

# “Together we can”

(Keeping pace with the “new normal”)

Results of the Online Consultation of the PFD network

Results of the Online Consultation of the PFD network.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Background and Participant profiles .....	4
A. Sustainable Development Goals .....	6
A.1. Ongoing work on Sustainable Development Goals.....	6
A.2. What is needed to achieve the SDGs .....	8
A.3. Role of the EU in promoting SDGs .....	11
B. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships.....	13
B.1. What stakeholders engage in partnerships and how? .....	13
B.2. Key factors to enhance multi-stakeholder partnerships .....	14
B.3. Role of the EU in supporting Multi-stakeholder Partnerships .....	16
C. Enabling environment .....	18
C.1. Current trends and most affected sectors/competences.....	18
C.2. Main obstacles for development actors.....	19
C.3. Role of the EU in fostering an enabling environment.....	22
Conclusions and Recommendations .....	26
Supporting SDGs through a results-oriented approach .....	27
Promoting MSPs through an actor-based approach.....	27
Fostering an enabling environment through a politically-informed approach .....	28
Role of EU Delegations .....	29

## Introduction

This document presents the results of a survey conducted by the Technical Assistance Team of the PFD among its constituents' networks. Its title, extracted from one of the many open remarks made by the respondents, seeks to reflect the collective mood that can be inferred from most of the replies. Indeed, despite being conducted in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis - or precisely because of that- a majority of participants has underscored the importance of the work of EU development policy with regards to the three main areas covered by the survey: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (MSP) and Enabling Environment (EE).

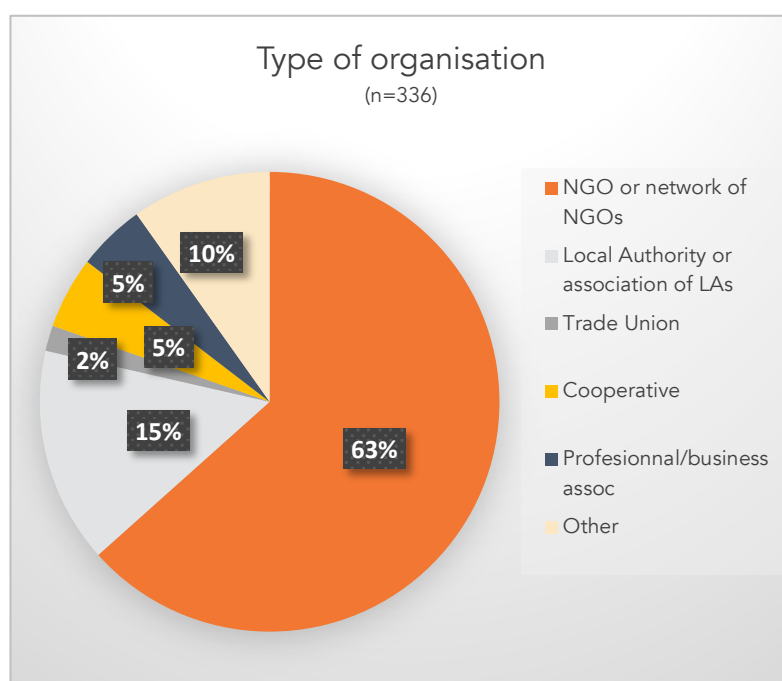
The social, economic and political effects of the health crisis may well have been unpredictable, but they cannot be considered as unexpected. On the contrary, the rise in inequalities, the overly centralised decision-making, the excessive restrictions of personal freedoms or the asymmetric burden on women and girls are longstanding trends that the COVID-19 situation has just exacerbated. This makes the three areas hereby addressed even more relevant and urgent, especially now that the EU development system is programming its support for the coming seven years.

It is in this framework that the insight captured by the survey takes on particular importance, as it comes from those development actors (CSOs, LAs and Association of LAs, Trade Unions, Cooperatives, Business Associations, etc.) that used to fall under the catch-all label of "non-state" actors. However, despite their diversity of backgrounds and mandates, the PFD constituencies have progressively built a shared vision of how developmental processes should unfold in order to be effective, sustainable and inclusive. A shared vision that remains structured along a common set of objectives (SDG), a favoured mean of implementation (MSP) and a series of preconditions that in many cases could be considered as ends in themselves (EE).

Arguably one of the most interesting lessons that can be drawn from the recommendations made by the respondents is that the three fields of work are deeply interlinked but can nevertheless be tackled through a variety of complementary approaches. Whereas the **Sustainable Development Goals** are prone to the adoption of a results-based approach that focuses on clear targets and indicators, **Multi-stakeholder Partnerships** are actor-based and require a combination of capacity building and dialogue so as to bring about the sort of trust and mutual understanding that are the cornerstone of any meaningful cooperation. All this, however, needs to take place in **Enabling Environments** that allow development actors to move from their traditional role of implementing partners to active participants in decision making processes. This last aspect is usually where policy meets politics and where respondents to the survey ask the EU to take a less diplomatic stance and stronger affirmative action both in the international arena and in each of the countries in which it operates. This becomes especially relevant in the current shift toward a more geographic focus of most of EU development funds and explains why the final recommendations are specifically addressed to EU Delegations.

## Background and Participant profiles

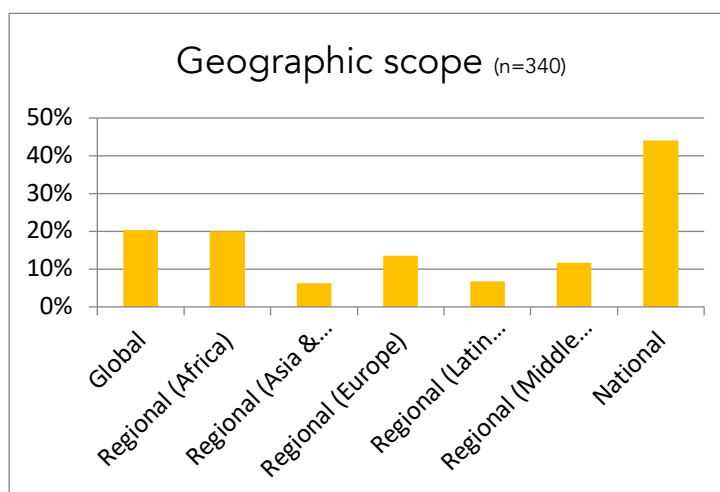
The Policy Forum on Development (PFD), the European Commission's multi-stakeholder space for dialogue on EU development policy, includes in its membership **75 civil society organisations (CSOs) and associations of local authorities (ALAs)** who represent thousands of development actors, including from marginalised communities. The PFD is carrying out a capitalisation exercise to understand the main messages from the past years of dialogue amongst forum members. This research aims to understand how development cooperation, specifically its work in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is seen by the PFD constituencies and how it has been affected by COVID-19. Without a better understanding of what is happening to development partners in the field, adequate policy, social and economic support cannot be properly put in place.



As part of this work to capitalise on the ongoing dialogue, the PFD organised a **consultation** amongst member networks to obtain feedback on: 1. the SDGs; 2. the enabling environment; and 3. multi-stakeholder partnerships, as well as the current COVID-19 situation. The SurveyMonkey questionnaire was shared via newsletters, email, and social media between 16 April – 18 May 2020. Of the more than 360 total respondents to the survey, roughly 28% came from Europe, 21% from Africa,

17% from the Neighbourhood, 14% from global networks, 10% from Latin America and 10% from Asia and the Pacific. This paper is a summary of the responses around each of these three areas and complements the summary work already done on the COVID-19 responses.

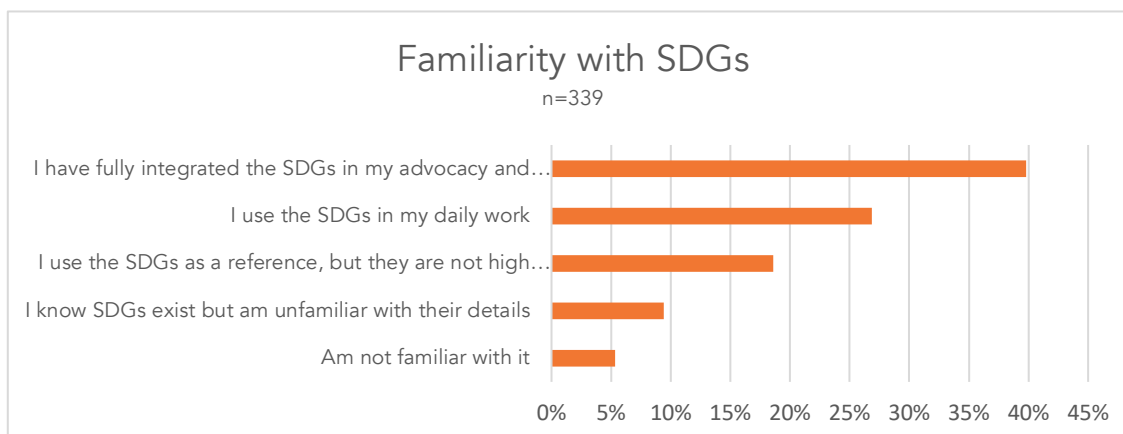
While not all respondents answered all questions, the breakdown of respondents' profiles shared showed a majority of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) took the survey. Respondents described their scope of work as primarily at the national level (44%), with 20% being global actors and 20% working in Africa. Many of the questions that address specific challenges and recommendations are therefore targeted at national level response. The point was made quite often that localisation of SDG is not widespread enough, so respondents stressed the importance of sub-national and local level infrastructure, funding and actions.



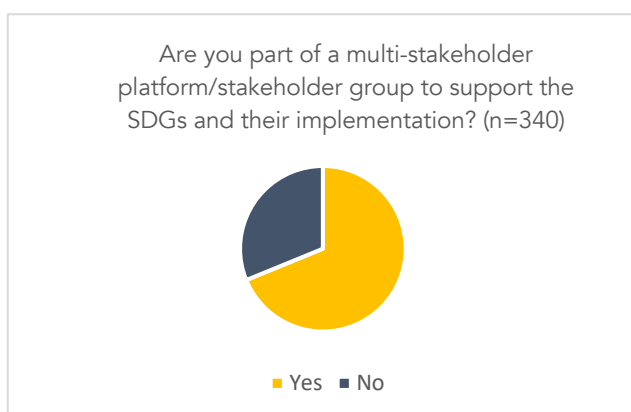
## A. Sustainable Development Goals

### A.1. Ongoing work on Sustainable Development Goals

The first section of the consultation asked some key questions about how the respondents use the SDGs in their own work, how they work and report on the SDGs, the key issues they face and what the EU could do to help overcome those issues. When asked about their familiarity with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and if they are used in their work, almost 40% of respondents said that they have fully integrated the SDGs in their daily work, with only 6% unfamiliar with the SDGs.



Such a high level of familiarity with the SDGs is reinforced by the fact that more than two-thirds of the respondents belong to some sort of multi-stakeholder platform or coalition to support the SDGs. In other words, the SDGs do seem to be fulfilling their structuring role, as they are being fully integrated by a majority of organisations not only in their advocacy, but also in their daily work, while also guiding the collective efforts undertaken by multi-

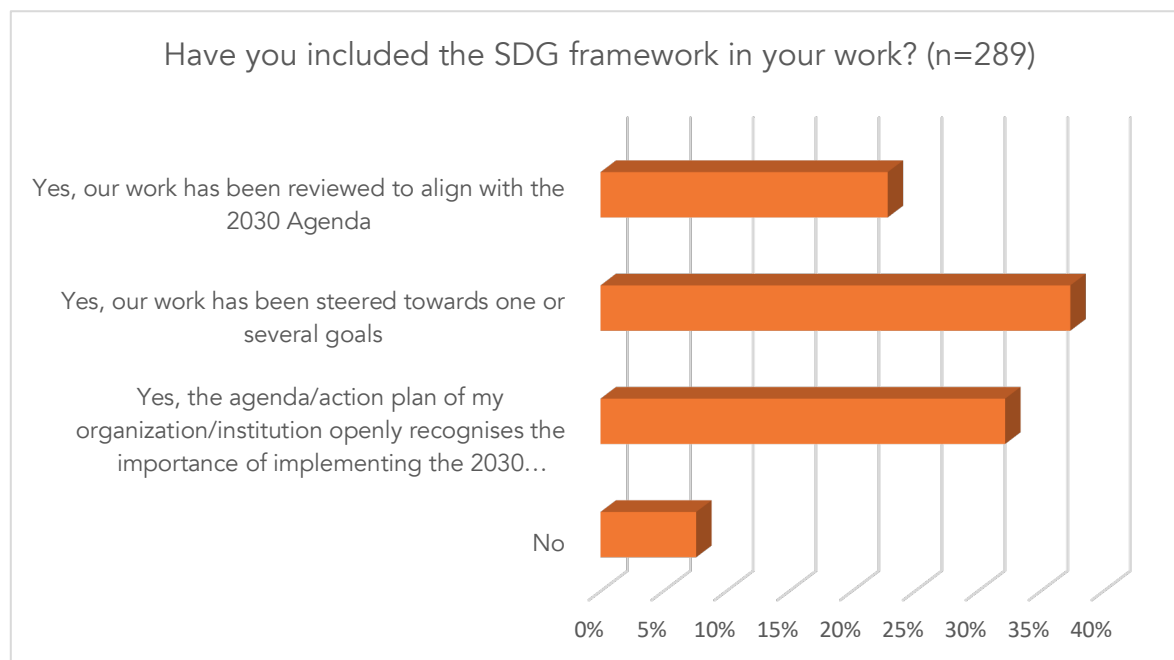


stakeholder platforms despite the diversity of mandates and backgrounds amongst their members. This aspect will be further analysed in the section corresponding to multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP), but it is important to underscore that the SDGs seem to have a considerable convening power when it comes to bringing together a disparate array of actors and framing their exchanges under a common results framework either via existing or new

platforms.

Not incidentally, a vast majority of the respondents has included the SDG framework in their work, mostly by steering their work toward one or more specific SDGs (37%), but also by reviewing their work so as to better align it to the 2030 Agenda (23%). While in one third of the organizations/institutions covered by the survey (32%) the adoption of the SDG framework may not have been as thorough, their action plans and other programmatic documents

openly recognise the 2030 Agenda framework. The residual percentage of respondents that have not included the SDG in their work (5%) is the same that claim not be familiar at all with them, which somewhat implies a high level of acceptance, as all those organisations/institutions that are relatively aware of the Agenda 2030 seem to have integrated it - albeit to different extents - into their own agendas.



When asked specifically about the **level of engagement in national reporting on SDGs** (n=287), 24% of respondents noted that there was no consultation mechanism in place where they work. While 30% of respondents took part in ad hoc consultations, only 8% considered themselves an integral part of the reporting process, at all steps of the voluntary national reporting process. 15% took part in a parallel process or shadow report, while 13% took part in some part of the VNR process. 9% responded that they knew of consultations taking place as part of a Voluntary National Review (VNR) process, but they were not taking part.

When asked if there is a **coordinating mechanism** in place for work with other partners, including the national government, 35% of respondents said there was not. 37% of respondents referred to an existing development strategy as the mechanism for engagement. 17% said there is an appointed SDG coordinator at national level. 18% of respondents said there was another mechanism, such as the Major Group of NGOs at the High-Level political forum, regional Women's Major Groups, or regional CS engagement mechanisms around the UN SDG process, bilateral partnerships, NGO platforms, UN Common Country Assessments, coalitions, MoU, etc.).

However, some respondents called the attention to the **inherent challenges of the SDGs**: "the timeline being too short for developing countries; the broadness of the goals making it difficult to implement concretely, notably in situations where data is lacking; lack of guidance on tools and methodologies which are not clear or accessible to those who need to implement the goals" (Congress of local authorities of Moldova). Others also noted the need to revise

the **current country classification system** based on income for a system that more accurately reflects the needs and capacities of a country, a claim that goes hand in hand with improving ODA criteria in order to increase resources for development financing. *"In Latin America and the Caribbean, almost 90% of countries fall in the middle-income category (MICs). This broad diversity of capacities and needs among MICs is, however, seldom taken into account by donor countries and multilateral agencies when prioritizing the allocation of official development assistance (ODA). For a middle-income region such as Latin America and the Caribbean, this has meant that its share of ODA flows fell from an already low 9% in 1990 to an even lower 7% in 2009, compared with Africa and Asia which receive the most substantial share (37% and 30% respectively). Considering the above, the EU could contribute to improving this situation by: .... Promoting the revision of the criteria used for country classification and the substitution of the currently used income-based criteria with new, better-suited indicators. These new indicators should be able to capture the multifaceted nature of development and thus lead to country groupings that are less heterogeneous internally"* (Cooperatives of the Americas)

## A.2. What is needed to achieve the SDGs

When asked about what respondents needed to implement the SDGs (weighted choices), **financial resources** (58% very important, 33% important and 5% moderately important) were deemed very important or important by the most respondents, closely followed by **awareness** by all stakeholders (54% very important, 33% important and 8% moderately important) and **support from national governments** (53% very important, 33% important and 11% moderately important). Indeed, all constituencies noted these concerns and discussed how their work is limited or affected by resource shortages and general lack of familiarity of the 2030 Agenda and its goals among the general population.

As could be expected, different types of stakeholders face different challenges when it comes to pursuing the SDGs. **Cooperatives**, for instance, noted that they are often overlooked as a development partner at country level and that this affects their capacity to contribute positively to the 2030 Agenda. When they are included, this is not always done in a formal, consistent manner, which ends having negative effects in terms of accountability, as some respondents explained that the lack of clarity as to who has engaged to do what and how each player will be accountable for their contributions. Not incidentally, several cooperative comments called on the **EU to act as an intermediary or facilitator** to bring together development partners in country and allow for a more structured space for engagement, to set clearer frameworks and goals and improve transparency and accountability.

**Local Authorities (LAs)**, on their side, also face accountability problems, albeit from another angle, as most of the respondents belonging to this group strongly stressed the need for financial resources at the local level so as to avoid the classic problem for local authorities operating in undefined decentralisation process: being held accountable without being made fully responsible by means of proper transfers or the ability to collect taxes. LAs and ALAs also consistently raised the lack of awareness of the SDGs in the population, a challenge that is not only confronted by local authorities but also at central government level. Some noted



a generational divide, with some “older” government leaders less attuned to the current development agenda, while others asked for EU support in clarifying and simplifying the explanation of the SDGs. Going a step further, the same respondent suggests to *“advocate for youth, who have good knowledge of the SDG and their global importance, to be part of the decision-making process, especially at small community levels like local authorities (Municipality of Ras el Metn, Lebanon). In other cases, the EU could “help to force a policy at the national level that secures funding mechanism to [local government units] LGUs whose work is aligned with SDGs implementation” (Ramallah Municipality) or “pourrait également contribuer au renforcement des initiatives des gouvernements locaux, lesquels manquent de moyens, de compétences techniques, alors qu'ils font face à des défis considérables” (Commune de Fort Dauphin)*

Support of national governments is highly important and is not forthcoming in many countries due to different reasons: a lack of political will; a lack of awareness; or a lack of clear methods of implementation (affected by capacity and resources). In this regard, one respondent considers that the EU could support by *“creating an awareness amongst newly elected LGRs and adopting a more cohesive approach between national and local government as well as civil society groups, rather than operating in silos.” (Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities)*

As for **NGOs**, they also consistently noted resource limitations as a challenge (and one greatly exacerbated by the current health crisis, as reflected in the accompanying note on COVID-19 impacts) with some of the respondents outlining the reasons behind this limitations: *“We see four major obstacles preventing partner countries to realise the SDGs: 1. The lack of public resources due to illicit financial flows, including tax avoidance by wealthy individuals and transnational companies (large companies operating in several countries); 2. conditions attached to loans by IFIs, which restrict spending in public services making inevitable to open them to private capital and privatisation; 3. the lack of political will by private and public creditors to cancel debt; 4. trade and investment agreements restricting significantly the policy and fiscal space for partner countries to realise human rights and the SDGs.” (ActionAid International)*

NGO respondents also called for greater awareness of the SDGs amongst the general population, the governments and also amongst EU institutions and Member States. The commitment to the goals has to be strong and upheld amongst the EU leaders responsible for policy areas that affect development. This is greatly tied to policy coherence, but this responsibility and accountability for SDG implementation as linked to a lack of awareness of the goals as well.

The next highest ranked challenge according to the respondents is the absence of **clear targets and indicators** (49% very important, 38% important and 13% moderately important), as well as of available, accessible and up to date **data** (48% very important, 40% important and 8% moderately important) two separate but clearly linked issues. Clarity in targets and indicators implies that there is a planned way forward, which is intended to be measured and used to improve implementation, as well as to establish accountability mechanisms. But however detailed the plan may be, without accurate and accessible data those targets and indicators cannot be monitored. This is also linked to the need and request to develop

**improved capacities** (47% very important, 40% important and 10% moderately important) to address complexity and multilevel cooperation, which is why local authorities especially requested capacity building for local governments to be able to understand, integrate SDGs in local planning and collect data for monitoring and follow up. NGOs as well called on the EU to help strengthen the capacities of local authorities. This need for multisectoral cooperation is expounded upon in the discussion of multi-stakeholder partnerships, but it is interesting to note that capacity building for development partners is considered key by partners from different sectors. The reliance on cooperation between local authorities and civil society is clear. Some respondents even cited the CSO-LA thematic programme as an important support to on the ground cooperation: *"Our members reported that the structure of the current CSO-LA programme already strongly contributes to the creation of MSP."* (Cooperatives Europe)

Another fundamental aspect in need of improvement for more effective SDG implementation is **coordination across different levels of government** (47% very important, 39% important and 11% moderately important) to avoid the following diagnostic: *"Manque de coordination et donc mise en oeuvre peu efficace de l'Agenda 2030"* (Fédération des Entreprises du Congo, RDC). Another respondent digs into the roots of the problem in her own country, showing the extent to which the lack of financial resources is linked to a combination of coordination failures and political (dis)incentives: *"The major challenge in the implementation of SDGs in Nigeria is financial resources and coordination among different actors. Sub-national governments are not doing enough to raise funds internally to implement the goals as they depend on funding from the federal government which is never enough as the major source of country's funding is from oil."* (Women Environmental Programme)

**Legal and institutional reforms** to empower relevant levels of government are equally seen as important or very important for 41% of the respondents while only for 12% they held moderate importance. *"The major challenge in implementation of SDGs agenda is weak legal and policy frameworks for Local Governments, lack of capacities, data and coordination"* (UCLG ASPAC). Several respondents made comments about the need for policy reform and enforcement - the development, implementation and follow up on strong policies. The regulatory framework for SDG implementation needs strengthening in many cases. The need to have a strong legal basis for action also serves as a protection against the changing political winds, illustrated by a couple of respondents from Latin America who noted how political change (or government leadership in transition) can bring past commitments into question. This explains why a **clear mandate** for SDG implementation (43% very important, 38% important and 13% moderately important) is considered slightly more important than **working with other stakeholders** (40% very important, 39% important and 17% moderately important), the two factors that are ranked last but nevertheless remain key, as shown in the great emphasis that respondents put on multi-stakeholder spaces and their recommendations to improve the effectiveness of EU support, outlined in the following section.

### A.3. Role of the EU in promoting SDGs

Given the opportunity to select recommendations to the EU, the top two recommendations by far were to: 1. **Dedicate more funding to SDG localisation** for all actors; and 2. Establish **multi-stakeholder working groups in partner countries** which include CSOs and LAs. About two thirds of respondents to this question (n=319, and only 3 responses possible) selected these two options. One third of the respondents supported at least one of the following three:

- Creating an intergroup at the European Parliament on SDGs, which would involve local authorities and civil society organisations
- Ensuring more policy coherence between external and internal EU policies
- Assessing the political implications of SDG implementation in partner countries so as to better inform its cooperation programmes and projects
- Increasing transparency in the development of Integrated National Financing Frameworks at country level

The ensuing open-ended question allowed for more detailed recommendations, of which a selection is hereby presented. These are left as quotes to retain the true reflection of the response, but the feedback refers to other aspects of the survey, showing their degree of interrelation: support for the 2030 Agenda and **SDGs as a framework** for development work, the **necessity of the enabling environment** and the strength of the **EU as a supporter and convenor of multi-stakeholder partnership**, all within a clear call for **policy coherence**.

1. *"Ensure that the EU's own development policy a) embeds the **principles of transparency, accountability and participation** in its own programming by engaging affected communities to the extent possible and b) supports measures in partner countries to **strengthen public financial management**, domestic resource mobilisation and reduce [international financial flows] IFFs out of their countries of origin. This dual-pronged approach is key to mobilise and safeguard the resources needed to pay for the 2030 Agenda. The latter element b) will require **policy coherence** between EU external and internal policies. In other words, the EU must take action at home to clamp down on EU jurisdictions enabling transnational corruption, tax avoidance and evasion, as well as taking action in partner countries on these issues, such as increasing support for oversight agencies, supervisory authorities and financial intelligence units, as well as CSOs to monitor their effectiveness."* (Transparency International Secretariat)
2. *"Most importantly **to follow national development vision and priorities**, which quite often are rather different from the ones promoted by international organizations. By national meaning civil society, local authorities and central government together. To bear in mind that governmental priorities are not national priorities unless three mentioned parts are equally involved."* (Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova)
3. *"EU needs to have **clear instructions on the working modalities with the different stakeholders**, at all levels, and at all stages of the policy-making process. In this sense, PLATFORMA calls to: 1. Create an overarching European SDG strategy, which provides clear guidelines on policy coherence within the European Union amongst the different levels of governance, as well as with partner countries. 2. Work in the spirit of multi-level governance: explicitly recognise the role of local and regional governments as*

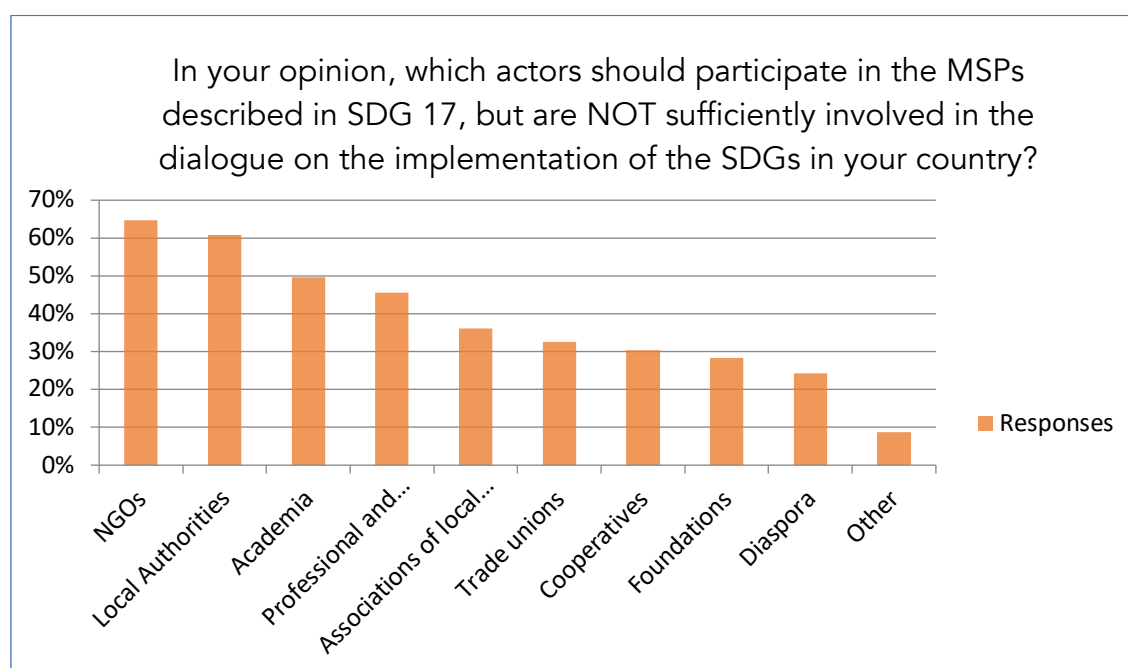
polymakers and provide them with an equal seat at the table. 3. Allocate funds and increase support dedicated to the localisation of the SDGs and learning between peers at EU and international level, including for capacity building and technical support for [local and regional governments] LRGs in partner countries aiming at spurring SDG implementation". (PLATFORMA)

4. "EU development policy can contribute [to SDG implementation] in addressing the ever-worsening shrinking space for CSOs in my country through **promoting enabling environment, supporting MSPs, and exert political pressure** to address the human rights situation in the country." (Asia Pacific Research Network)
5. "EU should allocate, through call for project proposals, **financial support to National networks** that effectively work in the field of SDG agenda. So that the government increases its accountability for the pledge towards fulfilling SGD agenda." (Albanian Coalition for Education)
6. "In the light of our experiences in country, we have seen that States have not clearly defined and integrated their 2030 agenda. Similarly, national, regional and international institutions have not strictly confirmed in practice their willingness to entrench participatory paradigms in the implementation of the SDG Agenda 2030, in particular with civil society. EU development policy can contribute to improving the situation by setting-up multi-stakeholder working groups in partner countries involving local authorities and civil society organisations and consolidating its support for the development of a strategic role for CSOs." (Environnement et Développement dans le Tiers-monde - ENDA T-M)

## B. Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

### B.1. What stakeholders engage in partnerships and how?

Multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources are considered essential for the achievement of the SDGs and the enhancement of the global partnership for sustainable development (SDG17, target 16). Being a flexible and open concept<sup>1</sup>, MSPs are defined by their objectives rather than by their composition, which is why they have become instrumental for the pursuit of SDGs. But in the end, it is these partners who define the nature of any partnership, so participants to the survey were asked about what type of partnerships they considered key to accelerate action for the SDGs. In this regard, partnerships between CSOs/LAs and the government were considered most important by respondents (74%), closely followed by partnerships amongst CSOs (67%). They were followed by public private partnerships (49%) and social dialogue among the government, trade unions and business associations (47%), with partnerships among local authorities considered as key by a third of the respondents (32%). It is important to note that, among the 77 respondents that considered Local Authorities as key to advance SDGs, only 21 were LAs or Associations of LAs (less than one third), while 107 out of the 158 that opted for partnerships amongst CSOs (i.e.: almost two thirds) were themselves CSOs or networks of CSOs.



<sup>1</sup> At least this is how the survey questions were framed, so as to allow for a broader interpretation on the side of the respondents

The versatility and openness of MSPs sometimes means that important stakeholders are being left out of the partnership for SDG implementation in a given country. When asked about those types of actors that were being side-lined, NGOs, LAs and Associations of LAs were the first ones to appear, albeit in a relatively low proportion if one considers the profile of the respondents. In line with the previous question, only 25 out of the 141 respondents that deem that LAs are not being included as they should were LAs or Associations of LAs (less than one fifth) while 107 out of 149 of respondents that considered that NGOs were left out (over two thirds) were themselves NGOs. This somewhat implies that the feeling of not being included as they should is more prevalent among CSOs than among LAs. But what seems more interesting in a survey where only 16 out of the 370 participants were Professional and Business Associations is the high percentage of respondents (105) that considered this category of actors as not being sufficiently involved. Similarly, Academia appears as another type of actor that is perceived as being less engaged than it should, followed by Trade Unions and Cooperatives.

As one respondent puts it: *"MSPs go with their risks, and those risks need to be taken into account from the design stage: power imbalances between various stakeholders, capacity of some to pay for research, contents and communication; language skills; time to get involved vs women busy with unpaid care work ; gender imbalances; fear to speak out in front of other (powerful) actors. Over-reliance on MSP without consideration of the sometimes intimidating context would be a major mistake. We wish the EU to support much more forcefully social dialogue, which goes with balance between tripartite stakeholders and protections."* (Action Aid)

## B.2. Key factors to enhance multi-stakeholder partnerships

When asked to rank key factors to support partnerships with multiple actors (being offered a 5 point scale ranging from unimportant to very important), respondents replied that the most important aspects were **improving accountability and transparency at all levels** (weighted average of 4.55) and **building the capacity of civil society and local authorities** (weighted average of 4.53). This also reflects in the commentaries to the open-ended questions, where accountability, mutual understanding and respect for all partners (see more below) were stressed. Yet there was also recognition of the reality where national government is not supportive, trusting or accountable. In some cases, government is actually interfering or forcing dependence on government entities, situations that can be overcome *"by supporting programmes that help MSPs to focus on innovative approaches of tackling governance deficits open to all players according to social mapping"* (NALAS) The means to mitigate the *"dominance of so-called more powerful partners over smaller ones"* is by *"Mutual understanding and the same level of capacity, well-developed guidelines and by laws helps to smooth the process of a well-functioning of MSPs"*. (YWCA of Albania)

**Capacity building** figures largely into all three aspects of the survey (SDG, EE, MSP) and is a pillar for a functioning work environment, the development of transparent and effective partnerships and implementation of work to achieve the SDGs. Capacity building for local authorities and for women's organisations were specifically noted in responses. Framework

partnership agreement holders cited these partnerships as one important way that the EU works to strengthen organisational capacity. For instance, *"the ICA-EU partnership, the framework partnership agreement that was signed by the ICA and its regional and global offices in 2016, has strengthened the cooperative sector in international development."* (ICA)

The next most important response was ***stronger overall commitment by the government to the achievement of the SDGs*** (weighted average of 4.44) and an ***enabling environment for CSO and LAs to operate as development actors*** (weighted average of 4.43). Indeed, the enabling environment is the fundamental layer of functioning partnerships as each actor must be able to fulfil their development role, which is why this aspect is covered in more depth in the next section. Open partnerships, with trust, transparency and accountability require confidence in the institutions and the processes. The EU can support different aspects of this environment, as noted in various responses - regulatory, political and economic frameworks. Some respondents called for the EU to have more direct relationships with national level CSOs, rather than working via large international CSOs, as a way to counteract the effects of shrinking space due to intermediary stakeholders (SOS Podgorica).

Others from Latin America highlighted the challenge of the political environment, where changes in government (and transitional governments) are a factor in policy continuity and therefore partnerships. Political change evokes changes in alliances and inclusion, and sometimes total policy change. *"En Bolivia hay un gobierno de transición y no se conoce las políticas públicas al respecto, aunque se menciona que la gestión continúa hasta que el nuevo gobierno que sea elegido en las siguientes elecciones (que por la emergencia sanitaria ha quedado postergado hasta nuevo anuncio)."* (Unitas)

The next most highly ranked responses were ***mutual recognition and full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms*** (weighted average of 4.40) and ***improving social trust and the culture of dialogue among diverse stakeholders*** (weighted average of 4.32), followed by ***better understanding of the roles of CSOs and LAs in development*** (weighted average of 4.30). All three aspects are closely related, as one of the respondents explains: *"Accountability and transparency are linked to respect and trust, and the environment to allow each actor to fulfil its role. Mutual transparency and accountability are dependent on understanding and respecting the role of each partner."* (Cooperation Committee for Cambodia – CCC).

A common understanding of the given partnership based on principles and a structured mechanism to work together is deemed essential, as highlighted by another respondent: *"Multi-stakeholder partnership has to have a common purpose that all could leave their individual interest agenda to the side and work collectively. A clear process to identify that common purpose should be facilitated before a multi-stakeholder partnership can be established. It can only work when there is a certain level of trust shared amongst the partners."* (PIANGO)

In order to improve trust and a culture of dialogue, more specific recommendations were noted, including: Maintain regular exchanges with the other partners; Organise meetings in person when possible: personal contact leads to more efficiency and consensus; Be inclusive in decision-making and prone to consensus; Identify common ground and space for synergies;

Have a positive communication style; and Treat all partners equally and with respect (ENoP) Mutual respect, regular communication, consultation and feedback mechanism are key elements that determine success or failure of multi-stakeholder partnership (Council of Governors)

The last factor for successful partnership highlights the importance of national level engagement in the form of **adequate processes for CSO and LA participation in national development plans** (weighted average of 4.24). Here the importance of recognising Associations of LAs as strategic stakeholders in dialogue and involving them in programming and monitoring process was noted, as well as the suggestion *"to open up thematic programme lines for both strategic partners in local development process: CSO and LAs."* (NALAS)

### B.3. Role of the EU in supporting Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

According to a majority of respondents, the EU is well placed to encourage multilateral and cross sectoral partnerships, which it can support via financial, technical and political support, either to existing MSPs or to those organisations and associations who wish to develop capacities to engage in MSPs. A number of respondents made reference to two ongoing programmes specialised in developing multi-stakeholder partnerships:

- The convening role of the **Policy Forum on Development** (PFD) was highlighted in the responses by some of its members: *"Continuous engagement in multi-stakeholder platforms, such as the Policy Forum for Development, are primordial for organisations operating on international level like ENoP"* (European Network of Political Foundations - ENoP). The need for multi-stakeholder dialogue at global, regional and national level was also stressed, to the point of encouraging the organization of national level PFDs. As well, the very selective nature of the PFD was noted, and therefore to a request to support MSP dialogues at various levels in addition to the PFD (see Asia Development Alliance). *"As a global network, we do believe that the EU has a great role to play at multiple levels, considering its political leverage. Focusing on our members across all regions, we would like to refer to the commonly agreed paper on Inclusive Multi-stakeholder partnerships by the PFD as it remains absolutely relevant till today"*. (ICA)
- As well the **Framework Partnership Agreements** (FPAs) were noted for their core organisational support and capacity building, and as a way to build partnerships both with the EU and amongst recipients. The EU can **lead** via **visible engagement** and encouragement of MSPs, with its ability to work across regions and mobilise multilateral and government support. Respondents encouraged work and synergies amongst the EU and other global and regional bodies. Funding instruments, such as EIDHR and others, help strengthen MSPs via actions that support capacities for engagement and address structural barriers in SDG implementation (see APRN). **Civil society roadmaps** were also noted as having unmet potential and needing wider use and inclusion in the country level processes (see Cooperatives).



Below is a selection of recommendations to the EU with regards to MSP:

1. *"The EU should provide support to advance the following actions: 1) **recognition** of the role of the different actors at all levels, 2) **capacity building**, with adequate human, financial and technical resources 3) **dialogue and consultation** to create ownership at different levels and associate stakeholders into strategies, 4) **open up implementation** processes to all stakeholders 5) **include stakeholders in the monitoring** and evaluation mechanisms of EU policies and programming 6) **institutionalize spaces** for multi-stakeholder dialogue to ensure continuity of the process."* (ICA)
2. *"In order to create and maintain partnerships that reflect country level ownership, the EU should **ensure that financial instruments involving the private sector require dialogue with and consent of affected communities**. It was suggested that the EU implement funding conditionalities to ensure governments are consulting and including MSPs in SDG implementation."* (Forus and EaP civil society).
3. *"Siendo **facilitador**, acompañante, no privilegiando el diálogo con unos por encima de los otros, manteniendo la imparcialidad y promoviendo la confianza, el respeto y los aportes de cada actor."* (Confederación Colombiana de ONG)
4. *"As well, **social dialogue** is fundamental and needs to be used more widely as a mechanism for wider engagement, inclusion and accountability. We wish the EU to support much more forcefully social dialogue, which goes with balance between tripartite stakeholders and protections."* (ActionAid International)
5. *"Improving **national and local ownership of development projects financed by EU blending facilities** is arguably the single most impactful thing that EU development cooperation can do to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships in aid-recipient countries. This will ensure that these funds are being directed towards achieving the SDG-related developmental outcomes, rather towards than commercial returns."* (Transparency International Secretariat)
6. *"The EU Delegations have a great role to play on **opening up spaces for consultation** with relevant development actors, providing capacity building around the SDGs, their targets and indicators, mobilizing/negotiating with governments to provide the frameworks within which stakeholders can act, create incentives or detect obstacles to sustainable development action, especially regarding social inclusion, inclusive economic development and progressive environmental protection."* (International Cooperative Alliance)

## C. Enabling environment

### C.1. Current trends and most affected sectors/competences

When asked about the current trends regarding the enabling environment for civil society and/or local authorities in their contexts the responses were rather evenly distributed, with a majority of respondents (38%) stating that the situation has remained the same and an equal proportion arguing that it is either improving or progressively worsening (27,13%). Only a minority (7,69%) considers that the situation has dramatically worsened and these are mostly CSOs, either with a global or regional scope, or from countries such as Cambodia, Brazil, the Philippines, Palestine-Gaza or Montenegro.

Despite the fact that most respondents consider the situation more or less the same, it is important to highlight the different perceptions among the main two groups of PFD constituents, NGOs (57) and LAs (13), when it comes to considering if the situation is improving or deteriorating. Indeed, while 18 LAs have a positive outlook of the situation versus only 2 with a negative one<sup>2</sup>; 47 NGOs paint a gloomier picture<sup>3</sup> as opposed to 33 holding a more optimistic view. This distribution is revealing, as it showcases the extent to which the features that constitute an enabling environment differ from one type of actor to the other, which may explain why a majority of cooperatives and trade unions consider that the situation has either improved or remained the same while most respondents belonging to professional or business associations consider that things are progressively worsening.

These differences are logically accentuated when the organisations operate in politically sensitive sectors such as the promotion and defence of civil and political rights, with an overwhelming majority of respondents (64%) considering that these are the CSOs that are suffering most from the phenomenon of shrinking space. They are followed by those protecting the environment against extractive industries (35%), media associations and investigative journalism (33%) and CSOs protecting gender equality, an interesting triad that showcases the way in which three different dimensions of power and sets of private interests - economic, political and social - exert pressure upon those groups that protect common values or public goods - environment, access to information, equality.

Interestingly, one quarter of the respondents considered that the space for trade unions and other organisations advancing labour rights is shrinking, but only two of these respondents are trade unions themselves, four are cooperatives and three are professional or business

---

<sup>2</sup> The positive appraisal of the EE for LAs comes from global and regional networks, with a broad geographical scope, while the most negative ones come from Associations of LAs operating at country level, namely in Lebanon and Tunisia, where the decentralisation processes are somewhat stagnated.

<sup>3</sup> Three quarters of those respondents with negative perceptions operate at global and regional level, while those with a national scope come from countries such as El Salvador, Egypt or Libya. On the contrary, from the 33 respondents depicting a more positive picture, half of them operate at regional or global level, while the other half come from countries such as Tunisia (2), Albania, Bolivia (2) or Turkey.

associations (out of a total of 64), which implies that there is a mismatch between the perceptions among those civil society entities specialised on labour issues and those active in other fields.

The contrary happens with the three types of CSOs that received the least responses - CSOs promoting/defending the rights of indigenous people (13%), CSOs promoting/defending Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (14%) and CSOs promoting/defending LGBTI rights (20%) - as if the awareness about the situation of these specific groups remained circumscribed to those actors that are specialised to some extent on those topics. This also applies to the "other" category included in the questionnaire, which was either used to state that all the options offered were equally relevant and depended on the national context or to add other categories such as "democratic political parties in opposition," "land ownership and small producers organisations" or "diaspora organisations".

Respondents were asked which competencies of LAs are most affected by shrinking civic space. The top answers were Education (59%), followed by Health and Human Resources (47%). However, the order of priorities changes when seen from the eyes of the 51 respondents belonging to LAs or Associations of LAs, for whom the most restrictive measures concern the areas of Urbanisation (21), closely followed by Human Resources (20) and the Power to levy certain taxes (18), two issues that seem to be directly correlated because every respondent who chose the second also selected the first. This shows that, contrary to the perceptions of the other types of respondents, LAs and Associations of LAs appear more concerned by those aspects that limit their capacities to fulfil their mandate than by competencies such as Education (13) and Health (15), and the latter despite the fact that the survey took place in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, when most governments adopted measures from a centralized perspective.

As for the "other" section, 43 respondents opted to suggest other areas in which LAs' space was shrinking or more limited than what they would expect, with a considerably broad array of topics ranging from tackling corruption to human rights, environment, social protection and social services, culture, development cooperation, urban mobility, women rights, land rights or natural resource management. Such diversity of expectations sheds light on the importance of LAs beyond delivering proximity services to their citizens, as very often they are also requested to manage public goods for which they lack either a clear mandate or adequate resources.

## C.2. Main obstacles for development actors

The perceptions above become much more nuanced when assessed in the light of the actual obstacles or restrictions that civil society and local authorities face in their daily work. With almost 50% of respondents deeming it very important and 27% important, **obstacles to sources of funding** are the most worrisome handicap for the majority of CSOs. In this regard, it is important to highlight the unintended negative effect that some EU measures such as trade sanctions can have in the already daunting financial situation that CSOs and LAs face. As one of the respondents argues, *"financial support should be increased unambiguously for civil society (including trade unions, journalists, etc) as fundamental actors in a participatory*

*democracy and crucial guardians of the social contract between the government and citizens"* (Action Aid) This is especially important because *"elections drive conflicts and polarisation if they are not complemented with sound mechanisms for the authorities to consult and work with CSOs at all levels"*, which makes the case to *"strengthen those financial instruments that do not require governments' consent (e.g.: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights) is also crucial."* (Sociedad Potosina de Ecología -SOPE)

In this same vein, another respondent (Partners Albania for Change and Development) suggests to *"enforce existing mechanisms of support particularly those financial instruments that do not require governments' consent"* while at the same time *"support CSOs in improving their own governance mechanisms to become more transparent and accountable, push for proper implementation and contribute to establishment of monitoring mechanism in this regard."* This linkage between the financial capabilities and the governance mechanisms of CSOs seems very relevant, as it touches upon the perceived legitimacy of these organisations and thus could become a crucial argument to counter the prejudices and negative depiction of civil society by some media. Not incidentally, another respondent from the same country (Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes) considers that *"the introduction and implementation of the subgrantee model has been effective in reaching out organizations at local level"*, as such schemes provide donors with much broader outreach while promoting local mechanisms for vertical accountability.

An example from Colombia illustrates this point, as one respondent explains: *"Se cuenta con una iniciativa de transparencia y rendición de cuentas de las OSC, así como con el Sistema de Acreditación de las OSC, ambos mecanismos que promueven el auto-control y permiten fortalecer la autonomía de las OSC, su oferta de valor y aumentar su legitimidad como actores del desarrollo. En la CCONG tenemos prácticas de diálogo político con el gobierno nacional, en torno a agendas de incidencia de las OSC, con lo cual se fortalece su rol político y de incidencia en el desarrollo, esto debería poder escalarse a nivel territorial."* (Confederación Colombiana de ONG)

This move towards autoregulation could be considered as one among several strategies to overcome what respondents deem the second two most important obstacles to CSOs and LAs normal functioning, **restrictive regulatory frameworks** (29% very important, 35% important and 20% moderately important) and **excessive administrative procedures** (25% very important, 40% important and 20% moderately important). Needless to say, both obstacles are interconnected and can give way to both virtuous and vicious cycles. The case of Kenya has been raised by some respondents as a positive experience, where *"the citizens' rights to assembly are protected in the Bill of Rights of Kenya's 2010 Constitution and are visible in the right to strike, the provision for independent candidates to run for political office, and the many peaceful assemblies and political rallies. The right to participate in governance, planning and development processes is protected in the country's constitution as one of its core principles, and structures have been developed at both national and county level to realize this freedom."*(Fairtrade). However, against the backdrop of this overall positive regulatory framework *"civil society successfully shelved retrogressive amendments to the Public Benefits Organizations Act 2013 which would have restricted CSOs' ability to register and operate, by organising demonstrations, lobbying members of parliament, strategically*

*engaging government agencies and public awareness raising campaigns”(European Partnership for Democracy). Similarly, “civil society organizations in Nigeria have teamed up and successfully challenged some bills that were anti-civil society that were being considered to be passed into law. One of such was an anti-social media bill which would have gouged the press and removed the right to freedom of expression or of holding government accountable. The mobilization by the CSOs helped in putting a stop to the bill. Another bill that was stopped through mobilization of the CSOs was a bill that sought to regulate civil society and made it mandatory to submit their proposed activities to government for approval.” (Women Environmental Programme)*

In other words, civil society needs to stay alert at all times and react to any attempt to curtail its room for manoeuvre, which can come from different fronts and in different guises, although frequently takes the form of excessive administrative procedures. These becomes especially suffocating when linked to the sources of funding, as one respondent noted from Seychelles, where *“access to funding is extremely difficult. Procedures are lengthy and not always clear and practical.”* (Association of the districts of Victoria Seychelles)

Nevertheless, it is not only national or governmental procedures that can hamper CSO's action, but also those from the donors: *“In countries where Special Procedures have been applied, the speed of action taken by the EU has been faster and the effectiveness has been greater, so in crisis situations where procedures cannot be followed the EU should provide more flexibility in its procedures.”* Along the same lines, another respondent considers that *“the European Union should study the bureaucratic documentary procedures accompanying the support it provides, taking into account the difference and privacy from one country to another, especially the countries of Africa and the third world, which cannot match all the procedures and European Union restrictions.”*(Athar for Development and Empowerment)

This said, administrative procedures are not negative in themselves, as argued by a respondent (Dominican Association of Local Community Authorities - DALCA) that welcomes *“the many attempts to harmonization of the working relation or bylaws of local authorities to afford them more autonomy to implement the EU agenda as well as overall effective functioning”* and suggests that *“support could be given to consultations and technical assistance”* to foster a more comprehensive reform and better division of labour between the central and local governments. A similar point is made by another respondent (Local Councils Association of the Punjab), who considers that *“the EU can support to bring national-sub national and local government on the table to debate and finalize the role and domain of each, and to support to those who are on the front line advocating for democratic local democracy”*.

This is closely related to the next most relevant obstacle, the **recentralisation of power (vs decentralisation)**, which is considered as important by 34% of the respondents and very important by 26%, closely followed by **ineffective decentralisation reforms** that are deemed important by 35% and very important by 24%. One respondent (NALAS) explains the dynamics underlying both processes: *“At regional level we see a tendency of re-centralisation which is a phenomenon that continues. Financial resources for LAs are further restricted. At the same time block grants increase the tendency of dependence on central government. Government structured dialogue with local government level is scarce. Local governments*

are largely left out if it comes to consultation on EU enlargement in candidate countries." Albeit more directly affecting LAs and Associations of LAs, this trend also touches on CSOs, who are usually involved in an *ad hoc* and intermittent basis instead of through sustained cooperation. A respondent (Centre for Research and Policy Making) explains consequences of this paradoxical situation as follows: *"The government is open to CSOs but is not taking CSO contributions with which is showing CS not to be credible partner; also in the past year government is substituting the development work done by CSOs with own activities, which results on shrinking the space of operation for CSOs"*.

To address this sort of situation *"Caritas Europa has developed what they call institutional advocacy, which fosters strategic relationships with national governments. This could be an important 'way in' so that governments/public authorities actually value CSOs and their solution-oriented approaches."* (Caritas Europa)

Ranking next in the list of obstacles is the **violation of human rights and persecution of human rights defenders** (with 30% of the respondents considering it very important and 30% as important), followed by a **restrictive interpretation of legislation by the judiciary** (with only 18% of the respondents considering it very important, but with 30% and 25% deeming it as either important or moderately important) and the **negative depiction of CS in state-owned or sponsored media** (very important for 23% and important for the 26%). However, no examples to illustrate these obstacles were provided by the respondents in the open-ended questions, so it is difficult to say how they operate in reality. The same can be said of the last two obstacles in order of importance, the imposition of **punitive taxes** and the **harassment by security forces or pro- government movements**, which are considered important by 28% and 24% of the respondents and very important by 16% and 20% respectively, with unfortunately no further hints on how these restrictions come into practice.

### C.3. Role of the EU in fostering an enabling environment

Respondents were offered the following set of options, from which they could choose up to three with an open-ended choice in which they could add their own recommendations, an option that was used by only 3% of the respondents. The results are as follows:

Ensure the establishment of a structured dialogue at country level with CSOs and LAs/ALAs	36.90%
Enforce existing mechanisms (e.g.: Civil Society oversight of Budget Support) in a more consistent manner	28.78%
Open spaces for political dialogue between development actors (donors, civil society, government, private sector).	26.20%
Strengthen those financial instruments that do not require governments' consent (e.g.: European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights)	23.62%

Support CSOs in improving their own governance mechanisms to become more transparent and accountable	22.51%
Introduce conditionality into its cooperation mechanisms	18.45%
Provide technical assistance to improve the regulatory framework	18.08%
Re-introduce in the MFF 2021-2027 (NDICI), the financial instruments used to support local authorities that do not require governments' consent (eg. CSOs-Local Authorities thematic programme)	15.87%
Strengthen LAs and their associations to provide basic services at local level	15.50%
Support partner governments and democratic institutions to acknowledge and better understand the role and legitimacy of civil society	15.50%
Promote and update EU country roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society	14.02%
Revise its procedures (eg.: eligibility criteria for non-registered organizations, confidentiality safeguards, financial transfers, subgranting, etc.) to take into account the realities that CSOs, LAs and ALAs face in the field	12.92%
Support partner governments and democratic institutions to acknowledge and better understand the role and legitimacy of local authorities and their associations	10.33%
Impose economic/trade sanctions	9.96%
Increase its support to national human rights institutions	7.38%

However, many recommendations to the EC were made in the other open-ended questions of the survey and have been compiled below:

1. *"An enabling environment means that civil society has the space to thrive, speak out, participate in policy consultations, demonstrations and campaigns. It means fundamental freedoms and human rights need to be respected and security ensured for those who need to express their views. To promote this enabling environment the EU could take a more political role in supporting fundamental freedoms and human rights, not only by supporting CSOs and their networks directly, but also by being a strategic partner of civil society when civic space is under pressure. Mirroring the UN civil society engagement mechanisms (see <https://www.wecf.org/global-roleprocesses/>), we recommend **to ensure that policy spaces are opened for groups that need to be able to speak with their own voice**, such as peoples with disabilities, indigenous peoples, women, LGBTQI, youth etc. See the [example](#) of Asia Pacific. These spaces are not for one representative, or representative organizations, but for a whole constituency, who should self-organize rotation and coordination. We have good experiences with this in the regional SDG processes." (Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) International)*



2. "In the face of a polarised media space around elections, Georgian civil society successfully passed a package that ensures cable TV subscribers can watch all key television channels in the pre-election period even if those channels are not included in the provider's package. Honduran civil society successfully pushed for an act that secured financial support for human rights defenders by the government and lobbied for the International Mission to Support against Corruption and Impunity (MACCIH). In Guatemala, massive protests in 2015 against corrupt politicians led to the resignation of the president and vice president and led to new platforms and networks advocating for clean politics. These examples are taken from a forthcoming publication of EPD into the closing democratic space that found that if donors, policy-makers and activists are **to really tackle the enabling environment with success then there is a need to move beyond civic space and look at other areas where space is also being closed** (such as the so-called level playing field and the use of the judiciary). This echoes several recent academic studies that have suggested that there is a need to address closing democratic space to support a conducive environment for civil society." (European Partnership for Democracy)
3. "Main point is to have much more support for civil society, local authorities and local governments associations as the main actors and promoters of change and development. Much less support for states and governments, which are rarely interested in reforms, changes and democracy. Much **more support for hard (capital investments) and advocacy projects and much less for soft and capacity building projects** as the latter do not bring any more sustainable results under the lack of reforms" (Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova)
4. "**Enforce existing mechanisms** (e.g.: Civil Society oversight of Budget Support) in a more consistent manner: Ensure the establishment of a structured dialogue at country level with CSOs; Provide technical assistance to improve the regulatory framework; Support CSOs in improving their own governance mechanisms to become more transparent and accountable; Strengthen LAs and their associations to provide basic services at local level; Support partner governments and democratic institutions to acknowledge and better understand the role and legitimacy of civil society ; Open spaces for policy dialogue between development actors (donors, civil society, government, private sector); and Promote and update EU country roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society." (Youth Vision)
5. "Provide more **flexible funding** modalities for (potential) grantees working in restricted environments // Provide **capacity building** support to better equip organisations in areas that are crucial to counter threats – physical as well as online security, access to legal consultation, fundraising and communication // Provide funds for **advocacy work** that focuses on countering a shrinking and fostering an enabling environment for civil society // Provide **platforms for dialogue** and foster cooperation between civil society, governments and businesses to create an enabling environment together // **Agenda setting in international events** – include the importance of an enabling environment for civic society in international discussions // Enforce existing mechanism and further strengthen the mechanisms that can **impose restrictions or even penalties** against (EU member) states that violate civil society principles // Enforce existing mechanism and



*further strengthen the mechanisms that can impose restrictions or even penalties on new forms of power through big tech companies // Position itself against populist rhetoric against civil society.” (Transparency International Secretariat)*

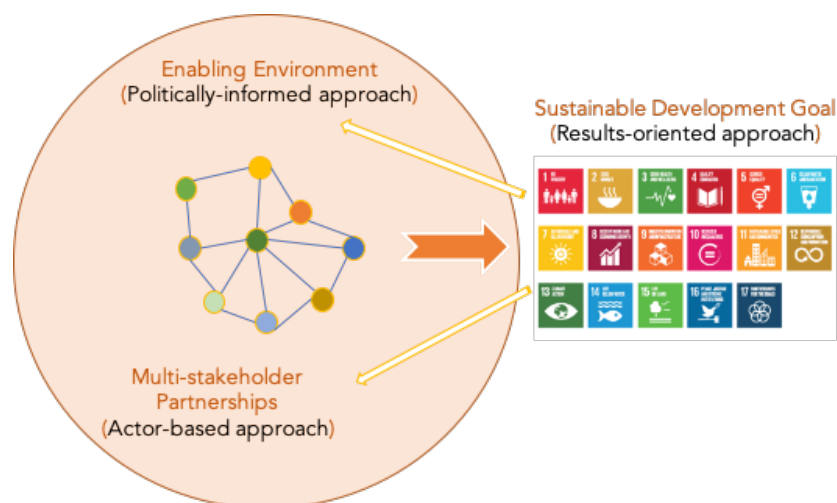
6. *“Consulting with local and regional governments means taking them as partners, from the beginning till the end of the policy-making process, just as another public authority, and create a constant policy dialogue at all stages, from the pre-programming to the implementation phase. We recommend the European Commission to **pursue the multi-stakeholder platform for SDGs in its new mandate and make the link with the Policy Forum on Development.**” (PLATFORMA)*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As shown in the replies to the open-ended questions, there are high expectations on the EU, as its work is generally considered of great importance in the three aspects covered by the survey. The EU's commitment towards the implementation of the SDGs, the support to MSPs and the promotion of an enabling environment for development actors is considered especially important given the global trend towards democratic backsliding and shrinking space, worrisome symptoms that have become more acute due to the crisis resulting from COVID-19.

Usually considered as a “package”, SDGs, EE and MSP are certainly intertwined, as they embody a new way of conceiving development cooperation and the role of the different stakeholders involved in developmental processes. But if the EU wants to understand how these relatively new players interact, it must first assess their needs, understand what they are asking for and why they are doing so, which was the purpose of this survey conducted among a broad array of stakeholders, stretching from CSOs, LAs and Associations of LAs to Cooperatives, Trade Unions, Business Associations. The diversity of their responses and demands suggests once again that solutions need to be as nuanced and multifaceted as the problems that they seek to address.

Whereas the SDGs are by definition results-oriented and thus fairly compatible with support measures that are also results-oriented, multi-stakeholder partnerships are built upon their partners –diverse also by definition– and thus demand actor-based measures that take agency into consideration and build the capacities of the stakeholders –albeit not individually but as part of a collective endeavour. Diversity is ingrained into the very notion of MSPs, which may explain why mutual recognition and trust are so frequently mentioned by the development actors. But such preconditions for any fruitful cooperation depend to a large extent on how enabling the environment may be for those same development actors. As mentioned by several respondents, technical assistance can be of help, but the root causes of shrinking space are political in nature and thus any intervention to address it would need to adopt a politically informed approach.



This leaves us with three distinct approaches towards each of those three notions –SDGs, MSPs and EE– that, despite being usually bundled together, depend on very different dynamics: while the result-orientation of SDGs can instil a common direction and sense of purpose, the actor-based aspects of multi-stakeholder partnerships makes them dependant not only on the capacities of its members, but also on the dynamics amongst them. After all they relate to each other through a web of affinities, interests, values and incentives and operate in a broader context that can only be fully grasped when analysed through a political lens.

As illustrated in the diagram, each of the aspects of covered by the survey grossly corresponds to a type of operational approach. None of these approaches is new to the EU, as all three have been previously adopted at different times and in different countries or regions. The orientation to results is deeply ingrained into the EU development policy, which it has been informing for decades, contributing to the international alignment with the aid and development effectiveness principles. Similarly, most of its capacity building has been actor-based, although strongly targeted towards governmental actors and institutions. In the last decade, this focus on the executive has been progressively broadening so as to encompass other stakeholders, making politically-informed approaches (Political Economy Analysis, Stakeholder mapping, Policy Analysis, etc.) crucial to implement aid modalities such as blending and budget support. Consequently, most of the recommendations to the EU combine two or three approaches:

#### Supporting SDGs through a results-oriented approach

- *“Introduction of performance indicators at national level; EU can create opportunities for CSO to closely monitor the process of indicators of performance implementation”.* (Albanian Local Capacity Development Foundation - ALCDF)
- *“Organise alliances for change around single-topic advocacy processes. Topic driven partnerships work much efficiently than general ones.”* (Instituti i studimeve sociale dhe humane)
- *“Frequent review of progress towards objectives set in the country roadmaps.”* (Liga de Defensa del Medio Ambiente)
- *“Posibilitándonos el desarrollo y monitoreo de agendas de implementación conjunta Posibilitándonos un marco de actuación con cobertura que asegure territorios con condiciones complejas en donde los Estados no puedan acceder, sea por falta de recursos o mismo por la existencia de conflictos Posibilitando un monitoreo más eficiente, que además puede aportar a un parámetro de cumplimientos reales de la agenda 2030.”* (Red Jubileo Sur/Américas)

#### Promoting MSPs through an actor-based approach

- *“Important issues to focus efforts on: Increase its support to national human rights institutions AND Revise its procedures (e.g.: eligibility criteria for non-registered organizations, confidentiality safeguards, financial transfers, subgranting, etc.) to take*

into account the realities that CSOs, LAs and ALAs face in the field" (Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) International)

- "EU's development cooperation could be helpful in strengthening MSPs by further supporting actors that are usually distant from decision-making processes and who lack resources. In particular, quicker, more flexible and longer-term funding should be provided to local NGOs. Funding requirements could be better tailored to the different structures of local development actors, such as faith-based actors." (Caritas Europe)
- "By identifying the voices (to describe the current and future state of SDG indicators) and the necessary skills to bridge the gaps, MSP must accept not all are primary and essential and "surrender the field" to the best equipped. EU should use mechanisms, like the Global Fund constituencies, to identify necessary actors, and a secondary tier of consultative MSP." (CivilSocietyTA)
- "This support could create forums for real dialogue between CSOs and the government. Further, the EU support for civil society should try and focus for building true grassroot level social change through true local CSOs, not professional development organisations that modify their objectives according to the international donors." (Kalevi Sorsa Foundation -part of ENoP)
- "Designing specific support programmes like the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda which is empowering and promoting partnerships for strengthening Local Authorities capacity to deliver services as well as support to LGAs." (Uganda Local Governments Association/East Africa Local Governments Association)
- "L'expérience, l'expertise technique et les moyens financiers sont les éléments les plus important que UE peut mettre en avant pour renforcer les Partenariats Multi-Parties Prenantes." (Youth Led Algeria)

### Fostering an enabling environment through a politically-informed approach

- "The EU should monitor and lobby against legislative restrictions that would make the work of CSOs more difficult. Another recommendation is to improve policy coherence within EU Institutions and among the Institutions and Member States. The EU needs a strong common Foreign and International Development policy to put pressure on partner countries regarding human & political rights, gender equality and labour rights" (Cooperatives Europe)
- "Political conditionality has been an effective method of managing the existing power erosion in Moldova (as part of the EaP Region), therefore - we find it an efficient tool." (EaP Civil Society Forum)
- "The policy frameworks for human rights in Pakistan has got improved since the GSP+ status is conditional to respect for core international HR institutions." (UCLG ASPAC)
- "At EU level, the adoption of the EU Green Deal and the recognition that the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 must be mainstreamed across EU policies and programmes have been a good decision. The EU development policy could contribute to reinforce the civil society and its space by including in its policy

*building the view of all relevant stakeholders, especially those most vulnerable"* (Fairtrade System)

- *"Considering that civil society organisations (CSOs) from developing countries and donor countries are development actors in their own right, playing a crucial role in reducing poverty with the capacity to reach out to, empower, represent, and defend people living in vulnerable situations, and to trigger social innovation. They are therefore essential partners of public and private actors in their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, EU should serve as an interlocutor between independent organisations and/or the government and provide opportunities for organisations working in partner countries to share knowledge and experience so they can build up trust and collaborate. Policy dialogue fora can also boost knowledge sharing and trust."* (Cooperatives Europe)
- *"While local development is defined as a priority in European policy documents, there is currently no guarantee that any programme will be devoted to it during the post 2020 period. The existence of programme dedicated to local authorities and local development currently depends on the agreement of the national governments in partner countries according to the Council and Commission proposal. While these governments have to choose a limited sectoral priorities, it is unlikely they will choose to support local authorities because: One of the biggest issue in the decentralisation process is the transfer of funds corresponding to the functions transferred to LAs. Thanks to democratic processes, it appears that capital, metropolitan or secondary cities happen to be dealt by political opponents or rivals of the national authorities To ensure EU support, a dedicated budget for LRGs is essential in the next MFF to avoid national political interest and have more flexibility in graduated countries for instance which means: 1) A dedicated thematic programme. 2) Earmarked budget in the regional geographic envelopes."* (PLATFORMA - CCRE/CEMR)

### Role of EU Delegations

Given the importance that respondents award to working consistently and coherently at country level with EUDs, below is a selection of specific suggestions in this regard:

- more active engagement with partners at country level;
- greater inclusion of actors;
- opening up spaces for consultation;
- enhanced dialogues and joint actions between CSOs;
- mapping of local and national CSOs and networks which work on sustainable development and on SDG implementation;
- providing capacity building around the SDGs, their targets and indicators,
- establishment of relevant working groups on the strategic priorities and needs defined by CSOs, and on cross-cutting issues (such as gender, environment, climate change), in an integrated approach;

- organization of widely publicized consultations with national and local CSOs on national programmes to ensure transparency in national financing frameworks, programmes and actions;
- development of guidelines, eligibility and selection criteria in calls for proposals;
- mobilizing/negotiating with governments to provide the frameworks within which stakeholders can act;
- create incentives or detect obstacles to sustainable development action.