



Expanding Civil Society Contributions to the Governance Agendas of the Sustainable Development Goals and International Financial Institutions

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June 2019



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TRANSPARENCY

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Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude for the support of the PTF Interns and Research Assistants who contributed to this report, including Eyad Mahadeen and Yeukai Mukorombindo. We would also like to thank other colleagues at PTF for their assistance in developing this publication and willingness to help with each of their unique abilities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Citizens worldwide are demanding more transparency, participation and accountability in government operations. The rising demand is fueled by the growth of digital communications, rapid urbanization, youth and women's activism, and concerns about climate change and rising inequality. Governments have responded by adopting [Sustainable Development Goal 16 \(SDG16\)](#) targets for reducing corruption, making institutions accountable and responsive, promoting inclusive and participatory decision making and ensuring public access to information, among others. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have also included governance and controlling corruption in their corporate strategies and are assisting borrowing countries to do so. These commitments reflect the belief and evidence that improving governance and controlling corruption as necessary for the achievement of the entire [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development \(Agenda 2030\)](#).

Despite these commendable commitments, a common view is that good governance goals are “aspirational” and prospects for achieving them are slim. Governments are known to be more responsive to elites who keep them in power rather than to all citizens and are often reticent to being held accountable. This has led to low trust in government institutions to fight corruption. For example, 57% of the respondents surveyed for the [2017 Global Corruption Barometer Report](#) said their government is doing badly in fighting corruption and key government institutions are corrupt. This view is supported by cross-country governance indicators that demonstrate the state of governance and corruption has not changed substantially in the past two decades. Indeed, available data indicates that progress towards SDG16 so far is ‘uneven’ at best.

Increased civic engagement is an important part of the solution to accelerate progress towards SDG16 and improve the effectiveness of IFI good governance and anti-corruption efforts. Even when governments institute measures to improve governance, these often do not work as intended, be it because of capacity constraints, weak incentives or design loopholes. These so-called “supply side” measures should be complemented by a demand for accountability. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) represent, support and embolden the “demand side” of democratic governance—engendering greater citizen uptake, better feedback and truly independent oversight.

Civil society has demonstrated its ability to enhance governance and is increasingly being urged to do more. For example, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General notes in a [2019 Report on Progress towards the SDGs](#), “The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was a victory for international cooperation but most of all for the world's people. The high-level gatherings in September 2019, including the SDG Summit, give us a moment to reflect on the first four years of this essential journey. Despite slow progress, I remain convinced that we can bring the Agenda's inspiring vision to life on all fronts, multilateral action is essential. In

the [Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#), thousands of worldwide civil society members of the [Transparency, Accountability and Participation \(TAP\) Network](#) have pledged to do their part, but have pointed out that complementary actions by key development partners that are needed for CSOs to maximize their contributions as called for in Agenda 2030.

In this context, this paper takes a deep dive into how civil society can accelerate and maximize its contributions to achieving the good governance targets of Agenda 2030 and IFIs. It submits seven recommendations for development partners, including CSOs, philanthropists, international NGOs, bilateral donors and IFIs to move from rhetoric to action. The paper examines roles for civil society to play in improving governance outcomes under SDG16 and IFI policies, reviews the evidence on what works and what does not, and presents recommendations for stakeholders to establish and expand successful CSO-led programs.

The authors acknowledge that national actions and budgets will be the primary determinant of progress in achieving SDG targets including those of SDG16. At the same time, IFIs play an important role in the development of low and middle-income countries, with the influence and resources to encourage borrowing countries to engage in CSO collaboration. As such, they can play a catalytic role in expanding CSO-led initiatives to improve governance, and have therefore been targeted in our analysis and recommendations.

SDG 16 PROGRESS

Reports on SDG16 progress indicate that the world is falling short. Governments seem, by lack of evidence in their [Voluntary National Reporting \(VNR\)](#), to have given it relatively low priority. Due in large part to the lack of official information available, unofficial reporting on SDG16 progress has been undertaken by CSOs themselves, noting little progress at the global level. The upcoming [UN High Level Policy Forum \(HLPF\)](#) meetings in July and September 2019 are scheduled to review progress of SDG16 among others. Reports prepared in advance of the meeting confirm that progress is falling short.

Civil society is a partner in Agenda 2030 and is expected to engage in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. However, evidence suggests that CSOs have not been appropriately involved thus far. Common reasons given among CSOs contributing to the HLPFs have been that few governments have encouraged informed collaboration and few opportunities have emerged for CSOs to participate substantially in official national reporting mechanisms. This lack of meaningful CSO participation is corroborated by the VNRs submitted by 102 countries from 2016-18.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

We reviewed more than 40 studies to distill information from hundreds of cases and sources on the primary factors influencing the effectiveness of civic engagement to improve governance. The evidence reveals that CSOs have been successful in producing positive governance outcomes, but this is highly dependent on context.

In nearly every socio-political environment, there is the opportunity for engagement between civil society and government, if the program is adjusted to suit the context. Pathways for CSOs to contribute to SDG and IFI good governance agendas include:

- Right to information advocacy and monitoring
- Public expenditure tracking and participatory budgeting
- Holding the state accountable through third party monitoring
- Raising awareness of people's rights and entitlements
- Encouraging citizens to express voice during consultations
- Representing the poor in policy formulation at a local and national level
- Demanding transparency, accountability, and inclusive access to services
- Engaging constructively to improve public services delivery
- Improving effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms
- Connecting with other CSOs to form coalitions

Our research indicates that successful civic engagement programs appropriately evaluate and address the following aspects of context:

- ***Access to and appropriate use of information.*** Qualitative and quantitative information is fundamental for civil society to judge whether services are being delivered satisfactorily and projects are being implemented appropriately. However, information is only useful if it is packaged in a way that permits the audience to comprehend what is being transmitted.
- ***Citizen knowledge & awareness.*** Multiple studies note the importance of citizen awareness. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) reviewed the lessons of 50 social accountability projects it supported, revealing they are more likely to succeed when citizens know their rights, be they the services to which they are entitled, procedures they can expect government agencies to follow or specifications for new infrastructure projects.

- **Engagement with public authorities.** To be effective, social accountability requires that CSOs engage constructively with government institutions and that the latter respond effectively to deficiencies identified. Interventions which help build an enabling environment and strengthen state responsiveness are more successful than those that only promote citizen voice.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1) Context Matters. The exact same measure that works in one context may not work, without adaptation, in another.
- 2) In suitable contexts, positive outcomes are produced such as increased: transparency; access; community participation and empowerment; government responsiveness; implementation effectiveness; grievance redress; inclusion; accountability of the state; budget utilization; trust in public institutions; and reduced waste and corruption.
- 3) The strongest evidence of positive outcomes is found in public services delivery and public financial management.
- 4) Use of CSOs as intermediaries makes a significant difference in raising awareness, organizing collective action, facilitating constructive engagement with authorities, ensuring inclusion, and closing feedback loops.
- 5) Combining multiple social accountability tools and continuous engagement to enable collective action produces better outcomes than one intervention for a short period.
- 6) Closing the feedback loop is essential for positive outcomes to materialize.
- 7) In certain contexts, negative outcomes can occur, such as token participation, reprisals and/or denial of service, elite capture, violent state response, community disenchantment.
- 8) Success at local levels has seldom led to change and institutionalization at sub-national and national program levels.

Source: *These insights are compiled by PTF based on literature review involving more than 40 studies and meta-studies containing synthesis of hundreds of other primary sources.*

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY-LED GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS

Entry points for CSOs to promote good governance. Civil society interaction with government counterparts has been most productive and successful in monitoring and reporting on: the delivery of public services which affect citizens directly, such as education, health, water supply and social protection; and public financial management. CSOs can make a greater contribution to the accomplishment of SDG16 governance targets in three ways:

- 1) ***Influence the design*** of government and IFI-funded programs by leveraging opportunities for consultations, advocacy, and participation in steering or advisory committees.
- 2) ***Engage actively*** in government programs to enhance results and development outcomes, including reduced corruption, citizen inclusion, participatory decision-making and increased transparency and accountability.
- 3) ***Monitor commitments*** made by governments and IFIs, track progress and hold them accountable for delivery by participating in multi-stakeholder review processes.

Proven tools and methods. Interventions that effectively facilitate civic engagement to improve the quality of service delivery include:

- Raising citizen awareness of their civil rights and responsibilities
- Building the capacity of citizens, CSOs and government agencies to work together constructively
- Training citizens to use social accountability tools such as community score cards, citizen report cards
- Facilitating grievance redress and building feedback loops for citizens to report shortcomings and discuss remedies
- Monitoring public procurement and delivery of goods and infrastructure at the local level, such as school construction and pharmaceutical delivery
- Participating in local budget formulation, decision-making and expenditure monitoring
- Forming coalitions for to amplify the voices of vulnerable communities

Modes of expansion. Experience suggests that it is possible to expand civic engagement efforts to the sub-national or national level, especially involving national service delivery programs operating at the local level with common approaches, standards and metrics. Institutionalizing engagement should begin through a series of demonstrative projects in

different settings following an appropriate contextual analysis. These programs would pursue “thick” engagement in selected sectors and regions designed to test and validate the proposition that civic engagement can be effective and influence the broad good governance agenda.

Model CSO Programs for Enhancing Governance. To illustrate the evidence presented, we have selected four examples of civil society-led good governance programs that use a well-defined approach based on a theory of change, operate at grassroots level, are led by CSOs, and cover more than one developing country:

- *World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) Process:* A component of larger projects that empowers beneficiaries to monitor, seek accountability and take collective responsibility for improved service delivery. This program has been implemented at the community level in countries such as Uganda, Pakistan, Armenia, Kosovo, Romania, Pakistan, and Lebanon.
- *CARE’s Community Score Card (CSC) Program:* An approach to improve the quality of services in CARE-supported programs through citizen feedback. It has been utilized in Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda and Tanzania.
- *Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA):* A partnership established by the World Bank to empower citizen voice and support government capacity to respond to citizen demand. It has funded projects in more than 25 countries including the Philippines, Mongolia, Guinea, Georgia, Mauritania and Indonesia.
- *Partnership for Transparency (PTF):* PTF-supported projects developed by CSOs in consultation with global development experts that facilitate citizen action to fight corruption and improve governance. PTF has supported projects and programs in more than 50 countries including the Philippines, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Latvia, Serbia, Kenya, Cameroon, Mongolia, and Ghana.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO EXPAND CSO CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

RECOMMENDATION 1: CSOs should accelerate, expand and intensify their programs using the entry points emerging from SDG16 national action plans and IFI stakeholder engagement policies. These policies are opening up significant new opportunities for CSOs to constructively engage with authorities to improve the delivery of public services and participate in the design and delivery of development policies and programs.

The process of intensifying CSO involvement should seek to: (i) engage CSOs in the planning and implementation of SDG16 national action plans; (ii) influence the design of

government and IFI-funded programs to make provisions for CSO engagement; (iii) seek contracts for promoting civic engagement and corruption free public services ; and (iv) scale-up advocacy for governments to “institutionalize” CSO engagement in public services.

RECOMMENDATION 2: CSOs should follow an evidence-based approach in designing and implementing programs for maximum effectiveness. We recommend the following guiding principles: 1) Begin with context and political economy analysis; 2) Choose SDG/IFI related objectives, outcomes and activities where success is most likely; 3) Aim for a long-term programmatic and iterative approach; 4) Seek formalization of engagement with authorities; 5) Generate research evidence on results; and 6) Share results with governments, international NGOs (INGOs), UN Agencies and IFIs.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Governments should encourage active civil society participation in the design and implementation of operations. Civic engagement depends to a large extent on the government attitude and policies. We recommend that governments institutionalize active civil society contributions in-line with Agenda 2030 commitments. We endorse and highlight following recommendations of the [Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG16+](#) for governments action: 1) Engage local and grassroots civil society to support implementation of SDGs; 2) Ensure ongoing and sustained financial support for CSOs to support SDGs implementation; and 3) Expand civil society space and create an enabling environment in which civil society can freely and safely operate and assemble.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Governments, IFIs and other donors should adopt guidelines to fund citizen/stakeholder engagement in the projects they support. IFIs and other donors generally require stakeholder engagement in programs they fund, but fail to explicitly allocate funds for such activities. As a result, stakeholder engagement often does not happen in a meaningful manner, particularly during implementation. IFIs should consider adopting a proposal recently put forth by the members of the [TAP Network](#) to create an “SDG16+ Challenge Fund” that would help support CSOs advance the ambitions of SDG16.

We suggest IFIs adopt guidelines that require staff to explicitly budget funds for stakeholder engagement (about 1% is the suggested norm) and give priority to grassroots CSOs for designing and implementing such engagement. This is an indicative figure representing the need for a simple, explicit budgeting practice across the board to incorporate into all development activities. To the extent possible, budgets for third party monitoring should be provided separately from the project budget and the oversight of the project authorities to avoid conflict of interest.

RECOMMENDATION 5: INGOs and foundations should assist CSOs in leveraging opportunities opened by IFI stakeholder engagement policies. These policies have the

potential to expand roles for CSOs in the design and implementation of stakeholder engagement components of IFI-funded projects. To take advantage of this potential, CSOs need the funding and staff to participate in project identification and preparation phases with the objective of maximizing CSO roles and business opportunities. There is enormous potential, but no incentives on part of government and IFIs teams working on project design and procurement plans. We recommend that INGOs and foundations expand their funding for CSOs to expand their up-stream (to integrate greater CSO engagement in project design) and downstream (to monitor implementation of CSO engagement) opportunities in IFI funded projects. This could be done by increasing funding to CSOs directly or through IFI established trust funds.

RECOMMENDATION 6: IFIs should be proactive in encouraging governments to engage civil society in good governance goals. IFIs generally, and multilateral development banks (MDBs) specifically, have commendable policies for engaging civil society. They also have the ability to influence the governments to open up space for civic engagement by funding CSO-led projects as well as through their policy dialogue and policy based lending. However, IFI performance is far short of the potential.

We recommend the following actions to ramp up CSO engagement in operations funded by IFIs: 1) Identify opportunities for CSOs to facilitate stakeholder engagement; 2) Include explicit provisions for CSOs to participate and anti-corruption plans; 3) Make changes in financing facilities and business processes for easier CSO contracting; 4) Include stakeholder engagement as part of country and sector assessments; 5) Use results-based lending to open up civic space; and 6) Establish systems to monitor and report on funding allocated and contracted to CSOs.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Support CSO Networks and Coalitions. CSOs are far more likely to have impact if they pool together in their quest for change. Indeed, coalitions between different groups of CSOs and at different levels (local, national, and international) were shown to be the most effective to bring about change and to help achieve sustainability. Networks need dedicated funding and staffing to enable them to work as equal partners with the public sector and private sector.



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