

2022 CPDE VNR Study

Challenge the ways of old:

CSO demands for urgent and extraordinary actions in Effective Development Co-operation towards pandemic recovery



CSOPartnership 
for Development Effectiveness



A DECADE OF CSO SOLIDARITY
ON EDC ADVOCACY AND PRACTICE

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CSOPartnership 
for **Development Effectiveness**

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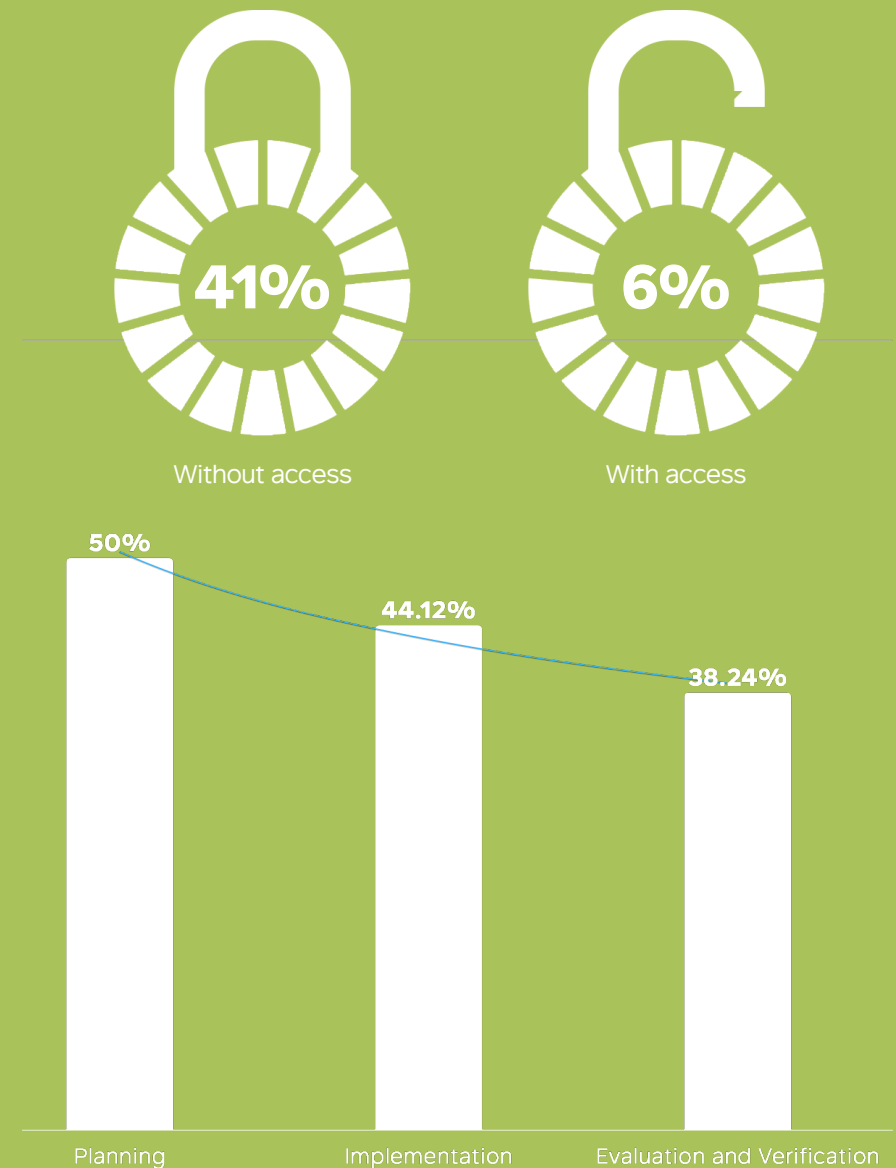


Executive Summary

Seven years have passed since the 2030 Agenda was launched. Although most countries have reported incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their national frameworks, progress has stopped there. This 6th edition of CPDE's VNR series shows widespread lack of consultation mechanisms for stakeholders. For the few CSOs who were able to share recommendations to their governments, almost none have been incorporated into their respective VNRs. SDG processes remain government-centred, while efforts to build back better, if unchanged, will simply go back to the ways of old where peoples' rights are curtailed and development is exclusive. Through the lens of Effective Development Cooperation (EDC), the CPDE VNR study outlines recommendations the development community can use to reconfigure its recovery roadmap.

Main Messages:

1. Governments must cascade the ownership of the SDGs from the national to the local levels.
2. Institutionalised and broad-based multi-stakeholder consultations that include civil society, especially those from the marginalised sectors, must be mainstreamed in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
3. Unlock barriers to transparency of the 2030 Agenda by allowing citizen verification and scrutiny of SDG processes.
4. Reform government processes and budget planning to be more evidence-based and results-driven.
5. Establish a national resilience plan that targets the most adversely affected.



Main messages

Governments must cascade the ownership of the SDGs from the national to the local levels. Promote democratic ownership of development programs that are based on national priorities rooted on community needs. National plans must bring the target and indicator setting of SDG implementation to the sub-national, local, and village levels.

Institutionalised and broad-based multi-stakeholder consultations that include civil society, especially those from marginalised sectors, must be mainstreamed in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Enabling laws, policies, clear sets of guidelines, and financial support must be made available to ensure genuine and inclusive participation.

Unlock barriers to transparency of the 2030 Agenda by allowing citizen verification and scrutiny of SDG processes. VNR and SDG implementation processes of governments should be open to civil society and the public for verification and scrutiny. CSO-generated information must be taken into account in government planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Reform government processes and budget planning to be more evidence-based and results-driven. National budgets must be redirected to the SDGs, poverty eradication, and factors that are inhibiting inclusive development in countries. Donors, together with all development partners, should further strengthen their commitment to effective development cooperation as a necessary ingredient to realising the 2030 Agenda.

Establish a national resilience plan that targets the most adversely affected. Governments should acknowledge that the impact of the pandemic is highly uneven. Marginalised groups and other disadvantaged sectors require more support to recover. National plans should begin with setting guidelines that will protect the rights of the people even as progress on SDGs were dislodged.

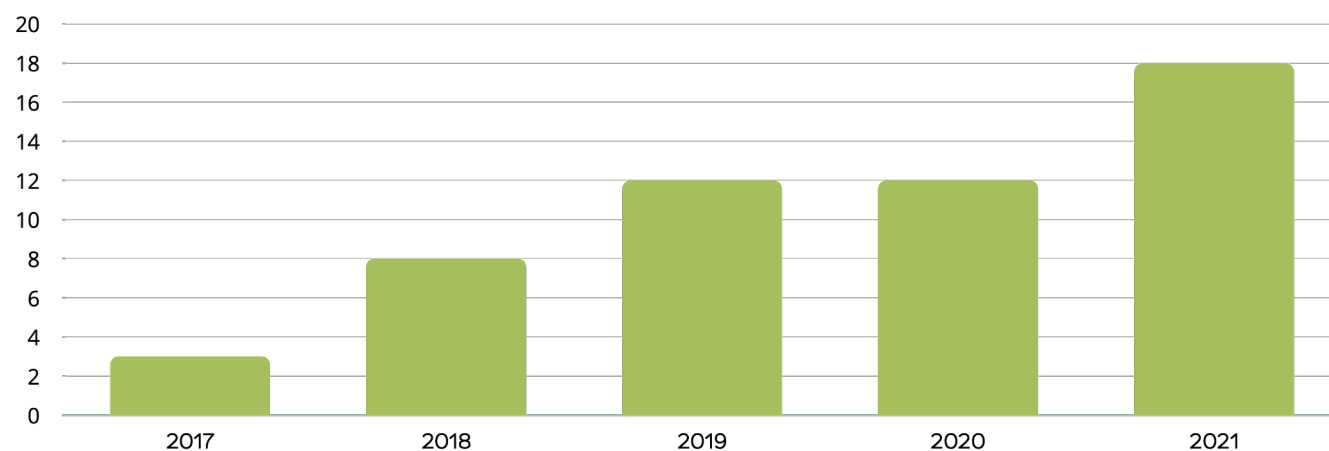
Methodology and background of the study

Ahead of the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2022, the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) conducted a survey from the 24th of March to the 13th of May 2022, to assess the quality of SDG implementation across the world. A total of 47 civil society organisations (CSOs) from 26 countries participated in the study. They represent 18 Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting countries for the year 2022.

This 2022 VNR study entitled “Challenge the ways of old: CSO demands for urgent and extraordinary actions in Effective Development Cooperation toward pandemic recovery” is the 6th installment of CPDE’s VNR series. Conducted annually for the last six years, it is a testament to the strong commitment of civil society to ensure that SDG implementation despite the context of its processes almost exclusively echoing in the realm of governments. About two-thirds of this year’s respondents are organisations who are committed to the process and have been engaged in the survey in previous editions, while one-third represents new CSOs answering the survey for the first time.

This study is limited to the contributions of the respondent CSOs who are CPDE focals in their respective countries. They do not necessarily represent or are exhaustive of all civil society of their countries.

Figure 1. CPDE VNR studies returning respondents have participated in



47 civil society organisations (CSOs) from 26 countries participated in the study.

In this study, 35 (70%) of the respondents' countries will be presenting their VNR for the year 2022, while the rest (30%) have presented in the previous years or are scheduled to report after 2022.

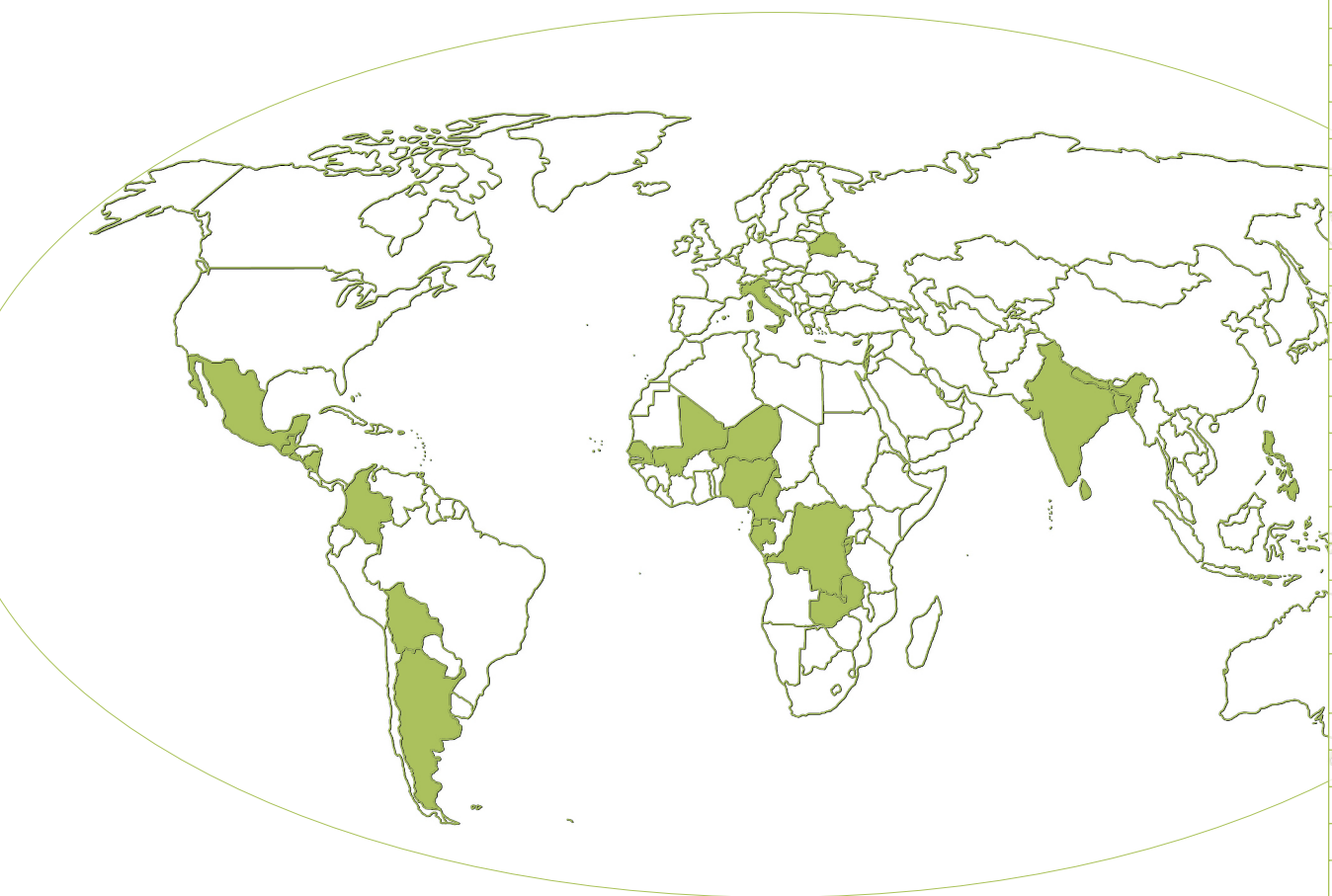


Table 1. **Countries covered by the CPDE 2022 Survey**

Countries	No. of CSO respondents	2022 VNR Reporting country
Argentina	3	Y
Bangladesh	1	
Belarus	3	Y
Bolivia	1	Y
Burundi	2	Y
Cameroon	3	Y
Colombia	1	
El Salvador	4	Y
Gabon	3	Y
Guatemala	1	Y
India	2	Y
Italy	1	Y
Lebanon	2	Y
Mali	1	
Mexico	1	
Nepal	1	Y
Nicaragua	1	
Niger	2	
Nigeria	1	Y
Philippines	3	Y
Democratic Republic of the Congo	2	Y
Rwanda	1	
Senegal	2	Y
Sri Lanka	1	Y
Togo	3	Y
Zambia	1	

Effective Development Cooperation

Effective development cooperation (EDC) is a framework that seeks to shape and align development programmes and policies to ensure that all stakeholders, especially those belonging to the marginalised sectors, are involved in the process of addressing the structural causes of poverty, inequality, and social marginalisation.

It embodies four shared principles:



Ownership of development priorities by developing countries: Countries should define the development model that responds to their needs.



Inclusive partnership for development: Development depends on the participation of all actors, and recognises the diversity and complementarity of their functions.



A focus on results: Creating a sustainable impact should be the driving force behind investments and efforts in development.



Transparency and shared responsibility: Development cooperation must be transparent and accountable to all citizens.

Introduction

Setting the pace of progress for the world to achieve the 2030 Agenda was not easy. This journey which began in 2016 had many innate challenges, especially rising to the level of ambition enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governments may have been ready to adopt the 2030 Agenda but were clearly not ready to take the necessary action and have failed to prioritise the needs of those left furthest behind, making the prospect of achieving the SDGs very bleak. The outlook has further worsened with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) providing governments with additional and exceptional powers to curtail peoples' rights, on the pretext of mitigating the impacts of the pandemic.

The 2022 CPDE VNR study showcases the recommendations and experiences of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) during this global crisis. It looks at the experiences of CSOs in the national implementation of the SDGs and offers recommendations, through the lens of Effective Development Cooperation (EDC), which the development community can use to reconfigure its recovery roadmap.

The theme of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) for 2022 is “Building Back Better from the COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” This framing, which sets high aspirations for the political process and negotiations taking place at HLPF, is already missing out on relevant points in relation to two main aspects. In its ambition, it fails to acknowledge that there are only eight years until the 2030 deadline set for the “full implementation” of the SDGs. There seems to be no recognition of how only scaling up political will through concrete action will actually get us anywhere near fulfilling the aspirations set by the SDGs and 2030 Agenda. Additionally, the idea of Building Back Better avoids providing concrete reference to not only the complex scenario shaped by the pandemic, but the urgent need for system change on how the international community is cooperating and working towards eradicating poverty and attaining equity around the world.

The lack of system change is evidenced by the study not much has progressed in terms of how countries are doing business. While 87.18% of the total 47 respondents have reported that their countries have integrated the SDGs into their national frameworks, only seven CSOs say that their recommendations have been included in their country's VNR. Only six CSOs were able to access their country's national frameworks.

This is consistent with CPDE's 2020 and 2021 VNR studies where past findings reveal that although there is a high level of awareness on SDG implementation and VNR processes, meaningful civil society participation is yet to be effectively integrated and implemented. CSO consultations were either informal, ad-hoc, or absent altogether. Even basic information and data on SDG implementation remain inaccessible to the public. The SDG process around the world remained government-centric and unwilling to open up to stakeholders or to expend precious resources to ensure more democratic processes.

The persisting lack of acknowledgement of civil society as independent development actors in their own right is detrimental to the very aspirations of the 2030 Agenda. In spite of its mantra to leave no one behind, to which countries readily subscribed to, many governments remain dismissive of CSOs. Economic growth has been deliberately and consistently used as an excuse to suppress the rights and voices of civil society and marginalised sectors. This has only been further reinforced in a COVID-19 world where increased militarism as a response to the health crisis has led to further infringement and violation of people's rights.

Through the EDC lens, we see these themes continue for 2022. However, this year is crucial as the world gears towards recovery and resilience. It is an opportune moment for all development actors, from governments to civil society, to bring to bear how the world can veer from building back to the ways of old but instead chart new ways forward through a process that is people-centred and democratic.

Progress on goals through the EDC principles

Country Ownership

Ownership at the national level remains the same

Most of this year's respondents (87.18%) say that their countries have an established SDG strategy and/or have integrated the SDGs into their national development planning. However, some countries such as Togo still do not have any specific roadmap or strategies for the implementation of the SDGs. Belarus and Guatemala on the other hand reportedly have SDG frameworks but these remain only in paper as progress on implementation is not shared publicly nor is it translated for it to be better understood by the broad citizenship.

The implementation of the SDGs are mostly reflected in the countries' ministries of planning, development, and economic affairs. Other countries put the environment as the central theme for the implementation of SDGs, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo which listed their Ministry of Agriculture, and Italy which listed the Ministry for Ecological Transition, as their responsible ministries. However, countries such as Burundi listed international agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the main responsible agency in their national SDG implementation. This is consistent with CPDE's 2021 study where select countries continue to rely and/or are still dependent on the support and leadership of external parties to coordinate their SDG implementation, reflecting persisting issues such as lack of political leadership, capacity, and ownership in some countries.

Figure 2: Status of country ownership of the SDGs and its implementation



Localisation of the SDGs is still unrealised

Only about 20 percent of the respondents have reported that SDG implementation is happening at the sub-national and local levels while half of the total respondents say that there are Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) being conducted. This is alarming as SDG implementation is best reflected when the framework is cascaded and localised within countries where targets and indicators are organically developed from the ground up.

Progress is stagnating

The common denominator that links most of the respondents is the continued lack of mechanisms for participation of stakeholders, particularly CSOs, in their country's SDG implementation. While there may be existing platforms for stakeholder engagement, most only focus on the private sector. CSOs are also not fully included in the decision-making process for discussing and developing strategies to address the SDGs.

The prevalence of corruption, lack of good governance, and the infringement on human rights also continue to be disabling factors that keep CSOs from engaging in national SDG processes. Mexico and the Philippines for instance report that their governments had questionable methodologies with respect to the VNR process, measurement of SDG indicators, and the formulation of national plans integrating the different pillars of the SDGs.

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Inclusive Partnerships

CSOs remain sidelined by SDG consultation processes

Only about 6 out of 10 CSOs report that there are existing mechanisms for CSO engagement in their country's SDG planning, implementation, and review processes. This aligns with the discussion on country ownership where many CSOs attribute their main issues to the lack of space to engage their country's SDG process.

Lack of resources and funding, limited participation due to the nature and structure of how consultations are conducted, slow and bureaucratic procedures, and the lack of information regarding SDG implementation remain structural barriers to the full participation of CSOs in the implementation of the SDGs.

Where existent, the quality of consultation and engagement spaces varies significantly depending on each country. Of those who reported existing mechanisms, less than 4 out of 10 say there is an existing government body that is mandated to reach out to other stakeholders. For the others, only laws, policies, or anticipated consultations exist.

Figure 3: **Existence of mechanisms for CSO Participation in SDG planning, implementation, and review processes.**



Many CSOs attribute their main issues to the lack of space to engage their country's SDG process.

CSOs that were included in their government's SDG consultation process were mostly included in the planning processes. **A downward trend is observed where less and less CSOs are integrated into the succeeding steps of the development process (i.e., implementation, monitoring and evaluation).**

CSOs reported that their participation in government consultations was mainly centered on providing inputs to existing SDG documents, with certain space for sharing recommendations and proposals through position papers and assessments. However, these inputs are rarely integrated into their respective country's VNR. In fact, **only 7 out of the 47 participating CSOs have recorded that their inputs were integrated into the final document.**

Figure 4: Inclusion of CSOs in different SDG implementation processes

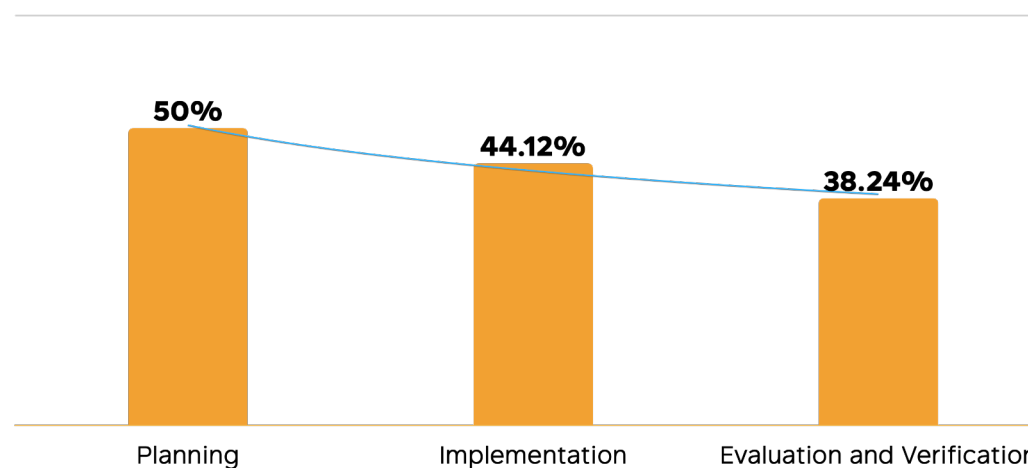
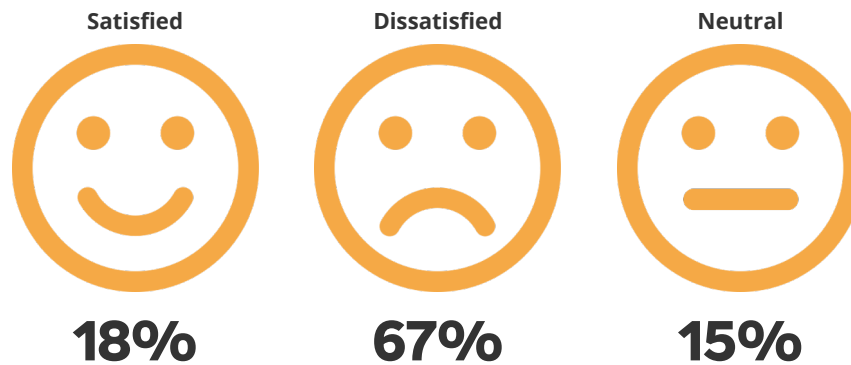


Figure 5: **Civil society satisfaction towards their country's stakeholder engagement**

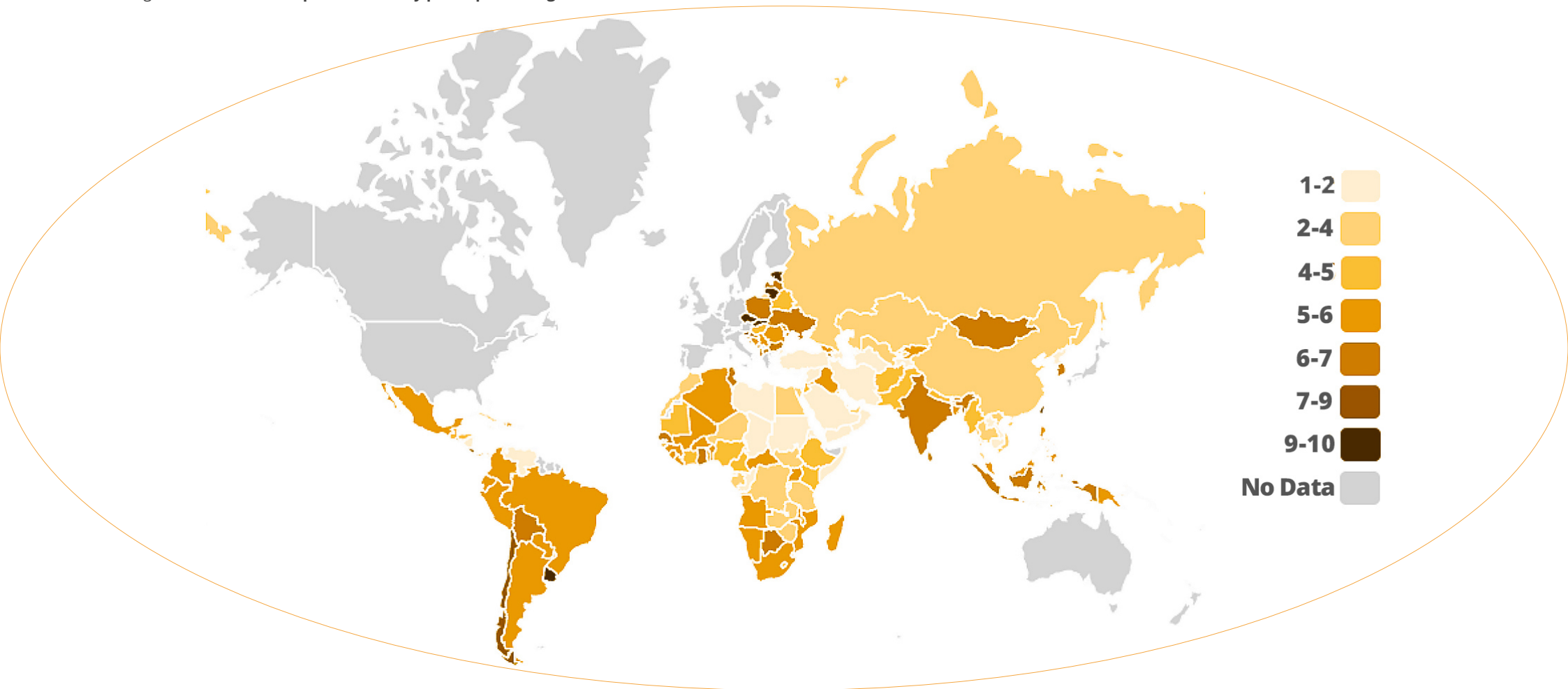


Only in 4 countries (Niger, Italy, Rwanda, and Argentina) have CSOs reported overall satisfaction with their country's mechanisms for CSO participation. While some countries have institutionalised an effective stakeholder consultation mechanism for their SDG implementation, this is the exception rather than the norm. Most CSOs are still dissatisfied by the state of partnerships in their countries. The lack of resources devoted towards their participation also remains a significant hindrance to participation in SDG implementation.

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The level of dissatisfaction of civil society is evident in the TCdata360 by the World Bank in 2020 that shows how much of the global south still ranks low in terms of civil society participation in governance.

Figure 6: **TCdata360 map of civil society participation in governance**¹



¹ World Bank, 2020, TCdata360. (Measure is at 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest)

Transparency and Accountability

Low overall transparency and accountability

60% of the respondents report having existing national frameworks and reporting processes on SDG implementation in their countries. However, only a fraction of this group can actually access these mechanisms. Out of the 47 respondents, only 6 are able to access the national frameworks of their countries. The remaining respondents are either unable to access their country's national frameworks or have only partial access. These frameworks are also described to be not publicly available for use and scrutiny by the people.

Figure 7: Number of respondents out of 47 that are with and without access to their national frameworks

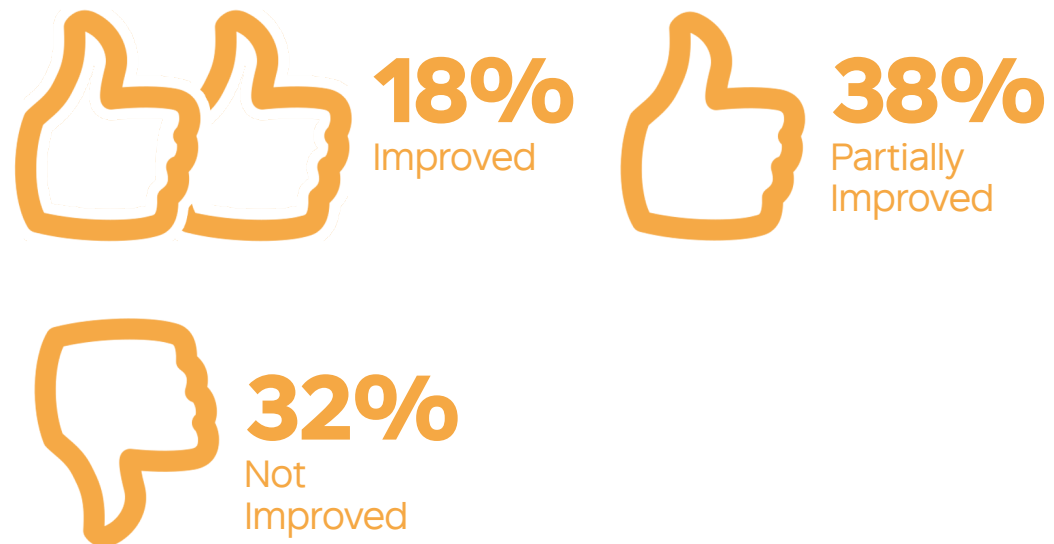


Most countries have either partially improved or have not improved at all in terms of making their SDG implementation more transparent.

The same is true for SDG-related data where only over half of the respondents have access to their own country's databases. CSOs from Mexico, Congo, India, Niger, and El Salvador all have reported that they do not have any access to SDG-related information at all, and that data is not readily available for civil society. **While most of the CSOs have limited access to these SDG-related information, 45% of them have used available data in their planning and assessment of their own SDG work.** Yet, and due to the aforementioned inaccessibility of information, over a third of the participants report being able to only partially make use of the available data on their SDG planning and assessment.

The outlook of how transparency and accountability has progressed over the years has been equally disappointing. From a civil society perspective, most countries have either partially improved or have not improved at all in terms of making their SDG implementation more transparent.

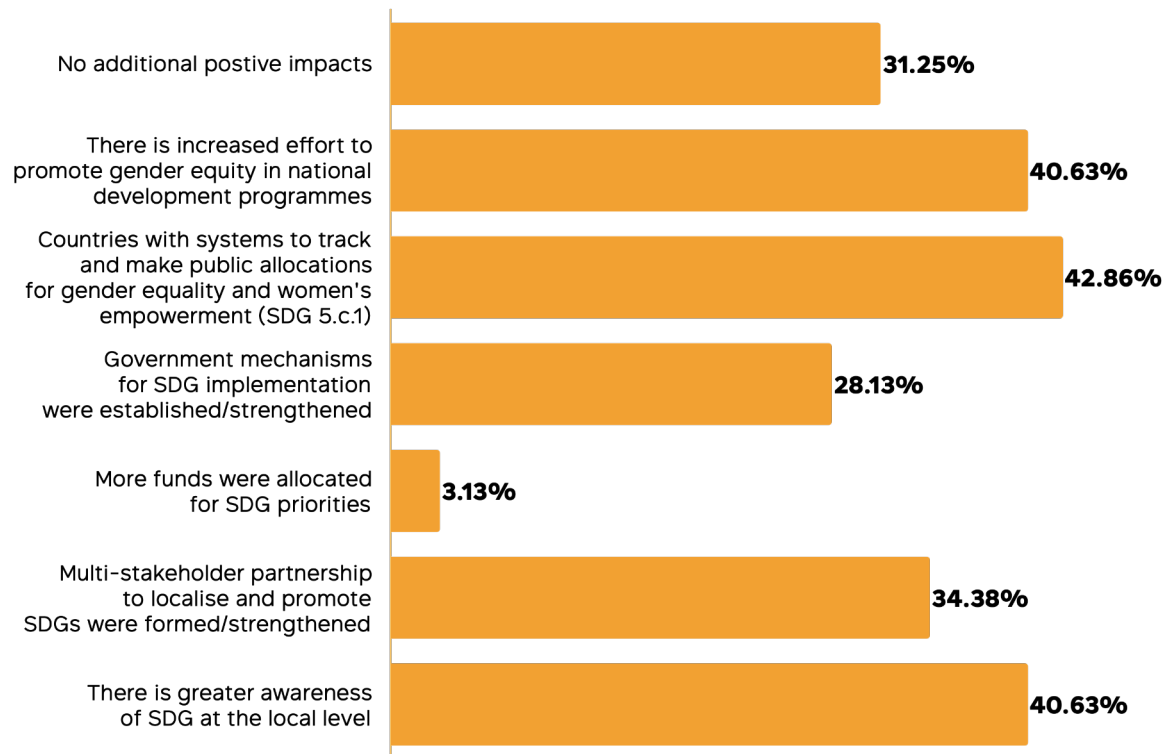
Figure 8: Proportion of improved, not improved, and partially improved transparency



Focus on results

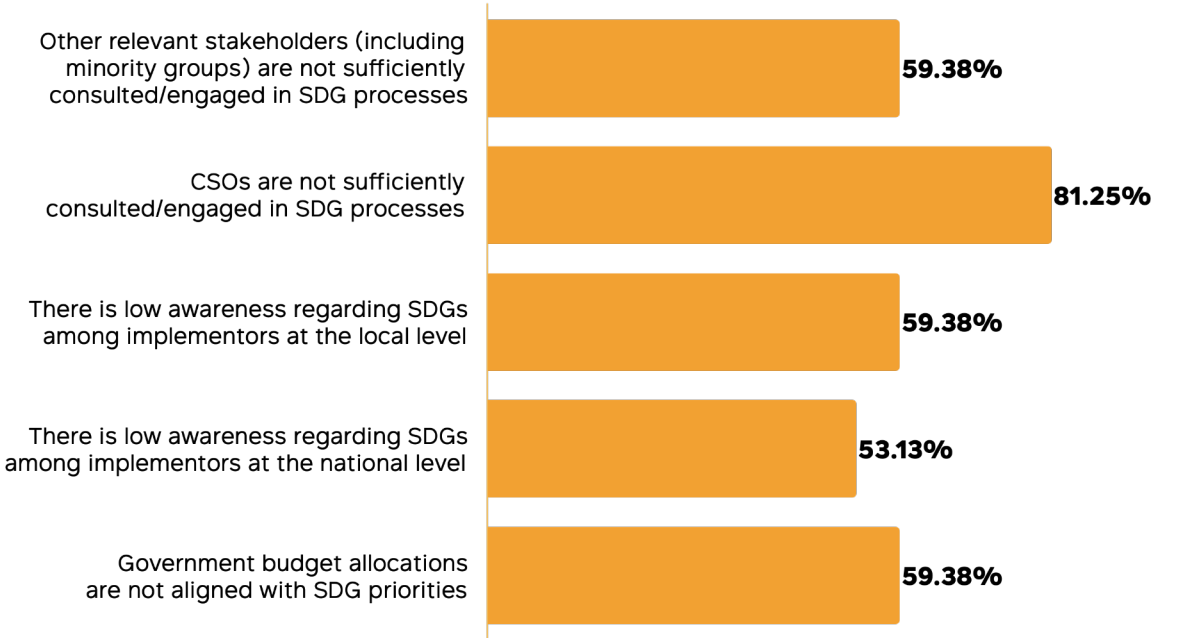
Greater awareness of SDGs at the local level and increased efforts to promote gender equality in national development programs were some of the positive outcomes of proper SDG implementation in select countries. Multi-stakeholder partnerships were also strengthened over the years, but given the previous responses in the preceding indicators, most of these partnerships may be attributed to the private sector and other non-government actors instead of to civil society.

Figure 9: **Positive development on SDG implementation in countries**



A major gap for focusing on results remains to be the degree to which CSOs are consulted and engaged in national SDG implementation in their countries. Other gaps which persist are the misalignment of government budget allocations with SDG priorities and the low awareness of SDGs among national and local implementors. Other stakeholders such as minority groups are also not sufficiently consulted and engaged in SDG processes.

Figure 10: **Persisting gaps in SDG implementation**



Other stakeholders such as minority groups are not sufficiently consulted and engaged in SDG processes.

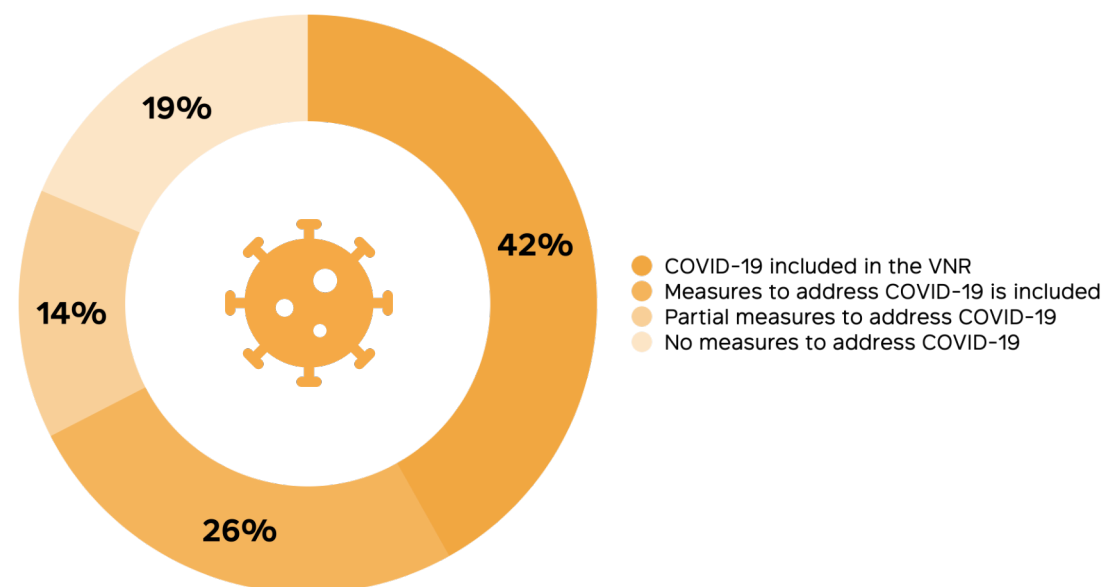
The COVID-19 repercussions

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments crafted national emergency plans and strategies but these hardly include, or have only allowed minimal participation of key stakeholders such as CSOs.

Most CSOs have not been treated as development actors in their own right in the response measures to COVID-19. Past findings of CPDE show that only CSOs who are and or either more institutionalised and government-friendly are the ones invited or allowed to participate in government decision-making process.

This is in keeping with the study's findings where although countries have reflected the impact of COVID-19 in their VNRs and SDG implementation processes, the truth is not accurately depicted. In fact, **many countries only partially depict the repercussions of COVID-19 and the government measures to mitigate it while some completely omit this altogether.**

Figure 11: Percentage of countries that have reported the implications of COVID-19 in their VNR together with the proportion of countries that included their measures to curb it.



Most CSOs have not been treated as development actors in their own right in the response measures to COVID-19.



Ways forward & key recommendations

Looking at the difficult situation of SDG implementation today, emphasis needs to be placed on whole of society approaches. A focus on the furthest behind with effective development co-operation as the key driver for implementation will be essential.

General

- Place the furthest behind first. Policies by governments must take into account vulnerable groups, especially women and girls, who are the most hit by the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.
- Incorporate and practice EDC principles in the conduct of planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of SDG related policies and programs
- Government's recovery plans should not focus solely on the economic aspect alone. Considerations over the climate crisis and the importance of sustainable consumption and renewable energy should be emphasised
- Acknowledge the expertise and network of CSOs in localizing the SDGs through legal assistance, network of local groups, and research studies.

Country ownership

Governments must begin cascading the ownership of the SDGs from the national to the local levels.

- Continue to promote ownership in establishing development priorities by developing countries
- National frameworks should be updated to consider the losses incurred during the pandemic, with a focus on the SDGs which have been less advanced and/or need to be now prioritised
- Governments should develop national plans that will bring the target and indicator setting of SDG implementation to the sub-national, local, and village levels

Inclusive partnership

Institutionalised and broad-based multi-stakeholder consultations that include civil society and marginalised sectors must be mainstreamed in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

- Mainstream the notion that CSOs are vital, integral, and helpful partners in implementing the SDGs especially at the local levels.
- Governments must guarantee that there is an institutionalised mechanism for all civil society to engage its SDG implementation process.
- Regular consultations, clear set of guidelines, and financial support should be provided for civil society engagement of the country's SDG implementation process.
- Due to the imbalanced proliferation of partnerships with a focus on including the private sector over or without the proper inclusion of civil society, there should be better government regulations and monitoring of business behavior for accountability.
- Cooperation on the implementation of the SDGs should promote the inclusion of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
- Governments and civil society should work together to safeguard and protect the rights of all citizens to conduct their independent monitoring and review of all development agenda.
- Civil society in turn should continue collaborating with other CSOs and development actors, especially in the follow-up to the Belgrade Call to Action initiative,² to generate greater impact and more robust recommendations to and commitments from their respective national governments.

² The Belgrade Call to Action: <https://bit.ly/3ytyhPJ>

Transparency and accountability

Unlock barriers for true transparency of the 2030 Agenda by allowing citizen verification and scrutiny of SDG processes.

- VNR and SDG implementation processes of governments should be open to civil society and the public for verification and scrutiny to ensure the accuracy of the VNRs and the democratic ownership of SDG implementation in the country.
- SDG data collection should include the institutionalised participation of non-state actors such as civil society, marginalised groups, and other peoples' groups
- SDG data should be made publicly available to harmonise the efforts of different stakeholders in the country. This will help CSOs and other actors better understand how to plan their SDG-related activities and coordinate their contributions with other development actors, towards attaining Agenda 2030 at the country level.
- CSO research, publications, and other knowledge products should be used to validate government findings in order to ensure the accuracy of national reporting and implementation processes.
- CSO-generated data must be incorporated into government planning, implementation, and evaluation processes to deliver better results and to reach those most in need.
- A national communication strategy should be developed in countries in order to raise awareness and mainstream the SDGs.
- more robust recommendations to and commitments from their respective national governments.

Focus on results

Reimagine government processes and budget planning to be more evidence-based and results-driven

- Development cooperation remains an essential means of implementation towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Donor countries should fulfill their commitment of 0.7% of their GNI for Official Development Assistance in order to meet the financing required to achieve the SDGs.
- The national budget of governments must now be redirected and appropriately balanced from a focus on the health infrastructure back to the SDGs, in particular, poverty eradication and zero hunger.
- Developing the national budget by governments should consider the furthest behind first. Development and financing plans, especially those targeted towards the SDGs,³ should have institutionalised participation by marginalised groups such as indigenous peoples and women and girls.

COVID-19 repercussions

Establish a national resilience plan that targets the most adversely affected

- Governments should identify in their plans which progress on SDGs were dislodged by the pandemic and what solutions can be put into place to recover progress.
- Governments should acknowledge that the impact of the pandemic is highly uneven. Marginalised groups and other disadvantaged sectors require more support to recover.
- Recognise the value of CSOs in building back better through contributions in relief operations, information dissemination, legal assistance, needs assessment, and policy advocacy.
- Stop using pandemic response programs as a pretext for monitoring and suppressing political dissent.

³ The latest OECD report on ODA Levels indicates that overall ODA delivered by donor countries remains at 0.33% of their combined GNI. Apparent increases in ODA delivery are actually barely significant when excluding vaccine donations and in-donor refugee costs - <https://bit.ly/3OKR9iq>

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