

S.A. CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING GROUP ON SDGs

KEY MESSAGES: CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION TO THE VNR

The delivery of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in South Africa requires a new sense of urgency if the promise of ending hunger and extreme poverty, reducing inequality, and ensuring peace and inclusive societies is to be achieved. Such a sense of urgency should be demonstrated through meaningful efforts to domesticate the 2030 agenda through policy alignment with the NDP and MTSF. This alignment must be enforceable at provincial and local government levels, establishing a system of governance fit for purpose, and fast-tracking delivery of the SDGs to the people of South Africa.

The South African Civil Society Working Group notes with dismay the slow pace of SDG adoption in the country, especially because such a pace points to lack of political will and commitment on the part of government. Three years into the adoption of the SDGs, it is clear that while a few areas have improved, delivery on key areas must be accelerated.

Data for Monitoring Sustainability

1. We commend Stats SA for successfully mapping out current data gaps in South Africa and preparing the country's first full SDG report. Through this process it has become clear that disaggregated data, as well as targets that affect the bottom 40%, are wholly inadequate or even missing.
2. The group recommends the following in this regard:
 - Firstly, an SDG monitoring framework highlighting a clear plan for closing the data gaps for Tier II and Tier III indicators needs to be developed. New reliable data sources, including citizen generated data, must be identified.
 - Secondly, monitoring and reviewing sustainable development cannot be a mere statistical and report writing exercise. It must be a meaningful process of reflecting on progress and mapping out a way to improve delivery.

An Institutional Framework for Implementation and Monitoring:

3. The CSO Working Group notes that government recently approved an institutional framework for implementing and monitoring the sustainability agenda in South Africa. However, this institutional framework has not yet been introduced to non-state stakeholders, nor has an action plan been developed for its establishment.
4. The CSO Working Group believes the full establishment of this structure, with non-governmental representatives, is key to successfully implementing the sustainability agenda in the country, underpinning the urgency of setting it up.
5. Furthermore, it is important that the process of establishing this structure is consultative. The CSO Working Group therefore strongly recommends a series of consultations led by DPME to facilitate this process.

The Application of “leave no one behind”

6. The application of the principle of “leave no one behind” is crucial as the country grapples with historical injustices, and to address social and economic marginalisation. The implementation of Agenda 2030, therefore, has to adopt an approach that prioritises those who are furthest from realising their development. In other words, development has to start at the margins and move towards the centre, ensuring it leaves no one behind.
7. The CSO Working Group notes that most of the critical indicators that government is lagging behind on directly affect the bottom 40%. Delivery of these targets must be prioritised using solutions articulated under each goal below, with particular attention paid to vulnerable groups including women, youth, children, and the disabled.
8. Furthermore, the principle of leave no one behind also applies to the extent to which citizens’ voices and agency are strengthened at national, provincial, and local levels.

Accountability of the State to its Citizens

9. Citizen’s voices are necessary to inform and influence the implementation of Agenda 2030 and ensure that development delivery responds to citizens’ needs. Citizen’s agency should be seen as a driver for the implementation of Agenda 2030 based on the understanding that citizens have to actively participate and drive development in their communities. This requires empowering civil society groups to collectively hold the state accountable.
10. State accountability to citizens as recognised in Agenda 2030¹ must be strengthened. Accountability needs to take place from the bottom up, starting by strengthening platforms for participation at local government level, to provincial and national government.

GOAL-SPECIFIC KEY MESSAGES

Goal 4: Quality Education

While South Africa has improved access to education over the last decade, this is not the case for equitable access to quality education. The South African government needs to ensure that everyone has access to quality education that is in line with their abilities, balanced with market needs. Pretoria is well on track to meet the quantitative aspects of SGD Goal 4. Furthermore, there has been significant growth in enrolment at all levels of provision, from early childhood development, Grade R (a pre-primary year), primary and secondary schools, post-school (TVET except university qualifications), university study, and further adult education. The relevance and quality of education though pose the greatest challenge in all levels of education. In addition, quality is inequitably distributed, adding a further brake on the life chances of poor learners in all sectors.

¹ Para 72 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits to engaging in systematic follow-up and review of this implementation of the Agenda and two of guiding principle of the follow up and review process are “(d) They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders”; and e) They will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.”

The blockages causing students to drop out - both at school and higher education levels – is another major stumbling block. It is essential always to have disaggregated data, as the causes vary tremendously between genders, and that monitoring of the situation is ongoing.

It is vital for schools and institutions of higher learning to have security policies. These range from the institutions having written, known, and implemented policies regarding, for example, harassment and sexual violence, to having good lighting on campuses as part of ensuring safe passage. A holistic approach ensures that women and girls' needs are addressed. A further example is safe toilets for all children, including issues of privacy and menstrual hygiene for girls.

Quality education cannot take place without gender equity being applied to human resourcing, retention, and training. In addition, teacher and lecturer training and discipline are essential.

Education is a crosscutting theme, as is gender equality. Therefore the issue of appropriate curricula, learning methods, and access to decent work opportunities go hand-in-hand.

Goal 8: Decent Work

Unemployment, inequality, and poverty are South Africa's three top development challenges. In fact, the country is regressing as far as decent work and employment are concerned, especially for the poor, unskilled, and semi-skilled. This is likely to continue as economic growth stalls and productivity growth in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors decrease. While we recognise the positive commitment of government and industry reflected through the 2018 Job Summit, it is critical that the commitments made be implemented. Furthermore, the economy must be restructured to promote inclusive development by effectively targeting the informal economy and the entrepreneurial sector, and by implementing social wages.

Goal 10: Reduce Inequality

The continuing rise of inequality in South Africa remains a problem. The income and consumption of the bottom 40% shrank from 8.2% in 1994 to 7.2% in 2014; and inequality, measured in Gini coefficient terms, reached 63% in 2015. The growing strife that the poorest of the poor face is an indicator that, despite numerous policy measures, the "leave no one behind" principle is not yet realised. In the absence of a coherent economic and social policy response, inequality continues to rise. We recognise the progress in increased access to social services, as well as the adoption of the national minimum wage as mitigating factors. However, the current trend in labour markets and migration, and the skewed distribution of wealth, will continue to drive higher inequality in South Africa. The income differential between men and women continued to widen, exacerbating inequality.

Goal 13: Climate Action

South Africa is increasingly experiencing extreme weather events such as floods and drought. Though the country has systems in place to collect and verify data on natural disasters, these systems do not adequately address the physical manifestation of such weather events, nor do they sufficiently account for slow onset events such as droughts. In fact, the systems do not assist the poor to deal

with the effects of extreme weather conditions – yet another indicator that the “leave no one behind” principle is not yet realised in the South African landscape. Poor and marginalised communities bear the brunt of climate change, with child- and female-headed households affected disproportionately. Food insecurity is increasing among the bottom 20% of the South African population, as are water security and the overall quality of life. The induced impacts of climate change on food prices and access to basic services have resulted in the cost of living far exceeding the marginal affordability for vulnerable groups in society.

South Africa’s contribution to climate change is increasing, with greenhouse gas emissions rising. Although there are developments in the electricity supply sector to decarbonise, climate action requires broad and economy-wide measures which include liquid fuels (transport), industry both primary and secondary, agriculture, as well as waste, to name a few. Therefore, climate action is not occurring at the required level of ambition in South Africa. Adaptation to already prevalent impacts is not supported, nor are there sufficient initiatives to this effect particularly when considering human settlements.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

We acknowledge government’s efforts to build a just society, and acknowledge the role of Chapter 9 institutions and the courts in upholding the constitution and enforcing safety in the country. However, the high levels of crime within the most vulnerable segments of society, and the high level of violence against women and children in particular, are of significant concern. New forms of insecurity related to scarcity of economic opportunities, public service delivery protests, drug abuse, abductions (human trafficking), and the growing black market in body parts directly lead to increasing unrest and violence in communities.

Further, violence against women (VAW) continues to be a big challenge, recently having been declared a national crisis by the President. Even with limited data to work from, violence against women in South Africa is enduring, and has been described as ‘widespread, at a high level and normalised’² and as occurring in endemic proportions. Interpol’s comparative statistics worldwide suggest that in 2002, South Africa ranked as the world’s number one in terms of reported cases of VAW. Recent reports indicate that this situation has not changed. The recorded murder rate of 24.7 per 100,000 females in South Africa is significantly higher than global levels.³ These safety challenges must be urgently addressed. Current urban planning patterns do not prioritise safety, and lack crime prevention elements - especially in informal settlements where the most vulnerable live.

Civil society plays a fundamental role in promoting and protecting human rights, sustainable development, democracy, and the rule of law. In this regard it is essential that the state creates and

²Human Rights Council (HRC). (2016). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Her Mission to South Africa*.

³Abrahams et al. (2009); Dahlberg, L., & Krug, E. G. (2002). “Violence – A Global Public Health Problem”. In E. Krug, L. L. Dahlberg, J. Mercy, A. Zwi, & R. Lozano (Eds.), *World Report on Violence and Health* (pp.3–21). Geneva: World Health Organisation.

maintain laws and a regulatory framework in which civil society organisations and the public can operate freely, without any fear or unnecessary constraints.

The rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression are internationally recognised and protected. South Africa is a signatory to and has ratified international treaties that recognise fundamental rights such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁴, which commits parties to respect the civil and political rights of individuals, including the right to freedom of expression.

South Africa has also ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, which also recognises the right to freedom of expression.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

South Africa is making slow progress on domestic resource mobilisation. Compounding revenue shortfalls have resulted in rising debt service cost to the amount of R 202 billion, or 11 percent of public expenditure. A country with a large public debt component is indicative of a stressed national budget, weak financial administrative systems, and a poor economic environment. Illicit outflows and Tax avoidance of various forms has shifted tax burden disproportionately to lower income brackets.

The CSO Working Group strongly recommends that the government uses the VNR platform to call on the global community to urgently address illicit financial flows and financing for development by delivering on commitments they already made. The country is affected most when it comes to illicit financial flows, owing to a lack of accountability and corruption by global corporations.

We note with great concern that South Africa is categorised as an upper middle-income country, which does not take into consideration the high levels of inequality with a Gini coefficient of 0.63, a poverty rate of 55.5 percent, and an unemployment rate of 27.7 percent. This categorisation has implications for South Africa in terms of trade, technology transfer, and access to development support.

South Africa forms part of various South-South Cooperation (SSC) partnerships - including the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Bloc - which have committed to promoting the SDGs. The country is well placed to take leadership in promoting inclusive partnerships in SSC, including with civil society.

Civil society is concerned with the public's limited understanding of South Africa's role in terms of its reach (quantity) and effectiveness (quality) in its SSC endeavours, especially in Africa. Given its long history in SSC, and more than ten years of planning for the South Africa Development Partnership Agency, the country should urgently intensify efforts to strengthen its accountability and capacity to assess the effectiveness of its SSC. Improving accountability and transparency of the country's SSC is important for effective inclusive partnerships, which is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda under SDG 17.

⁴ Adopted by General Assembly through resolution 2200A (XXI) on 16 December 1966. It entered into force about 10 years later on 23 March 1976. Available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.

THE END.

The Key messages were written by experts from the following organisations:

1. African Monitor
2. Bridge - Linking Innovators in Education
3. Catholic Institute for Education
4. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
5. Commission for Gender Equality
6. Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)
7. The Economic Justice Network (EJN) of FOCCISA
8. Human Rights Institute Of South Africa
9. National Labour & Economic Development Institute (NALEDI)
10. Nature Justice
11. NEHAWU
12. National Union of Mine Workers
13. OXFAM SA
14. South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union(SACCAWU)
15. SACCAWU
16. South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)
17. Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT)
18. Solidarity Center
19. Sonke Gender Justice
20. 350 Africa.org
21. Gender CC
22. Green Peace Africa
23. Legal Resource Center

They were also adopted by the South African SDGs Open Club Symposium held from 12th to 14th June 2019 which was brought together by approximately 130 civil society representatives from different sectors.