

# Transformative action to realize the 2030 Agenda through effective coalitions

**While implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is primarily the responsibility of governments, the scale and ambition of the agenda call for contributions from stakeholders across society including parliamentarians, citizens, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia, and the media. Based on a review of multi-stakeholder coalitions from around the world, this working paper provides a series of good practices and evidence-informed recommendations that can be used to strengthen the governance of coalitions in order to trigger accelerated and transformative actions for sustainable development.**

## Key messages

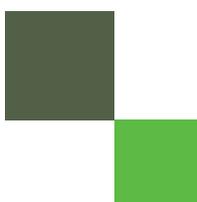
- Multi-stakeholder 2030 Agenda coalitions are emerging around the world and making valuable contributions to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including through the promotion of cross-sector collaboration, creation of dedicated space to amplify the voices of groups most at risk of being left behind and engagement in follow-up and review processes that strengthen whole-of-society accountability for progress.
- Effective 2030 Agenda coalitions are characterized by a clear mission, well-established membership principles, participatory strategic planning, well-defined decision-making processes and transparent and inclusive governance structures.
- Good practice is ensuring that coalition activities are grounded in a firm commitment to the transformative values and principles of Agenda 2030, which include diversity, inclusiveness, leaving no one behind, whole-of society approaches, protecting nature, collective responsibility and transparency and accountability.

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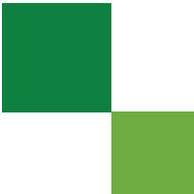
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## Introduction

In 2015, world leaders adopted the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda, which introduced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sets out a transformative plan for people and planet. It aims to promote shared prosperity, environmental sustainability and progress on sustainable development that leaves no one behind. Realizing the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda requires a whole-of-society approach.

A whole-of-society approach to 2030 Agenda implementation requires the promotion of multi-stakeholder and multi-sector partnerships to create transformative synergies between the goals and more importantly, calls for the reduction of inequalities between genders and efforts to leave no one behind (LNOB). The LNOB principle is intended to engage and empower those most vulnerable in society. As part of the effort to realize the 2030 Agenda, global, national, regional and local coalitions are emerging to ensure a whole-of-society approach. Coalitions are a valuable strategy in exchanging knowledge, sharing resources, amplifying awareness-raising efforts, localizing the agenda, advocating for systemic change and creating a focal point for governments to seek advice on the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, some governments have developed advisory bodies or multi-stakeholder councils as an important means to ensure inclusive, whole-of-society implementation and oversight.<sup>1</sup>

Based on a literature review, desk-based review<sup>2</sup> of 72 coalitions focused on the 2030 Agenda and interviews with members of 13 coalitions (10 national, one regional and two global in scope),<sup>3</sup> this policy brief identifies standard and good practices with respect to 2030 Agenda coalitions. The research looked at diverse coalitions, including multi-stakeholder coalitions comprised of civil society, academia, the private sector and government multi-stakeholder coalitions comprised of diverse non-state actors and coalitions composed solely of civil society organizations. This brief provides a series of good practices followed by evidence-informed recommendations to strengthen governance and overall efforts of 2030 Agenda coalitions to trigger accelerated and transformative actions for sustainable development.

## Transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda

A good practice is an activity or approach that demonstrates incorporation of one or more of the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda. The agenda is human rights-based and focuses on the inclusion of, and change for, the poorest and most vulnerable by promoting their inherent dignity and human rights through the promotion of inclusivity, solidarity and participation. The 2030 Agenda is universal in that it applies to all countries and people. The economic, social and environmental pillars of the 2030 Agenda are of equal importance, with the SDGs being integrated and indivisible - achievements under any one goal are linked to progress on others. Implementation of the agenda should occur with respect for planetary boundaries and intergenerational responsibility, recognizing the need to protect the planet's resources now and for future generations. Importantly, good practices respect the aspirational nature of the 2030 Agenda, demonstrably moving beyond standard practices or business-as-usual approaches. Finally, the 2030 Agenda is grounded in commitments to transparency and accountability.

In the review of coalitions, the research team looked for examples of coalition governance, activities and overall approaches that demonstrate the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda. For example, this means concerted efforts to ensure transparency and accountability to members and demonstration of transparency, inclusion and participation in governance and how activities are carried out, particularly for those at risk of being left behind.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Shannon Kindornay and Renée Gendron (2020), *Progressing National SDGs Implementation: Fourth Edition*, Canadian Council for International Co-operation.

<sup>2</sup> A challenge in the review of coalitions is that the level of information available greatly differed from one organization to another; from funding, to types of donors if any, to use of volunteers or not, to publishing of names of members and coalition sign-up criteria. That said, standard practice in terms of information provided includes funding sources, membership and coalition goals. The review of coalition websites found that information was not consistently listed regarding funding sources with only 36% indicating how they were funded. Other important information gaps included information regarding membership criteria. Only 32% of the coalitions reviewed provided this information.

<sup>3</sup> The national coalitions operate in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Ghana, India, Italy, Kenya, Nepal and the United Kingdom. The regional coalition operates in the Middle East and North Africa region.

## Understanding standard and good practice

### Stakeholders and membership

Having a range of stakeholders in a coalition ensures broader societal participation in realizing the SDGs and improves access to resources, but also creates more synergies. Synergies can arise from relationships that develop from adverse circumstances and work to transform circumstances into conditions that are favourable to all.

Thirty-nine out of 72 (54%) coalitions examined had more than one type of stakeholder in their membership list, while of the 39 coalitions with multiple stakeholders, 13 (33%) had five or more types of stakeholders in their alliance such as the private sector, government, trade unions, etc. The most common types of stakeholders noted were non-governmental organizations and faith groups, while the least common type of stakeholders were private businesses and organizations that represented the interests of an ethnic group. Eleven out of 72 (15%) coalitions were government-led platforms,<sup>4</sup> while three (4%) only allowed members of parliament of the same country or other national or regional governments, and only two coalitions (3%) noted local authorities as members. Forty-two out of 72 (58%) did not refer to having a national government as part of their coalition, and six (8%) noted their membership was exclusive to non-government organizations. Our research found that the number of coalitions with exclusive membership rises to 14 out of 72 (19%) when the definition of non-government organizations is expanded to include non-government organizations, faith-based groups, student and trade unions and associations. These compositions reflect the highly contextual nature of the circumstances facing each coalition, as well as the mandate and overarching goals of the coalition.

A standard practice for coalitions is listing a partial or full membership list on the organizations' website, as well as criteria for membership. Only 75% of coalitions listed their partial or full membership list on their website, while 22% who provided information on their membership had fewer than 20 members, 50% had between 21 and 100 members, 26% had a membership of between 101 and 1,000 members, and 6% had more than 1,000 members. Interviews suggest a number of good practices with respect to inclusion and membership.

Good practice includes intentionally creating synergies by choosing members selectively and purposefully in order to have a balanced network with representation from different sectors that speak to the different dimensions of sustainable development and governance. By cooperating with a broad range of stakeholders, coalitions can better represent civil society and other stakeholders within the 2030 Agenda framework and can help implement effective sustainable development policies.<sup>5</sup> In many cases, civil society coalitions emerged organically out of existing relationships of trust established over time through collaboration during national dialogues and campaigns, specific initiatives to monitor the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (e.g. joint civil society spotlight reports) or in active negotiations with the government to prioritize and localize the 2030 Agenda, as in the case of ANND, a regional network (Middle East and North Africa) based in Lebanon and the CSO Working Group in Brazil. However, in cases where the formation of coalitions has been more deliberate, good practice suggests that the recruitment of members requires intentional and proactive public relations campaigns targeting specific sectors in the early stages of the coalition to ensure that no sectors are missed or one single sector dominating.

The interviews point to four distinct areas of member selection and network building reflecting the transformative elements of the 2030 Agenda. These include representation to capture:

- 1) Each of the 17 SDGs, recognizing their indivisibility and integrated nature;
- 2) Cross-cutting principles, such as accountability and LNOB;

<sup>4</sup> Formas was included as a government-led coalition.

<sup>5</sup> WHO Civil Society Task Force on TB – Terms of Reference.



- 3) Technical aspects of 2030 Agenda implementation, such as monitoring and financing; and
- 4) A whole-of-society approach, with deliberate effort to include diverse stakeholders across public, private, civil society and academic sectors.

### **SDG coverage**

The SDGs themselves can inform the structure and approach taken by coalitions - integration should define strategic planning and efforts should be made to identify linkages to different parts of the Agenda 2030 in designing or redesigning the way that coalitions are governed and operate.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, coalitions sought out members that could represent each of the 17 SDGs. For example, the Kenya SDG Forum actively sought out representatives for each SDG, who sit on working groups from which two representatives for each SDG are elected to the Director's Forum. In other cases, members were recruited and selected based on their representation of specific SDGs or clusters of SDGs that were prioritized by the coalition. ASVIS (Italy), for example, created working groups on every SDG, and then thematic working groups (e.g. SDGs 6, 14 and 15 work together).

### **Cross-cutting principles**

Coalitions also selected members that could speak to cross-cutting principles, such as accountability and LNOB. When NEON<sup>7</sup> (Czech Republic) decided to focus more broadly on accountability and good governance, it invited coalitions who work on pro-democracy and anti-corruption agendas to participate in its coalition. In another example, WNTA (India) emerged out of a coming together of networks and campaigns that represent civil society organizations, grassroots organizations and identity-based communities from across the country, all interested in demanding government accountability in relation to its performance, commitment to global processes (the Millennium Development Goals and now the SDGs) and its electoral promises. Accountability is the overarching theme around which its membership is united. It has also reached out to organizations from different regions, and those that represent specific constituencies (gender, caste, youth and LGBTQ+). The principle of LNOB means that 2030 Agenda coalitions should ensure that the most underrepresented and marginalized are represented in membership, as well as governance structures (discussed further below).<sup>8</sup>

### **Technical capacity**

Coalitions also strategically select members that can assist with some of the technical aspects of SDG implementation, monitoring and advocacy. ASVIS (Italy) established working groups on cross-cutting issues such as research, statistical models, finance for sustainable development, culture for sustainable development and business confederations, the latter including unions of farmers and small business owners. The CSO Working Group of Brazil includes local forums, social movements, NGOs, international non-governmental organizations and representatives from the private sector (e.g. banks, forums for small farmers and small producers). In addition to this broad membership it actively selected economists to join a working group that takes the lead on data analysis for its spotlight reports, similar to the statistical modelling working group in ASVIS. A few other coalitions highlighted the important role played by members, who are statisticians, academics or subject experts in order to ensure the rigour of their research outputs and raise the credibility of their reports

### **Whole-of-society approach**

It is important to recognize business, academia and civil society as partners in development planning, on the premise that investing in growing relationships will promote innovation and strengthen the coalition over the long

<sup>6</sup> Cheryl Freeman, Mike Wisheart, Katie Fry Hester, Dave Prescott and Darian Stibbe (2016), *Agenda 2030 Implementation Policy Paper: Delivering on the Promise – In-country Multi-stakeholder Platforms to catalyse collaboration and partnerships for Agenda 2030*. World Vision and the Partnering Initiative, pp. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Formerly *Mej se k svetlu* ('Get on with the world' coalition).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 33.



term.<sup>9</sup> Some coalitions focus exclusively on civil society members (e.g. Wada Na Todo Abhiyaan [WNTA] India and the Kenya SDG Forum), while others deliberately recruited members from different sectors. The Nepal SDG Forum includes members from the Migrant Worker's Association and the Chamber of Commerce. The Citizen Platform for the SDGs (Bangladesh) reached out to social movements, academics, entrepreneurs and the private sector. UKSSD has successfully attracted high levels of private sector membership and there are a number of private sector members on its governance structure. ASVIS (Italy) promotes the participation of - and engagement with - the private sector (specifically business associations and labour unions) as well as the participation of academic institutions through the Italian University Network for Sustainable Development, which is one of its members. Pampa 2030 includes NGOs, three large trade unions, faith-based organizations and academic institutions in its membership.

### Clear guidance on what membership entails

Beyond good practice pertaining to membership selection and network building, the study also identified good practice in terms of requirements for membership. A less common, yet innovative practice among the coalition websites reviewed, was of six coalitions (26%) requiring members to agree to work according to certain principles or submit a plan of action to demonstrate how they would work towards the goals. Some coalitions that were interviewed are selective about membership, and require members to submit applications, including statements of commitment to the 2030 Agenda and its underlying principles to the secretariat for approval (e.g. Citizens Platform for the SDGs Bangladesh), and are discerning about potential members and their legitimacy as partners and potential conflicts of interest (e.g. UKSSD). In the case of the CSO Platform on SDGs (Ghana), this process has been simplified in order to ensure accessibility using the completion of online forms which are then linked automatically to sub platforms (subject experts) for review.

Good practice suggests that new members require a clear understanding of the coalition's mission, expectations and standards prior to joining the coalition. For example, the CSO Working Group of Brazil outlines its democratic principles on its website while Forus International has an ethics policy to which all members are expected to abide. In addition, members sign agreements when they join Forus International that set out expectations in terms of the level of participation expected and membership fees. Ghana's CSO Platform on SDGs also has a constitution (described as an operational framework) on its website, which includes governance principles, expectations and codes of conduct for members.

### Membership agreements

Legitimacy is important for coalitions to operate. There is a view that members should share the credit for a coalition's successes and take responsibility for its failures. All participants should be willing to contribute time and resources to achieve the coalition's goals, and for this, representatives should obtain buy-in from the leaders of their own organizations in advance.<sup>10</sup> UKSSD requires that the Chief Executives of prospective member platforms/ organizations sign on to the agreement so that they obtain organizational endorsement and representatives feel mandated to participate. While this has been a limitation in the recruitment of larger organizations, it has been effective in promoting active participation among members. The Kenya SDG Forum has a membership charter that is signed by the heads/ senior executive of new members. It includes the purpose, strategic direction, expectations and membership fees. This charter was actually initiated by members and passed during the Annual General Meeting to ensure collective ownership.

<sup>9</sup> Cheryl Freeman, Mike Wisheart, Katie Fry Hester, Dave Prescott and Darian Stibbe (2016), *Agenda 2030 Implementation Policy Paper: Delivering on the Promise – In-country Multi-stakeholder Platforms to catalyse collaboration and partnerships for Agenda 2030*. World Vision and the Partnering Initiative, pp. 33-34.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, pp. 18.

### Elements of Good Practice: Membership Selection

- Depending on the context and mandate of the coalition, strategic public relations and partnership engagement campaigns should be developed at the outset to target specific sectors and build networks in order to promote the indivisible and integrated SDG framework, cross-cutting principles such as accountability and LNOB, technical 2030 Agenda implementation, and whole-of-society partnerships.
- Clear guidance on what coalition membership entails (e.g. costs and levels of participation), should be included on websites, as well as criteria for applications to meet (e.g. demonstrated commitment to the 2030 Agenda) and application processes to follow, with particular attention paid to accessibility and equity.
- Prospective members should have access to information about the coalition's mission, principles, policies and expectations so that they can make an informed decision about joining.
- Membership agreements should be signed by senior executives in order to ensure organizational buy in that does not hinge on the interest and presence of individuals.

### Scope and activities of coalitions

Coalitions should have a clearly defined collective purpose and goals as part of standard practice. It is extremely important that these be agreed upon at the outset to set the expectations of how coalitions will operate and what they are working to achieve.<sup>11</sup> This means a clear set of issues that need to be tackled, and a strong motivation for establishing a coalition as the 'best response' to the issue or as 'better able' to respond than current coalitions.<sup>12</sup>

Coalitions act as facilitators of multi-sectoral engagement and increased collaboration,<sup>13</sup> agents of accountability and transparency that hold government to account on the 2030 Agenda,<sup>14</sup> vectors for collective action to influence policies and create dialogue through joint actions and campaigns,<sup>15</sup> and enablers of member efforts. Eighteen out of the 72 coalitions (25%) reviewed, indicated on their websites that they provide support to increase the capacity of their membership. In this sense, coalitions strengthen collective responses<sup>16</sup> and seek to enable collaboration that lends legitimacy to create or challenge norms, standards and policies.<sup>17</sup> This sets a coalition apart from networks, which do not require agreement on joint action or shared targets.<sup>18</sup> Unlike networks, coalitions design and implement specific initiatives and activities at national, regional and international levels, or coordinate the work of members towards a common goal.<sup>19</sup>

To support their efforts, coalitions commonly undertake research and encourage the incubation of innovative and transformative solutions to difficult and complex challenges in order to drive policy change.<sup>20</sup> 2030 Agenda coalitions

11 Richard Moyes and Thomas Nash (2011), *Global Coalitions - An Introduction to Working In International Civil Society Partnerships*. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), pp. 18-21.

12 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, pp. 16.

13 Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (2018), *Terms of Reference*; Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors (Jan. 2018), *Terms of Reference*.

14 Ibid., TAP Network Steering Committee 2020-2021, *Terms of Reference*.

15 Helen Yanacopoulos (2015), "Patterns of Governance – The Rise of Transnational Coalitions of NGOs" in *Global Society Journal*.

16 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

17 Darian Stibbe, Stuart Reid and Julia Gilbert (2018), *Maximizing the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Partnership Value Creation*. The Partnering Initiative and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, pp. 11-13.

18 Jonathan A. Fox (2010) *Coalitions and Networks*. California: USA.

19 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

20 Chayenne Polimédo, Keith Porter, Rei Tang, Heather F. Hurlburt (2016), *A Multistakeholder Governance Agenda: What are the opportunities?* Policy Dialogue Brief. Stanley Foundation.

tend to encourage the sharing of information, experiences, research and best practices on SDG implementation and activities among their members and with external stakeholders.<sup>21</sup> Some also raise awareness of the SDGs<sup>22</sup> and promote capacity development by sharing knowledge and skills among their members through formal training or peer-to-peer learning, and in doing so strengthen the work of members on the ground.



The review of 72 coalitions found that most common activities included 30 of 72 (53%) extending resources throughout their websites to their members, while 38 of 72 (25%) provided support to increase their membership's capacity. Furthermore, 57 of 72 (79%), indicated engagement on policy and advocacy, with a focus on research geared to inform policy changes. Likewise, the same percentage, 79%, showcased that they also engage in awareness-raising activities such as mobilization in support of the SDGs. Although websites indicate attention to awareness-raising, only 34 of 72 (47%) indicated that lobbying and advocacy are part of their respective activities. In terms of formal gatherings, or ad hoc annual conferences, 19 of 72 coalitions, 42%, indicated they had some, but did not indicate whether non-coalition members could participate. Only 25 of 72 coalitions (35%) indicated direct involvement or assistance in the implementation of SDG-related projects. This broad range of activities was confirmed by the interviewees. Good practice suggests that effective 2030 Agenda coalitions focus on clearly defined objectives that integrate the 2030 Agenda into coalition mandates and relationship building that helps maintain collective effort based on trust and legitimacy.

### Defining goals and objectives clearly

It is important for coalitions to focus on the common ground when trying to define goals clearly. For example, in ASVIS the broad range of members, including representatives of trade unions and businesses, are encouraged to consider the importance of sustainability for economic, social, environmental and institutional development and focus on key policy commitments (e.g. the EU's commitment to sustainability). The CSO Working Group in Brazil defers to the position of the UN Secretary General and the transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda in order to avoid polarization and conflict among its members. Forus International focuses on issues that are relevant to all members,

<sup>21</sup> Coalition 2030 – Working together to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals, Terms of Reference.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

such as the creation of an enabling environment, in order to move beyond issue-specific conflicts. Furthermore, by focusing on interlinkages and promoting engagement with cross-cutting themes and integrated policy and programs, organizations develop an appreciation and awareness of issues facing other members.

Good practice suggests that non-partisanship is essential for coalitions. In the interest of promoting a common ground, coalitions should not promote a particular political agenda, which could polarize coalition members. For example, the CSO Working Group in Brazil tries to avoid the pitfalls of political discussions. Reports do not make ideological statements or align with specific political parties, and instead rely on reliable quantitative data and case studies that have been triangulated and widely validated. While finding the common ground is important, NEON (Czech Republic) recognizes the diversity of its members but sees itself as an ideological alliance in terms of promoting basic, liberal progressive views of the world.

The CSO Working Group in Brazil values the role of the spotlight report in giving members something concrete to hold on to – a means by which they can see themselves and can be recognized for their contributions as individuals and as a collective. The process of collaboration on this tangible output is itself transformative as members develop a sense of belonging to a collective entity and a sense of ownership over its products. In a useful example, UKSSD's Measuring Up report was compiled by 17-member volunteer specialists, who each had their own networks and collectively collated the data and drafted the chapters, with funding for coordination from the private sector. Seeing how effective multi-stakeholder collaboration has been in terms of leading to specific outputs (e.g. VNR, spotlight and Universal Periodic Review reports), is one way of promoting a common ground and motivating members to overcome individual differences, as noted by ANND in Lebanon.

### **Building trust among members**

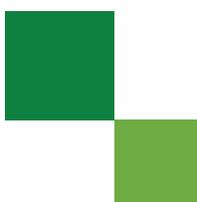
Coalitions also need communication pathways and conflict-management strategies to promote cooperation and constructive dialogue among members.<sup>23</sup> For example, the Food Security Coalitions used a combination of feminist approaches, consensus building and peace circles to find common ground between the disparate groups within the coalition.<sup>24</sup> Others have recommended that cross-cultural interlocutors (with cultural and social capital) and translators should play a role within coalition governance structures and working groups to establish trust and facilitate communication among members.<sup>25</sup> In this context, coalitions have adopted a number of strategies to build consensus in decision-making and maximize the voice of members.

Many coalitions have prioritized the creation of a positive space characterized by mutual respect, trust and inclusion rooted in strong interpersonal relationships. NEON (Czech Republic) values the role of the Backbone Group as "consensus builders" and "conveners," and grounds their work on a three C model: competencies, community and cooperative structures. Referring to an integral framework, the conveners emphasize the importance of investing in personal competencies and relationships, that can then be transferred from the individual to institutional level. The conveners also emphasize the development of softer skills in order to build cooperative structures, such as facilitation, active listening, how to put aside ego and promote the collective interest. Emphasis is placed on providing opportunities for members to meet and build relationships informally and through a range of capacity development and peer learning opportunities, build these softer competencies to prevent and respond to potential conflicts. Forus International also invests in interpersonal relations and trust-building processes that allow for face-to-face contact (e.g. through meetings, leadership development activities and social activities), which contribute to a heightened sense of belonging and collective ownership. In order to break down silos and learn about each other's

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan A. Fox (2010) *Coalitions and Networks*. California: USA

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Duni (2018), *Coalition Building and Maintenance: A Case Study of Food Secure Canada (2001-2012)*. Ryerson University, Toronto: Canada, pg. 147-148.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan A. Fox (2010) *Coalitions and Networks*. California: USA.



work, SDG Watch Europe encourages different organizations to host coalition meetings, which entitles them to talk about their own work for 10 minutes prior to the meeting.

### Information sharing and capacity development

Coalitions actively promote information sharing among members as a means of promoting coordinated activities and showcasing the achievements of members. This information is shared in newsletters and on coalition websites. In an innovative example, A4SD's website includes an interactive map where members can upload their own stories, photographs and videos in order to demonstrate what they are doing to meet the 2030 Agenda. Sharing is also undertaken for the purposes of learning and promoting a community of practice around transformative principles and accelerator pathways.

Some coalitions actively promote the capacity development of members. For example, the Kenya SDG Forum works with members to build capacity, especially when it involves community-based entities. The coalition has used peer-to-peer learning and the success of SDG 5 (and its fully funded gender project) within the forum to inspire its members to explore learning opportunities. The secretariat sees one of its roles as linking members with capacity-building opportunities, by hosting meetings with experts (e.g. around data collection and analysis), promoting peer-to-peer learning and disseminating information.

Capacity development is not restricted to formal activities. NEON (Czech Republic) provides implicit rather than explicit capacity development support. It has supported member networks to develop fundraising projects in a collaborative way, through a process of guided rounds of negotiation, synchronizing funding applications and coordinated submissions. It also provides more explicit forms of capacity development support by inviting members to participate in seminars on competencies or skills identified through surveys and questionnaires. There has also been informal peer learning, whereby individual platforms discuss particular issues and provide support to each other. By providing – and highlighting - a clear added value to collaboration with specific activities and outputs, members may be more inclined to overcome individual differences and focus on the common ground.

#### Elements of Good Practice: Scope and Activities of Coalitions

- Coalitions should have clearly defined goals that rest on the common ground, informed by agreed upon principles, shared motives and relevant issues.
- Building trust among members, promoting a sense of belonging and ownership over collective outputs is an important part of network building.
- Conflict management and consensus building are necessary to create effective cooperative structures and processes from the individual to the interpersonal and organizational level.
- Showcasing the achievements of members and how they are contributing to collective outcomes is an important role for conveners, as it promotes a community of practice and encourages peer-to-peer learning.
- Collaborative, peer-to-peer and experiential learning is an added value for members that should be encouraged in order to enhance coalition effectiveness.

### Governance

A practical guide on coalition building noted that coalitions are more effective when local communities can play a role in governance: "Affected communities are not only represented by but are leading the coalition."<sup>26</sup> To be

<sup>26</sup> Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, pp. 18.

effective, coalitions must be inclusive, embrace diversity and gender equality,<sup>27</sup> and thus good practice of governance is one that requires equal and inclusive leadership, representation and more importantly, membership. Indeed, inclusivity and non-discrimination should be fundamental principles guiding coalition governance and operations.<sup>28</sup>

Including a broad variety of stakeholders provides opportunities for equitable participation; however some impediments do exist. Coalitions face challenges in terms of how to effectively and equitably engage smaller stakeholder organizations. Decision-making processes, criteria for eligibility to participate<sup>29</sup> and access to resources<sup>30</sup> are all critical questions in which power dimensions must be addressed. Competition between coalition members and domination by certain groups can also be a challenge.<sup>31</sup> While the literature review suggests that many coalitions are not equipped to address these challenges,<sup>32</sup> interviews suggest that a number of good practices are emerging in terms of effective, inclusive and accountable governance mechanisms.

Most coalitions are governed by some form of a steering committee, which defines who can be involved in decision-making, including sub-committees, working groups and co-chairs. The steering committee also oversees the staff team who fulfill the administrative requirements of the coalition.<sup>33</sup> Our research showed that 65% of coalitions had posted information on their governance mechanism on their websites while 32% listed their committees. Very few coalitions (8%) indicated the length of tenure of their board, in addition to the frequency of board meetings and remuneration of their boards. Overall, literature and research findings suggest that ensuring transparency and accessibility with respect to steering committees, boards, subcommittees and working groups are aspects of good practice in coalition governance structures. While standard practice appears to be the inclusion of basic governance information, good practice goes further by providing detailed information on terms, mandate, functioning and contacts in the public domain.

### **Harnessing conveners**

In some cases, governance arrangements emerge organically around a 'loose network' but the appointments of specific organizations/ platforms or individuals into leadership or convening positions are driven by an appreciative, strengths-based assessment of expertise and legitimacy, with some arguing for a selection of those who have "convening power" and "moral authority" (Citizen Platform for the SDGs in Bangladesh) and those who have a track record of negotiations with the government around the Millennium Development Goals and the SDGs. In ASVIS (Italy) for example, the President is a founding member, and the director is an internationally recognized economist and statistician. In some coalitions (e.g. NGO Federation of Nepal), the presidency is rotated among founding members.

### **Formal selection processes for steering committees**

For the steering groups, standard practice suggests that coalitions recruit members from the general assembly to occupy governance positions based on nominations or formal applications, requiring written submissions, interviews with existing steering group members or a vote among general members (e.g. UKSSD [UK], WNTA [India], Forus International). In other cases, coalitions put out calls at global, regional and/or national levels (depending on the scope of the coalition) for individuals, who may be external to the coalition membership, to occupy seats on their governance structures in a highly competitive process (e.g. Action for Sustainable Development [A4SD]).

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27 Ibid.

28 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

29 Chayenne Polimédio, Keith Porter, Rei Tang, Heather F. Hurlburt (2016), *A Multistakeholder Governance Agenda: What are the opportunities? Policy Dialogue Brief*. Stanley Foundation, pp. 4.

30 Jonathan A. Fox (2010) *Coalitions and Networks*. California, pp. 490.

31 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, pp. 17.

32 Chayenne Polimédio, Keith Porter, Rei Tang, Heather F. Hurlburt (2016), *A Multistakeholder Governance Agenda: What are the opportunities? Policy Dialogue Brief*. Stanley Foundation, pp. 3. Sarah Duni (2018), *Coalition Building and Maintenance: A Case Study of Food Secure Canada (2001-2012)*. Ryerson University, Toronto: Canada.

33 Richard Moyes and Thomas Nash (2011), *Global Coalitions - An Introduction to Working in International Civil Society Partnerships*. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV).

Emerging good practice indicates that the Terms of References for these leadership positions should be developed in consultation with the wider membership, and should be shared widely through member networks and on UN platforms. Equity and diversity are important considerations in the appointment of members to participate in governance structures.

### **Equity and inclusion considerations in selection processes**

Some coalitions have created inclusive and equitable participation mechanisms within their governance structures. For example, the NGO Federation of Nepal uses a quota to ensure that at least 33% of those on governance bodies are women. Specific considerations (e.g. quotas and targeted support) were also made to ensure the participation of organizations representing Dalit constituencies, Indigenous communities, minorities or marginalized people, as this is required by law in Nepal. In addition to working groups on specific SDGs and constituencies, the NGO Federation of Nepal includes district and provincial chapters to ensure accessibility, promote inclusion and expand its geographical reach. Forus International has a gender policy and has made a commitment to a quota of at least 40% of all governance positions being occupied by women. Governance appointments also consider regionality and language proficiency as an important aspect of accessibility for the global membership.

The Citizen's Platform for SDGs (Bangladesh) conducted disaggregated research on those who should not be left behind in Bangladesh, and on this basis identified 12 groups of underrepresented communities. It has deliberately tried to ensure that it has representatives from each of these groups in the coalition. WNTA's (India) Steering Group specifically includes people representing five specific constituencies, namely gender, youth, LGBTQ+, disability and caste (Dalit constituency), all of whom have a strong, growing voice with their own networks and campaigns.<sup>34</sup> UKSSD (UK) has taken steps to improve regional representation through an informal affiliation with a group in Scotland. Until recently one of the members of the steering group, was tasked with the role of promoting regional representation. A4SD's facilitation group includes representatives of different groups, including youth, disabilities, gender and Indigenous people. Regionally based representatives are also selected for geographical diversity. In general, the decentralized and participatory principles of governance allow for feelings of inclusion and ownership among members. To overcome power imbalances specific attention is paid to enabling smaller community-based groups in the global south to participate on an equal footing with larger, international organizations within the A4SD coalition.

Hence, in order to ensure inclusion and diversity there are a number of good practices that suggest the following are important when promoting LNOB namely, the application of quotas in governance structures, specifically for underrepresented groups; disaggregated research to understand the barriers to equitable participation; dedicated network-building activities or accessibility-promoting tasks for governing committees; and targeted support for smaller and underrepresented groups to engage in coalition governance.

### **Ensuring continuity in leadership**

Good practice also includes careful consideration of the continuity of leadership in coalition governance structures. Forus International staggers the appointment of council members in order to ensure continuity of leadership and institutional memory within the council. Continuity is also key for WNTA (India), where past conveners of the Steering Group are encouraged to remain a part of the steering group as ex-officio members, providing ongoing guidance and support.

<sup>34</sup> WNTA was also contracted by the government to undertake consultations in LGBTQ+ and disability communities. The coalition has also done extensive work bringing together civil society organizations and organizations focusing on disability issues for the purposes of collective advocacy.



### **Governance grounded in principled approaches**

Emergent good practice suggests that governance structures should be informed by a particular philosophy/ conceptual framework, evidence of what works or does not work, or modelled on international good practices. For example, NEON's (Czech Republic) governance arrangements and facilitation methodologies were informed by principles of collective impact as well as integral theory and spiral dynamics.

Furthermore, the principles that underlie governance structures and procedures should be widely shared and understood among members. A4SD for example, displays its governance principles on its website, placing emphasis on "decentralization" and "radical inclusivity" through the coordination of four working groups (including policy and advocacy, direct campaigning and public mobilization, innovation and delivery of the SDGs), as well as a Facilitation Group which includes regionally based representatives and stakeholders representing certain underrepresented groups, who define their own agendas and are given opportunities to showcase their own work in line with the broader mission of the coalition. ANND (Middle East and North Africa regional coalition based in Lebanon) promotes the principles of equal partnership, transparency and respect within the coalition to build trust, with all partners having an equal say in governance. This is not formalized in a written code of conduct or internal policies, but is widely understood because it is based on a history of successful collaboration among civil society partners.

Some coalitions discouraged the use of formalized policies that may over-bureaucratize governance structures, while others argued that this enhances the effectiveness of governance bodies and clarifies expectations for applicants and new members. For instance, the steering group of UKSSD is guided by a Terms of Reference that explains decision-making procedures, clearly outlines the number of meetings that will be held and the time commitment expected from each steering group member. It also lists the responsibilities of those in the steering group and refers to a code of conduct.

Given the multi-stakeholder nature of UKSSD's steering group and the differing perspectives and interests of its members, some coalitions have found it useful to develop a policy around potential conflicts of interest related to finance, politics, affiliation or personal interest. For this reason, UKSSD has created a formal Conflict of Interest Policy for the steering group that requires members to state the conflict of interest upfront, which is then discussed by the steering group; the course of action determined by the steering group includes asking the member to excuse himself/ herself from further discussions, forming an independent subcommittee to further guide the work, or in some cases, asking the member to resign from the steering committee. Having this policy in place serves to mitigate potential tensions and challenges arising from a conflict of interest.

### **Monitoring and evaluation for evolution and effectiveness**

Good practice includes mechanisms to review and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of certain governance structures over others, so that they can be restructured accordingly. For example, in order to enhance efficiency, UKSSD reduced the size of its steering group from 12 to a maximum of seven (and a minimum of five) in order to streamline decision-making. ANND (Middle East and North Africa regional coalition based in Lebanon) found that identifying one focal point for coordination and electing working group leaders enhances timely engagement and accountability. ASVIS (Italy) has learnt that having at least one member of the secretariat (responsible for day-to-day operations) as well as a working group coordinator present in all working group meetings promotes an efficient transition from work plan development to implementation.

### **Transparent and accountable governance**

Good practice suggests that governance structures must include informal and formal mechanisms for accountability and transparency. By involving the membership in governance in Forus International, the more members demand and expect certain standards from each other, and a collective conscience is developed within the organization around a



shared understanding of expectations. NEON (Czech Republic) relies on informal checks associated with the fact that member coalitions are composed of member organizations that are also holding them accountable to a particular code of conduct and standard. More formally, UKSSD shares the minutes of meetings and the actions arising from those minutes with members.

Emphasis is placed on openness in the network so that members feel like they are co-creating initiatives. Forus International recognizes that member coalitions are also accountable to their own national constituents so council members are encouraged to share information and decisions with the members of their own platforms. An annual report, which documents the activities and achievements of the governing bodies, is sent out to members. In addition, at the General Assembly which occurs every two years, council members give a short presentation on their priorities and achievements to the wider membership. A4SD emphasizes accountability throughout their work in a decentralized manner. The regional coalitions share information with their own networks, discuss regional plans and report back on progress to their own members. A4SD provides them with tools and resources on how to enhance this accountability.

An important component of accountable governance is the creation of mechanisms for grievances to be raised and a safe space for conflict to be discussed. An example was provided from the Kenya SDG Forum where a letter of grievance led to the selection of a third co-chair. As a principle the secretariat is open to members' ideas and suggestions, and focuses on the mandate and what needs to be done without being side tracked by conflict. The secretariat remains neutral and lets the majority decide. It also creates a space where members can discuss their political opinions without reservation, but takes no sides. When there is conflict, reference is made to the annual work plan that is agreed upon in January to guide conversations.

When there is conflict that cannot be resolved it is important for individuals who are trusted and seen as legitimate moral authorities, subject experts, or neutral third parties to lead the mediation process. For example, at WNTA (India) having the former conveners of the steering group on hand to provide guidance and support to the steering group has helped the coalition work through smaller personality conflicts, with an emphasis placed on trust and the value of relationships. The perspectives of academics and subject matter experts are also garnered when resolving conflict around strategy development at WNTA. Some coalitions have institutionalized conflict-resolution mechanisms (e.g. mediation committees), such as Forus International. UKSSD relies on informal negotiation and collegiality within the steering group rather than formalized voting systems for decision-making, but when decisions cannot be reached within the steering group the chair holds a casting vote.

There also needs to be a recognition that certain activities may contribute to conflict and tensions, and that preventative and mitigation strategies should be developed in advance. For example, conflict often arises when the work is not distributed equitably so WNTA (India) ensures that tasks (e.g. writing chapters for the government review report) are divided up in smaller subgroups so as to reduce the burden on a single member. Recognizing that resource competition might lead to conflict, Forus International has established a peer support committee made up of members, which decides on the allocation of sub-grants to members. When conflict arises over the way basket funds are spent in the NGO Federation of Nepal, all members are encouraged to participate in budget planning decisions and opportunities for funding are shared with all.

### **Capacity through effective secretarial support and shared responsibility by members**

Coalitions are often supported by a secretariat or coordinator. Coalition coordinators (and/or communication officers) are generally responsible for distributing Steering Committee meeting minutes to members, internal communications and maintaining websites.<sup>35</sup> Coordinators also consult with coalition members on specific issues and members

<sup>35</sup> TAP Network Steering Committee 2020-21 Terms of Reference.



are encouraged to share information within Working Groups. Member representatives are also expected to share information about the coalition with their respective organizations.<sup>36</sup> Networking and information-sharing activities take place in person (council meetings, working group meetings, biannual conferences, periodic forums) or virtually (email, teleconference, web meetings). Beyond information-sharing, good practice suggests that there should be a sharing of responsibilities, drawing on the strengths and expertise of different members, as emphasized in the Brazil CSO Working Group model. Individual and organizational investments and clearly demarcated roles and responsibilities established from the outset is thus good practice and symbolic of building strong communication bridges and promoting transparency.

#### Elements of Good Practice: Governance Structures

- Roles and responsibilities should be clear for members, working groups, committees and other subgroups, and mechanisms should be in place to hold those in leadership positions to account.
- Coalitions should carefully select conveners in consideration of expertise and legitimacy, as well as transparency, accountability and equity.
- Members should have meaningful input into the development of ToRs for steering committees and the selection of members of these committees.
- The timing of steering committee appointments should consider the importance of continuity and institutional memory, and the ongoing supportive role that former steering committee members can play.
- Equity and inclusion must be considered in selection processes through the application of quotas, disaggregated research on power dynamics and barriers to equitable participation, targeted support for smaller and underrepresented groups and accessibility-promoting initiatives.
- Governance must be grounded in principled approaches, evidence of what works and international good practices.
- The formalization (and bureaucratization) of governance approaches should be carefully considered in relation to the size and mandate of the coalition and the context in which it is operating.
- Leadership should be developed and supported, particularly in relation to convening and facilitation skills and competencies.
- Transparent and accountable governance is a priority that requires both formal and informal measures, as well as conflict resolution, grievance and mediation mechanisms.
- Effective secretarial and coordination support is required for day-to-day operations to complement the sharing of responsibilities by members.
- A strengths-based assessment is needed to assess the capacity of the secretariat and members in order to decide how the expertise of each member can be harnessed to support the functioning of the coalition.

<sup>36</sup> Coalition 2030 Terms of Reference.

## Strategic planning

Strategic planning supports the ability of coalitions to “bring benefits like greater connectivity, alignment, efficiency, buy-in, and accountability.”<sup>37</sup> Areas typically included in strategic planning include partnership strategies,<sup>38</sup> key stakeholder mapping in relation to the issues addressed by the coalition,<sup>39</sup> platform strengthening, including with leadership by members of governance committees, and policy development and promotion.<sup>40</sup> Coalitions also engage in strategic planning to elevate the work of members and connections between them. This includes efforts to encourage members to develop case studies, document successes and challenges, promote information-sharing and facilitate connections within the coalition on similar issues. Importantly, strategic planning efforts should be grounded in a clear and common understanding of funding regulations and how these impact the form and structure of the coalition itself as well as the activities it can undertake.<sup>41</sup>

Overall, it is good practice to choose adequate strategic planning methods that suit the coalition’s needs and objectives. Other important considerations for strategic planning include how the coalition will maintain its credibility, particularly in terms of the research it carries out to inform its work. At the outset, coalition leaders should make important decisions around data collection, validation, ownership and usage. One example of good practice in this area includes partnerships with academics to ensure rigour in policy asks. For example, Food Secure Canada partnered with academic communities that provided scientific and technical information to define policy problems and provide policy options, bringing credibility to the coalition when speaking to the media and helping to influence public opinion.<sup>42</sup>

### **Making use of diverse approaches to strategic planning that work for individual coalitions**

With these considerations in mind, the interviews revealed that coalitions use a variety of methods for strategic planning. Some coalitions prefer more organic, informal processes when developing a strategy. For example, the Citizens Platform for the SDGs (Bangladesh) does not support the structured development of a theory of change, and prefers strategic plans to develop more organically based on the expertise, credibility and visibility of members acting collectively for a shared purpose (rather than specific objectives) in relation to a specific context.

Other coalitions support bottom up strategic planning processes, however, the extent to which these processes are participatory varies. While transformative in person strategic planning sessions involving members and governance bodies are a good practice, given practical realities many coalitions use surveys and other remote communication methods to gather input from members for strategic plan development. For example, the coordinator of the CSO Platform on SDGs (Ghana) collects feedback from members using a simple template that they are required to complete, and this input is considered in a workshop of the Steering Committee where priorities are identified for the coalition’s annual strategy, which is broadly in line with an overarching five year theory of change.

In other cases, working groups are used as the mechanism by which strategic plans are developed. However the risk is that strategic plans and work plans created by separate working groups may perpetuate a siloed way of thinking. Good practice suggests that the mechanisms and processes for strategic planning should carefully consider interlinkages and policy coherence. For example, within UKSSD the working groups (e.g. advocacy working group) develop their own strategic plans and then present it to the steering group for final approval to ensure that

37 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, pp. 48.

38 Darian Stibbe, Stuart Reid and Julia Gilbert (2018), *Maximizing the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Partnership Value Creation*. The Partnering Initiative and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

39 Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, p.g. 48. See also Chayenne Polimédio, Keith Porter, Rei Tang, Heather F. Hurlburt (2016), *A Multistakeholder Governance Agenda: What are the opportunities? Policy Dialogue Brief*. Stanley Foundation; Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, p.g. 48.

40 Sandra L. Trillo (2015), *Cross-sectoral policy coalitions: a case study of Sustain Ontario – the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming’s efforts to reform public policy*. Dissertation. York University, Toronto, p.g. 190.

41 Richard Moyes and Thomas Nash (2011), *Global Coalitions - An Introduction to Working in International Civil Society Partnerships*. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), pp. 16.

42 Sarah Duni (2018), *Coalition Building and Maintenance: A Case Study of Food Secure Canada (2001-2012)*. Ryerson University, Toronto: Canada, pg. 167-168.

their work is tied to the broader direction of the coalition. The advocacy work plan generates communication products, which leverages partner engagement and fundraising. Efforts are, therefore, made to ensure that the working groups are not working in a bubble in recognition of the importance of leveraging interlinkages to promote the 2030 Agenda.

### **Strategic planning that is innovative and iterative**

ANND (Middle East and North Africa Region) promotes structured forms of strategic planning for human rights monitoring, including a mapping of possible joint actions, a clear timeline for collaborative work, continuous communication and follow up among members to ensure effective engagement. Innovation is also promoted in strategic planning in some coalitions. On a quarterly basis, UKSSD members and partners meet in a deliberately informal space to be creative and come up with innovative suggestions around themes proposed by the director. With guidance and managing expectations (particularly in relation to budget realities), these ideas are translated into actual and affirmative deliverables. NEON (Czech Republic) invites members of the Backbone Group (max. 20) to participate in a strategic retreat, which involves a collective evaluation of what has been working and why, an identification of lessons learnt and then strategic planning using innovative facilitation techniques informed by integral theory.

### **Inclusion in strategic planning**

Good practice is ensuring that strategic planning processes are accessible and inclusive by considering factors such as geography, language and power dynamics. For example, Forus International recently developed a three-year strategy. At the General Assembly, workshops were organized with particular teams on specific issues, reviewing past progress, challenges and actions to be taken over a 2.5-day period. The secretariat developed a framework for the strategy and then over a period of 18 months consulted with members. The secretariat facilitated and convened sessions with members, recorded responses to allow them to work on a strategy that reflects the input of members, and then shared the strategy and structured work plan in different languages with members for approval. These sessions were held at different moments in different regions and in different languages to make the process accessible to members from the entire network. Out of this process emerged a decision to focus on SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships) given their relevance to all members, focusing extensively on the creation of an enabling environment – a transversal issue – rather than catering to the priorities or interests of different groups of members or different individual members.

### **Taking advantage of strategic moments**

Strategic planning must be accessible, participatory and empowering, but should also take into consideration the geopolitical context and UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development follow-up and review timeline. A4SD encourages the input of its members in the development of its decentralized strategic plan, but generally it is structured broadly around a series of key global UN moments, such as the High-level Political Forum and the UN General Assembly. Coalitions should also take advantage of key strategic moments at the national level, such as local and national elections. For ASVIS (Italy), the European Sustainable Development Week is an important event in the annual calendar. With assistance from their diverse membership, the coalition hosts over 1000 events throughout Italy during this week. In 2019, the opening event of the festival was opened by the Prime Minister, which indicates a significant level of political engagement with the 2030 Agenda.

### **Continuity of strategic plans**

An emergent good practice is the promotion of continuity in strategic plans, despite changes in leadership. At A4SD, the strategic plan that is currently being developed will be approved by the existing facilitation group before positions for the new facilitation group are advertised. This will ensure continuity over time as new members are



recruited and oriented. The new elected Steering Committee of the NGO Federation of Nepal develops a strategy as their first task, in consultation with former committee members. Together with members of the previous committee, academics and subject experts, they spend 2-3 days developing the strategic plan. It includes a SWOT analysis, consideration of inputs, review of the roadmap and overall mandate. On this basis, a three-year strategic plan is developed.

### **Flexibility in strategic plans**

Continuity in overall mission is important, but good practice indicates that coalitions should also allow for flexibility in their strategic plans, while remaining accountable to their members. For example, the NGO Federation of Nepal's strategic plan can be adjusted in full board meetings; however, any major changes to the strategic plan need to be approved by the General Assembly.

Coalitions in the UK, India and Czech Republic have had to adjust their missions, objectives and targets as a result of political shifts and closing civic space. For example, UKSSD and the 2030 Agenda Working Group (Brazil) are now shifting their focus away from the central government to local governments, who are more receptive to the 2030 Agenda. NEON has broadened its strategic priorities to accountability and democratic principles, as this is perceived as more of a priority in the Czech Republic right now. Flexibility is also required in terms of adapting to COVID-19, since coalitions have been forced to adapt to virtual meetings, rapidly prepare collective statements, adjust work plan targets, rethink the nature of face-to-face consultations, facilitation and experiential learning processes, and provide support to members who are actively involved in relief work or participating in COVID-19 committees, commissions and task forces.

#### **Elements of Good Practice: Strategic Planning**

- Strategic planning methods should be selected with the context and the coalition's needs, objectives and membership in mind; regardless of the method, the input of members should be encouraged and valued to ensure that the strategic plans are collectively owned and reflect shared goals, objectives and principles.
- Interlinkages should be considered in the development of strategic plans to do justice to the universal and indivisible nature of the SDGs and to promote synergies and minimize trade offs within the coalition.
- Strategic planning should be innovative and iterative, but should also be balanced by budgetary realities and take advantage of global and national strategic moments.
- Inclusion should be foregrounded in strategic planning processes, in order to promote the meaningful participation of underrepresented individuals, groups and smaller grassroots organizations, and thereby ensure that the strategic plan speaks to the needs and interests of all members and advances the transformative agenda of the LNOB pledge.
- Although continuity should be promoted in strategic plans as steering groups change over time, they should also be flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts and priorities.
- Strategic plans should leverage the accumulated knowledge and expertise of members, while also identifying needs and gaps that may require internal capacity development or external support.

- Value creation should be integrated into strategic planning so that organizations are able to identify and pursue the partnerships within coalitions that they perceive as adding value, while also furthering the SDG agenda (see the Partnership Value Creation Tool).<sup>43</sup> The value added should not only rest on information-sharing but should also include capacity development for members. For example, in a survey on SDG coalitions, respondents noted the need to increase their technical capacity to monitor or track the SDGs.<sup>44</sup>

## Decision-making

A challenge faced by coalitions is ensuring effectiveness and timeliness in the context of participatory and inclusive approaches, which may impact productivity and external legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> Interviews with coalitions suggest that emerging good practice includes transparent, accountable, inclusive yet streamlined decision-making processes for different subjects and issues, and that consideration should be given to timeliness and the urgency of the response required.

For matters not requiring an urgent response, the interview data suggests that coalitions are moving away from top down or centralized forms of decision-making in favour of bottom-up or horizontal decision-making. The exception is when statements and narratives have been agreed in principle and are in line with the coalition's official positioning, or when matters require an urgent response, for instance in response to COVID-19, in which case the coalitions tend to revert to more traditional centralized approaches.

For example, the CSO Working Group (Brazil) promotes horizontal decision-making principles and all organizations have a say in decisions. When co-facilitators have an idea, a collective discussion with the other co-facilitators is held. When it comes to spotlight reports, a collective meeting of co-facilitators is held to define the methodology and divide up the responsibilities. When it comes to political statements, an organization drafts the statement and submits it to the group for review, in order to obtain some form of diplomatic consensus. In cases when the statements and narratives have been agreed upon in principle, the coordinator drives it forward without obtaining approval from the membership.

In the NGO Federation of Nepal, constituencies (e.g. Dalit community, women's groups) organize their own virtual meetings and face-to-face meetings to discuss work plans and outputs, and they then submit content to the steering committee for compilation. Similarly, NEON (Czech Republic) creates opportunities for members to propose new initiatives to which other members can align, through a mechanism called 'Orange Alert'. Within ASVIS (Italy), working groups decide on how the work plan will be operationalized guided by key annual appointments, events and reports proposed by the secretariat. When decisions need to be taken urgently (e.g. in response to COVID-19), decisions are debated within the secretariat and discussed with the coordinators of the working groups. Collective sign off is required for reports and outputs, although the secretariat is mandated to sign off on statements (e.g. letters to the European Commission) when they are in line with the coalition's mission and official positioning. New topics would need to be discussed within the working groups before being released.

Within Forus International, collective statements are generally reviewed by all members, but in difficult situations where a quick response is required, the coordinator looks to existing documents that have been adopted or agreed by members in the past. Even in these cases statements drafted by the secretariat have to be approved by the Executive Committee before being released. They are then shared with members and relevant working groups; however, this requires translation into French and Spanish, which may cause delays. When an immediate turn around

<sup>43</sup> Darian Stibbe, Stuart Reid and Julia Gilbert (2018), *Maximizing the Impact of Partnerships for the SDGs: A Practical Guide to Partnership Value Creation*. The Partnering Initiative and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, pp. 26.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Lockwood (2018), *National Civil Society Coalitions on the Sustainable Development Goals – A Mapping*. Norwegian Forum for Development and the Environment (FORUM).

<sup>45</sup> Sandra L. Trillo (2015), *Cross-sectoral policy coalitions: a case study of Sustain Ontario – the Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming's efforts to reform public policy*. Dissertation. York University, Toronto, pp. 291.

isn't required, statements are drafted by the following process: members contribute to an open shared Google doc, and a series of phone conversations and virtual calls are held to obtain inputs from different partners and networks. The text is drafted in an inclusive and collaborative way, before being finalized and shared on social media. Outputs are proposed by members by emailing the coordinator, or raising it in the facilitation group or thematic working group meetings.

When there is no time to organize a thorough debate, NEON's (Czech Republic) Backbone Group signs up to petitions or letters based on a shared understanding of what is important to the coalition. For transversal topics that do not fit in the missions of particular platforms, consultation is undertaken through emails or shared online documents. Emphasis is placed on facilitation, negotiation and trust, with the common understanding that NEON does not represent particular agendas and does not act as one body; agendas are always led by member organizations, so as to ensure that there is no damage to the network's reputation. The NGO Federation of Nepal and the CSO Platform on SDGs (Ghana) give members an opportunity to opt out if they do not agree with collective statements; this resolves the challenges associated with speaking with one voice.

#### Elements of good practice: Decision-making

- Productivity and legitimacy require careful consideration of the timeliness of decision-making procedures.
- Decision-making procedures should be agreed upon in advance for both urgent and regular decisions so that they remain transparent.
- Good practice includes obtaining consensus around the coalition's mission, objectives and official positioning in advance, so that if there is an emergency that requires an immediate response, the steering group and coordinator is able to defer to this position.
- When there is no urgency, coalitions should develop formal and informal mechanisms for members to discuss key decisions in an inclusive and transparent manner.
- Good practice includes the creation of accountability mechanisms to ensure that key decisions and collective statements represent the voices of the majority of members, and agree in advance upon the principles of consensus, consent or options to opt out.
- If decisions are taken by the secretariat, there is a need to ensure that they are transparent and held accountable to member coalitions and organizations, and their constituencies.

#### Funding and fundraising

While the most common type of funding for coalitions was government funding, with 15 of 26 coalitions (58%) indicating that it was their primary source of funding, three of 26 coalitions (12%) noted membership fees supported their operations, three other coalitions stated they received funding from both governments and foundations, while one coalition stated that they were funded by donors but did not provide additional information. Another coalition stated corporate donors funded its work and a last one said they were volunteer-based.

Access to resources helps sustain participation in coalitions, but reliance on donors makes coalitions subject to external influences and may have a deleterious effect on sustainability.<sup>46</sup> In addition, large NGOs can afford long-term investments with risks (e.g. some partners not consulting with others) and uncertain results, but grassroots

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan A. Fox (2010) *Coalitions and Networks*. California: USA, pp. 490.

movements need to deliver tangible results in the short term; this hinders their long-term participation in coalitions.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, a good practice of strategic planning, related to funding and fundraising, is for a clear and common understanding of funding and regulations, particularly in light of official registration requirements and fiduciary responsibility.

### **Fiduciary responsibility**

Most of the coalitions interviewed were not registered as legal entities but were supported by host organizations, which has affected their ability to fundraise, specifically in relation to large grants. Having a host also gives them access to support, particularly in relation to finance and human resources matters. This arrangement has worked well for many coalitions; however, it does require clear expectations, goodwill and trust. It also provides a financial buffer for some coalitions in times of financial stress, with the cost of some of the coordination and facilitation activities being shared or subsidized by the host. In order to reduce the burden on a single host, WNTA's (India) host organization changes over time, as members of the steering group take turns holding and managing the money for the campaign. This has led to some challenges in terms of adapting to different financial management procedures, but it does give the coalition some security in terms of shrinking civic space, the tightening up of regulations on CSOs and the dearth of core funding. Some coalitions are considering legalization in the long term in order to allow for the diversification of funding and ensure direct oversight over the budget.

### **Funding sources**

The coalitions targeted different sectors for funding, with ASVIS (Italy) for example, receiving extensive private sector sponsorship and support, particularly for events where branding can be displayed. WNTA (India) has received funding from the government and United Nations agencies for the implementation of specific projects. Pampa 2030 (Argentina) has received funding from the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. The Citizens Platform for SDGs (Bangladesh) raises funds from individual organizations with overlapping objectives or relies on a classic pool of self-financing, where organizations pool funding to cover certain costs on an *ad hoc* basis.

All the coalitions were concerned about sustainability and recommended strategies to obtain core funding to allow for the retention of human resources and long-term planning. Some use basket money to pay for the coordinator out of voluntary contributions from members, but other costs related to project implementation are covered by members through their own funding mechanisms. Many have received additional short-term funding for COVID-19-related projects, but this will not support long-term sustainability.

As part of its commitment to prioritizing support to the national and local membership, A4SD has a very lean coordination team (coordinator and regional coordinators); this allows the primary aims of the budget to focus on decentralized engagement and highlights a changing approach to enable light-touch collaborative methods of engagement and is also more likely to appeal to new donors who may be less inclined to support centralized kinds of coordination. Over the last two years it has allocated most of the budget to support national coalitions (e.g. in terms of producing spotlight reports or hosting a national conference), but it is now in a position to fundraise for an additional network support post. It is also considering re-establishing a fundraising task force, which was active early on. Many of the coalitions recommended the employment of a person responsible for fundraising and partnership development, or the creation of working groups for this purpose.

Despite these challenges, some coalitions are in a position to provide funding to their members. NEON (Czech Republic) is hosted by a think tank, which has successfully raised funds to cover some of the costs of the coalition and generate a small amount of extra resources for the partner platforms in recognition of their time and energy

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



working on coalition projects. This also gives them a sense of ownership over the process. Forus International and A4SD also prioritize disbursing funds to members through sub-grants or support with specific activities (as stated above regarding national reports and workshops).

#### Elements of Good Practice: Funding and Fundraising

- Coalitions should diversify funding to enhance sustainability and reduce the influence of a single donor.
- The level of investment required from members should take into consideration the size of the organization and the risk that they are able to take; membership fees or contributions to basket funds should not pose a barrier to equitable participation by smaller, community-level organizations.
- There should be a clear and common understanding of funding regulations and fiduciary responsibility, particularly when coalitions are hosted by member organizations.
- Dedicated resources, fundraising personnel or working groups should focus on generating core funding in order to ensure sustainability.
- Conveners should promote peer-to-peer learning and experiential learning around fundraising, and should support or facilitate the process by which members submit collaborative joint funding applications.

### Monitoring and evaluation

Coalitions can evaluate progress based on five measures namely 'coalition organization', 'action on identified issues', intermediate outcomes, coalition impact and 'legal and policy change' using subjective and objective measures. In terms of the former, progress should be measured against benchmarks, while the latter should include assessments that capture how coalition members feel about the coalition.<sup>48</sup>

#### Regularize monitoring and evaluation

The Kenya SDG Forum has prioritized monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in order to ensure that the coalition is on track in terms of achieving indicators within agreed upon time frames, and in terms of identifying success stories that can be showcased. At the annual general meeting a report back is given on the implementation of the annual work plan. The secretariat develops templates that guide members in terms of what data and feedback is required. These are then analyzed and collated for monthly reporting. Training is also provided to members on M&E and how to complete these activity reports. Funding is only dispersed when reporting is conducted, and there are informal accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that members complete their monthly reporting tasks. A4SD also requires the submission of data from members for its regular reports, which are presented to the Facilitation Group and then prepared for donors. This requires high levels of collaboration.

#### Simplify monitoring and evaluation

In order to ease the reporting burden on members, the secretariat of the CSO Platform on SDGs (Ghana) has designed a simple template for sub-platforms to monitor their work, which includes general information about progress and challenges. This information is submitted and compiled into a report by the secretariat. Many coalitions use surveys to gather information about members' feelings of satisfaction and self-reported perceptions of increases in confidence, knowledge and skills, and instant feedback is gathered after events by most coalitions, but in general

<sup>48</sup> Tom Wolff and Debra F. Erenberg (2018), *Coalition Building for Tolerance and Non-discrimination: A Practical Guide*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

M&E is a new and challenging undertaking, particularly as it pertains to outcomes and impact. UKSSD's M&E framework centres on monitoring the hit rate of published reports on the website. This also enables them to measure which chapters are more popular and how many people are downloading the full report. This is a good indication of levels of interest, but there is no monitoring system for tracking engagement with government.

#### **Elements of Good Practice: Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Coalitions require a monitoring and evaluation strategy that includes both objective and subjective measures that consider their outcomes and impact in relation to their members' competencies and collaboration, but also in terms of their collective impact in relation to the 2030 Agenda.
- M&E should be regularized and simplified to encourage the input of all members, but disaggregated data collection and analysis may require capacity development initiatives, coordination and accountability measures. Conflict management and consensus building are necessary to create effective cooperative structures and processes from the individual to the interpersonal and organizational level.
- Documentation and ongoing feedback are required.





## Recommendations

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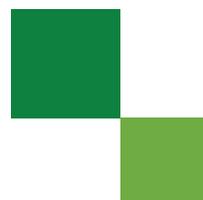
This brief has provided a series of good practices to strengthen the governance of coalitions to trigger accelerated and transformative actions for sustainable development. Although some information and procedures are known to be standard practice, there is an opportunity for coalitions to develop stakeholder and multi-sector partnerships based on good practices that enable transformative synergies between the SDGs and adhere to the transformative principles of the 2030 Agenda, including reducing inequalities, ensuring no one is left behind, and ensuring transparency and accountability. Four key recommendations emerge.

**Promote effective, inclusive and collaborative partnerships that are strategically selected and fostered to advance common goals, the indivisible and integrated 2030 Agenda, key cross-cutting principles such as accountability and LNOB.**

Coalitions are more effective when they work together with civil society and communities most affected by an issue. Cooperation with a broad range of diverse stakeholders from across sectors is a critical part of a whole-of-society approach and part of the value addition 2030 Agenda coalitions bring to implementation. Supporting such diverse partnerships means working to collectively agree on values, principles or 'core beliefs' that will enable members to set aside their competing interests and viewpoints, and focus on specific target objectives and principles. At a minimum, coalitions should make a firm commitment to the values and principles of Agenda 2030, which include diversity, inclusiveness, LNOB, and protecting nature. Investing in interpersonal relations and trust-building processes that allow for face-to-face contact and a feeling of belonging is important, with an emphasis on creating positive, relational structures, spaces and events.

**Leaving no one behind should be integrated into the mandate and goals of 2030 Agenda coalitions and translated into principles and working methods that concretely ensure effective inclusion and participation by those at risk of being left behind in governance, decision-making and activities.**

Ensure that LNOB is included in the coalition's goals, that budget is allocated for disaggregated data collection that provides information about the needs of the most marginalized and that the most underrepresented and marginalized are represented in multi-sectoral coalitions, and in their governance structures. Inclusivity and non-discrimination should be fundamental principles guiding coalition governance and operations, and equitable power dynamics between coalitions, platforms and individuals within coalitions should be promoted.



### **Strengthen inclusive, flexible and effective leadership and governance.**

Accountability, transparency and inclusion should be prioritized in policies and practice, and this includes in the recruitment of leaders and coordinators, the way decisions are made and funding dispersed. Roles and responsibilities should be clear for members, working groups, committees and other subgroups, and mechanisms should be in place to hold those in leadership positions to account.

Decision-making processes should be agreed upon at the outset (i.e. majority rule vote, hard or soft consensus), and the extent of membership input on strategic plans, day-to-day decisions, and on urgent matters should be widely understood. Meaningful consultation, active participation and decentralized decision-making should be encouraged, wherever possible.

The leadership style should be carefully considered in light of the coalition's mission, membership and contextual realities. Leadership development should be promoted, specifically in relation to convening and facilitation skills. Continuity and adaptation to change should be emphasized in leadership structures and decision-making processes. The extent of formalization and bureaucratization of coalition governance structures should be weighed up against effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and transparency considerations.

### **Leverage the interlinkages between SDGs and coalition members through strategic planning, governance models, activities and efforts to increase members and build networks.**

Develop holistic systems-thinking strategies to respond to the complex, interdependent nature of the SDGs, which (a) encourage multiple stakeholders within a system to interact and co-develop complementary strategies, (b) consider the boundaries and overlapped areas across scales and borders, (c) encourage integrated multi-sectoral and cross-sector partnerships and solutions, and (d) direct resources to reaching the most marginalized, which includes ensuring that the most marginalized are included in the platform's goals and engaged from the outset. In other words, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda principles provide the basis for the structure and approach taken by coalitions. Integrated approaches to SDG implementation, alongside the transformative principles noted above, should inform the design and redesign of how coalitions are governed and operate.

