FINAL EVALUATION REPORT OF THE SDGS CATALYSTS NETWORK

Under the project: CSOs For Good Governance: Enhancing Civil Society’s contribution to governance and development processes in Trinidad & Tobago (CSOs4GoodGov)
This report is prepared as a deliverable under the European Union-funded project **CSOs For Good Governance: Enhancing Civil Society’s contribution to governance and development processes in Trinidad & Tobago (CSOs4GoodGov)**. The project was implemented from April 2017-March 2020, with the overall goal to catalyse transformation to a more environmentally sustainable, socially just, inclusive, accountable and resilient model of development and governance, through supporting the effective involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in implementation of the **2030 Sustainable Development Agenda** in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T).

The project brought together leading civil society organisations (CSOs) in T&T as the **SDGs Catalysts Network**, to support their effective participation and engagement in local implementation of the SDGs, in partnership with Government and other stakeholders; to break down traditional sectoral silos; and to demonstrate how the sector can work together through integrated thinking and action.

See more on the project here: [https://canari.org/csos4goodgov/](https://canari.org/csos4goodgov/)
The SDGs Catalysts Network is an informal network of 21 leading CSOs working across sectors in T&T to address the full range of development priorities encompassed by the 17 SDGs (e.g. poverty, environment, inequality, gender, youth, health, education, social and community development, culture and heritage etc.), with some CSOs working across several goals.

Photo: Civil society members of the SDGs Catalysts Network and the European Union Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago at the launch of the Network in Trinidad, September 2017.
Advocacy: Develop civil society positions and facilitate and promote joint advocacy to influence sectoral and national policy for implementation of the SDGs.

Action: Mobilise and encourage civil society action for implementation of the SDGs and support reporting on civil society contribution to delivery of the SDGs.

Partnership: Improve capacities for more effective partnerships among CSOs and between civil society and government and other development partners.

Participation: Ensure effective civil society engagement in the prescribed national coordination mechanism for the SDGs being led by the Government.

The objectives of the SDGs Catalyst Network were in the following areas:
Functioning of the SDGs Catalysts Network

• The SDGs Catalysts Network was convened by CANARI in 2017 (comprising 23 leading CSOs in T&T) with appropriate Terms of Reference and rules of operating and engagement. The Network was fully functional throughout the project.

• While 23 Catalysts originally accepted invitations to join the Network, 2 members were unable to continue actively engaging. These CSOs remained open to 2-way sharing of information including on any relevant opportunities for engagement and participation of civil society. By the end of the project, 21 CSOs were engaged as Catalysts with a common understanding and a shared vision of civil society roles on the SDGs; and building relationships amongst themselves and with their extended networks to explore opportunities for collaboration. Several of these CSOs started to undertake joint advocacy and action (amongst Catalysts and members of their networks).

• It was anticipated that establishment of the Network would contribute to strengthened participation and overall impact of CSOs in the national SDGs process, increase visibility of CSO contributions and highlight and reinforce their tripartite role as implementers, advocates and watchdogs. In terms of the objectives of the Network, significant progress was made in all 4 areas related to advocacy, action, partnerships and participation. Examples can be found throughout this report.

Key areas where results have been achieved include:
• Civil society started mapping and re-aligning its work with the SDGs
• Building of relationships – identifying synergies, gaps, opportunities & improvements for working together and with government
• Engaging in knowledge sharing and exchange to build awareness and capacity
• Collectively identifying civil society priorities for sustainable development
• Civil society actively collaborating for a stronger voice
• Implementing practical advocacy action
• Promoting SDGs and communicating more effectively on their work
In general, Catalysts seemed to have a good understanding of their role and what it was meant to do. They described their role as shift/change makers, facilitators and fire-starters and identified specific functions in being a voice for others, empowering change, growth and transformation in people, including via providing knowledge to promote change and helping people recognize shared interest across differences.

With respect to demonstrating their role, Catalysts noted in their organisations they shared information with staff to raise awareness, and tried to more consciously integrate SDGs as part of project design. Externally, they tried to create further awareness in their networks, and became more open to collaborative partnerships with others, advocating collectively and identifying opportunities to do so.

There is a recognised need for continued efforts in enrolling others, including effective transfer of knowledge and learnings to other organisation members/networks.

Catalysts however are more aware of and working with other Catalysts and their networks on collective advocacy on specific policy processes relevant to all CSOs (e.g. NPO Bill, Escazú Agreement), as well as SDGs outside of their traditional sectors (e.g. on climate change – developing a cross-cutting civil society report, engagement on the National Environmental Policy, gender, disabilities and sexual rights issues).

They are also implementing initiatives which reflect cross cutting and cross sectoral issues e.g. Habitat for Humanity campaign which addressed shelter and disabilities, CAISO championing of intersectoral human rights issues via advocacy for a national human rights institute (NHRI).

Some Catalysts have actively sought to align their strategic plans with the SDGs and the adoption of methods and approaches they were exposed to, for their own work e.g. participatory approaches where more members were included in meetings and involved in decision making.

Overall their actions have catalysed greater awareness of the integrated nature of the SDGs and gaps and opportunities for collaboration and collective advocacy and action. Catalysts routinely referenced the SDGs framework in communicating about their work, reported on how their work helps deliver the SDGs on various platforms (knowledge platform, social media, organisation reports, government consultations) and further mobilised their networks to do the same.
Functioning of the SDGs Catalysts Network

- Given the challenges of coming together as a CSO network (many engaging for the first time and limited collaboration/competition among CSOs historically), an extended process of building trust and relationships, as well as getting familiar with and aligning to the SDGs framework, Catalysts took on their roles well.

- The majority of the Catalysts (21/23) remained together throughout the lifetime of the project and continued to build and strengthen relationships. While participation was not equal, mainly due to differing capacities of participating CSOs, interest was consistently present. One important conclusion was that a Catalyst’s non-participation in project activities did not equate to lack of involvement in advocating for and advancing SDG implementation. A strong core group emerged, able to provide support, advice and motivation to others.

- Several factors contributed to continued engagement of the Network’s members. These included (but are not limited to): opportunities arising in the national environment/landscape, which caused or motivated CSOs to rally together; Willingness to work through discomfort and disagreement for the greater good (for the most part agreeing to disagree); Working by consensus and engaging each other in a participatory manner; CSOs organically taking up some roles based on their competencies and experience, willing to share information, knowledge of opportunities and help others. The flexibility of the Network in accepting differences in capacities and realising achievements and progress was being made in the ‘process’ and not only in the final outcomes and outputs, was key.

- Some barriers to participation in the project (as well to engaging more widely in actions in their organisations contributing to project outcomes) were noted as limited capacity in terms of time, funding and human resources. Early issues included lack of clarity on the relevance of the interventions being offered, whether it was a priority for their organisation, and fear of cultural change by their organisations. However, based on final evaluation by the Network, it appears most of these concerns were resolved and resulting trust, collaboration and partnerships built became highly valued intangible benefits.
In February 2020, CANARI facilitated a final evaluation exercise on the project, specifically, the SDGs Catalysts Network as a mechanism for civil society engagement in national development.

CANARI engaged Catalysts in an interactive outcome mapping exercise using the project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, collectively developed with Catalysts in Year 1 of the project. This approach assesses results in terms of changes in relationships and behaviour.

In plenary, Catalysts were encouraged to share feedback on the outcomes and related indicators of change (progress markers) identified in the M&E framework, noting any evidence or examples to demonstrate that the outcome had been achieved.

Summary results from outcome mapping are shared in the next few slides. More detail can be found in the report of the 10th Quarterly meeting of the SDGs Catalysts Network.

Overall, Catalysts noted increased trust, collaboration, and partnerships over the project timeframe. The value of the SDGs Catalysts Network for raising awareness, networking, and supporting relationship building was emphasised. On the basis of relationships and trust built by the Network, CSOs were beginning to advocate collectively and starting to develop other collaborative projects on the SDGs. While this represents significant progress in terms of changes to behaviour and relationships, more time is needed, including beyond the project, to properly assess any further results and impact on the ground.

Participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning using outcome mapping
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<td>CSOs applying more integrated approaches to sustainable development in their work</td>
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<td>CSOs working together to develop and implement integrated cross-sectoral collaborative approaches to implement the SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs reporting on collective civil society contribution to SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs collectively inputting on Government plans and reports on implementation of the SDGs in T&amp;T</td>
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<td>Catalysts actively engaging other CSOs to input into Government mechanism on SDGs and feeding back on the process and results</td>
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<td>CSOs aligning their own work to the SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs starting to report on how their work delivers the SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs sharing information with other CSOs on implementation of the SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs nominate representative(s) to engage in Government mechanism on SDGs</td>
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<td>CSOs identify targets across multiple SDGs where their work contributes to implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda</td>
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**Assessment of Outcome 1.1**
Key points:

- Catalysts recognised a **big shift in thinking about sustainable development and integrated ways of working**. CSOs are beginning to apply integrated approaches and examples of cross sectoral engagement are starting to emerge. Related to this, there is a growing appreciation for collective advocacy.

- Some Catalysts are actively considering **SDG alignments in project planning and design and are making SDG linkages to various programmes and projects** within their organisations. Generally, this has become more organic from the project start to now and a few CSOs have aligned or are aligning their strategic plans with the SDGs including CANARI, Veni Apwann and the Caribbean Kids and Families Therapy Organization (CKFTO).

- Continued efforts should be made by CSOs in applying more integrated approaches to sustainable development in their work, and for working together to develop and implement integrated cross-sectoral collaborative approaches to implement the SDGs.

Photos: Catalysts engaged in participatory M&E exercise using outcome mapping, March 2020. Credit: CANARI
Key achievements or progress

**Outcome 1.1**

CSOs collectively inputting on Government plans and reports on implementation of the SDGs in T&T

The development of a CSO shadow report to support knowledge sharing and advocacy on civil society priorities and recommendations for Trinidad and Tobago’s implementation of the SDGs, specifically SDG 13 Climate Action, is a clear example of integrated working and diverse CSOs coming together to collectively input on Government plans/reports on SDG implementation, and report on civil society contributions. A total of 53 CSOs (including 21 Catalysts) participated in the process of preparing this report.

The report will support the Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the 2020 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
Key achievements or progress

CSOs aligning and reporting on how their work helps deliver the SDGs

This includes reporting via the mechanisms developed under the project, and other external opportunities:

- Caribbean Civil Society SDGs Knowledge Platform
- CSOs4GoodGov Facebook
- Year 1 Annual report and reports of Quarterly meetings of the SDGs Catalysts Network
- Catalysts and members of their networks participated in government consultations for the T&T Voluntary National Review, which covers national progress on implementing the SDGs.
Outcome 2.1 Innovative approaches to civil society advocacy for strengthening Government transparency and accountability are developed and piloted in key areas, with potential for replication and scaling up.

| Love to see | CSOs across sectors collaborating on targeted advocacy to promote implementation of the SDGs in T&T’s national development agenda as a transformative and integrated agenda for people, prosperity and planet | ✔ |
| Like to see | CSOs conduct advocacy within their sector(s) to promote implementation of the SDGs in T&T as a transformative and integrated agenda for people, prosperity and planet | ✔ |
| Expect to see | CSOs communicating about the SDGs as a global transformative and integrated agenda for people, prosperity and planet | ✔ |

Key points:

- There is a growing appreciation for collective advocacy efforts from the project start to now. Examples to illustrate good practice include the NPO Bill 2019 advocacy campaign, Escazú T&T campaign, and development of the CSO shadow report to support the T&T Voluntary National Review on progress in implementing the SDGs.
- Opportunities which arose during the project e.g. advocacy on the NPO Bill 2019, contributed to shifts toward more collaborative CSO advocacy across sectors. The preparation of a CSO advocacy paper examining the legal and fiscal framework within which CSOs operate and recommendations for improvement, contributed to the readiness of CSOs to advocate successfully on the key issues raised.
- While the value of collective advocacy is recognised, further behaviour change is needed.

Assessment of Outcome 2.1
Key achievements or progress

CSOs collaborating across sectors on targeted advocacy

Catalysts and members of their CSO networks developed joint positions and conducted collective advocacy. Specific examples include:

- Development of the [CSO advocacy paper](#)
- Development of the [CSO shadow report](#) on SDG 13 to share civil society priorities and recommendations on addressing and accelerating climate action in T&T
- Collective advocacy campaigns:
  - CSO advocacy campaign on the NPO Bill 2019
  - The [Escazú T&T Campaign](#) to advocate to the T&T Government to sign and ratify the Escazú Agreement.
  - Advocacy on human rights issues and LGBTQI equality involving CAISO and others who form part of the Alliance for Justice and Diversity e.g. the [ADD ALL THREE to the Equal Opportunities Act – Campaign](#)
  - Advocacy campaign led by Habitat for Humanity and others to make housing/land more accessible for vulnerable populations - the disabled, those living with HIV & AIDS and the LGBTQI communities in T&T
Key achievements or progress

CSOs communicating on the SDGs and conducting advocacy within their sector(s) to promote implementation of the SDGs in T&T

3 notable advocacy actions funded under the CSOs4GoodGov small grants mechanism are highlighted below:

1. Habitat for Humanity Trinidad and Tobago: “A Public Awareness Campaign to promote Hurricane Resilient Housing Practices and Healthy Housing Habits”. Seven workshops were held for vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities), 72 radio advertisements, 4253 reached through social media, 15 disability groups and 217 persons directly engaged.

2. CKFTO: Disabilities Awareness Campaign with CKFTO Count Me In Puppet Program. During a six-month period in 2019, CKFTO’s Count Me In® puppet show was performed 58 times at 44 schools across T&T for 7,630 viewers.

3. Agriculture Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT): A GREENER TOMORROW – The Creation a Sustainable Agricultural Sector Through Education, Training and Sensitization of Farmers and Consumers to promote and encourage sustainable agricultural practices. 121 farmers were trained in 5 workshops.

Photos:
1. Habitat for Humanity awareness campaign materials. Credit: Habitat Trinidad & Tobago
2. CKFTO puppet used as part of the Count Me In Campaign focused on disabilities awareness
3. ASTT conducting awareness raising and training with local farmers as part of their advocacy action project
Outcome 3.1 Leading CSOs across sectors in T&T are individually stronger, more effectively networked and collaborating with each other, government and the private sector to advocate for and deliver sustainable development results under the SDGs.

| Love to see | • CSOs supporting each other to enhance leadership, governance, and communications and advocacy capacities through peer learning and exchange and serving as peer coaches and mentors | Strongly Agree |
| Like to see | • CSOs engaging in capacity building initiatives and applying learning to address priorities to enhance their leadership, governance, and communications and advocacy capacities |  |
| Expect to see | • CSOs analysing their priorities to strengthen their organisation’s leadership, governance, and communications and advocacy capacities |  |

Key points:

• CSOs engaged in several planned capacity building actions under the project such as the SHIFT! Leadership Training, Veni Partaje specialist clinics and mentoring sessions, and Advocacy training workshop. Many Catalysts identified positive change experienced in the areas of Leadership and Governance; but felt more work needed to be done in Communications and Advocacy.

• Planned interventions were complemented by opportunities for practical capacity building and application of learning during the project.

• CSOs supported each other to enhance capacities in key areas through the project and linked initiatives. Generally, CSOs with stronger competencies in certain areas were very willing to help others – e.g. by providing advice/tips, sharing expertise in subject areas, mentorship and hands-on engagement.

Assessment of Outcome 3.1
Key achievements or progress

CSOs engaging in capacity building initiatives and applying learning; and supporting each other to enhance leadership, governance, and communications and advocacy capacities through peer learning and exchange and serving as peer coaches and mentors.

Apart from planned capacity building initiative under the project, there were opportunities for practical capacity building and application of learning through:

- planning, designing and implementing small grant advocacy action projects;
- active participation in developing joint positions and conducting collective advocacy e.g. development of the CSO advocacy paper and NPO Bill campaign; and development the CSO shadow report on SDG 13;
- observing or being engaged by other Catalysts/CSOs demonstrating good practices and process.
Outcome 4.1 All CSOs in T&T benefit from a coherent legal, fiscal and funding framework that supports them to deliver and be accountable for results that contribute to national development and good governance.

| Love to see | ✓ | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| CSOs collectively advocating to the Government and key partners (private sector, donors and technical agencies) for adoption of an enabling legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T |

| Like to see | ✓ | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| CSOs working together to inform development of recommendations for an enabling legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T |
| CSOs raising awareness of other CSOs in their sector(s) and networks on needs for an enabling legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T |

| Expect to see | ✓ | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| CSOs identifying areas where the legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T needs to be made more enabling |

Key points:

- The development of the CSO Advocacy Paper was a key factor in enhancing CSOs’ readiness to advocate effectively and in a coherent and cohesive manner.
- CSOs including Catalysts were able to grasp an opportunity that arose, and actively implemented a collective advocacy campaign on the NPO Bill 2019, which highlighted key issues for addressing an enabling legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T.

Assessment of Outcome 4.1
Key achievements or progress

CSOs working together to inform development of recommendations and collectively advocating to the Government and key partners for adoption of an enabling legal, fiscal and funding framework for CSOs in T&T.

Notable actions here include:

- Development of the CSO advocacy paper with recommendations
- Collective CSO advocacy on the NPO Bill 2019; 91 CSOs participated in the process
- Formation of the Civil Society Alliance: Laws for Us comprised of key CSOs with interest in continuing to advocate and communicate with CSOs in T&T on the process moving forward on the NPO Act of 2019 and other legislation for CSOs.
Key events & milestones in the life of the SDGs Catalysts Network

Catalysts’ participation in several key activities (both planned under the project and other opportunistic events), contributed to their overall growth over the project timeframe.

These are documented in a timeline in the next few slides, with relevant reports linked for reference.

Photo: Members of the SDGs Catalysts Network at their final Quarterly meeting in March 2020. Credit: CANARI.
Establishing the SDGs Catalysts Network – June-August 2017

Launch of SDGs Catalysts Network – Sept 2017

1st Quarterly Meeting – Dec 7th 2017

2nd Quarterly Meeting – Feb 16th 2018

National Civil Society Advocacy workshop – March 22-23, 2018

CSOs4GoodGov project kick off & mobilising – March-May 2017

CSO Advocacy case studies published – April 2018
THE SDGs CATALYSTS NETWORK: KEY EVENTS & MILESTONES

CLICK EACH BUTTON FOR MORE INFORMATION & RELATED REPORTS ON ITEMS BELOW

3rd Quarterly Meeting & 1st annual project M&E survey of Catalysts – June 6, 2018

4th Quarterly Meeting – September 28, 2018

Creation of CSOs4GoodGov Facebook page – July-August 2018

Year 1 Annual report published – October-December 2018

Writeshop & development of joint CSO statement issued during the UN HLPF – July 9, 2018

6th Quarterly Meeting & 1st M&E on capacity building – March 13, 2019

5th Quarterly Meeting – December 6, 2018
THE SDGs CATALYSTS NETWORK: KEY EVENTS & MILESTONES

CLICK EACH BUTTON FOR MORE INFORMATION & RELATED REPORTS ON ITEMS BELOW

14. Go-live & launch of the Caribbean Civil Society SDGs Knowledge Platform – April-July 2019

15. Catalysts engage in NPO Bill Advocacy campaign – March-April 2019

16. 7th Quarterly Meeting & 2nd M&E exercise on capacity building – May 28, 2019

17. 8th Quarterly Meeting & 2nd annual project M&E exercise, September 28, 2018

18. 9th Quarterly Meeting & CSO Shadow report writeshop – December 3, 2019

19. 10th final Quarterly Meeting – March, 2020

20. Major publications produced - CSO shadow report to support the T&T VNR, and CSO Advocacy toolkit – March 2020
Assessing most significant change for Catalysts

Looking back over the 3 years of the CSOs4GoodGov project, Catalysts assessed the most significant change for them, their CSO or civil society in T&T because of the project.

These Most Significant Changes noted by Catalysts related to:

**Awareness & knowledge sharing:**
- Increased awareness of the SDGs and opportunities for reporting and knowledge sharing on CSO contributions to national development e.g. through platforms such as the Caribbean Civil Society SDGs Knowledge Platform.
- Exposure to what other Catalysts/CSOs are doing was valuable in supporting each other and ensuring especially longer standing CSOs did not stagnate or remain limited in their knowledge and approaches.

**Action:**
- Increased awareness of opportunities for action, including via collaborative efforts
- Enhanced access to resources to support action – advice, funds, networks to support implementation
- Increased importance placed on considering SDG linkages in planning, design and evaluation projects and initiatives

**Partnerships and collaboration:**
- Increase in opportunity for partnership and collaboration, including through increase in dialogue and connections with representatives of other CSOs
- Active building of trust through consistent engagement as a network
- More practical demonstration of collaboration among CSOs
- Networking opportunities and support within the Network on best practices and good governance
- Change from more adversarial stance to one of more strategic collaboration
Assessing most significant change for Catalysts

Looking back over the 3 years of the CSOs4GoodGov project, Catalysts assessed the most significant change for them, their CSO or civil society in T&T because of the project.

These Most Significant Changes noted by Catalysts related to:

**Participation:**
- Increased Government involvement of CSOs in public sector work, and increased communication, especially by the Ministry of Planning and Development

**Advocacy:**
- Better and more strategic advocacy as a group
- Changes in the external environment and civil society sector in general — engagement in project activities created a lot of exposure for Catalysts, awareness of opportunities for joint advocacy and demonstrated there is strength in numbers
- Greater impact of collaborative civil society mobilisation and advocacy on legislation passed by the Parliament and its approach to developing legislation, with new engagement of structural mechanisms for stakeholder input into legislation and policy.
Most Significant Change: Catalyst Voices

“The most significant aspect of the project would be the networking that was established between the NGOs. All the NGOs worked together to help each other in best practices and good governance. There have also been changes at an institutional level. The SDGs inform planning and decision making; our advocacy program has been revised, where SDG’s have been incorporated into the message of reducing inequality for persons with disabilities and fostering inclusion for all.” ~ Caribbean Kids and Families Therapy Organization (CKFTO)

“The most significant change was our ability to train staff of the Ministry of Housing to establish a commitment to gender responsive budgeting (GRB), and to set in train the first pilot implementation of GRB in Trinidad and Tobago. The CSOs for Good Governance project was key to providing the resources to undertake the training and to establish a partnership with the Ministry.” ~ University of the West Indies Institute for Gender and Development Studies (UWI-IGDS)

“As the representative for the Trinidad & Tobago Transparency Institute, the most significant change for me has been the increase in dialogue and connections with representatives of other CSOs, and the realisation that many of our interests are not mutually exclusive but, in fact, intersect, leading to collaboration on projects; the growing awareness that programs and projects should be more aligned with the SDGs.” ~ Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute (TTTI)

“I think that the most significant change in the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT) was that we became a member of the SDGs Catalyst Network and benefitted from the Advocacy Action (Small Grants) Facility. With funds and advice from the Network members, we significantly advanced our policy of partnership and co-operation with many more CSOs, the EU, Arthur Lok Jack International School of Business, Couva/ Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce and Government departments such as the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Board, WASA Adopt A River programme, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Works and Ministry of Community Development, among others. This significant change in our new policy of increased partnership and cooperation will now be a fundamental component of all future programmes of the ASTT.” ~ Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT)

“We’ve become a bit more conscious of the SDGs, taking them into consideration when planning projects. We’ve also noticed a shift in donor mindsets to have the SDGs incorporated into project plans. Being a part of the Catalysts group has kept us in the know. We have now incorporated the SDGs into our planning sessions and are utilising them for evaluations for businesses receiving loan funding. The SDGs have allowed us to rethink how we as an organisation are making an impact.” ~ Youth Business Trinidad and Tobago (YBTT)

“What Catalysts were able to capitalise on from networking is big! Collaboration was becoming very normal, and more comfortable.” ~ Veni Apwann
Lessons & recommendations

- The SDGs Catalysts Network has shown significant potential to be used as a model for CSO engagement in development and policy processes.

- Some key reflections and lessons, and recommendations relevant to the sustainability of the Network, as well as usefulness as a model, are shared next.

Photo: Relationship circle drawn by members of the SDGs Catalysts Network at the Launch of the Network, September 2017. Credit: CANARI.
Lessons

• The level of CSO engagement is often dependent on the capacity of CSOs involved, including capacities shaped by time and availability of human and financial resources.

• An early focus on relationship building and trust amongst CSOs/Catalysts and emphasizing the value of networking, was critical in supporting later collective advocacy efforts for example, during the NPO Bill advocacy campaign 2019. A significant investment in time and effort is needed for this.

• Changes are more evident at an individual level, but continued and perhaps more nuanced efforts are needed to fully enrol Catalysts at organisational level. Communicating the ‘stories’ of positive change and impact from the project can help get others on board with the movement.

• The model of using a network of leading Catalysts to connect to many networks was especially important for information sharing, building wide awareness of opportunities and a significant level of trust to be able to collaborate effectively.

• In terms of advocacy, CSOs must be prepared to engage when real opportunities present themselves; this requires some flexibility to take advantage of these opportunities and not be constrained by a project workplan or log frame.

• CSO readiness for advocacy is also crucial. CSOs must continue to scan the environment; and build capacity and expertise in various areas, including through practical experiences, wide collaboration and consultation, knowledge sharing and research and documenting positions on key issues and recommendations, so as to be able to capitalise on/leverage opportunities for engaging or advocating when they arise. For example, the readiness of the CSO Advocacy Paper meant CSOs were ready to input and have dialogue with government once the opportunity presented itself.

• Engaging in collective advocacy provides opportunities for increased access to resources and expertise, voice and visibility of CSOs and the potential to increase reach, as well as credibility of the sector, including in the eyes of government.

• Building in CSO accountability measures, for example, required reporting on small grants actions, is critical for transparency and to support shared learning across the project.

• More integrated working across sectors can add depth to work being done by CSOs in their own sectors. For example, CSOs working in diverse sectors contributing to analysis of climate change as a cross-cutting development issue.
Recommendations

For overall sustainability of the SDGs Catalysts Network:

- Make efforts to ensure that results and impacts (including those outside of the project) have been captured and are being effectively communicated.
- Review the strategy for engaging the Government and means for effectively promoting civil society inputs in national monitoring and reporting of progress against the SDGs (especially given lack of a clear government mechanism for wide engagement on SDGs). The SDG 13 CSO shadow report (and process for development) should be promoted and other opportunities to do shadow/spotlight reports explored, building on relationships fostered by the Network.
- Continue to review effective strategies and tools for advocacy and leverage existing opportunities for policy advocacy, including around improving the legal and fiscal framework for CSOs in T&T.
- Continued sharing of information on contributions of civil society to national governance and development including via the existing Caribbean Civil Society SDGs Knowledge Platform as a main mechanism; and via engagement in key meetings such as the VNR.
- Explore opportunities for sustainability of the knowledge platform itself, including additional funding and interest by Catalysts to assist with curating content, also as a means of increasing ownership and good governance of the platform. Additionally, awareness and information sharing should be strengthened toward better supporting CSOs to submit their work.
- Explore mechanisms for continued communication, coordination and collaboration beyond the project, for example, informal meetings/forum, exploring opportunities to work together via new proposals for projects or collective advocacy, or leveraging other existing groups that have formed such as the CSO Alliance Laws for Us.
- Continue to promote and facilitate opportunities to enrol additional CSOs in aligning to SDGs (role of Catalysts).
Recommendations

With respect to the SDGs Catalysts Network as a model:

*Based on experiences of the Network*

- Invest time in building relationships and trust, and creating a common vision.
- Strong leadership and coordination is required but revise expectations that everyone will be working at the same level or capacity; assess and address needs and expectations early, including via structured mechanisms such as (self) assessments, developing relevant Terms of Reference, and basic criteria for selection and participation.
- Be flexible – the process of building effective CSO networks for collaboration and engagement, is as important as the outcome. As much as is reasonable, meet people where they are and provide support where needed. Consistently make efforts to check-in as priorities and capacities change over time.
- Emphasize use of participatory approaches, action learning and capacity building (especially learning by doing) in all aspects – planning, communicating, reporting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Build in measures for transparency and accountability – e.g. sharing information early, reporting on small grants actions including via peer sharing.
- Develop a framework for monitoring and evaluation that allows capturing of lessons, experiences and best practices beyond the log-frame e.g. incorporating complementary approaches to monitoring such as outcome mapping and most significant change methods.
- Be on the look out for synergies and opportunities to collaborate, coordinate and manage resources more effectively.
- Identify high capacity CSOs who can act as mentors and coaches.
- Actively seek to build relationships and engage with government and other key development partners; focus on fact-based approaches and work together to present cohesive information and arguments.
- Document results and learning and share widely.
For more information:

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- Visit CANARI’s website to learn more about the project and other related work that we do: www.canari.org

- Visit the SDGs Knowledge Platform to see examples of the SDGs Catalysts Network’s contribution to delivering the SDGs in Trinidad & Tobago: https://hub.canari.org/sdg/