

Statement of NGO Major Group
David Banisar, ARTICLE 19
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Thank you Mr Chair,

We welcome the substantial and positive discussion in the past week on the issues of transparency, access to information and public participation as essential facilitators in achieving sustainable development.

These are all essential to ensure accountability as well as being human rights in their own right. They are necessary to ensure that the participation of all stakeholders to achieve sustainable development.

These rights are already well recognized in the General Comments of the Human Rights Council and Economic and Social Council and the UN Special Rapporteurs on extreme poverty, water, health, environment, indigenous persons, housing, and others.

They were even included in the Millennium Declaration but didn't make it into the MDGs and has been said often this week, that has been a major problem.

However there are many barriers:

- Civil society cannot engage when countries shut down civic space by limiting funding, by requiring organisations to register as foreign agents.
- The media - from broadcasters, newspapers to citizen journalists and bloggers - cannot engage when they are silenced through law or violence and cannot reveal real problems and new ideas and challenges to the status quo.
- Communities cannot engage when they cannot obtain information about budgets and spending and the activities of their governments and are prohibited from organising and protesting
- And the private sector, which has been widely touted as being a major part of the solution, cannot engage when they do not have the information that they need to determine risks and investment.
- Finally, no one can engage when information is collected in sub-standard manner and kept secret and only presented as general statistics on how the goals are being achieved that may not be related to reality. Much work will be needed to ensure this.

As the High Level Panel of Eminent Person's recommended, the SDGs need to address these barriers in a manner which facilitate all stakeholders to fully engage.

How to measure?

The challenge is of course how to measure these needs. There has already been strong arguments made in many forums that human rights, good governance and accountability are not measurable. That only simple counting of services provided and people's

improvements can be measured. But that argument takes too narrow an approach, one that takes the same path of the MDGs and fails to create mechanisms to meet the goals.

And it also ignores that many international standards and indices that already exist from UN bodies and other IGOs and civil society. Some of these are:

Freedom of Expression

- The UNESCO Media Development Index
- A zero-tolerance approach on attacks on civil society and media organizations and fully investigation and prosecutions. This also ties in with indicators on violence already under discussion.
- Ensuring gender equality in media and senior management

Right to Information

- Compliance with standards issued by UN Human Rights Council and UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, as well as model bills from African Union and OAS and COE Convention on Access to Official Documents
- *Membership in the Open Government Partnership*. Multi-stakeholder initiative with 60 countries already members chaired by Indonesia and Mexico
- Budgets - Open Budget Index
- Open Data Index
- Compliance with International Aid Transparency Initiative

Public Participation

- Compliance with the Inter-American Strategy on Public Participation. In addition, standards on indigenous consultation and participation set by OAS and UN SRs
- Full adoption of Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Environmental Assessments as set out under the Turku Convention
- Civicus Civic Space Index

Environment

- Adoption of Pollution Release Transfer Registers using standards by OECD and UNITAR
- Compliance with UNEP Bali Guidelines on implementation of Principle 10
- Extractives - compliance with EITI standards, which was just recently upgraded

So we need to move forward from the false argument on "it cannot be measured so we cannot do it" to choosing the best and most meaningful ones and embedding them into the goals in such a way that they can be measured and all parties can be held accountable at all levels.

Thank you. For more information, please

see <http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37393/en/access-to-information-central-to-the-post-2015-development-agenda>

