



Outcomes and Learnings from the CSO Post 2021 HLPF Meeting

1.0 Introduction

On 21 September 2021, the Zimbabwe CSO Reference Group on SDGs convened the post High Level Political Forum (HLPF) meeting which was attended by Government, CSOs and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representatives. The meeting was held at Holiday Inn Hotel, in Harare. The meeting provided opportunities for stakeholders to report back on the Voluntary National Review (VNR) experiences; identify possible areas of action and collaboration; identify possible activities for the Global Week of Action and beyond; and launch of the Zimbabwe CSOs Reference Group on SDGs Website. The meeting was a follow up to Zimbabwe's second Voluntary National Review (VNR) report which was shared with the world in July 2021 during the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The primary focus of the 2021 VNR was to follow up on progress made in the implementation of all the 17 SDGs after the 2017 VNR.

The High Level Political Forum is held annually by the United Nations and it is a key global forum responsible for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs and Agenda 2030. The HLPF is an intergovernmental forum whose purpose serves to hold governments to account and supporting their efforts to make progress on the SDGs implementation. Countries indicate their willingness to be reviewed each year through the mechanism of the VNR. In addition to aiding the assessment of progress towards achieving the SDGs, the VNRs are intended to be a tool for sharing the knowledge and experiences of implementing the SDGs at the national level. The Voluntary National Reviews are expected to demonstrate incorporation of the SDGs in the national frameworks and policies which entails leaving no one behind, availability of disaggregated data, tackling inequality, raising awareness and creating ownership of the SDGs.

2.0 Lessons from the 2021 Government VNR Consultations

In conducting the 2021 VNR, the government used a multi-pronged approach. This included but not limited to extensive review and analysis of national surveys, reports and administrative records; and administration of questionnaires and direct engagements with representatives of stakeholders. The consultative processes leveraged on existing SDGs institutional framework comprising the Parliament, the Cabinet, Steering Committee, Technical Committee and Thematic Clusters. CSOs called on the government to institutionalize the SDGs thematic clusters so that they become operational, allowing systematic participation of CSOs.

2.1 Localisation of SDGs

- The government of Zimbabwe, with the support from UNDP, committed to align NDS 1 Result Framework to SDGs. The alignment process will be cascaded to all provinces in line with the devolution agenda

- The government is planning to conduct four local voluntary reviews (VLRs) targeting 2 Urban Local Authorities and 2 rural local authorities in 2021. The VLRs will be anchored on stakeholder participation and will be cascaded to other local authorities beyond 2021.
- The government is expediting the Operationalization of the SDGs Unit under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The Ministry has engaged the Public Service Commission to expedite the recruitment process for officers to work in the SDGs Unit which will be manned by 5 Sustainable Development Officers.
- The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare will be consulting stakeholders for the development of the 2022 SDGs national work plan.

2.2 Role of CSOs in Localising SDGs Post 2021 HLPF

CSOs defined their role post 2021 HLPF as that of facilitating citizen participation in governance and service delivery processes, providing the voice for the poor and marginalized. CSOs will also play a key role in SDGs data collection, reporting and monitoring with the support of other stakeholders such as the Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZIMSTAT).

3.0 CSO Experiences

The consultations for the CSO VNR Spotlight report were done using the People's Scorecard tool which was adopted from the Action for Sustainable Development. The Zimbabwe CSO Reference Group on SDGs members, which are apex organisations, consulted with their sectoral membership and networks to input the people's scorecard. The raw data collected using the people's scorecard was then consolidated and this culminated into the CSO VNR Spotlight report that was shared with the government to compliment the national VNR.

The Key success factors that aided CSO VNR consultations was that representation across stakeholders was included in the process of data gathering including high school and tertiary students who are often left behind in such processes. The inclusion of a broad spectrum of citizens was key in the spirit of leaving no one behind. Civil society Sectors appreciated that they could focus on goals that are specifically related to their line of work. They also appreciated the training process on the People's Card that was provided by the PRFT as it equipped them for the actual data collection.

3.1 Challenges

A number of challenges relating to the administration of the People's Scorecard were raised by CSOs and these included, but not limited to;

- Limited resources made it impossible to conduct a nationwide outreach. As the consultations were largely done online those with connectivity challenges could not participate effectively.
- Limited time period to fully familiarise and complete the People's Score Card as well as to go through a validation process of the information captured in the scorecards
- The Scorecard was too long to complete and the additional requirements for evidence made the process cumbersome
- People Score Card tool was difficult to translate to local language The tool was only in English and this made it exclusionary to other groups that do not take English as a first language

- There was no provision to have the tool in Braille to accommodate those who are visually impaired
- There is limited knowledge of SDGs amongst children and young people.

3.2 Recommendations

In light of the challenges raised by CSOs, the following suggestions were put forward;

- More time is needed for data collection for both CSO-led and government-led processes.
- The tool should be simplified and translated into other local languages such as Shona and IsiNdebele, Braille etc.
- Tools must be clear and precise to avoid confusion and back and forth.
- Ample time should be provided for CSOs to conduct their own consultations which will inform the Government reports. CSOs must continue to produce spotlight reports that provide an adequate overview and to compliment Government's reports.

4.0 Leaving No One Behind

The key take away from the 2021 HLPF is the need to i) strengthen the health systems as the basis of responding to the pandemic and its consequences, ii) having the right financing mechanisms that will form the basis of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, iii) fighting poverty and hunger with attention given to the most vulnerable, and iv) strengthen the role of the UN system in facilitating realization of SDGs.

The leave no one behind (LNOB) principle means no one is excluded. LNOB should be viewed in the broader context knowing who is being left behind, where are they? why are they left behind? and what can be done to ensure that they are not left behind. This calls for greater data analytics. Critical analysis determines what assets vulnerable groups have at their disposal and what can be done to transform their fortunes. It is also about leaving no geographic area behind and ensure that the ecosystem that support livelihoods is not left behind also.

The criteria of determining who is left behind should be context specific although guided by the universal standards such as poverty and deprivation. Data gathering and analysis becomes important to make the analysis granular in order to produce detailed household level data as opposed to the current averages that are being used.

5.0 Launch of the CSO Reference Group on SDGs Website

The Zimbabwe CSO Reference Group on SDGs used the opportunity to launch their website that was developed through support from the UNDP, Zimbabwe Office. The website address is www.zimcsosdg.org. The website will facilitate sharing of SDGs information, data and activities of CSOs in Zimbabwe. However, the CSO reference group website needs to be digitally accessible for people with disabilities. Hence experts on web content accessibility will work closely with the website designer to ensure that it becomes accessibility compliant.

6.0 Next Steps

As CSOs plan to build on the 2021 VNR process, there was consensus that CSOs embark on the following course of action to support government efforts on SDGs implementation;

- Generation of Data - call for CSOs to focus on detailed and granular aspects of data.
- Mobilization across sectors – CSOs need to collaborate with the Business, politicians, informal sector, and marginalized communities to enhance the realization of the goals.
- Capacity Building regarding a Tracking and Monitoring tool on SDGs - the tool will become a reference point for the CSO Spotlight report.
- Evidencing the work of CSOs - e.g. Spotlight reports - contributing to the progress reports at the National level
- Awareness Raising - efforts tend to focus around Government led/UN processes. CSOs must initiate and lead their own processes on this and build momentum around them.
- Government and CSO collaboration - processes to be more open to CSO participation.
- Mainstreaming SDGs in running programs
- Budget Tracking - with an eye for SDGs within the entire cycle of the Budget.