



Institute for Development
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Role of CSOs in Improving SDG Monitoring & Data Analysis: Case of Georgia



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Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Background – challenges on the way to SDGs.....	5
CSO contribution to SDGs in Georgia: Role of IDFI.....	6
Data: nationalization of SDGs and how to measure progress	8
Institutional Setup: getting organized around SDGs.....	10
Ownership: who is in charge of SDGs?.....	13
Policy Linkages: translating SDGs into actions	14
Lessons Learned.....	15
Recommendations	19

Abstract

This paper highlights Georgia's progress and challenges so far in terms of nationalizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the crucial role of CSOs (represented by a Georgian leading CSO Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, IDFI¹) in the process.

As Georgia was not actively involved in implementation of MDGs, it faced additional challenges when starting nationalization of SDGs, which required both technical and expert support from non-state actors. The key challenges discussed in the paper are related to availability of data, institutional setup of the government to implement and monitor SDGs, ownership (or lack of thereof) about being in charge of SDGs among various sectors and linking SDGs with strategic policy documents, for ensuring real impact.

The paper discusses steps to face each challenge identified above, such as nationalization of global goals, creation of electronic monitoring system (EMS), institutional setup created for implementing and monitoring the process, ensuring ownership among state and non-state actors, and linking nationalized SDGs with policy documents. In the last part of the paper some key lessons from Georgia are discussed, including both the success stories of CSO engagement, and the gaps and challenges still left. At last, the paper provides recommendations to CSOs, government, business and ADB as well as other development partners to promote CSOs engagement in monitoring implementation of SDGs.

The paper especially emphasizes SDG 16, as it was the starting point for collaboration between IDFI and Georgian government. However, overall the paper refers broadly to institutionalization of SDGs in Georgian context through establishing multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism and nationalization of 2030 Agenda (not limited to SDG 16), where IDFI has a leading role and acts as a "shadow government" – a position which has both its advantages and disadvantages for a CSO.

The key takeaway of Georgian case is that while active role of leading CSO(s) might ensure willingness inside the Government, it is not sufficient for long-term sustainability, and SDGs require cross-sector ownership and coordinated actions for common good, as well as sufficient human and financial resources.

¹ https://idfi.ge/en/page/p/our_history

Introduction

In September 2015, the United Nations, its 193 Member States and civil society unveiled the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Goals, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Post 2015 Development Agenda included intergovernmental negotiations that were followed by the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015. SDGs that were adopted by United Nations Resolution [A/RES/70/1](#) on 25 September 2015, contain 17 goals and 169 related targets aimed at improving issues across three interconnected dimensions – economic, social and environmental.²

The Government of Georgia (GoG) offered high-level political support to prioritize SDGs on a national level. As one of the first countries that actively endorsed the goals, Georgia has advanced ownership of SDGs priorities through the horizontal integration of SDGs indicators into existing national strategies and policy agendas. The Administration of the Government of Georgia (AoG) was identified as the main institution charged with coordinating all matters related to the integration, implementation and monitoring of SDGs on a national level.

In 2017, Georgia institutionalized the SDG Council along with its four Working Groups (WGs) on Social Inclusion, Economic Development, Democratic Governance and Sustainable Energy & Environment Protection. Although still a lot needs to be done, the progress so far would be impossible without active collaboration of AoG with local CSO (IDFI) and donor organizations (SIDA, UNDP). This paper discusses the role played by such collaboration in case of all SDGs, and SDG 16 in particular.

The special focus on SDG 16 derives from the fact that, although crucially important for sustainable development, the Millennium Development Goals did not cover Peace, Justice and Effective Institutions. At the same time, SDG 16 is exactly the area where IDFI started its active watchdog/think tank activities since 2009, and where it has achieved a dual role of criticizing and assisting the Government of Georgia in various good governance-related aspects.

Since the very beginning, IDFI had a unique position in promoting SDGs nationally. On the one hand, since 2009 IDFI has established itself as a reliable and neutral watchdog, monitoring such good governance related issues as access to information, Public Administration Reform, fight

² [Sustainable development knowledge platform, - https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/)

against corruption, inclusive policy-making process, public procurements etc.³ At the same time, the experience in OGP – where the co-founder and director of IDFI is co-chair of the national forum, along with the Ministry of Justice – has given IDFI strong position in terms of collaboration and close partnership with the government.⁴ Such unique position of both carrot and stick approach in regards with the government is pretty unique at least in Georgia, and has its advantages and disadvantages. This position of IDFI also became crucial in promoting SDGs in Georgia.

Background – challenges on the way to SDGs

Since 2015 Georgia has achieved notable progress in the implementation of SDGs. The uniqueness of Georgian case is that from the very first days of implementing SDGs it was done in close partnership with a leading Georgian CSO – Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). Such role of IDFI was crucial not only in terms of accountability, but also from the perspective of practical technical needs of the government.⁵

Before 2016 the Government of Georgia had already expressed its readiness to move forward the Agenda 2030 and SDG 16 was highlighted as one of the most important goals and prioritized its implementation. However, since this process was starting in 2016 very few has been done in terms of translating goals into national system. Moreover, there has not been much of experience accumulated in Georgia since the implementation of Millennium Development Goals was rather weak and less coordinated process. Thus said, Georgia was starting the implementation of SDGs from the blank paper. Therefore, at this stage translation of global SDG 16 indicators into national monitoring system seemed very challenging.

In order to better understand the need for such collaborative approach it is important to keep in mind that starting the implementation of SDGs in Georgia was associated with a number of key challenges – related to **data, institutional setup, ownership and policy linkages** – each outlined below.

First challenge concerned identifying correct indicators for measuring progress on each nationalized target, and making sure that relevant **data** is available and analyzed. Availability of

³ https://idfi.ge/en/page/p/our_fields_of_activity

⁴ <http://www.justice.gov.ge/Ministry/Index/273>

⁵ Project “Facilitate the Landing of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the National Level”, implemented by Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Donor Organization: United Nations Development Program (UNDP) – Governance Reform Fund (GRF) through SIDA – Swedish International Development Agency, see more: https://idfi.ge/en/facilitate_landing_of_2030_agenda_for_sustainable_development_at_national_level

disaggregated and periodically updated statistical information remains to be a significant challenge in terms of evidence-based policy-making in Georgia. Especially, taking into consideration limited scope and quality of the data collected by state agencies.

Furthermore, there was lack of **capacity to monitor and coordinate** reporting process across all government institutions. Since Georgia was not actively engaged in implementation of MDGs, it also did not have sufficient institutional framework and experience for coordinating the process on national level. Thus, one of the crucial needs identified early on was to create a reliable mechanism for coordinating and monitoring the implementation process.

Additionally, the lack of **ownership** posed a significant challenge in terms of implementing SDGs. While the Government of Georgia took upon itself the commitment to SDGs relatively early on, it still required a great deal of input and support from local CSO (mostly limited to IDFI) and donor organizations (especially SIDA and UNDP). Having ensured the ownership on the side of the AoG, the significant challenge remained in terms of inclusion of relevant non-state stakeholders (CSOs, business, academia etc.) in the process. There remains lack of understanding about both the significance of SDGs and their crucial role in the process; it seems that many non-state stakeholders have a false perception of SDGs being solely responsibility of the government, while in reality no government is able to successfully implement all SDGs alone – even if it wanted to. In this sense SDGs is yet another area where old-fashioned top-down “governing” is replaced by more horizontal “governance” – underlining crucial importance of cooperation among all sectors more than ever.

Last but not least, there was a challenge in terms of **linking global SDGs to actual policies in Georgia**, making sure that SDGs do not remain simply “beautiful words” but are actually translated into daily policies of government agencies. The difficulty of Georgian reality is that policy process lacks clear structured framework and is characterized by a complex combination of strategic documents at national level, many of which lack coordination. Therefore, the key challenge in case of SDGs was how to make sure that global goals are translated into local policies, without actually overcomplicating the already complex system.

CSO contribution to SDGs in Georgia: Role of IDFI

The above-identified needs were especially challenging, since AoG lacked both material and human resources to nationalize and implement ambitious SDGs. Therefore, AoG was in need for external assistance in implementation of SDGs. The progress in terms of SDGs in Georgia would

not be possible without active support from SIDA, UNDP and IDFI. The latter has been providing assistance to AoG both in terms of technical capacities (planning, organization) as well as expertise in public administration reform, managing multi-stakeholder policy processes and institutional building.

IDFI's activities in supporting AoG to implement SDGs can be divided into three main areas, and are addressing the needs identified above. **The first objective** of IDFI is to strengthen the data collection and coordination, capacities of leading national SDG mechanisms (the SDG Council Secretariat, the Council itself and the Council's WGs.) An effective Council is critical to successfully implement SDGs in Georgia. Together with its WGs, the Council should ensure the quality and accuracy of data, facilitate effective coordination among government institutions, and review and approve progress reports. For this purpose, IDFI assists AoG in two directions. First, IDFI provides technical and logistical support to the SDG Council Secretariat. Second, to help systemize the Council's work, IDFI ensures that all respective documents necessary for Council meetings are provided and translated.

The second objective of IDFI is to increase the capacity of civil servants to effectively monitor SDG implementation and apply newly-acquired skills in the development of the first progress report on SDGs implementation in Georgia. Moreover, trainings for civil servants on proper use of the EMS will bolster the production of quality reports and will ensure that information added by government agencies is accurate and relevant. This will also aid the SDG Council Secretariat as they coordinate the SDG progress report.

The third objective of IDFI aims to increase awareness on SDGs. To this end, AoG and IDFI use multiple public awareness tools to increase public interest and ownership of SDGs in Georgia. IDFI has identified several target groups based on results from previous awareness-raising activities such as CSOs, private sector, academia and civil servants in relevant public institutions. Roundtable discussions with CSOs coupled with meetings engaging private sector, academia and students secure the participation of those target groups in the work of the SDG Council and its WGs. A final conference scheduled for December 2018 will gather all target groups together with government institutions to discuss the results of SDG implementation and detail future steps. The activities conducted within this objective will establish public ownership of SDGs, thus abiding by the principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

Each cluster of thematic activities, connected to the above-mentioned needs, is discussed separately.

Data: nationalization of SDGs and how to measure progress

The Government of Georgia selected the Administration of the Government (AoG) as the leading entity that is tasked with coordinating SDG matters in Georgia and leading the nationalization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a result of extensive interagency consultations led by AoG, Georgia has fully or partially nationalized all 17 Global Goals⁶. An informal working group led by AoG and composed of representatives of Georgian public institutions has developed the first version of the SDG National Document, which unites all policy directions of the 2030 Agenda that were prioritized by Georgia, and outlines national and international indicators for each nationalized target and assigned responsible institutions for the implementation of each target. The first version of the nationalized SDGs has been adopted by GoG in October 2017, however, it was far from perfect. The indicators and data sources of nationalized targets as outlined in the original document were especially weak, in some cases making it virtually impossible to measure any progress on SDGs. Furthermore, although the SDG Matrix did cover all 17 Goals, it only covered about half of possible targets, and there was not enough time and space for discussion of nationalization of the remainder non-nationalized targets.

As highlighted above, the AoG and other responsible government institutions lack the capacity to generate and analyze relevant data for the implementation of SDGs. Moreover, the Council and its WGs are, in their present state, functioning solely as platforms for review—limited to evaluating the general progress of government institutions on SDG-related issues. Starting from next year, however, the production of monitoring reports will call for the Council and its WGs to expand their current functions and assume a key role in data collection and analysis. This will necessitate expert involvement in each of the WGs to ensure that WGs are adequately equipped to carry out effective data collection and analysis.

With this in mind IDFI has employed Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) expert, who is closely cooperating with relevant stakeholders (mostly state representatives) in order to (a) improve indicators and data sources of each target and (b) discuss possibility of nationalization of those

⁶ Note: at the initial stage out of 17 Global Goals, 169 targets and 244 global indicators, Georgia has prioritized 17 Goals, 98 targets and 204 indicators. At the moment the document of nationalized SDGs is undergoing consultations and the final number of nationalized SDG targets will be available in October 2018.

targets that have not been nationalized so far. M&E expert works closely with civil servants to provide consultancy on data collection and analysis.

Talking specifically about SDG 16, IDFI participated in a UNDP pilot initiative designed to support six countries (El Salvador, Georgia, Indonesia, South Africa, Tunisia and Uruguay) in translating the global SDG16 indicators into a country-owned monitoring system that is supported by relevant and meaningful governance, peace and security measures; As part of this project, metadata sheets for each national supplementary indicator were developed with the help of IDFI. Metadata sheets clearly outline the rationale, method of computation, limitations and recommended frequency of data collection. Such metadata sheets were highlighted as essential complements to the summary indicator scorecards to ensure that national SDG16 indicators are clearly communicated to both data producers and data users, as well as the broader public.⁷

In addition to the Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the SDG Implementation presented at UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) in September 2016⁸, the GoG is committed to producing a national monitoring report on SDG implementation progress in Georgia. Reports will be formulated based on the information and data accumulated through the national Electronic Monitoring System (EMS) for SDGs (explained in more details below) and provided by responsible government institutions. The progress reports will include specific data on individual goals and targets and will be measured against national indicators. The first progress report is to be produced in 2018 with crucial assistance from IDFI's M&E expert who will provide both technical and data-related consultation and input for the report.

Assuring accuracy of the data accumulated throughout the implementation and monitoring process of SDGs is another priority for the GoG. As the UNDP Pilot Monitoring Report⁹ demonstrated, the “real test” is to start collecting data that will measure nationalized SDG indicators.

Speaking particularly about SDG 16, analysis of Georgian SDG National Document demonstrates that for Goal 16 there are two types of data sources – administrative data and data produced by international organizations. Currently, the nationalized Agenda does not include other forms of

⁷ Monitoring to Implement Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Pilot Initiative of National-level Monitoring of SDG16, United Nations Development Programme, 2017, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/Monitoring%20to%20Implement%20SDG16_Pilot%20Initiative.pdf

⁸ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/georgia>

⁹ Monitoring to Implement Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, Pilot Initiative of National-level Monitoring of SDG16, United Nations Development Programme, 2017, http://www.undp.org/content/dam/norway/undp-ogc/documents/Monitoring%20to%20Implement%20SDG16_Pilot%20Initiative.pdf

supplementary data that might be relevant for contextualizing SDG 16. Such data can be produced, for example, by civil society and can help understand how specific targets are implemented. These targets range from reduction of violence to promotion of rule of law, reduction of corruption and fight against organized crime.

The project implemented by IDFI has laid ground for institutionalization of a system of scorecards and national metadata in the monitoring system. If global metadata forms were only used for global SDG indicators, it was within the scope of the UNDP pilot project when Georgia adopted metadata forms for nationalized indicators. Metadata forms are used to provide detailed information about the indicator itself, what it measures, which layers of disaggregation it offers, methodology of collection, frequency of publication, source, etc.

In addition to examining SDG 16 targets and proposing recommendations for complementary and supplementary indicators, AoG and IDFI have conducted a qualitative assessment of each indicator through a system of scorecards, which aimed to analyze whether indicators have national policy implications, aggregation methodologies based on international standards, levels of disaggregation, etc.

Institutional Setup: getting organized around SDGs

Throughout 2016 and 2017, the Government of Georgia has made significant effort to set up a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism for SDGs and has advanced the transposition of the 2030 Agenda into the national policy context. As mentioned before, due to lack of experience during MDGs, Georgian government faced an additional challenge in creating a functional institutional system supporting implementation of SDGs.

The implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is facilitated through the Sustainable Development Goals Council, which was formally adopted through the Ordinance of the Prime Minister of Georgia, on May 2 2017.¹⁰ The Council was established within the auspices of the Public Administration Reform Council, which was transformed into the Public Administration Reform and Sustainable Development Goals Council through the Decree of the Prime Minister. The detailed functioning of the SDGs Council was elaborated in its Terms of Reference (ToR) submitted and approved by the Council on its first meeting on October 24, 2017. In addition to its existing functions related to public administration, the Council gained the core

¹⁰ https://idfi.ge/en/nationalization_of_sustainable_development_goal_16_in_georgia

function to oversee the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Georgia. The ToR of the Council grants it following functions:

- Coordination of interagency issues associated with the implementation of SDGs;
- Adoption of decisions on updating and extending SDGs, SDG indicators, and the SDG national document;
- Continue to incorporate SDGs into Georgia's national policies

Establishment and oversight of relevant working groups to support the strategic planning, integrated implementation, and effective monitoring of assigned SDGs and related thematic fields, etc.

The Council is chaired by the Head of the Administration of the Government of Georgia and co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and reports directly to the Prime Minister. The meetings of the Council take place at least once a year. The Policy Analysis, Strategic Planning and Coordination Department of the Administration of the Government serves as the Secretariat of the Council and provides analytical and technical support to its operation. The Council is composed of ministries and other government agencies; however, it also allows for a possibility for the participation of representatives of UN agencies, EU delegation, non-governmental organizations, business associations and academia, without voting rights.

To support the functioning of the Council, four thematic SDG Working Groups have been established – Social Inclusion, Economic Development, Democratic Governance and Sustainable Energy and Environmental Protection and. With the support of UNDP, AoG prepared Terms of Reference (ToR) for each working group. These ToRs outline the mandate and responsibilities of the Working Group, its structure and composition. Together with SDG 5 and 10, SDG 16 falls within the competence of the Democratic Governance Working Group. As stipulated by the ToR, the responsibilities of this Working Group are to:

- Ensure the efficient implementation of assigned SDGs.
- Make informed recommendations to relevant stakeholders on key policy priorities.
- Incorporate knowledge-sharing mechanisms that can be utilized by the Working Group to advance the integrated implementation of SDGs.
- Ensure the integration of SDGs into national policy planning system via incorporating the SDG targets into existing or prospective National Strategies and Action Plans.

- Provide feedback, guidance and relevant insight in the drafting of Georgia's Voluntary National Review on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.
- Create effective mechanisms to successfully monitor and evaluate assigned SDGs.

In order to make sure that these institutions are functional, IDFI provides technical and organizational support to AoG in terms of planning the scope and calendar of meetings, providing gap analysis and recommendations on the format, organizing the venue and managing invitations etc. As of July 2018, three out of four introductory Working Group meetings have been conducted, with the fourth scheduled for the end of the month. The SDG Council will gather for the second time in October 2018, and will present the very first national progress report on SDGs in Georgia. SDG Council oversees policy decisions and is the highest platform on SDGs in Georgia. The Working Groups (comprised of civil servants, as well as relevant representatives of international organizations, NGOs and business) are aimed to become the most functional institutions, that should target specific thematic areas and will be charged with coordinating the work of various bodies, compiling content and data from relevant institutions, and incorporating the SDG targets into existing or prospective National Strategies and Action Plans. With such ambitious goal in mind, it is crucial that Working Groups are meeting on a regular basis, with clear focus and format.

One of the most important achievements so far is the establishment of an Electronic Monitoring System for Sustainable Development Goals, also created within the framework of IDFI project. The complex system will enable AoG and lead government institutions to report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through a web-based monitoring system. The system has back-end and front-end parts, intended for various levels of users and is overall managed by the Administration of the Government of Georgia (AoG). The back-end system is used for public entities responsible for each local target, and enables them to report their progress directly through the system. The back-end has multiple functions, such as: managing global/local goals, global/local targets, data sources and responsible entities; reporting progress; compiling overall reports (annual, ongoing, for a specific period etc.). The structure of the back-end system is as follows: (1) Global Goal (2) Georgia Adjusted Goal (3) Global Indicator (4) Georgia Adjusted Indicator (Target) (5) Baseline Indicator (6) Data Source (7) Responsible Entity. The entire SDG Matrix (the working document including such data as all nationalized SDG goals, targets, indicators, data sources and responsible public entities) and all related documents (including scorecard and metadata forms, as well as linkages of SDGs to the state policy system) will be integrated in the EMS. This will make SDG implementation and monitoring process smooth and will help the AoG to effectively and in timely manner coordinate the process. All the information related to the implementation of SDGs will be

provided by the government institutions through the EMS. As of August 2018, the development of EMS back-end system is completed, with testing and training of civil servants scheduled for September 2018. This last aspect is of particular importance, as by defining 1-2 key civil servants in charge of SDGs, AoG plans to achieve higher level of sustainability and coherence in the monitoring and reporting process. Once the National SDG Document is incorporated in the monitoring software, the administrator will assign tasks to every lead agency, which will annually report on the implementation of each indicator. In addition, the system will simplify the preparation of the Voluntary National Review reports by providing ready-made visualizations on the implementation of each target, and simplifying analysis through aggregating all relevant data (both quantitative and qualitative) in one system. While the technical part of the system is finished, the content that is intended for its back-end still undergoes consultations among state and non-state stakeholders, and thus EMS is still not used in practice.

The front-end website is intended for all interested parties and is publicly available. The webpage connected to the EMS will ensure publicity of all information, including monitoring reports, SDG Council meetings and other relevant updated. As a result, on the one hand EMS will simplify the work of government institutions and help AoG in coordinating the process and on the other hand will provide comprehensive information to the public and raise awareness on SDGs. Public launch of the connected webpage is planned for December 2018.

In order to be able to share this experience with other interested countries, at first Georgia needs to test and use this system in practice. In case of interest IDFI will be happy to discuss details for replication of the system.

Ownership: who is in charge of SDGs?

In the very beginning, Georgian government agencies seemed reluctant and could not see their role in the process of nationalization SDGs. As it was mentioned previously, Georgia was taking first steps in implementing global agenda, and hence there was lack of experience and awareness among public institutions on SDGs. Thus, it was needed to target institutions and engage them in the process, otherwise it would have created serious problems in terms of generating data and hindering whole process of implementation and monitoring. Partnership with AoG is of crucial importance, but other public institutions also required additional information and motivation. Together with the AoG and experts, IDFI conducted several workshops and targeted meetings, which led to raising interest of the institutions and gradually involving them in the process.

However, engaging state institutions was only one part of the entire puzzle – as effective implementation of SDGs is impossible without active participation of all sectors and relevant stakeholders – including business, academia and CSOs.

As part of the awareness-raising campaign on SDGs, IDFI together with other implementing partners conducted public lectures in 10 municipalities, launched an essay and visualization contest, carried out workshops for civil servants, CSOs and the media, held a meeting with private sector representatives, and hosted the international SDG 16 Plus Forum. Despite the considerable work conducted to raise awareness on SDG-related international and domestic developments, the lack of meaningful involvement among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the private sector and academia remains a persistent challenge. A more targeted awareness-raising approach is important at this stage to encourage greater contributions from the aforementioned groups.

It is imperative to highlight the lack of capacity of CSOs involved in the implementation and monitoring processes of SDGs. Despite public lectures carried out across regions and a workshop conducted as part of the 16+ Forum, CSO involvement in SDGs processes remains low. Additionally, limited awareness among CSOs contributed to a low turnout and participation in the work of the Council. Only two CSOs attended the first Council meeting on 24 October 2017, one of which was IDFI. In order to increase public ownership of national activities related to the SDGs, it is vital to empower specific target groups, like CSOs, with sufficient information and skills that will eventually translate into tangible input. Thus, it is especially significant to engage CSOs working on the rights of various marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities and vulnerable women, as well as CSOs working on social and economic affairs, environmental issues, education, etc. This inclusive approach will promote the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’.

Moreover, since the private sector has demonstrated low-levels of involvement in the SDG process despite its corporate social responsibility policies, a more targeted approach to engage the private sector in SDG implementation will be crucial. Furthermore, fostering greater awareness on SDGs in educational institutions will be imperative for engaging youth. To this end, members of academia, together with the students, must be strategically informed.

Policy Linkages: translating SDGs into actions

As noted above, the real challenge in terms of SDGs is to make sure that the global goals are effectively translated into national/local policies. It was decided with AoG that instead of created an additional overarching SDG strategy, more helpful – and more challenging – would be to map all

strategic documents and link them with SDGs. This is the main responsibility of a policy expert hired by IDFI – who is closely working with civil servants in terms of analyzing existing policy documents, creating linkages between SDG targets and these documents, and providing analysis and recommendations for any gaps identified in the process. The analysis, which should be available by October 2018, will be a useful guideline for GoG to plan development of further strategic documents and make sure that these are in line with global and nationalized SDGs.

Lessons Learned

One of the ways to understand inclusive policy-making process, is to analyze various levels of inclusion – informing, consulting, dialogue and partnership.¹¹ Informing is one-way process when non-state stakeholders are provided with essential information about functioning of the administrative bodies, such as schedule of meetings, or administrative costs. Consulting is more advanced, as it implies asking for opinion from non-state stakeholders, however it is still quite limited as it usually takes place either before or after the decision-making process itself. Dialogue in this sense indicates active involvement in the decision-making process along with state agencies. And lastly partnership is when non-state stakeholders provide such capacity that is essential for functioning of the state institutions, and thus become close counterparts in the selected policy area. With these levels of participation in mind, in case of SDG IDFI is clearly at the stage of partnership, and has established itself as a sort of “shadow government” in some cases. Although no decisions can be made without active daily consultation with AoG, at the end of the day IDFI provides essential services to plan and implement SDG-related activities, especially those connected with data collection and monitoring, policy linkages with strategic documents, institutional setup for SDG implementation and awareness raising among broader stakeholders.

Such position has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, since IDFI has been closely monitoring policymaking process for years, and has considerable expertise in public administration reform, the willingness of AoG to partner with IDFI in this global initiative adds credibility to the entire process.

¹¹ More about levels of participation: Arnstein, Sherry R.(1969) 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation', Journal of the American Planning, Association, 35: 4, 216 — 224

<http://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/Arnstein%20ladder%201969.pdf>

On the other hand, an important lesson learned during the process (as well as during Open Government Partnership (OGP), where IDFI is also closely partnering with GoG)¹², is that close partnership in one area does not necessarily guarantee even access to information in other areas. A good example for this is the case of Ministry of Justice (and its entire system), the main counterpart of IDFI within OGP, which still failed to provide IDFI with public information about administrative costs. As a result, in its annual rating of access to information IDFI had to name the Ministry of Justice together with 12 of its subordinate bodies as the least open public institution in Georgia in 2016.¹³¹⁴

Furthermore, being in close partnership with a government institution does have its obvious limitations and disadvantages in terms of project implementation. In contrast with other initiatives where a CSO has more leverages to plan the timeline and activities, providing capacities and technical assistance to the government necessarily implies being overly dependent on the tight and often unpredictable schedule, frequent changes in plans and especially concern about changes in the leading counterparts. Such conditions require special flexibility and understanding both on the side of implementing CSO and the donor organizations.

Last but not least, as the close collaboration with the government in case of SDGs has shown, there are much more serious systemic challenges when it comes to quality dialogue with non-state stakeholders, and in the absence of clear frameworks enabling engagement of relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process, active partnership with even such a leading NGO as IDFI will not be sufficient to change the overall efficiency of the policy process. In this case, while IDFI might be able to show what it means to plan and implement policies alongside the Government, much more is needed both from the state and non-state stakeholders to make sure that policymaking process is inclusive and takes into consideration positions and arguments of all counterparts. SDGs have the potential to become such unifying framework in case of Georgia, but as mentioned above, the success of this initiative will largely depend on the ability of various sectors for effective collaboration and improved governance, as opposed to top-down governing by the AoG or any other administrative body.

¹² <http://www.justice.gov.ge/Ministry/Index/273>

¹³ Access to Public Information in Georgia - 2016 Report, <https://idfi.ge/en/2016-idfi-foi-report>

¹⁴ In 2017 there was some progress in case of Ministry of Justice, which was named as the most closed public institution in 2016. The 0% indicator in 2016 was improved by 74,9% in 2017. See more: https://idfi.ge/en/2017_open_and_closed_public_institutions_in_georgia

When talking about SDGs, it is hard to distinguish and prioritize among the global goals, as all are essential for sustainable development. However, IDFI believes that SDG 16, and in particular engagement of the youth, is the most crucial factor that can guarantee any effort for increased sustainability. Today we have the largest global youth population in history, however recent studies show that many of them are skeptical about democratic institutions and political actors.¹⁵ At the same time, they are the most informed and connected generation that we have had.

Therefore our biggest concern should be not simply partnership of one or two CSOs with the government, but making sure that young generation upholds principles of SDGs and plays an important role in SDG implementation. How to ensure this? This is a rather challenging question, as it connects two crucial aspects – inclusive policymaking on the one hand, and the youth – on the other.

Georgia is still struggling with inclusive policymaking process, and the youth is not an exception. On the contrary, the youth is still vastly underrepresented in decision-making process, even on youth related issues.

If we take for example SDG Goal 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels – and specifically focus on youth, this is the baseline we have in Georgia:

- Only 10.9% of youth take part in deciding on youth related issues (2013 study);

Youth are not actively engaged in public life in Georgia. Their majority (90.4%) is of the opinion that they have the right to take part in deciding on youth related issues

In 2013 only 10.9% took actual participation in the decision-making process on youth related issues.

Furthermore, The share of youth program activities in the adjusted Ministry of Education and Science budget is 6.01% (2015)

When we talk about lack of inclusive policy making – it is similar to famous chicken and egg dilemma, as it is hard to understand which should come first – guarantees for engagement from the state, or activism from the society (and youth especially). That is why, if we approach

¹⁵ E.g. <https://www.dw.com/en/study-reveals-half-of-young-europeans-are-skeptical-about-democracy/a-38689788>

government representatives (e.g. in a training), they tend to blame the society, and vice versa. The truth is of course far from such black-white division and much more complex.

From institutional perspective in Georgia there are very few legal guarantees for non-state actors to engage in policy process, especially at early stages¹⁶ (e.g. before draft is initiated at the Parliament and becomes public).

Access to information about planned or ongoing policy changes is extremely difficult and there are no legal requirements to ensure prior consultations even with stakeholders influenced by policies.

Dialogue with non-state actors is more an exception than a rule, and largely depends on the will of particular politicians and involvement of international organizations.

Even in the rare cases when attempts to dialogue are made, the process often lacks such crucial aspects as justifications of refused comments, direct engagement in decision-making process, sufficient informing and mapping of relevant stakeholders, sufficient time for submitting comments etc.¹⁷

On the other side of the spectrum, Georgian civil society still struggles to use even those limited civic rights that it has, and the youth is no exception.

Here are some examples from recent public surveys:

- Only 1% of population has ever approached the Parliament to request public information,¹⁸ - youth is only slightly more active than the population overall. Still, 98% of youth have never approached the Parliament to request public information.¹⁹
- The majority of youth (79%) do not know that they have the right to attend plenary sessions and committee hearings in the Parliament²⁰

¹⁶ Lovitt, J. 2016. "Civil Participation in Decision Making in the Eastern Partnership Countries - Part One: Laws and Policies", accessed on 29.01.18 at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/partnerships/7401-civil-participation-in-decision-making-in-the-eastern-partnership-countries-part-one-laws-and-policies.html>

¹⁷ Avalishvili, L., Iakobidze, T., Merebashvili, N., Kevkhishvili, A. (2017). "Public-Private Dialogue at the Initial Stage of Draft Law Development". Accessed on 16.01.18 at: https://idfi.ge/en/dialogue_between_public_and_private_sector_at_early_stage_of_law_initiation

¹⁸ Caucasus Barometer, 2016. accessed on 28.01.18 at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ti2016ge/FOIREQ/>

¹⁹ Caucasus Barometer, 2016. accessed on 28.01.18 at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ti2016ge/FOIREQ-by-AGEGROUP/>

²⁰ Caucasus Barometer, 2016. accessed on 28.01.18 at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ti2016ge/KNWATT-by-AGEGROUP/>

- The majority of youth (52%) perceive the Government as parent as opposed to an employee²¹

A complex issue like this cannot have one simple solution. Since this is a chicken-egg dilemma, the approach should also be comprehensive. From the perspective of public sector, additional legal guarantees are needed for ensuring more inclusive policymaking from earliest stages. SDG has the potential to promote understanding of such standards in policymaking among decision-makers. However, financial and technical assistance of international organizations like ADB, UNDP and SIDA are essential especially for small developing democracies like Georgia.

As for the CSOs – and the civil society that these organizations represent, more civic education and building practical capacities is needed. Most importantly, the citizens should be shown, that active participation is not just a beautiful democratic term, but is essential for effectively solving their own daily problems.

Recommendations

In a way, SDGs are a unique global exercise in collaborative policymaking and governance, which implies active role of various sectors: the government, civil society, academia, business, international organizations etc. The very nature of the concept of sustainability is based upon the belief in coordinated actions for common good. In the modern complex world of information technologies and globalized market, no single government alone is able to overcome the numerous challenges we are facing today globally or locally – be it connected with poverty, education, health or institutions. Therefore, while nothing new, SDGs underline once more the crucial importance of cross-sector cooperation and open dialogue. Although still a developing democracy with many social and economic challenges, Georgia has established itself as an important regional leader in governance reform and there is significant expertise both within the public sector and civil society. This last part is devoted to some of the main recommendations on how the lessons learned from Georgian experience could be applied and implemented in other countries worldwide, by each sector.

CSOs

²¹ Caucasus Barometer, 2016. accessed on 28.01.18 at: <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017ge/GOVTROL-by-AGEGROUP/>

As Georgian experience has shown, many positive reforms would not have taken place unless there was constant bottom-up pressure and healthy criticism from civil society. While the institutional framework for inclusive policymaking is far from perfect in Georgia, the recent experience with SDGs underlines how the Government is in need for partnership and assistance from civil society, and to what extent the success of any endeavor – especially as ambitious, as SDGs – depends on the ability of the government and civil society to find common ground and assist each other, despite possible differences in opinions and positions.

In order to engage in monitoring of SDGs, CSOs need access to relevant information (including but not limited to baseline and target indicators, data sources for each SDG local target, the data used to measure progress on each target etc.). Furthermore, the role of CSOs is irreplaceable in providing alternative, non-state data, such as surveys as indicators to measure progress on SDGs. Such alternative data can even be combined in shadow reports on SDGs, providing a more non-biased vision about the progress on each global goal.

Government

One of the key challenges in Georgian case was to make sure that the government institutions have sufficient ownership to implement ambitious SDGs. Finding reliable counterparts (especially taking into consideration frequent political/administrative changes) is crucial for success of such comprehensive goals. However, making sure that the Government understands and is willing to undertake these goals is not sufficient if it does not have resources – both human and financial – to include SDGs into its policy system.

There are numerous ways in which Government can promote more engagement of CSOs in monitoring of SDGs. First of all, as all engagement starts from access to information, it is crucial that all data and documents related to monitoring SDGs is proactively available open data format and additional clarifications are provided upon request. Furthermore, while CSOs are generally informed about the process and provided with updates about ongoing progress, more effort is needed to not only inform and consult them, but directly engage them into decision-making process on data sources, relevant local targets and indicators.

Business

The role of business in achieving sustainable development is substantial, as many activities of private sector could be harmful for long-term sustainability. The foremost way for private sector to

promote CSOs engagement in monitoring SDGs by providing CSOs with comprehensive data about contribution of business to implementation of along with sharing expertise on measuring indicators, especially where there are gaps in the data collected by government institutions.

ADB and other Development Partners

Last but not least, international organizations have a crucial role in making sure that the overall quality and comparability of nationally created data is ensured. As Georgian experience has shown, international organizations are especially irreplaceable when the government is in need for technical and organizational assistance, as well as a reliable counterpart in negotiations with various stakeholders.

In order to promote engagement of CSOs in monitoring SDGs, ADB and other development partners can provide significant support. First of all, lack of financial sustainability of local CSOs, coupled with decreasing interest of international donor organizations, lack of social responsibility of business as well as social problems often undermine long-term stability of monitoring endeavors. Furthermore, as the experience has shown, international organizations are often key to ensuring credibility of the entire process, and their engagement can be play a vital role in ensuring that the Government does not lose interest and ownership of implementing SDGs.