



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT



**Beyond2015**  
Campaigning for a global development framework  
after the Millennium Development Goals

## Outcomes of the Joint ACFID-ACOSS Civil Society Forum

*“The role of Australian civil society in implementing the  
Sustainable Development Goals”*

25 August 2015

### What are the main opportunities that the SDGs present in Australia?

- The SDGs represent an opportunity to radically transform the ways in which civil society organisations work, both across sectoral divides within civil society, and with government and the private sector. They are an opportunity to work collectively and mobilise new and unexpected partnerships.
- The goals present a useful opportunity for civil society organisations to use a consistent framework to describe both our collective aspiration and our individual efforts to address poverty, equality and sustainability issues both here in Australia and globally.
- The goals set a benchmark for governments, and present a global platform to hold governments accountable on local issues. There is an opportunity for civil society to take a leadership role rather than waiting for Government to act, and to leverage existing mechanisms for monitoring progress on key issues.
- The goals are an opportunity to reclaim the narrative around poverty using the lived experience of people. They are also a chance to spur the discussion about inequality, both in Australia and globally. This narrative can be used to reach individuals via existing organisational networks including social media and donor bases.

### What are the main barriers to taking up the SDGs in Australia?

- Low public awareness of the SDGs in Australia is a barrier to reaching the goals. Additionally, there is a general public cynicism that needs to be countered – civil society needs to sell the SDGs as both aspirational and achievable.
- Different sections of civil society have tended to work in siloes rather than collaborating. Resource constraints, competing priorities and increased pressure on NGOs who conduct political advocacy are both challenges and opportunities for working collaboratively.

- At a government level, short term political cycles and a dismissive attitude towards UN frameworks in general are barriers. The SDGs are still seen as a development agenda, rather than as goals which are relevant for Australia.
- Australia needs a national action plan, but this will be meaningless if those affected don't have a voice, particularly Indigenous communities who are often denied self-determination.
- The lack of adequate and disaggregated data is a barrier to ensuring no one is left behind.

### **How can civil society organisations take up the SDGs?**

- CSOs can use their existing networks (staff, board, donor bases, etc) to communicate the goals in a way that makes them personal, and pitch the goals at different levels so that people can engage to the extent they are able.
- Organisations can embed the SDGs into their strategic planning processes – this is also an opportunity to articulate where individual organisations fit within the bigger picture. Organisations could choose to focus in on the SDGs that are particularly relevant for their work or take a more general approach.
- Organisations can also embed the targets and indicators of the SDGs into their own measures of poverty/development and monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Peak bodies can lead by building coalitions and linking people together, for example by 'picking and linking' organisations working on similar issues.
- Organisations and peak bodies also need to advocate to Government on the importance of integrating the SDGs into Australia's domestic and international development policy, and for establishing effective cross-government mechanisms to enable this to occur.

### **Ideas for collaborative action emerging from the Forum**

- ACFID & ACOSS to produce/curate common resources on the SDGs which organisations can use to educate their staff/boards/donor bases, ensuring consistency of messaging across the domestic and development sectors.
- ACFID will establish a mailing list of those who attended the Forum (on an 'opt out' basis) so organisations can continue to communicate about what they are doing.
- ACFID to plan a follow-up event at which agencies can profile what they are doing to integrate the SDGs into their work.
- ACFID/ACOSS will reach out to the environmental movement for future civil society events around the SDGs.
- ACFID/ACOSS will explore opportunities for 'all in' moments around the goals over the next three to five years, such as producing a shadow report card to measure Australia's progress, or holding a summit on the goals.