

Preface

Governments committed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to engage in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of this Agenda. Since then a total of 187 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) have been presented or announced, demonstrating their interest in and political ownership of the 2030 Agenda process. However, while some have reflected the participation of civil society, many more have not. 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.

Since 2016, the Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has published the yearly Spotlight Report, assessing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the structural obstacles to its realization, with a particular focus on the rich and powerful. In assessing progress, the report not only focuses on policy incoherence, but analyses and assesses the extent to which policies are framed by the ambitious principles of the 2030 Agenda, particularly the human rights framework, and the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

The report builds on the content of the previous reports. The 2016 report examined whether current policy approaches, as they are reflected, inter alia, in the 2030 Agenda itself, are an adequate response to the global challenges. The 2017 report explored the concurrent trends of privatization, partnerships, corporate capture and their impact on the implementation of the SDGs. The Spotlight Report 2018 described alternative policies that are genuinely coherent in the interest of sustainable development, human rights and gender justice.

This year's report dives more deeply into the (global) governance arrangements, structures and institutions that will actually be necessary to implement these policies and to unleash the transformative potential of the SDGs.

It offers analysis and recommendations on how to strengthen inclusive and participatory governance and to overcome structural and institutional obstacles and gaps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In doing this, it poses a challenge and a call to action to world leaders just in advance of the SDG Summit in September 2019.

The report consists of three parts: The first contains two overview articles, which highlight key insights of the contributions to this report and messages from national 'spotlight reports'. The second includes five chapters on cross-cutting governance reform areas that demonstrate the interlinkages between various SDGs and the need to 'de-silo' current policy approaches. The third comprises 17 brief 'Spotlights on the SDGs', highlighting selected examples of good or bad governance regarding specific goals.

This and previous Spotlight reports are supported by a broad range of global civil society organizations and trade unions. They are 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 their fundamental critique of underlying social structures, power relations and governance arrangements. Thus, meaningfully tackling the obstacles and contradictions in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs requires more holistic and more sweeping shifts in how and where power is vested, including through institutional, legal, social, economic and political commitments to realizing human rights.

In other words, as the following contributions make clear, a simple *software update* is not enough – we have to revisit and reshape the *hardware* of sustainable development.

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