



# Leverage Points for Success

## The Role of the Social Sector in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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### > BACKGROUND

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated 169 targets present an unprecedented opportunity for the global community to embrace the leveraging power of the social sector to deliver on-the-ground results.

Already, local organizations are delivering most of the social sector services in their countries and are the conduit to the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. For this reason, the social sector must continue to be included in the planning, execution and monitoring of the SDGs. The inclusion of civil society in the development of the SDGs offers the global community an opportunity to expand these contributions even further to achieve the impact we collectively imagine.

Counterpart International sees the “social sector” -- or what others refer to as civil society, the independent sector or the nonprofit sector – as the critical third leg of the stool of a strong and stable society. It is this sector, made up of citizens, that comes together to achieve what the public or private sectors are not set up to do – or in some cases are unable to do.

The social sector is indeed an army of skilled workers. Our partners at Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies note that 75 percent of the sector is already delivering real services in communities around the world. And, from research in 13 countries, this sector makes up 7 percent of the workforce.

And yet, the sector’s potential is limited by a lack of resources and ever-increasing government restrictions. In their report, *The State of Civil Society 2015*, our colleagues at CIVICUS note that, “In 2014, there were serious threats to civic freedoms in at least 96 countries around the world.” This includes restrictions on basic human rights and the ability to work with international nonprofits.

Ironically, countries signing on to the SDGs are at the same time reducing the ability of the social sector to operate in their countries. This reality only underscores the need to do all we can to support, through comprehensive capacity building, private and public partnerships and global collaboratives, the ability of the social sector to fully participate in delivering SDG goals.

### > LEVERAGE POINTS FOR SUCCESS

The global community needs the social sector – in every country -- fully equipped and fully engaged if we are going to be successful in delivering on the SDG agenda. Private and public investors need to embrace and employ best practices in partner-building and collaborative approaches with the social sector. Specifically, Counterpart sees three key leverage points for SDG implementation success.



### **1. Support full engagement of on-the-ground service providers in implementation, resource allocation and monitoring.**

The social sector needs to be included in the implementation discussions slated to begin in 2016. Local organizations should participate in national planning, receive appropriate levels of resource allocations to deliver local services and receive support to be the “eyes and ears” of community SDG monitoring. Engaging governments in recognizing that the local voice is essential to co-creating implementation success will be crucial moving forward.

### **2. Invest in capacity-building for sustained impact and success.**

Governments, donors and investors and international nongovernment organizations will achieve the SDGs only with the collaboration of on-the-ground partners who live and work in the very communities where lasting change needs to occur. To make change stick, and to lift up the ability of local partners to solve local problems, a key leverage point toward success will be investing in the capacity of local partners to learn problem-solving capabilities that become embedded in their community and to embrace the skills needed to be architects of change. Counterpart maintains that by earmarking a portion of social investment toward capacity building (versus 100 percent to project costs), investors will receive what we call a “capacity dividend” that ensures success well beyond the immediate goals of a particular project.

### **3. Build networks and collaboratives.**

The profound needs addressed in the SDGs point to challenges that know no boundary. As individual nations begin to develop implementation plans in collaboration with the social sector, a more robust and intentional effort to share knowledge and strategies across boundaries and across specific sectors needs to be embraced. By building social sector networks and developing learning collaboratives that are sector agnostic, the global community will have a better chance of “lifting all boats” in mutual learning and innovation-sharing that will contribute to achieving the SDGs.

## **> COUNTERPART’S DISTINCTION**

Fifty years ago our founders, Betty Bryant Silverstein and Father Stan Hosie, embraced a clear and distinct approach to their efforts to support people living in the tiny islands of the South Pacific. They believed that local people are best able to solve local problems. This belief is still core to Counterpart’s approach and it is why capacity building is at the center of everything we do. We believe in the courage and determination of people to drive their own destinies. And we equip individuals, organizations and communities – our counterparts – to become solution creators in their own families, communities, regions and countries. Learn more at [www.counterpart.org](http://www.counterpart.org).