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Training and awareness-raising for the Sustainable Development Goals: Ghana's experience

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1. Introduction

Training and awareness-raising have become important strategies in not only disseminating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also on their implementation. This would enable their targets to be achieved. One of the challenges which dogged the predecessor Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is inadequate training and awareness-raising, especially amongst public sector workers that eventually negatively affected their achievement. Accordingly, it behooves member countries to place a lot of premium on institutionalizing training and awareness-raising programmes and strategies particularly in the public sector. It is for this reason that the use of primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, professional training institutes, civil service commissions and decentralized local governance institutions have been encouraged not only to lead the advocacy in training and awareness-raising for the SDGs but also undertake the training and awareness-raising activities if they have the capacity to do so. In case some of the institutions do not have the capacity and competencies, governments are encouraged to appeal to the international community for technical assistance for the deployment of personnel in training of trainers programmes for the teams in the countries.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the training and awareness-raising for the SDGs using Ghana's experience. More specifically, it discusses the policy and institutional framework for training and awareness raising, the strategies, the progress made, the challenges and how the challenges can be addressed to ensure effective training and awareness-raising for the SDGs.

2. The Policy Framework for Training and Awareness-Raising

In Ghana many policy documents are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana provides a legal basis for the just, equitable and inclusive development of the country and enjoins all successive governments to take the necessary measures to improve and transform the economy to ensure maximum welfare, freedom, happiness of citizens, improved livelihood and suitable employment (Republic of Ghana 1992). This is in line with the SDGs, which seek to build a world that is just and equitable with peaceful and inclusive societies. Second, the SDGs' central tenet which is "leaving no one behind" is consistent with the goal of "creating opportunity for all" in the government's development blueprint, *An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All, 2017-2024* (Republic of Ghana 2017). An assessment of the previous development blueprint, Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2011-2017) which was developed before the

adoption of the SDGs in September 2015 was found to be responsive to about 70 percent of the SDGs targets. Thus most of the development issues promoted by the SDGs are not new to development actors in Ghana.

Even though the constitution and national development blueprints do not mention training and awareness-raising of the SDGs, but their implementation within the context of the SDGs implies they cannot be achieved without enough knowledge, skills, competencies and understanding. The annual Constitution Week celebration and Constitution lectures are devoted to public education on the Constitution while the debates in Parliament and outside it on the government's development blue print even though are not strictly on the SDGs directly show that the policy framework for training and awareness creation of the SDGs exists. These documents drive political and socio-economic development of the country including the SDGs and therefore remain important policy framework. More importantly, national planning and budgeting processes take account of the SDGs (Republic of Ghana 2019).

3. The Institutional Framework for Training and Awareness-Raising

According to the *Ghana: Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* of June 2019, Ghana has adopted an inclusive and multi-stakeholder partnership approach to the implementation of the SDGs, backed by sound institutional arrangements and high-level political support. The primary vehicle for implementing the SDGs in Ghana is the decentralized planning system which assigns development planning responsibilities to the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), and implementation roles to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). The Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) coordinate, monitor, evaluate, and provide technical backstopping for the districts within their geographical area. The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) is the apex coordination body at the national level. The planning system allows for participation of all stakeholders including civil society, private sector, traditional authorities, youth groups, PWDs, and other marginalized groups in all stages of the planning process.

To foster better coordination in the implementation of the SDGs, new structures have been set up to augment the decentralized planning system. These new structures are the High-Level Ministerial Committee (HLMC), the SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC), and the National Technical Committee (NTC). These bodies have served as avenues for deepening inter-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder collaborations at all levels, and the CSOs Platform, which was formed in 2015, as a coordinating platform for over 300 CSOs in pursuit of achieving the SDGs is represented on all three committees. The Minister of Planning chairs the HLMC with 15 ministers of state as members (Republic of Ghana 2019; Ghana Civil Society Organizations Platform 2019).

The Director-General of the NDPC chairs both ICC and NTC. Whilst the ICC draws 15 members from elected MDAs and a representative of the CSOs Platform, the NTC comprises 80 members including 7 CSO representatives and 73 representatives from the MDAs. Furthermore, there is the SDGs Advisory Unit which was established in the Office of the President to provide technical, policy, and strategic support to the President's advocacy efforts following his

appointment as Co-Chair of the UN Secretary General's Eminent Group of SDGs Advocates. The Unit's core functions include exploring innovative ways of promoting advocacy and implementation of the SDGs and leveraging the President's global role to support the domestic agenda to enhance prospects of realising the SDGs (Republic of Ghana 2019; Ghana Civil Society Organizations Platform 2019).

It is instructive, however, to note that these structures that operate at the national level have not been successfully translated to the sub-national level, namely the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Activities related to SDGs at the local level are not well coordinated, which have undermined accountability and inclusiveness as well as efforts at achieving the targets. Although the MMDAs have integrated the SDGs into their local development plans, they have not done much to promote local ownership or awareness or to actively engage other stakeholders on the implementation of the SDGs. This local ownership and coordination could be achieved by the MMDAs replicating the national level implementation structures, such as the Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC) (Ghana Civil Society Organizations Platform 2019).

4. The Strategies for Training and Awareness-Raising

To raise public awareness and knowledge as integral parts of the implementation of the SDGs, a comprehensive communication strategy was developed to improve knowledge among key stakeholders and galvanise support for the 2030 Agenda.. The communications strategy prescribes actions and tools needed to educate and inform target audiences on the goals. The strategy uses the following: (i) social media platforms; (ii) SDGs-branded souvenirs; (iii) radio and television programmes; (iv) community dialogues; and (v) collective action to engage with stakeholders. It focuses on developing popular campaigns to inform, inspire and involve everyone on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The target audiences for Ghana's SDGs communications strategy include MDAs, MMDAs, traditional authorities, academia, private sector, media, schoolchildren, youth, farmers, drivers, fisher folk, head porters, civil society, educational institutions, faith-based organisations, marginalised groups and the general public.

Awareness creation campaigns have been conducted in four regional capitals focusing on market women, schoolchildren, fisher folk, street children, marginalised groups, and farmer groups. Currently, efforts are being made to translate the SDGs into local dialects, braille, local proverbs and adinkra symbols for ease of communication and understanding by target audiences.

The media's role in its reportage on the SDGs is critical to creating the requisite awareness on the Goals amongst the people. In the words of Sedegah (2019):

The media has the responsibility to rally public support for the successful implementation of those Goals in order to reduce to the barest minimum some development challenges encompassing poverty, gender inequality, environmental degradation, hunger and infrastructural deficit.

Given the critical role the media play in bringing about paradigm shifts, the strategy assigns special roles to the media to champion the implementation of the SDGs. Specifically, they are envisaged to inform, educate and provide platforms for public debate and discussions. Media SDGs platforms have been created to facilitate information sharing and discussions on the goals at national, regional and district levels. Training sessions have been conducted at national level and in four regional capitals for the media on the SDGs and how they can effectively report on the SDGs.

To reach rural communities, the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) has launched a project known as “Participatory Community Radio and the Right to Communicate - A Singular Pathway to the SDGs, (CR-SDGs).The project focuses on training community radio personnel, advocacy, social mobilisation, and behavioural change for the attainment of the SDGs especially in rural communities.

Box 1: An example of multi-stakeholder training and awareness raising on SDGs in Ghana

In February 2019, the Ghana CSOs Platform on the SDGs in partnership with the Government, trained news editors and media reporters in Greater Accra on monitoring and reporting on the SDGs. A media network for the SDGs was created in Greater Accra following the training.

Some CSOs, private sector and traditional authorities partnered the Asutifi North District Assembly to develop and implement a Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) master plan. The framework called Asutifi North Ahonidie Mpontuo (ANAM) seeks to achieve SDG 6 targets in the district by 2030. The Government, the CSOs Platform and Private Enterprise Foundation have collaborated to organise multi-stakeholder consultative meetings on the SDGs seeking to set the implementation of the goals on a sound footing at the time.

Source: Ghana CSO Platform on SDGs, p. 10

5. Progress Made So Far

It is clear that training and awareness raising programmes on the SDGs, led by the NDPC have been undertaken in Ghana. Progress has been made in some areas. First, the multi-stakeholder approaches adopted to operationalise the SDGs seems to have increased wide participation in policy formulation and implementation towards realising the SDGs targets. It has also led to broad stakeholder engagement of, and consultation with, people with disabilities (PWDs) which has sought to enhance their ownership and interest in the SDGs (Republic of Ghana 2019).

Second, the formation of the CSOs Platform has provided an avenue for engagement and collaboration among non-state civic organisations as well as with government and the private sector. The contributions of CSOs are mainly in the areas of public awareness creation; training of local NGOs and citizens to monitor progress on the implementation and service-delivery of programmes, such as social interventions as the Ghana school feeding program, subsidised fertilizer for farmers, National Health Insurance, and quality healthcare; advocacy towards increased resource allocation and effective implementation; monitoring and reporting; promotion of innovative interventions, such as climate smart agriculture; and, holding government accountable for inclusivity (CSOs Platform on the SDGs 2019).

Third, is the involvement of the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG), an umbrella body of political heads of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) – local government units. The SDG implementation comes under its Research and Program Department. NALAG addressed the SDGs at its 2018 regional conference and had a special SDG focus at its 2019 national conference. It also undertook SDG awareness training for staff of MMDAs. In addition, it organised nation-wide SDG sensitisation workshops in ten regions in 2017 ‘to educate our members and the local authorities on what these targets and goals are and why it is important to carry everyone along’ and the benefits these have for the Assemblies. This afforded NALAG the opportunity to advocate for the integration of the SDGs goals and targets in to the medium-term development goals of the MMDAs, that is localizing the SDGs (Wright et. al. 2018).

In July 2016, the SDGs Implementation Committee organized a national wide orientation on the SDGs, African Union’s Agenda 2063 and Paris Climate Agreement for all selected officers of MMDAs, RCC and MDAs. The purpose of the orientation workshop was to sharpen the skills of key regional, district and MDA officers to ensure that their Medium Term Development Plans(MTDP), especially the annual action plans and budget From 2017 onwards reflect the goals, targets and indicators of the SDGs and Agenda 2063. The orientation covered the linkages among the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the Paris Climate Agreement, the implementation arrangements, the expected roles of MDAs and MMDAs, and potential sources of resource mobilization. Operationalizing key SDGs principles such as “Leaving no one behind”, “Local ownership”, and the integrated and indivisible nature of the goals were also discussed.

In December 2017, Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) organized a training workshop for local Government Coordinating Directors to apprise them on the SDGs implementation and data requirement for monitoring the progress of implementation. The Coordinating Directors were briefed on the findings of a national SDGs data assessment, the challenges to getting assess to timely and reliable data and introduced them to SDGs indicator meta-data. At the workshop, the Coordinating Directors also discussed the modalities for working in partnership with GSS to revise their data collection templates to enable them collect SDGs related data.

6. Some Challenges

In spite of the progress made, there are some challenges that have dogged training and awareness-raising for the SDGs.

First, localizing the SDGs has not worked to perfection as envisaged because multi-stakeholder engagement at the national level and local level adaption has been ineffective. The structures for effective coordination as they exist at the national level are not present at the MMDA level. As a result, coordination of implementation and engagement efforts at the local government level is weak. Despite the guidelines provided by NDPC for MMDAs to mainstream the SDGs into their medium-term plans and annual action plans, there is little concerted drive at the district level to promote action(s) to implement the goals. Localisation of SDGs is how local and regional governments and other local governance actors can critically contribute towards the overall achievement of the SDGs and how the SDGs can provide a framework for local development

policies. SDG 11, on sustainable cities and human settlements, is the lynchpin of the localizing process.

Second, there is a low level of awareness and knowledge on the SDGs among households and citizens. Apathy, partisan politicisation of development issues, and polarisation hinder citizens' mobilisation around the SDGs. At a minimum, it is expected that citizens should know the key principles and concepts of the SDGs. Some of these key principles and concepts are inclusion, gender, climate change, partnerships, accountability, and “leave no one behind (CSOs Platform for the SDGs 2019). More so, citizens are less empowered to demand accountability from public sector players on programmes for achieving The SDG targets.

Third, is the inability of the media to feature prominently in their reportage issues relating to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Activities on training and awareness-raising are rarely in the news thereby making it a bit difficult for people to follow the implementation of the SDGs at the national, regional and district levels. The media's role in awareness-raising cannot be underestimated. Without a strong and coordinated media reportage, knowledge and awareness on SDGs have been undermined.

Fourth, faith-based organisations have not been as actively engaged in the SDGs discourse and implementation process. Meanwhile, it is important to proactively bring all these other stakeholders on board and explore opportunities for forging partnerships to support the implementation of the SDGs.

Fifth, there is weak coordination between the ICC and the SDGs Advisory Unit particularly in awareness creation. It appears that some awareness creation campaigns by the SDGs Advisory Unit took place with little involvement of the ICC. Continued implementation of activities without strong involvement of the ICC has the potential to undermine institutional collaboration and coordination required for optimal results (CSOs Platform on the SDGs 2019).

Sixth, the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) highlights the financial constraints it has in engaging SDG localisation; likewise, the lack of standardised or baseline SDG data at the local Government level is identified as a problem. In a broader context, the Government's 2018 SDG Indicator Baseline report the role of the local government in the context of SDG 11, where it states that “metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies lack the administrative capacity to collect taxes and fees that would otherwise fund services and infrastructure provision in their respective localities. A more substantial reallocation of resources from national to local level can be considered” (National Development Planning Commission & Ghana Statistical Service 2018, p. 15).

7. Conclusion: Addressing the Challenges

There is no doubt that the institutional architecture exists for implementing the SDGs and provides a good basis for engagement, training and awareness-raising. It seems participatory, inclusive, and encourage collaboration between state and non-state development actors. There is also some room for intra- and inter-sectoral collaboration even though there is more room for improvement. For training and awareness-raising to be improved and strengthened for the effective implementation of the SDGs, the following recommendations are important:

7.1 Expanding and resourcing institutions involved in training and awareness-raising on SDGs: There is the need to expand the institutions involved in training and awareness-raising of the SDGs. The current institutional arrangement for training and awareness-raising on the SDG has been sidelined, to some extent, two key institutions mandated by the 1992 Constitution, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ).

In addition, there is also the urgent need to resource institutions involved in training and awareness raising through budgetary and human resource support. The NDPC, as the lead agency to implement the SDGs and train and raise awareness has not got the resources to perform the task leading to sporadic and uncoordinated training and awareness raising activities and programmes.

7.2 Placing emphasis on the two-pronged aims of training and awareness-raising: Awareness-raising activities should aim to increase the engagement of citizens and local communities in order to promote their sense of ownership of the Agenda and their participation in the achievement of the SDGs at local level. However, awareness-raising is not only about letting citizens know about the existence of the SDGs. It is also about empowering them to participate in the achievement of the SDGs in their daily lives. MMDAs should be supported to recognise the 2030 Agenda as a framework for action, and set up mechanisms that enable citizen participation and institutional accountability, by using the SDGs as a fresh start to engage with a broader cross-section of actors, such as the private sector and community organizations, and to launch new forms of collaboration and participation (Wright et. al. 2018).

7.3 Diversifying training and awareness raising strategies: Public awareness-raising campaigns should focus on the message that the SDGs are relevant to ordinary people all over the world. The SDGs cover issues that are directly relevant to citizens' daily lives, including vital challenges such as poverty, gender inequality, climate change and insecurity, as well as public goods like education, health, water, energy, air quality, housing and the conservation of natural resources.

Activities that can be undertaken to raise awareness among the population should make the SDGs engaging and harness the power of local culture. Such activities could include concerts, campaign buses, fairs, events showcasing success stories, award ceremonies, and collaboration with well-known figures (e.g.: actors, musicians, sportspeople, writers, and photographers) or foundations that can act as ambassadors for the SDGs. The planning of activities should include a gender perspective to ensure that women and girls are not excluded. MMDAs should reach out to the traditional media, for example, through training and activities for journalists, and use their social media channels to communicate the SDGs directly to citizens.

7.4 Communicating the SDGs through education: One of the important means of communicating the SDGs is through education. This is expected to build critical understanding among young people at the MMDAs. Education initiatives should focus on both formal and informal education. Some examples of possible actions include: (i) Formal education: curriculum

development, teacher training, SDG education programmes in schools, and direct work with parent-teacher associations (PTAs).

7.5 Deepening the emerging culture of collaboration and partnership between Government, CSOs and Media: There is the need to deepen or strengthen collaboration between government, CSOs and the media. This will not only reduce mutual mistrust and suspicion and increased synergy in the implementation of sustainable development but also enable the stakeholders to put the resources together to pursue a proactive, coordinated and vigorous training and awareness raising strategies and programmes. The presence of this united front is capable of strongly mobilizing citizens around the SDGs through information generation, dissemination and awareness-raising.

7.6 Localising the SDGs is a task that must be done: It is instructive to note that while the SDGs are global, their achievement will depend on the ability to make them a reality in our communities. All of the SDGs have targets directly related to the responsibilities of public sector workers especially at the local level, particularly to their role in delivering basic services. That is why public sector workers at the local level must be at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. As the closest level of government to citizens, they are well-placed to raise awareness about the importance of the SDGs and their relevance to local communities. They have the potential to bridge the gap between central governments and communities and should play a strong role in fostering the involvement of civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and other community-based organizations to make possible the localizing of the SDGs and the realization of the targets.

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