



THE OPEN SDG CLUB SOUTH AFRICA 2023

SYMPOSIUM REPORT

List of acronyms and abbreviations

CAN Community Action Network
CEO Chief Executive Officer
CGE Commission for Gender Equality
CoGTA Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
COSATU Congress of South African Trade Unions
CRAM Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey
CSO Civil Society Organisation
DPME Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DStv Digital Satellite Television
FBO Faith-Based Organisations
FGD Focus Group Discussions
GBV Gender-based Violence
GDP Gross Domestic Product
HLPF High-level Political Forum
ICT Information and Communications Technology
ILO International Labour Organisation
IRP Integrated Resource Plan
IUDF Integrated Urban Development Framework
LNOB Leave No One Behind
MTSF Medium Term Strategic Framework
MSP Multi-stakeholder Partnership
NDC Nationally Determined Contribution
NDP National Development Plan
NDSF National Development Stakeholders Forum
NGO Non-governmental Organisation
NPC National Planning Commission
QLFS Quarterly Labour Force Survey
RISDP Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan
SACONO South African Congress of Non-profit Organisations
SADC Southern African Development Community
SADC-CNGO SADC Council of Non-governmental Organisations
SAWG South African Working Group
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

UIF Unemployment Fund

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

VNR Voluntary National Review

WFTO World Fair Trade Organization

WHO World Health Organization

WTO World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

The Open SDG Club South Africa is a national space that was formed in 2019 by the African Monitor, the CGE and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), along with members of the South African Working Group (SAWG). The Open SDG Club South Africa was the adaption of Open SDG Club Berlin. The South African club has three components: The Open SDG Club multi-stakeholder dialogues, Open SDG Club community dialogues, and the symposium. It took place on 22 & 23 February 2023 at the Market Photo Workshop in Johannesburg.

In 2023, the Open SDG Club South Africa met for the first time in three years after the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had prevented this from happening. It is important to note that 2023 marks the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Symposium was convened under the theme "Mobilising action for accelerated delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ". The symposium presented an opportunity for civil society and other non-state actors in South Africa to take stock, review the SDGs and share perspectives on an open, inclusive and collaborative platform. Additionally, it was designed to showcase and encourage the transformative nature of the SDGs, especially ensuring engagement between civil society actors and decision-makers.

The theme of the Open SDG Club South Africa 2023 Symposium was aligned with a key message of the HLPF in line with the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2023 theme.

The symposium was designed to be a dialogue platform. Each session was designed to produce a set of recommendations for mobilisation actions for accelerated delivery of SDGs. SDG solution labs followed the symposium. It brought together leaders from government, members of parliament, civil society and Faith-based organizations, representatives of grassroots communities, businesses, the labour movement, academic institutions and United Nations agencies.

The symposium brought together 24 panellists and speakers including prominent South Africans, among them members from the UN, the CEO of the CGE, and representatives from national and international organisations. There were 121 registered participants and 27 who attended online.

The symposium was opened by Ms Namhla Mniki, who is the Open SDG Club South Africa Symposium Convenor and also moderated the first High-level panel, "Mobilising collective actions for a new phase of accelerated delivery". High level panelists included Mr Lusanda Batala, Acting Chief Sector Expert: Research, Partnership & Development, DPME Stats SA, Dr Kefiloe Masiteng, Secretary of Planning, the National Planning Commission; Department Of Planning, Monitoring And Evaluation, and Dr Achieng Ojwang, Executive Director, Global Compact South Africa.

The outcomes of these various sessions, as well as those of the Open SDG Club community dialogues, are presented below.

Call To Action

Based on discussions, comments and presentations made at the Symposium, there is a call for individuals, communities, and governments to take active steps towards achieving the SDGs. This includes raising awareness about the goals, mobilizing resources towards their implementation, and holding leaders accountable for progress made. Some specific actions that can be taken include:

Localisation and education

1. Teaching people about the SDGs and their relevance to local communities.
2. Incorporating the SDGs into personal and organizational decision-making processes.
3. Teaching people about the SDGs and their relevance to local communities
4. Engaging in collective action and volunteering to support SDG-related initiatives.

Prioritisation

5. Taking action towards addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty.
6. Advocating for policies and programs that support sustainable development.
7. Collaborating with others to build partnerships and alliances that can advance progress towards the SDGs.
8. Embracing technology and innovation to support the implementation of the SDGs.

Accountability

9. Taking responsibility for individual actions and making sustainable choices in daily life.
10. Demanding accountability from governments and other stakeholders for progress towards the SDGs.
11. Celebrating successes and sharing best practices to inspire others to take action towards the SDGs.

Framing the Open SDG Club South Africa 2023 Symposium by Rev Mazabane, member of the African Monitor Board of Trustees

Rev Ndaba Mazabane welcomed the attendees to the SDG Club Symposium on behalf of Archbishop Njongo Ndungane, the Emeritus Archbishop of Cape Town and Founder & President of African Monitor. He thanked the Commission for Gender Equality, the National Planning Commission, and the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation, along with the South African working group on SDGs for their continued support of the African monitor team. Rev Ndaba Mazabane highlighted the importance of faith leaders' involvement in the symposium and bringing their community's voices to the discussion.

The Open SDG Club South Africa Symposium 2023 was convened under the theme "Mobilising action for accelerated delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" in line with the theme of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2023. The symposium presented an opportunity for civil society and other non-state actors in South Africa to review the progress of the SDGs and share their perspectives in an open, inclusive, and collaborative forum. Rev Ndaba Mazabane acknowledged the support from institutions such as ABSA Bank and the GIZ.

Rev Ndaba Mazabane noted that 2023 marked the midpoint of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and progress towards the realization of the SDGs has been slow and uneven. The Covid pandemic has halted or reversed the achievement of the SDGs. The UN secretary-general has called for an urgent SDG rescue effort "as a road map out of the crisis."

Globally, progress towards the realization of the SDGs is not on track and far from what is required to realize the 2030 goals and targets. Progress has been mainly in shifts in the development discourse; however, far less impact has been made in the 'normative domain' and the 'institutional domain.'

In South Africa, progress has been mainly in changing political discourse and institutional and normative domains. The SDG coordination mechanism aims to strengthen the implementation of development policies and review progress on the SDGs, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the Southern African Development Community Regional Indicative Strategic Development Programme (SADC RISDP). Rev Ndaba Mazabane highlighted the new social compact developed by state and non-state actors that lend a "whole society approach" toward development delivery.

According to the Sustainable Development Report (2022), South Africa is on track only in two SDG goals, namely gender equality (Goal 5) and responsible production and consumption. The progress toward the realization of the remaining 14 goals has been stalled or very slow to meet the 2030 targets. Progress on Goal 1, which is to end poverty, has been reversed, and there has been all-but-absent progress on the national triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and

inequality. Rev Ndaba Mazabane emphasized that this gap has dire implications for the realization of all other SDGs.

Mobilising collective actions for a new phase of accelerated delivery.

The Open SDG Club South Africa 2023 Symposium was opened by a high-level panel, “Mobilising collective actions for a new phase of accelerated delivery”. The panel shared insights on practical steps to mobilise action for accelerated delivery of SDGs. Contributions from the panellists are discussed below. The session was moderated by Ms Namhla Mniki.

Moderator:

- Ms Namhla Mniki – Development Economist & Founder of Kajeno Bua Inc.& Open SDG Club South Africa Symposium Convenor

Panellists:

- Dr Kefiloe Masiteng, Secretary of Planning, the National Planning Commission; Department Of Planning, Monitoring And Evaluation (DPME NPC)
- Mr Thulani Mahlangu, GIZ/SDG Initiative
- Mr Glenn Farred is the Executive Director of the SADC-CNGO

Ms Namhla Mniki – Development Economist & Founder of Kajeno Bua Inc.& Open SDG Club South Africa Symposium Convenor

Namhla Mniki explained that the SDGs are 17 commitments made by governments worldwide to promote development in their countries. Mniki highlighted that South Africa has faced challenges in achieving the SDGs, such as a stagnant economy, but progress had been made in some areas such as access to healthcare. Mniki also mentioned that South Africa's response to COVID-19 has been praised globally. She continued listing the SDGs, including good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean energy, and affordable energy.

She said that as the 2023 marks mid-way of the 2030 the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the country's main concern was not to create new laws. Lawmakers and government officials examined the 17 goals together with existing South African laws, institutions and budget systems and make them work together. This was in an attempt to domesticate the SDGs.

Dr Kefiloe Masiteng, Secretary of Planning, the National Planning Commission; Department Of Planning, Monitoring And Evaluation (DPME NPC)

Dr Kefiloe Masiteng stated that achieving the SDGs could be accomplished by implementing the National Development Plan, which was started ten years ago in 2012. However, the country faced significant challenges with the first three priorities of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. Despite efforts, poverty continued to be a significant issue, with over 50% of the population living below the poverty line, which was set at R419 in 2010.

Dr Masiteng pointed out that the issue of inequality was primarily about money, and the country's focus was on creating jobs and growing the economy to increase household incomes. However, despite these efforts, the rich continued to get richer, and the poor remained poor. The country had hoped that 90% of jobs would come from small, medium, and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs), but 64% of jobs still came from the formal sector, leading to a lack of progress towards achieving the National Development Plan's goals.

Dr Masiteng emphasized the need for the country to be agile, honest, and deliberate in its efforts towards achieving the SDGs and the National Development Plan's goals. This could be accomplished by empowering women, ensuring children have access to education, and working with young people to make them game-changers in society. However, she acknowledged that these things were easier said than done, and the country needed to be deliberate in its efforts.

Dr Masiteng also highlighted the cost of poverty, stating that it was more expensive to live in poverty than in suburbs. She stressed the need to put money towards fighting poverty and for the country to prioritize addressing poverty, as poverty was expensive to tackle. Dr Masiteng also spoke about gender equality, stating that progress was being made in Parliament in terms of putting women into positions of power. However, she emphasized that this should not be a mere counting exercise and that women should be given equal trust and empowerment to men.

Dr Masiteng's comments highlighted the significant challenges that South Africa faced in achieving the SDGs and the National Development Plan's goals. She emphasized the need for deliberate, honest, and agile efforts to address poverty, inequality, and unemployment, along with prioritizing women's empowerment and gender equality.

Dr Kefiloe Masiteng spoke about three key elements that were included in the National Development Plan (NDP). According to her, in order to see change in the livelihoods of the people, social compact and social cohesion were at the heart of it. This was not just an English word, but about how people lived with one another, how they cohered each other towards developmental issues in the country, and not sitting somewhere and laying the loss, while others left that law.

She also emphasized the need for a strong government to achieve the nation that had been built in 2008. A strong government should be able to lead development for South Africa and be deliberate in its actions. Working together with the private sector, the government should be able to coalesce and bring trust to the table. Dr Masiteng believed that the government was very important and when the private sector trusted the government, development would improve.

Dr Masiteng talked about the effectiveness of leadership and the challenge that South Africa faced in implementing any development plan. She noted that development should not be the responsibility of the government alone. Civil societies, private sector, and government all had a responsibility to come together, work, collaborate, and partner to make sure that everything changed in the country. She emphasized that National Planning was not just for the government but for everyone, including politicians who were supposed to drive implementation and make sure that the nation was united.

Dr Masiteng believed that if a few of these things changed in the next five years by 2027, there would be fewer people living in poverty and fewer complaints about being left behind because everyone would feel coerced.

Mr Glenn Farred is the Executive Director of the SADC-CNGO

Glenn Farred spoke about the need to address poverty, inequality, and exclusion in rural South Africa, particularly for black African women. He emphasized that the black African woman in rural South Africa has been ignored, which is a fundamental problem that must be addressed.

Farred highlighted that the Gogo, or grandmother, plays a crucial role in holding families together in rural South Africa. He argued that social cohesion and social compacting must take into account the experiences of the black African woman in rural South Africa, as they are often the ones who bear the brunt of poverty and inequality.

Farred also noted that the problem has not necessarily been the design of systems and policies, but rather the failure to start from the impact that needs to be seen. He stressed the importance of making trade-offs and learning to find direct and immediate solutions that work within the system.

Farred acknowledged that civil society has also failed to contribute meaningfully to solutions for poverty, inequality, and exclusion in rural South Africa. He argued that civil society must focus on solutions beyond policy, rhetoric, and legislation and place gender at the heart of their work. He suggested that civil society must ground themselves in the realities of the black African woman in rural South Africa and find simple solutions that can be quantified and worked within the system.

Farred also emphasized the importance of language in framing issues of poverty, inequality, and exclusion. He argued that language can sometimes confuse and obscure the human face of these issues. He noted that the most effective campaign led by civil society post-1994 was the unionization of the impacts of HIV and AIDS. This campaign was effective because it told a human story and connected policy to people.

Farred concluded by noting that addressing poverty, inequality, and exclusion in rural South Africa requires a 360-degree whole society leadership approach. He argued that everyone must change, and that this change must begin with a deeper reflection on the challenges facing civil society. He also noted that the cost of participation in these processes is high, both in terms of time and resources.

Overall, Farred's remarks underscore the urgent need to address poverty, inequality, and exclusion in rural South Africa, particularly for black African women. He emphasizes the importance of finding direct and immediate solutions that work within the system, and of grounding solutions in the realities of those most affected by poverty and inequality. Farred also stresses the importance of language in framing these issues and connecting policy to people.

Mr Thulani Mahlangu, GIZ/SDG Initiative

Thulani Mahlangu, a representative of the SDG Policy Support Initiative, spoke about their work with the South African government and the government of Germany. He clarified that their entity is a development cooperation agency and not a donor agency. Their role is to bring in expertise to help the government in improving its policies and capacity to implement them effectively, and to ensure that the development agenda is inclusive and consultative.

Mahlangu emphasized the importance of social cohesion in the development process and ensuring that no one is left behind. He discussed their work in supporting the government in implementing its core development framework, the National Development Plan (NDP), and other programs through the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) processes. They also work to improve the capacity of public entities tasked with coordinating and implementing these frameworks.

Mahlangu stressed the need for evidence-based policymaking, and their collaboration with the presidency to bring scientific evidence and research into the policy space. They work to involve academia and civil society in policy development, implementation, and oversight, to ensure a strong representation and voice for all stakeholders.

Regarding the issue of colonial crimes, Mahlangu stated that it is an issue that can be taken up between the two governments at the bilateral level. He advised that it is a matter for the National Prosecuting Authority's special division to address.

Overall, Mahlangu emphasized the importance of effective leadership, coordination, and consultation in the development process, and the need to involve all stakeholders to ensure a sustainable and inclusive development agenda for South Africa.

Policy recommendations

The high-level panel discussion was instrumental in setting the scene for the symposium by highlighting a need to create a social compact in order to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. Panellists stressed the need for community participation and ownership of the SDGs on a localised level.

1. The panel highlighted the need to define the face of poverty, which is the black African rural woman.
2. Community engagement and active participation are essential to achieving SDGs, and resources need to be reallocated to facilitate this.
3. The government needs to strengthen its capacity and improve coordination to ensure effective implementation of policies.
4. To make development meaningful, advocacy, learning, and teaching need to be promoted and communities should be part of the development agenda.

5. The symposium also advocated for building human capabilities and allocating resources to achieve development goals through a flexible framework that includes agreed-upon trade-offs.

Session 1: Civil Society's Perspective on a Renewed Social Contract

Moderator: Mr Glenn Farred, SADC Council of NGOs

This session discusses the proposed social contract framework in South Africa and considers civil society perspectives. The discussion focuses on the emerging perspectives from a study on the new social contract, informed by community consultation in Kwa Zulu-Natal, the Northern Cape, and Gauteng. This discussion aims to contribute to the conclusion of a comprehensive new social compact.

1. **Presentation:** Emerging Civil society perspective on a renewed social contract - Dr Janet Munakamwe, WITS University
2. **Panel discussion:** What are the key pillars of a renewed and resilient social contract in South Africa?
 - Ms Zanele Ncwane, Provincial Manager at Commission for Gender Equality, Kwa-Zulu Natal
 - Ms Corlett Letlojane, Executive Director, Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA)
 - Miss Yolokazi Mfuto, Youth Representative, University of Pretoria

Emerging Civil society perspective on a renewed social contract - Dr Janet Munakamwe, WITS University

Dr Janet Munakamwe presented preliminary findings of a citizen report that presents key outcomes from a combination of literature reviews, and provincial and national consultative dialogues conducted by the African Monitor and the Sustainable Development Goals Working Club. The primary objective was to gather data that would inform the formulation of civil society and grassroots communities' formal submission to the conversation towards a new social compact in South Africa.

The report was a direct response to the president's pronouncements in 2020, stating that there was a need for a new social compact. The report resulted from robust engagement with various communities and national consultations that took place. The citizen report analysis hinges on an appraisal of the country's performance in relation to the Agenda 2030, and its approach is completely different from the Presidential Social Sector Summit approach, which had a draft framework.

Dr Munakamwe questioned who was consulted, for whom, and how they were consulted, she also pointed out that the input from civil society providing technical advice and the voices were completely different. Protests that occurred in 2021 were a clear message coming from communities that the most marginalized did not have their needs met. The speaker points out that the litigation process is expensive, and our communities do not understand what we mean when we say that we can go to court. Therefore, the only alternative for them is to throw stones or burn buildings.

Dr Munakamwe noted that the social compact was not detached from the objectives and ambitions of the 17 SDGs and that the report is based on an appraisal of the country's performance in relation to the Agenda 2030. There is also a need for inclusivity in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to ensure that all stakeholders are represented, including marginalized communities.

An emphasis was placed on the importance of ensuring that all voices are heard, including youth and elderly workers, and suggests that representatives should come from the people rather than appointed positions. It was also highlighted that the need for meaningful transformation at the NEDLAC level to ensure that the social compact involves all social partners with shared responsibility.

Dr Munakamwe also discussed the importance of socio-economic and ecological policies to end gender-based violence and eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and access to health and ecological justice. The presentation emphasizes the importance of citizen voices, participation, and meaningful consultations in achieving the SDGs. She acknowledged the progress made in terms of policies and legislative reforms but highlights the need for implementation and mass education and awareness raising on SDGs.

Panel discussion: What are the key pillars of a renewed and resilient social contract in South Africa?

Ms Corlett Letlojane, Executive Director, Human Rights Institute of South Africa (HURISA)

Ms Corlett Letlojane emphasised the need for social compacts and citizen involvement in Sustainable Development. She noted that the South African constitution is based on democracy, participation, human dignity, and equality. She said that although progress had been made in the past, civil society's voice had been weakened during the state capture era, with infiltration and fear instilled in those who spoke out against corruption. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated this situation, and citizens were afraid to speak out. Ms Letlojane discussed how government officials documented those speaking out against corruption and violations and how civil society lacked resources due to donor fatigue and the expectation to work as volunteers. She recommended resource mobilization, capacity building, and partnership building to strengthen civil society's voice and help it to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms Zanele Ncwane, Provincial Manager at Commission for Gender Equality, Kwa-Zulu Natal

Ms Zanele Ncwane presented on the Kwa-Zulu Natal leg of the community engagement driven by African Monitor, Africa Unite, and CGE. During the presentation, the issue of language differences between academics, institutions, civil society, and communities was discussed. The understanding of social compacts was also found to be lacking among participants, although they were aware of the processes involved. The representation of youth in the discussion was significant, and the participants highlighted the exclusion and discrimination they faced due to their age. The issue of poverty was also discussed, with the speaker highlighting how expensive it is. The lack of stable networks and data in many communities due to load shedding also hampers access to government systems to report gender-based violence, leaving women vulnerable to attacks. She highlighted the need to empower civil society to hold the government accountable and to ensure access to funding. The importance of community-based programs to

empower citizens was discussed, as well as the need for citizens to be empowered to hold the government accountable using a human rights-based approach.

Ms Mfutho, Youth Representative

Ms Mfutho discussed the concept of a social compact, which she believes is a political concept that has been around since the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR). She felt that the government's recent embrace of the social compact is actually a recognition of the socio-economic and political issues that have been plaguing South Africa for some time.

Ms Mfutho believed that young people need to take power into their own hands and ensure that their participation in politics is meaningful. She felt that economic growth will only occur when people take responsibility for their communities and their economies. For her, economic growth was not just about money coming into Africa, but rather Africa serving the whole world by finding localized solutions that can be applied globally.

Ms Mfutho also touched on the issue of politics, noting that the low voter turnout in South Africa is a cause for concern. She believes that people need to elect leaders who they see as fit, rather than waiting for an organization to endorse them. She urged people to be relatable to their community members and not just talk about politics in public spaces, but also in their homes and communities.

Finally, Ms Mfutho discussed the importance of education in solving South Africa's problems. She believes that it is essential for parents to talk to their children about how to solve problems in their communities and the best ways to do so. She also noted that it is important to translate important concepts like the SDGs into local languages so that people can better understand them and find effective solutions to problems.

Policy recommendations:

1. Ensure inclusivity in the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to ensure that all stakeholders, including marginalized communities, are represented.
2. Empower civil society to hold the government accountable and ensure access to funding.
3. Build capacity and strengthen civil society's voice to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Partner with civil society to mobilize resources to strengthen its voice.
5. Empower citizens to hold the government accountable using a human rights-based approach.
6. Ensure that all voices, including youth and elderly workers, are heard, and representatives come from the people rather than appointed positions.
7. Ensure meaningful transformation at the NEDLAC level to involve all social partners with shared responsibility.
8. Develop socio-economic and ecological policies to end gender-based violence and eliminate poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and improve access to health and ecological justice.
9. Ensure implementation and mass education and awareness-raising on the SDGs.
10. Build stable networks and data in many communities to ensure access to government systems to report gender-based violence and prevent attacks on women.

Session 2: Multi-stakeholder coordinating mechanism as a catalyst for the delivery of the SDGs in South Africa

This session focuses on strengthening national SDG coordination structures by establishing the National Development Stakeholder Forum. This roadmap will provide a pathway towards establishing the NDSF.

Moderator: Ms Lynette Maart

Presentation: Roadmap for establishing the National Development Stakeholder Forum (NDSF).
Dr Dineo Seabe, Multi-Stakeholder Expert & University of Cape Town

Dr Seabe presented a roadmap to establish and institutionalize the National Development Stakeholders Forum in South Africa, which aims to catalyze progress in achieving the SDGs in the country. She explained that the National Development Stakeholders Forum is a form of a multi-stakeholder partnership aimed at supporting the effective implementation of South Africa's development agenda, including the National Development Plan, Agenda 2030, and Agenda 2063 spearheaded by the African Union.

Dr Seabe highlighted that South Africa has not been doing well in terms of progress in achieving the SDGs, ranking 108 out of 163 countries with a score of 63.7 out of 100. She mentioned that South Africa has only made progress in two out of the 17 goals and has stagnated in part 14 and regressed in goal 1, which is No Poverty.

The problem with the institutional setup in South Africa is that all relevant stakeholders have been working in silos, with academia doing research, society and non-profit organizations providing services, the government having its own programs and initiatives, and the private sector working towards growing the economy and creating employment. There has been no collaboration between the different sectors, which is essential in achieving the SDGs. Dr. Seabe suggested that multi-stakeholder bodies or partnerships, which are linked to SDG Goal 17 on Partnerships, would be an effective vehicle to drive the achievement of the SDGs.

Multi-stakeholder bodies are cross-sector collaborations that provide platforms for collective action, where interested stakeholders can collaborate on specific challenges, goals, topics, or issues and exploit opportunities to achieve greater impact than what they would have been able to achieve working alone. They also provide forums for consensus building on controversial issues, identify practical, inclusive, and socially acceptable solutions to development issues, and bring together various sectors of society to champion and find the best solutions to a problem considering various capabilities, skills, and resources of the stakeholders involved in the partnership.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships include members across different sectors, such as civil society, NGOs, business, government at various levels, international agencies, donors, and foundations. They take various forms and can address a single issue or a basket of issues. The identifying market is that they are voluntary initiatives that could be set up by anyone, but they are not mandated by the government.

The establishment of the National Development Stakeholders Forum in South Africa would provide an opportunity for all relevant stakeholders to work together towards achieving the SDGs, with each stakeholder bringing something to the partnership to champion the cause and accelerate progress in achieving the SDGs.

Dr Seabe discussed the value added by multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) in advancing sustainable development. MSPs can help navigate complex issues and provide a platform where governments can adapt quickly and strategically to build resilience and innovation in times of crisis. They can also be an effective vehicle for mobilizing additional resources and expertise by pulling in the strengths and capabilities of different sectors, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and participation of all members of society, and facilitating localization of the development agenda by encouraging engagement and input from local government.

Dr Seabe provided an example of an MSP in South Africa, the Strategic Water Partnership Network, which was established in 2011 to address water challenges in the country. The network was initiated by the Ministry of Water and Environmental Affairs in collaboration with the 2030 Water Resource Group and involved government, private sector, civil society, international organizations, water professionals, and think tanks in the country. Initially, the network had only five voluntary and informal members who were interested in water issues in the country, but as they mobilized resources, they set up a steering committee and formal structure. The network has grown to include close to 100 members and has been successful due to significant groundwork and research at the beginning, the appointment of a champion who mobilized commitment from the private sector, an inclusive approach that helped build trust, and a focus on finding solutions and appropriate resources.

Dr. Seabe also discussed the National Government Stakeholders Forum, which aims to strengthen the SDG implementation institutional mechanism in the country by bringing all different sectors together to collaborate and coordinate resources for achieving the SDGs. The forum helps provide better coordination and identifies issues that need to be addressed to achieve the SDGs in the country.

Overall, MSPs are valuable in advancing sustainable development as they provide a platform for better communication of development priorities, promote diversity, inclusivity, and participation of all members of society, facilitate localization of the development agenda, and help mobilize additional resources and expertise. The success of MSPs depends on significant groundwork and research, the appointment of a champion, an inclusive approach, a focus on finding solutions, and appropriate resources.

Panel Discussion: Stakeholder Perspectives on an SDG coordinating mechanism in South Africa

Dr Achieng Ojwang, Executive Director, Global Compact South Africa (online)

Dr. Ojwang began her presentation by explaining that their interest is ensuring that businesses are setting targets aligned with South Africa's development priorities and global targets, and prioritizing their actions to help the country meet its own development targets.

Dr. Ojwang emphasized that responding to the SDGs and national development plans should be mainstreamed into corporate strategy rather than being seen as something done for charity. She highlighted the importance of mapping stakeholder and institutional mechanisms and explained that in 2019, the UN Global Compact acted as the private sector partner for South Africa's first Voluntary National Review, collating performance and reflecting on the progress of the SDGs. Dr. Ojwang also stressed that representation is crucial, and the MSP will provide an important platform for stakeholders to meet, compare notes, and hold each other accountable.

She spoke about the importance of peer accountability and the need to collectively engage through partnerships on the SDGs, especially on SDG 17. Dr. Ojwang highlighted the role of data in holding companies accountable and urged the importance of reporting. She concluded by expressing support for the MSP from the Global Compact network side and pledged to bring in the business perspective.

Mr Lusanda Batala, Acting Chief Sector Expert: Research, Partnership & Development, DPME

Mr Batala explained that the work they are doing at the forum is a result of the government's recognition that there is a lack of coordination and understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in South Africa. He mentioned that when someone asked where to go for information on the implementation of SDGs in the country, there was no central point of reference. Therefore, the government developed a coordination mechanism that was approved in 2019, and the forum is trying to implement the decision made by the cabinet.

The objective of the forum is to encourage collaboration, stop working in silos, and provide a central point for information. Mr Batala expressed his encouragement to see the private sector supporting the forum and hoped that it would facilitate the development of an organic working relationship among stakeholders. He emphasized the importance of understanding the objective of the forum and making sure that each stakeholder is included.

He also highlighted the need for the forum to produce an effective and inclusive report on the country's progress in implementing SDGs. Mr Batala encouraged the forum to engage in continuous dialogue on developmental issues and to share the outcomes of the process with the government so that they could act accordingly. Lastly, he expressed his willingness to work with the forum and stressed the urgency to start engaging now.

SDG Lab Event 1: Best practice on Voluntary National Review (VNR) and Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR)

This session discussed best practices regarding local and national voluntary reviews to inform civil society and to ask for inclusive national processes. Based on the presentations and discussions, the SAWG members will develop and submit CSOs' ask on the national processes.

Moderator: Ms Lynette Maart

- Mr Joshua Atura-Oscae, Youth Advocates Ghana : Experience of the Ghana recent VNR
- Mr Lusanda Batala, Acting Chief Sector Expert: Research, Partnership & Development, DPME

There is currently a great need for civil society to prepare for the voluntary National Review 2024. South Africa had been admitted to this process of the SDGs in 2016 and had their first review was in 2019. However, it was noted that the process didn't go so well, as there was a need for multi-stakeholders to be involved and for the government to consult local communities and civil society. As a result, civil society had to augment and wrote a separate citizen report, which was accepted and taken into the public record.

The process of the voluntary National Review is often led by a government agency, and in this instance, it was led by DPME and supported by Stats SA. It was also highlighted that in the upcoming review in 2024, there is a need for people to use this opportunity to think about questions that we need to ask about the VNR process, as the government has already started with its process.

Mr Joshua Atura-Oscae, Youth Advocates Ghana : Experience of the Ghana recent VNR

The session aimed to learn from Ghana's process of VNR and what they have learned that South Africans can take forward to the second process.

Youth Advocates Ghana, a youth-led organization, was established in 2011. Over time, the organisation expanded its operations to cover the entire Ghanaian region and the African continent. Its main focus was on sexual and reproductive health rights. They provided information and services to young people in Ghana and other parts of Africa, especially in the areas of family planning and consultancy.

The organisation also worked closely with government organizations and multilaterals such as the United Nations Development Program and West African Network for Peacebuilding. They aimed to influence policy that informed youth programs and interventions, and also promote peace, especially in election years. In fact, they provided support for the youth in upcoming elections in Nigeria and Liberia.

Their flagship program was the SDG 16 Basics Dialogue, where they convened youth organizations and groups across the country to discuss the state of peace in their communities and districts. They explored ways to improve intelligence gathering and promote peace in their communities. They also had the Jack Fellowship Program, which focused on building the capacity of young people to influence policy and participate in decision-making spaces.

Deductive issues, which drew on community issues, served as a powerful tool for advocacy. They used an online TV platform to reach audiences who were unable to attend. Currently, the

organisation was active on Facebook, where they shared content and engaged with their audience.

Lastly, they were the lead convener and host of the African SDG Summit. They worked with local partners across African countries to implement the project, which was set to be held in Lusaka, Zambia. They called on young people, youth organizations, academia, media, and everyone interested to participate in the program, which was a platform to discuss how young people were contributing to the SDGs in Africa, and the opportunities and challenges they faced, especially with the emergence of COVID-19.

The organization believed in the strength of the youth in Africa. With over 600 million youth out of a little over a billion population, they believed that there was strength in numbers. They aimed to develop young people from the community level to the national level and influence them to be power levers in achieving their goals.

Mr Lusanda Batala, Acting Chief Sector Expert: Research, Partnership & Development, DPME

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on conducting Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to monitor and report progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda. As part of this, there has also been an increased focus on the principles of sustainable development, leaving no one behind, and localization of strategies.

In order to effectively align with the Secretary-General's Voluntary Guidelines, VNRs need to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental issues. They should also incorporate the principle of leaving no one behind and focus on the localization of strategies. This means engaging with stakeholders meaningfully, including supreme audit institutions, local governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, specific vulnerable groups, and facilitating multistakeholder engagement.

Building data-based VNRs with evidence is also important, and national statistical offices should be engaged in monitoring and data visualization. Non-official data sources should also be used to show progress towards the SDGs. Identifying gaps and challenges is crucial, and the requirement of external support may be necessary.

The validation process of VNRs involves branches of government, including executive, legislative, and judiciary, as well as government efforts to ensure stakeholder participation. Peer review engagement of independent reviewers, other countries, or academia as peer reviewers is also an essential part of the validation process.

Lessons learned from the 2019 VNR emphasized the importance of partnership and collaboration, advance planning and preparation, statistical data, institutional coordination mechanism, the integrated nature of the development goals, and approaching development agendas with a sense of urgency.

In South Africa, VLRs have not been effectively utilized, with only the City of Cape Town conducting a VLR through the assistance of UNDESA. Other municipalities, such as Ethekwini and City of Tshwane, are interested in doing VLRs and are in the process of doing so. As a result, the National Planning Commission (NPC) approached UNDESA to do capacity building for SA municipalities on the process of VLRs. A multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder coordinating framework, inclusive of government and non-government stakeholders, is required, as well as a coordinating mechanism that leverages existing political and administrative coordinating

structures within the country, being adapted slightly to take into account the SDGs, Agenda 2063, and SADC-RISDP requirements. Therefore, the National Coordinating Mechanism is critical in the VNR process.

Panel 2: Planning of the South Africa Voluntary National Review 2024

Moderator: Ms Lynette Maart

Presentation:

- Ms Sixolile Ngcobo, Commission for Gender Equality
- Dr Achieng Ojwang, Executive Director, Global Compact South Africa
- Mr Yared Tsegay, African Monitor

The session discusses civil society participation in voluntary local and national reviews. Experiences of organising civil society to contribute to the national process are to be discussed, and toolkits for shadow reports are presented. This then leads to a planning session where the SAWG members can review their participation in the processes led by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) on the National SDG report and develop a CSO plan for Voluntary National Review 2024.

Mr Yared Tsegay, African Monitor

Mr Tsegay discussed the progress and planning for the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process in South Africa, specifically regarding civil society participation. He noted that the planning process for the 2024 VNR had already begun and that the hope was to see more voluntary local reviews. However, previous experiences had shown that organizing these reviews could be challenging and did not always fit well into the VNR process. Mr Tsegay expressed the desire to follow the guidelines provided by the United Nations General Secretary or voluntary local reviews.

In terms of civil society participation, Mr Tsegay discussed the creation of a working group with civil society organizations in South Africa to provide inputs and collaborate with the government-led planning process. The group would focus on specific goals that would be the focus of the 2024 VNR and develop reports for each goal. These reports would be shared with the government to take into consideration when developing the national voluntary review process.

Regarding methodology, Mr Tsegay mentioned using the methodology developed by the apt for STG, a global technology for civil society to make inputs to the VNR process. He also discussed using citizen-generated data and stories to supplement the national statistical system. This would help improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the VNR process.

Mr Tsegay acknowledged the challenges of organizing such a large-scale process, especially when trying to cover all 17 goals. However, he emphasized the importance of focusing on specific goals and ensuring that the reports provided by civil society organizations were substantive and useful in the national review process.

Mr Tsegay discussed the preparations for the Global Compact for the business sector and the work that will be done by civil society groups. He stated that the focus will be on the HLPF set of goals, along with other goals that are relevant for civil society groups. The process will start in May, with efforts to mobilize civil society through working groups and existing data collection efforts. The data collected by various civil society organizations, such as those working on food security, will be consulted. The approach will be specialized and guided by the HLPF, with additional goals relevant to civil society groups. Specialization mobilizes will be involved in the process and will set up groups in the coming months. He also expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to compare notes as they move forward.

Overall, Mr Tsegay expressed optimism about the upcoming VNR process and the potential for increased civil society participation and input. He emphasized the need for collaboration and adherence to guidelines to ensure that the VNR process was comprehensive and useful in advancing progress toward Sustainable Development Goals.

Ms Sixolile Ngcobo, Commission for Gender Equality

Ms Ngcobo emphasized the importance of gender equality in the reports that will be leaving South Africa in 2024. As a representative of CGE, she believed that they had a vested interest in ensuring that gender equality was included in the reports. She pointed out that the chapter nine institution stood for a society that was free from all forms of gender oppression and inequality, making it crucial to broaden the scope of reporting beyond just equality code number five.

Ms Ngcobo highlighted the UN Department of Statistics, which had come up with over 80 gender-related indicators that cut across all 17 goals. She urged her colleagues to consider this as one of the major issues to be addressed throughout the calls that would be selected for the HLPF next year.

She explained that South Africa aligned its implementation of SDGs through three mechanisms: the National Development Plan, provincial growth and development strategies, and the Integrated Development Plans (ITPs) at the local government municipality level. While the first two mechanisms had occasional participation, the ITPs were reviewed every year by the local community. Ms Ngcobo believed that this was where the requirement for inclusion became crucial, especially for civil society.

Ms Ngcobo stated that if the inclusion was done correctly, it could align with the principle of leaving no one behind. She believed that the intersectionality of gender, race, and other factors increased inequality for people. Therefore, it was crucial to be aware of intersectionality when participating in civil society. She emphasised the universal commitment to ensure that those experiencing western forms of poverty, marginalization, and discrimination received priority in terms of the resources and programs being mobilized by global goals. If these communities were not represented at a community level or in advocacy, they could be left behind. Therefore, inclusion became vital.

Furthermore, Ms Ngcobo believed that they leave no one commitment was an overarching means to evaluate the implementation of the goals. At the community level, for example, if the service delivery protests were linked to the goals of the SDGs, it meant that there was slow progress in the implementation of these goals. She stressed that the SDGs were a global instrument that touched everyone at their doorstep. Therefore, civil society, government, private sector, and national human rights institutions, like the city, needed to be involved and included in the process of reporting.

Ms Ngcobo recognized that civil society was segmented into interest groups such as girls and women, children and young people, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minority groups, issues around gender identity and sexual orientations and expressions, rural communities, refugees, and migrants. She believed that these interest groups were crucial in the inclusion of issues that fulfilled their human development and took them out of vulnerability, inequality, and discrimination. She emphasized that the intersectionality lens must be supported by the gender-specific indicators that the UN had come up with, which cut across all the reports.

In conclusion, Ms Ngcobo believed that civil society knew which groups of people faced the highest levels of inequality, which groups were denied basic access, which groups faced the highest levels of discrimination and exclusion, and what the primary socioeconomic factors were that contributed to the marginalization of people in communities. Therefore, it was crucial to

strengthen mechanisms such as the open STG to ensure that civil society could participate effectively. She believed that the government should invite particular civil society groups, including those that represented marginalized communities, to ensure that the reports were representative of the issues raised in terms of marginalization, inequality, and discrimination.

Dr Achieng Ojwang, Executive Director, Global Compact South Africa

Dr Ojwang, a representative of the Global Compact, shared some insights on the organization's preparations towards the 2024 Voluntary National Review (VNR) process in South Africa. She mentioned that in 2019, when South Africa was going to report back on the SDGs for the first time, there was no uniting methodology, which posed a challenge. However, she stated that from the private sector side, they have been working on a methodology that can be shared with civil society and the government, which can be used as a framework towards the 2024 VNR process.

She explained that the Global Compact, as the largest corporate sustainability platform in the world, has partnered with South African companies to support the VNR process. Dr Ojwang emphasized that even though the Global Compact is closely linked to the UN, it is a South African company, and their strength in supporting the VNR process is linked to the massive multi-stakeholder network that they already have. She mentioned that they are also linked to about 70 other networks from around the world.

Dr Ojwang stated that in 2019, they looked at different sectors and assessed what the emerging practices and trends were, from about seven or so business sectors. As the Global Compact, they do not just drive performance through reports, but they also support companies to implement better practices and strategies towards sustainability. She highlighted that they currently offer five accelerators to the private sector that can enable them to really understand and share with other companies on SSD ambition.

One of the accelerators they offer is for innovation entrepreneurs, where they work with young people from businesses to take them through SD innovation processes. Dr Ojwang mentioned that they are seeing really great solutions coming out of this program. She also mentioned that climate is a big deal for them and has links to energy in South Africa, so they offer the climate ambition accelerator. They also target gender equality, which links up to their NDP pillar of reducing the massive inequalities in South Africa. They recently introduced another accelerator on human rights, as respecting and protecting human rights is their foundational principle.

Dr Ojwang stressed the importance of collaboration and inclusion towards the 2024 VNR process. As a multi-stakeholder platform, the Global Compact also sits with civil society. She acknowledged that Africa Monitor is dedicating its time to helping to lead society data and mentioned that in 2019, when they specifically asked civil society organizations for their performance, they had a number of them asking if they could report through their platform. She said that they did not say no because civil society also gives them comparable data to be able to test what the private sector is giving to them.

Dr Ojwang was happy to start with young people as innovators because it was the most popular and targeted young individuals. The young innovators took on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as challenge boards and approached the companies they worked with to send up to four young people. They were then taken through attainments, design thinking process, CES and innovation prototyping process to identify the problem they needed to solve based on the SDGs they chose. They were given two frameworks to come up with solutions that had a positive impact on society and made sense for the business sponsoring them. Examples included young

people from the mining sector who used mining waste to turn them into products. In many instances, companies financed the solutions that young people came up with. The limitation for them was working with young people from companies, but they were designing a much broader universe innovation program to target young people beyond the companies they worked with.

On the SDG ambition, the goal was to mainstream and offer it to companies to lead the implementation on the SDGs and use their resources and capacity to create change. They took the 10 principles of the global compact on human rights, labor protection, environment, and anti-corruption and combined those with the SDGs to embed them strongly into their business practices. It was about target setting with science involved just like in playing with ambition accelerators. It was about setting ambitious targets that could create change in their own countries and were linked to global targets. The SDG ambition was about companies setting targets that made sense in terms of impact on society.

Dr Ojwang explained that they mobilize by reaching out to as many private sector players as possible and mapping out business organizations with large stakeholder pools. They use social media and workshops to mobilize and collect data through surveys. They refine their methodology by prioritizing data needed for the DPMA and aligning with UN priorities. They also accept detailed case studies from companies and want to understand how they invest in SDGs and who they partner with.

In building their methodology for the VNR process, Dr Ojwang emphasized the need to identify who the experts and collaborators are, adding that the list in front of them is not exhaustive. She said that they are happy to expand the list and open up to other voices and expertise from outside their organization. Dr Ojwang concluded by saying that in supporting the DPMA to come up with a vision for the VNR process, they want to be able to accommodate the work that is going on through the multi-stakeholder platform. She thanked Africa monitor for leading the process to date and reiterated that alignment, collaboration, and inclusion would be essential towards the 2024 VNR process.

Key policy and institutional recommendations for Mobilising actions for accelerated delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Moderator: Ms Nangamso Kwinana

Team One:

Create space and facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue to develop a shared understanding and a common pathway for fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.

The language used in these partnerships should be simplified to mobilize action on the SDGs. The group suggested that even a person on the street should be able to understand what is being said in order to achieve the SDGs. They also discussed translating the language of policy into grassroots language and incorporating grassroots knowledge and language into policy. This would allow for effective communication and policymaking.

The group suggested coming up with a common language to communicate development. They emphasized that development should not only be labelled SDGs, but that contributions towards development should be recognized regardless of their label. The group also discussed mobilizing action through proper communication and information dissemination strategies. They recommended modernizing communication strategies, especially within the civil society space. This would include using technology more effectively to communicate.

The group discussed the issue of access to multi-stakeholder partnerships. They recommended facilitating an environment where those who are left behind can also take part in the process, ensuring inclusive participation. The group also suggested that society should capacitate itself to hold the government accountable. This would include having a clear idea of objectives and creating a social compact. The group pointed out that the current development agenda, especially the National Development Program, is outdated and needs to be updated to bring in the views of future generations.

The group noted the importance of coordination and continuous dialogue amongst different stakeholders. They suggested better coordination is required to scale up impact. Lastly, the group emphasized the importance of community-generated data and reporting. They recommended incorporating citizen-generated forms of reporting and monitoring of the SDGs. The group emphasized that contributions towards the acceleration of action to achieve the SDGs should be acknowledged, even if they are not labeled as such.

Team Two:

Share civil society, rights holders, and grassroots communities' perspectives for a new social compact for a peaceful, inclusive, and resilient society.

Group Two had a discussion about the old and new social compacts in South Africa, and the challenges faced in achieving the SDGs within the new social compact. They began by describing the old social compact, which began in 1948 and was built on the foundation of apartheid, where whites were considered first-class citizens, followed by colored, Indian, and African citizens. This system of apartheid permeated all aspects of society, including employment, where Africans were the last to be hired and the first to be fired. The social compact was primarily between the Afrikaners, who used state-owned enterprises to generate money to fund programs aimed at addressing the poor white problem.

In 1994, a new social compact was established with two legs, political and social-economic. The political leg promised an end to poverty, water access, and improved infrastructure, but the social-economic leg faced challenges due to the neoliberal economic system that prioritized investment and required favorable conditions for investment, such as deregulation of currency and low wages. This created antagonisms within the social compact, with left-leaning political promises but right-leaning economic policies.

To achieve the SDGs within the new social compact, the group suggested diversifying access to funding for development, including workshops on proposal development and financial management for CSOs. They recommended organizing an annual forum for CSOs to discuss their proposals with funders. They also suggested creating sustainable mechanisms for using the 350s plan to develop the economy and removing inequality in the education system by providing access to sports and culture. The group noted that education was too academic and theoretical, and suggested retraining educators to provide basic information and diversify the curriculum.

Team Three, topic: Local and national voluntary reviews to inform civil society, to ask for inclusive national processes and to mobilise collective action toward full implementation of the SDGs.

Group three had a discussion about the VNR (Voluntary National Reviews) process and the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). They discussed the urgent need to plan and implement the VNR process, and suggested using March as a timeframe to finalize the plan and implement it between April 2022 and April 2023. The implementation should be aligned with the other processes of government, business, and other communities.

There was a discussion in the group about which goals they should focus on, and they presented various ways to approach this question. Some suggested focusing on all the goals, while others suggested focusing on selected ones or waiting for the HIP (High-level Political Forum) to come out with its recommendations. Individual members of the group suggested focusing on goals 16 and 17, which deal with stakeholders and coordination aspects, and goals 1, 5, 7, and 9, which deal with poverty and the economy. The group agreed that there was a need to explore deeper solutions to address unemployment and structural poverty.

The group also discussed the principles and values that should guide the VNR process. They highlighted the importance of inclusion and collaboration, both among civil society organizations and between civil society organizations, grassroots communities, government, and business. They also discussed various methodologies, including case studies and local municipal reviews, to get deep into the qualitative content and engage local communities.

In conclusion, the group emphasized the need for an educational process to ensure that people have a grasp of the basic concepts and to promote a common understanding. They suggested mobilizing people through education and collaboration and developing an anatomy report that provides a description of the VNR process and its implementation.

Closing Session:

The symposium was held in February, and was a resounding success. The participants shared their insights and experiences on various topics related to development in Africa and ways to achieve the SDGs.

A significant issue that was discussed was communication, especially in light of the generational gap. It was noted that many people are now using social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, among others, to access information. Therefore, there was a suggestion that the information presented during the symposium should be made available on these platforms to increase accessibility. However, it was also acknowledged that not everyone has access to electronic media. Therefore, a task was proposed to translate the sustainable development goals into different languages and make hard copies available to people to help educate them about the SDGs.

The second issue discussed was the South African working group, which still needs to be processed into a plan. The participants agreed that while many ideas had been presented, it was essential to develop a plan to participate meaningfully in the voluntary national review process. The group acknowledged that the plan needed to be developed with clear objectives and outcomes, and it would be shared with everyone to allow more input. The process was described as an iterative one, with negotiations, structuring, and planning being critical to its success.

Accountability was also a crucial aspect of the discussions. The group emphasized the need for mechanisms to be built into the plan for accountability to hold everyone responsible for achieving the set objectives. It was agreed that the lack of accountability was a significant problem with loose ideas that were not grounded in a clear plan.

Finally, Joseph Eliabson, who was present at the symposium, expressed his satisfaction with the discussions and the participants' interest in accountability. He noted that the African Monitor only hosted the secretariat and that the actual work was done by the working group. He explained that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the working group had slowed down, but they were rebuilding it. Eliabson also reiterated the importance of accountability, which he said was a core principle of the African Monitor.

Overall, the symposium was a success, and the discussions provided valuable insights and suggestions on various issues affecting development in Africa. The South African working group is in the process of developing a plan towards achieving their set objectives. Accountability mechanisms are being built into the plan to ensure that the objectives are met.

Conclusion and recommendations

The two-day symposium brought together community, academic and political voices who were all experts in their field. The Open SDG South Africa 2023 Symposium continued to build a platform for critical, constructive dialogue to “Mobilising action for accelerated delivery of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

The symposium provided a platform for engagement between members of the UN, CGE and attendees. From these are a set of nine key messages.

1. Achieving the SDGs requires the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, and individuals.
2. The SDGs are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, so progress in one goal can contribute to progress in others.
3. The SDGs aim to leave no one behind and to reach the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women, children, and persons with disabilities.
4. Climate action is a critical component of the SDGs, and urgent action is needed to mitigate the effects of climate change.
5. Achieving the SDGs requires innovative and transformative approaches to development that address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.
6. The SDGs require the mobilization of financial resources, including public and private investment, to support sustainable development efforts.
7. Partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders at all levels are critical to achieving the SDGs, as no single actor can do it alone.
8. Data and evidence-based approaches are essential to monitor progress towards the SDGs and to identify areas where additional action is needed.
9. Education and awareness-raising are critical to achieving the SDGs, as individuals and communities must understand the goals and their importance to take action and make a positive impact.

Poignant dialogue between attendees in their teams led to a set of recommendations which can be read below.

Team one: The below came out of a multi-stakeholder dialogue which developed a shared understanding and a common pathway for fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.

1. Simplify the language used in partnerships to mobilize action on the SDGs, including translating policy language into grassroots language and incorporating grassroots knowledge and language into policy.
2. Come up with a common language to communicate development and recognize contributions towards development regardless of their label.
3. Modernize communication strategies, especially within the civil society space, by using technology more effectively to communicate.
4. Facilitate an environment where those who are left behind can take part in the process, ensuring inclusive participation, and capacitate society to hold the government accountable.
5. Emphasize the importance of coordination and continuous dialogue among different stakeholders, and incorporate citizen-generated forms of reporting and monitoring of the SDGs.

Perspectives for a new social compact for a peaceful, inclusive, and resilient society from civil society, rights holders, and grassroots communities.

1. Diversify access to funding for development, including workshops on proposal development and financial management for CSOs.
2. Organize an annual forum for CSOs to discuss their proposals with funders.
3. Create sustainable mechanisms for using the 350s plan to develop the economy and removing inequality in the education system by providing access to sports and culture.
4. Retrain educators to provide basic information and diversify the curriculum.
5. Address unemployment and structural poverty by exploring deeper solutions.

Local and national voluntary reviews to inform civil society, ask for inclusive national processes and to mobilise collective action toward full implementation of the SDGs.

1. Plan and implement the VNR process between April 2022 and April 2023, aligned with the other processes of government, business, and other communities.
2. Focus on all goals, selected goals, or wait for the HLPF recommendations to focus on specific goals.
3. Explore deeper solutions to address unemployment and structural poverty, focusing on goals 1, 5, 7, and 9.
4. Emphasize inclusion and collaboration, both among civil society organizations and between civil society organizations, grassroots communities, government, and business.
5. Utilize various methodologies, including case studies and local municipal reviews, to get deep into the qualitative content and engage local communities.