



CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT

Participation at the 2019 UN High Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals, New York, July 2019

PREPARED BY UGONNA UKAIGWE

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

United Nations Member States met in New York for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the Sustainable Development Goals from Tuesday 9th July to Thursday 18th July 2019, under the theme "Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality". The HLPF reviewed progress towards Six SDGs which are:

- SDGs 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- SDGs 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
- SDGs 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- SDGs 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
- SDGs 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels;
- Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

2.0 CSO PARTICIPATION AND FUNDING

A total number of 15 Delegates from the Ghana CSOs Platform on SDGs representing SDGs Sub-Platforms 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, 17, the Youth Sub-Platform and GFD participated at the HLPF. Among the delegates are: the National Coordinator, Ugonna Ukaigwe and the three Co-Chairs of the Platform: Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition, Mrs. Beauty Emefa Narteh; SEND GHANA, George Osei-Akoto and International Child Development Programme (ICDP), Mrs. Joyce Larnyoh.



Beauty Narteh, George Osei-Akoto, Ugonna Ukaigwe and Madam Joyce Larnyoh

The participation of the delegates was made possible mostly with support from its membership. The following organisations provided support for CSOs to participate at the Forum:

- ✓ Water Aid Regional Office in Ghana
- ✓ Action Aid Ghana
- ✓ Care International Ghana
- ✓ World Vision Ghana
- ✓ Millennium Promise Ghana
- ✓ Sight Savers Ghana
- ✓ Christian Aid Ghana
- ✓ GCAP
- ✓ UNDP New York
- ✓ UNFPA

The SDG Implementation Coordination Committee (SDGs-ICC) and The Government of Ghana acting through Ghana's Mission at the UN, added the civil society representatives as part of the official Ghana delegation. It must be noted that this is the second time that government has invited CSOs to join the official delegation to the HLPF. This gesture is highly appreciated as it granted the CSO representatives access to all official meeting venues. The delegate status given to civil society representatives is a reflection of the multi-stakeholder partnership that Ghana has established on the SDGs.

3.0 HLPF OPENING

The opening session, held on 9th July 2019 included two parts: Where do we stand; and who is at risk of being left behind? A summary of the key discussions are outlined below:

Where do we stand?

Presenting the UN Secretary General's Progress Report on the SDGs, Liu Zhenmin, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, noted that the world is not yet on track to achieve the SDGs. He highlighted areas where progress needs to be accelerated to include: leaving no one behind; mobilizing adequate and well-directed financing; strengthening effective and inclusive institutions; and investing in data. He welcomed the mainstreaming of SDGs into planning; actors beyond governments embracing the 2030 agenda; and the re-positioning of the UN system to support SDG implementation.

Speaking on data challenges, Mr. Julio Santaella from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography, Mexico, noted that existing gaps in collecting data on SDG indicators are related to the technical capacity of countries, the technical complexity of indicators, and lack of granularity to ensure no one is left behind. The session identified the importance of the following if the world is to accelerate progress on the SDGs:

- Multi-dimensional measures of poverty to reduce inequality;
- Volunteer-led mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of those furthest from government services;
- Refraining from taking unilateral economic measures;

- Addressing barriers to inclusion;
- Increasing engagement of non-governmental organizations; and
- Investing in tax collection capacity.

Who is at risk of being left Behind?

The following stakeholders emerged from discussions as being left behind – Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, refugees and displaced persons. The session highlighted the need for:

- ❖ A commitment to include refugees and displaced persons in national plans;
- ❖ Making improvements in public spending and fiscal policies;
- ❖ A multilateral pact to reduce tax evasion;
- ❖ Needs assessment to fill data gaps.

3.1 SUMMARY OF REVIEW OF PROGRESS ON THE SIX SDGS

As indicated earlier, the HLPF reviewed progress on Six SDGs – **SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13, 16, and 17**. The following concerns were highlighted regarding each of the goals:

SDGs 4: Progress on SDGs 4 shows a global learning crisis, with a low proficiency rate amongst school children in reading and mathematics despite increased enrollment rates particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. During the discussions, participants stressed the need for:

- ✓ Investments in scientific and technological education;
- ✓ Support for developing countries to build school facilities;
- ✓ Reducing inequalities within the education system;
- ✓ Increasing funding for the sector; and
- ✓ Improvement of conditions for teachers.

SDGs 8: According to Moussa Oumarou, International Labour Organization (ILO), progress on SDG 8 has not been encouraging when the 12 interlinked targets are examined. A presentation by UN DESA on the statistical snapshot on SDGs 8 highlighted an increase in economic growth globally, with Least Developed Country's (LDCs) falling short of their 7% target; 22% of the world's youth are not in education, employment, or training; and an increase in labour productivity with high variation across regions. In conclusion, participants emphasized the need to:

- Narrow the wage gap between women and men;
- Protect the freedom of movement of migrants;
- Policy coherence between the SDGs and decent work for all; and
- Introduce interventions for the "ultra-poor" to enable people to transition from safety nets to economic activities.

SDGs 10: Income inequality is on the rise, with the bottom 40% receiving less than 25% of overall income, and an increasing share of income going to the top 1% in many countries. 39% of women lack decision-making power at work and home; only 20% hold managerial positions; and 50% of those affected by extreme poverty are children below 14 years of age. The following were highlighted during the discussions:

- ✚ Progressive fiscal policies, coupled with social protection and partnerships with the private sector, to promote social inclusion;
- ✚ Moving beyond a monetary notion of poverty, to a multi-dimensional overtly index;
- ✚ Centralized wage bargaining, to ensure even income distribution; and policies and disaggregated data to reduce inequality.

SDGs 13: Participants called for an integrated approach to climate change and sustainable development; increasing climate finance flows and stepping up climate commitments; reviewing fossil fuel subsidies and adopting long-term emissions reduction strategies; and scaling up renewable energy to deliver on emissions reductions in the energy sector.

SDGs 16: According to UN DESA, no substantial progress has been made on the SDG 16 targets in recent years; women comprise 70% of the victims of violence; nine human-rights defenders were killed weekly in 2018 compared to seven in 2017; and only 40% of children under the age of five have birth certificates in sub-Saharan Africa. A presentation from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, notes progress on SDGs 16 but shrinking space for civil society expression. Participants called for:

- ❖ Integrated and people-centered approaches;
- ❖ Capacity building for implementation;
- ❖ Transparent public financial management, including good governance assessments;
- ❖ Strong political will and constitutional guarantees for integrating marginalized communities into society and the economy; and
- ❖ Collaboration between states, private agencies, and Interpol to deal with transnational cyber-crime.

SDGs 17: It was observed that official development assistance (ODA) went down by 2.7% in 2018 compared to 2017, humanitarian aid fell by 8% in the same period, and aid to the least developed countries and African countries, who need it most, is falling as donor countries are not living up to the pledge to scale up ODA.

3.2 GHANA'S ACTIVITIES AT THE 2019 FORUM

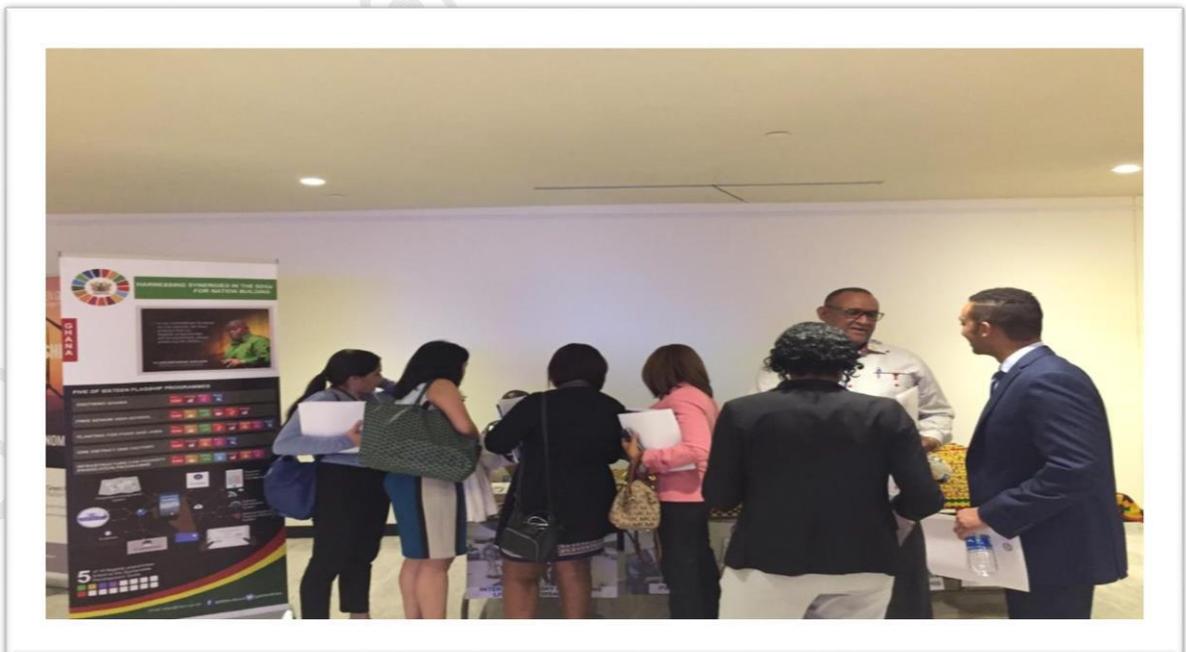
3.2.1. Government of Ghana and Civil Society Joint Exhibition:

From July 9th – 18th, the Government of Ghana and the Ghana CSOs Platform on SDGs hosted a joint exhibition stand. The stand showcased several innovations, both printed materials and videos from government and civil society. The innovations showcased included: Government's flagship programmes, Civil Society VNR Shadow Report and Policy Brief in print and soft copies on pen drives; printed info jingles on the SDGs, video documentaries showcasing Ghana's rich culture, progress so far on the SDGs, among others. SDGs branded Ghana Chocolates and Football were also on display.



Ghana Exhibition Stand with delegates' from Govt. and CSOs manning the stand

More than forty country representatives and delegates including representatives from the UN and African Union visited the Ghana stand, some twice and others three times and more. The delegates include: USA, Kazastan, Austria, Venezuela, Cameroun, Philippines, Peru, Germany, Nigeria, Malawi, Cuba, Tanzania, Finland, Kenya, Serbia, Puerto Rico, Poland, Siberia, Mali, Afghanistan, China, United Kingdom, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Namibia, Sirilanka, Mexico, Germany, Kenya, India, Mali, Serbia, Ghana, Uganda, Togo, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, Benin, Dominican Republic and Staff members from the UN in New York and African Union



A cross section of delegates asking questions at the Ghana Stand

3.2.2. Government of Ghana and Ghana CSOs Platform Side Event:

On 10th July, the Government of Ghana in collaboration with the Ghana Civil Society Platform organised a side event on the theme **“Building Partnerships for SDGs: Government, Civil Society, Private Sector and Traditional Authorities”**. The objective of the session was to share with the global community Ghana’s experience of building multi-stakeholder partnership for the 2030 Agenda. The Session moderated by Mrs. Gladys Gharthey, Ministry of Finance, witnessed presentations from a multi-stakeholder panel made up of representatives from government (Prof Gyan Baffour, Minister for Planning and Key Note Speaker), private sector (Mr Alhassan Andani, CEO of Stanbic Bank and Mr. Gayheart Mensah, Director for External Affairs, Vodafone) Ghana Civil Society Platform on SDGs (Mr. George Osei-Akoto), traditional authority (Ambassador Nana Effah-Apenteng, Paramount Chief of Bompata Traditional Area and Secretary to Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II) and Development Partners (Mr. Inge Herman Rydland, from Norway and the special envoy for the 2030 Agenda).

Prof. Baffour in his key note address reiterated the critical role effective partnerships play in ensuring transformative and sustainable development. All the panelists agreed with this view and went further to highlight the value that each stakeholder brings on board the partnership as well as the results of such partnerships. Below are the key highlights of the discussions:

- At the core of partnerships for development is a win-win relationship where partners can pull their resources and competencies together to address economic, social and environmental aims more effectively.
- For the world to achieve inclusive growth, sustainable development, peace and security, it requires the support of all stakeholders – government, private sector, civil society, traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, academia, development partners and youth groups, among others.
- The SDG 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals recognises multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development at all levels and across all sectors,
- Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the government of Ghana has created the necessary enabling environment for fostering partnerships among development actors.
- Ghana’s implementation arrangement for the SDGs reflects the multi-stakeholder approach with state and non-state actors which has resulted in a number of innovative partnerships and actions by traditional leaders, religious bodies, the private sector, academia, civil society organisations and the youth to accelerate the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.
- Chiefs in Ghana from time immemorial have been champions of development within their communities to complement the efforts of government.
- The SDGs has provided a framework to consolidate the gains from the initiatives by traditional leaders for the betterment of a larger population.
- Businesses should be accessed not by the profits they make but how socially and environmentally sustainable their operations are within the economy.

- Civil Society partnership with government has resulted in a shift from the antagonistic relationship between CSOs and government to one based on collaboration which also allows for effective accountability.
- Civil Society have a responsibility to complement government efforts on national development, while holding themselves and government to account on development issues.



A cross section of participants at Ghana's Side Event

3.2.3. Ghana CSOs Platform on SDGs Side Event:

The Ghana CSOs Platform organised a side event on 17th July on the theme: ***'Building Inclusive National Reviews: Promoting Civil Society Participation on the SDGs'***. The session was organised in partnership with Asia Development Alliance (ADA), Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD), Forus International, Transparency, Accountability and Participation for the 2030 Agenda (TAP Network), Asia Civil Society Partnership on Sustainable Development (APSD), UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and the Governments of Timor Leste and Mongolia. The session provided a platform for government, civil society and development partners to discuss the experiences of government-CSO engagement, the challenges and opportunities related to CSO-government engagement based on lessons learned during VNR reporting and other SDG follow-up mechanisms. The session was attended by Over 30 delegates. Key issues raised during the discussions include:

- The lack of action on leaving no one behind
- Lack of information on the actual changes happening on the ground in most countries
- Need to bring CSOs stakeholders together to push for change
- Need to ensure that public awareness is going hand in hand with decentralization
- Difficulties in identifying suitable entry points for partnerships in some countries

- ❑ Challenges associated with moving from superficial conversation to real actions
- ❑ Lack of multi stakeholder processes in some countries
- ❑ Need to support civil society shadow reporting and showcase best practices in producing shadow reports
- ❑ Voluntary National Reviews should be multi-level involving the National, Regional and International levels
- ❑ VNRs are not only a responsibility for government but our responsibility as a country



A cross section of participants at the Ghana CSOs Platform's Side Event

3.2.4. Ghana's Voluntary National Review (VNR):

On July 17th, Ghana for the first time presented its VNR Report along with 46 other countries, on the progress of implementation of the SDGs. Ghana's VNR presentation was done jointly by government and civil society. The Government of Ghana ceded two minutes out of its allotted time for civil society to present the key findings from the VNR shadow report. The National progress report on the SDGs was presented by Prof. George Gyan-Baffour while the CSOs shadow report was presented by Mr. Alexander Bankole Williams (A Person with Disability) on behalf of the Ghana CSOs Platform on SDGs.

Prof Gyan-Baffour in his presentation highlighted the progress that Ghana as a country has made on many of the SDGs targets. While complementing government's report, the CSOs shadow report highlighted the efforts by civil society in implementing the SDGs, the challenges that stakeholders need to work together to address and the way forward. Below are the key highlights of the presentations:

- ❖ Poverty in Ghana had declined marginally from 24.2 per cent in 2013 to 23.4 per cent in 2017.

- ❖ Growth in GDP remains robust, accelerating to 8.1 per cent in 2017
- ❖ Key macroeconomic indicators, including budget deficit, inflation and interest rates are trending downwards,
- ❖ Trade balance recorded surpluses in 2017 and 2018, leading to improved balance of payment position.
- ❖ Access to education especially at the senior high school level had generally improved as a result of Government's introduction of free Senior High school (SHS) flagship initiative which resulted in additional 271,000 students enrolling in SHS for the 2017/18 and 2018/19 academic years.
- ❖ Gender parity has been achieved at the basic level.
- ❖ The proportion of the population with access to electricity has also improved from 70.6 per cent in 2013 to 81.1 per cent in 2017.
- ❖ There has been marginal increase in forest cover. Ghana has commenced the implementation of the Forest Plantation Strategy 2017-2040, with the aim to protect the forest cover to achieve sustainable supply of planted forest goods and services.
- ❖ Ghana has developed a National Data for Sustainable Development Roadmap with three priority objectives which are: filling data gaps; encouraging data use; and strengthening the entire data ecosystem.
- ❖ Administrative data are being harnessed to generate timely and disaggregated information for monitoring.
- ❖ Ghana is also exploring new sources of data—geospatial and call details records from the telecommunication industry.
- ❖ A quality assurance framework is also being developed with CSOs, academia and the private sector to fully leverage data within the ecosystem.
- ❖ Citizens' awareness of the SDGs is crucial as many of the SDGs can only be achieved through behavioural change.
- ❖ Government to help strengthen the capacity of CSOs in the area of efficient data collection for monitoring the SDGs.



Joint Presentation of Ghana's VNR, Prof. George Gyan Baffour and Alexander Bankole Williams

4.0 LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 2019 HLPF

This section highlights some of the lessons learnt following CSOs involvement and participation in all the 2019 HLPF processes.

- VNR is a useful process that helps to take stock of our efforts and contributions in achieving the SDGs, without which we may not know what each stakeholder is doing;
- Strong multi-stakeholder partnerships is a catalyst for effective implementation of the SDGs;
- Public awareness and education on the SDGs and the VNR processes is critical to generate public interest and ownership of the Goals;
- Strong collaboration between Government and CSOs has helped to enhance the country's visibility at the global level;
- Civil society participation as part of government delegation to the HLPF is a good practice that should be continued

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- As part of efforts to enhance coordination and ensure ease of reporting on the HLPF, a standard reporting template should be prepared for future HLPF's. This template will be used by all delegates to report on the various meetings they attend during the Forum. All the reports collated will fed into the final report to be produced by the Secretariat.
- In future, all delegates should be properly briefed on all innovations to be showcased at the HLPF.
- It will be useful to showcase on the CSOs Platform website, all SDGs innovations exhibited at the HLPF as a way of giving visibility to the work of members.
- Ghana has built strong multi-stakeholder partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs, what remains is how to leverage this multi-stakeholder partnership to effect real changes on the ground particularly at the grass root level.
- CSOs produce complementary information to the national level data. Support is required to build the capacity of CSOs on data collection and disaggregation of data for monitoring. This has the potential to expand SDGs-related data collection for Ghana.
- Need for all stakeholders to begin to **'walk the Talk'**. There is a need to imbibe the behavioural changes required to achieve the SDGs e.g. Ghana needs to reconsider the use of plastics.

- Support for National Annual Voluntary Reviews. The VNR should be a process and not an event, as such there is a need to support CSOs to conduct annual voluntary national reviews in country.
- Support for advocacy for a civil society session at the HLPF: The VNR is an official event for member states providing opportunity for government to officially report on progress. A civil society session at the HLPF will provide an opportunity for CSOs to engage, exchange ideas and reach a consensus on issues emanating from the VNRs so as to present a united front.

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