

NOT WITHOUT US: CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 was preceded by a consultative process that spanned several years. Launched with the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, it involved various thematic and national consultations, expert group initiatives and intergovernmental stages in the form of an Open Working Group of UN Member States convening in 2013 and 2014 and intergovernmental negotiations during 2015.

Civil society played an active role throughout this process. Civil society stakeholders participated in sessions of the intergovernmental negotiations and the Open Working Group and provided input to governments ahead of and during sessions. Civil society fed into the discussions through participating in consultations organized by UN, government and other stakeholders and engaged in persistent advocacy also outside of formal settings to influence governments' positions. To coordinate their efforts and strengthen the impact of their advocacy, civil society organizations worked in coalitions across sectors and across countries and regions.

Through this engagement, civil society helped shape the 2030 Agenda. Civil society groups strongly advocated for an ambitious and holistic agenda covering a wide set of objectives across social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. They also firmly called for an agenda grounded in human rights principles and aspiring to improve outcomes for all people, including marginalized population groups, and thus an agenda addressing many of the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Civil society advocacy on these and other asks influenced the aims and ambitions of the Agenda.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights cut across the SDGs

Sexual and reproductive health and rights advocates strongly called for an agenda that, unlike the MDGs, would include

commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights from the outset. We also advocated for an agenda that would treat sexual and reproductive health and rights as cross-cutting and not just a health issue. We are pleased therefore that two separate targets on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights were included under the health and gender equality goals – Goals 3 and 5 – of the 2030 Agenda and that elements of sexual and reproductive health and rights are also touched upon in other targets.

Goal 3 includes targets calling for a significant reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality, an end to the AIDS epidemic and the achievement of universal health coverage, including financial risk protection and access to quality essential health-care services and safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all. Goal 5 targets demand the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls and harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Targets under Goal 10 call for the social, economic and political inclusion of all and the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices.

A whole range of targets furthermore address conditions that significantly contribute to an environment in which sexual and reproductive health and rights can be realized. This includes targets under Goals 4 and 8 on education and employment and under Goal 1 on ending poverty. It also includes targets under Goal 16 demanding the development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels as well as equal access to justice and legal identity, including birth registration, for all. It further includes targets under Goals 9 and 11 which call for the development of quality and reliable infrastructure and safe, affordable and accessible transport systems.

It is also important to bear in mind that sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential to the realization of many of the targets of the Agenda, beyond those under Goals 3 and 5 only.

Achieving targets on education and full and productive employment under Goals 4 and 8 respectively will not be possible if girls and women continue to miss out on education and employment opportunities because of early marriages and pregnancies. The social, economic and political inclusion of all, called for under Goal 10, will not be achieved if restrictive social norms discourage the participation of women and girls or if women's and girls' reproductive rights are denied (see Image 1).

SDG implementation – no one size fits all

The cross-cutting nature of sexual and reproductive health and rights is reflected in the SDGs and must now also guide governments' implementation efforts. There is no one size fits all approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Governments will pursue implementation in different ways, depending on their national circumstances and realities. They may choose to incorporate the goals and targets into already existing policies and processes or they may put in place new structures to guide their implementation. They may establish inter-ministerial working groups to coordinate implementation efforts or develop dedicated implementation strategies.

Yet, whatever the approach chosen to implement the SDGs, it will be important for it to be cross-sectoral so as to reflect the interlinkages that exist between the goals and targets. For sexual and reproductive health and rights this will mean that they must not be designated a responsibility of health ministries or ministries of women's affairs only, which would be contrary to the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, but be understood as a cross-cutting issue to be dealt with across sectors and across ministries.

Civil society involvement critical

Whatever the approach chosen for implementation, it will also be essential that provision be made for meaningful involvement of civil society. Civil society



Image 1. SDGs, SRH and human rights (1).

Specific targets relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights

There are several targets that relate directly to SRHR, as well as those that have aspects of SRHR, demonstrating the cross-cutting nature and importance of SRHR to achieving sustainable development for all. Given the scope of the Agenda, you may find it most helpful to identify those targets that relate more closely to your work or that are significant gaps in your context.

The specific targets that relate directly to SRHR are:

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Targets:

- 3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births
- 3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases
- 3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes
- 3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Targets:

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

- 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

However, elements of SRHR can also be found in other goals, demonstrating how SRHR cuts across all areas of sustainable development and is critical to the overall success of the Agenda. Furthermore, many of the targets of the Agenda are essential for creating an environment in which SRHR can be realized.

This includes, for example, the following:

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Targets:

- 4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- 4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Target:

- 6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation

and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Target:

- 8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Targets:

- 10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
- 10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
- 10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Targets:

- 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- 16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

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(CONTINUED)

played a critical role in the lead up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, amply demonstrating its ability to work across sectors and engage with a complex and multi-thematic political process and must now also be part of the implementation of the Agenda.

Civil society stakeholders can take on a variety of functions in the implementation process. They can spur government action through persistent advocacy and act as watchdogs holding governments accountable to their commitments. They can advise governments on concrete implementation measures to take, building on their experience on the ground, often working with marginalized communities. Civil society organizations can also directly support implementation through the role they often play in service delivery, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and can have an important role in supporting data collection efforts, including on marginalized groups.

To ensure effective civil society engagement in the implementation process, it is important that involvement not be of a merely informal nature. Civil society should have formal roles, such as through formal consultations on government implementation plans and measures, representation on mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts and formal channels for participation in accountability processes (see Image 2).

Enabling environment for civil society participation

In order for civil society to be able to contribute meaningfully to implementation of the SDGs, it is essential to have an enabling environment in which it can operate freely. This requires respect by governments of rights to freedoms of opinion and expression and of association and peaceful assembly as well as to access to justice. It also requires transparency of government and public access to information. Commitment to these freedoms and entitlements is affirmed in the 2030 Agenda itself. Goal 16 calls for “effective, accountable and transparent institutions” as well as “responsive, inclusive, participa-

tory and representative decision-making” at all levels and also explicitly demands public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms.

It will be important that governments raise public awareness of the SDGs and implementation measures, including by ensuring availability of information in all relevant languages and in accessible formats. Information on consultations and other opportunities for participation should be made available in good time and through channels accessible to all stakeholders. Particular effort should be invested in outreach to marginalized population groups, which can also be facilitated by civil society organizations.

An enabling environment also requires that civil society actors have access to funding and other resources. Governments should support and encourage civil society capacity-building and engagement through providing for funding for civil society activity and should refrain from unduly restricting civil society organizations’ access to resources. Particular focus should be placed on supporting the capacity-strengthening of organizations representing marginalized population groups and grassroots organizations.

Not without us

Civil society was a key stakeholder in the development of the 2030 Agenda, contributing its expertise and engaging with decision-makers at different levels and throughout all stages of the process. It must now also have a central role in the implementation of the Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda itself makes multiple references to engagement with civil society in the implementation process. It proclaims the Agenda as “an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people” and calls for the establishment of a global partnership “with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people” to work on its implementation. Governments must ensure that civil society has a seat at the table as they implement the 2030 Agenda and must provide for an environment in which meaningful civil society engagement is

possible and encouraged. Living up to the promise of the Agenda and the process that preceded its adoption requires no less.

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References

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Image 2. Actions for civil society to move forward the SDGs and SRH&R (1).

This flow chart illustrates some of the steps you can take to turn the 2030 Agenda into action through advocacy, awareness raising and working in coalition.

REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- Advocate for your government to report on progress made in a timely and transparent way
- Conduct your own research at national and community level
- Draft shadow reports on progress and track budgets
- Support the establishment of and take part in accountability mechanisms at national, regional and global levels

MAKE A PLAN

- Ask the government where it is with the implementation process
- Volunteer to be on any reference groups or oversight mechanisms
- Identify which team/ministry is responsible for the SRHR targets, and if it links to an existing mechanism or commitment
- Develop a plan to promote and monitor the implementation of the Agenda, especially for goals 3 and 5

WORK WITH OTHERS

- Identify allies at a national level who can support you in your advocacy
- Think beyond your usual partners and reach out to researchers, international human rights institutions, academics, economists and other networks

RAISE AWARENESS

- Identify your priority areas for action on SRHR
- Press your government to start awareness raising in Parliament and the media
- Start a public awareness campaign about the Agenda and how it will help achieve good health outcomes and gender equality