

CSO Partnership 
for **Development Effectiveness**



**Civil Society Reflections on the
Voluntary National Review Process
and Sustainable Development Goals
Implementation**

Key Findings and Recommendations

The CPDE Global Secretariat

3rd Floor IBON Center,
Diliman, Quezon City 1103
Metro Manila, Philippines



www.csopartnership.org



webmaster@csopartnership.org



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BACKGROUND

This document presents the Key Findings and Recommendations of the reflection document on SDG national level implementation and the VNR process. The CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) conducted the study this May-June 2019 in countries whose governments will be presenting their VNRs in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The objective/s of the study was to reflect on the progress of the national implementation of the SDGs and the VNR in reporting countries, and review CSO participation in these processes. There were **22 respondent CSOs** to the study from **17 countries**. The synthesis of the results includes reflections and recommendations to help veer the VNR process and SDG implementation in general to the path to progress.

KEY FINDINGS

Significant progress has been achieved in implementing principles of effective development cooperation (EDC) in ensuring CSO participation in pursuing SDG strategies, but this has yet to clearly translate in shaping national policies implemented by governments.

This is demonstrated through the following specific findings:

Planning and implementing SDGs

One of the key factors needed to jumpstart the implementation of SDGs is inclusive and multi-stakeholder planning. Such process entails that the position and stance of the stakeholders included in the process should be reflected in the national development policies.

While majority of the respondents (**73%**) reported that their governments have established specific SDG strategies, and all respondents reported that a specific government agency in their country has been assigned to spearhead the implementation of SDGs, there were two respondents that were not able to cite a particular agency, with one simply answering "government office." Another respondent said that only a few government bodies were tasked to implement the Agenda 2030 in their country. Another respondent revealed that while a specific agency has been overseeing the pursuit of SDGs since 2015, the said institution was weak in playing the role.

Even if most of the respondents were able to pinpoint the agency supervising the implementation of SDGs in their country, it is alarming to note that some countries, even at this point in time, has made little effort to assign particular agencies to oversee. A deeper study on the effectivity and strength of said agencies in playing the role to oversee implementation.

When asked if CSOs and other stakeholders were consulted in their country's SDG planning, implementation, and review processes, majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative. However, most of the answers also had caveats such as "there was very limited involvement," that there was only a "one-time consultation," and that there were "few consultations at the national level." All these point to how CSOs and other stakeholders were indeed involved, it was very minimal to the point of being tokenistic.

Some **86%** of respondents said that their inputs in their country's SDG planning have been received and incorporated in their government's efforts. These inputs range from consultations, position papers, and the provision of various data for their country's VNR report. It is important to note, however, that several respondents answered in the extreme, with some responses stating that "the level of involvement is almost non-existent."

Also, only **23%** of the respondents indicated that their inputs have been received and incorporated into their government's efforts, with many respondents stating that their inputs were not reflected in final documents.



Reporting and impact assessment

About **64%** of the respondents reported that there is an existing national reporting process on SDG implementation in their countries. However, at the extreme end, a respondent reported that no such process exists in their country, as their government is only beginning to define national targets for the SDGs. Some other respondents noted that the national reporting process in their country only started recently.

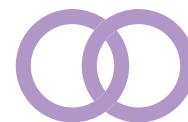
The respondents were divided when asked if the process of SDG implementation provided positive impact in forming/strengthening multi-stakeholder partnership to localise and promote SDGs. About **45%** answered in the affirmative, while **36%** said no. Some **18%** said that they are still in the process of assessing such impact as the process is still in the early phase in their country.

About **45%** of respondents indicated that the process of the SDG implementation provided positive impacts in national development, including the strengthening of linkages between CSOs and the government, and forming/strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships. However, **9%** were uncertain about this, with one respondent indicating that their government does talk about SDG implementation, but in practice, no strategic plan and program have been in place. Another respondent said that CSOs are still working hard to attain such goals.

Gaps

The respondents noted that main gaps in SDG implementation include:

- Their government's lack of political will in considering and implementing CSO outputs in national policy frameworks – One respondent noted that their “government doesn't have a specific and clear vision on SDG and do not involve other development participants.” Another respondent noted that “political will to take radical decisions is necessary.”
- Lack of funding and resources for effective partnerships – Several respondents noted how lack of funding limit their work on the SDGs and incapacitating them in pursuing several plans and targets.
- Absence of inclusive platforms for cooperative SDG implementation and monitoring – A key issue that many respondents raised is the lack of transparency, especially in the decision-making process, which one respondent called a product of “dysfunctional coordination framework.” The practice of effective development cooperation is clearly not yet widely in place, as several respondents report that instead of working smoothly with the government, many CSOs serving communities and delivering services for decades were even vilified and marginalised by state agents. The communities they serve are also marginalised in the process. One respondent thus suggested that a “multi-stakeholder consultation mechanism to introduce an integrated policy approach and to balance interests and concerns of social, economic and environmental aspects” should be put into place.
- The creeping influence of the private sector in implementing development plans – Several respondents reveal that in their country, the current development priorities and SDGs implementation are “more corporate-driven which are more facilitated by the government through development strategies and policies” rather than focusing on inputs and feedback from sectors directly being served by the SDG strategies.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Over-all

Create concrete partnership frameworks that will allow meaningful CSO participation in implementing SDG strategies.

Specifics

- Closer partnerships between CSOs and governments should be established to ensure that valuable inputs from various stakeholders are not only considered but also reflected in national policies. Certain guidelines should be set on the international, regional, and national levels to ensure that inputs from CSOs and other stakeholders are not rendered irrelevant and are indeed included in the implementation strategies.
- Enhance financing for SDG commitments including the consideration of planning and funding smaller projects that directly address the basic needs of those left behind rather than consistently pursuing bigger development projects.

CSOs and governments need to localise SDGs, and develop specific and measurable SDG indicators. Platforms for accountability on part of the government and CSOs should also be in place.

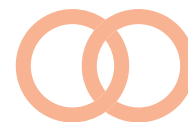
BELGRADE CALL TO ACTION

The Belgrade Call to Action, which calls on all development actors to take immediate and decisive action to reverse the trend of shrinking and closing space for Civil Society, was also shared to respondents, with all of them committing to promote the call to action through various schemes and levels – through policy dialogues, opening partnerships with other development partners, jumpstart a more proactive campaign at the national level, and many other forms.



Table 1. List of CSOs which responded to the study

Country	Civil Society Organisation
Armenia	Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia Foundation
Bosnia & Herzegovina	PRONI Center for Youth Development
Burundi	Chambre Transversale des Jeunes Entrepreneurs du Burundi
Cameroon	Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN)
Cameroon	Cameroon Youths and Students Forum for Peace (CAMYOSFOP)
Ghana	Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT)
India	Centre for Research and Advocacy Manipur
Indonesia	Institute for National and Democracy Studies (INDIES)
Ireland	Social Justice Ireland
Kyrgyzstan	Public Association The Right Step
Kyrgyzstan	Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan
Mongolia	Centre for Human Rights and Development
Nepal	Beyond Beijing Committee
Philippines	Coordinating Council for Peoples Development and Governance (CPDG)
Sierra Leone	ChildHelp Sierra Leone
South Africa	Economic Justice Network (EJN) of FOCCISA
Macedonia	Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC)
Uganda	Uganda National NGO Forum
Tanzania	Tanzania Coalition on Debt and Development (TCDD)
Zambia	ChildHelp Inc, Zambia
Zambia	Civil Society for Poverty Reduction



Annex 1: CPDE Questionnaire for National Focal Points of Voluntary National Review Countries

Q1 In what country do you work?

Q2 Name of your organisation?

Q3 Has your government established a specific SDG strategy or integrated SDGs into national development planning and/or development cooperation policy?

Q4 Which government agency is responsible for implementing the SDGs or the specific SDG strategy?

Q5 Are CSOs and other stakeholders consulted in your country's SDG planning, implementation, and review processes? If yes, was your organisation able to participate in these consultations?

Q6 What type of inputs were you able to provide? Do you believe these inputs have been received and incorporated into the government's efforts?

Q7 Is there a national reporting process on SDG implementation and is this reporting publicly accessible?

Q8 Has the process of SDG implementation provided positive impact/s in forming/strengthening multi-stakeholder partnership to localise and promote SDGs? What are these?

Q9 Has the process of the SDG implementation provided positive impacts in national development outside those identified in item 6? What are these developments?

Q10 In your view what are the main gaps in SDG implementation? Are there any elements that hinder your participation in the SDG implementation at the country level?

Q11 Do you have any recommendations or priorities?

Q12 Here is the link to the Belgrade Call to Action, which calls on all development actors to take immediate and decisive action to reverse the trend of shrinking and closing space for Civil Society. What can your organisation do to promote the Call to Action at the country level in relations to the SDGs (i.e. SDG 1 and SDG 16)? How will you promote this to engage other development stakeholders?

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