

What are ways that civil society and community groups are already stepping up to address gaps in implementation of the SDGs and how can their actions be supported and enabled by development partners?

Since the beginning, CSOs have played a key role in Africa in ensuring basic human rights and equal access to essential services, and holding duty bearers accountable.

Africa's progress on the continent determines to a large extent whether the global SDGs commitment to 'leave no one behind' remains rhetoric or becomes reality. It is faced with significant challenges such as extreme poverty, rapid population growth, rapid urbanization, deforestation, environmental impact of extractive industries, slow rate of economic growth, uneven rural development, climatic variability and natural environmental hazards, coupled with low tax revenues in relation to GDP at one end of the problem, and enormous development needs at the other end.

Presently, the continent is saddled with three significant gaps: namely; data, financial and implementation gaps.

1. Data

Achieving the SDGs requires a new generation and category of sustainability professionals who can broker between global, national, and local issues, between research and use, and between biophysical and social aspects of sustainability. Africa CSOs need support to acquire new skillsets and toolkits for sustainability through training and education in systems approaches to solutions, trans-disciplinary initiatives, and co-design. The gathering of data on a massive scale and the analysis of the data requires investment in technology and African CSOs need to be empowered in the field of technology to be abreast with the current trends in the sector.

2. Finance

To achieve success in a global project as the SDGS on the continent, African CSOs need sustainability in their finances. Donor agencies efforts are hugely appreciated by CSOs on the continent but their contributions alone will not be able to take us to the expected results. Moreover, Funders should trust African CSOs displaying transparency and credibility, fund them directly, and help build strong philanthropic infrastructure and organizations that can provide services and tools to meet the needs of local communities.

3. Implementation and role of CSOs

Although many African governments have committed to upholding fundamental rights as signatories to international and regional human rights instruments, civic space in Africa is shrinking and this downward trend is precipitated by laws, policies, physical attacks, threats

and demonization of those who stand up for the rights of citizens. A few governments have indeed initiated further democratic reforms and improved their human rights records in response to pressure from CSOs. However, many have reacted instead by either co-opting these groups or by cracking down on their activities. It should be noted that only an independent and active civil society can deepen democracy and guarantee equitable and sustainable economic development in Africa and elsewhere.

Considering these gaps; civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa have already been advancing the global goals through

- Localizing the goals and monitoring progress.
- Innovative and sustainable solutions.
- Promoting citizen-centric and collaborative governance
- Identifying development priorities and advocating for the poor by influencing governments to adopt new and better approaches in addressing poverty and other societal ills through policies and programs that are based on local needs, as well as opportunities and capacities that exist within communities and
- Empowering women for climate action activities

We call on development partners to support us through:

1. Partnerships to strengthen capacity building, including through existing networks and coalitions across the continent
2. Sustainable and long-term financing to ensure effective local implementation through trusted CSO groups who can provide direct support to communities on the ground

The defining challenge of our era is to accelerate development that is economically sound, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. The looming challenges in Africa are wide and deep and will require innovative responses that are embedded in partnerships and rooted in our shared values of justice, fairness, equity and solidarity and as such call upon the United Nations Resident Coordinators to boost their support to African CSOs in advancing transformational initiatives to help in recovering from multiple crises and achieving the SDGs.