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Integrating SDG Localization into Sustainable Urban Development: Lessons from Al- Nuzha, **Irbid**, Jordan

Policy Paper – 2026



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Published by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).
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United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) P.O. Box 30030,
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www.unhabitat.org

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PREFACE

Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires more than translating global goals into national targets — it demands that sustainable development be rooted in the realities, needs, and capacities of local territories. Local and regional governments are indispensable actors in this process: they deliver essential services, address inequalities on the ground, and turn policy commitments into concrete actions. Yet this critical role is only fully effective when backed by strong evidence, meaningful knowledge exchange, and coherent governance across levels.

The Local2030 Knowledge and Scientific Network (KSN) was established within the UN Local2030 Coalition precisely to respond to this need. As a dynamic global platform, KSN connects young researchers, policymakers, community leaders, and practitioners around a shared mission: to harness science for sustainable development with local impact. It does so by aligning academic inquiry with the specific priorities of local development stakeholders, while amplifying research findings as inputs to SDG-related global processes.

Central to this approach is the understanding that research must not only be produced — it must be translated into policy and action. KSN promotes a more dynamic and responsive model of academia, one that co-creates scalable solutions rooted in scientific evidence and community priorities, and that empowers local actors with the skills, tools, and institutional support needed to engage in evidence-based decision-making and influence policy. Through its Country Pilots — sponsored by the Italian government and implemented by UN-Habitat and the Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI ETS) — and Innovation Labs, the network operationalizes this vision by connecting universities and students with local policymakers, enabling interdisciplinary collaboration and capacity-building in territories across Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Action-research is the methodological backbone of this work. Territories are engaged not as passive subjects of study, but as spaces for experimentation and learning, where sustained interaction between researchers, local governments, civil society, and communities drives learning, adaptation, and co-creation. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods — data analysis, spatial assessments, stakeholder engagement, and participatory approaches — this process generates a comprehensive and grounded understanding of local dynamics, inequalities, and development opportunities.

This policy paper is the result of that process. It reflects the outcome of collaboration between academic research, territorial analysis, and multi-stakeholder dialogue, in the spirit of the KSN's core objective: translating research into policy and action. Its aim is to offer context-sensitive analysis and practical policy recommendations that can inform SDG localization at the local level – bridging the gap between global agendas and the communities that will ultimately determine their success.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Al-Nuzha, a densely populated neighborhood in Irbid, Jordan, faces acute urban challenges including critical scarcity in energy efficiency and social inclusion, as well as significant gaps in green infrastructure, climate adaptation, and local governance capacity. These findings are based on a comprehensive sustainability assessment conducted using the Sustainable MED Cities (SMC) framework, which evaluated Al-Nuzha across ten thematic indicators and identified energy efficiency and social inclusivity as the most urgent intervention areas. This policy paper addresses the lack of structured, data-driven mechanisms for integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into neighborhood-level urban planning in Jordan. The objective is to propose a scalable policy framework for SDG localization using the Al-Nuzha neighborhood in Irbid as a pilot case.

In response to these findings, the paper proposes three interconnected priority action areas: first, strengthening governance and institutional capacity so that the municipality can sustain SDG-aligned planning; second, investing in green infrastructure and energy efficiency to address the neighborhood's most critical environmental deficits; and third, enhancing social inclusion and climate resilience to ensure that interventions reach vulnerable populations and are durable over time. These three priorities are strategically sequenced: governance provides the institutional foundation, green infrastructure and energy deliver the largest measurable environmental gains, and social inclusion and resilience ensure equity and long-term sustainability across all interventions.

Together, these priorities translated into a framework for an integrated Concept Note that links territorial planning instruments, specific policy measures, and identified partnership and funding pathways, framing Al-Nuzha not only as a case study but as an adaptable model for SDG localization in similar urban neighborhoods across Jordan and the Mediterranean.

Rawan Khattab
December 2025.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and background

Figure 1: Spatial location of Al-Nuzha neighborhood within Irbid City, Jordan (Source: Author, 2026)

Based on previous studies from the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (2016–2025), the Mediterranean region faces significant urbanization pressures, with roughly two-thirds of its population currently concentrated in cities. UN-Habitat projections indicate dramatic urban expansion by 2050, estimating approximately 170 million urban residents across northern Mediterranean countries and over 300 million in southern and eastern territories. This rapid urbanization presents urban challenges across the region: proliferation of informal settlements, infrastructure deficits, inadequate basic services including waste management and clean water provision, constrained mobility systems, and mounting public health risks.

Jordan serves as an example of these urbanization dynamics, with approximately 91% of its population residing in urban areas. Secondary cities like Irbid – a northern city that is home to one of the largest archaeological hills in the region – have the highest population density in the country. Irbid is the second-largest city in Jordan. Irbid is a strategic zone linking Jordan with Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. It is divided into nine sub-governorates, with the Irbid Qasabah, divided into 25 districts. It is also experiencing rapid population growth, increased housing demand particularly for affordable housing units, with intensified pressures on municipal services and infrastructure.

Neighborhood-scale approaches help uncover local vulnerabilities, service gaps, and participatory planning opportunities that are often overlooked at the city scale. Al-Nuzha, a densely populated and socio-economically diverse neighborhood in northern Irbid, exemplifies these dynamics. Considered part of Irbid City's recent urban expansion, Al-Nuzha is a relatively new neighborhood characterized by high residential density and rapid development. It accommodates a range of urban utilities, including schools and essential public services, which contribute to its functional importance within the city. Nevertheless, the neighborhood faces pressing challenges related to energy consumption, mobility constraints, limited access to quality public spaces, and climate resilience.

1.2 Participatory process and priority identification

Al-Nuzha priority emerged through a participatory process involving:

- Initial consultation with Greater Irbid Municipality (February 2025)
- Stakeholder mapping workshop with municipal focal points and community representatives (May 2025)
- Field assessment and community consultations with municipal staff (May–October 2025)
- Validation discussion presenting preliminary findings to authorities and global community leaders during the Inter-Regional Workshop (November 2025)

1.3 Policy framework and institutional context

Territorial planning instruments: Jordan's planning system provides entry points for SDG integration through Municipal Master Plans, Land Use Regulations (Urban Planning Law No. 79, 1966), Participatory Planning Initiatives (Municipalities Law No. 41, 2015), and Building Regulations with energy provisions (National Building Code 2013, updated 2019).

National policy alignment: Key frameworks include the National Urban Policy Framework (under development), Updated National Green Growth Plan 2021–2025 (20% renewable energy target), National Climate Change Policy and NDC 2021, Jordan 2025 Vision, and The Jordan National Strategy for Social Protection 2019–2025. Coordination occurs through the National SDG Committee and sector-specific working groups linking Greater Irbid Municipality with the Ministries of Local Administration, Environment, Energy, and Public Works and Housing.

Global partnerships: UN-Habitat Jordan, Local 2030 Global Platform, ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability, GIZ municipal programs, EU regional cooperation, and academic collaborations provide technical knowledge, capacity building, and funding avenues for strengthening municipal capabilities and replicating best practices.

1.4 Policy context and pilot framework for SDG localization in Jordan

Despite existing national strategies, SDGs are not effectively translated into actionable, localized planning tools, leading to fragmented implementation, weak monitoring, and limited impact. Using the Al-Nuzha neighborhood in Irbid as a pilot case, the paper proposes a scalable policy framework for SDG localization, informed by the Sustainable MED Cities (SMC) assessment, which identifies critical gaps in energy efficiency (SDG 7.3 – Indicator 7.3.1), social inclusion (SDG 3.4 – Indicator 3.4.1; SDG 11.3 – Indicator 11.3.1; SDG 16.6 – Indicator 16.6.2), green infrastructure (SDG 15.1 – Indicator 15.1.1), urban resilience (SDG 11.5 – Indicator 11.5.1), and climate adaptation (SDG 13.1 – Indicator 13.1.1). The framework aims to strengthen governance mechanisms, deliver measurable sustainability performance, enhance the well-being of residents, and provide a replicable model for other municipalities.

1.5 Problem statement

This policy paper addresses the absence of structured, data-driven mechanisms for integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into neighborhood-level urban planning in Jordan, where rapid urbanization currently encompassing 91% of the population places growing pressure on infrastructure, services, and environmental systems. Despite existing national strategies, SDGs are not effectively translated into actionable, localized planning tools, leading to fragmented implementation, weak monitoring, and limited impact. Using Al-Nuzha, Irbid as a pilot case, the paper proposes a scalable policy framework for SDG localization, informed by evidence from the Sustainable MED Cities (SMC) assessment, which highlights critical gaps in energy efficiency, social inclusion, and green infrastructure. The framework aims to enhance urban resilience, strengthen governance mechanisms, deliver measurable sustainability performance, and provide a transferable model for other municipalities across Jordan..

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodology developed and applied in Al-Nuzha comprises a comprehensive sustainability assessment, scenario development, multi-stakeholder implementation and transparent monitoring, offering a holistic framework that is adaptable to diverse contexts while maintaining coherence with global sustainable development goals.

2.1 Assessment framework

The Sustainable MED Cities (SMC) assessment tool was selected for its comprehensive, indicator-based evaluation across environmental, social and economic dimensions. Its structured methodology supports comparability, benchmarking and scalability across municipalities, making it well suitable for national-level replication. The tool was applied through an assessment of performance across ten thematic areas using quantitative indicators. Data inputs were drawn from multiple sources, including ed field observations, infrastructure mapping, municipal reports, GIS-based spatial data, energy consumption records, and government documents.

2.2 Participatory process

The assessment incorporated community consultation meetings, municipal staff workshops and a stakeholder validation workshop.

2.3 Scenario development

Five intervention scenarios were developed through literature review, results analysis, municipal technical staff workshops, alignment with national policies (Green Growth Plan), and validation against international frameworks (SDG targets, New Urban Agenda).

3. FINDINGS: ASSESSMENT OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND GAPS

3.1 Critical gaps requiring intervention

- Energy efficiency:** Critical gap (−0.53 score) indicating high energy consumption.
- Social inclusion:** Minimal performance (0.02 score), highlighting inequitable access.
- Green infrastructure:** Weak performance (0.64 score), with limited green space coverage.
- Water management:** Strong performance (4.65 score) with 98% sanitation access.
- Environmental quality:** High performance (5.00 score).

Table 1: Key performance gaps and relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), illustrated by researcher

Performance levels are categorized as:

- Critical weakness (score < 0.5)
- Weakness (0.5–1.0)
- Moderate (1.1–3.0)
- Strength (> 3.0)

3.2 Strategic strengths

- Environmental quality (5.00):** Effective air quality management and low pollution levels.
- Water management (4.65):** Efficient supply networks, 98% sanitation connection.
- Economic performance (5.00):** Resilient local markets, 78% internet penetration, strong digital integration.

3.3 Scenario-based interventions

3.3.1 Scenario analysis

Although the scenarios proposed in this study differ in framing, they highlight the urgent need to address energy inefficiency, mobility challenges, governance gaps, and resilience deficits at the neighborhood scale. This alignment validates the robustness of the scenario framework developed in this research. The scenario-based interventions demonstrate potential to address these gaps:

- Eco-retrofit:** Focuses on passive and active building retrofits, including energy efficiency and renewable integration, directly targeting the low energy performance identified in the SMC assessment (B = −0.53). Literature indicates that building retrofits significantly reduce urban energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions (IRENA, 2020; Kabisch et al., 2017).
- Green nexus:** Enhances green urban areas, stormwater management, and biodiversity, addressing deficiencies in land use and biodiversity (A = 0.64) and promoting SDG 11 and 13 synergies. Nature-based solutions are widely recognized for improving urban resilience and livability (Frantzeskaki et al., 2019; UN-Habitat, 2020).
- Mobility and access:** Improves public transport, pedestrian infrastructure, and green mobility, targeting moderate transportation performance (F = 2.83). Sustainable mobility strategies are critical to reducing car dependency and mitigating urban air pollution (Seto et al., 2014; UN-Habitat, 2020).

- **Governance enhancement:** Strengthens institutional capacity, planning coordination, and policy implementation to improve governance (J = 2.00).

3.3.2 Future-oriented scenario-driven urban solutions

S1: Energy retrofits – Improving energy efficiency in buildings and integrating renewable technologies. Expected: 20% energy reduction, CO₂/year reduction.

S2: Green nexus – Expanding urban green areas, enhancing biodiversity, and promoting nature-based solutions for stormwater. Expected: 1%–5% green space, 2–3°C heat reduction, 50,000 m³ stormwater managed.

S3: Mobility and access – Strengthening public transport, pedestrian networks, and green mobility to reduce reliance on private vehicles, including bike infrastructure. Expected: car use 60%–45%, 80% accessible pedestrian infrastructure, 500 tons CO₂ reduction.

S4: Governance optimization – Enhancing cross-sector coordination, participatory planning, and institutional capacity; Municipal Sustainability Unit, capacity building, participatory platforms. Expected: 50 staff trained, 30% participation rate, institutionalized SDG monitoring.

S5: Integrated resilience – Combining energy, green infrastructure, mobility, and governance measures for a holistic sustainability strategy (combination of S1–S4 scenarios). Expected: comprehensive neighborhood transformation.

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Priority 1: Governance and institutions

4.1.1 For Greater Irbid Municipality

- **Institutionalize sustainability assessment tools** using SMC framework for regular neighborhood monitoring.
- **Integrate SDG criteria into planning** by embedding sustainability in Master Plan revision, building regulations and land use ordinances.
- **Enhance citizen participation** through Neighbourhood Councils, digital platforms and participatory budgeting (5% of capital budget).
- **Establish performance monitoring** with annual benchmarks, digital dashboard and quarterly public reporting.
- **Key indicators:** 5 neighborhoods assessed by 2026; Municipal Sustainability Unit established; annual sustainability reports published.

4.1.2 For national authorities

- **Create enabling policy frameworks** through finalized National Urban Policy Framework, updated Climate Change Policy and National Building Energy Code.
- **Provide incentives and support** via Municipal SDG Support Fund capacity building programmes.
- **Develop digital and high-tech data-sharing platforms** with standardized SDG indicators, benchmarking and open data access.
- **Key indicators:** Fund grants established; municipal staff trained by 2028; national data platform operational with 5 municipalities by 2027.

4.1.3 For international partners

- **Support knowledge exchange** through UN-Habitat technical assistance, GIZ training programmes and cooperation via ICLEI.
- **Facilitate funding** through blended finance, Green Climate Fund and co-financing with Central Bank of Jordan and World Bank.
- **Promote replication** via Local2030 platform presentations, international conference participation and best practice publications.
- **Key indicators:** International funding mobilized by 2030; 5 cities replicating Al-Nuzha interventions by 2030; 10 international conference collaborations by 2028.

4.2 Priority 2: Green infrastructure and energy

4.2.1 For Greater Irbid Municipality

- **Implement energy retrofit pilot** targeting 20 buildings (Phase 1).
- **Develop urban green space network** by converting 5 vacant lots to green parks, planting 2,000 trees annually and incentivizing green roofs (50% subsidy).
- **Promote nature-based solutions** through rain gardens, permeable paving, green corridors and urban cooling strategies.

Key indicators: 200 buildings retrofitted by 2030; 30% energy reduction; 1%–5% green space by 2030.

4.2.2 For national authorities

- **Establish National Urban Energy Retrofit Programme** with mandatory energy performance certificates.
- **Develop National Urban Green Infrastructure Strategy** with a 1 million urban trees by 2030 initiative.

Key indicators: 20,000 buildings retrofitted nationally by 2030; 20% national building energy reduction; at least 10 municipalities meeting green space standards by 2030.

4.2.3 For international partners

- **Provide technical assistance and co-financing** through UNDP grants and Green Climate Fund adaptation programmes.

Key indicators: Green infrastructure targets met by 2030; 20 technical assistance missions by 2028.

4.3 Priority 3: Social inclusion and resilience

4.3.1 For Greater Irbid Municipality

- **Implement universal accessibility programme** retrofitting 10 priority sites, establishing accessibility compliance requirements and creating a sustainability and SDGs Advisory Committee.
- **Enhance public safety and cohesion** via improved lighting (100 LED streetlights) and Community Safety Partnership.
- **Promote refugee integration** through economic inclusion programme (250 families) and Neighbourhood Awareness Council.
- **Develop climate adaptation plan** with vulnerability assessment and emergency response protocols.

Key indicators: 70% public spaces accessible by 2030; Climate Adaptation Plan adopted.

4.3.2 For national authorities

- **Mainstream refugee integration** in National Urban Policy Framework with specific guidelines, expanded work permits and adequate school and university capacity.
- **Enforce universal accessibility standards** through updated National Building Code, monitoring mechanism and retrofit support fund.
- **Develop National Climate Adaptation Framework** with Urban Climate

Adaptation Guidelines and updated climate analysis templates.

Key indicators: 5 municipalities with refugee integration strategies by 2028; 3 municipalities with Climate Adaptation Plans by 2028.

4.3.3 For international partners

- **Support inclusion programmes** through UNHCR–UN-Habitat joint programme and UNICEF child-friendly infrastructure.
- **Facilitate climate resilience cooperation** via Green Climate Fund support, UNDP vulnerability assessments and city network peer learning.

Key indicators: 5 climate projects funded by 2029.

4.4 Priority 4: From policy recommendations to an integrated concept note

The concept note should be grounded in the SMC assessment findings on energy efficiency and social inclusivity as critical weaknesses, with green infrastructure, climate adaptation, and governance scoring as moderate concerns. These findings directly shape the three priority areas proposed: governance and institutions provide the enabling foundation without which the other interventions cannot be sustained; green infrastructure and energy target the largest measurable environmental deficits; and social inclusion and resilience ensure that gains are equitable and durable. Collectively, these priorities do not function independently, they form an integrated logic in which institutional capacity enables investment, investment generates environmental and social outcomes, and resilience mechanisms ensure those outcomes are sustained over time. This integrated logic underpins the structure of the proposed Concept Note framework.

The Concept Note should translate the three priority areas into a single, coherent proposal.

Policy alignment is achieved by anchoring each intervention in existing frameworks: At the Local level, the Greater Irbid Municipality's strategic master plan and participatory planning mechanisms provide the local entry point; national sustainability frameworks such as the Green Growth Plan 2021–2025, the Climate Change Policy and the forthcoming National Urban Policy Framework provide the

regulatory and strategic context; and the 2030 Agenda and SDG 11 targets provide the global accountability framework.

Pilot implementation pathways should be phased: beginning with governance capacity-building and the institutionalization of the SMC assessment, progressing into green infrastructure and energy retrofit pilots, and subsequently expanding into social inclusion and climate resilience programming as institutional readiness develops, while simultaneously supporting organizational transformation and green networking initiatives across municipal and partner institutions in Irbid.

Stakeholder engagement should be structured around the roles already mapped in the Annex: municipal authorities leading implementation, national ministries providing enabling policy, international partners supplying technical and financial resources, and civil society and academia contributing to monitoring and knowledge generation.

Financing should draw on the blended mechanisms identified across Priorities 1–3, combining municipal budget allocations, national programme funds and international development assistance. These should be complemented by structured training and mentoring roadmap for Greater Irbid institutions tailored to their operational and sustainability needs.

5. CONCLUSION

Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the neighborhood scale presents a viable long-term pathway for advancing sustainable urban transformation in Jordan. The Al-Nuzha neighborhood demonstrates that targeted interventions addressing pressing urban challenges in energy efficiency, social inclusion, green infrastructure, climate resilience, and local governance can generate measurable progress toward SDG 11 and SDG 13. The comprehensive assessment shown in this study identifies actionable priorities; participatory planning approaches enhance community ownership; multi-level coordination creates enabling institutional environments; and evidence-based interventions, supported by transparent performance indicators, enable sustainable learning management.

Yet, the findings reveal a critical limitation of the SDG framework: many indicators remain too globally oriented to fully reflect neighborhood-level context realities. This highlights the need to refine indicator definitions in ways that enable policy-relevant comparison across global, national, and local scales, while remaining sensitive to contextualized characteristics. Strengthening this SDG alignment approach is essential for transforming the SDGs from a reporting framework into a policy-relevant tool for local decision-making. When applied throughout the planning cycle – from priority setting to implementation and monitoring – the SDGs can function as a predictive sustainable framework towards efficient urban policy. They encourage multidimensional solutions that address the most pressing environmental, social and economic challenges, while also strengthening participatory processes through measurable and transparent benchmarks.

In conclusion, Al-Nuzha serves not only as a successful demonstration case but also as a transferable model for comparable urban neighborhoods across Jordan and the Mediterranean region. It illustrates how targeted, and transparent and participatory planning initiatives can deliver tangible local impacts while contributing to a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban development paradigm.

Annex: Key stakeholders, key organizations and primary role

Stakeholder groups	Key organizations / actors	Primary role in SDG localization
Local authorities (municipal)	Greater Irbid Municipality	Project ownership, neighborhood-level planning and implementation, budget allocation, coordination of local services, and monitoring of SDG progress at the city and neighborhood scale.
National and regional governments	Ministries of Local Administration, Environment, Energy, Public Works	Policy and regulatory support, alignment with national development priorities, co-financing, and enabling institutional frameworks for local SDG implementation.
Parliamentarians	Members of Parliament (relevant committees)	Representation of local needs at the national level, facilitation of enabling legislation, and support for budget allocation to local development projects.
Development agencies / international organizations	Greater Irbid Municipality	Technical assistance, financial support, capacity building, policy guidance, and support for pilot projects and SDG localization methodologies.
Academic institutions	Universities in Jordan: German Jordanian University, JUST, Yarmouk, University of Jordan	Research and data generation, technical expertise, student engagement, innovation, monitoring and evaluation support, and evidence-based policy input.

Private sector and industry	ESCOs, engineering firms, banks, Central Bank of Jordan, technology companies	Investment, project implementation, technological innovation, service provision, job creation, and support for energy efficiency and infrastructure solutions.
Civil society organizations (NGOs and CSOs)	Jordan Green Building Council, EDAMA, local NGOs	Community mobilization, technical expertise, awareness raising, bottom-up participation, social inclusion, and accountability support.
Professionals	Architects, urban planners, engineers, surveyors, economists, nature-based solutions experts	Specialized technical skills, design and planning support, and mainstreaming sustainability principles into practice.
Faith-based institutions	Local religious institutions	Community engagement, outreach to hard-to-reach groups, social cohesion, and promotion of sustainability values at the community level.
Financial institutions	Local and regional banks, Central Bank of Jordan, World Bank development finance institutions	Provision of start-up capital, long-term financing, low-interest loans, and follow-up investment for infrastructure and development projects.
International and city networks	Local2030, ICLEI, Sustainable MED Cities	Knowledge exchange, peer learning, international visibility, and dissemination of best practices for SDG localization.

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