



The Community Sector and the SDGs

Discussion paper

Written by Teri Flint, Hui E! Intern March–April 2018

Executive Summary

Hui E! Community Aotearoa is committed to strengthening the community and voluntary sector in Aotearoa. As a part of this work Hui E! was an active member of the steering committee behind the New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit 2018. Hui E! firmly believes that the community sector, and the wider civil society, will be fundamental in the implementation and delivery of the SDGs in New Zealand. The purpose of this discussion paper is to assess the SDGs from a community sector perspective. This paper will discuss obstacles, barriers and problems for community sector adoption of the SDGs, as well as opportunities or pathways forwards for the community sector and SDG implementation.

The main findings are:

Community sector organisations are aware of the SDGs and are interested in them but over the last two years felt like there was little they could do without clear government direction. Some community sector organisations do not see a 'top down' international framework as being relevant or helpful for their grassroots work. Community sector organisations have also highlighted that the SDG framework lacks an indigenous perspective and feel that this diminishes the value of Agenda 2030. SDG progress is stalled by a lack of awareness in the New Zealand public. The community sector must not only work to raise public awareness, but also ensure that the community sector understands the framework and can translate it into their work. The community sector, and the public sector for that matter, have been reluctant or unable to link their existing work or priorities to the SDG framework. However, community sector organisations which do see the SDGs as relevant to their organisation's priorities cannot effectively contribute to SDG implementation because there is not currently an enabling environment for their participation.

The community sector needs to capitalise upon the change in the New Zealand political landscape in order to take ownership over SDG implementation. The community sector needs to stop assigning blame and lamenting government inaction. The community sector is uniquely placed to raise public awareness and drive grassroots action and should use what resources it has to begin to lead action on Agenda 2030. Civil society needs to prepare itself to be an effective stakeholder and partner in SDG implementation. A 'collective' civil society platform would enhance civil society's power by pooling resources and voices, enable the sector to effectively partner with other sectors and create civil society collaboration/prevent duplication. The New Zealand government needs to complement this effort by formalising civil society SDG engagement and commit to strengthening the sector so that civil society organisations can act as an equal partner in SDG implementation. The SDG framework emphasizes accountability, however how that is ensured at a government and civil society level remains unclear. Data collection will play a crucial role in ensuring accountability and transparency in reporting. The community sector must be involved in making New Zealand data collection legitimate and representative, as well as accessible for the public and useful for analysis of New Zealand SDG progress.

The 2018 SDG Summit in Wellington, New Zealand demonstrated that there is cross-sector interest in beginning to plan and take action on SDG implementation in New Zealand. It is essential that the community sector helps to build upon this renewed interest to initiate SDG action in New Zealand. The achievement of the SDGs will require bold, innovative and collaborative action and we must start designing these strategies now- together- so that New Zealand is not left behind in a global campaign to 'leave no one behind'.

The discussion paper will be framed by the following questions:

1. Why is community sector engagement with the SDGs essential? Are civil societies engaged in this process?
2. Why has the community sector not prioritised the SDGs?
3. Why are the public, civil society and the government not connecting to the SDGs? How can we connect them?
4. How can the community sector take ownership for the SDGs?
5. How can New Zealand civil society groups prepare themselves to be effective partners for SDG implementation?
6. Why is the issue of accountability central to the SDG framework?
7. What role does data collection play in Agenda 2030? How can we, the community sector, contribute to this?

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which encompasses a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. The 2030 Agenda serves as a universal, indivisible agenda that promises to 'leave no one behind'. The SDGs were designed to build upon the previous work of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which ended in 2015 and embody the post-2015 development agenda. The post-2015 agenda recognised the limitations of the MDGs and purposefully created the SDGs to be 'transformational'. A business as usual approach will not deliver these goals by 2030, the SDGs will require highly integrative, collaborative and innovative solutions to be successful.

The SDGs broadly reflect the same goals as the MDGs, however they have a much stronger focus on climate change and sustainable development as a reflection of the major issues debated in our world today. The SDGs view development in terms of sustainability through three dimensions- the economic, social and environmental. The SDGs have consequences for developing *and* developed nations, underscoring their universality and relevance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to stimulate action in five critical areas, for people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. The 17 SDGs are as follows,



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development. Accessed from:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2016/06/SDGs-Social-Inclusion.jpeg>

Reporting for the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development created a follow-up and review framework to oversee the implementation of the Agenda to ensure that 'no one is left behind'. Member states are encouraged to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national

levels, which are country-led and country-driven" (Agenda 2030, paragraph 79). The follow-up and review process is voluntary and country-led as it "recognises different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities" (Agenda 2030, paragraph 74a). Each country decides on the scope of their reviews and how the findings will be presented. The high-level political forum (HLPF) has the central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. Voluntary, state-led reviews are to be conducted by both developed and developing countries and should involve multiple stakeholders. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are designed to "facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals" according to the Division for Sustainable Development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Since the advent of the 2030 Agenda in 2015 22 countries voluntarily reported at the 2016 HLPF Conference, this grew to 43 countries in 2017, with an expected 47 countries volunteering to report in 2018.

'Ownership' and the SDGs

Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals are an ambitious project adopted by UN member states, and key to their success is the notion of 'national ownership'. The only way the SDGs can be successfully implemented is if member states are willing, and have the capacity, to readily assume ownership of this development project. National ownership is fundamental to the SDG framework because action on, and review of, the goals is entirely voluntary and state led. Agenda 2030 determined that reviews were to be voluntary and state-led in order to recognise that each country has its own unique context and that a one-size-fits-all-approach would isolate countries and be ineffective. Ownership will not be created if national governments and stakeholders are told to abandon their national priorities and follow an external blueprint. National governments need to adopt the goals they know, understand, find logical and align these with national priorities by creating, or matching existing government structures with responsibility for implementation. Agenda 2030 attempts to balance international goals with national realities. National execution of the SDGs is essential as this allows national partners/stakeholders to be involved in strategic and financial decision making. National execution also means that governments are accountability to the international community - but more importantly to their civil societies and citizens. Ownership needs to be taken up at the government level, but also on the community level.

When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015 New Zealand welcomed the adoption. The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time H.E. Mr Murray McCully assured that New Zealand "will play its full part" in the delivery of "positive, timely results". The New Zealand government assured its contribution to the achievement of the goals and highlighted the key issues for New Zealanders in relation to the SDGs: "growing the economy, improving living standards, health, and education, creating jobs, increasing the supply of affordable housing, encouraging women in leadership, keeping our communities safe, and protecting our environment" (Hon. Paula Bennett Minister for Climate Change Issues, 2016). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs determined that the SDGs will be implemented in New Zealand through a cross-government and cross-sector effort, and that New Zealand will influence global policy through its international leadership on key SDG issues. In the two years following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and 17 SDGs the New Zealand government had done little but express its support for the SDGs and not begun the process of nationally implementing the SDGs. This appears to have changed under the new Labour government. Although there is still no official confirmation yet on New Zealand SDG strategy, or when it will be conducting its VNR, this government has begun the complicated process

of building the SDGs into its structure and functioning. The SDGs were written into the supply and confidence deal made between the Greens Party and Labour and are, as such, embedded at the heart of this government. At this stage it appears that Ministry of Finance and Statistics New Zealand are working closely together and leading the governments SDG strategy, however this has not been officially confirmed by the government. There are still some lingering concerns across sectors that in order for the SDGs to withstand the pressure of election cycles, the SDGs should be the responsibility of an independent body (i.e. an SDG Commissioner) outside of government control. Overall, the SDG Summit demonstrated that the SDGs are a priority for this government and the goals very much align with the aim of this government to be transformational.

There can be a tendency of first world countries, such as New Zealand, to focus on development in terms of the foreign aid they supply rather than in terms of internal/national development. This is a lingering sentiment from the Millennium Development Goals period, wherein developed countries did not focus internally upon development and instead were primarily involved in aiding development across the developing countries. The MDGs were not something that the developed nations had to focus on, it was largely considered a project for the developing world. The transition to the SDGs has dramatically changed this, however many developed countries are struggling to understand how Agenda 2030 applies to them and what their role in this new framework will be. Whilst opting to adopt an international approach to development affirms New Zealand's international standing this approach to development can lead to national issues being ignored or overlooked. This is the space that the community sector operates in, the role of the community sector is to support the New Zealand community/ public. This is why it is essential that civil society and the community sector are considered key stakeholders in SDG implementation.

Purpose

Hui E! firmly believes that the community sector, and the wider civil society, will be fundamental in the implementation of the SDGs in New Zealand. The purpose of this discussion paper is to assess the SDGs from a community sector perspective. As such, the paper will discuss obstacles, barriers and problems for community sector adoption of the SDGs, as well as opportunities or pathways forwards for the community sector and SDG implementation.

This discussion paper will be asking the following questions:

1. Why is community sector engagement with the SDGs essential? Are civil societies engaged in this process?
2. Why has the community sector not prioritised the SDGs?
3. Why are the public, civil society and the government not connecting to the SDGs? How can we connect them?
4. How can the community sector take ownership for the SDGs?
5. How can New Zealand civil society groups prepare themselves to be effective partners for SDG implementation?
6. Why is the issue of accountability central to the SDG framework?
7. What role does data collection play in Agenda 2030? How can we, the community sector, contribute to this?

1. Why is community sector engagement with the SDGs essential? Are civil societies engaged in this process?

The 2030 Agenda identifies that collaboration with, and the participation of, civil society is key to the implementation of the SDGs. Goal 17 of the SDGs asserts that sustainable development should be complemented by "by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries" (SDG 17.16). Partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector need to be characterised by a shared vision and shared goals at each level of implementation- local, national, regional and global. Countries should "encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships" (SDG 17.17). Despite this emphasis upon civil society engagement there has been little concerted efforts of governments to build or improve partnerships with civil society.

In 2018 the Canadian Council for International Co-operation published an independent assessment of the 2017 voluntary national review reports that were submitted to the HLPF titled 'Progressing National SDGs Implementation'. This assessment found that member states still need to "formalise non-state actor engagement in government structures to realise the 2030 Agenda" (Independent Report, 2017: ii). When a country begins to develop a VNR report this independent assessment recommended that the 'best practice' would be for national targets and indicators to be selected through an inclusive consultation with local stakeholders. The independent assessment further recommends that governments actively solicit verbal and written inputs from all stakeholders as well as providing stakeholders the opportunity to review and comment on the first draft of a VNR. The countries, which submitted VNRs in 2017 asserted that they were consulting with stakeholders. However, the independent assessment concludes that the VNR reports provided inadequate details on the terms of this consultation process, nor do the VNR reports provide examples of stakeholder contributions beyond consultation.

The independent assessment found that "Reports also do not address the enabling environment for civil society (and the increasingly shrinking space that is available to civil society organisations around the world), nor other challenges that civil society organisations face in contributing to the 2030 Agenda; rather they highlight specific initiatives from civil society," (Independent Report, 2017: v). A report compiled by Together2030 found that in a survey group only one in four civil society respondents in VNR countries were aware of their governments process to prepare the VNR, and of the same group over 1/3 of respondents did not consider that civil society and stakeholders would be able to participate, or did not know whether they could (Together2030, 2017: 2). Civil society groups possess interest, expertise, resources and networks that can assist the achievement of the SDGs, however civil society cannot effectively contribute these resources if there is not an enabling environment for their participation. If national governments are serious about achieving the 2030 Agenda, and SDG 17 in particular, they need to seriously re-evaluate their existing partnerships with civil society and key community stakeholders, revitalise these relationships and find ways to formalise this engagement during SDG implementation and VNR review processes.

2. Why has the community sector not prioritised the SDGs?

The community sector is interested in, and passionate about the SDGs but does not have the capacity or the resources to enact the SDGs on its own, government leadership here essential. The community sector- and for that matter the broader public of New Zealand- has still not yet received

a clear or articulated government plan or approach towards implementing the SDGs in New Zealand. There is hope in the community sector about the recent change in the New Zealand political landscape. The Labour/New Zealand First coalition government has prioritised housing, health, education, families and the environment. The Labour government is highly focused upon social policy and has demonstrated an interest in improving the quality of life for New Zealanders, especially the most vulnerable portions of New Zealand's population. It is still early days for the Labour government, but community sector should seize this opportunity to work with or pressure a government which appears to share sector values and priorities.

Even more concerning for the community sector is the lack of awareness of the SDGs amongst the New Zealand public. If the New Zealand public does not understand or desire to see action on the SDGs then there is no incentive for governments to begin work on the SDGs. This is a cyclical problem, without public support governments feel no pressure, but without government action the public will remain largely unaware of Agenda 2030 and the SDG framework. In the absence of a concerted government SDG push, many community sector organisations have placed the SDGs low on their priority agendas so that they can devote their limited resources towards projects, which feel 'achievable'. There is also an assumption within the community sector that SDG implementation is work that 'other people will be doing' as groups do not identify how the SDGs is relevant to their work, or don't have the capacity to pursue SDG work themselves.

Community sector organisations might feel distant from the SDG framework because it is an international framework and as such its implementation can feel very 'top-down'. A community sector organisation working close to the ground can struggle to understand how this framework relates to them. Community sector groups might not relate to a top down, hierarchal approach as it limits opportunities for participation and focuses upon service delivery, not engagement. On the flip side of this, certain civil society groups may already operate according to other important international frameworks, treaties, or conventions and feel that the SDG framework is not as important or relevant compared to the frameworks the currently work under. The main issue here is that some community sector organisations are seeing the SDGs as something 'extra', not as something that they are already doing.

There is a portion of community sector groups, which will not wish to prioritise the SDG framework, or might not want to be involved in government partnerships at all. Some organisations pride themselves on being independent from government and would not desire to be in partnership with government or receive government funding for their projects. Community sector groups might be not only resistant to partnerships, but also towards having their work or projects placed under the 'umbrella' of SDG work. A community organisation might feel like they are losing their identity, independence, voice and organisation history by becoming integrated into a broader national project/ SDG plan. Furthermore, groups which identify themselves as independent from government might want to avoid or refuse to have their work being used to benefit government. After all, it was the national government, which agreed to adopt the SDGs, any work done to achieve them is a pat on the back for government, not for the community groups which make progress possible. It is clear that a lack of awareness is not the only reason why existing work is not being linked to SDG progress. There is resistance to the SDGs in the sector, which is much harder to resolve.

Even if we can bridge the gaps between community sector work and the SDG framework, the community sector has stressed that there is still a major gap in the SDG framework: indigenous perspectives. Indigenous peoples and organisations approach the SDGs from a defensive position (the need to protect indigenous rights) and also from a position of expertise, owing to traditional and historical knowledge and culture of sustainable development. Indigenous peoples and

organisations struggle to have a voice in local, national and global arenas, but they will have a fundamental place in sustainable development. Although the SDGs lack an indigenous perspective, some indigenous peoples and groups are making sure they are involved in the SDG progress because they are weary that 'if you are not at the table, you're probably on the menu'. In saying that, some community groups in New Zealand which operate from a Māori perspective feel that there isn't anything relevant in the SDG framework to Māori communities. As such, the SDGs are not considered a priority by these community groups even though their organisations may be indirectly working on the SDGs. The problem with international frameworks like the SDGs is that the messaging around them is generic enough to apply to a variety of contexts and it requires extensive tailoring to suit a national context. In the absence of a New Zealand government assessment or tailoring of the SDGs in New Zealand, there has been no effort to link the Māori perspective to the SDGs. This gap needs to be reconciled.

3. Why are the public, civil society and the government not connecting to the SDGs? How can we connect them?

The public

It is interesting to note that although the SDGs are sometimes called the 'people's goals' awareness and knowledge of the SDGs is limited in the citizenry and there are gaps in public attitude towards the SDGs. National governments across the globe have been slow to enact an action plan for the implementation of the SDGs and this may be the result of lack of pressure from the public who are unaware or do not understand the SDGs.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) compiled findings in June 2017 about 'What People Know and Think About the Sustainable Development Goals'. The main conclusion of the OECD was that only 28-45 percent of people surveyed had heard of the sustainable development goals. The OECD expands upon this, highlighting that 'hearing' about the goals and being aware of them does not mean the same thing as *knowledge* of the goals. One survey conducted by Glocalities across 24 countries found that only 1 in 100 citizens know the SDGs 'very well', 25% of people surveyed knew the SDGs by 'name only'. The news isn't all negative though, the OECD highlights that awareness of the goals is on the rise and is comparatively higher than it was during the time of the Millennium Development Goals. People surveyed from 16 countries demonstrated strong support for "*all* SDGs in *all* countries", placing top priority on eradicating global poverty, ending hunger, and accessing clean water and sanitation. People are interested in and want to engage with the SDGs, as of June 2017 over 10 million people had taken part in an online survey called MyWorld led by the UN and partners, which asks people to select the most important priorities to them to help the UN define its development agenda.

These findings have promoted examinations into why levels of awareness and knowledge of the SDGs is low even though general support for them is high. One of the simplest explanations is that the SDGs are not currently seen by citizens as being relevant to their everyday lives. People support the purpose of SDGs, but they don't have an adequate understanding of the SDG framework, nor how it will impact them. At a HLPF discussion in June 2016 a lead discussant pointed out that "We need to begin by making the Sustainable Development Goals relevant and as close to our countries and people as possible." Whilst the relevance of the SDGs to the public might seem self-evident this isn't the case, and without public awareness the collective journey of Agenda 2030 will be stalled. International frameworks do not often play a direct role in everyday life of citizens, this influence is often more indirect- if it is influential at all. For example, if you speak to people about sustainable

development it is highly likely they will not know about 'Agenda 2030', however if you ask them about equal rights, energy/fuel prices, job opportunities, environmental protection, etc., they will be able to understand and relate to these things. People are aware of the impacts of sustainable development because they are living them, they just don't associate or equate these issues to an international framework they may or may not have heard of. High level, political international frameworks might not be well understood on the ground, but the issues they are trying to address certainly are.

There is a similar problem with climate change issues. Despite scientific consensus regarding the causes of climate change and warnings of its consequences, it is hard for non-specialists, aka the average person, to understand the climate change phenomenon. An issue like climate change is difficult to understand because people assume its effects will be distant in time and space and it is an issue of overwhelming scientific complexity with no easy fix. While public awareness and interest in climate change remains low, national governments are far less pressured to have climate change as a top political priority. Agenda 2030 needs to be aware of this messaging/communication barrier, otherwise the public will continue to dissociate themselves from the SDGs framework and remain disengaged in the process. A dissociated public is unlikely to participate or change their attitudes, behaviour or take self-responsibility for sustainable development.

There are a few pathways forward to resolve the lack of public understanding. In order to combat low levels of awareness amongst the public of the SDGs the community sector can campaign for the inclusion of SDG education in formal education institutions. Education is key to combating low awareness, young people need to be educated about Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The pathway towards youth education directly supports SDG #4, Quality Education, and in particular Target 4.7: "By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development."

This education must take place in primary and secondary schools and could take the form of global citizenship education (GCED). GCED refers to the "responsibility side of globalization" according to Libby Giles, project advisor at the New Zealand Centre for Global Studies, GCED is essential to "help learners to attain a sense of identity (individual, national, regional and global) so that they will be able to participate actively and responsibly with the creation of opportunities as well as the solutions to problems" (Giles, 2016: 4). Although the community sector has little power to sway the make-up of the New Zealand school curriculum, the sector does have the ability to create discussions and interest around the possibility of GCED inclusion. At the moment there are many barriers in the New Zealand schooling system to GCED, however there is an opportunity for creating space in the schooling curriculum for GCED with the ongoing Tomorrow's Schools Review being conducted by the Ministry of Education. The School Review is utilizing a cross-sector advisory panel with all stakeholders, this is a chance for teachers and civil society groups to lobby and raise awareness of the importance of GCED.

Education of SDGs can also take place in universities. Universities can play a leadership role in the implementation of the SDGs, by promoting sustainable development culture through leadership, research and teaching students and the wider public. Universities should adopt the SDGs from a 'whole of university' approach which can be achieved by mapping what the university is already doing, building capacity to do more, identifying gaps and opportunities, integrating the SDGs into university plans and monitoring and communicating university action on the SDGs (SDSN Australia/Pacific Guide, 2017: 3). This is an opportunity for universities to define themselves as

responsible, forward thinking and globally-minded institutions on the world stage. Some New Zealand universities are already leading in this space. The University of Otago is the home of the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities. Auckland University of Technology, Massey University, Unitec Institute of Technology, University of Auckland and the Victoria University of Wellington are all members of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a network that aims to bring together members to develop and promote SDG solutions, policies and education. One possible pathway for universities to explore is the opportunity to sign up to international initiative, the University Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Lastly, adult awareness of the SDGs must be raised. As adults are outside formal education institutions, educating the adult public requires a different approach- this is an area in which the community sector can operate. The community sector and government could collaborate and produce a multi-medium media campaign that is geared towards introducing the SDGs to the New Zealand public. The community sector can run really effective awareness raising campaigns, and there are some excellent examples of best practice in this space. In June 2016 the UNDP and a group of musicians and artists collectively known as “Baixada Never Gives Up” who represent the Baixada Fluminense in Brazil, joined together to create a project to bring the 2030 Agenda to Rio’s periphery. At the heart of the project was a documentary called “Baixada Never Gives Up”, which explored the transformative power of music and how it could be utilised to inspire active citizenship and accountability in the Baixada region. The project also saw the creation of a promo CD with 7 SDG related songs. The aim of this project was to bring the SDGs closer to the every-day life of Baixada residents. In Belgium an annual film festival about the SDGs has been put into place and a group of organisations called SDG Voices have been internationally recognised for their efforts in challenging Belgium cities to mobilise Belgians around the SDGs.

Business can also play a crucial role in adult awareness. Economic growth relies upon stability and prosperity, as such business should make efforts to include the SDGs into business action by employing an ‘inclusive business’ approach in “companies’ value chains as customers, suppliers, retailers, and distributors” (WBCSD, 2016: 1). Should businesses include the SDGs in their values, strategies and staff training, adults- as workers and as consumers- will be far more exposed to the SDGs. Government must also take a lead in creating awareness, with the support of the community sector the government could embark or create some kind of national tour, which would visit cities and regions across the country, providing people the chance to go out and engage with the SDGs. Or at an even lower scale of effort, the government should begin by addressing the SDGs in speeches given by high-level officials and include SDG content on government/department websites. Government should also create or commission the creation of SDG content and deliver this over varied mediums: internet radio, television or printed brochures. The community sector can play a role in the creation of this content and using its connection to the public, ensure that the content is relevant and easy to understand.

The Community Sector (and government)

The messaging problem is not only occurring in the minds of the public, it is also a barrier for government and the community sector. In order for community sector to accept/adopt/align their work with the SDG framework, the community sector must come understand the language of the SDGs and translate the framework into areas that are relevant to their work. The SDG framework uses lots of ‘buzz words’, like accountability, partnerships, ownership, transparency, and even development in its messaging. The issue here is that there is not an agreed upon or universally understood definition for any of these words and each are interpreted differently in different

contexts (and by different sectors). Different interpretations can lead to a lack of understanding about what the framework requires of us and can also lead to inconsistency in implementation.

There seems to be a problem with linking or translating existing work or priorities to the SDG framework, at the government level and at the community level. Labour has prioritised housing, health, education, families and the environment. This focus upon social policy demonstrates an interest in improving the quality of life for New Zealanders, especially the most vulnerable portions of New Zealand’s population. The government is addressing development issues in its agenda, although not under the ‘label’ of Agenda 2030. There has also been a marked effort by the Labour government to highlight and address child poverty, with the government introducing a flagship bill on reducing child poverty that the Children's Commissioner called a "historic moment". In adopting social policies (on housing, education, the environment), governments are inherently working on SDGs- they are just not linking it to this international framework. This is true for the community sector as well. We are all working on the SDG by default, so why is no one recognising this work as progress towards the SDGs?

This could be a result of a lack of awareness, but it is hard to believe that both the government and the community sector are unaware of the SDGs. It could be the result of resistance, meaning that the government and the community sector do not want their work to be thought of in terms of SDG progress. This is a controversial explanation, one that seems rather at odds with the purpose of the SDGs. Government and the community sector might frame their reluctance in terms of a lack of resources, but if we shift our mindset and see all social programs/projects/policies as contributing to SDG progress then the SDGs aren’t actually ‘extra work’ at all. We suggest here that government and the community sector might be resisting linking their existing work to the SDGs because they want to feel personal ownership over their work, and not provide credit to an external, international framework.

In order to address the ‘linking issue’ of SDG work a crucial first step would be to review the national landscape, this includes assessing existing national and local priorities, strategies and infrastructure. This review process would be extremely useful for the community sector and for government as it would map existing work onto the SDG framework and identify where there are gaps, or opportunities going forward. The UN Development Group offers a guide for conducting this kind of preliminary review in its ‘Reference Guide for Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda’ (2016).

The Reference Guide For Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda

-  Four areas important to initiate now
-  Four areas important to initiate over time



The UN Development Group released the 'Reference Guide for Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda' in 2016. This guide maps out the stages that a country can undertake to mainstream Agenda 2030 into national policies/frameworks. Most relevant to this linking problem is a series of steps that all national stakeholders should work together to follow in order to identify how national plans align with Agenda 2030, before national plans or implementation can begin. The steps, taken directly from the reference guide are as follows:

- a. Reviewing existing strategies and plans and identifying gaps: to scan the landscape of existing strategies and plans at the national, sub-national and local levels and then compare against the global SDGs and targets to identify gaps and provide the basis for recommending areas for change;
- b. Mapping SDG interconnections: for identifying and understanding potential co-benefits and trade-offs to inform strategies and priorities;
- c. Making initial recommendations to the leadership of the national government: for addressing SDG gaps in existing strategies and plans whilst recognizing that the SDGs "...are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental";
- d. Setting nationally-relevant targets: for nationally adapted and inclusive SDGs that are achievable, yet ambitious; and
- e. Formulating visions, strategies and plans using foresight, scenarios and systems thinking: to incorporate the recommendations and the insights from the above steps into strategies and plans and matching ambition and commitments with resources and capacities

Source: The UN Development Group. Available from: <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/UNDG-Mainstreaming-the-2030-Agenda-Reference-Guide-2017.pdf>

Once this review process has taken place, or even during its occurrence, the New Zealand community sector and the government will be able to identify where there are gaps or opportunities in national priorities, strategies and infrastructure. It might become clear that there are areas in which should be considered much higher priorities areas, for example child poverty. Community sector projects/programs and national strategies might actually align well with the SDG framework, and there will be a clear link between existing work and the SDGs. Mapping the available infrastructure is crucial, infrastructure can refer to government and non-government organisations or financial/human resources. New Zealand needs to understand the infrastructure available for SDG implementation in order to assess whether or not in its current state if there is sufficient capacity to undertake SDG action.

4. How can the community sector take ownership for the SDGs? Is civil society ready to do so?

The SDGs may have been on the community sector 'radar' but had not yet made it very high up on the priorities/ agendas of community sector and civil society groups- this needs to change. The community sector needs to work with what resources it has to begin tackling Agenda 2030 itself. Community sector organisations should assess how they can incorporate the SDG framework into their organisation, or how they can link their work to the SDG framework. The community sector should begin by collaborating with fellow community sector organisations to create clarity on community sector interests, goals, resources as part of a civil society SDG plan. Presenting a united front will greatly enhance the power and potency of the community sector. The community sector must continue to make the broader public aware of the SDGs and inspire interest in SDG

implementation by leading the charge itself. The community sector needs to do its best to get the SDGs into the minds of the people and so it will stay on the agenda of the government.

The New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals Summit in April 2018 was an excellent opportunity for each sector to renew its interest in Agenda 2030, begin reflection on how the SDGs relate to their work and create a platform for cross-sector collaboration. At this summit the community sector affirmed that sustainable development is not a new challenge or idea and that the sector has long been working in this space- ahead of government and business. The community sector also highlighted the importance of accountability, each of the sectors needs to be accountable to New Zealand and its people, by aligning values and priorities to Agenda 2030 and being transparent so that the SDGs do not become 'greenwashed'. The community sector, and the other sectors, are still awaiting an official government direction on the SDGs- but should be hopeful about the interest demonstrated by the new Labour government. The community sector should begin SDG action where it can and continue to lead in the space of community development. The community sector is ready to begin work on the SDGs- because it is already working on the issues that each goal addresses. What needs to occur going forwards with the implementation of Agenda 2030, is that community sector groups map the work they are doing, link it to the SDGs and collaborate and share this work/resources with other civil society groups and the other sectors.

For the last two years the community sector has waited upon government action on the SDGs and has stuck predominately to assigning blame and lamenting government inaction. However, should government, based upon the interest demonstrated at the SDG Summit, get 'its house in order' and announce that it is ready to begin working on the SDGs with its partners- is civil society ready to be its partner? At the SDG Summit government officials, whilst carefully avoiding concrete details, alluded to a plan emerging in government around the SDGs. Government officials from MFAT, Environment and the Prime Minister and Cabinet departments explicitly linked their portfolios and work the SDG framework. Minister James Shaw asserted that the SDGs were "at the very heart of this government" and asserting that the once the government had gotten its data collection process in order that SDG implementation could begin. The day after the Summit at New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO award ceremony for Global Citizenship Education, the Minister for Education explicitly mentioned the SDGs in her speech and stressed the importance of education in achieving the SDGs. It is wrong for the community sector to assume that government has not yet begun to think about SDG implementation. The government appears to be collecting itself and preparing to launch its SDG plan and the community sector should not be caught unaware or unprepared. Community sector organisations, which have been reluctant to adopt the SDG framework because government had not yet put its support behind Agenda 2030 need to be aware of the government's shift towards the SDGs or get left behind when government finally decides that it is ready to go.

5. How can New Zealand civil society groups prepare themselves to be effective partners for SDG implementation?

Civil society will play a huge role in SDG implementation, by providing resources, expertise and leadership. However, civil society can only play this role if it is ready to be an effective partner and given the space and the resources to be one. To get ready to be partners in SDG implementation firstly, civil society needs to prepare itself to be an effective stakeholder and partner in SDG implementation. Secondly, the New Zealand government needs to formalise civil society engagement in achieving the SDGs. The government must recognise the value of the community

sector and work to create meaningful partnerships with civil society in order to achieve SDG #17, which will in turn feedback into the implementation of all the SDGs.

New Zealand is home to a vibrant and strong civil society, Statistics New Zealand estimated in 2016 that the number of non-profit institutions in New Zealand had grown from 97,000 in 2006 to 114,100 in 2013, the non-profit sector contributed \$6 to the New Zealand economy. The sector represents over 136,000 paid staff and 1.2 million volunteers. Volunteer labour alone contributed \$3.5 billion to the NZ economy (figures from Statistics New Zealand, 2016). Civil society groups provide essential research, social services, health services, research, education, support for culture and arts, environmental protection and political/law advocacy, and this list is far from exhaustive. Civil groups reach all kind of people across New Zealand, often the most vulnerable of our society. It is essential to utilise the reach of the community sector when implementing the SDGs so that New Zealand's SDG are inclusive and support our most vulnerable populations. Whilst the diversity of the sector is certainly one of its strengths, there can also be issues with having too many voices populating a shared space.

Partnerships are a huge part of Agenda 2030 (SDG #17), however, having the right to be a partner entails a certain amount of responsibility. In order to be an effective partner, civil society/ the community sector needs to take steps now to ensure it is ready to engage effectively and efficiently as an important SDG stakeholder. The community sector needs to build upon the momentum started at the NZ SDGs Summit to clarify and assert its collective goals and interest in SDG implementation. It would also be beneficial for civil society to come together and create a collective body, or entity, which can be used by government as a 'go-to point' for civil society collaboration. This body might be directly in partnership with government and other stakeholder sectors, it could be structured like a board and have equal representation for civil society, government officials, private sector and the tertiary sector. This would be a cross-sector body for collaboration wherein SDG implementation is the main purpose and goal. Or the collective group could be made up entirely of civil society organisation with a leadership body that acts as 'go-between' across sectors. The body could be populated by all interested civil society groups, or it could even have sub groups of community organisations that work in the same space/area and would be focused upon achieving the same SDG goals.

Whatever the collective platform might look like, it would be an opportunity to enhance civil society's power by pooling resources and voices, enable the sector to be an effective partner, and create civil society collaboration/prevent duplication. In creating this platform there must also be an understanding that certain community sector organisations will not wish to be a part of a formal arrangement at all. These wishes need to be respected, an organisation should not have to be a formal partner if they think that they perform better independently.

Government must also play a part in ensuring that civil society is included and able to be an equal partner. The SDGs are a massive financial undertaking and will require a huge amount of personnel, expertise and time to implement. In order to reduce the burden this places on government, the New Zealand government would be astute to use the pre-existing civil society organisations to aid in implementation. Civil society partnerships can extend the reach of government across New Zealand, they are valuable resource that should not be overlooked. Genuine civil society engagement will only be achieved by creating a more enabling environment, by institutionalising dialogue and consultation with civil society, formalising civil society inclusion in governance arrangements, and providing resources such as finance and capacity development so that civil society can engage more effectively.

The New Zealand government needs to conduct consultation with civil society organisations online and offline when it begins to create its national action plan for SDG implementation. The New Zealand government should engage in 'stakeholder mapping' as a means of establishing partnerships and gaging the interest/resources available in the community sector. The New Zealand government needs to create a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement in sustainable development policy. The exact make-up of this mechanism will depend upon how civil society chooses to organise and represent itself. The New Zealand government must commit to strengthening the sector so that civil society organisations can be engaged and contribute as genuine partners in SDG implementation.

6. Why is the issue of accountability central to the SDG framework?

If the NZ SDG Summit confirmed anything its that each sector- civil society, government, and business- believe that the SDGs are important. Whilst the Summit created lots of optimism around the SDGs, there is a danger that post-Summit, in the year before the Auckland Summit, the SDGs will fall back down the priority list of the sectors. Organisations from each sector may have spent the last few months preparing themselves and assessing the SDGs in the lead up to the Summit and now that it is over, their focus might drift away to more pressing concerns. It is wrong to think of the SDGs in this way. The SDGs should not be a one of many priorities on an agenda. In order for them to be truly adopted and implemented, with their holistic purpose in mind, the SDGs must inform every item on an agenda as an overarching framework or mandate. However, maintaining this commitment and keeping the sectors accountable to the SDG framework will be a complicated issue.

Accountability under Agenda 2030 is vague and was made purposefully so in its creation. National governments are responsible for implementation and review, governments are meant to be accountable to the international community - but more importantly to their civil societies and citizens. According to Agenda 2030, national governments are kept accountable by the benchmarks and indicators of each goal. It should be clear when a government is meeting its requirements and when it is not. But national governments are usually only body resourced enough to collect this data and can chose whether or not to report on it at all at the HLPF. The HLPF only has the authority to oversee the reviews that countries have voluntary opted to undertake. In an open and transparent society like New Zealand concerns around accountability do not seem all that pressing, however this concern should not be dismissed altogether. The community sector and civil society play an important function in keeping government accountable. Community sector and civil society groups are often able to see gaps in government statistics and often call them out on this. Data, as explored in the next question is key to ensuring transparency and accountability.

There are also issues relating to civil society accountability. Civil society groups operate- in theory- for the good of society, but they are ultimately accountable to their shareholders and donors and must operate according to their wishes/ priorities. If these shareholders don't wish to adopt the SDG frameworks, or again don't see the relevance of them to their organisation, civil society groups will struggle to make SDGs a priority. This accountability problem is not something often discussed, but it will be crucial going forwards and will affect whether or not New Zealand community can rely upon civil society to support and lead SDG action in their name.

7. What role does data collection play in Agenda 2030? How can we, the community sector, contribute to this?

Data and statistics are a crucial part of SDG monitoring and implementation, without high quality data available SDG progress is stalled or distorted. If a country does not possess quality statistics,

then they are unaware of how they are tracking towards achieving the SDG indicators, and the international community has no means to monitor individual country progress in order to ensure accountability to the framework. If countries are serious about achieving the SDGs they need to re-evaluate and strengthen their data and statistic capacities. National governments need to clarify which department(s)/agency(cies) are in charge of collection and dissemination. The selected departments/agencies also need to have the resources and capacity to accurately collect and disseminate data and statistics relevant to the SDGs. Often strengthening this capacity will involve modernization of national statistical systems and multi-stakeholder partnerships to mobilise resources and coordinate data collection and dissemination.

Statistics New Zealand is the official data agency of New Zealand and is currently the primary source of data collection/dissemination related to the SDGs. The New Zealand government has asserted its support of measuring and tracking SDG progress, but wants to do this in an effective way which avoids adding additional layers of bureaucracy. This is a situation most countries across the world will be working to avoid as well, and a simple solution is to expand upon existing national statistic offices to expand their reach and capacity where suitable, instead of creating new agencies (or more unnecessary layers of bureaucracy). There is currently no clear indication whether or not Statistics New Zealand is going to be expanding its capacity to more adequately collect data on SDG indicators in New Zealand.

One of the main problems with data is how it can lead to misrepresentation. In the context of Agenda 2030 and the commitment to 'leaving no one behind' it is crucial that data is used to provide an accurate picture of a country. When national averages, or even city averages, are used in data this can often mask wide disparities amongst a population. Data addressing deprivation or vulnerability needs to be multi-dimensional by taking care to address important variables such as age, sex, ethnicity and disability status. In order for data to be representative it needs to not only reflect the national average of a variable, but also how different groups of the population are affected differently by SDG relevant indicators. Data can be used to frame things a certain way, to tell the story from a certain perspective or portray a better picture than might actually be the case.

For example, when comparing an independent SDG Index Report (published in July 2017) and a UNICEF Innocenti Report Card (published in June 2017) there are a number of discrepancies. The UNICEF Innocenti Report focuses upon child-relevant SDGs, it ranks New Zealand quite low comparative to European Union/OECD countries, New Zealand sits 34th out of 41 countries across nine child-relevant SDGs. Conversely, the SDG Index report scores New Zealand quite high across 157 countries and inclusive of all SDG goals, it places New Zealand 20th in this ranking. Clearly the two rankings represent two different approaches to measuring SDG progress, one which is child focused and the other far more generalist. However, even taking these differences into account, it is confusing that New Zealand can be considered to be performing well in the SDG space, but also quite poorly in certain, specific areas. This difference may be the result of the quality of data available, in a summary of the UNICEF Innocenti report the UN Association New Zealand published, "perhaps what is saddest of all the data shown by the report card is the data that is not there."

The community sector and civil society play an important function in keeping government accountable. Community sector and civil society groups are often able to see gaps in government statistics and often call them out on this. At an intrinsic level, community sector groups and civil society organisations are 'the data', they are a part of the community in a way that government and business are not. These same groups are also often involved in conducting their own data collection and analysis and should be invited to include this data with official findings. In the past the New Zealand government has not treated civil society groups as equals, asserting that the research

conducted by community sector groups was 'anecdotal' because it was not compiled by an official government body. Community sector organisations should be critical of official data but should not go so far as to remove themselves from the process of collection. These groups need to be present and included ('at the table') so that data is legitimate and representative, as well as accessible for the public and useful for analysis of New Zealand SDG progress. The New Zealand government and the community sector must collaborate on data collection, and there is progress already being made in this space at the moment. During the SDG Summit Professor Girol Karacaolgu mentioned the creation of a new data collection website which was a product of close work with the community sector (through Anaru, General Manager of Hui E!) and Statistics New Zealand.

Conclusion

Hui E! firmly believes that the community sector, and the wider civil society, will be fundamental in the implementation of the SDGs in New Zealand. The purpose of this discussion paper was to assess the SDGs from a community sector perspective. This paper discussed obstacles, barriers and problems for community sector adoption of the SDGs, as well as opportunities or pathways forwards for the community sector and SDG implementation.

The discussion paper underscored the importance of the community sector in implementation of the SDGs, which is also stressed in 2030 Agenda (Goal #17). However, this discussion paper finds that there are many complex barriers to community sector involvement in SDG implementation. The sector feels like there is little they can do without government direction and often do not link their work to the SDGs or see how a 'top down' international framework is relevant to their grassroots work. The community sector should stop wasting its time or resources assigning blame and lamenting government inaction and instead embrace forward-thinking about the SDGs. The community sector needs prepare itself to be an effective partner and leader in SDG implementation. The community sector can lead in the SDG space however, it will not be able to do so if it remains fragmented and disconnected from the SDG framework.

New Zealand, as a nation, has always taken pride in its reputation for being progressive, egalitarian, and for 'punching above its weight'. The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity for nations around the world to improve the quality of life for all humanity, protect the world we live in, and ensure the ability of future generations to thrive. Two years into the Agenda 2030 and there has not been much concerted effort to begin SDG implementation in New Zealand. The achievement of the SDGs will require bold, innovative and collaborative action and we must start designing these strategies now- together- so that New Zealand is not left behind in a global campaign to 'leave no one behind'.

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