

CPDE Statement to the UN SDG Summit 2023

18-19 September 2023
UN Headquarters
New York, New York

The United Nations General Assembly has gathered for its 78th session, this time crowned with expectations around the SDG Summit, the second of its kind since the adoption of Agenda 2030. The Summit marks the halfway point to the deadline set for achieving said agenda. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres declared his aspiration for it to serve as a political milestone which can respond to the impact of multiple and interlocking crises facing the world. It is expected to reignite a sense of hope, optimism, and enthusiasm for the 2030 Agenda¹ by adopting an ambitious political declaration² that provides a roadmap for putting the world back on track to achieve the SDGs by their 2030 deadline.

Yet, all evidence indicates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the corresponding targets will not be met at all, unless –and possibly, even if – radical and difficult decisions are taken. The main trends emerging from the Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report prepared by the Secretary-General Office are disheartening and, nevertheless, not a surprise for civil society organisations and social movements working across the globe. In the report, the Secretary-General finds that many of the Goals are moderately to severely off-track³ - as is the commitment to leave no one behind. There seems to be – at least – generalised consensus around the fact that humanity is facing an unprecedented polycrisis. In this context, the responses we can collectively envision will require a drastic transformation of the systems by which we currently perpetuate our livelihood on Earth, as much as a renewed commitment towards the common ideal of “sustainable development for all”.

CSOs and grassroots organisations are and have always been at the frontlines of every crisis response. The role played by CSOs in keeping the social fabric intact at community level, facilitating basic services in places where no other institution – public or private – is present, safeguarding natural resources, historical heritage and memory, and facilitating processes for the inclusion of women, girls, youth, and those most marginalised, continue to be ignored and neglected. Top-down approaches in policymaking, the lack of consultation and data and monitoring, as well as worsening trends in the closing and shrinking of civic spaces continue to significantly hamper CSOs ability to operate as development actors in their own right. Over the past few years, governments have used the pandemic as a pretext to further crack down on and curtail the rights of the people to organise and speak with a collective voice. The ramifications are far-reaching and present a major hurdle to achieving the collective ambition enshrined in the SDGs, and not only those goals related to civil society.

One of the main studies developed to inform debate and decisions making during the Summit⁴, the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 (GSDR), was released days before the UNGA. The report presents evidence suggesting strong synergies between addressing climate change and

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/SDGSummit2023>

² [Latest Draft for the 2nd SDG Summit Political Declaration](#)

³ “A preliminary assessment of the roughly 140 targets for which data is available shows that only about 12 per cent are on track; more than half, although showing some progress, are moderately or severely off track; and some 30 per cent have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline.” (Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report).

⁴ The other being the already mentioned [Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report](#) prepared by the Secretary-General Office.

achieving the SDGs, whereby advancements in one can lead to improvements in the other. Pursuing the 2030 Agenda and implementation of the Paris Agreement in concert can significantly advance both agendas, the report states. It includes a call for greater institutional coordination and policy coherence across sectors and departments at the national level, to better integrate SDG and climate policy development and action⁵. Additionally, the report states that the large financing gap in climate and development action, and insufficient finance to enhance the synergies needed, are rooted in the *deep failure of the global financial architecture and finance fragmentation that makes policy coherence difficult*.

This is neither a novel nor new finding. CSOs have been calling for the reform of the international financial architecture for decades. CSOs would hope that this alignment in the diagnosis offers some space for hope for new collective ideas and solutions. Unfortunately, the report continues to promote the status quo by stating that “*current efforts to address these failures at the international level should include measures that encourage multilateral development banks and international financial institutions to introduce instruments that enhance climate and development synergies*”, leaving those responsible for the corporate capture of the sustainable development agenda to develop “new” solutions.

Reforming the international system and financial architecture must lead to sustainable development for all, and put the issues of poverty and inequality at the core of its mandate. The levers of power in the international system are grossly imbalanced, and decisions are often made behind closed doors – without input from those that they impact the most. There is then a fundamental need to reconsider where discussions around development finance are made, with the United Nations, being the obvious space. This is not to say that the United Nations is infallible; the institution has much to learn from other institutional spaces that seek to bring in the perspectives from non-governmental actors more deliberately. Yet, it is the only institution that enjoys universal membership and legitimacy in representation.

On the verge of the 78th General Assembly and the SDG Summit, the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness asserts that the effective development cooperation principles, aligned with human and women's rights frameworks, must be refocused, revitalised, and accelerated for a better and inclusive response to urgent global concerns. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030, the vital role CSOs play as development partners and development actors in their own right needs to be supported and re-valued now more than ever.

We call on governments at the SDG summit to 1) Utilise the Effective Development Co-operation (EDC) principles to ensure that development cooperation, especially ODA, contributes to the SDGs; 2) meet the 0.7% GNI target for official development assistance (ODA), and protect ODA's core mandate to poverty eradication; 3) commit to results that deliver the pledge to Leave No One Behind, and 4) build an enabling environment for CSO participation in SDG implementation.

Finally, we uplift past calls by civil society for a Convention on Development Cooperation, which would bind governments to a universally agreed mandate, definition, and purpose. This would eliminate the possibility of governments deploy aid in a way that is inconsistent with a core purpose that is universally agreed and understood, which is what we are seeing now. Given the current state of traditional development cooperation, with its many legitimate criticisms, as well as the urgency required to address the multiple crisis, it is time to revisit this call.#

⁵ It also recommends that the governance and policy frameworks for both the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda will need to be changed in order to align climate action with the SDGs.