[**Democratising SDGs**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1755209/democratising-sdgs)

[Aisha Khan](https://www.dawn.com/authors/6285/aisha-khan) Published May 23, 2023

The writer is chief executive of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change.

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GEOPOLITICS and structural imbalances are adding to the global mix of crises, necessitating urgency in action to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs, adopted in 2015, are a set of 17 goals that provide a blueprint for achieving equality, reducing poverty and seeking universal human rights for all by 2030. All the 191 UN member states have agreed to try and achieve the 169 targets by 2030. While the self-consciously ambitious SDGs have achieved some success, there is a high risk that most of the goals designed for people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnerships will remain unmet. The $2.5 trillion annual SDG investment gap will affect vulnerable countries more acutely. By all estimates, at the current rate of investment, it will be impossible to meet the SDGs by 2030.

The goals set eight years ago, with a view to address the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our planet are in dire straits. For Pakistan, trapped in economic low growth, high inflation and unemployment, falling investments, excessive fiscal deficits, and deteriorating external balancing position, the inability to meet targets will plunge the country in a deeper crisis. The demographic distribution of the population with four per cent falling in the over 65-year age bracket and 60pc belonging to the 15-64-year age cohort, adds to the volatile mix of high youth expectation and low country capacity to deliver.

One major challenge with the SDGs is that they are often seen as a top-down approach with governments, organisations, and corporations making SDG implementation decisions without necessarily involving the communities they are meant to benefit. This dilutes understanding and decreases buy-in from communities, resulting in imp­lementation that does not suit local needs.

To address this challenge, democratising and localising the SDGs is essential. This means involving local communities in decision-making, and tailoring implementation strategies to meet their unique needs. Some steps towards democratising and localising the SDGs include:

Local communities must be involved in making decisions.

1. Empowering local communities by in­­volving them in decision-making processes and providing then with tools and resources to take ownership of the SDGs. This could include training on how to contribute to decision-making processes, as well as funding or technical support to implement projects that align with the SDGs.
2. Ensuring transparency and accountability by co-creating policies and making information on SDG implementation publicly available, as well as setting up mechanisms for community feedback and oversight.
3. Encouraging partnerships between governments, NGOs, and communities to help ensure that the SDGs are implemented in a way that is both effective and sustainable. By working together, these groups can identify and address challenges in a collaborative way.
4. Fostering innovation and new technologies and approaches to democratise and localise the SDGs. Mobile technology can be used to gather data on local needs and preferences, while blockchain technology can help to ensure transparency and acco­untability in decision-making processes.

The Open Government Partnership could serve as a perfect fit-for-purpose SDG accelerator entry point in order to turn it from a global pressure and advocacy tool into a planning tool. The OGP, launched in 2012, is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from national and sub-national governments to promote open government, em­­po­w­­er citizens, fight corruption, and har­ness new technologies to stren­g­then governance.

It builds on the three cardinal pri­nciples of transp­a­rency, accountabi­lity and co-creation in policies as critical enablers for fostering more ef­­fective and inclusive governance processes.

Pakistan joined the OGP at the OGP summit in Paris in 2016, but no action has been taken since to formalise the agreement. The citizen-centric approach of OGP can promote participation in development and implementation of government policies and programmes, aligning action with achievement, monitoring progress and setting realistic goals for scaling ambition. This approach is well suited for localising SDGs and enhancing collaboration with civil society organisations, the private sector and other stakeholders in developing innovative solutions to complex development challenges.

The SDGs are linked closely to climate commitments. Achieving both is important for a safe future. Democratising SDGs will optimise their full potential and ensure that governments are accountable to citizens and their actions are in line with the SDGs. Meeting the SDGs will pave the way for a more equitable future. Missing them will fast track our descent into disarray.

*The writer is chief executive of the Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change.*

[**aisha@csccc.org.pk**](http://mailto:aisha@csccc.org.pk)

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