Learnings and reflections from *Antioquia Sostenible*:
A Colombian pioneer experience of SDG localization

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Abstract

In early-2016 a cross-sectoral group of organizations launched Antioquia Sostenible (Sustainable Antioquia) intending to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda in the department of Antioquia (one of Colombia's 32 states). Antioquia Sostenible was conceptualized as an open space of learning and articulation on sustainability and the SDG, and as a shared management platform in which Antioquia as a territory and everyone from their sectors, could report the contributions made to achieve the SDG.

During these three years, Antioquia Sostenible has been exploring different lines of action to boost SDG local appropriation in five of the nine subregions of the department. In the first year efforts were focused at the Valle de Aburrá Metropolitan Area on the consolidation of a learning community on the five SDG pillars (planet, people, prosperity, peace, and partnerships). As a result of these learning cycles, two milestones were achieved — first, a regional and collective vision for 2030 which prioritizes the SDG more relevant for Antioquia; second, a baseline of available indicators to measure the SDG in Antioquia.

In 2017 Antioquia Sostenible unfolded actions mainly in two different territories: East and Urabá (2 of the 9 subregions in Antioquia), purposefully selected by their contrasting socioeconomic characteristics. During this year an institutional network to promote SDG in each region was identified, best business practices at the local level were highlighted, and a Vision 2030 for the East was collectively created. In this year, the first report of indicators to track Antioquia's process towards the SDG was released.

In 2018, leveraging on learnings and achievements Antioquia Sostenible consolidated its Model for the Dynamization of Territorial Sustainability (MDTS), a four-phases approach to generate and transfer capacities to local actors for a collective work around SDG. Through a new partnership with a multisectoral initiative and the presence in two new subregions of the department (North and Northeast) further actions were unfolded, visiting directly 14 municipalities for the co-creation of a collective vision for each region based on an appreciative inquiry of their capacities, network, and common objectives. Also, during this second year, new reports focused on local data were released: business and NGO contribution towards SDG. For 2019 the vision is to continue growing and consolidate the MDTS. Through all this path, Antioquia Sostenible has been acknowledged by the

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Colombian branch of UNDP as the most significant experience of SDG localization in the country.

This paper written by the Lead Team of Antioquia Sostenible presents the Model for the Dynamization of Territorial Sustainability, synthesizes milestones and pitfalls of this three-year experience on governance, cross-sectoral collaboration, and SDG localization, and reflects on the replicability conditions of this initiative across similar territories.

1. Antioquia Sostenible: The beginning

Antioquia Sostenible takes up lessons learned from other exercises in territorial prospective[2] performed in Antioquia[3] since the nineties and is framed within an interest in pushing forward the creation of a new vision of the future that is consistent with the pursuit of sustainable and equitable development and the framework of the 2030 development agenda promoted by the United Nations.

Antioquia Sostenible is a cross-sectoral initiative that encourages the appropriation and localization of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in Antioquia through permanent measurement, routes for territorial action and knowledge management. It was introduced in April 2016 with the purpose of creating an open space for learning and articulation, directed at organizations in Antioquia's three sectors and managing knowledge about the topics of sustainability and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In the long term, Antioquia Sostenible aims to be an intersectoral strategy oriented to reporting on a unified statistics and practices platform that accounts for the sectoral contributions toward the creation of a socially responsible territory.

Antioquia Sostenible is headed by a lead team composed of private organizations including business foundations (Proantioquia in the coordination and leadership roles), business associations (Corporación ProSUR), think-tanks (Centro de Pensamiento Social and INNOVE[4]) and universities (Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana and Universidad EAFIT). The initiative has the support of large companies (Empresas Públicas de Medellín, ISAGEN) and social organizations of a private nature (Comfama).

Since its introduction in 2016 and until now, the initiative has experienced an organic growth process in the pursuit of its target regarding the territorial localization of the SDG. There are three key moments in its history: the setting in motion of the initiative, the start of the sub-regional routes for the appropriation of sustainability and the strengthening of the SDG appropriation exercises.

The following section presents the main elements of the process experienced in each of these moments.

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[2] The following are examples of these exercises: Informe Monitor (1995); Visión Antioquia Siglo XXI (1997), Plan Estratégico para Antioquia -PLANEA- (1998), Plan Integral de Desarrollo Metropolitano – _PIDM - Metrópoli 2008-2020 (2000), Plan Regional de Competitividad para Medellín, Valle de Aburrá y Antioquia (2009); Plan Director Bio2030 (2011) and Horizontes 2030 - Oriente, Aburrá y Occidente (2012).

[3] Antioquia is a department composed by 125 municipalities, which are grouped in 9 subregions (Valle de Aburrá, Bajo Cauca, North, Northeast, Southwest, Urabá, West, East and Middle Magdalena).

[4] These two organizations were present at the beginning of Antioquia Sostenible, but ceased their operations later on. During 2016 and 2017, INNOVE assumed the technical and methodological leadership of the initiative's setting in motion.

Year 2016: setting in motion of the initiative.

The initiative's first year had as a target the creation of a learning community on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Metropolitan Area[5] and the creation of *Visión Antioquia Sostenible 2030* (Sustainable Antioquia Vision 2030) as a territorial prospective proposal that brings together a shared horizon of actions and collective regional goals, all in the key of Sustainable Development Goals. To that end, the lead team developed a methodology of lectures in five cycles of knowledge related to the pillars proposed by the UN: Planet, People, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. These lectures were aimed at organizations in the public, private and academic sectors in Antioquia. Each of the cycles took place between April and December in the way of 8 workshops in which 600 people representing around 60 organizations participated. Drawing from the development of the learning community, it was possible to consolidate *Visión Antioquia Sostenible 2030*, which was formulated in terms of high-level goals, means and essential conditions presented as a territorial aspiration.

Figure 1. Visión Antioquia Sostenible 2030.
(Sustainable Antioquia Vision 2030)

For 2030, Antioquia must reduce the inequalities (SDG 10) expressed in its territorial conditions, in its inhabitants and the way they access opportunities. Just as well, positive peace must be guaranteed as a right and as a democratic expression of the state throughout all its territory (SDG 16). In order to achieve this, Antioquia must put an end to extreme poverty (SDG 1) and promote the equality of opportunities. The aforementioned, through education (SDG 4) expressed as a right and an opportunity for social mobility. Creating decent employment and economic growth (SDG 8) in all its regions, based on permanent partnerships between its agents (SDG17). The essential conditions include the promotion of sustainable communities and cities (SDG 11) that balance the urban and the rural, and allow taking effective action towards protecting the planet in all its dimensions (SDG 12, 13, 14 and 15). (Antioquia Sostenible, 2016).

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[5] The metropolitan area includes 10 municipalities from the Valle de Aburrá subregion including Medellín, Antioquia's capital.

Visión Antioquia Sostenible 2030 has also made visible three territorial gaps that divide the department's 9 subregions:

- *Antioquia Pujante* ("Thriving Antioquia" – Valle de Aburrá's Metropolitan area and aNear East)
- *Antioquia Cerrando Brechas* ("Antioquia Closing Gaps" – North, Northeast and Southwest)
- *Antioquia Olvidada* ("Forgotten Antioquia": Urabá, Lower Cauca and Middle Magdalena).

At the end of said year, Antioquia Sostenible's multidisciplinary team devised the Baseline of available indicators in Antioquia for measuring SDG. This document identified 64 available indicators based on the goals established by the UN. This selection of indicators was made possible through a review of secondary sources, among which are the ones from the *Departamento Nacional de Estadísticas* (National Statistics Department/DANE), social and economic indicators about the department gathered by the *Centro de Pensamiento Social* (Center for Social Thinking), as well as public information available in the Governor's Office of Antioquia's Statistical Yearbook. This exercise allowed determining the quality and quantity of available information and the gaps that are found at a sub-regional level when it comes to making a thorough measurement and achieving the created vision in a joint way.

Furthermore, the work in 2016 was backed by a communications strategy of promotion and circulation that allowed advances in two fronts. On the first one, making the project visible at the local, national and international levels. On the second one, concretizing important international partnerships with leading organizations on the subject.

Year 2017: Start of the sub-regional routes for the appropriation of sustainability.

In the second year, *Antioquia Sostenible* prioritized three lines of work: 1) Sub-regional routes for the East and *Urabá Antioqueño*, 2) Platform for open data on sustainability and 3) Pilot project in the southern Valle de Aburrá. In addition to these, other aspects were developed such as strengthening the internationalization of *Antioquia Sostenible*.

The sub-regional work routes were implemented in order to take *Antioquia Sostenible* to the territories of the East and *Urabá*. This is the essence itself of the SDG territorial localization. These routes are based on the understanding that each subregion (in relation to the other subregions and also within itself) represents contrasting realities. The East, for instance, especially the *Valle de San Nicolás* area, represents a thriving *Antioquia* that follows the *Valle de Aburrá* in development opportunities. By contrast, *Urabá* and especially its more rural areas, synthesizes the forgotten *Antioquia* in which some fundamental rights have not been guaranteed yet.

This exercise with sub-regional routes allowed looking at and visiting the territories, identifying the network of territorial agents working toward sustainable development, their interests and specific ongoing projects, as well as the joint creation of a vision of the work at a sub-regional scale. The Eastern *Antioquia* Sub-regional Route took place during the second half of 2017 through the collection of secondary information and also the dialogue, and interactions with local agents and had ISAGEN and Grupo EPM as its main allies. Due to the particular institutional conditions at the time, the *Urabá* route was made using only secondary information and interviews with local agents.

Throughout this year, the open data platform continued with the exercise of measuring the public indicators for SDG in *Antioquia* and with the consolidation of relationships and joint work with different agents in order to achieve the integrated report of both business and social sectors. The indicators array devised in 2016 was revised and extended, resulting in a total of 73 measurable indicators.

The internationalization process during this year went even further, as expressed in partnerships with institutions such as Earth Institute and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – ECLAC for sharing information and taking part in events in a joint way. This process allowed the initiative to find spaces to validate and position itself as a different and innovative practice. Likewise, the challenge of designing a sustainability model at a regional level became greater, a particularly demanding matter given that there are no similar strategies at a national or international level that can be taken as benchmarks.

Year 2018: Strengthening of the SDG' appropriation exercises.

Toward the end of 2017 and with the intention of continuing and furthering a self-examination exercise supported by action, the lead team carried out an evaluation of the work already performed and concluded that for 2018 it was necessary to separate its action framework in two aspects. First, the creation of a backing for the intervened subregions so they can successfully appropriate the SDG to their own dynamics. Second, the definition of new work subregions, taking into account the presence of strategic agents, with the opportunity of furthering the degree of mapping and intervention, reaching municipal levels this time.

As a result of this prioritization, a collaborative work with the EPM–PNUD partnership was consolidated and set in motion in 2018 in order to make progress in the Sustainable North and Northeast initiatives. These routes took place between August 2018 and February 2019 through work in 14 municipalities that allowed the development of a situational framework, the identification of the ecosystem of agents, the mapping of significative experiences at this level and the creation of a view at the sub-regional level that takes into account the involvement of a wide group of actors. Due to their intensity, these two routes allowed the testing of the sub-regional route methodology in different scenarios, improving it and feeding it back, as well as making evident the challenges of interinstitutional work at different scales.

Figure 2. summary of all the milestones and achievements of the Antioquia Sostenible process during its first three years.
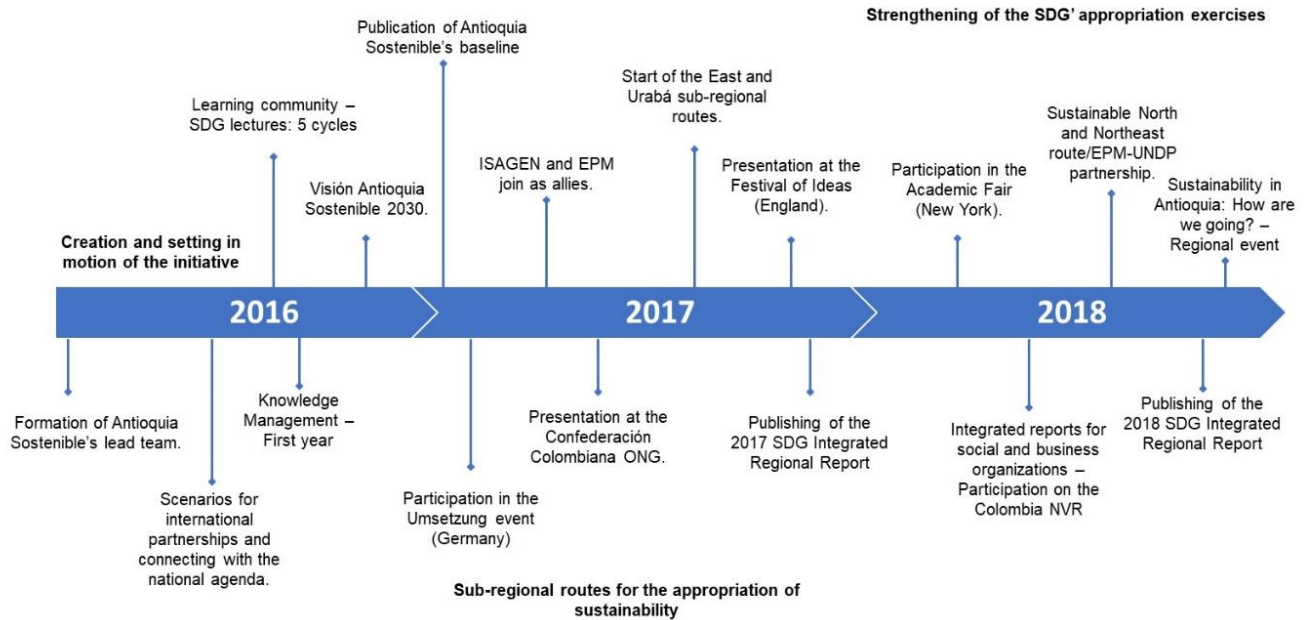
2. Model for the Dynamization of Territorial Sustainability.

The road traveled by *Antioquia Sostenible* has been one with an action-reflection focus which has allowed the conceptualization of a proven model based on two main components: prospection and territorial action. Chart 1 includes all the elements from both components of the model for the dynamization of territorial sustainability.

Territorial prospective

Territorial prospective explores and views the future of a territory and aims to understand which are the process that would allow the required transformations. It identifies the possible factors for change involved, the socio-territorial processes and the interests that are in play. Territorial prospective, which is the starting point and structuring axis of the model, is materialized with the creation of a vision for 2030 in the context of SDG implementation that helps establishing both imaginaries and projections of different territorial agents in one same exercise. The vision for 2030 is a conceptual source and a metric for focusing actions in the territory in a horizon of over 10 years.

This prospective is composed of two subcategories that strengthen it at the same time: knowledge management and measurement and evaluation. *Knowledge management* for Antioquia Sostenible means the collective creation in a horizontal way, transfer of knowledge on SDG and the documentation and socialization of the products made in each workspace. The *measurement and evaluation* imply the establishment of cross-sectoral indicators' baselines, the search for public information and a process of constantly updating this information.

Territorial action

The second component is territorial action, which refers to the concrete way of getting to the territories in order to develop collective agendas based around sustainable development and accomplishing a reinforcement of the capacities of the local ecosystem of agents. The territorial action component is composed of four subcategories: social appropriation of knowledge, institutional strengthening, collective territory planning and territorial governance.

The *social appropriation of knowledge* refers to the scenarios of knowledge exchange and horizontal work that allow acknowledging and making the voice of local agents heard. To this end, methodologies based on participative leadership (Art of hosting) have been developed that allow a process of co-creation in the local routes and the identification of local partnerships that make regional sustainability possible in the short term.

Institutional strengthening implies the acknowledgement of all the institutional agents that must be invited and involved, as well as the creation of a joint work blueprint toward a common agenda considering the individual roles and interests.

Collective planning implies the availability of information for appropriate decision making and, at the same time, the opening of scenarios for deliberation and discussion with both social and civic representativity that contribute to the management of changes in response to the territory's different environmental, social, cultural and political needs.

Finally, *territorial governance* refers to the establishment of a complex partnership system between multiple agents that are interdependent with each other and, at the same time, possess multiple interests and visions on the solution of collective problems. The dynamics of the lead team and the relations established at a sub-regional level can be found at the heart of this governance.

Table 1. Components of the Model for the Dynamization of Territorial Sustainability.

Territorial Prospective		Territorial Action			
Knowledge Management	**Measurement and Evaluation**	**Social Appropriation of Knowledge**	**Institutional Strengthening**	**Collective Territory Planning**	**Territorial Governance**
● Scenarios for discussion and horizontal work. ● Management of the shared vision of the future: Antioquia Sostenible 2030. ● Best practices systematization. ● Process systematization. ● Transfer of the Model for the Dynamization of Territorial Sustainability (MDTS). ● Internationalization. ● Model's networking and communication strategy.	● Baseline and indicators array. ● Permanent logs and reports at the business, social and public levels on the challenges and achievements in fulfilling the SDG. ● Information and territorial analysis platform.	● Learning communities. ● Pedagogical methodologies for SDG (integration of the SDG language in local dynamics). ● Collective mobilization exercises. ● Exercise in territorial appropriation through its agents and capacities, the territorial realities. ● Communication for the development or territorial dynamization.	● Lead team consolidation ● Implementation of the Sub-Regional SDG Routes (transverse). ● Knowledge of local agents. ● Institutional ecosystem (in two ways, at a macro level for partnerships and a micro level for territory). ● Installed organizational capacities – local agents. ● Concrete actions and projects.	● Participative process – Civic participation (transverse). ● Prioritization and collective creation of the territory under the sub-regional vision. ● Impact on the local participative processes.	● Acknowledgement among local agents. ● Networking partnerships and agendas for leveraging development. ● Shared management of territorial agendas. ● Dialogue methodology - tensions resolution.

3. Milestones and pitfalls

Governance and cross-sectoral collaboration

In order to achieve its purpose, *Antioquia Sostenible* was born with a focus on collaborative governance, inviting organizations within the public, private, social and academic sectors to get involved in the creation of a collective imaginary for sustainable territorial development. This cross-sectoral collaboration means putting into practice a model of shared coordination, as well as knowledge and capacities exchange, that translates into collegiate decision making.

The members of the lead team offer *Antioquia Sostenible* the capabilities they possess, owing to their nature and organizational purpose, with the purpose of contributing toward achieving the strategic goals of the territorial sustainability model. This sum of capacities has allowed the development of actions in both technical and methodological aspects, the management of partnerships and resources and the creation of practical and academic knowledge during the work sessions orientated towards consolidating mechanisms for mediation and participation that respond to the territorial particularities and the ecosystem of agents. However, this sum of capacities is not enough and the initiative is facing capacity gaps in regards to economic resources for the thorough development of the sustainability model in all of Antioquia's regions.

Articulating the actors in all sectors allows the consolidation of legitimacy and workforce in the subregions where the initiative has been developed. Thus, with the support of ISAGEN in Eastern *Antioquia*, EPM in *Urabá*, the EPM-UNDP partnership in the North and the Northeast and of Comfama, in a transverse way with the economic backing, *Antioquia Sostenible* has deployed the territorial sustainability model recognizing the ecosystem of agents that will dynamize the discussions on development, as well as basing itself on objective indicators and the identification of local best practices. The institutional block behind *Antioquia Sostenible* is a guarantee of continuity, governability and methodological rigor in the interventions. Even though the articulation of multiple agents allows representativity, in reality it implies that the initiative inherits both the friendly and unfriendly sentiments towards the organizations that make part of its lead team and the allied organizations.

The difference between the organizations involved is also evident. Despite performing work collectively, this disparity generates tensions in the relations that are created and two scenarios can be formulated: relations between peer allies vs. relations between ally and operator.

An essential topic in regards to governance is that the organizations currently involved in the initiative are of a private nature, which raises a challenge in terms of multi-sectoral strengthening of the lead team; in other words, the active involvement of the departmental government is crucial for the appropriation, support, visibility, monitoring and evaluation of the model of territorial sustainability, as well as in terms of the financial backing to continue mobilizing agents and dynamizing the discussion on sub-regional development.

SDG Localization

Antioquia Sostenible, through its sub-regional allies, has aimed to generate virtuous SDG discussion processes grounded to local realities. This appropriation implies encouraging a

conversation and an encounter between the vision and the development proposal for 2030 as well as the local rationales in social, environmental and economic terms.

This localization exercise has multiple dimensions. On the one hand, it implies an understanding of the different territorial realities that are present in the department's nine subregions, acknowledging the centrality exercised on the *Valle de Aburrá* metropolitan area.

On the other hand, SDG localization requires methodological design and development, acknowledging as well as inviting the agents and the fabric of institutional partnerships and understanding the territory through a process of measuring objective indicators aligned with the 17 topics on the agenda. This rather technical aspect allows for a collective creation of visions for 2030, the prioritization of thematic sustainability axes that will guide the strategic action in the different sectors toward the fulfillment of goals and the closure of gaps. The participative exercises aim for the integration of imaginaries and the acknowledgement of the other, both at an individual and institutional level, in the face of what has more relevance and opportunity for articulation.

The results of the multi-sector mediation exercises in the different subregions seek to integrate the indicators' objective information tied to the SDG with the knowledge, perceptions and realities belonging to the groups of interest, thus having a wide outlook of needs and opportunities at a local level. Likewise, the aggregate of local visions allows, in an aggregate way, the establishment of a sub-regional vision projected for 2030.

However, there are challenges for the agenda's localization in the context of territorial analysis based on available information: the SDG indicators at a local level do not exist in some cases or are outdated. Likewise, capturing the sectoral will for achieving the long-term goals is a topic that requires increased community leadership and the initiative's permanence in the dynamization of discussions and of invitations regarding the ecosystem of agents. Finally, the it is key to define the reach of Antioquia Sostenible in territorial terms in the face of focalization, that is to say the initiative must specify if its action framework is at a local level or if it reaches a level of knowledge raising and dynamization at a village level. Much the same way, this reach means defining the level of depth and understanding the relation between what's macro, like the creation of visions for 2030, and the deployment of specific actions in the smallest unit like a corregimiento's village inside a municipality.

Replicability

The process of replicating this initiative in other territories, either within Colombia or in Latin America and the Global South, requires attention to three elements: first, an understanding of the territories; second, the growth model and said model's expansion and, third, the territorial institutional articulation.

The understanding of the territories is associated with a comprehension of each territory's historical progression, as well as the previous planning and intervention processes that have been developed. This kind of initiatives built around sustainable development are not new and are framed in each territory within an accumulative process of initiatives started by others in the past. Thus, previous experiences around these have a powerful influence on the way new ones are developed. Recognizing this matter is of paramount importance.

Along the same line can be found the understanding of the dynamics and interests of the organizations that exercise leadership in each territory. So long as the social relations are not exempt of conflict, which must be recognized, understood and managed in the pursuit of joint work toward higher goals.

Besides, replicating the model requires a the development of a growth and expansion model that answers to the 2030 Agenda's time horizon and the dynamics of the pursuit of sustainable development themselves. In this sense, it is necessary that the organizations invited to exercise leadership from within the lead team are able to make a long term commitment and, at the same time, have the capability of realizing how other agents who temporarily join the initiative both create value for and capture value from the initiative.

Successfully replicating the model mainly requires a group of organizations that are willing and capable of exercising leadership. It is essential within the model for the dynamization of territorial sustainability developed by *Antioquia Sostenible* that conditions for organization and leadership are present at all scales (departmental, sub-regional and municipal). The aim is to avoid at all costs an individual exercise that favors only certain interests within a territory.