

Off-track, Under threat: SDGs in the time of Covid

This document presents the reflections and recommendations of civil society organisations (CSOs) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national level using the lens of effective development cooperation (EDC). This is based on the results of the survey conducted by the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) from May 19 to June 10, 2020. A total of 43 CSOs participated in this survey from 32 countries whose governments have or will be presenting their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

According to the survey respondents, nearly all governments have integrated the SDGs into national development planning and/or development cooperation policy. Moreover, a clear majority of countries have an SDG strategy and a designated agency for implementing this strategy. On the other hand, there is still a low level of awareness among implementors at the national and local level, suggesting that there is actually weak country ownership of SDGs in most countries. National budgets are also not aligned with SDG priorities according to the CSO respondents of the survey.

In terms of partnerships with stakeholders and civil society participation, most countries have mechanisms for stakeholder engagement but there is still a generally weak level of institutionalisation of stakeholder engagement in the SDG processes at the country level. Moreover, while most countries allow CSOs to participate in SDG discussions and consultations, this does not necessarily mean that they actually influence the resulting policies and implementation.

The survey respondents identified major factors that hinder civil society participation in SDG processes in their respective countries, including lack of resources devoted towards civil society participation, and lack of



Of the 32 countries
covered by the survey

87.5% have existing SDG strategy and designated agency for implementation

62.5% have low awareness among SDG implementors at local level

84.4% have existing mechanism for stakeholder engagement

15.6% have funding for stakeholder engagement

46.9% have national reporting that is accessible to CSOs

68.8% have inadequate consultations with CSOs

information regarding SDG implementation. According to the survey respondents, a little over half of countries have easily accessible information about the SDGs and less than half have national reporting processes that are open to the public.

Political factors are also germane with a number of CSOs reporting that the process of participation is neither inclusive nor transparent – indeed, that critical voices are deliberately excluded.

In terms of results, the survey did not attempt to measure the attainment of SDGs per se. Rather, the survey merely probed “other positive impacts” of SDG implementation that are nevertheless important. While the list is not exhaustive, the survey confirms that there are notable contingent benefits from SDG implementation in many of the countries covered by the study, such as the formation of multistakeholder partnerships and increased effort to promote gender equality in national development programmes.

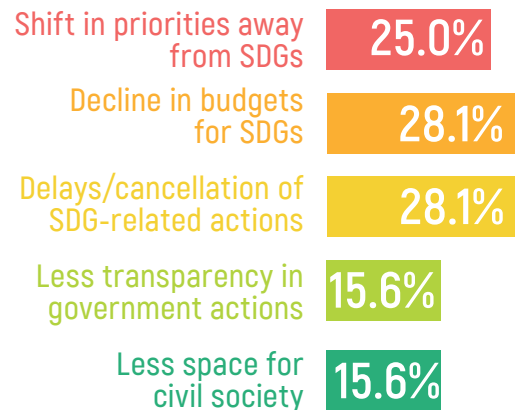
All CSO respondents identified major gaps in SDG implementation. Among the most commonly cited were: government budget allocations not aligned with SDG priorities; low awareness regarding SDGs among implementors; and inadequate consultation/engagement of CSOs in SDG processes. All participating CSOs expect that the COVID-19 will make SDG attainment even more challenging as SDGs take a back seat while governments focus all efforts and resources at combating the virus and providing relief.

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Expected implications of Covid-19 on Agenda 2030 implementation

Percentage of countries covered by survey (n=32 countries)



Major Recommendations

Duty-bearers must cooperate with civil society in translating the 2030 Agenda into local plans, programs and monitoring efforts, and ensure that local priorities inform national plans and the VNR process.



Ensure civil society engagement in the 2030 Agenda implementation by formalising and institutionalising CSOs' participation in governance structures supported by enabling laws, mechanisms, resources and capacity development for civil society, especially those from marginalised groups and communities.



Respect and protect the rights of all citizens to conduct their own independent monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda, including those who may be critical of state policies and programs.



Develop the national SDG results frameworks together with civil society and ensure that the VNR presents progress and achievements for specific marginalised groups and communities.



Map out the links between specific policies and programs with results when reporting progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

