



RCE GREATER ATLANTA

# Using Community- Based Evaluation to Assess Local Progress on the UN SDGs

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# Executive Summary

As community-based approaches to social change and sustainability are given more credit and acknowledged as creating effective change, our measurements of change need to become more community-based. CBE is an alternative to methods of evaluation that are often inaccessible to community-based organizations (CBOs) or that don't produce useful results. CBE is stakeholder-driven, participatory, and action-oriented.<sup>1</sup> This report sees the value of and focus

**3 PRINCIPLES OF CBE**  
**stakeholder-driven**  
**participatory**  
**action-oriented**

**SMALL DATA**  
**data that is comprehensible,**  
**accessible, and people-focused**

on small data and qualitative data as crucial to CBE. Valuing small and qualitative data allows for a shift away from inaccessible methods of evaluation. This document serves as both an argument for CBE, small data, and qualitative measurements, as well as a recommendation to RCE members for how to go about CBE and connect local work to large-scale frameworks, in this case the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To better understand CBE, and to try to make it even more beneficial for CBOs, it is helpful to incorporate Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), a community-driven sustainable development strategy. To further connect evaluation and reporting to a bottom-up approach and recognize community assets and knowledge, we can look to the ABCD framework. Partnerships are a valuable strategy in ABCD, and evaluation can be used not only to find funding from larger institutions, but also to form valuable partnerships with existing organizations and associations within communities.<sup>2</sup>

**ABCD**  
**Asset-Based Community Development;**  
**communities drive the process by**  
**identifying, connecting, and mobilizing**  
**existing (often unrecognized) assets**

Contrasting this, the current SDG Indicators are one of the easiest places to find measurements of sustainability progress, but being top-down they can miss local context and priorities. They often rely on big data and data collection methods. This report provides examples of top-down sustainability indicators localized to be more relevant, including examples for the RCE and some of its partners.

# How This Report Can Serve You

- This report can serve as an introduction to community-based evaluation (CBE) for RCE members and community-based organizations (CBOs), and as a general argument for the value of CBE and qualitative data in funding proposals and internal assessments. RCE members can use this report to have or pass along examples of localized SDG indicators or any framework often used to access funding, figure out what types of data might be best for different CBOs, and encourage CBE.
- The RCE network focuses on locally implementing and promoting the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and RCE members or partner organizations working to advance these goals may be seeking better ways to measure local progress.
- This report can serve as a source for CBOs of potential and actual examples of what it looks like to enact global frameworks, like the SDGs, on the local level, since local indicators are sometimes hard to identify.
- This report can help to facilitate partnerships, if CBOs are not sure where to start to assess their existing assets and areas needing support.
- This report can be used as a supplement to the [RCE DDG CBO Partnership Overview](#), which helps to identify support and partnerships for CBOs. The overview contains simple sets of questions for CBOs to answer, and a table to fill out of potential connections to the UN SDGs and the [Drawdown Georgia](#) (DDG) high-impact solutions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

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# INTRODUCTION

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**What is Community-  
Based Evaluation?**

**Introduction,  
Principles, and Goals**

# What is Community-Based Evaluation?

The purpose of evaluation and reporting is to assess impact, identify opportunities for improvement, and garner support, including partnerships and funding from federal and institutional sources. Having methods of evaluation can support the work of CBOs by helping them internally assess successes and areas needing support in the organization, and helping them ask for resources from external sources.

Missing from some forms of evaluation for the latter, though, is a sense of trust between parties, and there is generally an adherence to methods that limit CBOs. As community partners in the audience mentioned at the 2023 Southeast Environmental Justice Summit, reporting and grant applications have been barriers to them in procuring important resources. They expressed that applications were usually unnecessarily long, or asked for impact reports they didn't have the capacity to complete. When the evaluation required for access to resources felt too demanding, they felt as though sources of funding and resources were not trusting of the CBOs. To access funding aligned with the global framework of the SDGs, some CBOs may even have to alter or shift their programs.<sup>3</sup> With these faults of traditional evaluation in mind, many groups have begun processes of community-based evaluation (CBE) to build a better method of internal and external reporting.

As community-based approaches to social change and sustainability are given more credit and acknowledged as creating *effective* change, our measurements of change need to become more community-based, including small data and qualitative data.<sup>4</sup> Change will be effective when it can be sustained in a community, and for that to happen, proximity to those most affected is necessary and community members must be engaged throughout the process. Support for small data – data that is comprehensible, accessible, and people-focused – and qualitative data comes from the inaccessibility of some current sustainability indicators.<sup>5</sup>

# The Three Principles of Community-Based Evaluation

## stakeholder-driven

participation and decision-making from those in the community most affected by the issues that the CBO aims to address

## participatory

involvement of those most affected in all steps of the process, including evaluation design, implementation, and dissemination

## action-oriented

producing results that lead to actions and improvements to programs, ensuring that impact measurement finds ways to improve and build upon programs

Community-based evaluation is meant to be **stakeholder-driven, participatory, and action-oriented** in order to be most effective.<sup>6</sup> The key point of these principles is to go beyond in including community voices and to create work that “isn’t just sitting on a shelf.”<sup>7</sup> This framework prioritizes community knowledge and expertise, an idea also present in the ABCD framework.

# INCORPORATING ABCD

How can evaluation be more asset-based?

What does the ABCD framework add to the conversation?

# Making Evaluation (more) Asset-Based

One of the main methods of collecting data in research related to people and communities is surveys, but surveys have a large variety of limitations and can sometimes give flawed data and not allow for discovery of unexpected information. Additionally, community members hold a wealth of knowledge not shown on research surveys. ABCD not only focuses on already existing assets in a community, but also treats community members as experts in their own right. ABCD is a strategy for sustainable development to be community-driven. It states that “communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing, but often unrecognized assets, and thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity.”<sup>8</sup> This is a more bottom-up approach, but many existing SDG indicators, “supported by national-level data, [reflect] the top-down internationally applied definition of sustainability.”<sup>9</sup>

For example, under SDG 4: Quality Education, target 4.5 is “by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations,” and indicator 4.5.1 is “parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated.” The language of this indicator is possibly inaccessible and too technical. Additionally, even though citywide data may be available for these measurements in Atlanta, a CBO may not have time to set up this type of data analysis. They may know, instead, whether children in vulnerable situations or disabled people in the community are able to access education, in the form of transportation access to public schools or affordability of vocational school. These questions easily relate to target 4.5, but indicator 4.5.1 is written from the perspective of an institution with the ability to collect this data at a large level and perform complex data analysis. Here, sustainability indicators were created top-down, and a CBO may not be able to refer to them, instead needing to create their own measurements of local progress on the SDGs.

Looking at the ABCD framework may open up the RCE to making slight improvements to community-based evaluation. CBE could involve more storytelling, as is often done in seminars on ABCD. It may be worth it not to just transfer interviews from community members in a research study, or stories of success for a CBO into data in studies or impact assessment forms, but to keep those stories more intact. In the [RCE DDG CBO Partnership Overview](#), the reporting section includes space for storytelling, if there are any stories the organization is particularly proud of, such as an individual sharing the impact the organization had on their life. While not as large-scale proof of progress on the SDGs, these stories can keep some of the emotion and character of the organization's work, and the story may inspire or grab someone enough to create partnerships or give support.

While they don't show large-scale progress on the SDGs, stories can keep some of the emotion and character of the organization's work



It is a much smaller, and much more qualitative way of showing impact, but something personal can be powerful, and easier for a CBO to share on short notice than an impact report with data on dollars raised, hours put in by volunteers, etc. Another way to include the ABCD framework in community-based evaluation is to use evaluation to not just find funding from larger institutions, but to find other existing organizations and form partnerships. In this way, internal evaluation can help an organization find what support it may need from partners and what it can give in return. This may be the main use for CBE for organizations in the RCE, which will not only support CBOs and advance local SDG work, but also strengthen the RCE network.

# LOCALIZING SDGS

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**Localizing the UN  
SDG Indicators**

**Examples of  
Localized Indicators  
across the RCE**

# Localizing the SDG Indicators

Although the SDGs are comprehensive and very purposeful, some of the indicators for the SDGs can miss local efforts and may not serve a purpose for short-term evaluation. They also might not address local priorities, where an organization focused on outcomes in their community is not focusing on the national statistics or priorities found in the SDG indicators. As important as the global level is, “internationally generated indicators may result in trade-offs and measurement challenges at other levels.”<sup>10</sup> It may be difficult for organizations that are doing the groundwork in sustainability to relate to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, if indicators are national-level statistics. Putting inaccessible global indicators next to potential local indicators in hypothetical situations shows the contrast between the two.

SDG	Target	Global Indicator	Potential Local Indicator
10: Reduced Inequalities	10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality	10.4.1: Labor share of GDP	A relevant indicator for a local organization fighting for raised minimum wage could be the response from local government to petitions or proposed bills on raising minimum wage.
17: Partnerships for the Goals	17.1: Strengthen domestic resource mobilization	17.1.1: Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source	A localized indicator might be a success story of a neighborhood asset found and mobilized.

# Localizing the SDG Indicators

Target 10.4 refers to the adoption of fiscal, wage, and social protection policies, and while the labor share of GDP may eventually show progress on this target, this indicator will not be relevant at the local level. If some of the SDG indicators, like 10.4.1 and 17.1.1, are not relevant outside of a national level, or a long-term timeframe, then there need to be better ways for CBOs to measure their progress on the SDGs. The community-based approach to evaluation is also particularly important because it puts power into the hands of and amplifies the voices of those who are most affected by the social and environmental issues connected to the SDGs.<sup>11</sup>

For CBOs to also be able to best align their work with the SDG framework and the SDG/DDG joint framework put together by RCE member Allison Bridges, the program manager for the DDG Business Compact at GT, the SDG indicators must be easily localized for CBOs. Comparing the SDG indicators to the reporting section of the [RCE DDG CBO Partnership Overview](#), the SDG indicators are typically on national scales, and require intensive data collection and analysis.<sup>12</sup> Questions from the reporting section of the Partnership Overview, designed to be completed by a CBO, are on the scale of the organization and focus on the success of their programs and projects, allowing them to include their own measurements and stories of success. Although the Partnership Overview asks them to relate their work to the SDGs, they are not asked to provide full impact reports if they do not have them, and the questions are more accessible and efficient to answer.

RCEs can provide a local, rather than international-focused, version of the SDGs to their region. As networks that work with local organizations and problems, they may understand best how SDGs can be implemented and measured in their region.

# Examples of Localized Indicators Across the RCE

SDG	Target	Global Indicator	Localized Indicator
4: Quality Education	4.7: Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.	4.7.1: Extent to which global citizenship education and ESD are mainstreamed.	A localized indicator for the RCE's goals could be testimonials from its ESD programs. Another indicator could be the number of ESD courses offered at universities in Atlanta over time.
8: Decent Work & Economic Growth	8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation.	Proportion of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex.	The <u>Praise House Project</u> challenges institutions like Emory University to increase the diversity of their vendors. Increases in local vendors in Emory's plans indicates progress on SDG 8.
10: Reduced Inequalities	10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status.	10.2.1: Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.	A previous intern working for the <u>Center for Sustainable Communities</u> stated that a localized indicator for target 10.2 would be the prevalence of media and programs that use non-gendered language wherever possible, to include people outside of traditional gender identities.

# Examples of Localized Indicators Across the RCE

SDG	Target	Global Indicator	Localized Indicator
12: Responsible Consumption & Production	12.2: By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.	12.2.2: Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP.	For <u>WunderGrubs</u> , an organization that sells sustainably produced food products, such as bug protein powder, a quantitative indicator would make sense. WunderGrubs' impact on SDG 12 can be measured through how many regional businesses choose to swap out unsustainable products for theirs, and how many orders they fill.
17: Partnerships for the Goals	17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources.	17.16.1: Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness	An indicator specific to the RCE would be the number of partnerships formed through the RCE DDG CBO Partnership Overview, or perhaps a list of the stakeholders active in the RCE Greater Atlanta network by sector.

**LEARN MORE**

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**What sources are best  
for learning more and  
sharing with others?**

# Learn More

If interested in learning more about CBE and SDG localization, check out the two following sources referenced in this report:

- “Community-Based Evaluation: An Overview.” Eval4localizingSDGs, Centre for Community Based Research, [www.eval4localizingsdgs.ca/overview](http://www.eval4localizingsdgs.ca/overview).
  - This overview of CBE will be helpful especially to RCE members new to the concept. The overview includes slides on the principles of community-based evaluation, so you don’t have to dig at all for definitions and explanations of concepts. If you are looking for a broad introduction, this is the resource to share. The Centre for Community Based Research also uses this framework to talk about research in communities, not just CBO reporting, which is especially helpful in a network involving so many higher education institutions that do research.
- Switzer, Sarah, et al. SDG Localization Community of Practice. Zoom Presentation, 26 Apr. 2022, [linked here](#). (Passcode to the recording: GE@V6xU4)
  - This presentation gives an overview of the challenges in collecting evidence of the advancement of the SDGs, as well as stories of localizing the SDGs.
  - (15:45 - 23:38) Luis Patricio provides results from his study on a local project in London, finding that almost half of the SDG indicators were not applicable in their local context.
  - (36:45 - 42:42) During the Q&A portion, panelists discuss how to build capacity for evaluation, and how to start when you have no data.

