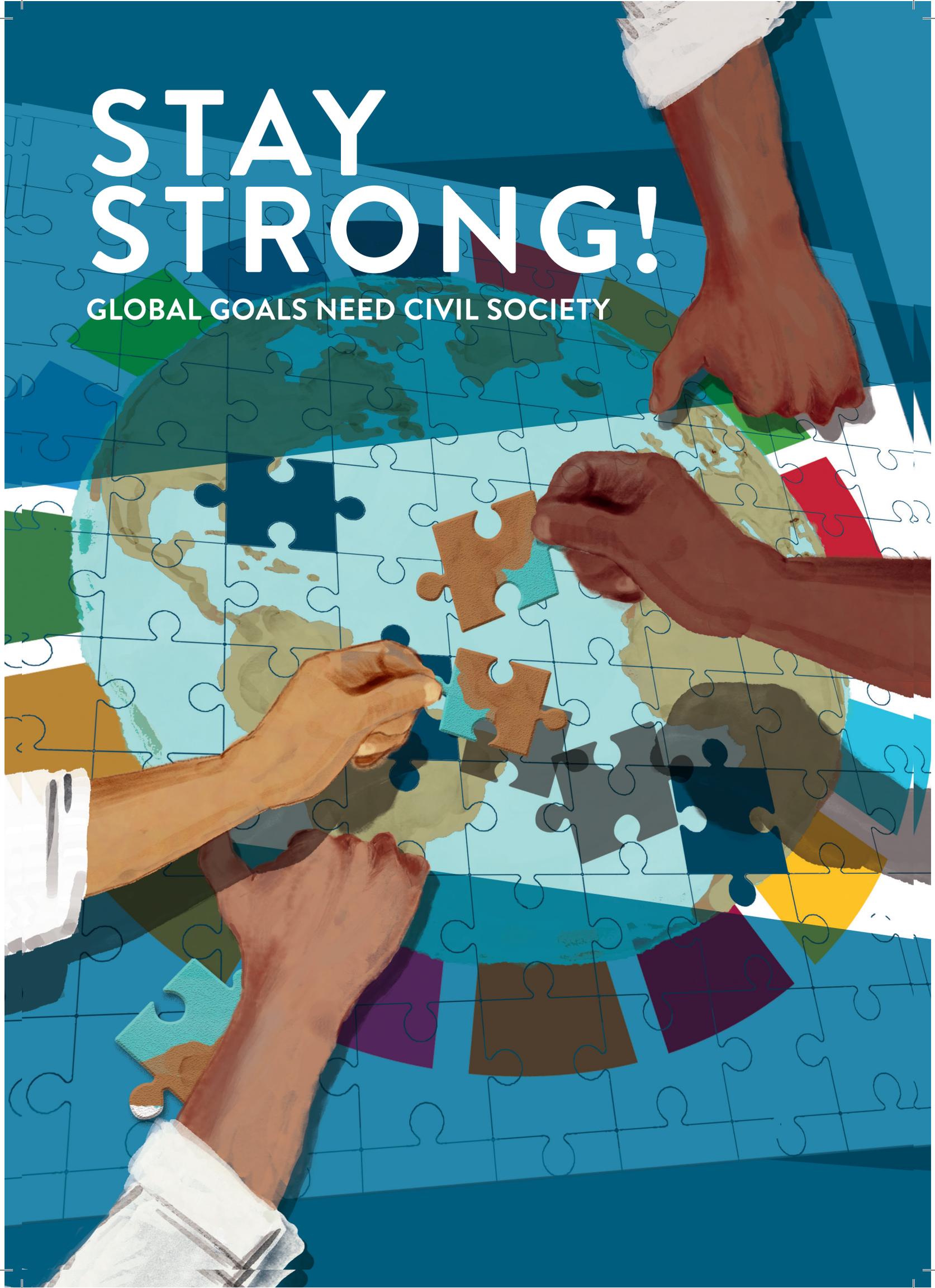


STAY STRONG!

GLOBAL GOALS NEED CIVIL SOCIETY



STAY STRONG!

GLOBAL GOALS NEED CIVIL SOCIETY

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FOREWORD

Dear readers,

The current state of the world is incredibly tense for sustainable development. In just five years, the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will expire, yet the attainment of these goals is far from achieved. Sustainability issues are under great pressure worldwide: massive cuts in funding, nationalist efforts in many countries, defamatory narratives and repression against civil society actors pose immense challenges.

Despite all adversities, civil society actors are vehemently committed to sustainable development, climate justice, democracy, and social justice. Whether through legislative changes in Ethiopia and Brazil, protests by marginalised groups in India, or transnational initiatives for multilateral processes, this demonstrates that the work of civil society organisations and their commitment to these issues is successful, effective, and important.

This publication was produced as part of our project, Countdown 2030 – Global Goals Need Civil Society, by CCRDA in Ethiopia, ABONG in Brazil, VENRO in Germany and VANI in India. We are four humanitarian and development policy umbrella organisations; through our project, we bring civil society positions to selected multilateral processes. As civil society networks, we advocate for the interests of our numerous members. We are united in our determination and commitment to advance these issues at the national and multilateral levels.

On the following pages, we aim to provide civil society actors and anyone committed to sustainable development with inspiration and motivation for their own work and initiatives. We will illustrate what civil society organisations have achieved despite challenges. We can learn from each other and our very different contexts; we can support and strengthen one another by forming alliances. Throughout the world, people, organisations and networks are committed to improving the living conditions in their communities or at regional or international levels. Whether through volunteering or full-time activities, citizens of the world contribute to strengthening democracy and promoting sustainability in their countries and at the multilateral level. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement are critical frameworks in this context.

The fact that countless people are committed and believe in the common good, humanity and a sustainable future – all this gives us hope. The following pages expound on what gives hope to representatives from civil society organisations, scientists and activists from our four countries.

Our recommendations for action align with the central demands of civil society organisations, encouraging political decision-makers to work towards sustainable and fairer policy measures.

We hope this inspires you!

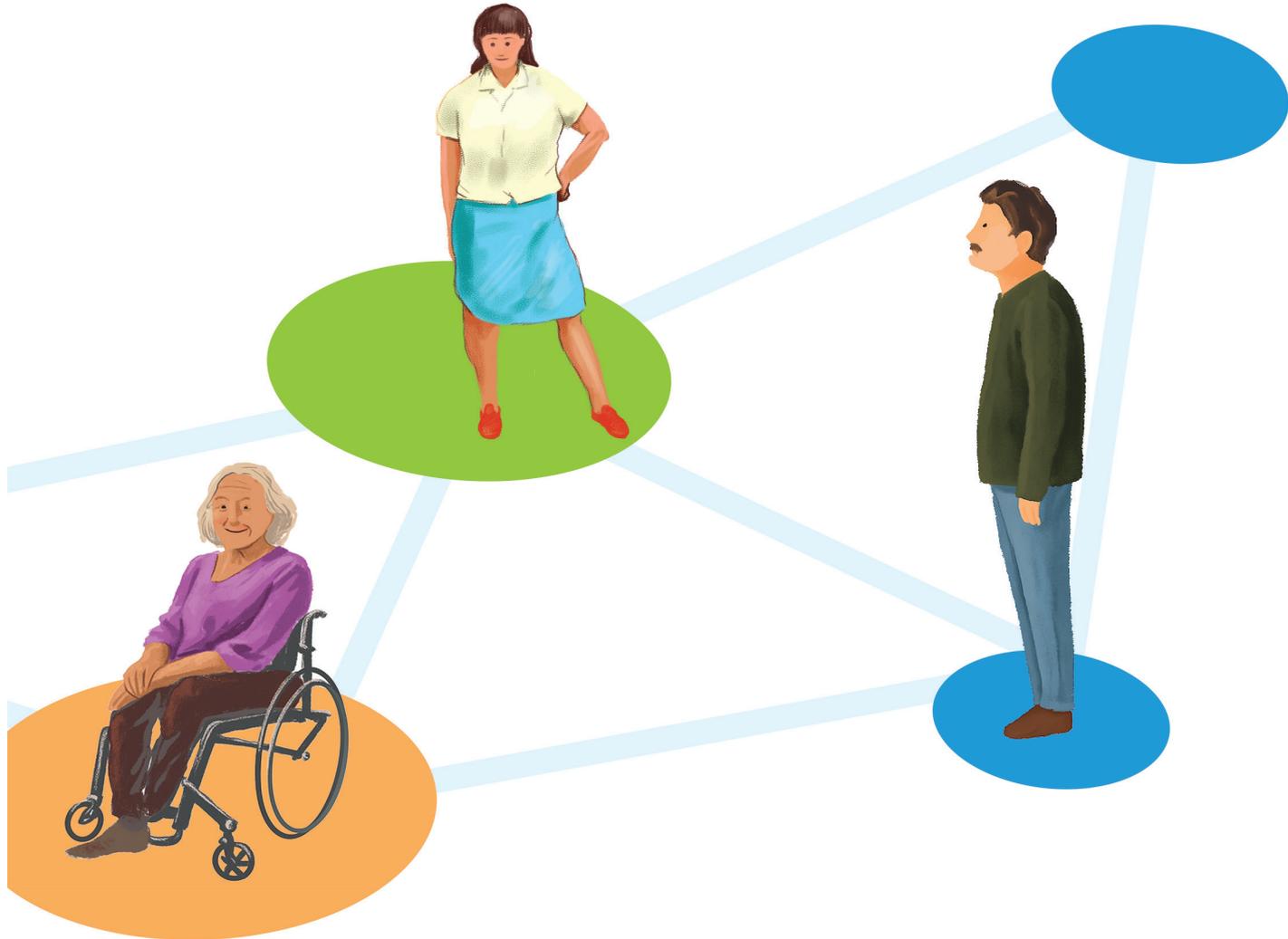
The editors





We must succeed!

September 2015: The spirit of optimism was palpable. An emotional event with impressive messages from Pope Francis and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai. 192 blue lights symbolised the 192 member states of the United Nations. Followed by minutes-long applause and the statement from the conference director: Now we are all *'developing countries'*. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been adopted by the UN General Assembly. Even then, the times were already marked by geopolitical tensions.



The guiding principle of the international community in terms of global sustainability was now definitively that of transformational sustainable development. The 17 SDGs and their 169 sub-goals are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Despite all the achievements, the first five goals on poverty and hunger reduction, health and education, and gender equality incorporate unfinished business from the Millennium Development Goals of 2000. Ecological and economic components have now been added to social sustainability. The basic idea is that it should be possible to treat this planet in an ecological, economical and socially sustainable manner if every nation does its homework, the high earners support the low earners, and no one is left behind. The shared global responsibility of all nations.

A framework for action was now in place. It was time to get started. Media professionals were sceptical. Too complicated. Difficult to communicate. One figure had a sobering effect: USD 500 billion was needed to achieve the SDGs – annually. National budgets could not handle that, they claimed; private capital would be needed. Nevertheless, countries, international organisations, researchers, civil society and the entire global development community embarked on this journey.

Ten years later, we are looking at a completely changed world. Country by country, development policy has been aligned with national interests. Military security is increasingly overriding global sustainability at the negotiating table.

Companies often use economic crises as an opportunity to distance themselves from supposedly troublesome issues, such as human rights and fair supply chains. Populists discredit development policy in a mix of ignorance and opportunism. The UN faces immense challenges and must reposition itself.

Civil society organisations have never been so important to the shared survival of our planet. They continue to implement the SDGs. They practice global solidarity and work together in partnership. With development and environmental education, every campaign and every statement, they address the global wounds of ecological irresponsibility and degrading injustice. They cannot achieve the SDGs alone with their commitment, their projects and their humanitarian response. However, they will ensure that the 17 goals are not lost sight of. Moreover, they provide a platform for anyone looking to act in a globally responsible manner.

It does not matter whether our planet ends up dying because of ecological uninhabitability, depleted natural resources or exploding social tensions. It is essential to recognise that this will occur if we do not change course globally. What civil society can do now is oppose national egoisms with global cooperation. It must lead by example and form alliances. It must seek new collaborations, and it must enlighten, enlighten, enlighten.

We have seen how fundamentally global co-operation can change in a single decade. We will see existential fears shift back towards global survival. Simply because the dangers, such as the climate crisis or social injustice, will become increasingly visible in the media.

Crucially, we will not have to start from scratch. Civil society will play a decisive role here. It will be important to control the complexity of global sustainable action under time pressure. It will be important to do everything in our power to come as close as possible to achieving the SDGs and commit to a follow-up process in good time. It will be essential to have robust structures in place for sustainable action. It was comparatively easy to bring the world to this existential point. It is becoming increasingly challenging to make it fit for the future. But this remains possible.

MICHAEL HERBST, Co-Chair, VENRO

Cooperation makes us strong

It moves civil society

Sustainability issues are currently facing challenges given the geopolitical situation. Today the public is less aware of socio-ecological injustices and environmental problems than it was a few years ago. Not only in the USA, but also in many other countries, populists are ruling or on the rise. National economic interests and isolation are at the forefront of the political agenda in many places in the Global North.

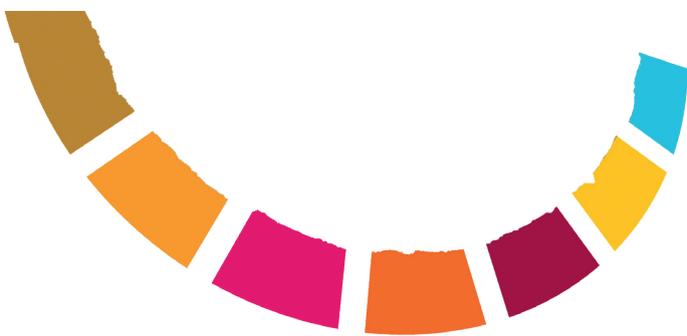
Many rich countries, including Germany, have reduced their development cooperation and humanitarian action budgets. The catastrophic climax so far has been the dissolution of USAID by the Trump administration. This deprived many international projects of their financial basis overnight. *‘It is particularly tragic that several systemically important information platforms have collapsed as a result, through which, for example, emergency relief operations were coordinated and resources could thus be used much more effectively,’* says Mathias Mogge, Secretary General of Welthungerhilfe in Germany, describing one of the fatal consequences. *‘Not just the financial losses, but the geopolitical situation is also deeply unsettling: What will the future hold?’* adds Dr Nigussu Legesse from the Ethiopian civil society umbrella organisation, Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA). But how do civil society organisations in the countries of the Global South and in Germany handle this challenging situation? Which topics are important to them and what makes them strong despite all this?

CIVIC SPACE IS SHRINKING

Many governments have restricted the space of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in recent years. In several countries, organisations risk losing their registration if they receive financial support from abroad. Harsh Jaitli, Managing Director of the Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), which brings together 645 organisations from all over India, explains the background in his country: *‘The original law of 1976 resulted from the fear that money from abroad could colonise society again.’* However, the law was tightened in 2010 and again in 2020 and has now led to the

abandonment of many civil society organisations. Furthermore, even critical reports about the true extent of unemployment and poverty can cost a government licence. Therefore, several NGOs react with self-censorship or shift their activities to areas that offer little scope for government criticism. Such trends can also be observed in Africa. *‘NGOs are not free, as described in many constitutions. For example, when they criticise corruption or human rights violations, they face restrictions,’* says Dr Gorden Simango, Director of All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which represents churches and church organisations from 43 countries. In Ethiopia, where Simango’s office is located, several NGOs have already lost their registration and foreign organisations have had to leave the country.

In Brazil, on the other hand, civil society has a strong position in principle. Its rights are also enshrined in its constitution. At the local, regional and national levels, there are councils – citizens’ councils – whose positions must be considered by the ruling officials. However, civil society has repeatedly experienced that governments do not take the councils’ recommendations seriously. Furthermore, many European cooperation partners have withdrawn over the past 15 to 20 years, reports Henrique Frota, Director of the Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (ABONG), with its 245 member organisations. *‘They justify this with Brazil’s economic power and that they only want to support the poorest. But Brazil is a country with extremely large social disparities, and there is a lot of poverty here.’* In Germany, civil society is also facing imminent restrictions. Some organisations have been stripped of their charitable status due to political statements, which have had negative tax consequences. At the beginning of 2025, the now ruling CDU asked 551 questions in Parliament about state support for NGOs that, in its opinion, are not politically neutral.



'Criticism must be allowed in a living democracy,' argues Kathrin Schroeder, head of politics and global future issues at the Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation Misereor in Germany. She recognises the danger that organisations will refrain from critical statements so as not to risk government funding. *'By the time we realise that we are censoring ourselves, it is almost too late,'* says Schroeder.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION GIVES HOPE

The Co-Director of the Brazilian Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (Inesc), Nathalie Beghin, fears that many young people have lost faith in a representative democracy.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



© Laura Hoffmann

'I am hopeful that despite the shift to the right, people are still prepared to face up to their responsibilities in racist structures. For me, a sustainable future is inextricably linked to justice, solidarity and the fight against all forms of discrimination.'

TUPOKA OGETTE

Intermediary for racism criticism, bestselling author and founder of Tupokademie (<https://tupokademie.de>)

GERMANY

On the other hand, Annie Namala from the Indian Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion (CSEI) reports very positive experiences with young people: *'Especially among young people from marginalised groups, there is a strong desire to stand up for their own community. Solidarity plays a major role here, while individualism is widespread in society in general.'* Gorden Simango from Ethiopia also has high hopes for the younger generation and refers to the campaign *'Africa – my home, my future'*.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



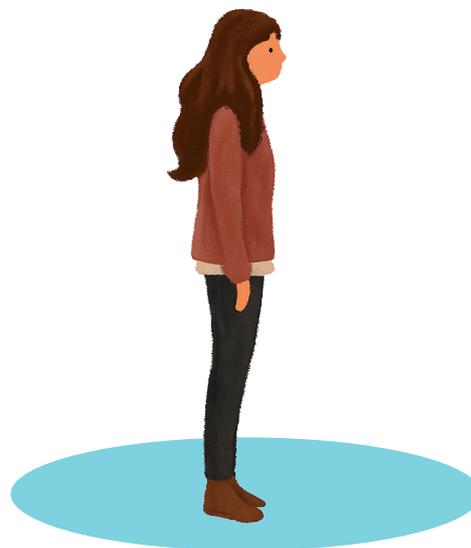
'As a human rights activist and defender of democracy, I find hope for a sustainable future in the rise of the Global South and the democratisation of international governance. I also strongly believe in the importance of strengthening civil society organisations and movements and the recognition that justice, equality, and environmental stewardship are inseparable and intertwined.'

NATHALIE BEGHIN

Economist, Co-Director of the CSO Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (INESC) and Co-Chair of Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe por Justicia Económica, Social y Climática (LATIN-DADD)

BRAZIL

It is a counter-movement to emigration, emphasising Africa's potential as a centre of excellence and aiming to shape the continent's future itself. 'A lot of young people launch start-ups and do excellent work. Music, art and culture are also on the rise. And they now know about the history of their own country and the region,' says Simango. These are all vital prerequisites for a vibrant democracy.



INTERNET AND DIGITAL MEDIA: A CURSE AND BLESSING AT THE SAME TIME

The internet, social media and digital tools play an ambivalent role in all of this. In India, digitisation is well advanced and enables easy communication across all borders and maintaining of informal contacts. 'There are also good online offerings that give young people and many illiterate people easy access to education and information,' says Namala, whose organisation itself offers online training. However, as in other places, populists dominate the internet in India, and many media outlets are closely aligned with the government. 'We are well connected with alternative media, and we educate young people about fake news,' says Namala. At the same time, she seeks international support against the increasingly anti-Muslim and anti-Christian



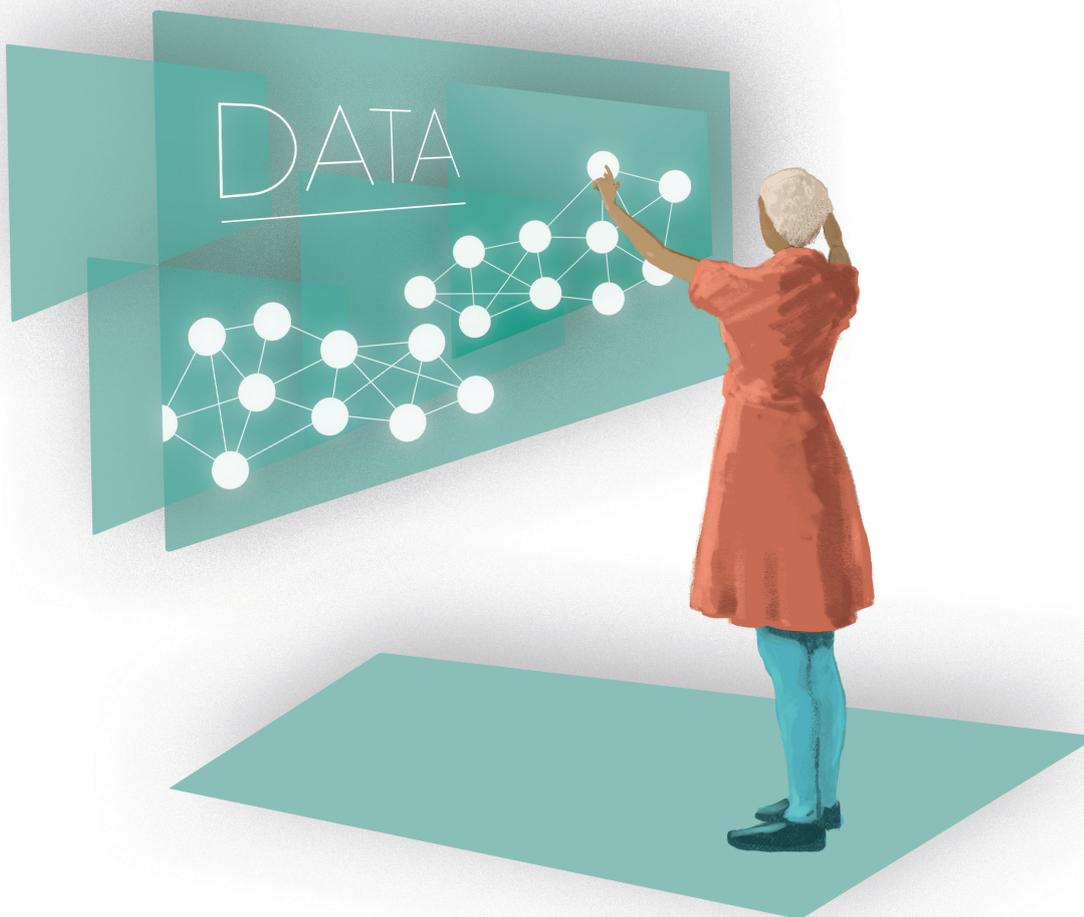
sentiment in India, which is fuelling the government policy and spreading predominantly via the internet. Additionally, she proposes an international platform on the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda, which focuses on the principle of *'leaving no one behind'*. This fits well with the visions of ABONG in Brazil, whose member organisations are united by the conviction that the current economic system inevitably excludes certain groups of people – and that this must be changed.

Nathalie Beghin is critical of the effects of the internet. *'Social media is isolating people and encourages pseudo-participation. It creates the illusion that you can express your opinion. Right-wing movements in particular know how to use social media to their advantage.'* They are also increasingly gaining influence on the streets, while mobilising for progressive goals in Brazil is becoming progressively difficult. Ten years ago, there were many mass demonstrations for justice, called for by large organisations such as churches and trade unions, which smaller civil society NGOs, such as Inesc, then joined. But trade unions are becoming less significant because greater numbers of people no longer have a formal employment contract and society is becoming increasingly fragmented. *'We're trying to understand what's going on, but we don't have any good answers right now,'* says Beghin.

OUR SHARED VALUE BASE: A GREAT ADVANTAGE

For years, civil society organisations have taken a completely different path from government policy. Instead of narrowing their focus to the national level and individual aspects, NGOs are increasingly networking. Their advantage lies in having a common value base from which goals can be derived. *'Our view of humanity is one of solidarity. Moreover, as civil society organisations, we can choose our allies; politics cannot,'* says Anke Kurat, Head of Global Justice and Sustainable Development at the Association of Development and Humanitarian NGOs (VENRO) in Germany.

Despite all the restrictions, the UN remains the most important anchor point at the international level. After all, it stands for the equality of all people, and every country has a voice here. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement form the central frame of reference for sustainability at the UN level.



Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which focused on the Global South, the 2030 Agenda requires all countries to provide regular reports on their progress towards fulfilling the 17 SDGs. Thus, all nations are encouraged to actively contribute to their implementation. This has given civil society an important lever for political demands: all governments must now be measured against their own concrete goals.

DATA: A SIGNIFICANT LEVER

For CSEI Director Namala, the commitment that no one should be left behind is the most important aspect of the 17 SDGs. Because it diverges from the traditional perspective of progress, which focuses on percentage improvements and often overlooks or renders invisible the most disadvantaged groups.

‘When we say we’re not leaving anyone behind, we need information about the marginalised groups and how they can be included,’ Namala argues.

The ‘*Don’t Break Your Promise*’ (WNTA) platform, co-initiated and led by Namala, is a coalition of numerous Indian organisations calling on the Indian government to deliver on its commitments under the 2030 Agenda. As part of the ‘*100 Hotspots*’ project, young members of disadvantaged groups in particular collect data about their environment. She reports that these people are not covered by ‘*the government programme for building toilets and other “charitable” measures that the government distributes, for example*’ – even though the situation regarding housing, nutrition and education in these groups is much worse than in other parts of society and people here experience more violence.

The approach is making an impact. The skills and self-confidence of young data collectors are not the only thing growing. They also use their findings at the political level and can justify their demands for improvements.

And because similar data collection efforts are under way in other countries such as Kenya, Nepal, and Vietnam, pressure is increasing on the Indian government to keep pace with the issue. In fact, for the first time, India's 2020 SDG Progress Report included a chapter titled *'No one should be left behind'*.

The ability to argue using data is a critical factor in the political work of civil society organisations. Every year, Welthungerhilfe publishes the World Hunger Index, which addresses not only hunger and malnutrition, but also various important topics, such as gender equality, as a central factor in climate resilience and food and nutrition security. Comparing the situation in different countries helps to identify and strengthen effective approaches.

LINKING REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL ACTION

'The international level is fundamental to making progress at the national level,' says Beghin. The previous tax systems structure has driven the division of the world into rich and poor. At the same time, the super-rich contribute massively to global warming and hunger through their behaviour and investment decisions. That is why Inesc conducts intensive research on tax issues and acts at the national, Latin American and UN levels.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



'Ethiopia's ambitious climate initiatives, particularly the Green Legacy campaign and reforestation efforts, combined with a rising youth climate movement, are driving nationwide awareness, accountability, and action to protect the environment and future generations.'

FASSIKAW MOLLA AMERA
Deputy Director General, Authority
for Civil Society Organizations

ETHIOPIA

The success of the intensive cooperation among many network partners is the 2023 decision of the UN General Assembly to develop a framework convention for international tax cooperation. Similar to the climate topic more than 30 years ago, this marks the beginning of a negotiation process involving almost all countries in the world. Fair taxation of companies and the assets of billionaires could lead to massive redistribution and free up money for climate protection and adaptation. At the same time, appropriate environmental taxes have the potential to steer economies in a more sustainable direction.



A Latin American platform for these issues now exists at the government level. A civil society council was also established as an official body within this framework.

Inesc's research is not only incorporated into international processes, but also benefits domestic organisations. For example, Brazilian women's organisations receive well-founded data and analyses on the fact that the female portion of the population, and in particular Black women, contribute a disproportionately high share of their income to the country. Equipped with such information, they can engage in effective lobbying.

MUTUAL STRENGTH THROUGH COLLABORATION AND EXCHANGE

'We need to double down on illustrating how networking at the local, national and international levels means that organisations are not on their own, but can support and strengthen each other,' says Kurat. VENRO was founded in 1995 as an umbrella organisation for development, humanitarian and development education NGOs in Germany. Since then, networking with other actors has become increasingly closer – both domestically and at the UN level, as well as in the G7 and G20 contexts. *'You know each other, you trust each other, you take action together,'* says Kurat. Diversity is an advantage. Today, for example, more than 150 development organisations, trade unions, environmental associations, women's and youth organisations and many more work together in Climate Alliance Germany. The international Climate Action Network comprises NGOs from 130 countries. For several years, many organisations have stopped predominantly sending personnel from Germany to partner countries and instead recruit their experts locally and worldwide.

The Ethiopian umbrella organisation, CCRDA, founded 50 years ago, now has over 400 members. *'Our advantage is that our members are knowledgeable and experienced in many areas and can exchange ideas and support each other,'* says Legesse.

His organisation provides the necessary infrastructure and organises events every year on specific topics such as climate or health at the local and national levels. This is not easy in a country where 80 different languages are spoken and travel is sometimes dangerous or impossible due to conflict.

Additionally, Legesse serves on the national steering committee for implementing the SDGs. CCRDA also contributes civil society perspectives at climate conferences or the Economic and Social Council ECOSOCC of the African Union. Central to the activities here is not only the cooperation with international partners in the Countdown 2030 project, but also agreements with their own government. *'We all serve one country,'* Legesse concludes. The role of NGOs is often to amplify the voices of the population, enabling international donors to better understand the situation in Ethiopia.

CRISIS AS OPPORTUNITY

The current challenging world situation, however, may also shed light on new perspectives.

'The cost-cutting measures of the Dutch government in development finance and most recently of the new US administration are leading to discussions in Africa about ways to gain more independence – without influence from outside expertise and money,' argues Simango. In spring 2025, the founding conference of the NGO platform *'Global South'* was held in Baku. Civil society representatives from 116 countries of the Global South met to launch a global South-South solidarity initiative. It had been launched six months earlier at COP 29 and now aims to ensure that the Global South will no longer stand on the sidelines of world events, but will take centre stage – and is now acting on this.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



'Marginalised people have developed an awareness of a sustainable future, ecological democracy, and a climate-just world. In this respect, the concept of South-South solidarity is increasing among people, communities, organisations and in government. Most importantly, women came forward to lead this ethos, ideology and initiatives locally and globally. So, we are very hopeful for a sustainable future.'

GHANSHYAM
Secretary, SAMVAD

INDIA

'We are convinced that there is also an opportunity in the increasing meltdown of development cooperation. It is impossible to act sustainably in a vertical relationship where one partner is dependent,' says Beghin. Time and again, the director of the Brazilian NGO is frustrated by the bureaucratic requirements that their organisation must fulfil if Germany or the EU supports a project. *'The rules are not discussed with us, but dictated to us. We should document the hours we worked every day and what exactly we were doing.'* This would completely ignore the reality of life and hinder civil society organisations from acting according to their own concepts or the needs on the ground.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



'What gives me hope is the fierce determination of young people – especially young women – who are demanding equity, justice, and climate action like never before. Across India and around the world, I see a growing recognition that sustainability cannot be achieved without gender equality and community participation. When we invest in the power and leadership of women and youth, we invest in a future that is not only sustainable, but also more just and inclusive.'

POONAM MUTTREJA
Executive Director, Population Foundation of India

INDIA

Beghin calls on the European partner organisations to remedy the situation and, like many other civil society organisations, would like to see institutional funding instead of eternal project funding. Mogge, Secretary-General of Welthungerhilfe, has a great deal of understanding for this position.

At the same time, however, he points out that the funding is taxpayers' money or donations and that the ministry and fundraising organisations need precise proof of the expenditure of funds. After all, the employees in the ministries themselves hardly have any discretion, because they, in turn, are controlled by the Federal Court of Audit.

Project funds flowing through many channels, the fragmentation of responsibilities, and a strong departmental orientation are hallmarks of modern statehood. Bureaucracy is growing; at the same time, this reveals that in many places such structures are increasingly less able to cope with complex problems. This is a breeding ground for the growing populism that focuses on exclusion and promises simple solutions that, of course, never work.

PROGRESS DESPITE HEADWINDS

The challenges are enormous – and have not diminished in recent years in light of a shift to the right, rising populism and fake news, as well as a growing remilitarisation of state policy. Nevertheless, the motto in most NGOs working for sustainability is: Don't give up, keep going, stay strong, especially in the face of geopolitically and nationally threatening developments. On the one hand, there is hope from the experience that there are people worldwide seeking to move in the same direction and numerous volunteers are getting involved across the globe.

On the other hand, cooperation among NGOs is steadily intensifying. Jaitli from the Indian network VANI summarises: *'We can support each other in expanding our skills and knowledge. In exchange, we will assess how a dialogue with our governments can best succeed. And we will create common spaces at international conferences or with platforms to become more influential and meaningful.'*

Furthermore, it is essential to celebrate and acknowledge the numerous successes that have been achieved. In Brazil, civil society played a crucial role in ensuring that a right-wing populist government was voted out. At the UN level, taxes for the super-rich are now on the agenda. In Germany, many formulations by civil society actors have been incorporated into the German Sustainability Strategy.

In India, almost everyone is familiar with the 17 SDGs. In Ethiopia, civil society plays a pivotal role in shaping the agenda for the 2nd African Climate Conference, scheduled for September 2025. Schroeder of Misereor sums up the strength of global civil society: *'Every organisation should focus its energy on what it does well. But for the major issues, we are better off networking'*.

ANNETTE JENSEN,
Freelance journalist and author

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



'My hope for Ethiopia's sustainable future comes from witnessing the unwavering spirit of its people – especially women and youth – who lead change in their communities, protect natural resources, and invest in education to build a better tomorrow for all.'

TEKETEL YOHANNES ANSHEBO
(PROF.)
Executive Director, Ethiopian Academy
of Sciences

ETHIOPIA



Success Stories

OUR JOINT PROJECT 'COUNTDOWN 2030: GLOBAL GOALS NEED CIVIL SOCIETY'

Four national civil society platforms from four different continents with around 1,500 member organisations: In the Countdown 2030 project, the national NGO networks, ABONG from Brazil, CCRDA from Ethiopia, VANI from India and VENRO from Germany, have joined forces to jointly shape sustainability policy at the multilateral level.

By 2030, the world community wants to have achieved the 17 SDGs. Multilateral decision-making and negotiation processes are crucial steps along this path.

Civil society organisations play an important role in shaping these processes. As national development and humanitarian platforms, we strongly support the common goal of reducing poverty, hunger and inequality worldwide.

With our wide reach, we make civil society more visible, powerful and coordinated and ensure that its perspectives are incorporated into global decision-making processes.

Our project activities include events at multilateral conferences such as the UN Summit of the Future, the Hamburg Sustainability Conference, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, and the UN Climate Change Conferences. The individual networks also organise their own events and publications to bring the jointly developed positions into politics and the general public. No less important are regular exchanges, joint learning and project workshops in all partner countries.

Current geopolitical tensions, nationalist aspirations and the restriction of their scope of action in many countries make the work of civil society organisations massively more difficult. Right now, civil society alliances, networks and partnerships are necessary to advance multilateral processes. Global goals can only be achieved together. We are actively implementing this in the Countdown 2030 project.

KAROLINE KRÄHLING, VENRO, Germany

HOW INDIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY HELPED SHAPE THE DATA PROTECTION ACT

One of the most significant recent examples of civil society advocacy in India is the engagement around the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023. This law, which governs how personal data is collected, stored, and processed, was introduced against the backdrop of the Supreme Court's 2017 judgment that recognised privacy as a fundamental right. From the very beginning of the legislative process, civil society organisations played an active role in scrutinising the drafts and highlighting concerns about potential violations of citizens' rights. These groups used a mix of policy analysis, public education, legal advocacy, and parliamentary engagement to shape the discourse.

Civil society actors published in-depth critiques of various drafts of the bill, flagged problematic provisions such as broad exemptions for government agencies, lack of independent oversight, and dilution of consent mechanisms. They also engaged the public through webinars, social media campaigns, and multilingual explainers that helped make the law understandable for ordinary citizens. Memoranda were submitted to parliamentary committees, and meetings were held with lawmakers to push for changes that aligned with the constitutional right to privacy. Furthermore, formal applications were used to demand transparency in how public consultations were managed.

Although the final version of the Act did not address all of civil society's concerns – particularly regarding government exemptions and the independence of the Data Protection Board – the sustained advocacy resulted in increased public awareness, stalled earlier regressive versions of the law, and built a strong rights-based narrative around data governance in India. This example stands out as a good practice because it demonstrates how civil society can effectively engage with a complex, technical legislative process using legal tools, public mobilisation, and strategic alliances, even in a challenging political environment. It also lays the foundation for continued oversight and advocacy as the law moves into the implementation phase.

DR PALLAVI REKHI, VANI, India

RECOVERY OF CIVIC SPACE IN ETHIOPIA

The amendment of the NGO law in Ethiopia in 2019 was a significant achievement for the entire civil society sector. CCRDA's leadership was pivotal in this transformation. NGOs benefitted in several ways from the new legislation. It led to better civic space because NGOs had additional rights from then on. For example, they can now work on human rights issues or generate their own income. Before the new legislation, these activities would have been unthinkable.

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



‘Worldwide, the number of people who emphasise that their future, their life chances and their prosperity are inextricably linked to healthy ecosystems and the mitigation of climate change is growing. At the same time, we have made enormous technological progress to enable sustainable business – for example, by expanding renewable energies, developing new mobility concepts or sustainable construction. President Trump’s destructive refusal to cooperate will create new cooperation alliances.’

PROF. DR DIRK MESSNER
President, Federal Environment Agency

GERMANY

How did the restrictions come about at that time, and how did CCRDA respond? In the lead-up to the 2005 parliamentary elections, CCRDA and its members were actively involved in educating citizens and mobilising civil society. This contributed to an unprecedented voter turnout. While this vibrant participation revealed the potential of civil society to contribute to democratic processes, it also triggered a severe political backlash. In the aftermath, the civic space shrunk dramatically.

Many NGO leaders were arrested, imprisoned, or forced into exile. CCRDA continuously revised and redesigned its modes of engagement to respond to the deteriorating environment. Recognising the need for evidence-based advocacy, the organisation took several steps to highlight the value of civil society and to push for legal and policy reform:

Data-driven advocacy

CCRDA conducted surveys to systematically assess the negative impacts of restrictive policies. On this basis CCRDA created a statement to inform stakeholders and policymakers.

Showcasing CSO impact

To counter negative perceptions and restrictions, CCRDA illustrated the tangible contributions of CSOs to national development in special publications, conferences, and policy briefs.

Recognition and visibility

CCRDA actively recognised outstanding CSO performances through public awards and impact documentation. This not only boosted the morale of actors in the sector, but also helped reframe civil society as an indispensable partner in Ethiopia’s future.

Advocacy for legal reform

In collaboration with national and international partners, CCRDA persistently lobbied for legal reforms. Through strategic dialogues and policy advocacy, it contributed to the eventual amendment of the CSO law in 2019.

DR NIGUSSU LEGESSE, CCRDA, Ethiopia

BRAZILIAN CIVIL SOCIETY PAVES THE WAY FOR SCHOOL NUTRITION FROM FAMILY FARMS

The legal regulation on the purchase of food from family farms for school meals was an important milestone for food security and sustainable rural development in Brazil. Civil society played a decisive role in getting this law off the ground and implemented.

Since the 1990s, civil society organisations have been mobilising to strengthen family farming and agroecology and to guarantee the human right to food. These organisations include rural social movements, NGOs, family farmers' associations, agroecology movements and food security councils. One of the main spaces for action was the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), in which representatives of civil society and the government debated and proposed participatory public policies.

One direct result of the Council was that the National School Meals Program (PNAE) required that at least 30 percent of food be sourced from family farms. Civil society exerted pressure on the National Congress, mobilised the public, and contributed its expertise to the relevant legislative process. The law represents an innovation in combining the school feeding policy with the strengthening of local production, generating income, promoting agroecology and appreciating regional food culture.

Civil society organisations were not only involved in drafting the law. They also monitor its implementation and compliance. Through school meal councils, regional forums, agroecological networks,

WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?



'India's progress on various SDG goals gives us hope for a better future, despite our country ranking 99th out of 167 reporting countries. To my mind, based on our many years of hard work at Prayas and allied civil society organisations, there is an urgent need to change the approach and attitude of governments towards us.'

AMOD K KANTH
Founder & Mentor, Prayas JAC Society and Allied Organizations

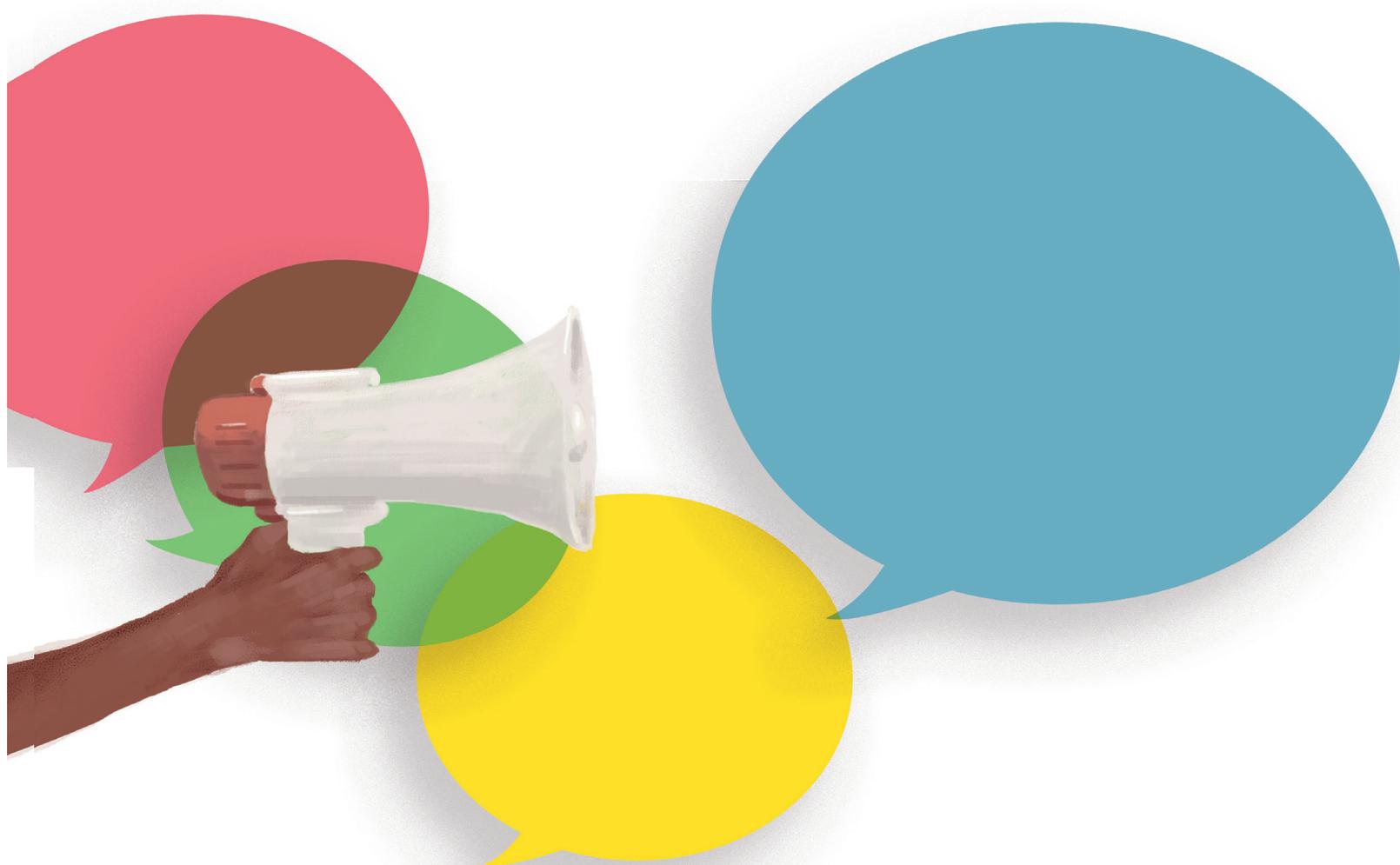
INDIA

and social movements, the population monitors compliance with the regulation, suggests improvements, trains managers and farmers, and builds bridges between agricultural producers and schools.

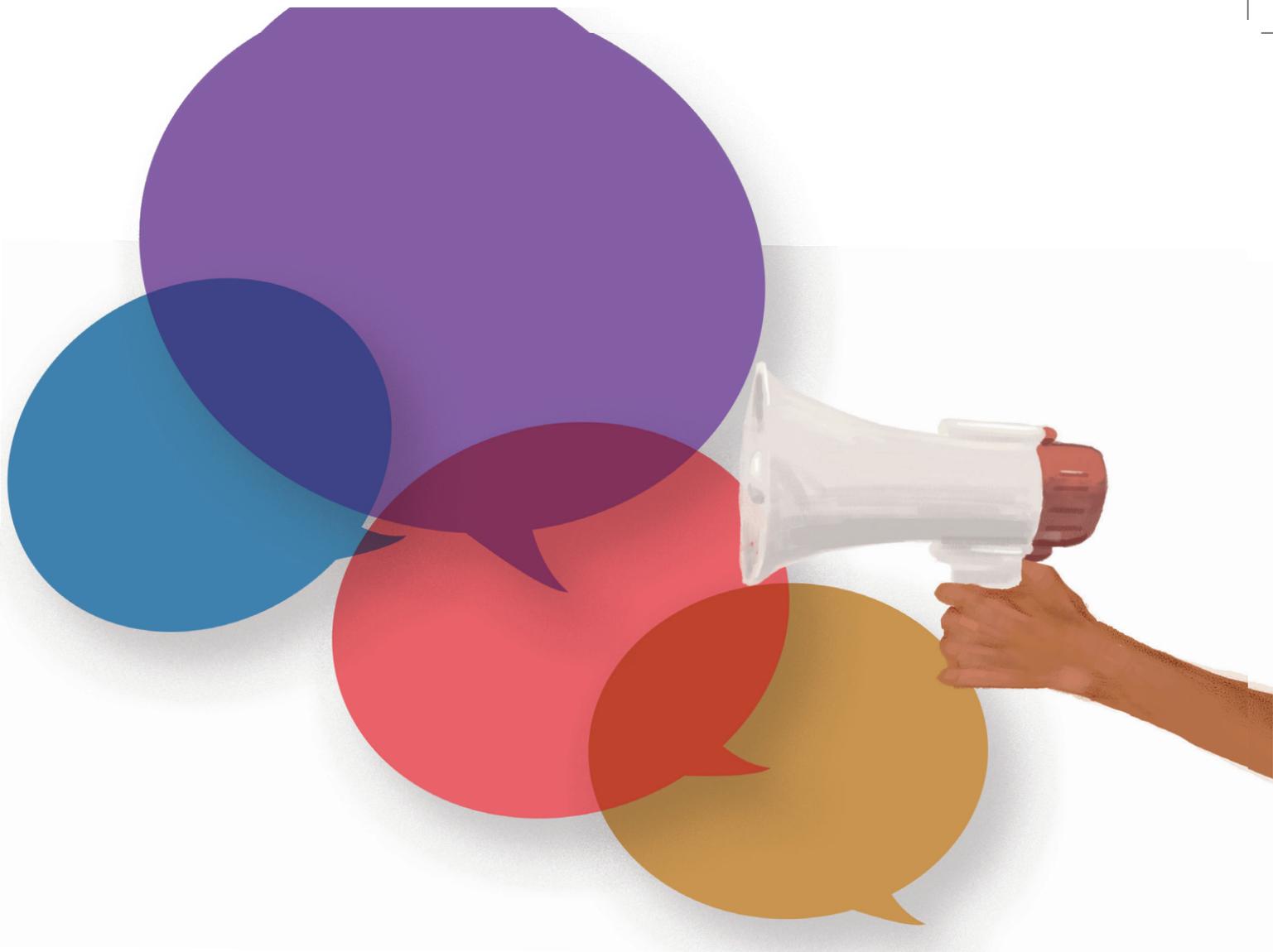
Organised civil society not only demands rights, but also develops tangible and sustainable solutions. Purchasing food for school meals from family farms is a successful example of how public services can be transformed into instruments of social inclusion, local development, and the promotion of the common good through the participation of the population.

HENRIQUE FROTA, ABONG, Brazil

Our recommendations for **action** to **politicians**



Global goals can only be achieved together. All political and civil society actors should contribute to strengthening a sustainable way of life and economy for the future. These are our recommendations for action to policymakers:



TAKING ON GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY

Economically strong and historically privileged countries should shape their policies to consider the global impact of their actions. Policy coherence is essential for this. Different policy areas of a government should not work against but with each other, pursuing a common goal. Therefore, governments should

- align their actions interdepartmentally and coherently with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advocate for the continuation of an ambitious multilateral process for the implementation of the goals;
- fulfil their responsibility for global justice and climate protection, in particular international commitments to fund development cooperation and humanitarian action and climate finance;
- expand strategic and fair partnerships with Global South and Global North countries so that common goals can be achieved in the long term.



SHAPING DEMOCRACIES IN AN INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY WAY

The Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved if all parts of society are continuously involved in political decisions at the local, national and international levels. Therefore, governments should

- expand dialogue processes and opportunities for participation – including the involvement of marginalised groups;
- create public spaces for participation.



ENSURING EQUITABLE FINANCING OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Climate and social justice, overcoming poverty and hunger, or realising human rights – none of this is possible without funding and the setting of political priorities. Structural causes of inequality cannot be addressed solely with individual measures; instead, investment and fair redistribution are necessary. Therefore, governments should

- ensure adequate and equitable funding by meeting existing funding commitments;
- support reforms of the international financial and debt architecture so that countries particularly affected by the debt crisis and tax avoidance regain financial leeway;
- implement a fairer tax policy by taxing large assets at the national and international levels.



STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY LEGALLY AND FINANCIALLY

Civil society organisations worldwide face massive challenges due to a lack of financial resources and a shrinking civic space. Civil society plays an important role in the peaceful, just and sustainable shaping of our coexistence. It is indispensable for a vibrant democracy and innovation and as a corrective means for violations of human rights. Therefore, governments should

- advocate for the protection and empowerment of civil society organisations and human rights defenders worldwide;
- consider civil society actors as allies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;
- financially support and legally protect civil society by:
 - providing adequate funding for civil society actors;
 - allowing space for criticism. Civil society actors should not fear repression on the basis of critical statements;
- reduce bureaucratic hurdles in project funding, for example, through simplified reporting.

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The **Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais** (ABONG) is the umbrella organisation of Brazilian NGOs and has been recognised as a non-profit organisation since 1991. ABONG is committed to strengthening civil society organisations dedicated to defending and promoting human rights and protecting the common good.

The **Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations** (CCRDA) is an association of legally registered and non-profit NGOs and other civil society organisations operating in Ethiopia. Founded in 1973 by 14 NGOs, the network now includes more than 400 national and international organisations with a long-term commitment in the areas of development, advocacy, humanitarian aid and human rights. CCRDA is committed to an Ethiopia without poverty, in which a strong civil society and social justice are ensured.

The **Voluntary Action Network India** (VANI) is a national network of development and volunteer organisations (VDOs) in India. With currently 624 members and a reach of around 10,000 VDOs across the country, VANI promotes volunteering and creates space for the active participation of civil society. In addition, the network supports human rights-oriented initiatives and is committed to justice, equality, and national and international solidarity.

VENRO is the Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid Organisations (NGOs). Its membership comprises around 150 German NGOs operating in the areas of private or church development co-operation, humanitarian aid and development education, public relations and lobbying activities.

