

# **BUILDING EFFECTIVE BOTTOM UP PARTNERSHIP for Sustainable Development**

## **Goals (SDGs): A Discussion Note by Vaagdhara, India**

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“Ours is the first generation that can end poverty and the last that may be able to do so”.

UN Secretary General

### **Background**

When the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were announced in 2000, many of us in the development sector or civil society, in particular those using human rights approach, were not greatly enthused because we thought MDGs were low on aspiration. We in the civil society are always ambitious and rightly so, and leave the realistic assessment to the governments. Perhaps the states know that what we in the civil society were considering as low aspiring MDG were itself a challenge for them. And End of December 2014 proved it.

Then comes the Rio+20, Sustainable Development Goals driven by new challenges and backed with new enthusiasm and renewed commitment, commonly known as Post 2015 agenda. Under this new agenda, with a new framework of state accountability, we are collectively aspiring for a higher goal, in fact goals, partly because we think that our experience in MGDs would help the global community to plan it better and achieve the results. And partly perhaps because if we did not achieve the MDGs, what is harm in setting it high, in any case it is not going to be achieved. For the time being, let us assume that this is not the case, and get ourselves involved in serious debate around the implementation of the SDG agenda.

In a few months from now, the UNGA will adopt Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the outcome document from the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD 3). It will be interesting to see how the “new” ideas will bring the promised outcome. The declaration of the ZERO draft raises some expectations and belies several hopes. It would really depend in part on how the UN system and Members States implement the new recommendations which have emanated from a long drawn and highly costly process(s) of consultations.

### **Zero Draft:**

As reflected by a number of Major Groups, broadly speaking, the Declaration in the Zero Draft fails to ensure a human rights-based approach as a cross-cutting framework or to adequately articulate issues of discrimination, gender inequality, structural and systemic disadvantages. Due to its strong focus on the current market based development model it fails to reformulate economic policy-making and indicators to reflect the value of people and planet in order to

uphold the principle of universality and also to address the needs and rights of vulnerable and marginalized populations.

### **Follow Up and Review**

Although the Zero draft does talk about commitment of Member States for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the goals and targets over the coming fifteen years, the past experiences raise some apprehensions and leave some doubts that need to be underlined here.

### **Creating a Baseline –**

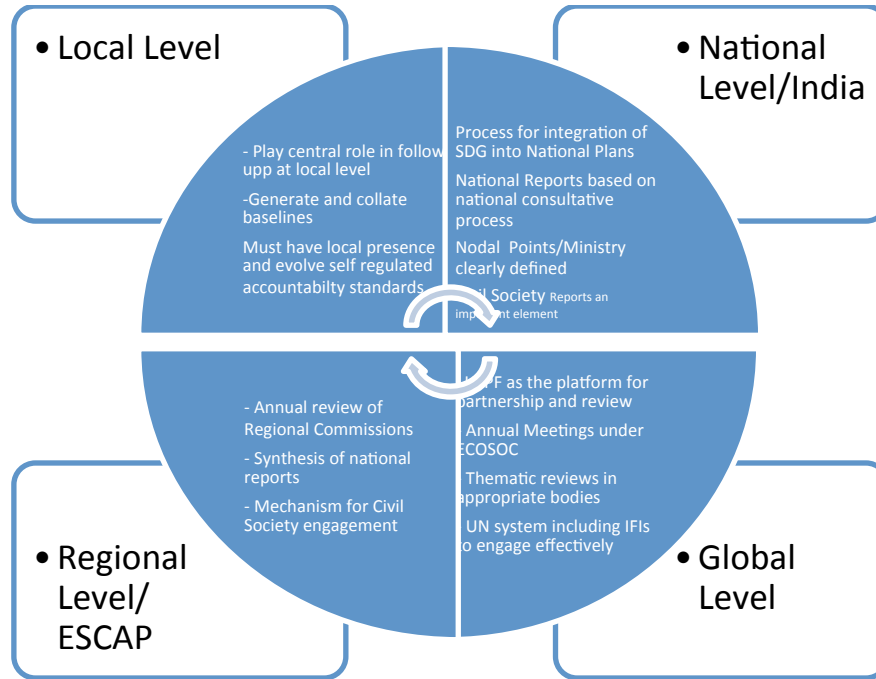
An authentic and reliable baseline at community level is very important and critical for building a shared understanding of the situation and the ways to track the progress made toward correcting the gaps in the framework of SDG. The experience indicates that in absence of such data we tend to have huge difference in the understanding of the key stakeholders. For instance the number of child laborers in India is way beyond any correct assessment; it varies from about 10 million to about 100 million as per the estimates of civil society and child rights activists. Similar variation could be seen in the number of children under malnutrition or cases of violence against women. Such a scarcity of authentic data for some of the most sensitive indicators of poverty and inequality is a big challenge for a meaningful debate about what kind of development India needs. As already said, group-disaggregated data on sensitive indicators like child malnutrition, maternal health or domestic violence are scarce and irregular<sup>1</sup>. This weakness also reduces the scope to link people's priorities outlined during consultation, with effective and accountable public policies and programmes. Therefore, a valid and reliable baseline is pre-requisite for effective implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. Such a baseline would help different government departments, UN agencies and civil society organizations to undertake actions in convergence, thus multiplying the position effects of different interventions undertaken by them individually.

States are not great performers when it comes to rights; somehow they feel obliged to maintain the status quo, but what is required for successful implementation of SDGs is very transformational change in the way we go about doing our business. For this, the Member States should be made accountable to their citizens and local civil society organizations, as well international community, both key stakeholders in monitoring of SDGs in a more structured manner. Zero Draft's voluntary follow up mechanisms and limited space for the High Level Political Forum to provide effective monitoring and follow up limit the effectiveness of moving from words to action. In this regard, the follow up and review process should ensure strong citizen led civil society's participation including through institutionalization of the Major Groups and other stakeholders; institutionalize transparent and participatory monitoring and review

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<sup>1</sup> Aspirations of Indigenous Communities from Banswara District of Southern Rajasthan: A Field Report

mechanisms; build on existing human rights accountability mechanisms; and ensure accountability on people’s rights for business and the private sector. The following picture indicates our emphasis on local level follow up as equal to other levels of implementation



### Localization of Data -

In our context, the process of data collection has to start at the level of local bodies to make it a uniform exercise, although actually it can be undertaken by civil society organizations. It must be noted that like any such development planning action, data collection is also a culture issue. At times, a widely divergent view is taken by customary laws and practices on one hand and secular law of the lands on the other hand. Therefore, we foresee that generation of baseline would also be an exercise in cultural alignment as well. For this to happen, local communities and civil society organizations together with government agencies will be required to build effective partnerships. It is possible that in order to participate effectively from a position of strength, local communities will have to be supported through a massive capacity building augmentation programme. One must also consider that communities will generate data not only for remotely located UN agencies or government departments, but for their own use at the local level. A system needs to be developed to digitize the data so generated.

At the national and regional level, civil society has to be an effective partner, however, the way new laws are being formulated or old being tightened to regulate and control the NGOs in different parts of the world, this seems to be a big challenge. Even in Zero draft, civil society

organizations are still not recognized as key partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of the agreements and relevant policies at all levels in the framework of the goals and targets. Equally they are also missing as key agents of transformation and monitoring within the structure of development of indicators, i.e. the Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDG). Thus, there is a need to recognize the importance of ensuring the effective and meaningful participation of civil society organizations as key partners in the follow up and review the new development framework at all levels. It is true that the entire domain of civil society is not about NGOs only, however, it is also true that NGOs are the soul of this independent civil society sector, and central piece of the envisaged partnership. SDG implementation needs government's reach and scale, equally it needs NGOs creativity, incubation of ideas, and creation of space for alternative viewpoints and approaches.

There have been talks of data revolution for sustainable development, to ensure that we have enough information needed to make best policy choices. Clearly that is true, we need a data revolution. However, lets us ensure that such a revolution is not guided by somewhat skewed variety of stakeholders. The southern communities and civil society should be leading this revolution, because they are one who should make policy and will need data. The process in the run to SDG has been very challenging for southern NGOs with this new system of major groups, the nodal points of most of these are located in North. And since the discussions started happening, most of it has taken place in New York; southern NGOs have been at great disadvantage in effectively participating in these processes. We must ensure that the data revolution, or for that matter any revolution is actively led by the civil society based in global South.

For our brothers, sisters and colleagues in transnational domain of civil society, the issues and challenges could be global, and indeed they are, however, for our local civil society organizations, the issues are local, the challenges are local and solutions are local. Having said that however, we would like to underscore that while talking about localization of sustainable development targets, we are not suggesting exclusion of involvement of key players for transitioning from global targets to local implementation. Global partnerships in which the **local structures play a key role** in methodology and follow-up/review processes is what we are asking for in implementation of the post-2015 development agenda;

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\* This discussion paper is an outcome of a long consultative process steered by Vaagdhara, Rajasthan and Indraprastha Public Affairs Centre (IPAC) New Delhi. A large number of civil society representatives and community based organisations participated in the consultative exercise. Vaagdhara is an NGO in special consultative status with ECOSOC.