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Centre for Policy Futures

Mapping the SDG Ecosystem of Civil Society Organisations in Queensland

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Policy Recommendation

Governments should prioritise funding, capacity-building, and co-governance mechanisms that empower CSOs to contribute to SDG debates and local implementation.

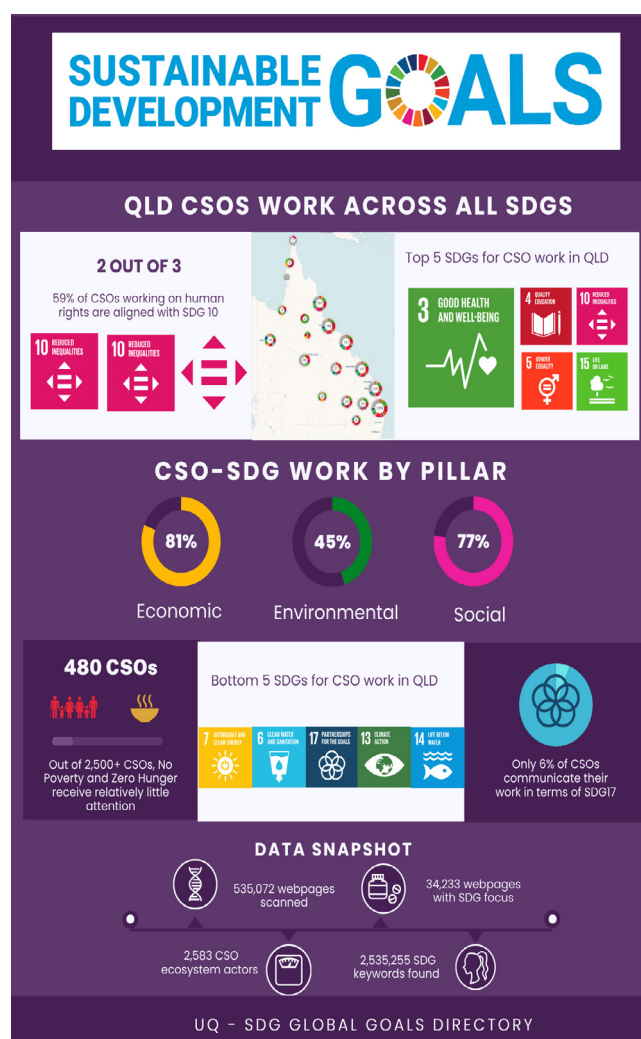### Role of Civil Society Organisations in Localising the SDGs

Localising the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a growing priority globally and in Australia, with civil society organisations (CSOs) - including not-for-profits, charities, social enterprises, and advocacy coalitions - central to this effort. They operate across diverse domains such as health, housing, education, poverty alleviation, gender equity, food security, and climate action, and contribute significantly to addressing social, economic, and environmental inequalities. Acting as crucial intermediaries between communities and government, CSOs are also often at the frontline of delivering rights-based solutions to vulnerable populations.

Their localised knowledge and grassroots engagement make them essential partners in monitoring and advancing SDG implementation, especially in areas where national progress is lagging. Despite their importance, Australia lacks systematic, high-quality national data on CSO activities and impacts, particularly in relation to human rights-based approaches and SDG implementation.

This data gap hinders the potential for effective policy development and limits the capacity of governments and civil society to coordinate sustainability efforts.

Why this study?

This study seeks to address this gap by mapping the SDG ecosystem of CSOs in Queensland. Using data from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), the study identifies 5,868 registered charities in Queensland and analyses their publicly available information using AI-assisted digital tools. In particular, it focuses on organisations classified as 'promoting or protecting human rights,' examining how their actions align with the SDG framework. This digital mapping provides a baseline for understanding which SDGs are most and least addressed, how they are distributed geographically across Queensland, and the extent to which CSOs are engaging with multiple and interconnected goals.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

QLD CSOS WORK ACROSS ALL SDGS

2 OUT OF 3
59% of CSOs working on human rights are aligned with SDG 10

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Top 5 SDGs for CSO work in QLD
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
5 GENDER EQUALITY
15 LIFE ON LAND

CSO-SDG WORK BY PILLAR
81% Economic
45% Environmental
77% Social

480 CSOs
Out of 2,500+ CSOs, No Poverty and Zero Hunger receive relatively little attention

Bottom 5 SDGs for CSO work in QLD
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER

Only 6% of CSOs communicate their work in terms of SDG17

DATA SNAPSHOT
535,072 webpages scanned
34,233 webpages with SDG focus
2,583 CSO ecosystem actors
2,535,255 SDG keywords found

UQ - SDG GLOBAL GOALS DIRECTORY

Findings

Key findings indicate that while CSOs are highly active in areas related to SDG3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), SDG4 (Quality Education), and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), there is significantly less engagement with SDG1 (No Poverty), SDG2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and with environmental SDGs more widely. The SDG ecosystem for SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals is also notably underdeveloped, despite CSO participation being vital to progress the agenda. Furthermore, although CSOs contribute substantially to human rights-based outcomes, particularly through efforts to reduce inequality and improve access to essential services, the interconnected nature of the SDG framework is not well understood or communicated within the sector.

This suggests a need for improved integration of rights-based and systems-based approaches in civil society reporting and impact measurement.

Innovative Approach

The project's methodological innovation lies in its digital mapping approach, inspired by Canada's SDG Movement Map. CSOs are often at the forefront of societal transformation, driving public engagement, community action, and values change. In the digital era, CSOs also leverage online platforms, social media, and digital tools to collaborate, connect stakeholders, and mobilise around complex sustainability challenges, without waiting for national policy shifts. The 'pilot' SDG Data Observatory for

Queensland developed at the Centre for Policy Futures – the basis for this report - represents the first of its kind in Australia. It enhances the visibility of CSO contributions to sustainable development, offers a collaborative platform for data sharing and policy dialogue, and strengthens the capacity of civil society to report on and scale up their sustainability impacts. Importantly, it also supports government and sectoral efforts to localise the SDGs by identifying gaps, fostering partnerships, and improving policy coherence.

The methodology contributes to national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda and lays the foundation for future investment in participatory digital infrastructures that support sustainability governance, human rights, and inclusive development. It should be expanded nationally.

Empowering Civil Society through SDG Mapping: Key Insights and Recommendations

Key Messages for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Mapping over 5,000 Queensland CSOs reveals important opportunities:

- Over 2,500 CSOs are already contributing to SDGs, yet very few explicitly refer to the SDGs in public communications. *Opportunity*: CSOs can use the SDG framework to better articulate their impact, attract support, and connect local action with global agendas.

- At least 49 CSOs actively engage with human rights and SDGs, often through work on inequality. Many more likely contribute to rights-based outcomes, but current data fails to capture this. *Opportunity*: SDGs can help CSOs identify, track, and prioritise human rights-related work.

- Integrated SDG mapping can reveal gaps and synergies, e.g., how work on health, poverty, or food systems also contributes to environmental goals like climate action. *Opportunity*: Use SDG tools to build stronger cross-sectoral **links and deepen sustainability outcomes.**

Key Messages for Governments

Scaling-up an SDG Movement Map is a crucial step towards improving engagement between civil society and government on SDG implementation in Australia.

To fully localise the SDG Agenda and promote inclusive, community-led sustainability action, requires governments to:

- *Recognise* CSOs as vital SDG actors and enhance their participation in planning, financing, and evaluating local sustainability efforts.

- *Invest* in data systems that allow for local, spatial, and disaggregated data collection - ensuring no communities are left behind in digital policymaking.

- *Support* information-sharing platforms that connect local governments, researchers, and CSOs to exchange insights and co-develop locally relevant solutions.

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