

The Long Road to Development

How effectiveness gaps hinder progress in Agenda 2030



CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness



Photo by Evan Krause on Unsplash

Conducted by the global civil society platform CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness in time for the 2021 UN HLPF.

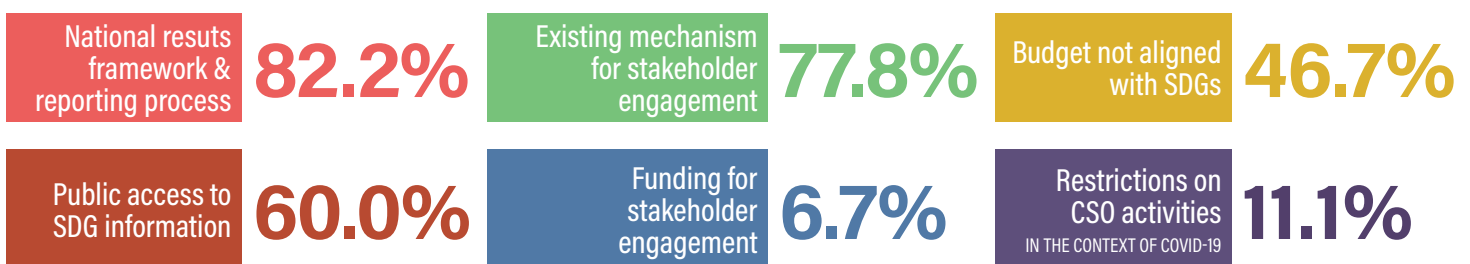
This document presents the reflections and recommendations of civil society organisations (CSOs) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the national level using the lens of effective development cooperation (EDC). This is based on the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) survey conducted from March 27 to April 30, 2021. A total of 109 CSOs participated in this survey from 45 countries – all but three are developing countries, and 11 are scheduled to present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) in 2021.

According to the survey respondents, nearly all governments have integrated the SDGs into national development planning 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, national budgets are not aligned with SDG priorities according to the CSO respondents of the survey, suggesting that there is weak country ownership of SDGs in most countries.

A seemingly positive sign for transparency and accountability is the high proportion of countries establishing a national SDG results framework and reporting process. However, this is made less meaningful because the SDG reporting process is not open to the public in nearly half of the countries covered by the survey. Moreover, SDG information is not proactively disseminated to the public. Even more alarming is the tendency of governments to be highly selective in their SDG reporting, highlighting their achievements while leaving out their shortcomings and failures, creating a misleading portrait of reality.

Out of 45 countries covered by the survey:



Out of 109 CSO respondents:



The CPDE gratefully acknowledges all individuals and their organisations whose valuable inputs to this year's VNR survey made this study possible.

In terms of partnerships with stakeholders and civil society participation, most countries have mechanisms for stakeholder engagement. However, there is still a generally weak 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 significant 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 information regarding SDG implementation. Political factors are also at play, with several CSOs reporting that the process of participation is neither inclusive nor transparent – indeed, critical voices are deliberately excluded.

In terms of results, the survey did not attempt to measure the attainment of SDGs per se. Instead, 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.

CSO respondents identified significant gaps in SDG implementation, including the misalignment of government budget allocations with SDG priorities and inadequate consultation/engagement of CSOs in SDG processes. CSOs report that SDG implementation has been delayed or disrupted by the pandemic and measures implemented to contain the pandemic such as lockdowns and social distancing. Some CSOs also report that CSO activities in their countries have been curtailed as part of pandemic-related restrictions.

Some of the major recommendations drawn from the survey results are:

- 1** Duty-bearers must cooperate with civil society in translating the 2030 Agenda into local plans, programmes and monitoring efforts and ensure that local priorities inform national plans and the VNR process.
- 2** Ensure that national SDG review processes are open to the public and information dissemination is conducted in a proactive manner that connects with citizens, not just technical experts.
- 3** 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.
- 4** Respect and protect the rights of all citizens to conduct their independent monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda, including those who may be critical of state policies and programmes.
- 5** Map out the links between specific policies, programmes and budget allocations with results when reporting progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda



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