Partners for Review

The Whole of Society Approach:
Levels of engagement and meaningful
participation of different stakeholders
in the review process of the
2030 Agenda

Discussion Paper

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Partners for Review

About Partners for Review

Partners for Review (P4R) is a transnational multi-stakeholder network for government representatives and stakeholders from civil society, the private sector and academia involved in the national review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Initiated on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the network's objective is to contribute to developing effective global and national review and accountability mechanisms for achieving the SDGs.

P4R facilitates dialogue and peer-learning on good practices and success factors, provides a safe space to explore challenges and lessons learned and shares expertise on new and emerging issues related to national monitoring and review. The exchange focuses primarily on three areas related to the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda: i) national coordination (whole of government), ii) stakeholder engagement (whole of society) and iii) addressing data challenges.

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Abstractions

Abbreviations

ACTION 4 SD	ACTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
ADIN	AFRICA DEVELOPMENT INTERCHANGE NETWORK
AWG	AFRICAN WORKING GROUP
CSEC	CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT CHARTER
CSOS	CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
CWCPS	COMMON WORKING AND COLLABORATION PLATFORMS
ENEP	NATIONAL COUNTRY STRATEGY TEAM
ESCAP	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC
GRI	GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE
HLPF	HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
MRAF	MONITORING REVIEW AND ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK
NGOS	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
P4R	PARTNERS FOR REVIEW
SDGS	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
STI	SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
TAP	TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY & PARTICIPATION NETWORK
UNDESA	UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
VNR	VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW
WG	WORKING GROUP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A multi-stakeholder approach where actors participate in a meaningful way is needed to achieve effective implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. Experiences from the first Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) suggest that more effort is needed to foster a common understanding of what meaningful participation for the 2030 Agenda means and how to operationalise it.

Based on experiences from members of the Partners for Review (P4R) network, this paper analyses participation of non-state actors in the review process of the 2030 Agenda and investigates how to make participation meaningful.

The study focuses on the review process at the national level and defines 'review' as a process in which different stakeholders are engaged in a joint diagnosis of progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The review process is considered a continuum of six interconnected steps: identification of national institutions and other stakeholders to participate; identification and alignment of national priorities with the 2030 Agenda; measurement of progress; analysis of ongoing achievements; identification of inputs for follow-up; and communication of the results obtained from the review exercise.

Under this framework, the study analyses the different roles, incentives and levels of participation of different actors in the review process. Findings show a great overlap of roles among different stakeholder groups, which can open up opportunities for cooperation and synergies.

The study shows that government actors are interested in involving non-state actors in the review process and that non-government actors are interested in participating for a variety of reasons. For instance, while civil society is motivated by having its work recognised and influencing public policy, incentives in the private sector are driven by the possibility of business cases. Actors in academia see it as an opportunity to connect research outputs with policy-making.

Based on a set of different mechanisms for multi-stakeholder participation, the study identifies and discusses four levels of participation where non-state actors have different degrees of engagement with the government. The four identified levels are: informative, consultative, empowering and partnerships. The informative level encompasses mechanisms to spread and share information among different actors. The consultative level opens a space for non-state actors to voice their concerns and share their knowledge with government actors. The empowering level allows non-state actors to strengthen connections among them and to become a visible key actor to partner with government. The partnership level enables government and non-government actors to work together on specific issues.

Findings from this study suggest that participation by multiple actors can emerge when there is genuine interest for engagement, space for collective work and the co-creation of knowledge. Further, in order to make participation meaningful, actors

should participate as equal conversation partners that are taken seriously but within the confines of their mandates and functions in the review process. Meaningful participation demands transparency, commitment and accountability and must be inclusive and representative. Examples from Brazil, Cameroon, Nepal and Paraguay provide insights into how to operationalise meaningful participation.

Both advancing through the different levels of participation and achieving meaningful participation entail challenges. The most outstanding challenge across the different levels of participation is a lack of effective coordination strategies. Whether it is coordination for multi-stakeholder consultations, for aligning the agendas of different stakeholders in one direction or for simultaneously working with multiple stakeholder partnerships at the national and sub-national level, existing mechanisms require efforts to make coordination more effective.

Beyond coordination challenges, aspects such as excessively hierarchical structures, inadequate planning, weak institutions, lack of social cohesion and perverse incentives are some of the main challenges that can prevent meaningful participation from emerging.

I. INTRODUCTION

A multi-stakeholder approach where actors participate in a meaningful way is needed to achieve effective implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

The indivisible economic, social and environmental pillars of the 2030 Agenda require different actors (state and non-state) from different sectors and disciplines to work together. At the same time, governments' commitment to leave no one behind involves providing opportunity and access for everyone to participate in decision-making processes and in the formulation of policies and programmes that affect their lives. The multidisciplinary nature of the 2030 Agenda and its 'leave no one behind' principle requires collective action by diverse stakeholder groups and the meaningful and inclusive engagement of all of them.

For the review and follow-up processes, this is particularly important not only because governments have pledged to conduct a 'robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review (…) operating at the national, regional and global levels' (A/RES/70/1, § 72–73), but also because the inclusive and collective action of diverse stakeholder groups in review enhances transparency and accountability, mobilises support at the national and sub-national/local levels and provides substantial feedback to improve the functioning of government policies in the 2030 Agenda framework (Anshul, et al., 2015).

However, experiences[1] from the first review exercises suggest that more effort is needed to foster a common understanding of what meaningful participation for the 2030 Agenda means and how to operationalise it.

To contribute to fulfilling this need and motivating further discussion on this topic, this paper analyses the participation of non-state actors in the review process of the 2030 Agenda and investigates how to make this participation meaningful.

This paper has been produced on behalf of the Secretariat of P4R, a transnational multi-stakeholder network initiated with the support of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) to contribute to developing effective global and national review and accountability mechanisms for achieving the SDGs.

Based on experiences from the P4R network, the study aims to explore the motivations and roles that different stakeholder groups can have when participating in the review process; identify what the different levels of participation that exist in the context of the 2030 Agenda are; discover what meaningful participation for the 2030 Agenda means; and show how meaningful participation can contribute to more effective review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

In this paper, the group of non-state actors includes civil society, the private sector and academia, where civil society refers to civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and movements, and academia includes think tanks.

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1 'Regarding participation of non-state actors, any specific mechanisms may be difficult to "transfer" from one country to another. Instead, it may be interesting to more generally discuss the advantages and drawbacks of different approaches. This may include an exchange about the extent of institutionalization or intensity of consultation that is necessary, and under which circumstances, to make participation "meaningful".' (P4Ra, 2018).

II. METHODOLOGY

Given the need for a better understanding of what meaningful participation for the 2030 Agenda means and how to operationalise it, this paper uses the knowledge and experiences from members of the P4R network to analyse meaningful participation by non-state actors in the review process of the 2030 Agenda.

The analysis of non-state actors' participation encompasses two dimensions: one related to the different levels of participation and the second to the meaningfulness of this participation. The analysis of both dimensions and its effects on the review process of the 2030 Agenda are mainly based on information and experiences from members of the P4R network. However, contributions from additional sources have been used to support the identification of different levels of participation and to complement the description of roles that non-state actors can have in the review process.

Twelve members of the P4R network from different countries (Afghanistan, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Denmark, Paraguay and South Africa) and different international organisations[2] were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. Within this group, six participants were representatives from civil society, two from the private sector, one from academia and three from government.

The selection of participants was based on the content of their lessons learned and experiences shared in one or more of the P4R network meetings and the linkage of these lessons to one or two of the dimensions of participation analysed in this paper. Geographical and stakeholder diversity was also considered.

The interview questions were designed to identify the roles, incentives and mechanisms for participation; ascertain what meaningful participation is and what the underlying success factors and challenges to achieve it are; and elicit examples to illustrate how meaningful participation influences the review process of the 2030 Agenda.

The information obtained from these interviews is not exhaustive or representative of all the different stakeholder groups. It is a first insight to understand the different motivations, expectations and realities of actors from civil society, the private sector, academia and government and aims to explore the advantages and challenges that different actors experience and face when participating in the review process of the 2030 Agenda.

Given the low number of interviews and the different backgrounds which may influence the participants' perspectives, the results provided in this paper do not demonstrate any hard facts but rather contribute to fostering a common understanding of what meaningful participation for the 2030 Agenda means and how this participation can be operationalised.
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2 Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Transparency, Accountability & Participation Network (TAP) and Action for Sustainable Development (Action 4 SD).

III. THE REVIEW PROCESS OF THE 2030 AGENDA: A NATIONAL-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE

Experiences from the first VNRs suggest that the term 'review' is used in different ways and often as a synonym for reporting and/or monitoring.[3,4,5] This introductory section defines and disentangles the review process. The purpose of this is to help to clarify the meaning of review and its potential benefits and to enable a better identification of possible entry points for participation.

The official terminology defines follow-up and review as one process but, in practice, these are two different processes, and follow-up should be executed after review.

While review provides a diagnosis of progress and sets up the bases for follow-up, follow-up ensures that action is taken in response to findings from review (ESCAP, 2016).

The national review process is both a management and accountability exercise. It is a process in which different stakeholders are engaged in a joint diagnosis of progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. As Figure 1 shows, the review process is a continuum of six interconnected steps.

FIGURE 1: THE REVIEW PROCESS

SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

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3   'In some VNRs, the term "follow-up" is used to describe implementation, while others use it as a heading to explain their next steps. "Review" in turn often seems to be interpreted as "reporting". Both terms often seem to be used interchangeably, with an emphasis on monitoring of progress.' (P4R, 2018), p. 11.

4   'A dialogue to clarify the meaning of different terms, and the potential benefits of review, may help countries to define their own processes and feed their experiences back into the global process.' (P4Ra, 2018), p. 5

5   More than half of the VNR reports in 2017 confused the use of evaluation and monitoring (iied, 2018).

1. - **Institutional set-up** is where actors are identified, and mandates and functions defined. This step is relevant for both national implementation and review. It includes identification of national institutions and government actors to lead and coordinate the review process at national and sub-national levels as well as across different sectors. This stage also includes identification of the multiple stakeholders that will participate and contribute to the national review.

2. - **National priorities** bring the SDGs into the national context. While the 2030 Agenda is applicable to all countries, each one has different national realities, capacities and levels of development (UNDESA, 2017). It is here that the exercise of aligning national priorities to the 2030 Agenda takes place. This exercise helps to create a sense of ownership favourable for implementation, review and follow-up.

3. - **Monitoring** involves measurement of progress. This part of the review has to do with defining and selecting the set of indicators that best captures the policy and programme priorities to achieve the SDGs and ensures that no one is left behind. It entails identification of data sources, institutional arrangements for data collection and production of usable and accessible information to feed into the review process (ESCAP, 2016).

4. - **Progress assessment** is the step in which results from monitoring are analysed. The analysis of ongoing achievements should be against value-based criteria of the 2030 Agenda, e.g. transformation, integration, inclusiveness and leaving no one behind. Results from monitoring should be presented in a way that allows for sufficient dialogue and discussion on whether those who are most in danger are not being left behind; whether the picture of progress presented in the monitoring step represents reality; what the underlying forces and drivers and emerging issues are; and whether these results are understood by all the stakeholders involved (ESCAP, 2016).

5. - **Inputs for follow-up** is the step involving identification of strategies and management changes to further improve goal attainment. This includes identification of adjustments and/or corrections in implementation and resource allocation strategies as well as mobilisation of the means of implementation (ESCAP, 2016).

6. – **Results communication** involves the compilation and presentation of results and the most relevant information obtained from the review. Communication of results can be done through a website and/or a film or any other means that countries deem suitable, and they should be available to everyone who is interested.

The review, as implied in the 2030 Agenda (A/RES/70/1, §§47-48, 72-77), is to be designed to enable multi-stakeholder engagement, dialogue, mutual learning, collective work, ownership and guidance on follow-up and implementation. To achieve a significant effect on the progress of the 2030 Agenda, the review process has to be conducted on a regular basis and not just once or occasionally.

IV. PARTICIPATION OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE REVIEW PROCESS: ROLES, INCENTIVES AND LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

This section describes the identified roles that non-state actors can have in the review process of the 2030 Agenda; analyses the incentives for non-state actors to participate and the incentives for state actors to involve other stakeholders in this process; and identifies different levels of participation by non-state actors according to the mechanisms used for participation in the review process.
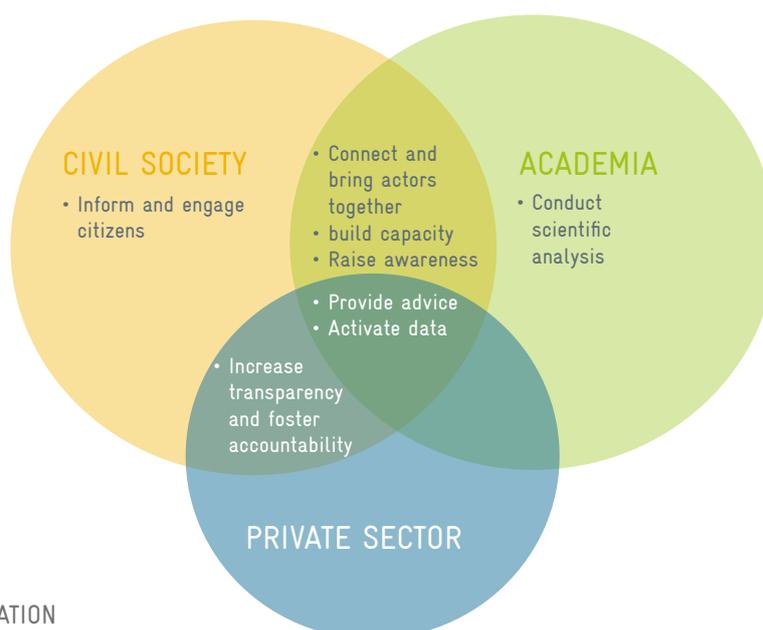
A. - ROLES

Non-state actors play a variety of roles as agenda-setters, lobbyists, expert advisors, implementation partners, enforcers and implementers, and these roles may evolve over time (Asselt, 2016). The aim here is to examine the actions performed by civil society, academia and the private sector to contribute to the first review processes of the 2030 Agenda.

As shown in Figure 2, there is a great overlap of roles among the different stakeholder groups. Roles are not limited to specific groups of non-state actors, but there are roles where certain stakeholder groups are more active compared to others. All the roles described below are relevant for review and can contribute to the whole process, but in some cases it has been possible to identify at which stages of the review process certain roles are key. The identification and description of the following roles is mainly based on information sourced from the interviews conducted by P4R. However, additional literature has been used to complement the description of certain roles.

Inform and engage citizens: inform about government plans and actions in the language and format that is relevant for citizens, allowing them to understand the successes and shortcomings of the policy

FIGURE 2: POSSIBLE ROLES OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE REVIEW PROCESS

CIVIL SOCIETY
• Inform and engage citizens

• Connect and bring actors together
• build capacity
• Raise awareness

ACADEMIA
• Conduct scientific analysis

• Provide advice
• Activate data

• Increase transparency and foster accountability

PRIVATE SECTOR

SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

or initiative in question, and thus provide relevant feedback for review (Anshul, et al., 2015). Some communities do not know that governments have committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Communicate to citizens that what government is doing is a function generally performed by CSOs (P4Rb, 2018). This role is particularly important in the first stages of the review process where national priorities should be identified and in the final stages where results of the review should be available to everyone who is interested.

Connect and bring actors together: make connections between government and citizens, and also among different stakeholders, so that they work together. Non-state actors can reach and effectively engage with citizens, in particular with marginalised groups, especially at the local level, and connect the grassroots level to the national and global levels (Anshul, et al., 2015). This capacity contributes to ensuring that the voices of groups that would otherwise not be able to contribute are heard and to creating synergies between national and local levels. At the same time, it can be utilised by governments to deliver more efficient and effective initiatives. This role is mainly dominated by civil society organisations, because of their connection to the grassroots. However, academia is also working on connecting different actors. Universities, particularly public ones, can provide neutral spaces for conversation and engagement with society (P4Rb, 2018).

Build capacity: capacitate relevant actors with regard to the SDGs. CSOs are taking an active part in performing this function by building capacities in sustainable development, in how to work with the government to ensure participation in the SDGs and in how to link their own work to the 2030 Agenda. Academia also has the potential to contribute. In terms of education and teaching functions, universities have the responsibility and ability to build capacities relevant to the review and follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda (P4Rb, 2018).

Raise awareness: raise awareness on the potential of the 2030 Agenda among different stakeholder groups, including in government. Most of the time, this function is taken on by CSOs and academia. Raising awareness helps to translate the 2030 Agenda into a national and local agenda where the

interests and needs of citizens are reflected and available in a language that can be understood by national and local actors. Efforts in this direction can be used by governments to accelerate the process of nationalisation of the 2030 Agenda, but also by non-state actors as a vehicle for their own advocacy (P4Rb, 2018). This role is especially relevant in the early stages of the review process, where key stakeholders and national priorities are identified.

Increase transparency and foster accountability: different actors can play an active role in this regard. Civil society is one of the key stakeholders; they can critically examine and challenge the views of government. For instance, civil society can perform as an official watchdog, scrutinise the government´s progress on implementation of the 2030 Agenda and provide an independent perspective on review. Transparency and accountability can also be improved by private sector actors. They can disclose information about the impacts, whether positive or negative, of their activities in sustainable development. Increasing transparency by sharing information on what different stakeholders and governments have achieved and on what remains a challenge contributes to holding different stakeholders accountable to their commitments (P4Rb, 2018).

Another way of boosting transparency is for government and/or civil society to report on what has been achieved and what remains a challenge and enable public monitoring and review.

Provide advice: bring relevant knowledge, expertise and innovation from different backgrounds to help governments and other stakeholders to carry out the review and follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda more effectively. This can provide reliable bases and quality of information to enlarge perspectives, improve decision-making and allow a more efficient use of resources. Advisors can contribute to identifying national priorities and how to link them to the 2030 Agenda; determining the most suitable indicators and data; assessing achievements; and identifying strategies and management changes to further improve goal attainment. Given that every stakeholder group has a different background of knowledge and expertise, this role can be taken on by civil society, academia and the private sector (P4Rb, 2018).

Activate data: make the available data easy to access and ready to be analysed by anyone who is interested. Taking advantage of existing data can contribute to accelerating measurement of progress and analysing the ongoing achievements in relation to the SDGs. Additionally, it can help different actors to make better decisions and contribute to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Actors engaged in this activity come from all three stakeholder groups (P4Rb, 2018).

These roles are not intended to limit the ways in which non-state actors can participate in the review process of the 2030 Agenda. The intention is to show what, as a general trend, different non-state actors are doing to contribute to the review process. This, in turn, might help state and non-state actors who are seeking to engage to identify the existing possibilities.

Conduct scientific analysis: analyse the root causes and drivers for changes and success factors. The scientific analysis embedded in research, a role predominantly performed by academia, can provide reliable evidence. This evidence has the potential to inform and strengthen the review of the 2030 Agenda by analysing the ongoing achievements of the 2030 Agenda and identifying better strategies to further improve goal attainment (P4Rb, 2018).

B. – INCENTIVES

Incentives for non-state actors to participate and incentives for state actors to involve other stakeholders in the realisation of the 2030 Agenda reflect the different reasons why actors decide to play a role in this process. Knowing the reasons on both sides, i.e. government and non-government actors, provides key information to improve adoption and development of the multi-stakeholder approach needed for review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

Unlike the roles described, incentives are easy to identify for each stakeholder group. On the contrary, identification of overlapping incentives among the different stakeholder groups is harder. It requires further and deeper tailored analysis where information about a specific project, topic and situation is available.

The overall goal of this brief analysis of the incentives for different stakeholders to participate in the review process of the 2030 Agenda is to show what their main interests and/or concerns are and present an initial insight into the possible opportunities that may encourage different actors to engage.

Literature on this aspect with regard to the 2030 Agenda is still sparse. This analysis is based solely on information from the interviews conducted by P4R, and the list of incentives may thus not be all-encompassing.

Civil society

The nature of their work means that CSOs strive to have an impact on policies and reflect the priorities of the communities they serve. Accordingly, activities that can help them to support and improve their work in this direction can be of interest to them.

For CSOs, being involved in the 2030 Agenda is an opportunity to connect with and learn from bigger national or international organisations. Connecting with key actors can help them to empower themselves and institutionalise their work. In some cases, where political instabilities affect the working space for civil society, CSOs have used the 2030 Agenda as a tool for joining forces to reorganise and coordinate their work.

Participation in the review process of the 2030 Agenda can provide CSOs with greater opportunities to have their work recognised, especially by the government, and hence bring them closer to influencing public policy although this also depends on how open and genuine governments are.

Interest in participation is also driven by the possibility of having access to additional support. When CSOs can show and demonstrate the positive impacts of their work on a visible platform such as the one offered by the 2030 Agenda, it is more likely that they will be able to access national or international support to continue their activities.

Private sector

Even though incentives for the private sector to engage in the review process might depend on the companies' culture and on the social context of the country and market in which they operate, some trends can be identified. The intrinsic interests of the private sector are mainly driven by business cases, i.e. when engaging adds value to investments in the long term.

Private sector enterprises may be interested in being part of the 2030 Agenda because it helps them to strengthen their brand, the trust their customers have in them and their relation with different key stakeholders. For instance, it is positive for companies to show that they are part of the 2030 Agenda project because it gives them the opportunity to deal with high-level officials, politicians and other stakeholders that, from a business position, might be difficult to reach.

Being engaged in the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs allows companies to identify the most relevant aspects for their own resilience and investments and where positive impacts for sustainable development should be made. Investments requiring documentation on impacts for sustainable development are increasing and if companies do not pay attention to this, investors will not put their money into them.

Another incentive for the private sector to participate is the desire for positive publicity. The 2030 Agenda platform is a space where companies can showcase their best practices and contributions to sustainable development. In some cases, where the government does not care about sustainable development, some companies take the initiative and show their leadership.

Besides the intrinsic interests, private sector participation can be driven by a top-down approach. This is when government implements policies to encourage companies to participate in the review process of the 2030 Agenda, for example, by requiring a report on their impact on sustainable development.

Academia

Actors in this group work to improve and produce new knowledge, and sharing and applying this knowledge is often at the core of their interests.

Most researchers want as many people as possible to know and use their research. At the same time, researchers are responsible for making a contribution in their respective fields of expertise as well as in the society that gives them a 'social license' to do their research. The latter applies especially to universities and research institutions that operate with public money and therefore have a social commitment to provide a return on this investment. Being part of the review process of the 2030 Agenda can help to narrow the gap between the production of research and innovation and its actual use in public policy.

Government

Most governments recognise that the transformative action necessary to achieve the 2030 Agenda requires cooperation. Government alone cannot address these challenges adequately and relies on support from all stakeholder groups.

Having the inclusive and collective action of diverse stakeholder groups in review can help governments to better identify national priorities, measure and monitor their progress and determine strategies to further improve goal attainment. Governments are interested in accessing and using the knowledge, capacities and data produced by other stakeholders. They have a strong interest in using the research and innovation produced in their respective national science, technology and innovation (STI) systems. Doing so may help them to target their resources more efficiently and accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Incentives to include multiple stakeholders are also driven by the possibility to enhance transparency and national ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Bringing non-state actors on board legitimises government actions, enables citizens to own the process and motivates non-state actors to strengthen collaboration with government actors.

C. – DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

After discussing what non-state actors can do and why they might be interested in being part of the review process, the focus turns now to participation. This section identifies the different levels of participation for non-state actors in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

There is an ongoing debate about what citizens' participation is. The first approach claims that citizens' participation can be defined only through the level of power citizens can have (Arnstein, 1969). Building on this, other authors argue that participation occurs as a process of co-creation of knowledge and not only in relation to power (Collins & Iso, 2006). Others state that citizens' participation emerges when the diversity of knowledge and experience of the participants adds value to the project (Tritter & McCallum, 2006).

Taking these different approaches into consideration and based on information from the interviews conducted by P4R, this paper defines multi-stakeholder participation in the context of the 2030 Agenda as follows: multi-stakeholder participation occurs when there is a genuine interest to engage (government) and to be engaged (other stakeholders) and when there is collective work and co-creation of

knowledge, that is, when there is a space to share information, voice concerns, share knowledge and expertise and learn from each other.

There are diverse mechanisms for multi-stakeholder participation; they differ depending on the political situation and characteristics of each country and stakeholder group. To facilitate the analysis of non-state actors' participation, different participation mechanisms have been clustered according to their scope and main objective.[6] Based on this, four levels of participation have been identified: informative, consultative, empowering and partnerships (see Annex for examples for each level). Each level, starting with the informative level and going up to the partnerships level, implies a higher potential degree of engagement between state and non-state actors and comprises different advantages, opportunities and challenges. Figure 3 shows these four levels of engagement and highlights the importance of there being a genuine interest in engagement and the co-creation of knowledge at every level.

The description of the advantages, boundaries and challenges of the following levels of participation is based on information from the interviews conducted by P4R.

FIGURE 3: LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION
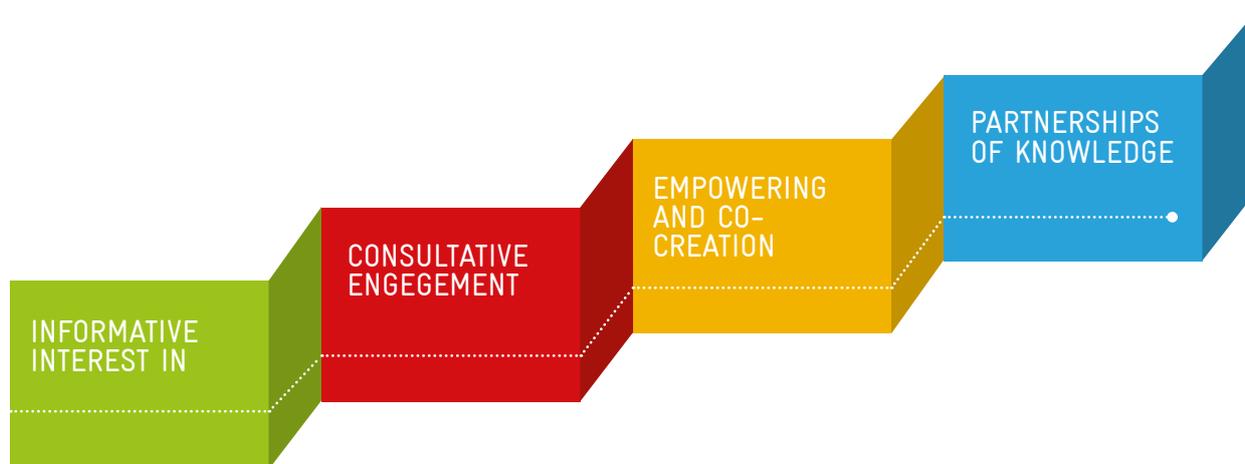
SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

6   For more details on the list of mechanisms and their classification, see Appendix 1.

Informative level

The set of mechanisms aimed to raise awareness on the 2030 Agenda spread key information on sustainable development and report on the ongoing achievements have been clustered into this level. The characteristics common to the mechanisms contained in this level are the proliferation of information and the fact that the relation between state and non-state actors is limited to sharing information.

Acceleration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and improvements in transparency are the advantages associated with this level. Informing people about the structure and principles of the 2030 Agenda, its advantages and why it is important to work with it contributes to raising awareness and stimulates implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, sharing information about ongoing progress and achievement helps to improve transparency.

Transmitting the right information to the right people at the right time involves some challenges. Both the information and the 'right people' change constantly, and efforts in this direction must therefore be constant. For instance, when there is a change in government, actors already immersed in the 2030 Agenda might have to start an informative process with the new actors. Another challenge related to this level is reaching different stakeholder groups at both the national and the sub-national level. Often, due to resource constraints and a lack of effective diffusion strategies, informative mechanisms are implemented only in the capital and big cities.

Consultative level

The consultative level is characterised by mechanisms intended to give space to non-state actors to voice their concerns and share their knowledge and expertise in order to complement and facilitate the government's work. For example, government can benefit from having access to valuable information and data from a variety of non-state actor groups, which can contribute to developing the VNR.

At this level, non-state actors may be invited to work on specific issues relating to implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, but separately from government. When suggestions and proposals made by non-state actors are taken into account for negotiations and feedback is given, the consultative level can contribute to strengthening relations between state and non-state actors. Having constant and constructive dialogues helps to build trust among different stakeholder groups. However, if concerns and/or advice provided by non-state actors do not go beyond the meeting room, mechanisms at this level will end up being part of a symbolic participation.

A lack of coordination strategies and adequate intermediary platforms for communication of human and financial resource constraints, internal conflicts within government and an increasing global trend reducing space for participation by non-state actors, especially civil society, are some of the main difficulties faced by actors when performing at this level of participation. These challenges are not limited to this level of participation; from this level on, these and other difficulties need to be tackled in order to advance.

Empowering level

Mechanisms included in this level of participation are aimed at strengthening connections among different non-state actors and empowering them to become a visible key actor to partner with government. Nevertheless, the success of efforts to enhance relations with government usually depends on the political will of the government.

The main purpose of these mechanisms is to empower non-state actors by enabling them to work together, join forces, position themselves as key actors for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda and collaborate with government in doing so.

The most prominent challenges observed at this level are the lack of effective coordination strategies to focus efforts and align the agendas of different stakeholders in one direction, the 2030 Agenda, and the difficulty of achieving a common understanding among the different stakeholders,

including government, to show that working together is a win-win situation. As in the previous level, human and financial resource limitations and a lack of adequate intermediary platforms for communication also pose challenges at this level.

Partnerships level

At this level, mechanisms are designed to open up a space where non-state actors and government work together on specific issues for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. Partnering with government provides opportunities for synergies, a more efficient use of resources and accountability.

Despite their possibilities, partnerships between government and non-state actors do not always lead to systemic changes. For instance, partnerships between the private sector and government could be efficient for one project, one topic, one issue and one element but not systemically change the way companies impact on sustainable development.

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, participation in this level leads to the need for further expansion. Once the partnership has been achieved, there is often the need to expand it to further levels in order to increase the quality of work and the chances of influencing policy. At the same time, this might require more complex coordination mechanisms. Frequently, governments at the national and sub-national levels do not have experience in simultaneously working with civil society, academia and the private sector. There is a need to set up effective coordination structures to avoid duplication and inefficiencies among all the actors involved.

While partnerships constitute a high level of participation, the meaningfulness of the interaction can be undermined when a government tries to co-opt stakeholders through the partnership. It is possible, for example, for a government to collaborate with CSOs to buy their allegiance.

V. WHAT MAKES PARTICIPATION MEANINGFUL?

'Meaningful participation' is a term often used to describe how participation should be in order to work towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Meaningful participation can mean different things for different people, and ignoring these differences might hinder the process of actually achieving it. Based on information provided to P4R through interviews with civil society, academia, the private sector and government actors, this section aims to find out what makes participation meaningful and what the main challenges to achieving it are.

As shown in the previous section, different actors can play different roles and therefore have different responsibilities in the review process. Taking that into account and based on the experiences of actors from civil society, the private sector, academia and government, meaningful participation can be

defined as follows: meaningful participation is when actors participate as equal conversation partners that are taken seriously but within the confines of their mandates and functions in this process. This means that the different actors have the freedom to disagree with each other when they have different views and that their contributions are objectively evaluated. Furthermore, this participation should go hand-in-hand with representative participation, transparency, and commitment and accountability.

Representative and inclusive participation

As previously discussed, participation has to do with a willingness to enable participation at different levels. This means that non-state actors can be informed, voice their concerns, have a constructive and institutionalised dialogue and work

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FIGURE 4: MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION
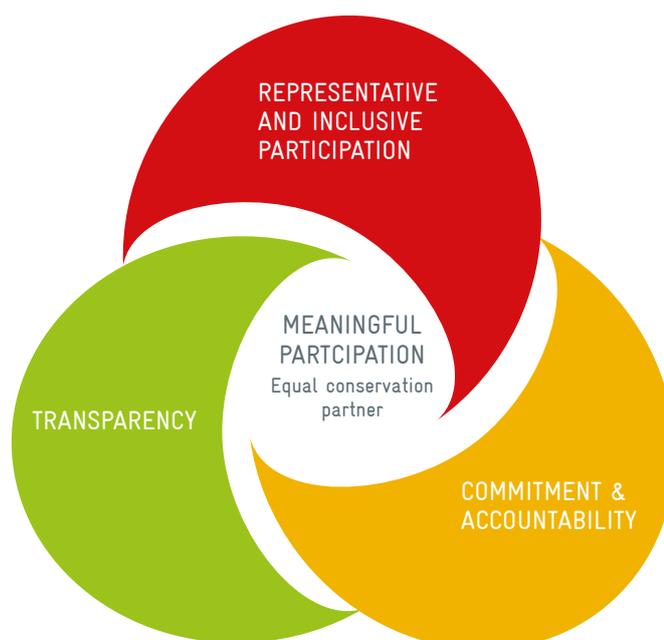
SOURCE: OWN ELABORATION

hand-in-hand with government for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. Making participation meaningful requires it to be representative and inclusive. Governments should engage different actors from different stakeholder groups and not exclude those that disagree with them (as long as they respect the constitution and legal rights). Furthermore, participation by different stakeholders should be representative of the voices of all those who would like to participate but do not have the means to do so. Many stakeholder groups face resource and capacity constraints that prevent them from physically participating in spaces where debates occur, e.g. the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). Digital participation can contribute to reaching those who are not able to physically participate and enable them to voice their concerns.

Transparency

Unlike the perspective of transparency as a function to improve the review process itself, in this case, transparency is seen as a component for building trust among different stakeholders to achieve meaningful participation. This means that information about the performance of different actors and the impacts of their actions, whether positive or negative, towards achieving the SDGs is available to everyone who is interested. It implies that information about roles and mandates, expected outcomes and the allocation and use of public resources by those involved in the process is accessible.

Commitment and accountability

These two elements must go hand-in-hand. The first element has to do with self-commitment to cooperating on finding ways to solve problems together, compromising and advancing towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, whereas accountability is associated with the responsibility that every actor involved has towards citizens, other stakeholders and the principles of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs to accomplish what they have committed to.

Main challenges

Making participation meaningful entails additional challenges besides those already mentioned for each level of participation. Based on information from the interviews conducted by P4R, three main challenges were identified: cultural barriers, technical and social constraints and perverse incentives.

In many countries the relations between non-government and government actors and within the structure of the state are very hierarchical. This cultural barrier reduces the spaces for actors to participate as equal conversation partners which prevents participation from being meaningful.

Technical constraints are associated with inadequate planning which means that actors do not have enough time for all the meetings, making the process difficult to follow. From a macro perspective, social constraints are related to weak institutions and societies with a lack of social cohesion. Perverse incentives have to do with the directions of accountability, for instance, when the voices of CSOs are supportive of government because they are government-sponsored and not because government actions contribute to what they are striving for. Another example is when governments, especially those of development aid recipient countries, are primarily accountable to their donors and not their citizens.

VI. HOW MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION CONTRIBUTES TO MORE EFFECTIVE REVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE 2030 AGENDA

It is too early to tell where the greatest impact of meaningful participation has occurred although a couple of examples from members of the P4R network can illustrate how they are working to make participation meaningful and how this can have a positive impact on the review of the 2030 Agenda.

Brazil: The political instability experienced in Brazil in 2016 jeopardised the negotiations between government and civil society on setting up the Brazilian National SDG Commission. The impeachment procedure led to polarisation in the working space for civil society. The Commission was finally created on 1 December 2016.

Under this scenario, the CSO Working Group[7] (WG) decided to use the 2030 Agenda as a positive agenda for transformation and monitoring. The strategy aimed to strengthen connections among civil society organisations and empower them to drive their efforts towards one single goal, the 2030 Agenda as a guide for Brazil.

The National SDG Commission, composed of sixteen people from federal government, sub-national government, civil society and the private sector, is the institutional body in charge of the review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda in Brazil. It is mandated to edit the VNR and request information from the line ministries. It is the main institutional governance mechanism for fostering dialogue, engagement and integration of the initiatives carried out by sub-national entities, civil society and the private sector. The aim of the Commission is to disseminate and internalise the 2030 Agenda in Brazil and to ensure a transparent implementation process.

In this case, the main success factor was the institutionalisation of civil society. The CSO Working Group for the 2030 Agenda helped to create trust among civil society stakeholders, ensure their commitment and hold them accountable to the 2030 Agenda. Their empowerment gave them a more prominent role in the negotiations with government at different levels, which in turn contributed to the establishment of the National SDG Commission.

The publication of the Spotlight Report two years in a row has shown the level of organisation and shared awareness among the members of the WG toward aligning their monitoring of the SDGs. The final composite becomes more than the sum of the parts since the parts use it as an introduction to establishing dialogue among different stakeholders. So far, the Spotlight Reports have not been challenged on the content they hold (despite a few editing mishaps).

Cameroon: Since 2016, the Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN) and other CSOs that are members of Cameroon's National Strategic Group for the SDGs and Development Effectiveness have been implementing a programme to position African CSOs as key actors in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda in Cameroon. After a long process of consultation and advocacy, the National Strategic Group for the SDGs and Development Effectiveness facilitated a multi-stakeholder structured dialogue on the SDGs within the Common Working and Collaboration Platforms (CWCPs), achieving specific government-CSO partnerships.

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7   The CSO Working Group is an institutionalised group of different civil society organisations in Brazil formed in 2014. The WG has been monitoring the 2030 Agenda in the country and has been responsible for disseminating the SDGs among different stakeholders at both the national and sub-national levels. Some representatives are in the National Commission, while others exert influence through the Technical Chamber for Partnerships and Means of Implementation.

The programme initiated as a pilot initiative in Tanzania and Cameroon by the African Working Group (AWG) on sustainable development, with the support of the Commonwealth Foundation, has three main objectives. First, ensure that the greatest number of people at the national and sub-national levels know and understand the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Second, allow citizens to participate and show how they can contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. And third, open a constructive dialogue between civil society and government as a means to ensuring accountability for the SDGs.

To implement this programme, three tools were developed: a Civil Society Engagement Charter (CSEC) for the SDGs, which is a guide for CSOs on how they can work to ensure participation in the SDGs, a Monitoring Review and Accountability Framework (MRAF) and the CWCPs, with specific sectoral or thematic platforms.

The development of the Monitoring Review and Accountability Framework is based on a translation of the SDGs' global indicators into a local and understandable language and reality. This means that people at the grassroots level are being asked for their interpretation of the goals and indicators. For instance, during consultations with citizens, CSOs ask people what poverty eradication means for them. These interpretations are then translated into simple contextualised indicators embedded in the MRAF. This ensures that everybody understands the Agenda and, at the same time, contributes to connected national priorities for the 2030 Agenda. Together with this framework, a structured institutionalised dialogue has been established. This structure sets out how different stakeholders will be interacting with advisors, government representatives and other actors in the participation process at the national level and helps every stakeholder to know its responsibilities and hence be accountable for them to others. The third tool is the CWCP with its specific component. These platforms are spaces where stakeholders from public institutions, civil society, the private sector and other groups discuss issues that are relevant for them and assess their actions for implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda.

Having an institutionalised dialogue has been crucial to position CSOs as a key actor and partner with government. At the same time, it is worth noting the importance of the qualitative analysis based on the perspective of CSOs and how this contributes to government efforts in the implementation and review of the Agenda, which has helped open and maintain negotiations with government actors.

Achievement of common understanding about the potential of working together and constrained resources have been the main challenges to implementing the programme. To overcome these challenges, CSOs have been constant in raising awareness and making their achievements visible to everybody, especially the government. Despite the lack of resources, CSO activities were translated into SDG actions; they did not need to start by doing more and new things. They started with translating what they do into SDG language, mainstreaming the achievements of youth, women, the disabled and other groups as well as drawing synergies when possible.

Nepal: In 2017, TAP hosted a civil society workshop on SDG 16 with the NGO Federation of Nepal. The workshop was an opportunity for national civil society to define what they wanted to ask their government to do. The outcome from the workshop was the idea of having an institutionalised mechanism for the government to follow up on SDG 16 and for civil society to engage in that.

Civil society did some advocacy with the government, which was open and receptive to it, and they agreed to have a dedicated forum where civil society and the government could come together and discuss SDG 16 issues in Nepal. The forum was established in 2017 and aims to prioritise SDG 16 in the National Development Plan and their VNR. Having this open dialogue, at the very least encouraged the government to prioritise this issue.

Paraguay: In response to the need to improve inclusive development and social equity, Paraguay's government created the National Country Strategy Team (referred to by its Spanish abbreviation – ENEP). The process started in 2011 and was con-

solidated in 2012. The ENEP is a multi-stakeholder group formed by eight government representatives and 42 representatives from civil society, the private sector, indigenous groups, workers' groups and academia.

By national decree, the ENEP is multi-stakeholder participatory body where the strategies and goals for the country's agenda are discussed and delineated. The ENEP advises the executive branch and participates in the elaboration of public policies.

In 2013, Paraguay had, for the first time in the democratic era, a National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP, now aligned with the 2030 Agenda, is the result of a vast national consultation process in which the ENEP played a key role, embedding the priorities from all the different stakeholder groups. To cover the sub-national level, Paraguay is working on the creation of municipal development councils, which are also multi-stakeholder groups. A total of 232 out of the 255 municipalities in Paraguay have a municipal council that functions as the ENEP but at the sub-national level. Municipal councils are the channels through which the ENEP can bring sub-national priorities to the national discussion.

As part of their functions, the ENEP meets the president of the country twice a year to review the progress of the NDP and advise the presidency on what new strategies and measures should be taken in order to achieve national goals.

Despite the political instability experienced in Paraguay in 2012, thanks to citizens' commitment and support from international organisations, the ENEP managed to continue discharging its functions.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the limitations of the analysis, it has been possible to determine that genuine interest in engagement and spaces for collective work and the co-creation of knowledge are necessary conditions for participation by multiple actors to emerge. Making participation meaningful requires participants to be considered as equal conversation partners and taken seriously. It also requires them to be transparent about their actions and accountable to their commitments, and participation must be inclusive and representative.

Depending on the countries' realities, aspects such as excessively hierarchical structures, inadequate planning, weak institutions, a lack of social cohesion and perverse incentives are some of the main challenges preventing meaningful participation.

According to the mechanisms evaluated in this paper, there are four levels of participation in the context of the 2030 Agenda, in which non-state actors have different degrees of engagement with government representatives: informative, consultative, empowering and partnerships. Each level entails its own advantages and limitations but shares common challenges.

The most outstanding challenge across the different levels of participation is the lack of effective coordination strategies. Whether it is coordination for multi-stakeholder consultations, for aligning the agendas of different stakeholders in one direction or for simultaneously working with multiple stakeholder partnerships at the national and sub-national level, existing mechanisms require efforts to make coordination more effective.

Examination of the roles that different stakeholders can play in the review process shows a great overlap among the different roles which can be interpreted as possible synergies or opportunities for cooperation among the different stakeholders.

The existence of incentives to engage (government) and to be engaged (non-government) shows that there is room for the negotiation of strategies to adopt and develop an approach in which multi-stakeholder groups work collectively in the review process.

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Appendix 1

INFORMATIVE	CONSULTATIVE	EMPOWERING	PARTNERSHIPS
Guides on how the work from CSOs can be linked to the 2030 Agenda	Consultation working groups – a space for non-state actors to voice their concerns and work on specific issues separate from government[8]	Programme to position CSOs as key actors[8]	Partnerships for sustainable data to utilise data on sustainability produced by companies[8]
Spotlight report to inform about the principles of the 2030 Agenda and its goals, targets and indicators structure[8]	Dialogues with non-state actors – dialogues to consult non-state actors' concerns[8]	Institutionalised working groups (civil society working groups)[8]	Multi-stakeholder working groups – a space where non-state actors and government work together on specific issues[8]
Training courses on sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda[8]	Research on issues related to coordination[8]	Platforms and digital technologies to connect researchers with policy-makers[8]	Multi-stakeholder national SDG commissions / committees / councils – entity where non-state actors can contribute and work with the government[8]
Reporting on sustainable positive and negative impacts[8]	Multi-stakeholder national SDG commissions / committees / councils – entity where non-state actors have a consultative role[8]	Civil Society National Coalition – a coordinating body for civil society to strengthen voices from civil society[8]	National multi-stakeholder integration process – consolidation of a country vision based on a multi-stakeholder process to align national priorities to the 2030 Agenda[8]
Parallel review reports from the point of view of civil society[8]	Establishment of an advisory committee which represents non-state actors[9]	Creation of bodies to mobilise the advice of scientists and experts[9]	Institutionalised space for exchange and cooperation among government bodies and stakeholders, e.g. through a national commission for SDGs[9]
Communication strategy – a strategy to raise awareness and interest of different key stakeholders[8]			Public Private Action for Partnership to mobilise private technologies and resources

8   P4R Interviews (P4Rb 2018)
9   *Compendium of National Institutional Arrangements for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* prepared by UNDESA (UNDESA, 2018)

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