

## EL SALVADOR

# Salvadoran Civil Society Organizations struggling to focus, participate and obtain financing to achieve the SDGs

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### From MDGs to SDGs

In 2014, the government of El Salvador presented an MDG progress report assessing the country's progress and achievements until 2012. At that time, 10 of the 30 indicators of MDG compliance<sup>2</sup> had been reached, seven were on the compliance path and were highly likely to be achieved, six were likely to be met and seven were identified as having priority in the social agenda after 2015.

Despite such progress towards achieving the MDGs, there are still many basic needs of Salvadorean people that have yet to be met. The new Sustainable Development Goals therefore provide a renewed opportunity for all social, political and economic sectors to commit to the fulfillment of these goals.

More than a year after the beginning of the 2030 Agenda, the majority of the Salvadoran population does not know about the SDGs, very few people are aware of the MDGs, and fewer still know if they were fulfilled or not.

El Salvador was one of the 60 countries selected by the United Nations Development System to organize consultations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

<sup>1</sup> Organizations that comprise Social Watch El Salvador (Asociación Intersectorial para el Desarrollo Económico y Progreso Social- CIDEP-ASAFOCAIS), appreciate the economic solidarity and political analysis, and thank César Villalona who provided the statistical data for this report.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.sv.undp.org/content/el\\_salvador/es/home/presscenter/articles/2014/03/24/el-salvador-grandes-avances-en-los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-del-milenio.html](http://www.sv.undp.org/content/el_salvador/es/home/presscenter/articles/2014/03/24/el-salvador-grandes-avances-en-los-objetivos-de-desarrollo-del-milenio.html)

Mechanisms were opened for civil society organizations to engage in an inclusive dialogue about the priority issues for the country's development in the 2030 Agenda.

In these consultations, the concerns of marginalized populations were highlighted by civil society organizations, in debate with academics and opinion leaders, the private sector and trade unions and the public sector. Indigenous peoples, women, people with physical challenges, isolated territories and communities, and the youth sector were identified as priorities.

The consultations identified priority topics: the right to work, decent housing, food and sustainable agriculture, the right to education as a tool to increase the quality of life, timely health services as a fundamental right, the right to security with a focus on prevention and reintegration, mainstreaming the issue of prevention of gender violence and domestic violence. Protection of the environment was highlighted, as well as preparation for the effects of climate change, taking into account its impact on food security.

The issue of migration deserved special attention, as a situation that generates family disintegration and transculturization of those who are forced to leave the country due to poverty or insecurity.

Based on the themes identified, a vision document was developed, identifying three challenges: 1) placing people at the centre of public policies, with voice and vote on issues that will impact on their lives; 2) building a country with equal opportunities and access to quality public services that also guarantee human rights on an equal basis for the entire population; and 3) the need to reconcile all sectors of society. The political polarization inherited from the armed conflict (ended by a peace agreement in 1992) and its underlying economic and social causes does not allow tolerance of diverging opinions or a frank dialogue around the priority objectives to achieve the common good over particular interests.

The document "El Salvador-Development Agenda Post 2015 - The country we want" summarizes this common vision: "A fair, inclusive El Salvador, free from discrimination and violence, with equal opportunities and rights for all, and with educated and happy children".<sup>3</sup>

El Salvador is one of the 15 countries chosen by the UN to test the accelerated implementation of the SDGs and one of the six pilot countries for the implementation of SDG 16 on peace, access to justice and sound institutions. An agreement was signed between the UN agencies and the government of El Salvador to create a National Council for Sustainable Development to follow up and monitor progress towards the SDGs, comprised of representatives of the government, the United Nations, civil society, and the private sector. To date, formal and continuous mechanisms of work with civil society have not yet been established.

More than a year after these formal commitments, there are still gaps in dialogue, coordination, implementation and monitoring. The government's National Agenda for Sustainable Development, defines the medium term (until 2019) goals, prioritizing eight Sustainable

Development Goals and a set of 35 targets. However, civil society organizations are still not aware of the processes that have led to the definition of these priorities and more efforts need to be made to effectively coordinate the inclusion of the concerns and priorities of civil society.

El Salvador continues to face a large fiscal deficit, which means that just tax reform is urgently needed, in order to obtain the necessary revenues for the implementation of social programmes.

The lack of political agreements and the lack of a comprehensive tax reform make the tax structure in El Salvador very unfair and deepen inequalities, since 80 percent of government revenue comes from consumption taxes (including VAT) and taxes on wages, which affects mainly the working population, and only 20 percent comes from corporate income.

The Social Watch coalition in El Salvador has promoted awareness and advocacy actions aimed at demanding tax justice through different concrete proposals that include: 1) control tax evasion, 2) review legislation that allows large companies not to pay taxes and that cost government up to US\$ 1.2 billion per year, 3) increase to 40 percent the tax on companies earning more than US\$ 1 million a year, 4) require the Attorney General's Office (FGR) to investigate and try more than 150 cases of corruption prior to 2009 and 5) demand that resources be reclaimed from those appropriated by former government officials, taking into account that some of them are already facing legal proceedings for corruption offenses.

The Social Watch coalition also has focused on the high levels of environmental vulnerability facing the country. According to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction issued by the UNDP in 2015, since 2001 in El Salvador, the annual historical average of losses due to extreme weather events is "equivalent to almost 60 percent of the annual average of their public investment".<sup>4</sup>

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3 UNDP-El Salvador, Development Agenda Post 2015: "The Country We Want", 2014, p.47, available at: [http://sv.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/elsalvador/docs/publicaciones/b\\_Agenda%20de%20desarrollo%20post%202015\\_el%20pa%C3%ADs%20que%20queremos.pdf](http://sv.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/elsalvador/docs/publicaciones/b_Agenda%20de%20desarrollo%20post%202015_el%20pa%C3%ADs%20que%20queremos.pdf)

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4 UNDP, Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015, p. 107; available at:

In this context, the Social Watch coalition of El Salvador welcomes the prohibition of metal mining in El Salvador, is a triumph of the struggle carried out by different social organizations, which now have this legal tool to defend the environment and the lives affected. El Salvador is the first country in Latin America and in fact the world that strictly prohibits all exploration and exploitation of underground metals, as well as open-pit mining. This ban represents a historic advance in the region and means reducing the environmental impacts on water, air, forests and soils to guarantee the sustainable development and well-being of Salvadoran families.

The ban is the result of more than a decade of popular struggle against mining and in defense of life and the environment, a process that also had its dark moments when it claimed the lives of environmental activists in events that have not yet been fully clarified.

At Social Watch El Salvador, we hope that the prohibition against mining is the first of a series of environmental regulations that a country as vulnerable as El Salvador badly needs.

These include especially a general water law, which recognizes access to water as a public good and a fundamental human right, regulating water management to ensure sustainability and the right to water for life, and the protection of other ecosystems that are threatened by big business and transnational companies that profit at the expense of the Salvadoran environment. However, there has historically been a vacuum in the effective implementation of laws and agreements that guarantee the protection of the environment and vulnerable areas, mainly because of the lack of citizen participation in monitoring and implementing the laws. It is urgent therefore that non-governmental organizations and the different expressions of organized civil society, give priority to three main lines of action in El Salvador:

- to generate the necessary knowledge about the SDGs,
- to demand the permanent participation of CSOs, trade unions and communities in high-level discussions on the implementation roadmap, and
- to demand comprehensive fiscal reform to effectively combat tax evasion and avoidance, thus guaranteeing needed revenues for implementing the SDGs in the country.