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South African Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) strategy workshop

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1. Introduction

On the 1st of September 2017, African Monitor in partnership with UNDP South Africa hosted a civil society Strategy workshop, with the aim to facilitate a dialogue between key Civil Society Organizations (CSO) networks in South Africa to build a strong CSO constituency for SDGs implementation. The expected outcome of the consultation was to have clear agreement among civil society networks on operational modalities and strategic priorities for the CSO Working Group on the SDGs.

The expected outcomes of this workshop were:

- Membership of the CSO Working Group is broadened to include multiple sectors, provincial structures, and broader NGO and CBO community in South Africa.
- Guiding principles for partnership, modalities for collaboration and effective practices of working are agreed and adopted by the Working Group.
- Working group structures are formalised including a representative national steering group, as well as provincial structures.
- A strategy for engagement with the South African government, and priority actions endorsed as part of the CSO roadmap on SDG implementation.

2. Action towards the implementation of the SDGs in South Africa: A brief background

Director of African Monitor Ms Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso opened the workshop by welcoming the participants and urged them not only to bring their professional hat into the conversation, but also their context. She then went on to give a history of the genesis of the South Africa CSO Working Group on SDGs, explaining that the work started during the negotiations on Post -2015 development agenda, which later become Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She indicated that this civil society platform had then produced a roadmap which highlighted the need for a more inclusive platform – thus leading to this meeting as a critical outcome.

Ms Mniki-Mangaliso also gave a brief background of the adoption process of the SDG and highlighting the role of different government ministries in the adoption and implementation process. She briefly explained the transfer of political mandate from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) to Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation

(DPME); the complexities caused by lack of clarity on the location of the political mandate and the need of re-establishing relationship with designated government entity; and implications for the domestication process in the country.

She highlighted that Stats SA has conducted consultations with multiple stakeholders including civil society to develop a new set of indicators for the national SDG monitoring process. She also pointed out that some government departments have also started working on the SDGs, although this seems to be happen in silos. She stated that CSOs task in the consultation is to discuss how to engage with government and other stakeholders so as to avoid this schizophrenic response to the SDGs.

Reflections and perspective around the engagement with other CSO platforms, communities and community based organisations with the NDP, SDGs, and other agendas:

The participants were asked to reflect on some of their experiences and perspective around engaging with local communities and broader civil society on the SDGs. Mr Jimmy Gotyana from SANGOCO highlighted the importance of civil society coming together and sharing ideas and thoughts, giving a background of the SA landscape before and after CSOs decided to form a coalition on the MDGS. He pointed out that the shadow report produced by civil society created spaces for engagement between the government and CSOs during the MDG era. Mr Eric Ntshiqela of NANGOSA highlighted the plight of community based organisations, particularly the fact that they are largely excluded from processes such as the SDGs despite the fact that they should be the most involved.



Overall, input and discussion from civil society during this session highlighted the following:

- The issues related to lack of financing for Non – Government Organisations (NGOs): Participants noted that receiving funding from government weakens civil society.
- Fatigue from communities: It was pointed out that discussions that are not followed by actions were making communities lose confidence in civil society organisations.
- Inclusivity and openness: It was also stated that the group needs to be inclusive of community based organisations and needs to have strong leadership and presence at grassroots level if it is to have any impact at that level.
- The participants reiterated the importance of educating people about the SDGs and translating the agenda in a language that can be understood by communities. They also pointed out that people cannot see the connection between their lives and the SDGs, and the entire process of the MDGs and the SDGs is still a bit confusing for citizens and CSOs at grassroots level.
- Local government engagement: Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Managers are not aware of the relationship between the SDGs and policies such as the IDP. This means that local government authorities are not yet positioned or capacitated to deliver on the SDG promises.
- Engagement with government: Regarding CSO-government relations the participants asked how best to engage with government without losing or compromising ourselves. It was highlighted that Stat SA has recently shared the indicators that they have put together for monitoring SDGs in the country. They are now about to finalise it and give it to government. A lot of thought has gone into the indicators and they have mentioned that they have fewer gaps than the MDGs. Participants noted the need to access this document and share it with the rest of the CSO community.
- One of the concerns that were raised was around funding and CSOs independence. Questions around how CSOs can retain ownership and ensure that our agendas speak to the contextual reality were raised.
- Pertaining to the CSOs model the group is to adopt, the participants asked what will an effective consultation look like and how do we get to that point?

4. International / Global Experience – Perspectives from the UNDP

From UNDP SA, Mr Bongani Matomela shared the global experience on the implementation of SDGs. He highlighted that for CSOs to play effective role, the workshop has to consider the following:

- How to engage with government differently, at national, provincial and local government levels.
- In regards to how the SA CSO working group will function with the Stats-SA sectoral working groups, he stated that Stats SA now has a national coordination body on the SDGs and that the SA CSOs working group needs to support those who are part of the coordination body
- He spoke about the need to be very concrete in the things that the CSOs want to do.
- He also emphasised the importance of citizen participation and stated that is the overriding factor and that we need to measure the impact that we are making as CSOs.
- Regarding the facilitation of localising the SDGs at provincial and local level, he pointed out that a Monitoring toolkit has been developed with focus being on goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies. This could be used as a model for other SDGs as well once completed.
- Urged CSOs to meet with the Minister in the Presidency heading DPME to express CSO concerns, as he may not be aware of the challenges we are facing.



Discussion and Deliberations

- **Role of the SA working group** – a concern was raised with regards to the role CSOs should play in the implementation of the SDGs. It was stated that government should play a primary role and CSOs should come in as a supporting role. CSOs should be a stakeholder that ensures that government does not retract.

It was pointed out that CSOs should pay attention to the introductions under each SDGS and stated that that's where the role of the CSOs comes in.

- **Engaging with government** - there were divergent views as to how to engage with government. One was that government no longer trust CSOs in the country as CSOs are accused of pushing for regime change – this highlights a need to improve our relationship with government. On the other hand, the discussion highlighted the complexity of effectively engaging with divergent arms of government, all of which are currently working in silos.
- **Reflection and planning** – It was emphasised that the group needs to reflect and have a plan; it must also align its plans to the national development plan.
- **Current affairs** – It was pointed that it was time that the parliament of South Africa started discussing current affairs, for example the rising poverty levels. How then could this platform better engage with parliament to strengthen its role?
- **Making use of the SDG agenda** - the agenda is a framework for advocacy work and it should be used as such.
- **Information sharing and language** – regarding access to information and language, some of the questions asked include how can people access information and why is there limited knowledge of this information? How should this information be communicated? How do we use media to disseminate information to our communities? We need simplify information for people to understand it.



6. Road-map for CSO participation in the implementation of the SDGs.

Ms Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso presented the current CSO roadmap on the SDGS, which highlights the following principles:

- The SDGs and Agenda 2063 are seen as a tool and a framework for CSOs to leverage for local level advocacy, and to create a sense of urgency around the implementation of development commitments across social, economic, environmental spheres. Leverage on the SDGs principles - What the SA CSO Working Group wants to leverage on is the leave no one behind principle; as well as the fact that the SDGs bring together business, government, civil society, as well as the integration of the environmental outcomes with inclusive economic development and social development.
- Local ownership - The SDGs need to be understood in a local context and leveraged to advance the citizens needs and be rooted on citizen agency. This also highlights the fact that SDGs must be implemented at the local level.
- The SDGS are about development planning reinforced by global commitment.

The roadmap highlighted the following as the priority objectives and/or actions for the working group:

- Mobilising CSOs and better coordination
- Agents for the domestication and implementation of the SDGs
- Localisation
- Capacity building
- Citizen driven monitoring



The participants deliberated on the priority actions and the following were chosen as the priority actions for the group going forward:

Monitoring SDG implementation in South Africa:

- Track government progress and processes. To do this, CSO must access the already developed baseline by Stats SA to determine where they have identified gaps in the SA policy, indicator and planning framework.
- Therefore, group will interface with the monitoring and follow up led by Stats SA.

Strengthen CSO engagement through better coordination, resourcing and capacity building:

- Mobilise more CSOs and resource our own work
- Have CSOs mainstream their SDGs in their work. However, to do this it is important to stick to the mandate of our organisations and not be driven by funding
- It was stated that the group need to categorise and leverage on its skills and expertise. Therefore, the mapping exercise must look at the possibility of doing a skills audit for civil society to highlight already existing skills and expertise.
- The group should also have a sector of focus, so that attention can be paid to policy aspects and delivery needed under each goal. It was decided that the group would follow current government clustering as a way of facilitating better engagement with government.

Better and more effective engagement with government:

- The CSO working group needs to close the gap between the high level political forum (HLPF) and the local level, and also monitor the SDGs at all levels
- CSOs need to be involved in every state of the implementation of the SDGs
- Establish what communities want and engage government on what people want – Know Your City is currently profiling people in informal settlements; this could be used as a knowledge base to inform our advocacy with government.
- Familiarise ourselves with structures in government working on the SDGs and determine different strategies of working with each.
- It was stated that the working group needs to build the capacity of its members.

Look into programmes government is running and then determine what needs to change in those priorities. Civil society needs to be clear on what it is asking of government.

7. A model for CSO engagement with SDGs at national and provincial levels

Ms Mniki-Mangaliso gave a brief explanation of the different CSO structures in existing in three African countries – Tanzania, Ghana and Cameroon which the South African CSOs can adopt. The structures are as follows:

Option 1: Leadership, profile and action - Cameroon

- The main objective of this model is to ensure that CSO have a strong profile and engagement with government
- CSOs are represented by a small specialised team
- The team has CSO mandate and trust
- Not representative of CSO community

Option 2: Representation and political participation - Tanzania

- The objective here is to build a representative inclusive structure for CSO engagement.
- Structure ensures geographic representation
- Focus on inclusivity
- A Steering group then leads the big structure

Option 3: Sectoral issues and agenda based

- The objective here is to ensure that civil society is engaged in a way that enables or facilitates advocacy and thematic influence.
- CSO platform is organised into Sector Working Groups
- A Steering committee leads the group, with representatives of each sector
- Policy action and interventions are clear and focussed

The SA CSOs Working Group opted for a hybrid model that will take into consideration some of the above elements. There will be a three-tier model that takes into consideration geographic representation, sector working groups, inclusivity and leadership.

8. Summary of key decisions and way of working for the SA CSO Working Group on SDGs:

On structure and coordination:

At the national level, the Working group will be made up of thematic clusters with membership from CSO entities. Each sectoral cluster will have a Chair to coordinate action and engagement. Each of the chairs of the clusters will make up the steering committee of the Working Group. Also in the steering group will be 3 representatives of youth, women and disabled community, as well as the host community.



At the provincial level, the sectoral clusters will be replicated, together with the chairs for each cluster, and the steering group.

At the local government level, the CSO teams will be organised as organically, with at least one organisation identified as the main node.

Chosen sectoral clusters:

The group will have four sectoral groups which are:

- The peace, justice and governance cluster
- The social cluster
- The environmental cluster
- The economic cluster.

This is based on the government clustering system. Organisations were asked to allocate themselves into the different clusters. See Addendum 1 for CSO members under each cluster.

There was strong argument for Gender as a standalone cluster and the counter argument being Gender, Youth and Disability should be mainstreamed through the clusters. It was clear that the need for strong gender component in the work of the working groups and a mechanism has to be developed to ensure that emphasis. Towards this end, CGE will produce a rationale on a stand-alone gender equality working group vs gender mainstreaming across all goals.

On Working Group Membership:

All organisations present at the meeting, including platforms for youth, NGOs, CBOs, Informal Settlement Dwellers and others, joined the SA CSO Working Group on SDGs and committed to participate actively. It was agreed that those that could to attend will also be engaged going forward. To this end, the mapping analysis to be completed at the end of September will guide.

On the CSO Mapping Analysis:

It was agreed that a mapping analysis for CSO in South Africa will be concluded at the end of September. However, the outcome of this will not be seen as the end, but rather the beginning of an ongoing process to be handed over to Sangonet as the custodians of the CSO database. The mapping analysis will include both names of organisations as well as their sectoral focus and value-add in order to complete the skills map. Furthermore, a strategic approach will be developed about how to better engage with these entities going forward.



Next step and Way forward:

- Finalise a mapping exercise on civil society in South Africa
- Operationalize the road map and start implementation immediately
- Establish sectoral clusters, develop an advocacy plan and CSOs positions, and to establish contacts with technical line departments. Each cluster has to nominate leads.
- The interim steering groups shall be composed the lead for each cluster and special focus lead (gender, youth and disability) plus Nangosa and SANACO
- Establish contact and meet with the Minister in the Department of planning , monitoring and evaluation and Statistics South Africa

Closing remarks

Ms Mniki-Mangaliso thanked all those present for the making the time to be there and for their level of engagement, and commitment. She also thanked the participants for their willingness to listen to divergent perspectives. She

said she is also trusting in the idea that we may now keep the process going and achieve something tangible.

Addendum 1: Clusters

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