



Survey of the UN 2030 Agenda Follow Up and Review process Analysis- *Towards a more open & inclusive approach*

Executive Summary

We are now over 3 years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sustainable Development Goals at its core. In 2015, governments committed to an ambitious agenda for transforming our world towards a more just and sustainable future, including follow up and review mechanisms to ensure effective monitoring of delivery at global, regional and national levels. In 2019, there will be a review of these follow up and review mechanisms and it is essential that civil society voices are included in the process.

As a basis for communicating the views and recommendations of civil society at this critical point, this report draws on a survey of stakeholders assessing their experience of these mechanisms across the first three years.

As part of the 2030 Agenda, there was a commitment to a follow up and review process that is “robust” and “participatory”. This process includes: a) national engagement linked to the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs); b) regional engagement linked to the UN’s regional Sustainable Development Forums; and c) global review at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) at UN HQ in New York. This process provides an annual process for review at the United Nations, as well as a broader space for dialogue on sustainable development. The Forum currently meets annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for eight days, plus every four years at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly for two days. The first meeting under the General Assembly will be in 2019.

Action for Sustainable Development (www.action4sd.org) is a civil society platform which exists to enable and empower an ecosystem of grassroots partners, to engage with the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. This survey builds on work undertaken every year since 2015 to support effective engagement of national coalitions and networks of civil society in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) at the UN. Technical support for the preparation and administration of the survey, and the resulting report, was provided by a small research-to-policy team at Newcastle University, led by Dr Graham Long.

This survey was widely distributed to the A4SD networks during the period October-December 2018, including many organisations and coalitions that have been directly involved in their own Voluntary National Reviews and in developing their own civil society reports. There were 149 responses from a broad range of civil society organisations; 119 in English, 21 French, 9 Spanish; from 62 countries, with the highest number of responses coming from Nigeria and India.

Recommendations

1. *Information sharing alone is not sufficient, real dialogue with civil society is needed*

There are some positive signs that information is being relatively well-disseminated from the global level meetings of the HLPF, and to a certain extent from the regional and national levels. However, there are still very limited opportunities for real dialogue: for example, 40% of respondents perceive *no* opportunity to participate in the HLPF, and 42% perceive *no* opportunity to receive a response from policymakers. These limitations manifest themselves as obstacles to participation - whether that be opportunities to participate in relevant committees, speak in meetings, and limited feedback to written consultations; and obstacles to accessibility in terms of accreditation, language and disability.

Key recommendations:

- a) Develop a deliberative process at national level with clear expectations for participation, including sufficient time to gather inputs and genuine exchange of views between governments and civil society stakeholders.
- b) Ensure dialogues takes place before, during and *after* review meetings, such as the HLPF.

2. *Make Leave No One Behind a higher priority*

One of the most transformational aspects of the 2030 Agenda is its commitment to 'Leave No One Behind' and to reach the furthest behind first. This survey shows that from the point of view of many civil society organisations, not enough is being done so far to hear the voices of the communities at risk of being left behind and those who work with them. For example, a majority of respondents – 63% - saw little or no focus on "leave no one behind" in national level review. It is therefore crucial that the Leave No One Behind commitment leads to real change in terms of policy decisions, implementation as well as follow up and review.

Key recommendations:

- a) Ensure that any engagement mechanism should include explicit commitment to engage with the full cross-section of participants in each country.
- b) Provide additional support and resources to hear the voices of those who are most often excluded.

3. *Civil society partners demand the right to provide inputs to 'whole of society' reviews*

While a number of opportunities for online feedback are now in place, there is a clear sense from this survey that civil society stakeholders feel they can contribute more. There are many organisations that responded which have specific knowledge and expertise on key aspects of the 2030 Agenda but limited opportunities for real dialogue mean that their experience does not seem to be effectively incorporated into the review mechanisms.

Key recommendations:

- a) Ensure that there are more flexible and inclusive ways to include wider inputs from civil society partners and experts within the official review process.
- b) Feature national civil society 'shadow', 'spotlight', or 'parallel' reports alongside the official Voluntary National Reviews.

4. Particular improvements are needed at national and regional level

The results of this survey suggest that the global level review seems to have adopted a process which is more inclusive of key stakeholder views than either the regional or national levels. This perception may be due to the fact that a number of respondents are actively involved in the Major Groups and other Stakeholders and are therefore more engaged in this global dialogue. However there can be little doubt that the follow up and review process is not consistent in each country and respondents regard the regional and national levels much less favourably. It is therefore essential to ensure better inclusion of civil society organisations and local community representatives in national and regional processes.

Key recommendations:

- a) Regional mechanisms can be strengthened via peer learning and development of a good practice guide for stakeholder engagement.
- b) National engagement processes can be strengthened via shared learning within the region and improved guidance on national engagement, including building a direct link between SDG review and national planning processes.

5. Establish better links from regional to global level meetings

As set out above, there appears to be more progress in engagement with civil society at the global level. However the global meeting of the HLPF does not seem to be embedded into an ongoing process linking each level of review. There is a need to ensure improvement in the process of gathering inputs and expertise, which starts from the sub-national level and is then collected at national level and shared at regional and global levels.

Key recommendations:

- a) Give greater prominence to feedback from regional commissions at the HLPF.
- b) Ensure follow up after the HLPF within each region to share experiences and monitor impact of commitments at national level.

6. Improve support to stakeholders, including resources and capacity development

In terms of ensuring inclusion of diverse views, there is a clear need to ensure appropriate support for a wider range of voices to be heard. At the moment, there is a lack of equal opportunities within civil society itself, whereby the larger more well-resourced organisations are able to cover the costs of their own participation at key meetings while smaller grass-roots organisations are unable to join or even unaware of these meetings.

At the same time, civil society itself needs to consider how to organise to maximise effective access, inclusivity and participation. There are clear opportunities to improve network support and ensure that organisations are able to receive information from relevant civil society partners, including the Major Groups & other Stakeholders.

Key recommendations:

- a) Greater provision of funding for civil society participation, including coordination.
- b) Support to capacity development in key areas such as monitoring of progress, advocacy and external engagement.

You can find the full report on our website here:

www.action4sd.org/tools-resources