and affordable housing into the Pambansang Pabahay para sa Pilipino (4PH) delivery system.

Invocation	Interpretation	Authorization	Instrumentation	Implementation	Monitoring	Feedback
Explicit SDG and development-plan commitments frame housing as a national priority.	The housing problem is translated into backlog reduction and project delivery.	RA 7279 and RA 11201 assign duties to DHSUD, housing agencies, LGUs, and other actors.	4PH uses project approval, financing, development partnerships, and program rules.	Delivery depends on land, finance, LGUs, developers, housing agencies, and lenders.	Program outputs and administrative compliance are reportable.	The corpus does not show one actor responsible for correcting the complete outcome.

PH2. Socialized housing and 4PH delivery pathway.

Republic Act No. 7279 establishes responsibilities for socialized housing, land, and resettlement; Republic Act No. 11201 gives the DHSUD policy, coordination, and monitoring functions; and the 4PH Operations Manual translates these commitments into project rules, financing, approval processes, and development partnerships (Republic Act No. 7279, 1992; Republic Act No. 11201, 2019; Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development, 2023). The pathway becomes less clear at implementation. Land, finance, infrastructure, project approval, and delivery depend on several public and private actors, none of which controls the whole process. PH2 is therefore classified as explicit upstream with moderate but interrupted translation depth. Its main break is divided responsibility. The documents identify actors responsible for individual parts of delivery, but they do not identify a single institution accountable for ensuring that land, finance, infrastructure, approval, and construction come together into an adequate housing outcome when one component fails.

4.5 T3 - Rental Replacement and Tenant Protection

T3 examines Toronto's effort to preserve rental housing and protect tenants during demolition or conversion.

Invocation	Interpretation	Authorization	Instrumentation	Implementation	Monitoring	Feedback
Housing rights, affordability, security, and anti-displacement principles are indirect SDG signals.	Loss of existing rental housing is treated as a preservation and displacement problem.	Municipal planning authority and Chapter 667 regulate demolition and conversion.	Replacement requirements, tenant assistance, conditions, permits, and consultation.	City Planning applies requirements during development review.	Replacement units and compliance are visible in the approval process.	Appeal and consultation exist; long-term lived outcomes are less clearly measured.

T3. Rental replacement and tenant-protection pathway.

Direct SDG language is largely absent, but affordability, housing security, and displacement are translated into municipal planning rules. The City can require replacement rental housing, tenant assistance, and conditions on redevelopment, which are then applied through the development-review process. T3 is classified as low visibility with higher translation depth: implicit but embedded. The pathway weakens later, at Monitoring and Feedback. The documentary record can show whether units were replaced and conditions were imposed, but it gives less evidence about long-term affordability, disruption to work or community ties, or the security of affected tenants over time. The distinction is between satisfying an administrative requirement and knowing what happened to the person affected by it.

4.6 PH3 - Flood Risk, Resettlement, and Livelihood Protection

PH3 examines housing in relation to flood risk, informal settlement, infrastructure, resettlement, and livelihood, including the role of the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA).

Invocation	Interpretation	Authorization	Instrumentation	Implementation	Monitoring	Feedback
SDG 11 links housing, inclusive settlements, and resilience; national framing is explicit.	Flood exposure and settlement near waterways are treated as infrastructure and housing problems.	National departments, MMDA, LGUs, housing agencies, and project institutions share authority.	Flood works, solid-waste measures, safeguards, participatory housing, and resettlement.	Delivery requires infrastructure, land, finance, relocation, services, and inter-agency coordination.	Project indicators include infrastructure, households, consultation, satisfaction, and grievances.	Project safeguards exist, but responsibility remains divided across the wider governance system.

PH3. Flood-risk, resettlement, and livelihood-protection pathway.

SDG visibility is relatively high and moving upstream, where adequate housing, sustainable urban development, and resilience are connected. As the pathway moves toward Authorization and Implementation, responsibility is divided across national departments, the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), LGUs, housing agencies, and project institutions. No single institution controls the full problem. PH3 is therefore classified as relatively high visibility with substantial but interrupted translation. Its main break is one of jurisdictional fit: flood risk, housing, land use, infrastructure, and resettlement operate across

municipal and institutional boundaries, while authority over these areas remains divided among different levels of government and agencies. This fragmentation creates a coordination problem, as no single institution has sufficient authority to address the housing and flood-risk problem as a whole (Cabanilla, 2014). The pathway also shows why relocation alone cannot establish adequate housing. The World Bank framework includes indicators on consultation, satisfaction, and grievances, but questions of livelihood, services, community ties, and longer-term security remain central to whether relocation produces an adequate outcome (World Bank, 2017).

5. Comparative Discussion

The pathways point to three broader findings. First, SDG visibility is not the same as localization. Second, localization weakens when authority and responsibility do not fit the scale of the housing problem. Third, the meaning of adequate housing can narrow when broad commitments are translated into administrative outputs. These findings shift attention from whether the SDGs are present in policy to what institutions do with them.

5.1 Finding One: SDG Language ≠ Meaningful Localization

The first finding is that visibility and localization are separate. Philippine national documents generally make the SDGs and localization more explicit. Toronto's municipal pathways more often use the language of rights, dignity, affordability, complete communities, security, and tenant protection. However, across both cases, greater visibility does not necessarily mean that SDG commitments increase the depth of translation into policy.

This supports research showing that the SDGs can organize planning, reporting, and coordination (Ortiz-Moya & Reggiani, 2023, 2025), but it also sets a limit on what alignment can prove. T2 and T3 use little direct SDG language while translating affordability and housing security into binding municipal instruments. PH1 and PH2 begin with clearer SDG attribution but become less continuous as responsibility moves toward local planning, finance, and delivery. The result is a visibility–translation gap: SDG language can be highly visible without becoming deeply embedded in policy, while SDG-related commitments can become embedded even after explicit references to the goals disappear. Explicit language still matters because it makes commitments easier to identify, connect across levels of government, and track over time. However, mentioning the SDGs shows that a commitment has been recognized. It does not, on its own, show that meaningful localization has taken place. A stronger measure of whether meaningful localization has occurred would be the existence of real changes resulting from the

commitment. For example, institutional change, substantive funding, impactful policy instruments, recognition of the duty to serve the interests of local populations, and pivoting from failed efforts. The distinction matters because it prevents SDG alignment from being treated as an outcome in itself.

5.2 Finding Two: The Problem of Jurisdictional Fit

The second finding is that localization weakens when the authority to act does not match the scale of the problem. Fragmentation tells us that many actors are involved. Jurisdictional fit asks whether those actors have the territory, legal power, resources, and responsibility needed to govern the problem they have been assigned. Smith's (2022) study of homelessness governance in Canadian cities shows why this distinction matters. Multilevel policy involves governments and local actors whose institutional relationships shape the forms of coordination that are possible. Toronto shows this through the limits of municipal authority. T2 reaches a binding planning instrument, yet provincial law determines its scope, while housing markets, commuting, development pressure, and displacement extend beyond the City's boundary. Metro Manila presents the problem differently. PH2 and PH3 divide necessary parts of delivery across national departments, metropolitan bodies, LGUs, housing agencies, infrastructure institutions, developers, and financing bodies. NEDA's localization framework can strengthen vertical linkages between national and local planning (NEDA, 2022), but alignment does not by itself create one institution answerable for the complete outcome.

This extends the policy-integration problem identified by Ortiz-Moya and Reggiani (2023). Coordination across sectors matters, but the governance map must also fit the geography of the problem. Flood systems cross LGU boundaries, housing markets cross municipal borders, and resettlement can move a household away from work, schools, and services in another jurisdiction. Institutional boundaries do not necessarily correspond to the way these problems are experienced. The central issue is therefore not whether responsibility is shared, since complex housing problems will often require shared responsibility. The problem arises when responsibility is divided without a clear account of who remains answerable for the outcome. In that situation, each institution may complete its assigned task while the larger commitment remains unrealized. Localization can weaken as no institution is responsible for ensuring that the separate actions produce the intended result.

5.3 Finding Three: Where People Become Less Visible

The third finding concerns what happens to the meaning of adequate housing when it enters administrative systems. SDG 11 begins with broad ideas of adequacy, affordability, safety, inclusion, resilience, and dignity. Governments must translate these ideas into rules, targets, and such indicators. Some reduction is unavoidable. Administration relies on quantifiable goals, so that they can track if outcomes are being met, but they have to remember that numbers are not most important.

The problem is what is typically measured is not always what the commitment is intended to achieve. T3 can record replacement units and development conditions without fully showing whether an affected tenant remains secure and able to afford housing over time. PH3 can record relocation while leaving harder questions about livelihood, access to services, community ties, and longer-term security. This means a measurable output can be marked as complete while the experienced lived outcome remains uncertain.

Janzen et al. (2023) help clarify the missing step. Community-based evaluation is not simply consultation after the indicators or measures of success have already been chosen. It asks who defines success, whose knowledge enters the evaluation, and whether evidence can change what happens next. Malenfant et al. (2024) make a related argument in Canadian housing-rights research, emphasizing meaningful participation by people with lived experience of housing need rather than treating lived knowledge as an add-on to research and policy. The evidence in this study does not support a claim that people are absent from either case. Toronto includes rights, dignity, consultation, and accountability provisions, while Philippine resettlement and flood-management frameworks include participation, livelihood, grievance, and social-protection measures. The narrower finding is that people become less visible when monitoring moves toward administrative outputs without a clear route back to lived experience. This is why Feedback matters. Monitoring can show that a target was missed. Accountability begins when the system identifies who must respond and what can change. A dashboard, consultation, or grievance process has limited corrective value if the evidence it produces has no clear institutional consequence. The last stage of localization is not measurement alone, but the capacity to learn from failure.

5.4 What the Toronto-Metro Manila Comparison Reveals

Learning can move in both directions. Toronto shows how SDG-related principles can become embedded through rights, planning, and tenant-protection instruments even when SDG visibility is weak. Metro Manila highlights the connection between housing, national-to-local planning, infrastructure, flood risk, land, and livelihood. Each case exposes a limit in the way the other organizes the housing problem.

Toronto's pathways show the value of identifiable municipal duties and enforceable policy instruments. Metro Manila traced through Philippine national-to-local pathways shows why housing adequacy must remain connected to resilience, livelihood, and coordination across all levels of government. Neither system provides a model for the other to copy. The comparison moves the question beyond which system performs better and toward a different question: what must remain intact when a global commitment is translated through institutions that differ in power, territory, and capacity?

6. Conclusion

The question that follows from this research is larger than whether the Sustainable Development Goals can be localized. It is what institutions should require for SDGs to be claimed localized. If a global commitment can remain visible while losing force, or become embedded while its original language disappears, then the presence of the SDGs cannot be the final measure of their influence. What matters is what the commitment asks institutions to do differently, who becomes responsible for doing it, and whether that responsibility remains clear when policy moves from principle to practice. This matters beyond SDG 11. Global goals are necessarily broad. They must be broad enough to apply across countries, governments, and political systems that differ substantially from one another.

This same problem extends beyond SDG 11. Global goals must be broad enough to travel across countries and political systems. The closer a commitment moves toward implementation, the more it depends on institutions that were not designed around the global framework. Authority is divided, resources are unequal, political boundaries rarely match the geography of social problems, and administrative systems tend to measure what can be counted. The challenge of localization is therefore not simply to bring a global goal closer to the local level. It is to preserve the purpose of the commitment while institutions divide, specify, and administer it.

Housing makes the stakes of that problem concrete. Adequate housing cannot be reduced to the existence of a unit, just as implementation cannot be reduced to the completion of a program. Adequate housing concerns security, affordability, location, livelihood, community, and the ability to remain connected to the institutions and relationships that structure everyday life. When these dimensions fall outside monitoring, the policy may still produce an output at the cost of losing part of the promise that gave the output meaning. Future approaches to SDG localization should ask not only whether governments meet targets, but whether their measures remain capable of recognizing the people for whom those targets were created.

6.1 Comparison and Positionality

The comparison between Toronto and Metro Manila also extends to a broader way of thinking about comparative policy research. Following Wong (2014), cases do not become useful only when they can be made alike; institutional difference can itself produce knowledge. Toronto and Metro Manila organize authority, housing, infrastructure, and local governance differently, and for that reason each makes a different part of the problem visible. A Global South case should not enter comparison as an incomplete version of a Global North case, and a Global North city should not be treated as the institutional model toward which other cities should move (Wong, 2014). The more useful comparison asks what one context allows us to question about the other. The Metro Manila case raises questions about resilience, livelihood, informal settlement, metropolitan coordination, and national-to-local planning that can expand how housing adequacy is understood in Toronto. Toronto, in turn, raises questions about enforceable municipal instruments, rights, tenant protection, and identifiable policy duties that can be brought back to the Philippine context. Learning moves in both directions.

My own position as a Filipino student researcher has shaped how I understand the value of that comparison. Having a connection to both Manila and Toronto made it difficult to treat either place simply as a case on one side of a comparative table. It also made questions of housing security, migration, livelihood, and the distance between policy and everyday life harder to treat as secondary. It raised a pivotal question: what becomes possible when two places that are usually studied through different academic and political categories are placed in conversation with one another?

Positionality shapes the questions I ask and the perspective I bring to the research, but it does not replace evidence or determine how that evidence should be interpreted. Reflexivity is

instead a methodological responsibility. Berger (2015) argues that a researcher's social position and personal experience can shape what becomes visible in qualitative research. Having an explicit reflection on one's social position is part of research quality and trustworthiness. In this study, my connection to both Manila and Toronto informed the questions I noticed and the comparisons I found worth pursuing, but classifications remained tied to documentary evidence, coding rules, and recorded research decisions. For future comparative work, reflexivity should be part of the methodology rather than treated as an obs

6.2 Future Research

The next stage of this research should move beyond the documentary record. Interviews with residents, housing advocates, policymakers, community organizations, developers, and implementing institutions could test whether the pathways visible in policy documents correspond to how responsibility and implementation are experienced in practice. The Translation Chain could also be connected to budgets, project locations, affordability periods, displacement patterns, grievance outcomes, and changes in housing conditions over time. Comparative work across additional Canadian and Philippine cities would help distinguish what belongs to Toronto and Metro Manila from what may reflect wider structures of housing governance.

The framework itself can also be tested elsewhere. Climate adaptation, transportation, public space, informal settlements, and other policy areas raise the same basic problem: a broad commitment must pass through several institutions before it can alter everyday conditions. The Feedback stage deserves particular attention. When a target is missed, who is required to respond? What changes because of the evidence? Who has the power to demand correction? These questions push the argument beyond whether the SDGs 'work.' They ask what kind of institutional relationships are required for a global promise to retain its meaning once it becomes policy. A commitment should not become meaningful because it has been named, reported, or measured. Its meaning lies in whether it continues to shape responsibility and action as it moves through institutions, and whether the people, whose lives give that commitment its purpose, remain visible along the way.

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Appendix A. Core Document Corpus

The 16 core documents below form the primary evidentiary basis of the comparative analysis. Supporting academic and policy sources were used for context, but pathway classifications were based on this corpus.

ID	Document	Level / Type	Main Analytical Use
TOR-01	HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan	Municipal strategy	Priorities, responsibility, targets, implementation
TOR-02	HousingTO 2024-2025 Progress Report	Municipal report	Delivery, funding, monitoring, governance gaps
TOR-03	Toronto Housing Charter	Municipal charter	Rights, dignity, inclusion, public commitment
TOR-04	Toronto Official Plan, Chapter 3	Municipal plan	Housing, land use, complete communities, authority
TOR-05	Toronto Inclusionary Zoning Policy	Municipal planning policy	Affordability obligations in development
TOR-06	Ontario Regulation 232/18	Provincial regulation	Authorization and limits on municipal action
TOR-07	Rental Housing Demolition and Replacement Framework / Chapter 667	Municipal framework	Preservation, tenant protection, displacement
TOR-08	National Housing Strategy Act	Federal legislation	Explicit SDG and right-to-housing context
PH-01	NEDA Guidelines on the Localization of the PDP Results Matrices and the SDGs	National localization framework	Explicit SDG priorities, vertical alignment, indicators
PH-02	Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028	National development plan	Targets, planning, agency responsibility
PH-03	Philippine New Urban Agenda Implementation Report	National implementation report	Urban alignment, progress, implementation constraints
PH-04	Republic Act No. 7279	National legislation	Socialized housing, land, resettlement, LGU duties
PH-05	Republic Act No. 11201	National legislation	DHSUD mandate, coordination, monitoring
PH-06	4PH Operations Manual	Administrative manual	Financing, approval, actors, delivery
PH-07	National Resettlement Policy Framework	National framework	Displacement, livelihood, resettlement, monitoring
PH-08	Local Shelter Planning Manual (updated 2016)	Local planning manual	Translation of housing needs into LGU planning

Table A1. Core document corpus used in the comparative analysis.

Appendix B. Coding Rules and Analytical Definitions

Category	Coding rule
Explicit visibility	The document directly names the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda, or SDG 11.
Indirect visibility	The document uses substantively related language - such as dignity, adequate housing, inclusion, resilience, or complete communities - without clearly presenting the policy as SDG implementation.
Higher translation depth	The commitment reaches identifiable authority, policy instruments, implementation procedures, monitoring, and at least some public accountability.
Lower translation depth	The commitment remains mainly strategic or becomes difficult to trace through resources, local implementation, monitoring, or response.
Embedded	The commitment is attached to durable rules, mandates, procedures, budgets, or accountability structures.
Interrupted	The pathway contains operational elements, but the connection weakens at a specific stage. Interrupted does not mean absent.
Translation break	A stage at which the relationship between commitment and downstream action becomes weak, unclear, or no longer changes decisions.
Jurisdictional fit	The degree to which institutional authority, territory, and resources match the scale of the housing problem.

The coding was applied across the full pathway rather than determined by a single upstream document. Visibility and translation depth were therefore assessed separately.

Appendix C. Pathway Classification and Decision Summary

The table summarizes the final pathway classifications and the main reasoning behind them.

These entries are retrospective unless a dated research note establishes otherwise; the summary does not present reconstructed decisions as contemporaneous.

Pathway	Visibility	Translation depth	Main break	Decision basis
T1	Indirect at municipal level	Higher / embedded	Attribution; feedback	Federal SDG language is explicit, but municipal documents carry the commitment mainly through rights and housing language. Instruments and monitoring are developed, while SDG causation and corrective duties are harder to trace.
T2	Indirect / absent	Higher but constrained	Authorization; territorial reach	Affordability is translated into a binding municipal planning tool, but provincial law defines its scope and the housing problem extends beyond the municipal boundary.
T3	Indirect	Higher / embedded	Long-term lived outcomes	Replacement and tenant-protection duties are enforceable, but the documentary record is thinner on long-term affordability, displacement, and tenant security.
PH1	Explicit upstream	Lower to moderate	Implementation; feedback	Localization architecture is explicit and linked to planning, but the corpus does not establish equal local access to land, finance, capacity, or corrective processes.
PH2	Explicit upstream; indirect operationally	Moderate / interrupted	Divided delivery responsibility	Legislation, program rules, and finance are present, but land, finance, infrastructure, and delivery depend on multiple actors without one clearly responsible for the complete outcome.
PH3	Explicit upstream	Substantial / interrupted	Jurisdictional fit; human outcomes	Housing, flood risk, infrastructure, and resettlement cross institutional and LGU boundaries; monitoring is broader than unit counts but responsibility remains divided.

Table C1. Final pathway classifications and decision basis.

Appendix D. Stage-by-Stage Pathway Maps

These maps preserve the stage-level coding used to produce the pathway classifications in Section 4.

T1 - Rights-Based Housing Strategy and Municipal Implementation

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	The National Housing Strategy Act explicitly connects housing, dignity, sustainable communities, the UN SDGs, and the right to adequate housing.
Interpretation	Toronto carries the commitment through housing rights, affordability, inclusion, security, and dignity.
Authorization	City Council and municipal housing institutions receive strategy and delivery roles.
Instrumentation	HousingTO, the Housing Charter, implementation plans, programs, and the Data Hub.
Implementation	City divisions act, but major delivery depends on land and senior-government funding.
Monitoring	Targets, dashboards, and progress reports track actions and delivery.
Feedback	Reporting and review exist, but missed targets do not automatically create a defined corrective duty.

PH1 - National SDG Localization and Local Shelter Planning

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	National localization guidance explicitly connects the SDGs to housing, inclusive urbanization, resilience, and local development.
Interpretation	National plans connect the goals to livable communities, housing, and development results.
Authorization	NEDA, DILG, DHSUD, regional bodies, provinces, and LGUs have linked roles.
Instrumentation	Results matrices, development plans, shelter-planning tools, indicators, and local programs.
Implementation	LGUs must connect plans to land, budgets, staffing, and projects.
Monitoring	National and local indicators and progress reporting are expected.
Feedback	The core corpus does not show a consistent corrective process across LGUs.

T2 - Inclusionary Zoning and Affordable Development

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	Affordability, inclusion, and complete-community goals; SDG language is indirect.
Interpretation	Part of the housing problem is defined as insufficient affordable housing in growth areas.
Authorization	Provincial law enables and limits municipal inclusionary-zoning power.
Instrumentation	Toronto requires affordable units in specified development contexts.
Implementation	City Planning applies the policy through development approvals and private projects.
Monitoring	Affordable units and compliance can be tracked through approvals.
Feedback	Municipal adjustment remains tied to provincial rules and development conditions.

PH2 - Socialized Housing and 4PH Delivery

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	Explicit SDG and development-plan commitments frame housing as a national priority.

Stage	Pathway coding
Interpretation	The housing problem is translated into socialized housing need, affordability, and project delivery.
Authorization	RA 7279 and RA 11201 assign duties to DHSUD, housing agencies, LGUs, and other actors.
Instrumentation	4PH uses project approval, financing, development partnerships, and program rules.
Implementation	Delivery depends on land, finance, LGUs, developers, housing agencies, and lenders.
Monitoring	Program outputs and administrative compliance are reportable.
Feedback	The corpus does not show one actor responsible for correcting the complete housing outcome.

T3 - Rental Replacement and Tenant Protection

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	Housing rights, affordability, security, and anti-displacement principles act as indirect SDG signals.
Interpretation	Loss of rental housing is treated as a preservation and displacement problem.
Authorization	Municipal planning authority and Chapter 667 regulate demolition and conversion.
Instrumentation	Replacement requirements, tenant assistance, conditions, permits, and consultation.
Implementation	City Planning applies requirements during development review.
Monitoring	Replacement units and compliance are visible in the approval process.
Feedback	Appeal and consultation exist; long-term lived outcomes are less clearly measured.

PH3 - Flood Risk, Resettlement, and Livelihood Protection

Stage	Pathway coding
Invocation	SDG 11 links housing, inclusive settlements, and resilience; national framing is explicit.
Interpretation	Flood exposure and settlement near waterways are treated as both infrastructure and housing problems.
Authorization	National departments, MMDA, LGUs, housing agencies, and project institutions share authority.
Instrumentation	Flood works, solid-waste measures, safeguards, participatory housing, and resettlement.
Implementation	Delivery requires infrastructure, land, finance, relocation, services, and inter-agency coordination.
Monitoring	Project indicators include infrastructure, households, consultation, satisfaction, and grievances.
Feedback	Project safeguards exist, but responsibility remains divided across the wider governance system.