

Insufficient number and types of CSOs engaged in formal SDG processes and consultations

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can only be successful with strong global partnerships and cooperation. Civil society organizations (CSOs), due to their direct connection with poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities, are recognized as key partners in the successful implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. In the face of this increasingly urgent agenda, the **Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment** ([Task Team](#)) commissioned a research study focused on the identification of factors that help and hinder the engagement of CSOs in the implementation of the SDGs.

The study was undertaken by the International Institute of Social Studies ([ISS](#)), a renowned higher education and research institute of social science that is part of [Erasmus University Rotterdam](#), under the leadership of the principle researchers Professors [Kees Biekart](#) and [Alan Fowler](#). **Key messages** highlighted here are derived from the Synthesis Report coming out of this study. The report synthesizes evidence from 21 case studies in six countries, selected because of differences in their freedom or 'space' available for CSOs. The countries are: **Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, Lao PDR, Nepal & Tanzania.**



The research question: "What factors in a country's environment help or hinder effective CSO participation in SDG-related processes and how is this practically felt/experienced?"



Key Messages

- **CSOs are not sufficiently engaged in formal SDG processes or consultations at the country level.** Although the study found that the SDGs provide an accepted framework for conversation with governments about CSOs' operating environment, it also found that there is a **lack of diversity** of types of **CSOs engaged in multi-stakeholder dialogue**, with those that are part of the aid system and in an urban location at an advantage.
- **Implementation of the SDGs does not necessarily lead to an 'opening' of civic space.** CSOs' engagement in the SDGs provides insights about respect for civic freedoms but it says little about actual compliance with international civic freedom agreements. The study found CSOs to be more effective in engaging with the SDGs where there are open civic spaces, and that closed civic spaces often reflect distrust between governments and certain segments of civil society. **Reduction in civic space tends to weaken the commitment to SDG 17.17's call for multi-stakeholder partnerships.**
- **The study shows a variety of mechanisms used by government to constrain civic space, directly defying the spirit of SDG 16.10** which calls for protection of fundamental freedoms. Such mechanisms range from limiting information access, selective CSO inclusion/exclusion, curtailing foreign funding and stringent laws inducing self-censorship.
- **Open civic spaces can undermine solidarity between CSOs, as competition for their positioning towards SDG activities increases.** Where in closed spaces CSOs tend to operate informally, in open spaces CSOs engagement with SDG activities tend to be formalized, which attracts well established (inter)national NGOs with a more solid financial basis.
- The study found that the **SDGs have not brought about any significant change in the way donors (official aid system) function towards CSOs.** This includes a lack of continuous support, making CSOs engagement in the SDGs irregular. At the same time, the study also found that the significance of official aid is diminishing as **funding for CSOs' work in the SDGs is increasingly coming from private sources.**

The full Synthesis Report can be downloaded [here](#). For more information about this Study, please contact the Task Team Secretariat: taskteamcso@iss.nl