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DEVELOPING THE CAPACITIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY FOR A **SUCCESSFUL** **IMPLEMENTATION** OF THE 2030 AGENDA



- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Agenda 2030, partnerships & the capacity development of civil society
- Capacity development versus capacity building of civil society
- Civil society capacity development for agenda 2030 monitoring & implementation
- Current capacity development initiatives linked to Agenda 2030 implementation
- Identifying the capacity development needs of civil society
- Investment in the capacity development of civil society linked to Agenda 2030
- Global support for CSO capacity development as a means of addressing the shrinking space for civil society
- Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The experience of IFP members in starting to monitor and implement the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development has convinced our global network that there is an urgent need for the international political community to plan for, and fully resource a coordinated approach to the capacity development of civil society globally for Agenda 2030.
- We believe that a systematic and objective identification of the capacity development needs of civil society globally is clearly required. This assessment process should relate not just to the internal capacities of CSOs but also to their ability to engage externally in multi-sectoral partnerships and to positively influence their environments.

“There is an urgent need for the international political community to plan for, and fully resource a coordinated approach to the capacity development of civil society globally for Agenda 2030.”

- Civil society should be the main actor in identifying its own capacity development needs. It should also play an integral role in the establishment and functioning of a global, multi-level, capacity development co-ordination system. Global, regional and national civil society platforms and networks should play an important co-ordination role at their respective levels.
- In light of the shrinking space for civil society which is a growing trend internationally, the IFP believes the opportunities presented by the implementation of Agenda 2030 to strengthen civil society globally must be seized, in order to enable it to respond collectively to the challenges it faces.
- Based on the work of our national and regional members in monitoring and implementing the Agenda 2030 to date, and in light of the results of the early research that we have conducted with some of our members, the IFP calls on the UN, its Member States and other major donors to:

- (i) Plan for, and develop a co-ordinated global approach to the capacity development of civil society and other stakeholders, linked to the monitoring and implementation requirements of the Agenda 2030 and **include civil society in its design.**
- (ii) Provide assistance to global networks such as IFP, and to other regional and national networks in **identifying and supporting the Agenda 2030-related capacity development needs** of their member organisations.
- (iii) **Create a Global Fund to promote the capacity development of different stakeholder groups involved in Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation,** with a particular focus on civil society. Ensure that the Global Fund is distributed in a way that respects the universality of the agenda, and the diversity of needs expressed by civil society from different regions, and is equally accessible to smaller, less well-resourced CSOs as to larger ones.
- (iv) **Allocate specific funding for a Global Open Source Online Library - with tools, information, best practices and lessons learned,** to support capacity building and development for CSOs (with tools and resources available in various languages). This library should build on what has been already created and harness existing innovations rather than attempting to reinvent them.
- (v) **Support the development of national, regional and global-level indicators in consultation with civil society** which will measure the extent to which the capacity development of civil society has been enabled at each of these levels. **Develop an indicator linked to Goal 17** (Means of Implementation) which measures the financial resources dedicated to the capacity development of civil society each year and their sustainability over time.
- (vi) Consider changes in financing arrangements and financial instruments to make it easier for CSOs to be supported in their Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation activities, including the **availability of diverse grant windows, the possibility of simpler procurement and supervision processes, a greater focus on ongoing structural support for CSOs** rather than for time-limited projects, and sufficient provision to cover overheads.
- (vii) **Create official spaces for meaningful CSO participation within official regional and international forums,** and use them to promote the exchange of ideas, tools and resources related to capacity development between CSOs and with other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

INTRODUCTION

Civil Society and Agenda 2030

Civil society was a key stakeholder in the development of the 2030 Agenda. It strategically contributed with its expertise and evidence and engaged with decision-makers at different levels throughout all stages of the policy process.

As a global network of national NGO platforms and regional coalitions that contributed to shaping the new agenda, IFP believes that the level of ambition of the Agenda 2030 should have been higher. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that this agenda has begun to positively address the root causes of inequality, poverty, climate change, environmental degradation, human discrimination, and social exclusion. This has been achieved largely because the process of developing the Agenda 2030 was much more inclusive and participatory than the previous process which produced the MDGs.

Civil society must be a key stakeholder in Agenda 2030 monitoring & implementation.

Civil society must now have a central role in the monitoring and implementation of this ambitious universal agenda, not just in critical advocacy, but also in proposing and implementing practical solutions. Although the capacities and potential of civil society vary greatly by country, it is a key player in local, national, and global development efforts. This is why civil society organizations globally need to be actively involved as equal partners with governments, donors, the private sector, and other stakeholders in monitoring and implementing Agenda 2030 programs and policies.

Civil society's role must be more than just an informal one.

CSOs must be given formal roles, guaranteeing their participation in: (i) formal consultation processes on government implementation plans and measures, (ii) formal representation mechanisms which oversee implementation efforts, and (iii) formal channels for participation in accountability processes, and in the definition of public policies going forward.

Civil society must be strengthened and empowered to become a key player.

As IFP's national NGO platforms and regional coalitions become more engaged with Agenda 2030, there is an urgent need for the international community to plan for a structured and coordinated approach to the capacity building and development of civil society from national

to global level and to make provision for sustainable and predictable resources for this purpose.

“Capacity development will be essential to empower the sector to become a key player in the ongoing monitoring and successful implementation of this ambitious universal agenda”

The IFP believes that this capacity development will be essential to empower, the sector to become a key player in the ongoing monitoring and successful implementation of this ambitious universal agenda. Civil society organizations globally are extremely diverse and any development aimed at increasing their effectiveness in relation to the Agenda 2030 needs to be based on their diversity. A wide variety of actors must be allowed to participate from different levels and should have access to differentiated initiatives for capacity development.

AGENDA 2030, PARTNERSHIPS & THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Goal 17 of the Agenda 2030 addresses the issue of the capacity development of civil society in the context of a “Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships.

SDG#17 calls for a “revitalized and enhanced global partnership that brings together governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizes all available resources” [1] for a successful implementation of SDGs. It includes the following targets:

17.9: Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation;

17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships **that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources;**

17.7: Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships **building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.**

It is clear therefore that the Agenda itself recognizes that a **successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will depend on strong collaborative partnerships between governments and a range of other actors at all levels.** Importantly, these actors include civil society, and this inclusion should occur at all stages of program-cycle planning, consultations, implementation, monitoring and reviews.

These partnerships will require effective information-sharing and the collaborative development of new approaches to move the Agenda 2030 forward. **The construction of effective multi-stakeholder partnerships require a longer-term investment of time and resources.** It cannot be assumed that many of the skills and capacities required for the effective functioning of these multi-stakeholder partnerships already exist in different sectors. This is certainly not the case for many civil society organisations globally, which despite the crucial role they play are under-resourced and under-supported in many contexts.

A systematic and objective identification of the capacity development needs of civil society globally, which relates to their internal capacities and their ability to engage externally in multi-sectoral partnerships and to influence their environments, is clearly required as a first step.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT VERSUS CAPACITY BUILDING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

When considering the capacities that will be required of civil society globally to effectively monitor and implement the Agenda 2030, it is important to differentiate between the need for capacity building and capacity development. Both approaches are very similar, although capacity building refers to learning processes which are developed from scratch, assuming no pre-existing abilities before the learning process commences (ie building a new capacity structure).

Capacity development, on the other hand, begins with a recognition of existing assets and capacities. It involves processes which develop these capacity already present in the different structures, highlighting and retaining them. From this point of view, **the concept of capacity development, adopted and promoted by the IFP, should be understood as a long term endeavour, rooted in broader change processes that are owned and driven by those involved.** It involves both the acquisition of technical competences and knowledge, a change in values and mindsets. and the collective construction of the learning processes and change processes required.

CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR AGENDA 2030 MONITORING & IMPLEMENTATION

It is obvious that that civil society organizations globally need to enhance their capacities if they are to fully appreciate and respond to the implementation challenges presented by a universal and integrated sustainable development agenda such as Agenda 2030. **CSOs will certainly require capacity development in relation to activities in which they may not previously have engaged,** such as citizen-driven accountability, data collection and analysis linked to Agenda 2030 monitoring, or engagement with the private sector in multi-stakeholder partnerships.

They will need to improve their partnership and advocacy strategies and develop their capacities to innovate, to ensure successful implementation. Capacity development will also be critical for the scaling-up of programs linked to the Agenda 2030.

There will be a need for CSOs to focus more on the development of in-country practical skills and analysis of concrete processes and policies, rather than on academic theory. Capacity development initiatives will need to take existing capacities into account, identify local knowledge and mobilize it from the outset. CSOs will require not just skills training, but the development

of systems to deal with the challenges of working with multiple stakeholders and of managing accountability, transparency and effectiveness issues. Increased leadership and learning will be needed for CSOs to become more effective in their planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities.

Improved access to information, training materials and relevant experts from different sectors will be critical elements of successful capacity development programmes aimed at civil society. Online platforms providing open content education and training materials, for instance, are some of the tools that will help to facilitate these processes.

Finally, and based on an ongoing process of needs assessment of its member organisations, IFP believes that the capacity development of civil society globally, linked to Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation, will need to address the following three dimensions:

- (i) **Human capacity:** education and training of individuals, linked to strategic leadership and other skills;
- (ii) **Organizational capacities:** and the development of organizational policies, procedures, programs and structures to ensure effectiveness and efficiency;
- (iii) **Sectoral institutional support:** the development of civil society's skills and capacities for cooperation with other stakeholders and the creation of a legal and institutional framework adapted to the needs of organizations.

CURRENT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES LINKED TO AGENDA 2030 IMPLEMENTATION

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (www.unitar.org) has a new Capacity for the 2030 Agenda Initiative, aimed at helping national governments and other stakeholders build capacity for the main-streaming, implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. However, there is little transparency thus far and it is difficult to ascertain how much of these activities will benefit civil society organizations. The UN

also launched the Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development in Bonn, mainly created to respond to the learning, training, and knowledge management needs of UN staff and partners in the context of the SDGs.

Some bilateral donors or regional actors such as the European Commission have also been supporting capacity building projects for civil society linked to Agenda 2030. There are currently numerous capacity development programs, managed by INGOs, international or regional networks, capacity building institutes or other actors. **The IFP believes that the role of national development NGO platforms and the regional coalitions with which they are associated will be central, both in monitoring and reviewing the Agenda 2030**, gathering the knowledge of existing initiatives to make available to individual NGOs and also in overall co-ordination and facilitation of the capacity development of individual NGOs.

The IFP believes that a **global and multi-level co-ordination system is needed to support and resource the capacity development of civil society linked to Agenda 2030**. The aim of such a global capacity development co-ordination system should be to increase the effectiveness of CSOs in different parts of the world to monitor and implement the Agenda 2030. Civil society should be a key stakeholder in this new global co-ordination system, with global, regional and national civil society platforms and networks playing an important co-ordination role at their respective levels.

IDENTIFYING THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The capacity development needs of civil society organisations should be objectively defined largely by the sector itself, with the focus on the monitoring and implementation requirements of the new global agenda. With this aim in mind, IFP and Dochas, the Irish platform of development NGOs, recently jointly developed and implemented a pilot survey of the capacity development needs of their members and their partner organisations. This pilot survey was carried out between May and June 2017. 37 CSOs and networks of CSOs from the international development, social justice, human rights and environment sectors completed the survey. The respondents included NGOs from Ireland, UK, Nepal, Finland, Latvia, Malta and Indonesia.

The survey sought to establish the perceptions of the participating organisations of their capacity development needs linked to the following areas:

- (i) Knowledge and awareness of the Agenda 2030
- (ii) Capacity to engage in effective Agenda 2030-related advocacy
- (iii) Capacity to engage in strategic planning for Agenda 2030 implementation
- (iv) Capacity for external engagement with state actors and other key stakeholders on Agenda 2030
- (v) Capacity for public awareness-raising linked to Agenda 2030
- (vi) Capacity for monitoring & reviewing Agenda 2030 implementation
- (vii) Capacity of the organization to serve as a strong role model of sustainable development
- (viii) Capacity to partner effectively for Agenda 2030 implementation. Respondents were also asked to list their top three capacity development needs linked to Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation.

The pilot survey results revealed that:

- 89 % of responding organisations were interested in engaging in capacity development aimed at **increasing their staff member’s knowledge and awareness** of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.
- 76% of responding organisations were interested in **capacity development to plan their own Agenda 2030 implementation strategies.**
- 83% of respondents were interested in capacity development to strengthen their **ability to politically engage with state actors** (government, parliaments, local authorities) and other stakeholders (private sector, academia) on Agenda 2030 implementation.
- 77% of responding organisations were interested in capacity development linked to **public awareness-raising, campaigning & social media skills** for effectively communicating the Agenda 2030 to the public in local and national contexts.
- 79% of responding organisations would welcome capacity development in the areas of **data gathering, analysis,** interpretation and presentation linked to Agenda 2030 monitoring and reviewing activities.
- 83% of organisations were interested in capacity development to bring about **changes in their own organisational behaviour** and practices, to become better role models of sustainable development.
- 80% of responding organisations were interested in capacity development aimed at developing their **ability to identify, develop and maintain partnerships** as part of future Agenda 2030 related multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Although the sample of CSOs participating in this pilot survey was a limited one, IFP will continue to reach out to its national and regional members around the world to assist them in identifying their Agenda 2030 – related capacity development needs. Our global network will work with other CSO networks and sectors to advance this survey process. Our findings will be presented to the UN system, governments and other major donors. We will subsequently advocate for the adoption and sustainable resourcing of a comprehensive and structured global approach to the capacity development of civil society linked to Agenda 2030 implementation and monitoring.

INVESTMENT IN THE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY LINKED TO AGENDA 2030

Investment in capacity development for civil society has been a major challenge for many countries around the world. This is an issue that must be properly addressed by the UN system, governments, and other key stakeholders of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, if its ambitious goals and targets are to be successfully achieved. **As yet, however, many current funding arrangements and programmes are primarily project oriented,** and focus largely on the delivery of concrete outcomes and activities linked to different objectives rather than on capacity development. While this kind of funding will be necessary for the implementation of the objectives of the Agenda 2030, **sufficient resources will also need to be dedicated to the structural support of CSOs** including for their human resources, training, employment of consultants, overheads, and other requirements. This kind of resourcing would allow for the capacities of CSOs to be brought into line to a much greater extent with the ambition and the implementation requirements of the Agenda 2030. **Particular attention needs to be paid to those countries in which there has been significant under-investment in civil society over many years,** and in which civil society is weak and poorly resourced.

GLOBAL SUPPORT FOR CSO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AS A MEANS OF ADDRESSING THE SHRINKING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

There are many worrying political trends internationally, including the return of nationalist discourse and growing restrictions to fundamental freedoms, that create environments which are increasingly hostile to civil society both domestically and globally. The IFP believes that advantage must be taken of the opportunities presented by the implementation of Agenda 2030 to strengthen civil society globally, to enable it to respond collectively to the diverse challenges it faces. **Properly resourced capacity development for CSOs globally has the potential to be an important element of a badly-needed, overall strengthening of the sector.** It is crucial for civil society to make a strong advocacy case for this approach to the UN system, to progressive governments and other influential international actors. IFP intends to play a leading role in global advocacy efforts to secure an international commitment to establish a global capacity development co-ordination system for civil society linked to Agenda 2030 and for the adequate and ongoing resourcing of this new system.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) Plan for, and develop a co-ordinated global approach to the capacity development of civil society and other stakeholders, linked to the monitoring and implementation requirements of the Agenda 2030 and include civil society in its design.
- (ii) Provide assistance to global networks such as IFP, and to other regional and national networks in identifying and supporting the Agenda 2030-related capacity development needs of their member organisations.
- (iii) Create a Global Fund to promote the capacity development of different stakeholder groups involved in Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation, with a particular focus on civil society. Ensure that the Global Fund is distributed in a way that respects the universality of the agenda, and the diversity of needs expressed by civil society from different regions, and is equally accessible to smaller less well-resourced CSOs as to the larger ones.
- (iv) Allocate specific funding for a Global Open Source Online Library - with tools, information, best practices and lessons learned, to support capacity building and development for CSOs (with tools and resources available in various languages). This library should build on what has been already created and harness existing innovations rather than attempting to reinvent them.
- (v) Support the development of national, regional and global-level indicators in consultation with civil society which will measure the extent to which the capacity development of civil society has been enabled at each of these levels. Develop an indicator linked to Goal 17 (Means of Implementation) which measures the financial resources dedicated to the capacity development of civil society each year and their sustainability over time.
- (vi) Consider changes in financing arrangements and financial instruments to make it easier for CSOs to be supported in their Agenda 2030 monitoring and implementation activities, including the availability of diverse grant windows, the possibility of simpler procurement and supervision processes, a greater focus on ongoing structural support for CSOs rather than for time-limited projects, and sufficient provision to cover overheads.
- (vii) Create official spaces for meaningful CSO participation within official regional and international forums, and promote the exchange of ideas, tools and resources related to capacity development between CSOs and with other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 as part of these forums.



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The International Forum of National NGO Platforms (IFP) is a member-led network of 64 national NGO platforms and 6 regional coalitions from all continents representing over 22,000 NGOs active locally and internationally on development, human rights and environment issues.

This paper is based on the political analysis of IFP's members at national and regional levels.

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