

PRESS RELEASE

Civil Society takes the lead on action for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)!

Launch of the SDGs Catalysts Network in Trinidad & Tobago

Port of Spain, October 9, 2017 - Civil society in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) has begun to position itself and stands ready to actively support national development with the launch of the SDGs Catalysts Network in September 2017, under the European Union-funded project 'CSOs for Good Governance: Enhancing civil society's contribution to governance and development processes in Trinidad and Tobago'(CSOs4GoodGov).



Civil society members, the EU Ambassador and Ministry of Planning and Development representatives at the launch of the SDGs Catalysts Network

The CSOs4GoodGov project is spearheaded by a consortium¹ of seven leading civil society organisations (CSOs) in Trinidad and Tobago - Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), Environment Tobago (ET), Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, United Way Trinidad and Tobago (UWTT) (which is project lead), University of the West Indies-Institute for Gender and Development Studies (UWI-IGDS), Veni Apwann (VA) and Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD).

The main objective of the project is enhancing civil society's contribution to governance and development processes in T&T and specifically, to support the effective involvement of CSOs in national implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the heart of the effort to do this, the project consortium convened and officially launched the SDGs Catalysts Network on Wednesday September 20, 2017. CANARI is serving as convener and coordinating activities of the Network under the CSOs4GoodGov project.

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The launch marks the beginning of a collaborative three-year journey to catalyse action and amplify civil society voice in national development and governance processes. It saw the coming together of 20 'Catalysts' as leading CSOs working across sectors in T&T to address the full range of development priorities encompassed by the 17 SDGs – a clear message of civil society's interest, eagerness and readiness to contribute and engage in this area.

The launch was also attended and supported by the EU delegation (project sponsor) and the Ministry of Planning & Development. Ambassador of the European Union to T&T, H.E. Arend Biesebroek noted the importance of an enabling environment for civil society to play an effective role. He saw the project and the process as "an opportunity to create new mechanisms" as we work together in our bid to contribute towards national development. Mr. Peter Mitchell, Assistant Director in the Socio-Economic Policy Planning Division of the Ministry of Planning and Development helped to set the national context related to the national development strategy - Vision 2030 - and noted that the process for implementation will continue to involve civil society.

In the workshop that followed, Catalysts were engaged in exciting discussions and interactive exercises to: deepen their understanding of civil society roles on the SDGs; spread awareness on civil society initiatives aligned to various SDGs; and pinpoint needs, gaps, synergies and opportunities for strengthening relationships. Implicit was the recognition that civil society has already been working at the front-lines of delivering the SDGs and can support government as implementers, advocates and watchdogs. Catalysts noted the importance of aligning their work to the SDGs as a necessary strategy to "position civil society as a key player in development" and agreed on the immense value of collaborating "to enable more reach and bigger voice," as well as the importance of not focusing on "being the face of the cause" but instead "profiling messages over individual organisations."

As homework, Catalysts were asked to identify at least one other CSO to target for relationship building in the coming months and work will begin on a joint communication and advocacy strategy to ensure agreed priorities and key messages are effectively communicated in the national development process. Overall there was a sense that the collective working approach will, in itself, be an important capacity building action and the outcome will be that the CSO sector develops into a model for collaboration, engagement and innovative advocacy, with the SDGs as the foundation.

About the CSOs4GoodGov project: For more information see <https://csosforgoodgov.org/>

About the SDGs Catalysts Network: For more information see <http://www.canari.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/canari-csos4goodgov-project-summary.pdf>

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