

PRELIMINARY DRAFT  
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# Expanding CSO Contributions to Governance Agendas of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs)

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# Summary of Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 commendably calls for reducing corruption and making governments more transparent, participatory, responsive and accountable. The upcoming [UN High Level Political Forum \(HLPF\)](#) in July 2019 will provide an official assessment of Goal 16. Available data indicates progress so far is uneven at best and intensification efforts are needed.

PTF is at an advanced stage of preparing a paper that focuses on how CSOs can make a greater contribution to governance outcomes under SDG 16 targets that are also supported by multilateral development banks (MDB). The purpose of this paper is to examine roles for CSOs to play, review the evidence on what works and what does not, and present recommendations to establish and expand successful CSO programs.

We aim to finalize the paper for presentation in coming weeks as part of activities of the [Transparency, Accountability and Participation \(TAP\) Network](#) during the UN HLPF meeting. This preliminary summary of findings and recommendations is being released at this time for consultation and feedback.

Please provide any comments to [info@ptfund.org](mailto:info@ptfund.org) or comment directly on our website: [ptfund.org/comment-2030/](http://ptfund.org/comment-2030/).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Stern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Richard Stern

*President, Partnership for Transparency (PTF)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Good governance and control of corruption are essential for more effective development results. Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) and strategic priorities of the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) – specifically the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the regional development banks (RDBs) – include specific targets for improving governance and controlling corruption. They recognize that realizing good governance goals will help achieve better results in development across the board.

Despite these global commitments, a common view is that good governance goals are “aspirational” and prospects for achieving them are slim. This view is supported by cross-country governance indicators that demonstrate the state of governance and corruption has not changed substantially in the past two decades. Indeed, available data indicates that progress towards SDG 16 so far is uneven at best.

The purpose of this paper is to examine roles for CSOs to play in improving governance outcomes under SDG 16 and MDB policies, review the evidence on what works and what does not, and present recommendations to establish and expand successful CSO programs.

The authors acknowledge that national actions and budgets will be the primary determinant of progress in achieving SDG targets including those of SDG16. At the same time, MDBs play an important role in the development of low and middle-income countries, with the influence and resources to engage borrowing countries in CSO collaboration. MDBs have policies to improve governance (e.g. disclosure of information, stakeholder engagement, results tracking, anti-corruption requirements) and the means to enforce them (e.g. project supervision, inspection panels, monitoring and evaluation). As such, they can play a catalytic role in expanding CSO-led initiatives to improve governance, and have therefore been targeted in our analysis and recommendations.

## **SDG 16 COMMITMENTS & PROGRESS**

A critical element of SDG 16 relates to reducing corruption, making institutions accountable and responsive, promoting inclusive and participatory decision making and ensuring public access to information. They are important goals by themselves but are also necessary for the achievement of the SDGs as a whole. Likewise, MDBs have recently adopted and/or updated policies and programs for enhancing governance and controlling corruption.

Despite these commitments, [reports](#) on SDG 16 progress indicate that we're falling short. Governments seem – by lack of evidence in their Voluntary National Reporting – to have given relatively low priority to CSO engagement. Due in large part to the lack of official information available, unofficial reporting on SDG 16 progress has been undertaken by CSOs themselves, noting little progress at the global level.

Although civil society is expected to play several roles in implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, evidence suggests that CSOs have not been appropriately involved thus far. Common complaints among CSOs attending and otherwise contributing to the HLPFs have been that few governments have encouraged “informed collaboration and cooperation” and few opportunities for CSOs to participate in official reporting mechanisms.

## **RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CSO ENGAGEMENT TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE**

We reviewed more than 40 studies, including 10 meta studies, to distill information from hundreds of cases and sources. A review of the research evidence base reveals that CSOs have been successful in producing positive governance outcomes depending on context.

Documented positive outcomes include increased transparency, responsiveness, inclusion, accountability of the state, reduced corruption, increased trust in government – all of which are fully aligned with the good governance goals of SDG 16 and MDB policies. The strongest evidence of positive outcomes of CSO engagement is found in the areas of public service delivery (such as education, health, social protection and water supply) and public financial management (budget processes).

In nearly every socio-political environment, there is the opportunity for engagement between civil society and government if you adjust the program to suit the context. Pathways for CSOs to contribute to SDG and MDB good governance agendas include:

- Right to information advocacy and monitoring
  - Public expenditure tracking and participatory budgeting
  - Holding the state accountable through third party monitoring
  - Raising awareness of people's rights and entitlements
  - Encouraging citizens to express voice during consultations
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- Representing the poor in policy formulation at a local and national level
  - Demanding transparency, accountability, and inclusive access to services
  - Engaging constructively to improve public services deliver
  - Improving effectiveness of grievance redress mechanisms
  - Connecting with other CSOs to form coalitions

Research indicates that successful CSO engagement programs appropriately evaluate and address the following aspects of context:

- Access to and appropriate use of information. Qualitative and quantitative information is fundamental for civil society to judge whether services are being delivered satisfactorily and projects are being implemented appropriately. However, information is only useful if it is packaged in a form and with the necessary clarifications to permit the audience to comprehend what is being transmitted.
- Citizen knowledge & awareness. Multiple studies note the importance of citizen awareness. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) reviewed the lessons of 50 social accountability projects it supported. An important lesson from this review is that social accountability is more likely to succeed when citizens know their rights, be they the services to which they are entitled, procedures they can expect

government agencies to follow or the specifications for new roads being built.

- Engagement with the State. To be effective, social accountability requires that civil society engage constructively with the State and that the State respond to deficiencies identified. Interventions which help to build an enabling environment and strengthen state responsiveness are more successful than those only promoting citizen voice.

In summary, CSO engagement can produce positive outcomes when designed to take appropriate account of local circumstances and when flexibly adapted to evolving experience and context.

## **ELEMENTS AND EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE CSO-LED GOOD GOVERNANCE PROGRAMS**

The evidence clearly supports the argument that expanding CSO-led good governance programs can contribute to progress in achieving SDG 16 targets and supplement government actions. However, this is unlikely without a significant intensification of financing, action research and collaboration among stakeholders.

## KEY INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH EVIDENCE ON CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1) Context Matters- the exact same measure that works in one context may not work, without adaptation, in another.
- 2) In suitable contexts, positive outcomes are produced such as increased: transparency; access; community participation and empowerment; government responsiveness; implementation effectiveness; grievance redress; inclusion; accountability of the state; budget utilization; trust in public institutions; and reduced waste and corruption.
- 3) Strongest evidence of positive outcomes is found in public services delivery and public financial management.
- 4) Use of CSOs as intermediaries makes a significant difference in raising awareness, organizing collective action, facilitating constructive engagement with authorities, ensuring inclusion, and closing feedback loop.
- 5) Combining multiple social accountability tools and continuous engagement to enable collective action produces better outcomes than one intervention for a short period.
- 6) Closing the feedback loop is essential for positive outcomes to materialize.
- 7) In certain contexts, negative outcomes can occur, such as token participation, reprisals and/or denial of service, elite capture, violent state response, community disenchantment.

**Entry points for new programs.** Analysis suggest that CSO interaction with government counterparts has been most productive and successful in monitoring and reporting on the delivery of public services which affect citizens directly such as education, health, water supply and social protection.

**Proven tools and methods.** Interventions that effectively facilitate CSO engagement and social accountability to improve the quality of service delivery include:

- Raising citizen awareness of their civic rights and responsibilities
- Building the capacity of citizens, CSOs and government agencies to work together constructively

- Training citizens to use social accountability tools such as community score cards, citizen report cards
- Facilitating grievance redress and building feedback loops for citizens to report shortcomings and discuss remedies
- Monitoring public procurement and delivery of goods and infrastructure at the local level, such as school construction and pharmaceutical delivery
- Participating in local budget formulation, decision-making and expenditure monitoring
- Forming coalitions for to amplify the voices of vulnerable communities

**Modes of expansion.** Experience suggests that it is possible to expand citizen engagement efforts to the sub-national or national level, especially involving national programs operating at the local level with common approaches, standards and metrics in every community. Beginning the process of institutionalizing CSO engagement in national and sub-national level service delivery programs should begin through a series of demonstration projects in different settings and following appropriate contextual analysis. These programs would pursue “thick” CSO engagement in selected sectors and regions designed to test and validate that citizen action can be effective and influence the broad good governance agenda.

**Examples of CSO Programs for Enhancing Governance.** We have selected four model programs that use a well-defined approach based on a theory of change, operate at grassroots level, operated by CSOs in developing countries, and cover more than one country:

- *World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action (CVA) Program:* Often used as a component of larger projects to empower users to monitor, seek accountability and take collective responsibility for improved service delivery.
- *CARE’s Community Score Card (CSC) Program:* An approach to citizen participation to insure the effectiveness of CARE-supported programs.
- *Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA):* An organization established by the World Bank to empower citizen voice and support government capacity to respond.



- *Partnership for Transparency (PTF)*: Supporting CSO-led projects that facilitate citizen action to fight corruption and improve governance. PTF programs emphasize a 'demand driven' approach where priorities and methods are defined by CSOs themselves in consultation with global development experts.

The collective indication of these programs is that CSOs around the world can make a substantial contribution to the accomplishment of SDG 16 governance targets when mobilized and supported effectively, by expanding their programs along three main avenues:

- 1) Influence design of government and MDB-funded programs by leveraging opportunities for consultations, advocacy, participation in steering/advisory committees.
- 2) Engage actively in government programs and projects to enhance results and development outcomes, including reduced corruption, citizen inclusion, participatory decision-making and increased transparency and accountability.
- 3) Monitor commitments being made by governments and MDBs, track progress and hold them accountable for delivery by participating in multi-stakeholder review processes established by the SDGs and MDBs.

## **ACTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO EXPAND CSO CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE**

**Action 1: CSOs should intensify their engagement in SDG Action Plans and MDB good governance agendas.** The intensification process should seek to: (i) expand the number of communities engaged in SDG and MDB programs; (ii) influence the design of MDB-funded programs to make provisions for CSO engagement; (iii) mobilize support from private donors; and (iv) scale-up advocacy for governments to "institutionalize" CSO engagement.

**Action 2: CSOs should follow an evidence-based approach in designing and implementing their programs for maximum effectiveness.** We recommend the following guiding principles: 1) Begin with context and political economy analysis; 2) Choose SDG/MDB related objectives, outcomes and activities where success is most likely; 3) Aim for a long-term programmatic and iterative

approach; 4) Seek formalization of engagement with authorities; 5) Generate research evidence; and 6) Share results with international NGOs, UN Agencies and MDBs .

**Action 3: Governments should encourage active CSO participation in the design and implementation of operations.** CSO engagement depends to a large extent on the government attitude and policies. We recommend that governments institutionalize active civil society contributions in-line with Agenda 2030 commitments.

**Action 4: Governments, MDBs and other donors should adopt guidelines to target at least 1% of total costs of the projects/programs they fund for citizen/stakeholder engagement.** MDBs and other donors generally require stakeholder engagement in programs funded by them but fail to explicitly allocate funds for such activities. As a result stakeholder engagement, particularly during implementation and monitoring, seldom happens and potential benefits do not materialize. We recommend that official aid donors, philanthropies and CSOs ensure that at least 1% of all programs and investment project budgets be dedicated to citizen/stakeholder engagement.

**Action 5: International NGOs and foundations should increase their assistance to developing country CSOs.** We recommend that donors collaborate with MDBs to set up funds for CSOs promoting stakeholder engagement and good governance. In addition, donors should expand direct funding for: a) CSO-led programs to influence and monitor design and implementation of stakeholder and citizen engagement plans; and b) CSO-led programs that are aligned with SDG and MDB targets and that are most likely to succeed.

**Action 6: MDBs should be pro-active in encouraging governments to engage CSOs in good governance goals.** We recommend the following actions to ramp up CSO engagement in operations funded by MDBs: 1) Identify opportunities for stakeholder engagement best implemented by CSOs; 2) Include explicit provisions for CSOs to participate in governance and anti-corruption plans; 3) Make changes in financing facilities and business processes for easier CSO contracting; 4) Include stakeholder engagement as part of country and sector assessments; 5) Use results-based lending to open up civic space; 6)

Establish systems to monitor and report on funding allocated and contracted to CSOs; and 7) Expand support for the capacity building of CSOs and government for their engagement.

**Action 7: Support CSO Networks and Coalitions.** CSOs are far more likely to have impact if they pool together in their quest for change. Indeed, coalitions between different groups and at different levels (local, national, and international) were shown to be the most effective to bring about change and to help achieve sustainability. Networks need dedicated funding and staffing to enable them to work as equal partners with the public sector and private sector.

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