



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES



PARTNERSGLOBAL
Together for Democratic Change

The importance of ensuring an enabling environment for civil society as it relates to the Sustainable Development Goals

*Report to the Working Group on Enabling
and Protecting Civil Society*

June 2017



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Disclaimer

The study “The importance of ensuring an enabling environment for civil society as it relates to the Sustainable Development Goals” was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.



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Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	1
A. Objectives and Approach.....	1
B. Methodology.....	3
C. Limitations.....	6
II. Enabling Environments and Sustainable Development	7
A. The Role of Civil Society in Development	7
B. Effects of the Closing of the Political Space	11
III. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: an Opportunity to Protect and Open the Civic Space
A. Windows of Opportunity	14
B. A Role for Civil Society.....	15
C. Challenges to using the 2030 Agenda as an advocacy tool	17
D. Using Goal 16 as an entry point – opportunities and challenges	22
IV. Recommendations	23
Notes and References	28
Annex 1: Country Caselets.....	31
HAITI.....	31
ZIMBABWE.....	32
KUWAIT.....	32
HUNGARY	32
SERBIA.....	32
ECUADOR.....	32
NICARAGUA.....	32
NIGERIA	32
JORDAN.....	32
BRAZIL.....	32
MEXICO.....	32
KAZAKHSTAN	32

Executive Summary

Objectives and Approach

In December 2016, the Community of Democracies engaged PartnersGlobal to develop a study on “The Importance of Ensuring an Enabling Environment for Civil Society as it Relates to the Sustainable Development Goals” (the study) to address the linkage between an enabling environment for civil society and the successful realization of the SDGs, particularly SDG16. The objective of the study was to explore the links (through practical examples/caselets) between an enabling environment for civil society, sustainable economic and social development, and the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The PartnersGlobal team conducted a rapid literature review on the relationship between enabling environments and sustainable development. The literature review also covered relevant documents related to the 2030 Agenda. The PartnersGlobal team also conducted in-depth semi structured interviews and focus groups (both virtual and in-person) with 47 representatives from international organizations, governments, academia, and national and international civil society organizations and networks. The information collected during the literature review and the interviews and focus groups informed the development of the analytical sections, the caselets, and the final conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Key findings

A thriving civil society is key to achieving long-term sustainable development, and its contributions range from:

- Producing and analyzing data;
- Reviewing and shaping development policies based on their technical expertise;
- Ensuring that the voices of marginalized and vulnerable populations are taken into account;
- Providing access to remote locations and underserved populations;
- Shedding light on ignored or underserved Goals and pushing for action;
- Raising awareness and bringing stakeholders together to tackle development challenges, including the SDGs.

The closing of the political space and the restrictions to the operations and existence of civil society organizations has a direct negative impact on sustainable development by:

- Affecting the provision of services by civil society organizations, faith-based and grassroots groups;

- Increasing the proclivity to social conflict, including violent expressions of it, by excluding large sectors of the population and feeding a sense of disconnection between the institutions and the citizens;
- Hindering economic development by losing revenue generated by civil society organizations and displacing from the workforce CSO staff;
- Incentivizing corruption and inefficient allocation of scarce resources due to lack of transparency and accountability.

The complexity and ambition of the 2030 Agenda make it clear that governments will need to work together with different stakeholders, including organized civil society, in order to fulfill the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. There are several windows of opportunity for productive relationships between civil society and governments to tackle the SDGs, including:

- The broad acceptance of the 2030 Agenda and its perceived neutrality;
- The creation of shared meanings and common language between a wide range of stakeholders;
- The explicit emphasis on partnerships, collective action, and inclusiveness;
- The newness of the Agenda, which allows for flexibility and co-creation;
- The emergence of formal and informal platforms for multi stakeholder engagement.

The main challenges to utilizing the 2030 Agenda as an advocacy tool for the opening of the political space include:

- The lack of awareness and complete understanding of the agenda between some stakeholders, including civil society organizations at the local level; government institutions that were not involved in the negotiation process; business; and individual citizens;
- Decreasing engagement from global civil society due to the exhaustion of the negotiation and approval processes, which trickles down to local organizations;
- The rise of narratives and political forces that repudiate globalization and question the role of multilateral institutions and efforts;
- Difficulty in breaking thematic silos, which hinders the possibility of broader action by civil society;

- The still incipient engagement from private donors, which might not be providing incentives for civil society to fully embrace the Agenda.

Goal 16, which focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies might seem like an obvious lever in the fight for a more open political space and the need to protect civil society's work. However, there are different opinions on the feasibility of using Goal 16 as a tool to advocate for a more open civic space were divided among the stakeholders interviewed for this study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the desk research and our analysis of the findings of the interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, we recommend:

- Raising awareness and building constituencies for the SDGs;
- Engaging with the media to support awareness raising efforts;
- Finding strategic points for engagement and a common agenda, where possible;
- Engaging private and public donors to mainstream SDGs into development work;
- Connecting organizations and groups working on different sectors and bolster collective action;
- Fostering the emergence of multi-stakeholder partnerships that can serve as more cohesive and unified fronts to participate in decision-making processes around development;
- Institutionalizing processes and spaces for civil society-government and peer-to-peer engagement at the High Level Political Forum and at the domestic level;
- Remind governments of their international commitments to an enabling environment for civil society under the 2030 Agenda and other international treaties, covenants, and platforms and seeing the 2030 Agenda as a complement to those other mechanisms and frameworks.

I. Introduction

A. Objectives and Approach

In December 2016, the Community of Democracies engaged PartnersGlobal to develop a study on “The Importance of Ensuring an Enabling Environment for Civil Society as it Relates to the Sustainable Development Goals” (the study) to address the linkage between an enabling environment for civil society and the successful realization of the SDGs, particularly SDG16. This study was commissioned specifically by the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society to help strengthen its advocacy work on civil society space, and in support of the Community of Democracies’ priority around the same issue. The objective of the study was to explore the links (through practical examples/caselets) between an enabling environment for civil society, sustainable economic and social development, and the fulfillment of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The PartnersGlobal team (Julia Roig, Luis Gomez Chow, Dana Barringer, and Roselie Vasquez-Yetter) acknowledges that there is a lot of existing research and anecdotal evidence of the importance of civil society in achieving development goals. To avoid redundancies, the study aimed to uncover meaningful arguments for a positive and productive relationship between civil society and government entities and the potential benefits of collaboration and coordination as a complementary approach to achieve true sustainable development thanks to the active participation of civil society and citizens in public decision-making process and policies.

We believe that there are opportunities for communication and collaboration between civil society organizations and governments even in the most restrictive environments; however, we also acknowledge the importance and necessity of other types of approaches, including peaceful demonstrations and protests, civic disobedience actions, and the pursuit of legal strategies at the national, regional, and international level, as means to achieving greater transparency, accountability, and formal safeguards for civic engagement and citizen participation. While we have focused our study on collaboration and joint action, we see both approaches as complementary, each with its own limitations and advantages. We also believe that different civil society stakeholders can opt for one or the other, based on their own experiences, strategic vision, organizational culture, and their own analysis of the local context at a given moment in time.

Intended audience

The study was envisioned to serve as an evidence-based advocacy tool for governments and civil society actors to make the case for the important role of the sector in accomplishing the 2030 Agenda and the need, thus, to respect and guarantee the basic rights and freedoms that can allow civil society to operate. In this sense, the intended audience of the study includes, primarily: local, national, and international civil society organizations working to open the political space or to prevent the closing of the political space through different means and approaches. However, the study is also expected to serve the Community of Democracies, its members, and other stakeholders as a resource in their efforts to advocate for a more open civic space with other governments and in multilateral fora.

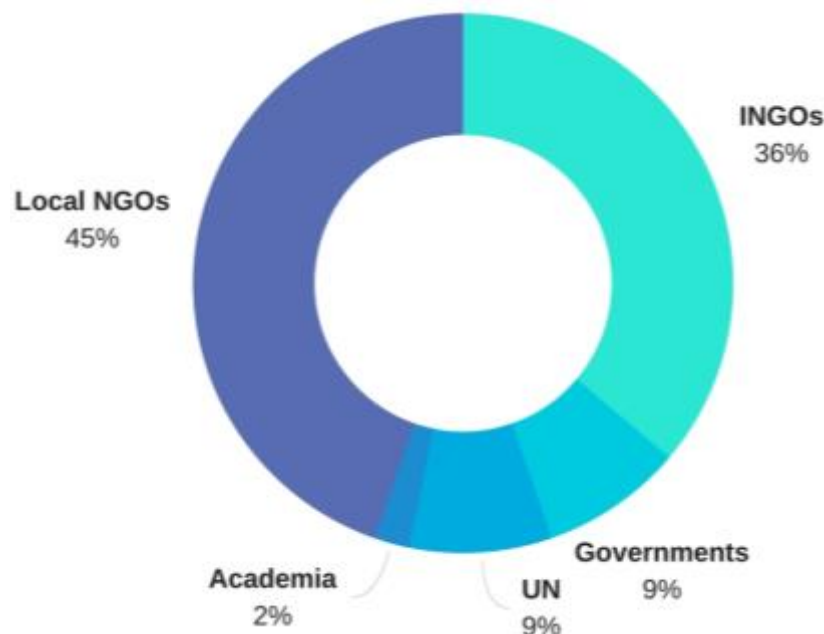
B. Methodology

The study has sought to provide compelling arguments to bolster two hypotheses:

- An enabling environment that protects civil society allows the sector to play a positive and significant role in the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Respect for civil and political rights and freedoms allows for more equitable and stable economic development. Denying basic political rights to disadvantaged groups and making it impossible to engage peacefully in issues of relevance to them (such as access to resources), can result in conflict, exacerbate the resiliency of communities, and lead to instability and the reversal of development gains and inequitable development.

To accomplish this, the PartnersGlobal team conducted a rapid literature review on the relationship between enabling environments and sustainable development. The literature review also covered relevant documents related to the 2030 Agenda, including official UN documents, articles, reports, and studies from nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, and think tanks. A list of the documents consulted can be found in the reference section of this study.

As part of the information gathering phase, the PartnersGlobal team also conducted in-depth semi structured



interviews and focus groups (both virtual and in-person) with representatives from international organizations, governments, academia, and national and international civil society organizations and networks. Instead of following a strict guiding questionnaire, the interviews and focus groups took the form of flexible and confidential (Chatham House Rule) conversations.

To ensure candid and open insights, we have avoided using direct quotes that reference a particular individual or institutions in the study. During

the three-month assignment, the PartnersGlobal team interviewed a total of 47 individuals from the sectors mentioned before.

To identify the potential interviewees, we utilized a snow ball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability technique that works like chain referral: after observing the initial subject, the researcher asks for assistance from the subject to help identify people with a similar trait of interest. In this case, the core of the sample was composed by the members of the Advisory Committee of the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society of the Community of Democracies, who referred the PartnersGlobal team to a “second circle” of stakeholders; the individuals on the second circle also provided recommendations for additional interviewees, and so on.

Governments		
Name	Institution	Country
David Gillies	Global Affairs Canada	Canada
Chloe Baudry	Global Affairs Canada	Canada
Adriana Castro Gonzalez	SDG Commission / National Department of Planning	Colombia
Cornelius Hacking	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands	The Netherlands

Local Nongovernmental Organizations		
Name	Institution	Country
Joao Antonio Souza	Instituto de Estudos da Religião	Brazil
Shana Santos	Instituto de Estudos da Religião	Brazil
Boris Cornejo	Fundación Esquel Ecuador	Ecuador
Humberto Salazar	Fundación Esquel Ecuador	Ecuador
Sandra Alvarez Monsalve	Organización Ecuatoriana de Mujeres Lesbianas	Ecuador
Yvon Janvier	Bar Association of Jeremy	Haiti
Eva Deak	Partners Hungary Foundation	Hungary
Rasha Abdel Latif	Partners-Jordan	Jordan
Jamila Asanova	ARGO	Kazakhstan
Sylvia Aguilera	Centro de Colaboración Cívica	Mexico
Ana Paulina Cerdan	Centro de Colaboración Cívica	Mexico
Maria Regina Alvarado	Fundación para el Desarrollo de las Mujeres Chontaleñas	Nicaragua
Felix Maradiaga	Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Publicas	Nicaragua
Dayra Karina Valle	Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Publicas	Nicaragua
Ruth Okugbeni	CLEEN Foundation	Nigeria
Maciej Tański	Fundajca Partners Polska	Poland
Blazo Nedik	Serbian National Association of Mediators	Serbia
Ana Toskic	Partners for Democratic Change Serbia	Serbia
Natalie Ross	Council on Foundations	United States of America
Patrick Makoro	Nhaka Foundation	Zimbabwe
Evan Mawarire	#ThisFlag Movement	Zimbabwe

International Nongovernmental Organizations		
Name	Institution	Country
Carol Rask	DanChurchAid / Act Alliance	Denmark
Meri Joyce	Peace Boat	Japan
Minna Hojland	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict	The Netherlands
Pascal Richard	Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict	The Netherlands
Oli Henman	CIVICUS	South Africa
Mandeep Tiwana	CIVICUS	South Africa
Melanie Greenberg	Alliance for Peacebuilding	United States of America
Stone Conroy	Alliance for Peacebuilding	United States of America
Andrew Tomlinson	Quaker United Nations Office	United States of America
Joan Parker	Counterpart International	United States of America
Roberto Stuart	Global Communities	United States of America
Jaime Atienza	Oxfam America	United States of America
Scott Sellwood	Oxfam America	United States of America
John Romano	TAP Network	United States of America
Minh-Thu Pham	United Nations Foundation	United States of America
Bonian Golmohammadi	World Federation of United Nations Associations	United States of America
Mari Ullmann	World Federation of United Nations Associations	United States of America

United Nations Agencies		
Name	Institution	Office
Mariana Gamez	United Nations Children's Fund	Mexico City
Jordi Llopart	United Nations Development Program	New York
Jens Wandel	United Nations Development Program	New York
Alexandra Wilde	United Nations Development Program	Oslo

Academia		
Name	Institution	Country/Region
Megan Haddock	John Hopkins University	United States of America

The information collected during the literature review and the interviews and focus groups informed the development of the analytical sections, the caselets, and the final conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Scope of the study

The original vision for the study was to focus exclusively on Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda; however, based on the conversations with key stakeholders, the PartnersGlobal team decided to broaden the scope and include relevant good examples related to any of 17 Goals of the 2030 Agenda. In this sense, the caselets included in the study cover a wide range issues, from participatory budgeting, to health and education. Despite this diversity of topics, all selected caselets showcase a common trait: the possibility for productive engagements between civil society and government to tackle a common challenge and the achievement of better outcomes because of these engagements.

C. Limitations

The development of the study has followed a qualitative and flexible approach to accommodate the time, budget, and other practical constraints. We see this study as a starting point to continue the conversations on the role civil society plays in development and, in particular, in the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. The study does not represent, in any way, an academic or scientific endeavor, and the contents of the study were based on our analysis of existing information and the interviews with the key stakeholders mentioned above. The PartnersGlobal team acknowledges that there is a lot of existing research around enabling environments for civil society and long-term sustainable development. We also acknowledge the existence of several toolkits and frameworks that aim to provide guidance on how to use the SDGs and launch national conversations and processes around the 2030 Agenda. Conducting a complete and comprehensive review and analysis of these sources of information was beyond the scope and timeframe of the study. We focused mainly on data sources -reports, studies, papers, etc.- highlighted by the interviewees themselves. Similarly, the caselets presented in the study are snapshots of concrete promising examples that other stakeholders could use as a source of inspiration to develop their own advocacy and engagement strategies to protect and promote the space for civil society. They were developed based on written and oral information provided by the stakeholders who were involved or led those examples, which might account for misrepresentations or small inaccuracies.

II. Enabling Environments and Sustainable Development

A. The Role of Civil Society in Development

“It is people mobilized as you are, more than any government initiative or scientific breakthrough, who can overcome the obstacles to a better world. From global campaigns to community organizing; from peaceful protest to the provision of life-saving services; from day-to-day projects to humanitarian emergencies, the civil society movement continues to grow and make its mark.”¹

- Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations

The challenges facing modern society require a collective, unified effort from a wide array of stakeholders. We know that no single actor, including the most effective State, can, by itself, respond to the pressing needs of a rapidly changing world and achieve long-term, inclusive, and sustainable development. Civil society -nongovernmental organizations, grass-roots and faith-based groups, social movements, and other civic groups- working at the local, national, regional, and global levels has been recognized as a key actor necessary to achieving sustainable development. Since the first official global discussions around sustainable development that took place in Stockholm in 1972², the United Nations and governments around the world have made formal commitments to bolster civic engagement and participation and guarantee an enabling environment for civil society. For example, the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Report) stated that:³

Making the difficult choices involved in achieving sustainable development will depend on the widespread support and involvement of an informed public and of NGOs, the scientific community, and industry. Their rights, roles and participation in development planning, decision-making, and project implementation should be expanded.

Several years later, the signatories to the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness agreed to⁴:

[D]eepen our engagement with CSOs as independent development actors in their own right whose efforts complement those of governments and the private sector.

To this end:

- a) *We invite CSOs to reflect on how they can apply the Paris principles of aid effectiveness from a CSO perspective;*
- b) *We welcome the CSOs' proposal to engage with them in a CSO-led multi stakeholder process to promote CSO development effectiveness. As part of that process, we will seek to:*
 - *Improve coordination of CSO efforts with government programmes, enhance CSO accountability for results, and improve information on CSO activities;*
- c) *We will work with CSOs to provide an enabling environment that maximises their contributions to development.*

Similarly, the 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement, which was subscribed by more than 160 countries, states that:⁵

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a vital role in enabling people to claim their rights, in promoting rights-based approaches, in shaping development policies and partnerships, and in overseeing their implementation. They also provide services in areas that are complementary to those provided by states.

Recognizing this, we will:

- a) *Implement fully our respective commitments to enable CSOs to exercise their roles as independent development actors, with a particular focus on an enabling environment, consistent with agreed international rights, that maximizes the contributions of CSOs to development.*
- b) *Encourage CSOs to implement practices that strengthen their accountability and their contribution to development effectiveness, guided by the Istanbul Principles and the International Framework for CSO Development Effectiveness.*

Finally, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by unanimity in September 2015 at a United Nations Summit, also highlights the importance of civil society and emphasizes the need for inclusive partnerships to achieve the accomplishment of the goals. The Declaration that established the 2030 Agenda mentions the importance of partnerships and of civil society as a key actor:

The scale and ambition of the new Agenda requires a revitalized Global Partnership to ensure its implementation. We fully commit to this. This Partnership will work in a spirit of global solidarity, in particular solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations. It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources.

The Agenda itself includes two goals that explicitly reference the need for an inclusive an open society and for all stakeholders -governments, civil society and private sector- to work together in true partnerships for the realization of the Agenda.

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.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



The World Economic Forum has highlighted the wide variety of roles that civil society can play in achieving sustainable development. According to the 2013 report “The Future Role of Civil Society”, civil society’s roles and relationships to other actors can be classified under 10 broad categories:

Watchdog	Holding institutions to account, promoting transparency and accountability.
Advocate	Raising awareness of societal issues and challenges and advocating for change.
Service provider	Delivering services to meet societal needs such as education, health, food and security; implementing disaster management, preparedness and emergency response.
Expert	Bringing unique knowledge and experience to shape policy and strategy, and identifying and building solutions.
Capacity builder	Providing education, training and other capacity building.
Incubator	Developing solutions that may require a long gestation or play-back period
Representative	Giving power to the voice of the marginalized or under-represented.
Citizenship champion	Encouraging citizen engagement and supporting the rights of citizens.
Solidarity supporter	Promoting fundamental and universal values.
Definer of standards	Creating norms that shape market and state activity.

* Source World Economic Forum⁶

As clearly stated by the Partnership for Transparency Fund 2016 Report, by fulfilling one or more of these roles, “CSOs have become active and independent actors contributing to many countries’ development”.⁷ Per this organization’s analysis and summary of several academic studies, evaluations, and reports from multilateral organizations, the impact of civil society to sustainable development has been significant, as local and international CSOs and networks have:⁸

- Raised billions of dollars from private sources to provide assistance around the three pillars of sustainable development, complementing and enhancing international development cooperation efforts and government-led domestic programs;
- Innovated approaches and frameworks of intervention in a wide range of sectors, such as health, education, environmental protection, disaster relief, good governance, migration, water and sanitation, etc;
- Generated new knowledge and theories of change for economic development and empowerment, poverty reduction and relief, service delivery, development aid policies, among others.
- Enhanced transparency and accountability in development programs implemented by themselves, governments, and multilateral organizations;
- Served as effective bridges between the local, national, and global levels, elevating the voices of individual citizens and raising awareness about concrete challenges and shortcomings of development;
- Influenced national and international policies and programs related to economic, social, and environmental development.

Apart from its direct role(s) in influencing, shaping, implementing, and evaluating development actions and policies, civil society also contributes to global sustainable development as an employer of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, and by generating revenue for governments through income and other types of taxes. According to the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project of Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies, civil society has become an important economic actor. The Project's Civil Society Comparative Index⁹ shows that civil society in the 36 countries covered by the index employed over 25 million people and had expenditures of approximately \$1.3 trillion dollars over the course of five years (2000-2005).

B. Effects of the Closing of the Political Space

Despite the global recognition and the evidence from different research of the importance of a thriving and independent civil society for sustainable development, in the past few years, the space for civil society has been shrinking and the pressures and attacks to its activities have become widespread. While the work of independent civil society has always been difficult in authoritarian regimes, it is becoming more common for democratically elected governments around the world to resort to practices that hinder the work of CSOs and networks, particularly of those promoting democracy, human rights, transparency, and civic participation. Across the globe, CSOs, social movements, and grassroots and faith-based groups are facing ever-growing challenges to their work, if not their own existence. The reasons for this new trend are multiple: from historical mistrust of civil society getting involved in issues considered exclusive of the political realm, to the anti-terror agenda, to a re-emergence of populist and authoritarian regimes due to a growing disenchantment with democracy and liberal values.

Several indices and reports from international public and private entities confirm that spaces for civil society are closing. Most notably, the 2017 CIVICUS Monitor states that, despite the international recognition of the rights to participation and freedom of expression, and their inclusion in most constitutions, "only three percent of people live in countries where space for civic activism - or civic space- is truly open ". USAID's own Civil Society Sustainability Index has demonstrated similar trends.

As stated above, rather than enabling the space for civil society, governments are increasing restrictions on civil society, particularly around registration and funding. These actions are hindering the ability for civil society to participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to engage in dialogues that would ensure the achievement of the goals. Without the participation of civil society, the government will be unable to reach all the goals, targets and indicators.

Aside from the value-based arguments to promote an enabling environment for civil society, interviewees and research pieces have noted that restricting the political space has direct economic and social effects that curtail sustainable development:

Diminished Service Provision

Apart from the direct and immediate negative impact on the ability of States to achieve SDGs, restrictions on civil society also affects the livelihoods of many individuals that rely on the services and aid provided by civil society actors in places where the State is still absent or where government resources are scarce. Following Eric D. Werker and Faisal Z. Ahmed arguments, “the bulk of funds flowing through NGOs remains focused on basic humanitarian assistance and development”¹⁰ and not on advocacy efforts around rights and freedoms.¹¹ According to their analysis, the world’s six largest international NGOs (as measured by their expenditures) specialize in direct relief and development programs.¹² While there are no similar, data-based analyses of national and local civil society actors, the argument can be easily extended to smaller CSOs, grassroots organizations, social movements, and other informal civic groups, which have historically had stronger ties to their constituents and focus on community-level activities.

More Proclivity to Conflict

Civil society organizations and other civic groups have served as bridges between governments and individual citizens. They have provided a service to governments by channeling, organizing, and moderating the voices and demands of citizens. Restricting the work of civil society has a direct and immediate impact on this function, making it more difficult for governments to address grievances and respond to demands from citizens and groups. As people feel excluded because of the government’s unresponsiveness or lack of capacity, tensions intensify and the risk of social conflict, including violent expressions of it, increases.

Missed Economic Opportunities

As noted in the section above, civil society has become an important economic player at the local, national, and global levels, raising billions of dollars from private sources (foundations and individuals) and employing millions of people worldwide. While there are no studies that provide concrete figures, restricting the space for civil society to operate can translate in a loss of revenue for governments (in the form of income and other types of taxes), affect consumption (as people lose their jobs), and slow down sectors and industries that provide services and goods to civil society organizations and groups.

Corruption and Inefficient Allocation of Resources

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “corruption is one of the main obstacles to sustainable economic, political and social development”, as it reduces efficiency and costs more than 5% of the global gross domestic product.¹³ Corruption can only be prevented and addressed if there is an open and transparent government and if civil society is strong and allowed to demand accountability. The closing of the political space results in less oversight and, thus, a more permissive environment that incentivizes corruption. As summarized by Daniel Treisman, “the most obvious cost [of corruption] is the risk of getting caught and punished [...] the risk of exposure may also be higher in more democratic, open political systems. Freedom of association and of the press engender public interest groups and reporters with a mission and the right to expose abuses. Greater civic engagement may lead to closer monitoring.”¹⁴

III. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: an Opportunity to Protect and Open the Civic Space

In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the UN. Through civil society, intergovernmental negotiations and other consultations, the 2030 Agenda has addressed the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals and has provided a more holistic approach to sustainable development.

The goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda offer a well-rounded approach to sustainable development over the next fifteen years. While the targets and goals are newly established, several governments have already started working to develop national plans that will allow them to fully implement the SDGs. When establishing these plans, governments must consider the role of civil society in achieving development goals and sustaining peace. Civil society organizations must work together with other stakeholders, including governments and the private sector, to create an environment based on cooperation and collaboration and support the progress of the SDGs.

Civil society has an important and powerful role to play as governments work to achieve the goals. While some governments have tried to limit the space for civil society, they will not be able to tackle all the SDGs and targets alone. When governments engage in political dialogues with civil society and the private sector and foster cooperation, the task of achieving sustainable development becomes easier. As will be presented below, a thriving civil society can support the fulfilment of the Agenda in many ways: the provision of services that can contribute to specific targets; monitoring, evaluating, and refining of government-led programs and policies; producing relevant assessments and data; identifying and naming shortcomings and pushing for improvement; connecting with citizens, particularly vulnerable populations, and ensuring that their voices and concerns are considered; etc.

Cooperation between governments and civil society is necessary to create sustainable development. Governments will not be able to achieve the SDGs on their own; therefore, they must work with the private sector and civil society to implement the new agenda successfully. To ensure proper implementation of the SDGs, civil society must form coalitions and open political dialogue with state institutions, and governments must formally incorporate civil society into the implementation process creating an environment of cooperation and collaboration.

A. Windows of Opportunity

Despite numerous challenges and obstacles that will be outlined below, interviewees also mentioned several **windows of opportunity** that local and international civil society organizations and networks could take advantage of, including:

Broad acceptance

- *Neutrality of the Agenda* - All 193 member states of the United Nations, even the ones considered highly restrictive or authoritarian, have undersigned the 2030 Agenda. This broad acceptance of the SDGs represents a window of opportunity for civil society to engage. The Agenda is still considered apolitical, which would strengthen the argument of civil society to engage with government. In other words, it offers a less contentious framework to discuss a broad range of issues, not only with governments, but also with the private sector.
- *Common language* - Similarly, the 2030 Agenda is a new framework that provides a common lexicon for stakeholders to think about different issues they care about.

Emphasis on partnerships

- *Need for collective action*
Governments must produce and submit for review national action plans and progress reports to the High Level Political Forum. This represents an opportunity for civil society to engage, since no government by itself will be able to achieve the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. While submission to the High Level Political Forum is voluntary, governments that wish to maintain a positive international image will participate in the process and will require the support of other sectors within their national boundaries.
- *New voices joining the discussions*
The private sector is steadily adopting the 2030 Agenda and aligning its corporate social responsibility strategies to the SDGs. Platforms such as the UN Global Compact and IMPACT 2030 represent ideal spaces for businesses and civil society to coordinate and work together towards common goals.
- *Intentionality on establishing partnerships*
Unlike the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda has been proposed as a stronger platform for multi stakeholder engagement and has a clear emphasis on partnerships, inclusiveness, and collaboration. As one interviewee pointed out, the SDGs “are not about ‘eradicating poverty’, but to provide the space and framework for different actors to tackle, together, the issues covered by the Goals”.

Capacity to influence processes and dialogue spaces

- *The newness of the Agenda entails flexibility and opportunity*
The High Level Political Forums (HLPF) will present a good opportunity to come together and advocate for more civil society participation in realization of the SDGs. Due to the recent adoption of the goals, the HLPF still represent a learning process for member states and for civil society organizations. Civil society organizations can advocate for an inclusive review process with other member states and with the United Nations itself.
- *Emerging spaces for multi stakeholder engagement*
Apart from the HLPF, since the approval of the 2030 Agenda, different stakeholders and institutions have created spaces for dialogue, collaboration, and experience-sharing. These initiatives, which include the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness & Enabling Environment, the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society, IMPACT 2030, Business for 2030, among others, are serving as spaces where stakeholders from different sectors can come together, discuss issues related to the 2030 Agenda and develop joint advocacy or learning initiatives to strengthen the SDGs and contribute to their achievement, including joint action.

B. A Role for Civil Society

While States are ultimately responsible for the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, civil society is a key actor for this ambitious endeavor, and its existence and activities must be protected and fostered. In addition to the overarching windows of opportunity linked to the 2030 Agenda itself, different contexts might provide other opportunities for successful civil society engagement and influence, even in the most restrictive societies. Based on the findings from the country caselets presented at the end of this study, some additional windows of opportunity for civil society to contribute to the achievement of the goals include:

Producing and analyzing data and monitoring implementation

- Several civil society organizations have developed strong methodologies and tools to collect and analyze specific data. Given this expertise, a potential role for civil society organizations with regards to the SDGs would be the collection and analysis of data that would inform the progress reports to be submitted by the governments to the HLPF. Even in places where National Statistics Offices are in place and functioning, civil society-produced and/or citizen generated data could complement official data and mitigate data biases;
- Civil society organizations can also serve the role of watchdogs, making sure that governments are delivering on their commitments under the 2030 Agenda, identifying shortcomings and mistakes.

Review and shape development policies with technical expertise

- Like the previous point, civil society organizations and groups have developed strong technical expertise and capacities on many areas, from health to agriculture, Rule of Law to crime prevention. In this sense, civil society organizations could be seen as expert partners that could strengthen or complement government institutions' capacities, increasing their effectiveness and reach.

Ensuring that the voices of marginalized and vulnerable populations are taken into account

- Based on their technical expertise, their knowledge of the local contexts, their access to remote locations, and their long-standing work with vulnerable and marginalized groups (both on direct service provision and also on advocacy for the recognition and respect of their rights), civil society organizations and groups are well positioned to bring forward the demands, concerns, and perspectives of traditionally excluded populations and push for their inclusion in processes, policies, and plans related to the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, civil society is also key in ensuring that long-ignored or relegated issues, become visible and incorporated into the efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Providing access to groups in remote locations

- Civil society organizations and groups have been a key stakeholder in development for many decades. While some governments believe that civil society organizations only focus on advocacy in the national or regional capitals, research show that the vast majority of civil society focus on service provision, accessing remote areas and vulnerable populations normally underserved by government institutions.¹⁵ This is particularly true in developing countries, where state institutions might be absent in some regions due to lack of human and financial resources, conflict and post-conflict situations, etc. In this sense, governments could take advantage of this, expanding the reach of their policies, engaging with underserved and underrepresented populations, and thus achieving better results under the 2030 Agenda.

Shedding light on ignored or underserved Goals and pushing for action

- While the 2030 Agenda is supposed to be indivisible and all 17 Goals are interlinked, it is understandable that States will focus on addressing certain Goals before others due to national priorities, state of development, and availability of resources. However, the prioritization of certain Goals and targets should not be confused with the relegation of others, particularly those that might be considered more sensitive in a given context. In this sense, civil society can serve as a guardian of the integrity of the Agenda, shedding light on intentionally or unintentionally underserved Goals and pushing for government action, including raising awareness and advocating for the change of this situation at the domestic and international level.

Raising awareness and bringing more stakeholders onboard to tackle the Agenda

- As a legitimate and credible actor with deep connections to their constituents, civil society organizations can also help ground the SDGs to the local level, making sure that more stakeholders rally behind them by helping them understand how the issues they care for might be addressed by the goals.
- Similarly, civil society, with its deep connections to its different constituents, can be a channel for citizens to voice their needs and concerns in an orderly way. It can also serve as an effective tool to bridge the divide between governments and the general population, bringing them together and channeling energies and resources to address common challenges.

C. Challenges to using the 2030 Agenda as an advocacy tool

Lack of Awareness

The literature review and interviews with key stakeholders show that governments, civil society organizations, citizens, and businesses still need to internalize and fully understand the 2030 Agenda. While it is true that several stakeholders of all sectors, namely a handful of large global nongovernmental organizations and networks, businesses within the UN Global Compact, and Foreign Ministries were deeply involved in the design and negotiation processes of the Goals, the level of knowledge and engagement has not trickled down to the national and local levels.

While this is true for all sectors, there are some particularities that are sector-specific:

Government

- *Weak dissemination across agencies*
Governments might represent the sector with the deepest knowledge and understanding of the SDGs, as the Agenda was approved via a UN General Assembly Resolution. However, it is clear from the literature review and the interviews that not all branches, departments, and levels of governments have the same level of awareness, as foreign ministries and missions to the UN have not necessarily explained the agenda to other government entities.
- *SDGs not making it into government planning*
In terms of domestic implementation, the challenges that States face are complex. Governments are expected to establish national plans to make sure there is a formal structure for planning, implementation and monitoring with a strong emphasis on the importance of interlinkages between the established goals and targets to fully complete the goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda. Due to

varying levels of development and resources, governments are finding it difficult to create fully encompassing plans that address all the SDGs and their indicators.

- *Few governments have aligned national policies and indicators with the 2030 Agenda*
Since the beginning of 2017, less than 50 countries have submitted national agendas and plans to complete the outlined SDGs to the High Level Political Forum, the entity responsible for overseeing and reviewing implementation at the UN Level. Few governments around the globe have internalized and aligned their national policies to the targets and indicators of the Agenda. Even fewer are making explicit references to the SDGs as a global, mutually agreed framework. Similarly, at the regional and international levels, few governments are explicitly referencing the SDGs in their engagements with other countries.
- *Countries from the Global North do not necessarily understand the SDGs as a universal agenda that also applies to them*
This is reflected by the fact that Foreign Ministries and International Development Agencies are the institutions responsible for SDGs-related work in countries in the Global North. In other words, these countries have not necessarily understood the difference between the SDGs and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They are using the SDGs to reframe their international development assistance, but not to guide their domestic policies.

Civil Society

- *Awareness levels and understanding around the SDGs within civil society organizations are weak*
Although several large global nongovernmental organizations and networks are actively involved in the discussions around the SDGs, particularly on the refining of the measurement indicators and the steps for effective implementation, this is a very small and select group and there is a disconnect between this international cohort and local organizations, even in the Global North.
- *Engagement in SDGs varies greatly based on sector*
There are also interesting differences within different sectors of civil society. It seems like human rights and governance-focused organizations have not been as engaged with the SDGs as “development” organizations focusing more on economic and social development. While their work might directly relate to the Goals and their targets, few organizations are explicitly making the connection. According to the interviewees, the reasons for this might include: heavier focus placed on other existing platforms, processes and spaces, such as the Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review process; and less experience than “development” or “service provision” organizations, which had previous expertise and knowledge of this type of platform because of the Millennium Development Goals.
- *Civil society largely absent from process*
Aside from professional civil society organizations, there is also a lack of awareness within social movements, grassroots organizations, other civic actors - churches, youth groups, community development organizations-, and ordinary citizens, around the SDGs. Few systematic efforts have been made to (re) connect and (re) engage these groups with the 2030 Agenda.

Only some international civil society networks and some country offices of certain UN Agencies have actively engaged with civil society at large around the SDGs. Similarly, very few governments have organized public dialogues or consultations around the SDGs.

Businesses

- *The private sector lags farthest behind in terms of awareness and understanding of the SDGs*

This is understandable since, historically, there has been less engagement of the private sector in UN negotiation processes around a Global Agenda. However, it is important to note that the UN Global Compact has since spearheaded the engagement of the private sector with the SDG platform, achieving some initial successes in influencing companies around the world –at the local, regional, and global levels—to align their corporate social responsibility strategies or social investments to the global Goals and their targets. Other initiatives to connect the private sector to the 2030 Agenda, such as IMPACT 2030, have also emerged.

Timeframes

- *Insufficient time has passed to digest the SDGs*

The SDGs are still very new and, as mentioned before, all stakeholders, even the United Nations itself, are still trying to “digest” and fully understand the goals before moving into the implementation phase. Due to this, it is difficult to expect civil society organizations to use the SDGs as an advocacy platform immediately. However, most interviewees pointed out that as the platform becomes more well-known and governments focus their attention into the action plans, there will be more opportunities for engagement.

Exhaustion from the negotiation process

- *Decreased engagement from global civil society*

Another factor preventing civil society organizations from using them as a platform is decreased energy and resources. The participation in the design and then in the negotiation processes depleted the energy, motivation, and resources from several global organizations. This exhaustion has resulted in a decreased engagement from these global organizations around the SDGs, which have in turn reduced their mobilization efforts at the international, regional, and local levels for the time being.

Perspectives on the United Nations and on globalization

- *Mistrust in the UN system and fear of bureaucratic processes*

Another factor that has indirectly affected local ownership of the SDGs and thus the usage of the 2030 Agenda as an advocacy tool by civil society organizations, is a less positive attitude towards the United Nations. Due to several high-profile scandals, local civil society organizations view the UN negatively and have, in some cases, decided to distance themselves from it. Also, some civil society organizations, local and international, might not be fully embracing the SDGs as an advocacy platform because of the fear of getting entangled into the burdensome bureaucratic processes of the UN system.

- *Rise of nationalistic, anti-globalization movements*

Finally, the rise of populist, nationalistic movements in several countries –both in the Global North and Global South–might undermine the potential for the SDGs to become a true global framework. The attacks on globalization and on multinational processes and institutions might deter some organizations from making explicit reference to the SDGs and will hinder their ability to use the 2030 Agenda as an advocacy platform.

Narrow vision

- *Difficulty in breaking thematic silos*

Another factor to consider when analyzing the potential of the SDGs to serve as a tool to advocate for more open and inclusive civic space is the fact that civil society organizations have traditionally worked in very closed silos. It is difficult for organizations to engage in conversations, processes, or partnerships that might not seem related to their thematic area of interest. Even if the SDGs require a holistic and multi-tiered approach, and include two overarching goals (16 and 17), organizations have continued to focus on their thematic areas and have not yet organized for a more cohesive and collective tackling of the SDGs.

- *Entrenched mistrust*

Another factor hindering the use of the SDGs as an advocacy tool for a more open civic space is the deep mistrust that still exists between sectors –governments, civil society organizations, private sector, etc. For example, even if the closing of civic space affects civil society organizations and businesses alike, these two actors seem reluctant to foster strong partnerships or collaborate on joint efforts.

Complexity of the Agenda and lack of detailed roles

- *The 2030 Agenda is not yet fully understood*

A key challenge civil society is facing with regards to using the SDGs is the complexity of the Agenda itself. The 17 goals, the targets and the indicators are not entirely understood by everyone and discussions around the indicators, needed data and systems, and implementation and monitoring mechanisms are still ongoing.

- *Lack of direction and vision for establishing partnerships*

While the 2030 Agenda clearly emphasizes the importance of partnerships (Goal 17), there is still a lack of understanding of what this means. Everyone has highlighted the importance of partnerships, but no official guidance has been provided on how to accomplish true partnerships to tackle the Goals. Additionally, there is no consensus on what the specific roles of different stakeholders (governments, civil society organizations, businesses, etc.) should be. As one interviewee pointed out, “even within the UN system, there is still an ongoing debate on what each stakeholder should be doing and how they should be engaging with each other”. Some civil society organizations and networks have in fact developed concrete principles and guides to facilitate emerging partnerships; however, there is still some lack of awareness around these, particularly among local civil society organizations and, potentially, government institutions.¹⁶

Incipient engagement from private and public donors

- *No explicit references to the SDGs in funding opportunities*
Potentially due to the recent adoption of the 2030 Agenda, few donors have explicitly incorporated the SDGs into their programs. While it is true that international development agencies are starting to use the SDGs as a framework for their foreign assistance, few make explicit references to them in their solicitations. This incipient engagement and lack of reference to the SDGs might be giving a disincentive for civil society to fully adopt the 2030 Agenda.
- *Misperceptions about the scope of the SDGs*
Some northern countries are struggling with their role in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The MDGs were seen as an agenda for the Global South and countries from the Global North saw their role as supporters of this Agenda -either through funding and/or technical assistance. As the new global framework for sustainable development, some countries in the Global North have not fully grasped the fact that they also need to align their domestic policies and development strategies to the SDGs and produce the same reports as all the other countries.

Lack of coordination at the international level

- *Few spaces for engagement*
Finally, another factor that is preventing civil society organizations from utilizing the 2030 Agenda as a tool to advocate for a more open civic space is the lack of dedicated, institutionalized spaces for the different stakeholders to engage with each other. Now that the SDGs have been adopted, the follow up for implementation and monitoring is in the hands of national governments, with little influence from the United Nations. Civil society organizations need to organize and push for the emergence of national dialogue spaces around the SDGs; however, they recognize that this requires time and resources that not everyone can afford.

D. Using Goal 16 as an entry point – opportunities and challenges

The opinions on the feasibility of using Goal 16 as a tool to advocate for a more open civic space were divided among the stakeholders interviewed for this study. Goal 16 was one of the most contentious goals in the negotiation processes, as governments were reluctant to include language that could be used to question or criticize their governing structures/approach. In this sense, some interviewees believe that Goal 16 might not be the ideal entry point within the 2030 Agenda to initiate productive engagements with governments that could lead to more open civic spaces. These interviewees suggested that a potential entry point for civil society in closing or closed political spaces could be to focus their advocacy efforts on other Goals. This approach could help open some communication channels with government officials in restrictive societies and start a steady trust building process that would eventually contribute to a change in perceptions and behaviours and allow civil society to engage with governments around the issues covered by Goal 16.

On the other hand, some interviewees highlighted that since Goal 16 was approved as part of the whole Agenda, civil society organizations should indeed be using it to remind governments of countries with shrinking or closing civic space about the commitments they made. Additionally, some interviewees also recommended linking the SDGs, and particularly Goal 16, to other existing binding platforms, institutions, and frameworks, such as the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, to make sure that governments do not ignore this goal. Less binding commitments like those made under the framework of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, confirmed at the latest High Level Meeting in Nairobi (2016) can also be used.

Somewhere in between, another group of interviewees recommended “extracting” the issues and targets under Goal 16 instead of leading with the global Goal. Some interviewees mentioned how some of the indicators under Goal 16 might be less politically charged than others (for example, 16.1, 16.2, 16.4, 16.9, and 16.A). Also, some interviewees highlighted that civil society organizations could use Goal 16 to bring together actors working on other Goals. According to them, Goal 16 is connected to all the other issues covered by the 2030 Agenda, since no sustainable progress can be made without functioning and accountable institutions and spaces for citizens to participate and engage.

IV. Recommendations

Considering the above-mentioned challenges and windows of opportunity, some initial concrete recommendations include:

Raise awareness and build constituencies for the SDGs

As mentioned several times before, there is still a widespread lack of awareness about the SDGs. For the 2030 Agenda to be used as a tool to advocate for a more open political space, people first need to know about the existence of the Agenda, understand its targets and indicators, and rally around it. The United Nations has made a great effort to publicize and educate people and institutions about the SDGs. Governments and civil society organizations need to build off of these efforts and further disseminate the 2030 Agenda, taking advantage of its closer connection to national and local public and private entities, as well as to individuals and communities.

Governments

- Within their borders, national governments should make sure that all branches and levels of government are aware of the state's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and understand how their mandate and work can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. The complexity and ambition of the Agenda will require all government institutions to work together in a coordinated fashion. The establishment of a high level, interagency commission could contribute to increased awareness and coordination within government. Furthermore, national governments, particularly the Executive Branch, should explicitly incorporate the 2030 Agenda into their National Development Plans or other long-term planning documents and directives, as well as on their strategic communications plans.
- Aid-providing governments and supranational authorities (like the European Union) could also use their Official Development Assistance programs to other governments to support awareness raising efforts and mainstreaming of the SDGs in countries that need it. Similarly, south-south coordination and cooperation spaces and initiatives should work to raise awareness, and regional leaders that are far ahead into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (like Colombia in Latin America) could provide guidance and advice to their neighbors.

Civil Society Organizations

- International civil society organizations that actively participated in the consultation and negotiation processes for the 2030 Agenda could take advantage of their networks at the national and local level to make sure that the SDGs are understood and adopted by their partners. While the United Nations and some governments carried out a global campaign to collect the feedback from civil society organizations, this effort has dissipated now that the Agenda has been adopted.

- It is also important for domestic and international civil society organizations and networks to make the connection between the specific issues that organizations and citizens care about and the SDGs. Without this intentional connection and an effective communication and awareness raising strategy, the SDGs risk of being considered yet another UN-led bureaucratic effort with no real implications on the ground. It is important to take advantage of the networks, knowledge, and access of international civil society organizations and networks and connect them with local and grassroots groups to “ground” the SDGs and raise awareness and buy in at the local level.
- Finally, working with the media will be paramount to undertake this endeavor. So far, media outlets have not been systematically engaged as part of any awareness raising efforts and civil society should seek to establish closer relationships and promote the SDGs within mass communication outlets.

Find strategic points for engagement and a common agenda, where possible

While the 2030 Agenda is indivisible and all 17 Goals are interconnected, a potential strategy to opening communication channels between governments and civil society organizations in closing or closed political spaces is to identify strategic points for engagement on topics or issues that might be considered “nonpartisan”. Both civil society and foreign governments can try to use these issues as entry points to engaging with authoritarian governments and slowly contribute to the opening of the political space.¹⁷

Governments

- The 2030 Agenda might not be the obvious framework for foreign governments to advocate for the opening of the political space and for the respect and promotion of basic human rights and freedoms. While all governments have subscribed to the 2030 Agenda and made commitments to fulfill all its goals, reporting is voluntary and there are other enforceable mechanisms that deal with human rights, such as the Universal Periodic Review. However, the 2030 Agenda can be utilized creatively, using its universality and perceived neutrality as windows of opportunity. Similar to civil society’s proposed strategy (see below), foreign governments could try to identify the least contentious issues and include civil society engagement as a requirement for the reception of Official Development Assistance programs around these “non-sensitive” issues.

Civil Society Organizations

- In highly restrictive societies, the entry point for civil society might be the least politicized goals, particularly those related to the delivery of concrete services. In these cases, civil society organizations should approach the government with a concrete offer of support to achieve one or more of the targets under a given goal, presenting it as a win-win relationship. This non-confrontational approach would serve a double purpose, on the one hand, the meeting of the targets itself, and, on the other, they would open the door for new ways of interaction between the two actors, laying the groundwork for a perception and behavioral change from government officials to civil society actors.

- This recommendation also applies to advocacy organizations, who could also identify targets or issues within the SDGs where civil society engagement might not be considered a contentious issue for closed governments. In these cases, advocacy for policy or legislative reform, or for concrete government action to achieve the target and tackle the goal, would not be considered confrontational -and thus dismissed by the government.
- Linked to this, another concrete recommendation is to reach out to National Statistics Offices. These institutions tend to be very technical and apolitical, making them more open to civil society engagement. As measuring the indicators of the 2030 Agenda will be a complex task, civil society could support these institutions in collecting, analyzing, reviewing, and disseminating data.
- Goal 16 can be used as an entry point for civil society - government engagement in restrictive societies by choosing the least contentious targets, such as 16.1, 16.2, 16.4, 16.9, and 16.A. This can be the strategy to start building a trust relationship with specific government entities or officers and to pave the way for increased trust and collaboration in the future and, ultimately, a more open political space.

Engage private and public donors to mainstream SDGs into development work

It is important to actively engage public and private donors, pushing for the explicit inclusion of the SDGs in the programmatic areas and funding priorities. While several foundations and international development agencies are starting to use the SDGs as a guiding framework for their giving programs, few are making explicit references to them or requiring potential and current grantees to align themselves to the 2030 Agenda.

Governments

- Aid-providing government should explicitly incorporate the 2030 Agenda into their Official Development Assistance and into their giving programs for civil society around the world, requesting applicants to clearly frame their interventions using the SDGs. This strategy could serve as an incentive for international and local civil society organizations to learn about, apply, and utilize the SDGs in their programming. As stated earlier, taking ownership of the Agenda is a necessary step to eventually using it as an advocacy tool to open the political space.

Civil Society Organizations

- Civil society organizations that manage large grant-making programs, or whose main area of work is to provide technical and financial assistance to other organizations should take a similar approach, using the 2030 Agenda as a framework for their grants and other type of support for local organizations and making an explicit link to the SDGs.
- Similarly, it is important to engage with domestic philanthropic groups or councils to raise awareness and to connect them with international stakeholders already utilizing and making explicit references to the 2030 Agenda.

Connect organizations and groups working on different sectors and bolster collective action

The 2030 Agenda was envisioned as a universal and indivisible framework for all stakeholders to tackle the most pressing development challenges facing our world. While the formal recognition of the interconnectedness of the 17 Goals represents a step forward, active efforts to connect organizations working on the different issues still need to be fostered and supported. Utilizing the SDGs as an advocacy tool to revert the closing of the political space will be more effective if broad coalitions emerge and remind governments about the need to fulfill all commitments under the 2030 Agenda. Both governments and civil society organizations should work to foster these cross-sectoral linkages.

Foster the emergence of multi-stakeholder partnerships that can serve as more cohesive and unified fronts to participate in decision-making processes around development

Linked to the previous recommendation, it is important to enable the emergence of partnerships between different sectors affected by the closing of the political space, such as businesses and academic institutions. Civil society and these sectors could benefit from the different expertise, perspectives, strategies, information, and access points of the others in their efforts to promote the opening of the political space. Acting as a unified front, or at least as a more cohesive voice, would increase their chances of success. While establishing effective multi-stakeholder platforms is not a simple task due to perceived or real competing interests and different priorities and advocacy approached, as stated before, the 2030 Agenda is comprehensive enough to cover and connect this diversity and serve as a common framework for joint action. Aid providing governments, private foundations, and grant-making international civil society organizations should work to incentivize multi-stakeholder partnerships between their local partners.

Institutionalize processes and spaces for civil society-government, and peer-to-peer engagement at the international and domestic level

- As stated before, the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will present a good opportunity to come together and advocate for more civil society participation in realization of the SDGs. A potential strategy to advocate for a more open political space leveraging the 2030 Agenda would be to make civil society participation a compulsory component of the reporting processes at the HLPF. Similarly, a formal space for other governments to assess and comment on the reports presented at the HLPF would provide a tool for democratic governments to press for the opening of the political space and the protection of the work of civil society around the world using the SDGs. The format of the Universal Periodic Review, while burdensome, could provide some ideas on how to guarantee and institutionalize civil society participation and peer-to-peer assessment in the SDGs.

- At the domestic level, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) can provide a valuable example on how to secure the engagement of civil society in SDGs-related work. Following the OGPs format, the HLPF could require governments to formally engage with civil society organizations in the development of national action plans to tackle the SDGs and in the implementation and monitoring of those plans. Defaults from governments could be reported to the HLPF by civil society organizations.

Remind governments of their international commitments to an enabling environment for civil society under the 2030 Agenda and other international treaties, covenants, and platforms

While the SDGs are not a compulsory framework with enforceability mechanisms, all governments are still accountable to them as the 2030 Agenda was approved unanimously via a United Nations General Assembly Resolution. Democratic governments and civil society organizations should take full ownership of the Agenda and refer to it when engaging with restrictive governments and in their global advocacy efforts to open the political space. The 2030 Agenda should also be seen as a complement to other mechanisms and frameworks that seek to promote and protect basic rights and freedoms and leveraged in spaces where those other mechanisms have failed (due to the perceived politicization, for example).

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16. For example, the “Partnership Principles for cooperation between local, national, and international CSOs” developed by CIVICUS and the International Civil Society Centre; and the toolkit “Collaboration for the SDGs: Exploring the Support System for Effective Partnering” developed by The Partnering Initiative.

17. As stated earlier in the report, we do not intend to minimize or disqualify efforts and strategies to advocate for a more open political space and to hold governments accountable when they violate basic rights and freedoms. This recommendation simply tries to present one possibility on how the SDGs could be used to foster more productive civil society-government engagement within a closed or closing society. We see this as a complement to other strategies and approaches, including strategic litigation within the regional and universal human rights systems.

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Annex 1: Country Caselets

HAITI

Supporting Government Efforts to Provide Healthcare to All Citizens

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



With the departure of the Spanish and French colonizers in the beginning of the 19th century, Haiti inherited antiquated and ineffective economic and political structures that have prevented this new nation from fully developing to its potential. Similar to Haiti during the Colonial era, the elites were able to maintain their power at the expense of the majority, creating an atmosphere of political instability and economic insecurity which has continued to follow the state into the 21st century. Following a decades-long dictatorship, Haiti began transitioning into a fragile democracy; however, most citizens feel they are being exploited while the government fails to respond to the needs of its people, especially their health needs. Despite efforts made by some local governments, health infrastructure across the island is inadequate for the growing population and, for a country prone to natural disasters and humanitarian crises, the lagging health care system has hindered the nation's capacity for sustainable development. Although in the past the Haitian government has failed to align itself with the Millennium Development Goals, the country has renewed its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. However, in order to achieve the provision of healthcare to all citizens by 2030, Haiti should be collaborating with civil society to fill the health gaps that they lack the capacity to provide.

The GHESKIO Center

With the continual natural disasters, humanitarian crises and lack of government capacity to provide sustainable health systems in Haiti, nongovernmental organizations began to fill the gaps in their systems. Since 1980, the GHESKIO Center has worked as one of the principal nongovernmental organizations through service, research and training centers that administer medical training and research opportunistic infections, especially HIV and AIDS. Through a community-based approach, the organization has strived to provide integrated primary care services while also emphasizing sustainability through their trainings of healthcare workers while providing integrated primary care services. Through a community-based approach, GHESKIO allows communities to receive access to sustainable healthcare and information regarding health promotion and health management. While the governmental and economic structure of Haiti has made it difficult for Haiti to provide adequate and effective healthcare to its citizens, the GHESKIO Center has been able to directly fill in those gaps and maintain a sustainable solution for future generations through the provision of health services and medical trainings.

The center's work has emphasized the importance of all aspects of health and demonstrated the significance of sustainable health systems to the stability of the Haitian state. As one of the foremost

organizations for healthcare in Haiti, GHESKIO has developed a strong relationship with communities and has partnered directly with the Haitian Ministry of Health. In a state that has been unable to provide the health infrastructure necessary to support its people, the government and civil society have collaborated in order to implement the effective and sustainable administration of healthcare.

Results

Over the past three decades, the GHESKIO Center has expanded its work across the country ensuring quality health care access and education and reaching even the most rural communities in Haiti. The collaboration between the Ministry of Health and GHESKIO has fostered the environment for the development of a sustainable health system in a country that is plagued by humanitarian health crises associated with the natural disaster. The partnership between the government and the organization has generated significantly positive results and GHESKIO receives almost 100,000 patient visits annually. The nationwide expansion and cooperation efforts between state and society resulted in a 50% decrease in infant mortality by the mid-1990s and, more recently, has reduced the rate of HIV transmission from mother to child to less than 5% as of 2009. GHESKIO has worked directly with communities, hospitals and governments in order to effectively implement sustainable and quality health care programs that educate, train and service communities across Haiti.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

During the 1980s when the GHESKIO Center was launched, Haiti was ruled by a dictatorship. There were no societal spaces for non-governmental organizations to grow and sustain themselves. While the state had neither the resources to build new infrastructures nor maintain what it had left, any new attempt by civil society to fill the gaps were perceived as suspicious by the elite in power and their loyal supporters. Consequently, government funding was largely unavailable and human capital was nonexistent as thousands of Haitians fled the oppressive regime. Although it was difficult for GHESKIO to develop as an organization during its beginnings, the organization has remained standing. The tenacity and will of GHESKIO to continue to provide access to healthcare and promote health education convinced the government that this organization was necessary to maintain a functioning state. Since the formation of the relationship between GHESKIO and the government, the partners have been able to cooperate and collaborate in a way that has advanced the health systems in Haiti and promoted access to health care for communities that had never had prior access.

Currently in Haiti, based on the strong partnership with the Ministry of Health, the GHESKIO Center has initiated at least one project in almost every clinic or public hospital. Whether their programs are related to maternal childcare, HIV/AIDS or infant rehydration, health programs with GHESKIO-trained staff have reached across Haiti to ensure that health is guaranteed as a human right.

GHESKIO has developed strong relationships with community members and grassroots organizations, permitting more effective response to health challenges and the development of a sustainable health system which addresses the needs of the Haitian population.

Connection to the SDGs

GHESKIO's work, as civil society organization in conjunction with the Haitian government, is aligned with the unified global development agenda to create sustainable progress. This specific partnership has addressed multiple Sustainable Development Goals by continuously improving people's overall health and well-being, reducing inequalities associated with health disparities (Goal 3), and finally promoting infrastructure development through trainings and education tools (Goal 4). Although there is still more work to be done in regards to Haiti's health infrastructure and health systems, the collaborative partnership between the Ministry of Health and the GHESKIO Center has begun a process of opening political spaces so that states and societies together can progress in a common goal.

ZIMBABWE

Government and Civil Society Partnering for Early Childhood Development

4 QUALITY EDUCATION



With the adoption of the new 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution, education was established as a guaranteed human right. Since then, the country has continued to work to develop and to guarantee the right of primary and secondary education to all children as envisioned by the International Convention on Children's Rights. While Zimbabwe has made great strides in its education system since gaining independence, the state and standard of educational and health facilities are many times in a state of disarray and disrepair creating challenges for students to access education and leading to low retention rates. Although the state promises education to children, economic, political and health crises such as the cholera epidemic in 2009 have prevented the government from effectively guaranteeing primary and secondary education. With the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals, Zimbabwe has recommitted itself to education and hopes to achieve Goal 4 by 2030 through the provision of free and universal education to all children; however, the government is lacking the capacities and resources to achieve this goal and, therefore, must work directly with civil society to ensure the SDGs are achieved.

The Nhaka Foundation

As the government continued to prioritize other issues over education and to overlook the disrepair of educational and health facilities, the Nhaka Foundation saw the opportunity to work to ensure public education to all children. Nhaka has begun developing and implementing a series of interventions designed to bridge the gaps between the government's capabilities, requirements mandating for early childhood development (ECD) programming and the sustainable implementation of such programs. The Early Childhood Development Programs partner with rural area primary schools, parents, and community care givers to repair and replace damaged classrooms in order to provide a clean learning environment that stimulates cognitive and motor abilities early on in a child's growth stages. Nhaka has worked to emphasize the long-term effects of education and nutrition to demonstrate to families the importance of children staying in school, particularly in rural communities, where entrenched inequality and poverty and lack of infrastructure has led children to leave school. Through their renovation and nutrition programs, Nhaka has been able to fill the gaps that the government has left in providing access to primary and secondary education programs creating more opportunities for access to education, particularly for students in rural areas. Children are now staying in school as they are no longer hungry during class and have a safe environment in which they can successfully learn and grow.

Results

In the 10 years that the Nhaka Foundation has been active in Zimbabwe, the organization has been able to grow from a school fees-paying organization to one that is able to reach thousands of children and foster a successful and safe learning environment in schools. Since the formation of the relationship between the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Nhaka Foundation, the gaps and disparities in early childhood education have begun to close and political space regarding education has been opened. In 2016, Nhaka worked to renovate six classrooms in five schools and construct five outdoor playgrounds while feeding 5,184 children through nutrition programs and additionally feeding 2,400 through seven emergency-feeding schools and the numbers are steadily increasing. The Nhaka Foundation continues to tackle new and emerging issues that affect young children in order to ensure that every child is granted safe and continual access to nutrition and education. In 2016 alone, 7,000 children who were a part of the nutrition programs stayed in school throughout the year. Additionally, the Early Childhood Development Programs have raised awareness in families concerning the importance of the long-term effects of education and nutrition, allowing for higher retention rates and access to education in rural communities. In a country where civil society has been hindered drastically by repressive state rule and restrictive NGO legislation, political spaces have begun to close and democratic ideals have been threatened; however, even with the closed environment in Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has fostered a relationship with the Nhaka Foundation promoting a physical environment that permits the implementation of effective and sustainable projects conducive to learning, growth and the optimal development of all children.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

The closing political spaces due a growing governmental fear surrounding the strength of civil society has created challenges and obstacles for the Nhaka Foundation as they strive to provide the opportunity for education. Prior to signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Zimbabwean government, Nhaka's access to provinces was limited to a small jurisdiction and there was not much government funding directly for projects. In addition, a lack of prioritization in the government and of a comprehensive ECD policy made it difficult for Nhaka to effectively and sustainably address the need for education in rural communities. However, since signing the MOU, the Nhaka Foundation has been granted access to all the provinces in order to be able to create a stronger learning environment that will motivate and encourage ECD learning and retain students. Nhaka has been working in collaboration with other organizations and coalitions such as ZINECDA, Zimbabwe Network of Early Childhood Actors, to advocate for a strong and clear ECD policy. The Foundation has also been working directly with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to facilitate continuous trainings for teacher development, which has fostered better communication and cooperation with ministry departments and has helped to ensure the sustainability of ECD programs.

Although the government is still provides insufficient resources regarding sustainable and effective primary and secondary education systems, they have become willing to allow organizations such as Nhaka to aid and support communities the government has been unable to assist. As the Nhaka Foundation has demonstrated its strength and endurance as an organization over the past ten years, the organization

has been able to gain confidence and support from the government, allowing the two organizations to cooperate and achieve their common goal. This opening of space has created the opportunity for the Nhaka Foundation as well as other NGOs to embrace their role as capacity building organizations that focus on the sustainability of programs, the development of skill and resources, and the strengthening of community partners and communities.

Connection to the SDGs

The government has taken steps to achieve the SDGs by working directly with civil society even as the political spaces in Zimbabwe are closing. As governments such as in Zimbabwe are incapable of providing education and health facilities that meet the needs of their citizenries, NGOs have been able to fill some of the gaps and even been occupying the role of the main service provider in many regions, especially in the most vulnerable rural communities. The Nhaka Foundation has been able to take on this role providing a link between civil society and the state by working toward decreasing disparities in Goal 3 and Goal 4 and implementing locally sustainable programs. The partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the slight opening of political space in a typically closed environment has allowed civil society to work with government in order to create sustainable development and working toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals together.

KUWAIT

Influencing Government Policy Towards Women by Raising Awareness

5 GENDER
EQUALITY



Kuwait is one of the wealthiest countries in the Arabian Peninsula and it has long been considered one of the most open countries in the Arab World. While women in Kuwait might have more freedoms than another neighboring countries, they still face harsh discrimination and violence. For example, women are not protected against domestic violence and the family courts set up to deal with the issue have prioritized reconciliation over protection. Similarly, the criminal code still condones corporate punishment and so-called “honor killings”, and the punishment for the perpetrators of these crimes are small fines or short term imprisonment. In addition, women still require the approval of a male guardian to get married, cannot pass citizenship to their children or spouses if they marry a foreigner, and do not have the same ability to file for divorce as their spouses. In response to this dire context, Kuwaiti women and organizations have begun pushing for structural legal changes. After gaining the right to vote in 2005, four women were elected to the National Assembly in 2009. Today, women’s organizations continue to advocate for the recognition and protection of their basic rights.

Abolish Article 153

A nascent initiative by five passionate women, Abolish Article 153 was formalized as a not for profit organization in November 2014 to eliminate honor killing legislation from the Kuwait penal code, which effectively gives men regulatory, judicial and executive power over their female kin in blatant disregard of the constitution, international agreements on human and women’s rights and even the Islamic Sharia. The organization’s ultimate goal is to create a safe environment where mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives are protected from all forms of violence, raising awareness of these violent practices and the legislation that sanctions them, and establishing safe houses for women under threat of violence. Abolish153 supports not only legal change but those who suffer as a consequence of existing legislation. The organization also works to build coalitions across the Gulf Coast Countries and the Arab world to abolish similar laws across the region.

As a young organization, Abolish Article 153 has focused its efforts on raising awareness, both within the public and with government authorities, around women’s issues and the institutional and structural discrimination they suffer. Apart from the public campaign for the reform of the criminal code and the abolition of article 153, the organization has taken advantage of new media and other online platforms to conduct their awareness raising efforts. For example, the organization has launched annual campaigns in support of International Women’s Day and has been able to secure the pro bono support from social and traditional media agencies and local photographers. They have also held art exhibits in Kuwait and Dubai in support of their cause and participated at panels and conferences in Kuwaiti Universities.

Apart from the awareness raising efforts, the organization has also delivered trainings on gender-based violence to representatives from women's organizations and movements from Kuwait and other Gulf countries. Finally, through a grant from a Kuwaiti foundation, the organization is currently implementing a survey to gather data on public attitudes towards violence against women

These efforts have helped in raising the profile of the organization and of its specific campaigns, resulting in ongoing traditional media coverage. Furthermore, their efforts have also led to successful engagement with government authorities and gained support from members of parliament, who have brought the issue of article 153 to the Assembly floor.

Results

Despite its recent creation, Abolish Article 153 has become one of the most visible and successful women's organization/ movement in Kuwait and in the region. For example, the organization's founder received the French National Order of Merit in recognition of her work to promote and protect women's rights in the Gulf.

Abolish Article 153 has also been successful in developing a network of allies amongst other nongovernmental organizations in Kuwait and in the region, raising the profile of women's rights and effectively connecting them to other issues such as health, education, economic development, etc., and bringing new constituents and allies into the defense of their cause. While this might be the norm in other regions of the world, it is important to note that, together with policies and legislation, public attitudes towards women and their right are still contentious issues in the Gulf. This situation has been also exacerbated by a rising conservatism and extreme interpretation of religious traditions.

As mentioned above, the organization has launched a series of national campaigns, including its flagship one to abolish article 153 of the criminal code, and held a series of events to raise visibility for their cause and gain the support from the public and from decision makers. As a direct result of these activities, the head of the Parliament's Women and Family Affairs Committee, Salah Ashour, has brought up the topic of reforming the criminal code and abolishing article 153 during parliamentary sessions. Furthermore, the organization has secured the commitment from the Ministry of Planning to incorporate the findings from the organization's perception survey on attitudes towards violence against women in their official reports., improving the official data and reporting that will serve to assess progress towards the recognition and respect of the rights of women.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Since its creation, the organization has faced several challenges to accomplish their work. First and foremost, while Kuwait might be considered relatively open in comparison to its neighbours, the work of civil society is not easy and the registration and reporting requirements are still burdensome. Similarly, while the organization has been able to obtain the support from some members of parliament and from

the Ministry of Planning, overall, the government remains suspicious of civil society organizations, even local ones. In addition, tribal and conservative forces continue to operate against the full recognition and protection of the rights of women, particularly in Parliament.

To maximize its potential for impact, the organization has focused most of its efforts on one single issue, the abolition of article 153 of the criminal code and has used the constitution and even religious analyses to make their point. In this sense, they have framed their advocacy in support of the modernization of Kuwait and its consolidation in the international arena as a stable, inclusive, and open country in a region long affected by conflict and war.

Connection to the SDGs

By working to eliminate violence against women and repeal legislation that discriminates against women, the organization's work is clearly linked to the achievement of Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda. While the government of Kuwait has taken some initial steps to address issues affecting women, it is clear that the work of civil society organizations, as Abolish Article 153, will continue to be instrumental in changing perceptions and building constituents for change.

HUNGARY

**Reducing Discrimination and Inequality of Roma Populations
by Combatting Prejudices in the Community, the Education System,
and the Media**

10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



The systemic discrimination that persists in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly in Hungary, has impeded the integration of Roma in all spheres of life and has made it the most vulnerable group in the region during more than a decade. While there has been significant foreign and domestic assistance aimed at Roma integration, the majority of Roma families still face systemic impediments to their development, including unemployment and severe poverty, economic exploitation, dependency on state assistance, segregation in education and related low levels of education, sharp deterioration in health and severe undernourishment of children as a result of lack of access to medical services, exclusion from political participation, harassment by police, and social and political isolation from the rest of society. Effective Roma integration into Hungarian society and decision-making processes is a necessary condition to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, particularly of Goals 10 and 16. Government, civil society organizations, and other civic groups will need to work together to overcome deeply entrenched prejudices and discriminatory practices that might be perceived as normal, including by the Roma themselves.

Partners Hungary Foundation

Established in 1994 and based in Budapest, the goal of Partners Hungary Foundation is to contribute to the establishment of a diverse, receptive, open society that lives in harmony with the environment and nature, capable of integrating the values of different cultures and in which equal opportunities structures are ensured for self-realization. The Foundation provides cooperative planning, problem solving and dispute resolution skills and services essential for a healthy and democratic society. It specializes in conflict management and consensus building, especially between Roma and majority groups, promoting gender equality, and building a more robust civil society in Hungary.

Since its creation, the Foundation has implemented several initiatives to combat institutional and structural discrimination towards the Roma population in Hungary and contribute to their full integration in Hungarian society and power structures. Furthermore, in the past decade, the Foundation has partnered with organizations in Slovakia and the Czech Republic to develop joint actions and approaches as the Roma face similar challenges in the three countries. The work of the Foundation has focused on three broad areas: 1) Community initiatives; 2) Media initiatives; and 3) National public policy discussions. The community initiatives focus on mitigating conflict, promoting tolerance, increasing Roma access to social services, and supporting political developments. Through trainings and a small grants program, the Foundation has also sought to build human capacity to manage conflict and encourage interethnic cooperation, and to develop a strong civil society sector capable of advancing Roma integration. The

media initiatives seek to promote objective coverage of Roma issues in the mainstream media, challenge stereotypes, encourage Roma participation in media production, and affect majority perceptions of minority groups in these countries. Finally, the national public policy discussions consist of multi-stakeholder roundtables where government officials, civil society organizations, and Roma representatives discuss specific issues affecting Roma population -such as access to health, media coverage, multi cultural education, etc. All initiatives undertaken by the Foundation with regards to Roma integration and respect have had the support and an active involvement of national and local authorities and, in some cases, have resulted in directives or official actions undertaken by the Hungarian authorities.

Results

Through the work of the Foundation and the active engagement of Hungarian local authorities, three communities in Hungary (Hatvan, Ózd, and Pécs) have established “Conciliation Commissions”. Trained in effective communication, mediation, and conflict resolution methodologies, the Commissions work to manage community disputes, particularly interethnic conflicts, and promote inter-ethnic tolerance. While the Commissions are not part of the formal justice system, they mitigate the risks of escalation of small conflicts and their eventual judicialization. Furthermore, the Commissions also serve to empower local communities and Roma. In the same three regions, the Foundation has worked together with the municipal authorities to facilitate cooperative planning processes to identify and address issues affecting Roma and the larger communities.

Through the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Hungarian State Television (MTV), the Foundation piloted an internship program that allowed Roma youth to work at the Television Network and learn valuable reporting, editing, writing, and production skills and network with experienced professional journalists. Additionally, as a result of the national public policy discussions, the Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs published a historic green paper on the representation of Roma in the media. The green paper, which was approved by consensus by a wide range of stakeholders, includes a series of recommendations to decrease conventional negative portrayals of Roma in the news and increase the number of Roma journalists working for mainstream media outlets.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Deeply held feelings of mistrust and intolerance between different ethnic communities in Hungary and persisting stigmatization and explicit and implicit discriminatory practices, both from society and from government institutions represent one of the challenges for the Foundation’s work towards effective Roma integration. However, a more significant challenge has been the slow but steady closing of the political space in Hungary and the unexpected harassment from the national government to civil society organizations, particularly those working on governance, human rights, and democracy. One of the most recent developments has been the signaling of organizations receiving funds from the Open Society Foundations, as the government now considers its founder, George Soros, persona non grata. As a

grantee of the Open Society Foundations, the Partners Hungary Foundation has seen its ability to work and engage with national government institutions diminished. However, the Foundation is taking advantage of its long-standing reputation and good relations with local authorities and Roma representatives to continue its work. The specific technical expertise of the Foundation has also helped to maintain a level of engagement with local authorities, which continue to seek the support from the Foundation to resolve conflicts and promote inter-ethnic harmony in their municipalities or departments.

Connection to the SDGs

After determining that the national and local governments' efforts to integrate Roma into Hungarian society, Partners Hungary Foundation and other civil society organizations in the country and region were able to collaborate directly with the government, serving as a bridge between Roma populations, communities, and authorities, and enabling the development of government actions to contribute to tolerance and equality. The Foundation provided a particular set of skills that Hungarian authorities lacked, and also served as a neutral convener and connector that helped mitigate the fears from Roma towards the authorities and the prejudices from the authorities towards Roma. While the work with the national government is currently stalled, the continued work of the Foundation is helping local authorities to achieve Goal 10.

SERBIA

Citizen Mediators Supporting Access to Justice



After the separation of Montenegro in 2006 and the declaration of independence by Kosovo in 2008, Serbia has been a country undergoing vast changes. Over the past decade, the country has been working to strengthen its judiciary branch while working toward European Union membership through talks, negotiations and the integration process. While the negotiations with the EU have been occurring for year, prior to 2014, there was very little framework regarding mediation systems in Serbia to assist in this process. As the state continued to focus on EU membership, primarily using their court systems for negotiation purposes, Judicial systems and courts became backlogged due to the lack of efficiency and an inadequate legal framework. Although the state has an obligation to its people to provide an adequate and effective judicial system and had attempted to enhance the judicial branch's role through legal reform, in past years, access to justice and the commitment to Rule of Law have diminished. However, with the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16, Serbia will be working to ensure that its citizenry is provided with peace and justice along with strong institutions to ensure those values are properly embodied and provided. While Serbia has been actively working with civil society through negotiations to become a member state of the EU, the government must also continue to work with civil society to progress and move forward regarding the achievement of the SDGs in its own state.

Partners Serbia and Serbian National Association of Mediators

While the judicial system continued to lag and the capability to access justice diminished, an opportunity for the government to work directly with civil society arose. As the government had failed to provide an effective and accessible justice system, Partners Serbia worked to unite mediators, emphasizing the importance in conflict prevention and resolution in the Serbian justice system. The coalition joined together on October 25, 2014 to form the Serbian National Association of Mediators (NUMS) and has united over 230 mediators through their common goals of a greater access to justice and a larger emphasis on Rule of Law.

Since Partners Serbia has been working directly with NUMS on mediation training, mentoring and advocacy, together, the two entities have been able to demonstrate the potential for mediation, promote alternative methods of dispute resolution and diminish backlogs in the judicial system. They have actively worked to ensure that Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) remains a viable and significant option for governments and justice systems that are unable to provide effective and sustainable access to justice. NUMS, alongside Partners Serbia, even participated in various working groups established by the Ministry of Justice of Serbia to draft the Law of Mediation that was implemented at the beginning of January 2015 to provide citizens with greater access to justice and to create a new framework for the implementation of mediation in Serbia. The formation of this mediation law has led to the Government of Serbia to

recognize the significance of mediation, allowing for the establishment of an effective system for alternative disputes and an increased accessibility to the justice system.

Results

With the foundation of Partners Serbia in 2008 and their work to establish NUMS in 2014, civil servants, business professions, civil society activists, students and other members of civil society have come together to collaborate to effectively improve access to justice and demonstrate the importance of mediation as a dispute resolution mechanism. While the number of mediated cases is low, knowledge and experience have been exchanged across Serbia and the government has recognized the importance of using mediation between parties in conflict. Currently, the association has over 50 mediators that work daily with the government to provide information on justice accessibility for annual reports to the EU, that have also helped in Serbia's integration process as a candidate for the European Union.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Without an adequate legal framework and a lack of prior mediation centers, Partners Serbia and NUMS experienced challenges when looking to diminish disparities related to justice and peace. In order to create a system that benefitted communities in Serbia, the two organizations worked continuously to promote conflict resolution through mediation and improve access to justice across Serbia. Members of both organizations were invited to participate in working groups with the Serbian Government to create and implement the Law of Mediation promoting the use of ADR methods as a way to end conflict. By filling gaps associated with the judicial system, NUMS and Partners Serbia have been able to develop and take on a larger role in civil society to make the justice system more accessible.

Since the National Association of Mediators has been working directly with the government, specifically the Ministry of Justice, the organization has been able to ensure that Serbian citizens are receiving greater access to their judicial system and that conflict resolution remains a prominent and principal feature in Serbian society. Currently, NUMS works directly with the government on implementation of the Law of Mediation by working to develop a clear plan and strategy, provide technical support and generate information regarding justice equality for the European Union as ways of achieving further equality in access to justice.

While there is still some backlog in the Serbian judicial system and there has not been a huge increase in mediation cases, NUMS and Partners Serbia have worked to foster an environment that allows citizens to understand the importance of conflict resolution through mediation and alternative methods rather than the court system. Through the promotion of mediation, their work on the implementation of the Law of Mediation and their direct cooperation with the Ministry of Justice, the collaborating organization have worked to provide a greater equal access to justice and a more progressive Serbia.

Connection to the SDGs

After determining that society was experiencing unequal and inaccessible systems of justice, civil society was able to cooperate and collaborate directly with the Serbian government in order to make sure that inaccessibility was diminished and progress toward equality could be made. As the Serbian government was experiencing the lack of capability to provide effective access to their judicial system, Partners Serbia and NUMS provided an alternative route for civil society to seek a solution and find justice. The establishment of NUMS has permitted civil society to work directly with their government and work toward improving gaps specifically related to Goal 16 through the promotion of peace and conflict resolution, an improved access to justice and the construction of accountable and inclusive institutions. While the political space in Serbia is relatively open, there are often gaps that the government cannot fill that civil society must act to diminish. In Serbia, the Ministry of Justice, Partners Serbia and NUMS have formed a valuable partnership that will allow the country to continue moving forward and achieving progress regarding Goal 16.

ECUADOR

Municipal Authorities Joining the Fight to Promote and Protect the rights of Vulnerable Populations

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



In the past few years, the government of President Rafael Correa evolved into a populist quasi-authoritarian regime which controls institutions and leaves no space for civil society to intervene, effectively curtailing freedom of association. Following the government's logic, civil society is an unnecessary stakeholder that represents "factions" and "specific interests" and not the general population, and thus should have no saying in public decision-making processes and policies. Today, the work of Ecuadorian civil society is directly affected by the Presidential Decree No. 16 of 2013, which established an extensive set of administrative and financial regulations that some claim exist only to monitor CSOs. Similarly, even though the constitution recognizes participation as a fundamental right, the government has utilized direct and indirect measures to restrict it or use it as a tool to assert political power. Most prominently, the government has adopted a strategy of "selective dialogue", with some groups and sectors having a privileged access to government officials and funds due to their support of the current administration. While these strategies to close the political space have had an impact on society as a whole, vulnerable groups have been particularly affected and their voices have been relegated even further. While this environment might seem dire, opportunities to raise awareness and promote human rights still exist at the local level, where municipal and district-level authorities are less reluctant to work with civil society in order to improve the lives of the citizens.

The Ecuadorian Organization of Lesbian Women

Founded in 2002 and based in Quito, the Ecuadorian Organization of Lesbian Women (Organización Ecuatoriana de Mujeres Lesbianas - OEML) was the first organization to defend and promote the rights of lesbian women in Ecuador. The organization has demonstrated considerable resilience in its capacity to operate effectively in a male-dominated and homophobic society and within the confines of closing political space for civil society. Through workshops and the mass media, it works to raise awareness of LGBTI rights and combat homophobia. It also works with government institutions to promote acceptance of alternative sexualities and to modify discriminatory policies and regulations.

While the LGBTI community remains its target population and main beneficiary, since 2015 the organization has expanded its scope and has focused on enabling the development of collaborative strategies to enforce the existing legal framework on rights of vulnerable populations, particularly of heterosexual and non-heterosexual women, people with disabilities, Afro-Ecuadorians, youth, and elderly people. They have focused their work in "La Delicia" District of Quito, a historically marginalized area within the capital city. To accomplish this, the organization has been training representatives of these traditionally excluded groups, public officials, and community leaders in promotion and protection of human rights; has supported the establishment of effective communication and coordination mechanisms between civil society and local authorities to address human rights issues of affected and vulnerable

populations in the District; and last year, with financial, logistical, and technical support from municipal and district-level authorities, organized a "Human Rights Festival" to make visible and promote the rights of excluded groups, the first in the country's history.

Results

The organization has been extremely successful in engaging a wide array of constituents, including LGBTI populations, youth, the elderly, afro-descendants, people living with disabilities, and indigenous populations and connecting them to each other, building broader coalitions to demand their rights. This represent a major shift for the organization, which in the past was exclusively focused on working with lesbian women. The success of OEML in bringing together these different stakeholders and mobilizing them for a common advocacy goal -the recognition and respect of their rights– is also a sign of the maturity and strength of the organization, as well as a proof of its capacity to insert itself into the democracy movements, while still representing a vulnerable spectrum of the population and remaining connected to its constituents. The deep and formal partnership between OEML and municipal and district-level authorities has allowed the organization to reach hundreds of people through official spaces such as clinics, community centers, and schools, and, at the same time, has contributed to a slow but steady change of culture within these government institutions, fostering respect and recognition of fundamental rights.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

For more than a decade, OEML has been at the forefront of the fight for equal rights for LGBTI populations and, now, for other traditionally excluded groups. Despite a rough start characterized by lack of empathy from the population, mistrust and -in some cases- indirect attacks from the national government, today, the organization is widely recognized, having received municipal and international awards and currently serving in the advisory council of the Ecuador office of UN Women. The country is still far from protecting the rights of vulnerable populations and expressions of xenophobia and homophobia are still common.

OEML has benefitted from the open communication and collaboration channels with different local government offices and agencies. The organization forged these productive partnerships while participating in the Constituent Assembly in 2007 and 2008. Policymakers also know OEML as the first lesbian organization in Ecuador and approach the organization frequently. These relationships have translated into direct support, both financial and in-kind of the local government for the implementation of the organization's projects. On the other hand, local government institutions have benefitted from OEML's technical expertise, knowledge of international frameworks, and connections to a vast network of organizations and networks around the world. Through this partnership and the benefits form it, local authorities are contributing the actual protection and exercise of the rights of vulnerable populations.

Connection to the SDGs

With society and some government institutions, particularly at the national level, still stigmatizing LGBTI populations and ignoring the needs and rights of other vulnerable groups, OEML has been able to access key decision makers at the local level and work with them to revert this trend. As local government still lack human and technical resources to address this issue and with a national government that has failed to deliver on its promises to vulnerable and marginalized groups, OEML's interventions and continued work is contributing to achieving some Goal 16, even if the organization has yet to explicitly incorporate the 2030 Agenda in its activities and interactions with governments and other stakeholders.

NICARAGUA

Grassroots Organizations and Municipal Governments Working Together to Address Local Challenges



The Government of Nicaragua has historically resisted and disqualified the participation of civil society in the public arena, particularly organizations involved in human rights, good governance and rule of law. This trend has intensified since the 2007 election of President Daniel Ortega, who has accused CSOs of being “antirevolutionary” promoters of foreign interests. His regime has enacted legal and quasi-legal strategies to obstruct independent civil society, co-opting the national security forces to create a surveillance and social control system that suppresses dissent and employing “professional harassers” to infiltrate social movements and protests. Ortega was re-elected on November 6, 2016 for another five-year term and conditions seem unlikely to improve during the remainder of his term, although the political environment will presumably be less tense without elections looming on the horizon. Worryingly, numerous foreign aid organizations have exited Nicaragua over the past year, including the UNDP, due to the difficulty of working in this volatile environment and the intensity of government scrutiny. Indeed, the Nicaraguan government must approve all foreign aid programs implemented in the country before funds are disbursed to local implementers. The CSOs are feeling strapped for cash and abandoned at a critical time.

The Chontales Women’s Network

Based in Chontales department of Nicaragua, the Chontales Women’s Network (Red de Mujeres Chontaleñas - RMCH) is the legal and technical arm of the women’s movement of Chontales. Formally speaking, it is a local CSO created in 2009 to promote and defend the rights of women in the region, with a particular emphasis on economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and ending gender violence. The organization is composed of 500 women organized in 10 municipal committees, each one of them with a small, yet formal, organizational structure. RMCH carries out advocacy activities and is working to build the capacities of women to better advocate before the municipal authorities. At the same time, the organization works with municipal authorities to raise awareness about issues affecting the rights of women in the region and serves as a communication channel between the two groups, enabling open discussions and engagements. To accomplish this, the organization has focused its work on establishing “Community Oversight Committees” around the Chontales department. The Committees are semi-formal structures composed of community leaders and municipal government officials that meet on a regular basis to discuss current events and issues affecting the rights of women and other vulnerable populations in the department and develop joint roadmaps to address this issues. The Committees validate these plans with the community and coordinate their implementation, including those requiring government action.

Results

In the past few years, the organization, in close coordination with the municipal authorities, has been able to establish Community Oversight Committee in five of the ten municipalities within the Chontales Department boundaries that continue to work together to address issues affecting the population, particularly women, children, and other vulnerable groups. The Committees have served as direct and open communication channels between ordinary citizens and government authorities. The Committees have had the ultimate results of: 1) increasing citizens' trust in local government institutions thanks to carefully facilitated and periodic dialogues; 2) shedding light on issues previously ignored or minimized by local and national authorities, such as domestic and gender-based violence; 3) opening up government processes and institutions to citizen oversight; and 4) enabling the inclusion of citizens' concerns and suggestions into government planning and fostering a more productive relationship between society and government at the local level.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Since its formal creation, the Chontales Women's Network has been working to promote a more inclusive and respectful society towards women and fight a deeply entrenched "machista" culture that persists at the national and, particularly, at the local level. While the work of the organization, and of the broader women's movement, has sometimes been disqualified as "anti-revolutionary" by the government of Daniel Ortega, the organization has managed to survive and expand its reach. Furthermore, taking advantage of the few windows of opportunity for engagement that still exist at the municipal and micro-local level, the organization has been able to overcome the barriers imposed by an authoritarian regime. By taking a nonconfrontational approach and presenting its intervention as a support to current government programming, the organization has been able to circumvent the presidential oversight of all government entities, including municipal councils and institutions, and has slowly, but steadily, paved the way for a new relationship between citizens and their local government officials.

While the political space in Nicaragua remains extremely closed, through the Community Oversight Committees, the organization is contributing to a change of perception and behavior, from the side of the authorities, towards civic engagement in decision-making processes and the implementation of government actions. Similarly, the organization has contributed to increasing government transparency and accountability by bridging the gap between citizens and public officials and enabling spaces for safe and productive interactions, including around sensitive issues.

Connection to the SDGs

After realizing that government authorities, from all levels, were unresponsive to the needs of women and other vulnerable populations, the organization decided to foster and organize communication channels between citizens and authorities, bringing the groups together to listen and understand each other and find common ground for joint action. By doing so, the organization has been contributing to a more inclusive and peaceful society in Nicaragua and to more transparent and accountable institutions, at least at the local level, in direct relation to Goal 16, even if the organization has not made an explicit reference to the 2030 Agenda in their strategic planning or during the implementation of their activities.

Similarly, by making visible the issues affecting women and vulnerable groups, namely violence that was never punished by the state, and helping government authorities and communities work together to address this, the organization is contributing to the achievement of the Goal.

NIGERIA

Strengthening Anti-Corruption Agencies and Working to Guarantee Citizens Access to Public Information



Despite the abundance of natural resources such as oil and gas, and an expanding manufacturing, financial, and technology sectors, poverty and inequality remain important issues affecting the lives of ordinary Nigerians. Linked to this, a severe shortage of economic opportunities, combined with a culture of criminal impunity and weak justice system because of endemic corruption at all levels of government, has led to the entrenchment of transnational organized criminal organizations, which have exploited weak governance structures to create ever more favorable environments for their trade. While the Nigerian government has taken several steps to address corruption, including the creation of anticorruption commissions and specialized law enforcement units, corrupt practices and systemic impunity remain significant threats to the long-term stability, democratic strengthening, and economic health of the country. Particularly troubling are those cases in which investigations or even indictments take place but convictions are never achieved or, if they are, result in insignificant punishment of the offenders. In high-level corruption cases, the convicted is often required to pay fines that are a small fraction of the total amount of funds stolen and judges regularly ignore the advice of prosecutors and hand down punishments far less severe than sentencing guidelines permit.

The CLEEN Foundation

Established in 1998 and based in the city of Abuja, the CLEEN Foundation (formerly known as the Center for Law Enforcement Education) is a Nigerian nongovernmental organization whose mission is to promote public safety, security, and accessible justice through the strategies of empirical research, legislative advocacy, and demonstration programs and publications, in partnership with government and other civil society organizations. Among its core competencies, CLEEN: enhances the capacity of justice institutions (such as the police and its oversight bodies) to deliver services and make their procedures more accessible and transparent to the people; builds partnerships between the police and local communities in crime prevention and feeding community concerns in the determination of policing priorities; promotes the use of empirical and quantitative data in the formulation of crime prevention, public safety and security policies. It uses technology to develop innovative tools for citizens to tackle corruption.

CLEEN believes that easy access to government information is a necessary tool to fight corruption, improve citizens' access to justice, and enable productive engagements with government institutions and officials. In this sense, CLEEN has launched a series of public initiatives around open government and the costs of corruption and has actively engaged with the government's independent anti-corruption agencies -namely the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)- to guarantee the adequate implementation of the 2011 Freedom of Information Act.

Results

Through their engagement efforts with the above-mentioned anti-corruption agencies, CLEEN has made available official data on corruption, impunity, and crime produced by the agencies, fulfilling its mission of guaranteeing access to information and bringing transparency to government institutions. As the anti-corruption agencies still lack human and technical resources to share relevant data, CLEEN has formally supported the agencies' work by analyzing the official data collected by the agencies and producing a quarterly report on their activities (including number of cases received, processed, and solved; number of cases pending; number of access to information requests received; etc.). Each report is shared with the agencies and with civil society organizations and used as a discussion point for periodic interactions between the two sectors.

Additionally, and to ensure that heads of the agencies are accountable to the public, CLEEN organizes quarterly town hall meetings between agencies and civil society. These town hall meetings have allowed civil society organizations to have more frequent interactions with agency heads and to ask questions or raise concerns in a structured and secure space. While many of these interactions between government and civil society often appear to be antagonistic and emanate from a place of mistrust, CLEEN has worked to build positive and constructive relationships, so that these spaces can serve to solve problems rather than increase animosity. CLEEN has also secured the participation of the heads of the agencies or the public relations officer in radio programs where people have been able to call and ask questions or report shortcomings from the agencies' work.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

The organization's efforts have resulted in successful partnerships between civil society and government officials, unlocked several datasets that had previously not been in the public sphere, and engaged Nigerian citizens on topics of accountability and governance in the security sector—a sector that is generally considered opaque. CLEEN has been successful in leveraging the Nigerian's government formal commitment to increased transparency and accountability. Some windows of opportunity that the organization has taken advantage of include the government's participation in the Open Government Partnership, the existence of an approved Freedom of Information Act, and the willingness of the professional staff and heads of the anti-corruption agencies to carry out their mandate as independent oversight bodies and guarantors of accountability from the side of the government. These have served as tools to ensure government buy in and participation in the organization's initiatives. The main challenge remains including these other government institutions and working in an environment characterized by crime, violence, and inequality.

Connection to the SDGs

Besides increasing the flow of information available to the citizenry, CLEEN's work have contributed to increase trust and confidence in public institutions and promote government-civil society collaborations. By working hand in hand with the anticorruption agencies, making information readily available for citizens,

and by bridging the gap between citizens and governments, the organization is directly contributing to the achievement of Goal 16. While the engagement of other Ministries and agencies from the national and local governments in Nigeria is still pending, the work with the anti-corruption agencies represents a significant step towards a more open and inclusive government that is responsive to citizens.

JORDAN

Participatory Budgeting as a Tool to Bolster Transparency and Accountability



As the Arab Spring swept across the Middle East, citizens protested, demonstrated and rioted in order to make their voices heard and hold their governments accountable. In Jordan, protests erupted in 2011, compelling King Abdullah II to promote sociopolitical reforms that would ensure stability for the state. While little progress has been made in implementing the reforms due to the lack of citizen participation and fears of the political repercussions, reforms regarding government structure and the decentralization of the national government are expected to be executed in August of 2017. As Jordan works toward embracing a decentralized system, increased citizen engagement and participation are necessary to ensure community needs and priorities are met and local governments are held accountable. The decentralization of the Jordanian government will allow for the opening of political spaces, and civic participation is paramount to accomplishing Goal 16. While the government has attempted to decentralize, the ineffective policies and reforms have proved unsuccessful leaving the opportunity for CSOs to work with both the government and communities to achieve progress in Jordan.

Partners-Jordan

Prior to the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals and Jordan's move toward government decentralization, Partners-Jordan began working to raise awareness on the methodology and importance of developing participatory programs in local governments to ensure communities across the country remained involved in their government's decision-making process. Over the course of sixteen months, Partners-Jordan established Participatory Budgeting Programs in six municipalities allowing citizens to directly partake in local governance. Through their Participatory Budget Programs, the organization has been able to foster strong links between civil society and their municipal governments, allowing CSOs, community members, and government to develop budgets in accordance with a community's priorities.

From November of 2012 to February of 2014, Partners-Jordan in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs began implementing their Participatory Budgeting Programs emphasizing the benefits of citizen involvement and direct participation through awareness workshops and assessments regarding community needs and priorities. Through their education efforts on the importance of the development of participatory programs, the organization has provided the opportunity for community members to directly collaborate with municipal governments and has expanded the active participation of citizens in local government affairs. In addition to education and awareness workshops, the organization has also formed committees to tackle priority issues and vote on matters considered of importance in the

community, creating the opportunity for citizens to directly participate in their government's decision-making process. In direct partnership with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Partners-Jordan was able to engage citizens in government processes, while establishing strong relationships, building trust between government departments and civil society, and promoting.

Results

Across the six municipalities, the Participatory Budgeting Programs resulted in the reallocation of funds to the priorities identified by citizens, resulting in the formal inclusion of their needs and concerns in the 2014 budget. The communities' efforts were directly reflected as a number in the budget, which has allowed citizens to hold their municipal governments accountable if the services are not implemented. At the end of the project, there was a 50% increase in the belief that citizens can exercise influence on the budget process and a 46% increase in the level of confidence regarding the clarity of the local government budgets. The efforts by Partners-Jordan and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have directly increased both trust in the government as well as direct participation, allowing Partners-Jordan to set the groundwork for citizen engagement as local governance becomes more important in a decentralizing Jordanian society.

Maximizing Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges

While cooperating directly with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs to create and implement the complete project, Partners-Jordan was able to foster an environment that inspired active citizen participation in local governance. While the Ministry cooperated and collaborated with Partners-Jordan during every step of the project, the organization experienced difficulties working with local mayors, the engagement of citizens, and a lack of trust between communities and governments; however, the established relationship Partners-Jordan shared with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the organization's continuous efforts to form channels and create strong connections with officials helped to diminish the previously growing gap between government and its citizenry.

Despite the challenges faced over the course of their project as well as the country's closed environment, Partners-Jordan was able to effectively implement Participatory Budgeting Programs that promoted and increased citizen engagement and participation, built strong connections between governments, civil society, and communities, and fostered trust between the three groups that has laid the ground work for the future and sustainable development of accountable institutions, civic participation, and the respect of human rights. Through their connections with the government, Partners-Jordan gave credit to the municipal governments, encouraging citizens to engage in the budgeting process and promoting collaboration between to the two groups.

As Jordan moves toward decentralized system, Partners-Jordan and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs have created a strong foundation for the country to move forward with an active and engaged citizenry,

allowing for communities to hold their governments accountable for future services and to have their needs and priorities heard by their local representatives. While the closing of the political space makes it difficult for civil society to operate, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Partners-Jordan, and other civil society actors have demonstrated the benefits and potential growth when all members of society can work together toward achieving and accomplishing a shared ambition.

Connection to the SDGs

Even prior to the adoption of the SDGs, Partners-Jordan was working to ensure that citizens were able to have a voice in their local governments. As Jordan and the national government move toward a more decentralized system, the strong foundation and the opening of the political environment to include more citizen participation will provide the country with proper tools and resources to continue developing and achieving progress. In partnership with the government, Partners-Jordan is promoting civic participation and accountability of government institutions ensuring that Jordan will take steps in the future to achieve Goal 16. While the project had finished before the SDGs outlined specific ideals for global progress, Partners-Jordan, in collaboration with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, has been able to foster the environment that will allow Jordan to continue making progress regarding the SDGs.

BRAZIL

Strengthening Psychosocial Services for Victims of State and Non-State Violence and their Families in Rio de Janeiro Through Capacity-Building and Advocacy

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



Following the peaceful transition to civilian rule in 1985, Brazil experienced a long period of economic growth which supported the development of infrastructure, increased the standard of living, and increased the influence of Brazil in regional and global affairs. This long period of growth, the successful weathering of international economic crises, and a very active international presence, supported the image of Brazil as one of the world's strongest emerging powers. While the Brazilian government was relatively successful in reducing poverty through increased government investment and cash transfer programs, the country still faces one of the world largest inequality ratios and violence and crime still plague the country. Furthermore, in the past few years, the country has been plagued by a shrinking economy, growing unemployment and inflation and a series of corruption scandals touching almost every level of government and all political parties.

The Institute of Religious Studies

Founded in the 1970s, at the height of the military dictatorship in Brazil, the Institute of Religious Studies (ISER) is a civil society organization, of secular nature, committed to promoting human rights and democracy. The main purpose of the organization is to promote studies, research, and social intervention about extensive issues affecting Brazilian society, such as public security, the environment, religious diversity, and defending and guaranteeing human rights. Over the last 40 years ISER has adapted to respond to the social demands and tendencies in Brazil and at the regional and international level. Expanding from a research institution, ISER has accompanied the development of the Brazilian human rights and social movements, focusing now on a wide variety of issues including: the combat against racism and sexism, the defense of the rights of women, the homeless, young people, and the protection of the environment, among others.

With crime and violence on the rise in Brazil, and accusations of corruption, bribery, and ineptitude affecting all level of government and all political parties, the organization decided to focus part of its work into the protection of victims of state and non-state violence and their families, and the establishment of a support and protection network based on quality access to psychosocial services at the municipal level. Leveraging its research and academic credentials, ISER has been working with different government authorities to develop and implement a formal, state-mandated capacity-building and certification program for health professionals and social workers, filling a gap in both technical capacities and guidelines and policies from government institutions.

Results

As part of its permanent commitment to human rights and to address violence committed by state and no-state actors, the organization has recently established a formal partnership with the municipal Departments of Social Development and Health to assess the needs and challenges of social workers and health professionals in providing adequate care services for victims of state and non-state violence and their families in the municipality of Rio. Through this partnership and joint venture with the social and health authorities of the municipality, the organization has developed and implemented a set of innovative methods to raise awareness and strengthen the capacities of health professionals and social workers and create a permanent psychosocial support service network, leveraging collective, multidisciplinary, and intersectoral work.

Together with relevant government officials, the organization has so far assessed the main limitations and shortcomings of psychosocial care services provided by the state and municipal authorities in Rio. As a result of this assessment, the organization is currently working with government authorities to modify the regulations that govern the private contracting of social workers and some health professionals to reduce the high rates of turn over and, thus, of missed expertise and knowledge. Parallel to this, the organization has developed a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary methodology and approach to strengthen the capacities of social workers and health professionals and connect them with relevant authorities and other practitioners in Brazil, and is currently training dozens of state employees. The organization is also working to institutionalize this state-sponsored training and certification program, and guarantee a broader reach in the municipality and the state.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Based in Rio de Janeiro, the organization has developed a long-lasting relationship with municipal and state-level authorities from all the political spectrum, and has managed to position itself as a well-respected technical partner, contributing to the analysis and evaluation of government policies, and participating in the joint development of regulations and policies to address some of the challenges facing the state and city of Rio. However, the current wave of corruption scandals and the growing polarization within society, government levels, and political parties have resulted in decreased access to decision-makers and a growing sentiment of mistrust from government towards civil society and vice versa.

The window of opportunity that this organization took advantage of was the evident lack of capacity from the municipal or national authorities to respond to the needs of victims of state violence and a growing social pressure to demand better services and access to justice. By offering its technical expertise and a network of well-known researchers and contributors, plus funding from an international foundation, the organization was able to secure the partnership with the above-mentioned institutions, getting access to state social workers and health professionals and engaging with the administration in the reform of regulations and policies to better serve the needs of victims

Connection to the SDGs

While the organization has not explicitly incorporated the SDGs into its current or future activities, it is clear that its work to improve psychosocial care for victims of state violence is related to Goal 16. This is particularly true as the organization has actively engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, including government officials, and has served as a channel for victims to express their concerns with the current support and protection network and demand action from government institutions. By working hand in hand with municipal and state level authorities, both for the reform of policies and regulations, and for the training of government workers, the organization is also contributing to a more transparent and accountable government. Furthermore, the actual training of health professionals and social workers to improve the psychosocial care they provide to victims can also be considered as contributing, indirectly, to Goal 3.

MEXICO

Bringing Civil Society Organizations and Government Authorities Together
for the Development of National-Level Indicators for Goal 16



Despite a crisis of violence and crime that has affected the country for over a decade, Mexican civil society organizations and other informal civic groups have continued to actively work for the improvement of the country and have become a legitimate, well-organized force capable of advocating for legislative and policy reforms, supporting the implementation of these reforms, and holding the government accountable for shortcomings. While the transition to a full democracy is still incomplete and with some civil society actors facing threats and harassment from state and non-state actors, the national government has taken some steps to more proactively engage civil society organizations. This has been particularly visible around the SDGs, with the recent launch by presidential decree, of a National Council for the 2030 Agenda that will provide a formal space for civil society and government actors to discuss the implementation of the SDGs in Mexico.

The Center for Civic Collaboration

Founded in 2005, the Center for Civic Collaboration (Centro de Colaboración Cívica - CCC) is a Mexican nonprofit whose mission is to promote a more peaceful and just society by strengthening spaces and capacities for dialogue, participation, and good governance. CCC specializes in enabling effective multi-stakeholder dialogue and consensus building processes, mediating conflicts between parties, and strengthening civil society networks and coalitions to address common problems affecting the public sphere. As a nonpartisan, “nonthematic” organization, CCC has been able to engage with different stakeholders on a wide array of topics, from citizen security, to sustainable tourism, to land and indigenous rights, focusing its interventions on bringing different perspectives together and facilitating collective action.

With international funding and explicit support of the national authorities, CCC has been working with a broad civil society coalition to develop a set of recommendations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to establish a coordination channel between this civil society-led effort with the government’s internal processes. At the outset of its intervention, CCC identified national and local organizations working on issues related to Goal 16, particularly those working on violence and crime prevention, access to justice, and transparency and accountability. As the 2030 Agenda is still very new, CCC focused on identifying the key actors working on these issues, even if they were not explicitly referencing the SDGs. Following the mapping exercise, the organization convened a series of workshops and later a dialogue and consensus building process to: 1) present and discuss the 2030 Agenda and the specific targets for Goal 16; 2) raise awareness about the connection between Goal 16 and their specific areas of work; 3) determine an engagement and advocacy strategy for the group; and enable articulation and participation spaces for civil society and government actors. As part of this process, the civil society coalition participating in the dialogues has decided to focus on developing the national level indicators for Goal 16 and to provide them as inputs for the government’s process.

Results

While this initiative is still unfolding, one of the key results so far has been the creation of a semi-formal coalition encompassing 40 civil society organizations networks for the implementation of Goal 16. With the support from CCC, this coalition has engaged scholars, academic institutions, and the Office in Mexico of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the development of indicators for Goal 16 that respond to the national and local context and priorities, and that take into account the perspectives and needs not only of those participating, but also of other relevant groups such as the victims' movements. Another key result of this initiative has been the establishment of an open and dynamic communication channel between civil society organizations participating in the coalition and government institutions working on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

By helping organize and prioritize the inputs, concerns, and proposals from civil society, the initiative led by CCC is allowing for more effective coordination between the two stakeholders. It has also made communication and engagement more efficient, as government has been able to receive the recommendations from the organizations in an orderly manner while, at the same time, providing feedback and updates on its own process via the coalition.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Mexico was very active in the 2013 and 2014 consultation and negotiation processes undertaken by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, leading regional consultations and spearheading the development of the Guadalajara Declaration, which was presented to the High Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This active involvement of the Mexican government in the consultation and negotiation processes and its explicit and high profile commitment to the 2030 Agenda represents a window of opportunity for civil society to engage. As the Mexican government tries to convey an image of commitment and active work towards the accomplishment of the SDGs, it has been open to the inputs and recommendations of civil society.

As of today, the main challenge in terms of engagement has been the involvement many different Ministries, independent government bodies, and agencies linked to the Presidency, and the slow pace of the government process to develop the national-level indicators. However, the recently launched National Council for the 2030 Agenda will mitigate this challenge and will serve as a formal coordination space where civil society will have the opportunity to actively engage in the implementation of the Agenda.

Connection to the SDGs

The work of CCC and the coalition of civil society organizations and groups it has helped create is explicitly linked to Goal 16. The initiative is contributing to breaking some thematic silos and connecting the work of highly specialized organizations into the 2030 Agenda. While it is true that the coalition is focusing only on Goal 16, the initiative has at least brought closer organizations working on the

different issues (violence prevention, corruption, justice system reform, etc.) under the umbrella of Goal 16.

KAZAKHSTAN

Enabling Spaces for Citizen Participation in Decision Making Processes in Kazakhstan and Central Asia

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the independence of the satellite republics, Kazakhstan has experienced challenges as it has adjusted to statehood. As a state with more abundant natural resources than other Central Asian Republics, Kazakhstan has worked toward growing its economy and expanding access to its resources and, in the end, improving the standard of living of its citizens. While this effort is in no way complete and with the government still far behind in terms of democratic rights and freedom, the government of Kazakhstan has taken some initial steps and tried to leverage its relative economic strength and serve as a sort of regional leader in a wide variety of issues, including citizen participation and civil society-government partnerships to advance and guarantee long term economic and social development.

Association for the Development of Civil Society “ARGO”

Founded over a decade ago, the Association for the Development of Civil Society “ARGO” works to assist in the development and strengthening of civil society in Kazakhstan and in the Central Asian Republics by combining efforts and mobilizing the resources of nongovernmental, state, private sector, and international organizations. In a nutshell, ARGO is a regional network that encompasses organizations that provide services to other “technical” or “thematic” nongovernmental organizations in the region. ARGO applies innovative methods of civil society development and it has provided more than 30,000 institutional development services, including trainings, consultations, roundtables, monitoring, evaluation, services of resource centers in the regions of Kazakhstan and in Central Asia. ARGO has also worked to bolster a more active and productive citizenry, enabling effective communication channels and spaces between the authorities and organized civil society, both at the national and regional level.

As part of this work, the organization implemented the “Development Through Regional Cooperation” program, whose main objective was to strengthen civil society in Central Asia by increasing civil society’s institutional capacity, fostering effective dialogue with governments, enabling south-south networking and learning between and across sectors, and rewarding emerging partnerships between civil society organizations and government institutions in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. One of the key components of this program was the organization of a Regional Civic Forum where representatives from governments and civil society organizations could discuss in a safe and structured fashion issues affecting democratic governance, civil society development, and sustainable development in the region.

Results

A concrete result from the Civic Forum and the overall implementation of the “Development for Regional Cooperation” has been the formal and permanent inclusion of representatives from civil society from the region in the “Dialogue Platform on Human Dimension” housed and coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan. The periodic meetings of the Dialogue Platform on Human Dimension have served as a high level and formal space to explore and establish partnerships between civil society organizations and governments to tackle diverse issues impacting sustainable long term development in the region. Furthermore, the “buy-in” from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has helped civil society, both within the country and in Central Asia, to show the possibility of positive partnerships between the nonprofit and the public sector and has allowed for a more open discussion of politically sensitive issues such as the adoption of Russia-style censorship measures in the region and their impact in society writ-large.

In addition to this, thanks to the organization’s work and to the open and continuous communication within the Dialogue Platform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cooperation regarding civil society strengthening has increase across the region. For example, over 1,200 representatives from civil society in Central Asia have participated in joint experience sharing events. Following the example of ARGOS and the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government of Kyrgyzstan has also hosted and sponsored regional exchanges and “study tours” for civil society organizations from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

Overcoming Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

One of the main challenges that the organization faced was the persisting mistrust from some government institutions in Kazakhstan, and in the region, to civil society participation in public decision making processes and in advocacy activities regarding democratic freedoms and norms. While the political space in Central Asia is still closed, the organization was able to identify a key ally within government - Ambassador-at-large Usen Suleimen from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan. Ambassador Suleimen was instrumental in “opening the door” for the organization’s work with the Ministry and with the inclusion of civil society representatives from other Central Asian Republics in regional, multi-sectoral activities around sustainable development.

Apart from the alliance with Ambassador Suleimen, ARGOS got the support from the national authorities of Kazakhstan by presenting its work as aligned to the government’s vision for the country as a regional leader in civil society development and public private partnerships for sustainable development.

Connection to the SDGs

The organization’s work around regional cooperation for sustainable development started during the negotiation process around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development. While ARGOS’ efforts were not explicitly framed using the SDGs, in retrospect, the organization affirms that their work was in direct relation to Goal 17 and, in an indirect way, to Goal 16. As part of their project and though their active

participation in the Dialogue Platform on Human Dimension, the organization has contributed to a shifting perspective of civil society-government engagement in the region and has promoted the establishment of concrete partnership initiatives between civil society organizations from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with their respective government to tackle specific development challenges.

About this report

This report was commissioned by the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society to help strengthen its advocacy work on civil society space, and in support of the Community of Democracies' priority around the same issue. The study explores the links (through practical examples/caselets) between an enabling environment for civil society, sustainable economic and social development, and the fulfilment of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

The report was produced by Jujia Roig, Luis Gomez Chow, Dana Barringer, and Roselie Vasquez-Yetter, from PartnersGlobal.

About the Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society

The Working Group fosters collaboration among states, civil society and international organizations to counter the backlash and shrinking space that citizens and civil society organizations face around the world. By combining the diplomatic influence of democratic states and the knowledge and tools of civil society organizations, with the collective power of the broader democratic community, the Working Group stimulates coordinated diplomatic action to encourage governments to amend restrictive laws that stifle citizens' voices.

Membership and Participation

Canada has chaired the group since its inception in 2009. The Working Group is made up of 15 governments (Botswana, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the European Union. Five civil society organizations with expertise in laws governing civil society (Article 19, CIVICUS, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, World Movement for Democracy and Act Alliance), and three advisory organizations (UNDP, the UK Charity Commission and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association) are also members.

About the Community of Democracies



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES

The Community of Democracies is an intergovernmental organization that drives the global democratic agenda through common action. Since its establishment in 2000, the Community has brought the world's democracies together to advance and promote the democratic principles and standards enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration Toward a Community of Democracies that was signed by 106 countries.

Building on the Warsaw Declaration, the Community's founding document that 106 countries signed in 2000, the Community of Democracies seeks to support democratic transition and consolidation worldwide by:

- Assisting societies in the development and strengthening of democratic institutions and values;
- Identifying, alerting and responding, consistent with the UN Charter and the Warsaw Declaration to threats to democracy so as to assist states to remain on the path to democracy;
- Supporting and defending civil society in all countries;
- Advancing broad-based participation in democratic governance;
- Giving a voice to those working peacefully for democracy in all countries.



About PartnersGlobal

PartnersGlobal has a vision for the world where all of us - communities, governments, organizations, and businesses- work together to peacefully manage change. We believe in the power of local leadership and global collaboration to achieve inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous societies. That's why we empower our affiliate centers, foster lasting partnership, and help people create just and democratic societies where:

- Rights are respected
- Conflicts are resolved without resorting to violence
- Ordinary people shape decisions that affect them
- Resources are carefully managed and conserved for future generations
- PartnersGlobal works through a global network to create partnership with local change leaders to transform conflict, strengthen democratic institutions, and achieve sustainable development.



COMMUNITY
OF DEMOCRACIES

Community of Democracies

Contact Us

Al. Ujazdowskie 41

00-540 Warsaw, Poland

Tel. +48 22 375 90 00

Fax. +48 22 319 56 28

E-mail: info@community-democracies.org

Website: community-democracies.org



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