

Preface

When governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, they committed to engaging in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of this Agenda. Since then 140 governments have prepared or announced Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), demonstrating their interest in and political ownership of the 2030 process. However, voluntary showcase-style reporting and congratulatory government self-assessments are not enough. Civil society organizations have a key role to play as independent watchdogs holding governments and international organizations accountable for their (positive or negative) contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is particularly relevant with regard to the richest and most powerful actors in the global system, given their economic influence and political weight in international decision-making.

Since 2015, the Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (www.reflectiongroup.org), created in 2011 to offer independent analysis of and suggestions to the international policy discourse, has regularly assessed the implementation of the new Agenda, identifying and tackling obstacles, and presenting its findings in an annual Spotlight Report.

The pilot report in 2016 assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the new Agenda, with a particular focus on the systemic obstacles and transnational spill-over effects that influence or even undermine the implementation of the SDGs.

The 2017 edition zoomed in on a notable trend in the discourse and activity around the SDGs: an uncritical focus on privatization, private finance and corporate partnerships as silver bullets for sustainable development. It analysed the many risks of these approaches, including corporate capture of policy and the impacts on sustainability and inequality. It argued for the reclamation of public policy space and bold measures to realize human rights, increase public finance, to regulate or reject public-private partnerships (PPPs), and to strengthen participatory and democratic governance structures at all levels.

Building on the content of the previous reports, the Spotlight Report 2018 dives more deeply into the policies, resources and actions that will actually be necessary to implement the 2030 Agenda, based in part on proposals and ideas that have already been discussed or attempted in different parts of the world. It highlights policies and approaches which depart from business-as-usual and prioritize fulfilment of human rights and respect for planetary boundaries.

This year's report consists of three parts: The first part contains two overview articles which summarize key findings of the contributions to this report and messages from national 'spotlight reports'. The second part focuses in five chapters on cross-cutting policy reform areas that demonstrate the interlinkages between various SDGs, the need to 'de-silo' current policy approaches, and to promote policies that are genuinely coherent in the interest of sustainable development, human rights and gender justice. The third part includes 17 brief 'Spotlights on the SDGs' highlighting selected examples of good or bad policies regarding specific goals.

The report is supported by a broad range of civil society organizations and trade unions, listed as partners. It is also informed by the experiences and reports of national and regional groups and coalitions from all parts of the world. The contributions cover many aspects of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (and beyond), and reflect the rich geographic and cultural diversity of their authors. But what all contributions have in common is the conviction that the world is still off-track in terms of achieving sustainable development and fundamental changes in policies and approaches are necessary – and possible – to unleash the transformative potential of the SDGs.

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