

# Civil Society and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa



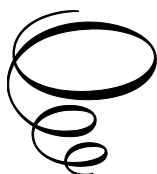
# Civil Society and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa:

## *Contributions and Challenges*

Edited by

Dudziro Nhengu

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Civil Society and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa:  
Contributions and Challenges

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## EDITOR'S NOTE



The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa is a pressing concern that requires the collective efforts of governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international donors. Despite the progress made since the adoption of the SDGs in 2015, many African countries continue to face significant challenges in achieving these goals. Poverty, inequality, and climate change remain major obstacles to sustainable development in Africa. In this context, CSOs play a vital role in promoting sustainable development in Africa.

CSOs are uniquely positioned to mobilize communities, advocate for policy changes, and provide essential services to marginalized populations. However, CSOs in Africa face numerous challenges, including limited funding, restrictive policies, and inadequate infrastructure.

This book is a response to the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the role of CSOs in advancing the SDGs in Africa. The 13 chapters in this book bring together the expertise of scholars and practitioners from diverse backgrounds to examine the complexities of CSO-state partnerships, the impact of international donors, and the challenges faced by CSOs in advancing SDGs in Africa. Through empirical research and case studies, the contributors provide nuanced analyses of the complex relationships between CSOs, governments, and international donors. The book covers a range of topics, including the role of CSOs in promoting quality education, advancing gender equality, and improving health outcomes.

We hope that this book will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the SDGs in Africa and inspire meaningful action towards achieving a more equitable and sustainable future for all.

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**Nyevero Maruzani** is a distinguished educator and scholar at the Midlands State University Gender Institute. Her research interests are on gender and development, especially in relation to education, disability and policy studies. From these and other related areas, she has written book chapters and published over twenty peer-reviewed publications in sole and collaborated research work. She has academic papers presented at a number of local and regional conferences. Nyevero believes in the possibility of an African developmental trajectory that will nurture and support sustainable strategies for gender equality and equity in aspects of development.

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# INTRODUCTION

PROFESSOR V. Z. NYAWO

A call for chapters towards this book project went out and 14 contributors produced chapters that make up this book. The project was necessitated by the background that, partnerships between the State – civil society and between and amongst diverse civil society groups are highly essential for addressing the complex and multi-dimensional problems encompassed by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This Special Issue of Sustainability on ‘Civil society and the sustainable development goals in Africa: Contributions, advancement and challenges’ called for theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions that showcase how the complexity of addressing political, economic, environmental, and social goals through collective civic arrangements requires a more robust and shared discourse, as well as a better understanding of the context, issues and challenges of working in this manner. The book project enhances knowledge and understanding of how civil society partnerships are key in strengthening the development and implementation of SDGs within the African context, while also exploring how shifts in contextual dynamics wrought by issues such as natural disasters, pandemics, political clashes and related conflicts impinge on the organising capabilities of civil society to sustain the collaborative effort that the implementation and achievement of the SDGs requires.

Specific objectives of this special issue were to:

- ☐ Assess the role civil society actors play in pushing for achievement of the SDGs through addressing the social, economic and political plights of gendered constituencies in Africa;
- ☐ Understand the barriers faced by CSOs in advancing SDGs in Africa;
- ☐ Understand the relationship between political and civil society actors in Africa;
- ☐ Appraise the various forms of power and vulnerability that characterise the citizens’ experience on the continent and
- ☐ Map a new research agenda for civil society and the SDGs in Africa.

The different contributors selected areas to write on from among the following themes, CSOs engagements in ending Poverty and Hunger, CSOs working to achieve Good Health and Well-being, CSOs working to achieve Quality Education, CSOs working to achieve Gender Equality and reduce general inequality, CSOs working to achieve Clean Water and Sanitation, CSOs working to achieve Affordable and Clean Energy, CSOs working to achieve Decent Work and Economic Growth, CSOs influencing positive developments in Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, CSOs influencing Sustainable Cities and Communities, CSOs influencing Responsible Consumption and Production, CSOs influencing Climate Action, CSOs impacting on Life Below Water and Life on Land, CSOs enhancing Peace and Justice Strong Institutions and CSOs impacting on Partnerships to achieve the different goals.

To set the ball rolling, **Nyawo and Kanherera** observe that sustainable Development Goal 17 places importance on partnerships for the attainment of the global goals. This background sets the stage pointing to the indispensability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as a vital cog in the implementation and subsequent realisation of the global goals at both global and local levels. Thus, CSOs reporting on SDGs improves implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2030. The chapter examines the state of reporting on SDGs in Zimbabwe, utilising qualitative document and thematic analysis in its methodology, the study provides a critical appreciation of progress, challenges and future prospects of CSOs. It draws attention to principles underpinning reporting, key functions and uses of CSOs reporting in SDGs implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The chapter further takes stock of current practices by exploring existing reporting approaches, platforms and processes available to CSOs in Zimbabwe among them Local Voluntary Reviews (LVR), Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and Spotlight Reports (SRs), noting reporting challenges and giving recommendations.

**Nhengu** analysed the intricate relationship between local civil society actors, international donors, and the state in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) on Good health and Well-being in Africa. A desk review of literature was employed to examine the impact of international non-governmental organisations (INGO) presence and tied donor funding on the efforts of public sector actors and local civil society organisations (CSOs) to achieve the goals of SDG 3 in Africa. The study established that, tied funding and other restrictions imposed by Official Development Assistance (ODA) donors hinder the effectiveness of efforts to implement SDG3 on Good health and Well-being in Africa. Untied

funding in turn prioritizes INGOs over local actors, further undermining the efforts of local Ministries of Health to achieve set goals for universal health coverage and positive health and well-being outcomes. The research concluded that aligning foreign funding modalities with local health priorities, respecting the coordination role of local health machineries and strengthening local civil society's autonomy are all crucial elements for achieving SDG 3 in Africa.

**Maruzani** puts it that the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relies heavily on state partnerships with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These non-governmental organisations play a key role in providing critical resources for the realisation of set goals at national and international levels. Civil Society Organisations work as key educational enablers for government and public authorities who cannot cope with all educational challenges that they face. Maruzani used a desk research approach guided by the postcolonial theory and the chapter presented information on contributions, advancements and challenges faced by Civil Society Organisations in promoting quality education (SDG 4) in post-colonial African States with specific reference to Zimbabwe. The chapter concluded by suggesting sustainable solutions to identified challenges that hinder progress towards the achievement of SDG 4 in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

**Chanhuwa** notes that sustainable goal 16 recognizes that strong, inclusive and accountable institutions have capacity to promote peace by finding lasting solutions that reduce conflict and insecurity. Civil society has the potential to secure national peace mostly through assisting in restoration of trust between communities and the state, through monitoring the work of the justice system in any country, ensuring that the courts adjudicate without fear and favour, to protect and redress the wronged. In Africa post-independence, most countries have struggled with democracy and election management. Africa has become a breeding ground for hostility, mistrust, strife and contention. This environment does not just make the political landscape unfavourable but the arena has become the foreground to the absence of peace and justice. This chapter interrogates the role of civil society in securing and building presence and justice in electoral processes, deriving from the experiences, impediments and lessons learnt from selected countries namely; Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia using the qualitative design.

In her second chapter **Nhengu** examines the challenges civil society mobilizations face in advancing women's rights in Zimbabwe and Senegal,

situating these struggles within the broader African context. Drawing on a systematic literature review and virtual interviews with 20 women activists from Zimbabwe, the research highlights the agency of women in promoting gender equality, both within legal frameworks and beyond. The analysis reveals that while CEDAW effectively defines discrimination and galvanizes advocacy efforts, legal measures alone are inadequate to address the entrenched effects of patriarchy. Instead, a multi-sectoral approach is necessary to combat gender discrimination in Sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter concludes by offering recommendations to address persisting gender inequalities, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts to mitigate patriarchal systems and ensure meaningful progress toward gender equality.

**Mugodzwa and Matope's** chapter delves into the complexities of women's participation in Zimbabwean politics, drawing on empirical research conducted in Harare in 2022. The study examines pivotal moments in history and the motivations driving five women's negotiation of political spaces and decision-making processes. Since Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, men have dominated the country's politics, while women have largely been relegated to peripheral roles, such as singing, dancing, and ululating in support of male politicians. This marginalization is perpetuated by violence, social inequalities, and patriarchal systems that restrict women's civic engagement. The chapter sheds light on the lived experiences of women in politics, emphasizing the crucial role women's participation plays in advancing gender equality and empowerment. Despite Zimbabwe's commitment to various protocols promoting women's decision-making in private and public spheres, significant work remains to be done. To create a more equitable society, institutional and legal reforms must tackle material, financial, social, cultural, and symbolic inequalities. Effective governance and gender mainstreaming strategies are vital in transforming society and eliminating discriminatory laws, norms, and practices.

**Mawere** notes that, one of the United Nations sustainable development goals for 2030 is gender equality which is a critical one in realizing other sustainable development goals. This chapter analyses gender and leadership positions in Teacher Education Colleges, Polytechnic Colleges and Vocational Training Colleges in so far as Principal and Vice Principal positions are concerned. Over and above this, six Universities are also subjected to gender and leadership analysis. This study intended to highlight how traditional gender–power relations could be altered in order to achieve institutional change. Sustainable change towards gender equality in institutions of higher learning is only possible if these institutions commit themselves to social justice in their leadership.

**Matope and Mugodzwa** contend that despite significant increases in women's participation in the labor market and Zimbabwe State Universities over the past two decades, gender equality in the workplace remains elusive. The systemic exclusion of women's concerns from Trade Union agendas has led to the feminization of Trade Unions in Zimbabwe, perpetuating disparities. This chapter critically examines the feminization of Zimbabwe State University Trade Unions, emphasizing the imperative of empowering women and girls in academic spaces. Employing an interpretive content analysis qualitative approach grounded in interpretivism, the study investigates discrimination, exclusion, and feminization within these unions. The authors argue that transformative change in organizations like universities requires trade unions to challenge and dismantle entrenched practices and values that hinder gender progress. Effective gender mainstreaming can increase women's representation in trade unions, promote gender-specific advocacy, and ensure implementation of policies and declarations. By challenging the status quo, gender mainstreaming can address systemic inequalities, foster inclusive union leadership and inform gender-responsive policy implementation. To achieve genuine equality, Matope and Mugodzwa stress the necessity of integrating gender-sensitive perspectives into trade union agendas, ultimately advancing women's empowerment and gender justice in Zimbabwe State Universities.

**Mhembwe** observes that women in different parts of the world, particularly rural women in developing countries continue to face several socio-economic and legal gender-based challenges, something that entrenches their poverty and levels of disempowerment. A qualitative research design was employed for the study to document the role of non-state actors in alleviating growing rates of poverty and in promoting sustainable empowerment amongst rural women in line with sustainable development goals (SDGs) number 1 and 5. The study notes that, skills development, infrastructure development support, health care services, market assistance, human rights activism, input supply and provision of credits are some of the strategies deployed by non-state actors in their bid to alleviate poverty and empower rural women in Zimbabwe. For example, because of the urban and tarmac biases, it was a challenge for some poorest rural women to benefit from programmes meant for the poor whereas some stakeholders faced funding challenges to see their programmes through.

**Maphosa** investigates how Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Africa promote good health and well-being by engaging effectively with communities. By utilizing documentary review to gather data, the research examines CSOs' strategies to mobilise communities and work together to



tackle health concerns to achieve lasting health results. The study focuses on key themes, such as CSOs' efforts in mobilizing communities and raising awareness, advocating for quality healthcare, promoting health education and behavior change, and enhancing health systems and service delivery. The results of this study enhance comprehension of policy makers on how CSOs promote good health and well-being in Africa.

**Mhuta, Matsa and Mapuranga's** chapter examined the role of CSOs in promoting quality education in Africa's higher education institutions and the challenges and prospects they face in this endeavour. In the context of Africa's higher education sector, civil society organizations (CSOs) have emerged as critical stakeholders in supporting the advancement of this goal. The design informing the paper is an exploratory qualitative desk analysis of purposively selected cases in Africa which are Ghana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The findings were that the CSOs have participated in education, but their participation has not been transformative. Power structures have not been addressed. The policy implementation frameworks ignore inequalities, inclusiveness, or equity issues. Therefore, the study recommends the establishment of transformative collaborations between CSOs and governments, academia, businesses, and other stakeholders to create a sustainable impact and advance the broader agenda of education for sustainable development. These collaborations have the potential to drive progress towards the achievement of SDG 4.

**Chinongwa, Nhengu and Chiriseri** examined the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in advancing attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) face setbacks emanating from multiple factors including inadequate resources, exclusionary practices and the negative effects of pandemics and climate-related disasters. These setbacks yield negative education outcomes, defeating the aspiration of SDG 4. Utilising two theoretical frameworks, the Stakeholder Engagement Collaboration Framework and the Resilience Engineering Framework, the chapter explored how CSO involvement in supporting HTE processes has potential to influence the attainment of quality education in the country. Findings showed how CSOs support HTE processes through providing humanitarian relief for learners, teachers and marginalised families during disasters, contributing to capacity building of education personnel and advocating for legal and policy reforms to ensure the provision of quality education, among others. Conclusions were that CSOs play significant roles in enhancing quality education, and that strengthening the effectiveness of teaching, learning and institutional policies and practices requires a multi-

stakeholder approach that also includes CSOs, among the usual traditional education sector stakeholders.

Finally, **Chauraya** observes that, in September 2015, having come to the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nation General Assembly adopted Agenda 2030 for the global sustainable development. The broad aim of this Agenda is improvement of human life by 2030 through 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an undertaking by the member states to create sustainable livelihoods for all. This chapter focuses only on SDG 5 which aims to ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.’ There has been notable progress towards achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women in higher echelons, education, health and well-being and legislative reforms. This notwithstanding, many challenges plague the journey to gender equality as women and girls remain the major victims of political, social, economic and technological disadvantage especially in Africa, a region with notorious high levels of discrimination against women. Does it mean that gender equality is an elusive agenda for this region? Using a desktop-review strategy, this chapter answers this question through unpacking complexities of achieving SDG 5 in Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The chapter makes a noteworthy contribution to the domain of global sustainability of gender equality.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS REPORTING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ZIMBABWE

NYAWO VONGAI  
AND KANHERERA LLEWELYN TATENDA

### **Abstract**

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development exhorts stakeholders to report progress regarding the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of monitoring and evaluation. At the same time, Sustainable Development Goal 17 places importance on partnerships for the attainment of the global goals. This background sets the stage pointing to the indispensability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as a vital cog in the implementation and subsequent realisation of the global goals at both global and local levels. Thus, CSOs reporting on SDGs improves implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Agenda 2030. Examining the case of Zimbabwe, this chapter serves to examine the state of reporting on SDGs. Utilising qualitative document analysis and thematic analysis in its methodology, the study provides a critical appreciation of progress, challenges and future prospects of CSOs. It draws attention to principles underpinning reporting, key functions and uses of CSOs reporting in SDGs implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The chapter further takes stock of current practices by exploring existing reporting approaches, platforms and processes available to CSOs in Zimbabwe among them Local Voluntary Reviews (LVR), Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) and Spotlight Reports (SRs). The chapter goes on to delineate reporting challenges facing CSOs in Zimbabwe before making recommendations for improved reporting by

the civil society for realisation of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

**Keywords:** Reporting; CSOs; SDGs, Sustainable Development; Voluntary Reviews; Agenda 2030

## Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global development targets agreed in 2015 by members to the United Nations as a successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations.<sup>1</sup> While the MDGs were more focused on the Low Income Countries (LICs) and Middle Income Countries (MICs) in its quest to eradicate poverty, the SDGs are unique in that they take a broader approach by calling all countries. The SDGs were agreed to with the purpose to address inequalities, climate change among other global challenges. They recognise that eradication of poverty must go hand in hand with economic growth and tackling social ills, climate change and environment. The realisation of these goals demands that all hands be on deck including CSOs, from inception to monitoring and evaluation. This chapter focuses on the role of CSOs in SDGs reporting zooming on the state of CSOs SDGs reporting in Zimbabwe. Reporting is critical to the realisation of SDGs as it forms part of the SDGs Follow-Up and Review (FUR) and monitoring and evaluation processes. The chapter commences with a background on the nature of SDGs by delineating the three dimensions of SDGs and the conceptualisation of reporting as a concept. This is followed by sections on the functions of reporting and the principles and guidelines underlying reporting. Using Zimbabwe as a case study, the chapter then provides a discussion on the current state of CSOs reporting inclusive of the existing reporting platforms among them VNRs, VSRs, VLRs and Spotlight reports and challenges militating against CSOs reporting through these channels. The chapter concludes with recommendations both structural and procedural on the best way to bolster CSOs contribution to SDGs reporting in Zimbabwe.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015”, accessed March 05, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2>

## Background

The SDGs are anchored on the tripartite dimensions of social solidarity, environmental responsibility and economic efficiency.<sup>2</sup> Jayasooria and Yi posit that the economic dimension aims to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth.<sup>3</sup> This is premised on shared prosperity, economic sufficiency, industrial and infrastructural development and decent work for all. The economic dimension also accounts for different levels of national development and capacities. The social dimension of SDGs aims to generate social capital by building peaceful, just and inclusive societies that protect human rights, promote equality leaving no one behind. At the environmental level, SDGs calls for a shift from purely economic advancement towards by mainstreaming efforts to combat ecological issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.<sup>4</sup>

The Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs in their dimensions are supported by 169 targets and 239 indicators as developed by the UN Interagency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs). The UN Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDGs), was assigned the task to deliver a set of viable and tendentially universal indicators. The tier system, targets and indicators form the global framework embodying the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This global framework functions as a benchmark for monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>5</sup> Follow-Up and Review (FUR) processes are crucial to the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. FUR processes are used to track progress assessing whether the country is on track to achieve the SDGs, monitoring progress and ensure that no one is

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCAP “Integrating the three dimensions of Integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development”, accessed March 05, 2024, <https://repository.unescap.org/handle/20.500.12870/3161>

<sup>3</sup> Denison Jayasooria and Ilcheong Yi “The Sustainable Development Goals and the Social and Solidarity Economy”. In *Encyclopedia of the Social and Solidarity Economy*, ed. Ilcheong Yi Peter Utting, Jean-Louis Laville, Barbara Sak, Caroline Hossein, Sifa Chiyoge, Cecelia Navarra, Denison Jayasooria, Fernanda Wanderly, Jacques Defourny and Rocio Nogales-Muriel (Northampton, MA), 310-320

<sup>4</sup> Angela Delli Paoli and Felice Addeo “Assessing SDGs: A Methodology to Measure Sustainability,” *Athens Journal of Social Sciences*, No 6 (3) (March 2019): 229-250

<sup>5</sup> Cristina Espinosa and Gabriela Rangel “What roles do civil society organizations play in monitoring and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals? An exploration of cases from Ecuador, Colombia, and Argentina,” *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, No 5(1) (November 2022):1-23

left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. FUR processes also help to identify areas where more action is needed, and to inform policy decisions. Central to the FUR process is the concept of reporting, which is the focus of this chapter, particularly the status of CSOs reporting on SDGs in Zimbabwe.

## **Sustainable Development Goals Reporting: The Concept**

Centre for Open Data Enterprise (CODE) define SDG reporting as the act of collecting, analysing, publishing and disseminating data and statistics on the SDG indicators to measure statistics towards Agenda 2030.<sup>6</sup>

Reporting enables international agencies, government, the civil society, and business to understand the impact of their activities on people and the planet in line with SDGs. By regularly tracking progress through SDG reporting, they can make better and informed decisions and take necessary measures towards attainment of SDGs.<sup>7</sup> SDG reporting goes beyond merely data collection but is action oriented by aiming to isolate challenges and develop new products, changing business practices, or collaborating with others to create positive change. The rewards of SDG reporting are numerous. It helps drive innovation and increase competitiveness and provides a way to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement in their sustainability policies.

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<sup>6</sup> The Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE) “Strategies for SDG Reporting”, accessed March 05, 2024, [http://reports.opendataenterprise.org/CODE\\_StrategiesforSDGreporting.pdf](http://reports.opendataenterprise.org/CODE_StrategiesforSDGreporting.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Norichika Kanie; Ruben Zondervan and Casey Stevens, Ideas on Governance ‘of’ and ‘for’ Sustainable Development Goals: UNU-IAS/POST2015 Conference Report. Tokyo: United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, 2014

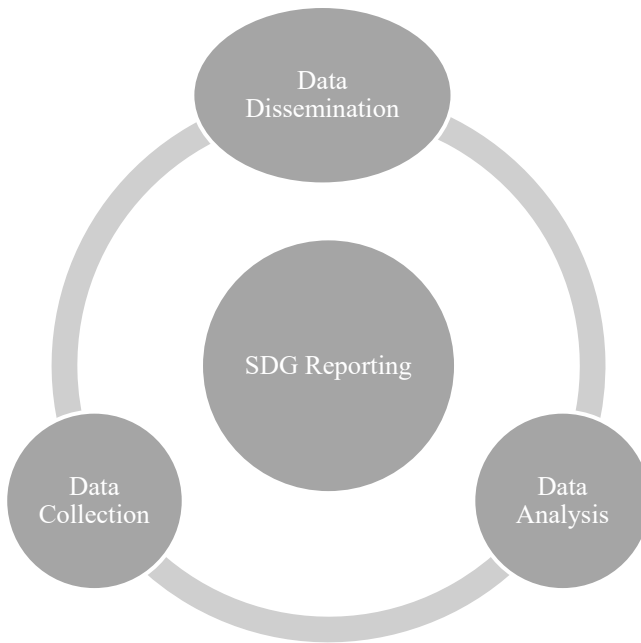


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of SDG Reporting

## **Uses and Functions of Civil Society in Sustainable Development Goals Reporting**

This section discusses the functions that CSO reporting should take in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SDGs. The functions of CSO reporting in SDGs are identified as follows: data collection and information provision, advocacy, accountability, policy translation, global partnership, peer learning. These functions apply to both local and national reporting of SDGs.

### ***Data collection and information provision***

In the quest for sustainable development, data is critical to measuring progress and understanding challenges faced by communities. Insufficient data can retard development indicators yet indicators are essential for

planning, monitoring and evaluation for sustained advancement.<sup>8</sup> Insufficient and incomplete data will lead to inaccurate SDG findings.<sup>9</sup> As such, it is the function of CSO reporting to facilitate provision of cheaper, broader, accurate, accessible and timely data. Involvement of local CSO offers the opportunity for provision of disaggregated, contextualised and localised SDG relevant data capturing statistics for the most vulnerable in society. This would complement official data as well as fill data gaps ensuring effective implementation of SDGs.

### *Advocacy and Accountability*

Advocacy is another function of CSOs reporting. Advocacy involves any attempts to influence public policy and decision making processes.<sup>10</sup> This includes raising awareness, issue framing and agenda setting. CSO reporting raises awareness of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs as a legitimate development agenda relevant to local needs and aspirations. At the local levels, reporting raises community awareness of SDGs levels as part of embedding SDGs onto the domestic scene in tandem with the Agenda 2030 theme of, *“Leaving No one Behind”*. At policy making level, CSOs actors also engage in advocacy to influence government policy and commitment towards sustainable development.<sup>11</sup> SDG reporting set the stage for issue framing and policy advocacy as local aspirations find their way into local and global policy dialogues. CSOs programmes and projects often identify SDG relevant issues of importance to marginalised groups but not captured by the government. Reporting, thus, ignite action leading to rapid policy translation of global goals to the national and local contexts.<sup>12</sup> Reporting also functions to guarantee authorities are held accountable by ensuring they

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<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Jeníček “Sustainable development – indicators,” *Agricultural Economics – Czech*, No 59 (2): (February 2013): 74-80

<sup>9</sup> Mehrbakhsh Nilashi; Ooi Keng Boon; Garry Wei-Han Tan; Binshan Lin and Rabab Ali Abumalloh “Critical Data Challenges in Measuring the Performance of Sustainable Development Goals: Solutions and the Role of Big Data Analytics,” *Harvard Data Science Review*, No 5 (June 2023)

<sup>10</sup> John Casey *Understanding Advocacy: A Primer on the Policy Making Role of Non-profit Organizations*,” Working Paper Series, Centre for Non-profit Strategy and Management (New York: Baruch College, 2011), 29

<sup>11</sup> Cristina Espinosa and Gabriela Rangel “What roles do civil society organizations play in monitoring and reviewing the Sustainable Development Goals?”

<sup>12</sup> Kristina Jönsson and Magdalena Bexell “Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals: The case of Tanzania,” *Development Policy Review*, No 39. (March 2018): 181–196



are responsible and answerable in the discharge of their duties and commitments as expected in the implementation of SDGs. As an agent of accountability, CSOs should be actively involved in SDG reporting at local and national levels.

### *Peer Learning and Review*

Reporting is an opportunity for peer review among CSOs. Reporting is multi-disciplinary putting players from different backgrounds on the same platform to report on their activities. This foster peer learning as a two way reciprocal and mutually beneficial process, allowing actors to share best practices, sharing knowledge, ideas, challenges and solutions.<sup>13</sup> CSOs get to learn extensively by explaining their ideas to others, working collaboratively with others, giving and receiving feedback, and evaluating their own learning. This merges with Goal 17 which places emphasis on partnership for the goals.

**Table 1: Uses and functions of Civil Society in SDG Reporting**

Domain	Related Activities
Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collecting and disseminating SDG relevant data</li> <li>• Production of cheaper, localised and disaggregated data</li> <li>• Analysing and verification of official statistics</li> <li>• Complement official statistics</li> </ul>
Advocacy and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise SDGS awareness for CSOs and communities</li> <li>• Issue framing and policy advocacy to amplifying the voices of marginalised communities</li> <li>• Create counter narratives and agenda setting for the marginalised</li> </ul>

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<sup>13</sup> The Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE) “Strategies for SDG Reporting”; Carol-Anne Sénit “Leaving no one behind? The influence of civil society participation on the Sustainable Development Goals,” Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, No 38(4). (March 2020): 693-712

Peer Learning and Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking by setting up of discussion forums, action groups and feedback platforms</li> </ul>
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## Principles and Guidelines of Sustainable Development Goals Reporting and Reporting Platforms

This section provides a discussion of principles guiding SDG reporting. Principles guiding reporting are enunciated in SDGs principles and the Follow Up and Review (FUR) framework for inclusive, diverse, transparent, participatory, evidence-driven and effective reporting of SDGs at both national and local levels.

SDGs reporting should be reflective of the “Leaving No One Behind” principle as the overarching premise of the Agenda 2030. The principle of ‘leaving no one behind’. This principle is essentially linked to the principles of equity, diversity, participation, transparency and accountability.<sup>14</sup> As such, SDG reporting and related processes should be anchored on wide ranging, cross-sectional and citizen led participatory approaches with stakeholders engaged mirroring prevailing structure of society including marginalised communities.

SDG reporting does not take place in a vacuum. There are standards, principles and guidelines put in place for SDGs reporting and dissemination. In 2018 the Statistics Division of the Department of Social and Economic Affairs (UNSD/DESA) organised in cooperation with multiple partners a conference to discuss the establishment of national data platforms for the reporting of the SDG indicators in both developing and developed countries. The conference agreed on the principles that should govern National Reporting and Dissemination platforms. The applicability of these principles is not only confined to the national reporting platforms for which they were designed but they can be modified and used across multi-level SDG reporting platforms from organisational, local, subnational and local. Reporting platforms should have in place clear institutional arrangements and management, fit for purpose, sustainable, interoperable and premised

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<sup>14</sup> Andrea Ciambra and Ricardo Martinez, Reporting on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Sweden: VLRs and Their Implications for Local Democracy. Stockholm: Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, 2022 [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/04/icld\\_researchreport\\_17\\_2022-final-web.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/04/icld_researchreport_17_2022-final-web.pdf)

on established statistical standards.<sup>15</sup> There should be clear institutional arrangements in place to govern the development of reporting platforms. This encompasses the coordination and cooperation of the national statistical system and data ecosystem guided by relevant legal and policy frameworks. In the age of the data revolution, efforts should be made towards leveraging available data from sources other than the traditional national statistical system.<sup>16</sup> Reporting platforms should also be fit for the purpose with a clearly defined purpose scope and features. According to UNSD/DESA reporting platforms should address the priority needs and requirements of subnational, national and global monitoring and reporting.<sup>17</sup> It is also important to be sensitive to time and availability of resources for sustainable reporting. The components of reporting and dissemination platforms should follow international, national statistical standards and best practice to facilitate data integration and harmonisation across different stages from local/subnational to national reporting platforms.

In addition to the principles, there are guidelines to be followed by countries aiming to develop reporting platforms and mechanisms. Platforms established should have national ownership by adhering to country-specific development priorities, administrative boundaries, ethnic and language needs.<sup>18</sup> Reporting should be a collaborative effort leveraging on the collective competences of donors, policy makers, CSOs and technocrats at both local and national levels; in order to leave no-one behind, ensure national ownership, and promote the use and impact of data for policy and decision making at the local level. Platforms should support national languages and accessibility to persons with disabilities.<sup>19</sup> Inclusivity should not be limited to natural languages but should also support the full range of devices including entry point mobile devices in the case of ICT-based reporting platforms. Reporting platforms should be innovative, novel and continuously promote strategies to improve the presentation, communication and use of data for sustainable development. They should support multiple ways to explore,

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<sup>15</sup> UNDS/DESA “Principles of SDG Indicator Reporting and Dissemination Platforms and guidelines for their application”

<sup>16</sup> Karina Cázares-Grageda and Koffi Zougbede “National SDG Review: data challenges and opportunities”, accessed March 10, 2024, [https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/National-SDG\\_Review2019\\_rz](https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/National-SDG_Review2019_rz)

<sup>17</sup> UNDS/DESA “Principles of SDG Indicator Reporting and Dissemination Platforms and guidelines for their application”

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Lisa McEntee-Atalianis and Humphrey Tonkin (2023) *Language and sustainable development*. Cham Switzerland: Springer

represent and communicate data on statistical indicators, and address the needs and priorities of diverse groups of users, including policy-makers, legislators, civil society, private sector, the media, the public, and academia. This includes innovative data visualization and data story-telling capabilities. Disaggregated data is widely agreed to be the bedrock of the FUR process.<sup>20</sup> The availability or the lack of disaggregated data may spell failure or success of SDGs reporting. As such, reporting should support and improve access to and also make use of disaggregated data to focus on all segments of the population. Data disaggregation following the principles of universality and leaving no one behind should follow disaggregation on the basis of, but not limited to, subnational geographic areas, sex, age group, impairment, income group, ethnicity, migrant status, among other important demographic characteristics.

## **The state of Civil Society Organisations reporting on Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe**

### ***Current Sustainable Development Goals Reporting Platforms and Mechanisms in Zimbabwe***

SDGs require a global, integrated, and participatory approach across all levels from adoption to reporting. This section provides an appraisal of current SDGs reporting platforms and mechanisms in use in Zimbabwe, namely Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), Voluntary Local Review (VLR), Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), Spotlight Reports and Independent Reports.

### ***Voluntary National Reviews***

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are the lynchpin of the follow up and review framework of the 2030 Agenda. By Definition VNR refers to the process by which countries take stock, review and present national progress

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<sup>20</sup> Fernando Ortiz-Moya; Hirotaka Koike; Junko Ota; Yatsuka Kataoka and Junichi Fujino “State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2020: Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs”, accessed March 05, 2024, <https://www.iges.or.jp/en/pub/vlrs-2021/en>

and challenges in the implementation of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>21</sup> They are a snapshot of where the country stands with respect to SDGs and targets. The objectives of VNRs are to share experiences, identify shortcoming, and accelerate progress. They also serve a purpose as norm building process through promotion of good practices development of partnerships. As an SDG mechanism, VNRs are state led and undertaken by both developed and developing countries without discrimination. The VNR process is made up of four phases, namely:

- 1) Initial Preparation and organisation;
- 2) Preparation of the VNR Report;
- 3) Presentation at the HLPF; and
- 4) Follow up post HLPF

Demonstrating their importance and essentiality to the formal follow-up and review architecture, VNRs are presented annually at the HLPF, the apex board for SDG implementation. VNR is key tool for accountability for the SDGs both at national and international levels. Given the global level at which they are presented, VNRs provide an important opportunity for states to be answerable to their citizens in relation to their implementation of SDGs. As an accountability tool, VNRs bolster national ownership of the SDGs and promote universality, equality, transparency, inclusivity.<sup>22</sup>

As a commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and attainment of the SDGs, Zimbabwe has submitted and presented two VNRs debuting the first report in 2017. This was followed by a second VNR in 2021 aimed at tracking progress in SDGs implementation since the 2017 VNR Report. The two VNRs serve as dashboards providing useful information on multiple socio-economic and ecological indicators towards the achievement of the mutually reinforcing agendas of the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063.

### *Voluntary Local Review*

Voluntary Local Review (VLR) has emerged as a powerful tool in the localisation and reporting of SDGs representing an innovation by and for local government to advance progress on their local priorities in a participatory

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<sup>21</sup>UNESCAP “Integrating the three dimensions of Integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development”

<sup>22</sup> Diana Huynh “What is in a Voluntary Local Review”, accessed March 05, 2024, <https://pub.nordregio.org/pb-2022-2-voluntary-local-review/voluntary-local-review>

manner. The Voluntary Local Review is an evaluation of the SDG implementation in a specific local context in which local authorities identify context specific priorities.<sup>23</sup> Voluntary Local Review is classified as a reporting tool providing the platform to assess, monitor and present local achievements in SDGs, as well as a process to enhance and bolster stakeholder's commitment and buy in to SDGs.

A VLR is a platform of convergence, self-introspection and localisation of global aspirations.<sup>24</sup> As a convergent point, VLRs create space for local governance to listen to the needs of the people and reflect them into policy making. It seeks to engage a multiplicity of stakeholders and give them an opportunity to play, create, monitor and report progress on their vision to be achieved by 2030 and actions taken thus far to realise the vision. A VLR is also a platform for self-reflection and introspection. By aligning the 17 SDGs and the accompanying targets to the local context, VLRs diagnose challenges and highlight areas needing improvement creating room for development of integrated and multi-sectorial responses to those existing challenges. A VLR gives a local take on the global conversation on sustainable development. It is an initial step for local governments wishing to make a difference. Therefore, a VLR ignites action that is locally focused but has global implications ringing true the notion of thinking global and acting locally.

In Zimbabwe, six localities have conducted Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). Two pilot VLRs were published in Victoria Falls and Harare in March and June 2020 respectively. A further four VLRs were conducted in 2023 by Bulawayo City, Zvishavane, Bikita Rural and Mutasa Rural. The reports were part of a partnership between the Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Local Government and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). According to Moyo<sup>25</sup>, the reports served as pilots to kick-start the proliferation of VLRs across Zimbabwe to improve SDG reporting at local levels.

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<sup>23</sup> UN-Habitat "VLR Guidelines Vol 2", accessed March, 05 2024, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/07/vlrguidelines\\_vol2.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/07/vlrguidelines_vol2.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Fernando Ortiz-Moya; Hirotaka Koike; Junko Ota; Yatsuka Kataoka and Junichi Fujino "State of the Voluntary Local Reviews 2020: Local Action for Global Impact in Achieving the SDGs"

<sup>25</sup> July Moyo "Voluntary Local Review: City of Harare", accessed March 3, 2024, <https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/TCND/voluntary-local-reviews-africa/Harare-VLR.pdf>