

Africa regional report

Whole-of-Society Engagement Mechanisms for Advancing the SDGs in Africa

Findings from 12 Interviews with Civil Society Organisations and National SDG Advisory Bodies in 10 African Countries

Prepared for the Global Forum on National SDG Advisory Bodies

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Executive Summary

This report presents key insights from interviews with twelve stakeholders across eleven African countries on the design, implementation, and evolution of whole-of-society engagement mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings illustrate that effective multi-stakeholder collaboration is in action across the continent, albeit with contextual challenges. Examples from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Benin, Uganda, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mauritania provide a robust foundation for learning and replication. The report highlights successful practices, enabling political conditions, institutional models, and critical enablers, while also outlining persisting constraints and recommendations for different stakeholders.

Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This report aims to explore how whole-of-society engagement mechanisms are advancing SDG implementation across Africa. It identifies successful practices, challenges, and lessons from twelve interviews with civil society actors, national SDGs advisory bodies and governments. The insights are intended to support Global Forum members, national governments, funders, and civil society leaders in designing effective, inclusive, and sustainable engagement systems.

Background: Whole-of-Society Engagement for SDGs in Africa

The 2030 Agenda calls for inclusive implementation frameworks where all societal actors contribute to development outcomes. In Africa, civil society, youth groups, academia, and private sector players are increasingly participating in monitoring, policy formulation, and advocacy related to achieving

national, regional and global development goals. Some engagement mechanisms are institutionalised, implemented in collaboration with national and local government institutions and some remain underdeveloped, underfunded, or uncoordinated. This report spotlights findings from 12 Interviews with CSOs and National SDGs Advisory Bodies in 10 African countries, sharing insights about their domestic whole of society engagement mechanisms for advancing the SDGs.

Methodology: Between May and June 2025, 12 interviews from 10 countries were conducted with representatives from the following organisations/ institutions:

- Benin (Maison de la Société Civile (MdSC))
- Ghana (Youth Advocates Ghana)
- Kenya (SDGs Kenya Forum)
- Malawi (Youth SDG Corps Malawi)
- Mauritania (Association for Development and Promotion of Human Rights)
- Nigeria (Nigeria Network of NGOs)
- South Africa (South Africa CSOs Working Group on SDGs (SAWG))
- Tanzania/Zanzibar (Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform and the Zanzibar Planning Commission)
- Uganda (Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development and Step Up Youth Initiative)
- Zimbabwe (Poverty Reduction Forum Trust)

Key Findings

Types of Whole-of-Society Engagement Mechanisms

Across the 12 interviews, stakeholders described a variety of mechanisms through which civil society and other non-state actors engage in the implementation, monitoring, and coordination of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their respective countries. While the formats varied by context, the following key types emerged:

National SDG Platforms Coordinated by Government: in countries such as Benin and Kenya, governments have established formal national SDG coordination platforms or technical directorates that include civil society representatives. These structures serve as central points for planning and monitoring SDG progress and often bring together different ministries. In Benin, for instance, the General Directorate for SDG Coordination and Monitoring functions as a public institution under the Ministry of Planning, working closely with Maison de la Société Civile to include non-state actors. Similarly, Kenya's SDG Directorate collaborates with CSOs through national planning mechanisms, facilitating joint participation in VNR processes and policy discussions.

Civil Society Platforms and Thematic Clusters: in multiple countries including Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa, civil society actors have independently created platforms to coordinate their inputs across the 17 SDGs. These platforms often organise member organisations into thematic clusters aligned with specific SDGs or priority areas. For example, Ghana's Youth SDGs Platform convenes youth-led organisations under a common framework, while Benin has institutionalised eight thematic pools that feed into broader coordination efforts. This form of organisation has strengthened targeted advocacy, enabled production of thematic shadow reports, and facilitated capacity building within civil society.

Multi-Stakeholder Committees Engaging Academia, Private Sector, and Youth: some countries, notably Kenya and Zimbabwe, have seen the inclusion of actors such as academia, labour unions, and the private sector in SDG coordination committees. In Zimbabwe, the Civil Society Reference Group, coordinated by the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust, sits on the SDG Steering Committee and thematic clusters convened by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare.

In 2024, organised labour was included for the first time in Zimbabwe's VNR process. However, interviewees consistently noted that while inclusion of labour and academia has improved, private sector participation remains limited or inconsistent across most contexts.

Community-Level Engagement Including Dialogues and Participatory Monitoring: engagement at the grassroots level is a strong feature in countries like South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, and Nigeria, where CSOs are implementing participatory methods to capture citizens' perspectives. Several organisations reported using tools such as citizen scorecards, community dialogues, and storytelling methodologies to monitor SDG implementation. These approaches provide qualitative data that complements national statistics and help surface lived experiences often overlooked in official reporting. In Zimbabwe, scorecards

have been used to collect data for spotlight reports, while Nigeria's organisations deploy local-level outreach to support SDG localisation, a strategy also being pursued in South Africa.

Joint VNR Processes and Parallel Civil Society Reports: the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process has emerged as a catalytic opportunity for civil society participation. In countries like Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, CSOs are actively contributing to VNRs through both official roles in drafting teams and the creation of independent shadow or spotlight reports. These reports provide alternative perspectives on SDG progress, rooted in community data. In South Africa, civil society groups produce a spotlight report ahead of each VNR cycle and engage in consultations with the government. In Kenya, CSOs have established a rhythm of participating in VNR working groups, advocating for inclusion and transparency in reporting processes.

These diverse models underscore that whole-of-society engagement in Africa is taking multiple forms—some led by government, others driven by civil society coalitions, and still others emerging at the community level. While institutional maturity and resource availability vary widely, a common thread across all countries is the recognition that multi-actor collaboration is essential to accelerate SDG implementation and ensure accountability to local needs.

Political Context & Influencing Factors

The political context in which whole-of-society engagement mechanisms operate significantly shapes their design, effectiveness, and continuity. From the interviews, several patterns emerged regarding how governance dynamics and political factors either enable or constrain meaningful collaboration around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Open Civic Space and Democratic Governance Enhance Collaboration: countries with relatively open civic space, participatory governance frameworks, and traditions of democratic accountability, like Ghana, Kenya, and Mauritius tend to report more constructive and consistent collaboration between government and civil society. In Ghana, civil society platforms enjoy direct lines of communication with decision-makers and are recognised as legitimate actors in policy development, including SDG monitoring and budgeting processes. Kenya's vibrant civil society also benefits from an enabling legal framework and established multi-stakeholder platforms. These contexts allow civil society to play both supportive and watchdog roles without fear of reprisal, facilitating a more robust and trusted engagement mechanism.

Government Leadership on SDGs Correlates with Structured Mechanisms: where national governments have taken a proactive and visible leadership role in SDG implementation, engagement mechanisms appear more structured and sustained. In Benin, for example, the General Directorate for SDG Coordination and Monitoring under the Ministry of Planning serves as a central institutional body that engages systematically with civil society. It coordinates sectoral inputs, validates reports, and facilitates joint planning processes. Similarly, Kenya's SDG focal points in government ministries collaborate with civil society actors, and this state-led coordination has supported the institutionalisation of regular VNR processes. Such leadership not only provides legitimacy to engagement mechanisms but also fosters long-term alignment across stakeholders.

Political Transitions and Elections Disrupt Continuity: in multiple contexts, interviewees highlighted how political transitions, especially following elections, tend to disrupt momentum around SDG engagement. Zimbabwe provides a clear example, where shifts in government administration often lead to restructuring of ministerial mandates and the sidelining of previously engaged actors. This affects the continuity of relationships and institutional memory, requiring civil society to rebuild trust and influence with each new leadership. South Africa and Ghana have also experienced similar interruptions, with elections often shifting national priorities and delaying consultation processes. In many cases, civil society must adjust its strategies, pause advocacy efforts, or re-establish its presence in government forums following political changes.

Civic Space Constraints Pose Challenges in Some Countries: in countries with tightening civic space, political volatility, or histories of state-civil society tension, for example in Zimbabwe and to some extent Benin, interviewees reported that engagement requires greater caution and strategic framing. Civil society actors in these contexts often avoid overt political confrontation and instead position themselves as technical partners supporting national development goals. For instance, organisations in Zimbabwe have adopted a non-adversarial tone, presenting shadow reports as complementary to government efforts, thereby maintaining their seat at the table while preserving their independence. In Benin, actors

avoid public criticism and opt for direct, closed-door engagement with authorities, especially during politically sensitive periods.

Narrative Shifts Reflect Progress: in several cases, civil society advocacy has contributed to changes in political narrative and planning approaches. For example, Zimbabwean stakeholders observed a transition in official language from a "whole-of-government" to a "whole-of-society" approach, reflecting a growing awareness of the value of multi-actor collaboration.

These narrative shifts are not merely rhetorical; they can signal openness to broader participation, especially when coupled with changes in policy coordination structures and inclusion of diverse stakeholders like youth, persons with disabilities, and organised labour.

Overall, the interviews confirm that political context matters deeply in shaping the form and function of SDG engagement mechanisms. In more open and stable democracies, multi-stakeholder platforms tend to be better institutionalised, more inclusive, and less dependent on external project cycles. Conversely, in politically sensitive or volatile environments, engagement mechanisms require careful navigation, strong coalition-building, and often rely on informal relationships to maintain access and influence.

Challenges and Successes

Despite notable efforts to operationalise whole-of-society approaches, stakeholders consistently highlighted a range of structural, institutional, and operational challenges that undermine the impact and sustainability of their engagement mechanisms.

The most widely cited challenge was the chronic lack of funding and technical support for civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in SDG processes. Many organisations, including those in Zimbabwe, Uganda, and South Africa, reported reliance on external donor funding that is often short-term, fragmented, or insufficient for meaningful participation. This limitation directly affects CSOs' ability to conduct consultations, generate data, prepare reports, or attend policy meetings. Technical limitations such as a lack of staff trained in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) or policy analysis, were also identified, reducing the strategic effectiveness of civil society contributions.

Coordination remains a persistent struggle, both within civil society and between sectors. In several countries, including South Africa, Nigeria, and Tanzania, the lack of an overarching, institutionalised structure for coordinating CSO efforts has led to duplication, competition, and siloed advocacy. Without clear mandates, some platforms struggle to mobilise members consistently or engage effectively with government bodies. In contexts where multiple coalitions exist with overlapping mandates, stakeholders noted confusion about representation and authority.

In a number of interviews, participants flagged the issue of tokenism in state-CSO engagement. Although CSOs are increasingly invited to government-led processes such as SDG steering committees or VNR consultations, their inputs are not always integrated into official documents. For example, in South Africa and Nigeria, civil society contributions were acknowledged but not meaningfully included in final reports. The absence of structured dialogue and follow-up often leaves civil society feeling peripheral to the policymaking process.

Across multiple countries including South Africa, Ghana and Zimbabwe, CSOs reported challenges accessing timely and disaggregated data. Many official data sets are outdated, centralised, or insufficiently granular to support community-level advocacy. Moreover, there is limited investment in citizen-generated data systems, despite their potential to complement national statistics and offer real-time monitoring of SDG indicators. This data gap inhibits evidence-based advocacy and reduces the visibility of marginalised groups.

A common challenge across interviews was the lack of structured feedback mechanisms to evaluate the impact of multi-stakeholder collaboration. While some platforms conduct annual reviews or produce alternative reports, most countries do not have institutionalised M&E systems to track progress, capture learning, or adjust strategies. This weakness undermines accountability and limits the ability of platforms to demonstrate added value or improve effectiveness over time.

Despite these challenges, the interviews revealed encouraging examples of progress and innovation. Several mechanisms have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and positive influence on SDG implementation. These successes offer valuable lessons for replication and scaling.

Where government ministries have shown sustained commitment to inclusive SDG coordination, platforms have flourished. In Kenya, the SDG Kenya Forum works closely with national planning agencies and benefits from regular participation in government-organised SDG processes. Similarly, in Benin, the General Directorate for SDG Coordination has institutionalised collaboration with civil society actors, ensuring mutual input on planning, data sharing, and reporting. These cases show that government goodwill and continuity are critical to the long-term success of engagement mechanisms.

Neutral, well-respected CSO intermediaries play a crucial role in convening diverse actors and maintaining credibility with the government. The Maison de la Société Civile (MdSC) in Benin serves as a model, bringing together over 1,600 CSOs into thematic groups and coordinating alternative reporting that complements official reviews. MdSC's apolitical stance and technical rigor have earned it the trust of both civil society and state actors.

In countries like Ghana, thematic advocacy campaigns have yielded tangible policy wins. For example, the Youth SDGs Platform led a national campaign advocating for menstrual health funding, resulting in a successful budget allocation. This illustrates how focused, data-driven advocacy on specific SDG targets can translate into policy outcomes when well-coordinated and publicly visible.

Interviewees from Malawi, Uganda, and Zanzibar highlighted how whole-of-society engagement mechanisms have become more inclusive by intentionally involving youth, women, people with disabilities, and grassroots leaders. These actors often bring critical perspectives and legitimacy to platforms, especially through participatory tools like community dialogues and citizen scorecards. Their involvement has strengthened the local relevance and social accountability of SDG efforts.

In Kenya, annual multi-stakeholder SDG conferences convened by the government provide a structured space for consultation, learning, and alignment. These events offer predictable opportunities for CSOs to contribute evidence, showcase initiatives, and engage with policymakers. The format encourages transparency and allows for tracking of progress between cycles, which many respondents suggested is replicable in other countries.

Together, these findings show that while national SDG advisory bodies and CSOs working on the SDGs face considerable constraints, particularly around resources, coordination, and political receptivity, there are also dynamic success stories that reflect the ingenuity, persistence, and strategic adaptation of civil society. Scaling these successes will require systemic support, political commitment, and investment in institutional and financial infrastructure that enables whole-of-society partnerships to thrive.

Adapting to Politically Challenging or Low-Trust Environments

Across the 12 interviews, civil society leaders described various strategies for navigating political sensitivities, managing low trust between sectors, and sustaining engagement in contexts marked by authoritarian tendencies, shrinking civic space, or heightened political contestation. Despite variations across countries, a set of common, adaptive practices emerged. One of the most widely used strategies is engaging government actors through technical diplomacy, often framed as constructive, data-driven support rather than public criticism. In Benin, the Maison de la Société Civile (MdSC) has deliberately adopted a non-adversarial approach, choosing to raise contentious issues privately and through official channels rather than in the media. Armand Vignon explained that this quiet diplomacy allows CSOs to highlight concerns while maintaining access to government processes. They strategically submit inputs and recommendations directly to relevant ministries, often using evidence from community-level data or expert-validated reports.

This behind-the-scenes engagement builds trust, allows for issue resolution without public confrontation, and signals the CSO sector's commitment to collaboration rather than confrontation. A similar approach is employed in Zimbabwe, where the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust has built relationships with the Ministry of Public Service by positioning its contributions as complementary to government efforts and avoiding overt political alignment.

Another strategy used to mitigate political risk is the temporary suspension or modification of advocacy activities during election periods, especially when tensions are high or civic space becomes restricted. In Benin, the MdSC paused advocacy programmes funded by Swiss Cooperation during communal and parliamentary elections to avoid the appearance of foreign interference. This was done preemptively

and transparently, both to protect programme integrity and to ensure continued trust with public authorities.

In South Africa, although the civic space is comparatively open, CSOs reported exercising additional caution in their engagements during national elections, including delaying certain advocacy campaigns or framing their interventions in ways that avoid political misinterpretation. The emphasis here is on timing, tone, and narrative sensitivity, with CSOs making deliberate decisions about when and how to raise issues to prevent unnecessary backlash.

A recurring success factor across challenging political environments is maintaining a neutral and evidence-based posture. Many interviewees stressed the importance of being non-partisan, technically sound, and consistent in how they engage with public institutions. In Zimbabwe, this strategy has allowed the Reference Group to be formally included in the drafting of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Their alternative Spotlight Reports, grounded in community-level scorecards and citizen data, are now recognised by the government as legitimate contributions, despite political headwinds.

Similarly, in Nigeria, CSOs gain credibility by presenting their findings through rigorous methodologies and data validation. This professionalism signals to public authorities that the CSOs are not engaging in partisan activism but offering meaningful input aligned with development goals. In some cases, platforms bring in independent statisticians or policy experts to co-develop parallel reports, further bolstering their legitimacy.

By focusing on constructive critique, policy alignment, and methodological soundness, these organisations successfully shift the narrative: from being viewed as watchdogs or critics, to being regarded as knowledge partners and national contributors.

Several organisations adapt their messaging by aligning their language and goals with national development frameworks. For example, CSOs in Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda strategically frame their SDG work around national planning documents, avoiding language that might be perceived as oppositional or externally imposed. By demonstrating how their activities contribute to shared objectives, they reduce resistance and increase policy traction. This framing also extends to the language of inclusion. For instance, Kenya's civil society platforms regularly use terms like "partnership", "multi-sector collaboration", and "whole-of-society" to align with government priorities, helping to build a sense of joint ownership over the SDG process.

In countries with low levels of trust or a history of politicised civil society-government relations, several platforms have sought to diversify their stakeholder relationships as a risk mitigation strategy. In Malawi and Uganda, for instance, CSOs intentionally build partnerships with academia, faith-based groups, and professional associations. These actors often enjoy higher public trust and can serve as intermediaries when direct engagement with government is not feasible or too politically sensitive.

By working in coalitions that include a wide spectrum of actors, CSOs diffuse political risk, enhance their legitimacy, and present a more unified, depoliticised voice on SDG issues.

Across the 11 countries, CSOs and SDG engagement platforms are not passive victims of political instability or civic space constraints. Instead, they are actively adapting their approaches through diplomacy, timing, evidence-based engagement, and strategic alliances. These practices are not only enabling civil society to continue participating in national development processes, but are also creating a model of politically astute, credible, and inclusive engagement that can be replicated in other regions facing similar constraints.

The findings affirm that non-state actors in the region prioritise building trust, maintaining neutrality, and advancing non-confrontational advocacy as cornerstones of effective whole-of-society SDG engagement in politically sensitive or low-trust contexts.

Institutional and Resource Requirements

Across all countries, interviewees emphasised the critical need for dedicated, skilled leadership and operational support to manage coordination, facilitate dialogue, and drive collective action. Platforms that benefited from a functional secretariat or coordinating body, like the Maison de la Société Civile (MdSC) in Benin or the Youth SDGs Platform in Ghana, were more likely to maintain momentum, coordinate thematic clusters, and synthesise civil society inputs effectively.

These secretariats are not merely administrative. They serve a strategic function, mobilising partners, managing relationships with government, guiding advocacy messaging, and ensuring inclusive consultation. Where such leadership is weak or absent, mechanisms risk becoming dormant or fragmented. For instance, in Uganda, the lack of consistent leadership between VNR cycles resulted in the weakening of civil society coordination and reduced national influence.

Moreover, technical capacity, including skills in data analysis, policy literacy, facilitation, and communications, was frequently identified as a limiting factor. Several organisations noted the importance of training their members on SDG frameworks, national policy processes, and community-based monitoring tools in order to participate meaningfully in national dialogues.

A near-universal theme across all interviews was the acute lack of sustainable and flexible funding to support both CSO engagement and the broader functioning of multi-stakeholder mechanisms. Platforms often rely heavily on project-based external funding, primarily from international donors. In Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Malawi, interviewees highlighted how dwindling resources directly limited their ability to convene consultations, develop reports, or attend government-led forums.

The absence of domestic financing whether through government allocation or philanthropic support, renders most mechanisms vulnerable to funding gaps. This dependency weakens long-term planning and makes participation ad hoc and reactive, particularly outside of VNR periods.

Additionally, several respondents noted that while governments may invite CSOs to participate in official structures (such as SDG steering committees or national consultations), there is often no provision to support their participation, especially for grassroots or rural organisations. This creates an uneven playing field and undermines the inclusiveness that the SDG agenda aspires to uphold.

A few countries, such as Benin and Ghana, have explored pooled or multi-donor funding models through partnerships with institutions like GIZ, UNDP, and Action for Sustainable Development. These approaches offer replicable models for other contexts, though they still require strong local coordination to be effective.

Another important finding was the absence or weakness of formalised mandates and clear operating procedures for many engagement mechanisms. In several cases, participation in national SDG processes was described as “invited spaces” rather than constitutionally or institutionally guaranteed roles.

In Kenya, South Africa, and Benin, some progress has been made in formalising civil society’s inclusion in national SDG coordination platforms. For example, in Benin, civil society sits on the General Directorate for SDG Coordination and Monitoring, while in Kenya, CSOs participate in government-led planning and review sessions. However, even in these contexts, interviewees noted the importance of codifying participation through memoranda of understanding, terms of reference, or policy instruments that define roles, expectations, and rights of participation.

In other countries, mechanisms remain largely informal, which leads to inconsistency and unpredictability in CSO-government collaboration. This lack of structure makes it difficult to plan, allocate responsibilities, or hold partners accountable.

The interviews underscored the need for clearly defined coordination roles and complementary functions between government agencies and civil society actors. Where these roles are ambiguous or overlapping, collaboration breaks down or becomes symbolic rather than substantive.

Several interviewees highlighted the value of multi-stakeholder steering committees with defined roles for each sector. In Zimbabwe, for instance, civil society is represented on both SDG clusters and the national SDG Steering Committee, offering a structured pathway for feedback and influence. However, interviewees also warned that without clarity on who leads coordination, who is accountable, and how decisions are made, platforms risk becoming fragmented or tokenistic.

Respondents repeatedly called for joint planning sessions, shared dashboards, and co-developed indicators as ways of strengthening coordination and fostering mutual accountability.

The effectiveness and sustainability of whole-of-society engagement mechanisms across Africa depend heavily on a combination of institutional clarity and resource investment. Skilled secretariats, sustained funding, formalised mandates, and well-defined coordination roles are not merely desirable, they are foundational.

Without these elements, even the most well-intentioned efforts risk fading after initial momentum. However, where they are present, as seen in parts of Benin, Kenya, and Ghana, platforms can evolve into credible, trusted, and influential contributors to national development and SDG achievement. Strengthening these pillars through policy reform, donor support, and national commitment is essential for embedding inclusive engagement at the heart of Africa's development trajectory.

Potential for Replicating and Scaling

Insights gathered from the interviews highlight widespread recognition among civil society organisations (CSOs) and national stakeholders that their whole-of-society engagement mechanisms for SDG implementation possess significant potential for replication and scaling. Despite varying political contexts, levels of institutionalisation, and funding availability, many of these mechanisms exhibit characteristics that could be successfully adapted and expanded to other national or subnational settings.

Mechanisms that are formally recognised and embedded within national planning or coordination structures are consistently identified as having high replication value. In Benin, for example, the *Maison de la Société Civile* (MdSC) has institutionalised thematic pools aligned with the SDGs and integrated civil society voices into national SDG reporting through structured partnerships with the General Directorate for SDG Coordination. The government's openness, the clear terms of engagement, and the long-standing partnerships with donors like GIZ and Swiss Cooperation make this model a replicable example of civil society-government collaboration.

Similarly, in Ghana, the national CSO SDGs platform, along with youth-led mechanisms like the Youth Advocates Ghana's SDG hub, are anchored in formal participation channels. These platforms contribute directly to policy discussions, budget advocacy, and VNR processes, offering a robust framework that can be adapted by other countries. The integration of youth as thematic leads and the formalised structures of engagement were cited as key features worth emulating.

In Kenya, the SDG Kenya Forum has evolved into a formalised national actor that collaborates directly with the Ministry of Planning and national SDG structures.

Its role in multi-stakeholder steering committees and its coordination of sector-specific working groups provide another strong model for replication, especially in countries where civil society participation remains informal or fragmented.

Across multiple countries including Ghana, Benin, Uganda, and South Africa, the formation of thematic clusters based on SDG domains emerged as a highly scalable innovation. These clusters bring together CSOs and other actors working on related issues (e.g., health, education, gender) to coordinate advocacy, generate data, and feed into joint reports. The model's strength lies in its flexibility: it can be tailored to national priorities while ensuring focused and organised civil society participation. In Uganda, the national SDG CSO platform has begun to adopt a thematic structure inspired by other countries, particularly Ghana. This cross-pollination of models demonstrates the feasibility of scaling such approaches through South-South learning and peer exchange.

Youth platforms, particularly in Ghana and Malawi, were also highlighted as promising and transferable. These platforms serve as dedicated spaces for youth-led advocacy, data collection, and policy engagement, often operating more nimbly than older, traditional civil society formations. Their success in pushing issues such as menstrual hygiene funding (Ghana) and grassroots participation (Malawi) shows that youth-driven mechanisms are not only replicable but can be catalysts for innovation and broader inclusivity.

In addition to platform structures, several tools and methodologies were identified as practical innovations that can be adapted across contexts. Most notably: citizen scorecards used in Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Tanzania have allowed communities to participate directly in monitoring SDG progress. These tools bring qualitative, people-centred data into national conversations, complementing official statistics and creating a richer evidence base for advocacy.

Spotlight and shadow reporting, as practiced in Ghana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, provide scalable models for independent civil society assessment of SDG progress. When timed alongside Voluntary National Review (VNR) processes, these reports create accountability and visibility for community-level concerns.

Digital consultation tools, mentioned by interviewees in Nigeria and Kenya, also represent adaptable innovations, especially in resource-constrained settings where in-person engagement is difficult. There are already signs of cross-country learning and diffusion of successful models. As mentioned, Ghana's youth-led SDG advocacy and thematic structuring influenced similar approaches in Uganda and Kenya. Likewise, Zimbabwe's use of adapted citizen scorecards, originally developed by Action for Sustainable Development, demonstrates that tools developed at global or regional levels can be customised to local realities.

This diffusion often happens informally, through regional meetings, workshops, or Global Forum engagements, but the appetite for more structured learning exchanges was clearly expressed by interviewees.

Several suggested that future progress depends on more deliberate mechanisms for horizontal sharing across the continent, through joint trainings, toolkits, or peer mentoring arrangements.

While interviewees broadly agreed on the potential for replication, they also emphasised the importance of adapting mechanisms to national contexts. Political environment, administrative structures, and civic space vary considerably across Africa, and models must be sensitised to these realities.

Therefore, while core principles such as inclusivity, structure, thematic focus, and joint planning are replicable, the design and rollout of any mechanism must be anchored in local dialogue and co-creation with national stakeholders.

The mechanisms currently in place across the countries interviewed are not only relevant to their domestic contexts but also offer valuable lessons and practical models for replication and scaling across Africa and beyond. Structured platforms like those in Benin, Ghana, and Kenya; thematic clusters; youth-led engagement; and participatory tools such as scorecards and spotlight reports, all represent transferable innovations that can help broaden and deepen whole-of-society engagement in the SDGs.

Scaling such efforts will require greater investment in horizontal learning, stronger documentation of what works, and flexible funding to adapt successful models to new contexts. However, the foundations are clearly in place and with the right support, these mechanisms can significantly contribute to accelerating sustainable development progress across the continent.

Case Studies

Benin: MdSC's coordination with the SDG Directorate demonstrates how structured collaboration and thematic hubs can elevate civil society contributions.

Ghana: Civil society platform and youth cluster achieved policy influence on menstrual health and effective VNR participation.

Kenya: Multi-stakeholder SDG Conference convened annually with strong co-leadership from government and civil society.

South Africa: The SA Working Group on SDGs enabled CSO coordination, though engagement with the government remains uneven.

Uganda: NNGOF facilitates CSO representation and co-leads policy monitoring processes with the government.

Zimbabwe: Youth-led platforms are mainstreaming SDG awareness and participation in national dialogues.

Mauritania: Youth platforms engaging local authorities and raising visibility of marginalised voices.

Nigeria: VNR alternative reports and community-level dialogues anchored by civil society coalitions.

Malawi: CONGOMA coordinates CSO involvement in SDG forums and engages subnational authorities.

Tanzania (Zanzibar): Government-led coordination allows for joint reporting and civil society engagement.

Recommendations

For National Governments

- Institutionalise whole-of-society platforms within national SDG coordination structures
- Provide co-financing for CSO engagement and thematic cluster coordination
- Ensure civil society contributions are reflected in VNRs and development plans
- Maintain civic space and protect non-partisan CSO participation

For Civil Society Organisations

- Coordinate through unified platforms and avoid duplication or competition
- Build technical and policy engagement capacity, especially among youth- and women-led groups
- Develop parallel reports aligned with national timelines to influence official reporting
- Maintain neutrality and credibility to ensure long-term access and trust

For Funders and International Partners

- Provide flexible, long-term core support for coordination roles and technical assistance
- Support country-to-country learning and peer exchanges
- Fund inclusion-focused mechanisms for youth, grassroots, and marginalised groups
- Align reporting requirements with national engagement processes to reduce burden

For Global Forum Members

- Facilitate horizontal learning among African platforms
- Offer technical guidance on formalising and institutionalising engagement mechanisms
- Document and share successful models through toolkits and case study publications
- Advocate globally for donor support aligned to country-owned coordination platforms

Conclusion

Whole-of-society engagement mechanisms are recognised as vital infrastructure for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across the region. The interviews conducted for this study affirm that such mechanisms are not only active but also evolving in scope, scale, and sophistication. From national SDG platforms and multi-stakeholder committees to youth hubs, thematic clusters, and community-led scorecard initiatives, the diversity of engagement structures reflects appreciation of the importance of inclusive, participatory governance in sustainable development.

Despite this progress, persistent challenges remain. Civil society organisations (CSOs) across the continent continue to grapple with chronic underfunding, unclear mandates, and fragmented coordination. In many contexts, their participation is limited to consultation rather than meaningful co-decision-making. Moreover, disruptions linked to political transitions, shrinking civic space, and limited access to disaggregated or real-time data often weaken the continuity and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder efforts.

The report also highlights compelling success stories and promising practices. Countries have demonstrated that when governments and CSOs work together in a spirit of mutual respect and shared purpose, real progress is possible. Formalised platforms, consistent stakeholder mapping, structured feedback loops, and tools such as spotlight reporting and citizen scorecards have enabled grassroots voices to inform national policy and global reporting. Youth engagement, issue-based campaigns, and thematic working groups have further energised the space and created momentum for broader participation.

A key enabler across all these cases is the presence of credible, neutral coordination bodies, often in the form of civil society secretariats or trusted intermediaries. These bodies play a crucial role in convening diverse actors, facilitating evidence-based dialogue, and bridging the gap between government structures and community-level realities. Additionally, flexible and pooled funding, where available, has improved the resilience and sustainability of collective efforts.

Looking ahead, the potential for scaling and replication is high. Many of the mechanisms described are adaptable, especially when grounded in locally appropriate institutional arrangements and informed by peer learning. There is strong demand for cross-country exchanges, joint capacity development, and south-south cooperation to accelerate shared learning and innovation across contexts.

The Global Forum and its members are uniquely positioned to support this agenda. By investing in regional collaboration, developing typologies and toolkits, advocating for institutionalised multi-stakeholder participation, and championing independent civil society inputs into SDG processes, the

Forum can help ensure that engagement mechanisms become not just ad hoc consultation bodies, but core pillars of democratic and accountable governance for sustainable development. In conclusion, whole-of-society mechanisms are not merely aspirational, they are operational, impactful, and poised for growth. With the right support, political will, and long-term investment, they can drive deeper inclusion, more responsive policy, and faster progress on the SDGs.

Prepared by: African Monitor, in its capacity as Africa Region Hub Coordinator, on behalf of the Global Forum on National SDGs Advisory Bodies

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