

Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA)

In Special NGO Consultative Status to ECOSOC since 2013

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Report to the 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on CVSA's Contributions to the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development June 16, 2017

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the central platform within the United Nations system for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all 193 Heads of State and Governments in September 2015

Opening Statement

This is a report on the progress of CVSA's all-volunteer, nation-wide Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the United States, launched in February 2016. Our focus this year has been to continue to mobilize leaders of nonprofit, community organizations, faith-based congregations, as well as college administrators, teachers and students, civic and youth organizations and high school teachers, for the implementation of the SDGs in the United States. We do this through speaking engagements, presentations and workshops building both awareness of the 2030 Agenda and its importance, and assisting groups in developing plans of action for their implementation of the SDGs.

We have developed an "SDG Organizer's Toolkit," which we distribute to organizations on the front lines of addressing conditions of poverty, hunger, homelessness, unemployment, lack of access to health care and legal justice, environmental destruction and more in all regions of the United States, as well as to teachers and students, to build their own "Take Ownership of the 2030 SDGs" campaign in their communities and to bring the Agenda to their local elected officials while expressing their interest in participating in the process of planning and implementing the Agenda in the United States.

CVSA leadership is committed to building a groundswell of public interest, participation and demand for the implementation of the 2030 SDGs in the United States, from the community level up. Our resolve to continue and expand this entirely volunteer, grassroots effort has grown over the last year as we find: a) the continued absolute public silence on the part of the U.S.

government and mainstream media on the SDGs; b) most discussions among the U.S.-based corporations that endorse the SDGs are directed at development projects abroad, not sustainable development in the United States and not with the involvement of low-income and other disenfranchised people in the decision-making; c) the people of the United States, including those involved in work for social, economic and environmental justice, are still largely unaware of the existence or content of the historic global agreement to “Transform Our World” with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is despite the rise in civic involvement and grassroots activism in the United States over the last year, and despite the fact that implementation of the 2030 Goals would thoroughly address all of the concerns and demands being expressed by the people of the United States about their economic and social problems; and d) Finally, we are encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive response we have received from those who have heard our presentations and want to participate in expanding the campaign.

Our report focuses on building Policy and Enabling Environment for the 2030 Agenda in the United States, to “create ownership of the SDGs” and to inspire government to take steps to inform and build engagement of all stakeholders in the implementation of the Goals and targets in the United States, and to act in solidarity with all other nations struggling to implement the Goals.

Summary

CVSA has been leading a nationwide Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in the United States since February of 2016. This campaign has engaged community-based volunteer organizations, church congregations, college students and others interested in activities to promote the SDGs at the community level and seeking to participate in the planning that every level of government needed for the successful implementation of the Goals.

We began the campaign by training CVSA volunteers in how to use a simple pitch (or narrative) for calling nonprofit organizations, workers’ associations, environmental justice groups, faith-based organizations and communities, local businesses, and many more groups to inform them of the United States’s agreement to implement the SDGs and to schedule presentations to these organizations’ staff, volunteers, and supporters.

The goal of CVSA’s Community Education Campaign is to mobilize the

thousands of committed people here in the United States who are already involved in building a more just world through their own community and volunteer work, to take up these Sustainable Development Goals as their own and leverage the power of a unified global movement to produce real change in the United States through the implementation of the Agenda.

For this purpose, CVSA has developed an SDG Organizer’s “Take Ownership of the SDGs” Toolkit designed for use by leaders within community organizations to hold discussions with their staff, volunteers and members of their community on how their organizations can, 1) make the SDGs known in their community and, 2) determine what actions they will take as a group or in alliance with others to inform local and state government officials that communities in the United States urgently need these Goals carried out. They will inform officials that they expect to have a voice and be consulted in the planning and implementation of the SDGs.

The Toolkit includes a guide for organizing workshops; a flyer to promote the workshop; a power-point presentation and narrative that describes what the 2030 Agenda is, how and by whom it was written, the current status of the United States toward achieving the Agenda, and actions that groups and individuals can take to promote and achieve the Agenda; a copy of CVSA’s 2016 Report to the HLPF; a poster they can reproduce with the 17 Goals, and a copy of the official 35-page “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” document.

Additional tools, such as fact sheets relevant to each of the 17 Goals, other educational material, sample letters, phone agendas to local elected officials, will be added to the Toolkit by CVSA volunteers as they are developed and sent to everyone involved in the campaign. The Toolkit makes it possible for community leaders to reproduce these workshops in their own community with their various constituencies, and expand this nationwide Community Education Campaign from the ground up.

Good Practices/ Arm’s Length Organizing Examples

Three examples of how CVSA’s Presentations and distribution of the CVSA SDG Organizer’s Toolkit have generated local action for the implementation of the SDGs in the U.S.:

A) In January 2017, CVSA organizers were invited to Camphill Village USA in

Copake, NY to make a presentation about our Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the 2030 SDGs to the members of the Camphill Village USA community at their monthly Community Forum chaired by one of their members, Ted Todd. This is one of 17 Camphill communities in North America, part of a larger international social movement of over 100 communities where adults with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and social disadvantage live in supported communities to reach their potential.

After the presentation, the seven-person steering group of the Community Forum reported to CVSA that the Forum has taken on the SDGs as a project with a focus on Goal 4 and Goal 8. They are using the CVSA SDG Organizer's Toolkit and consulting with CVSA organizers on their plans to promote the 17 Goals to the larger community Camphill is located in, in Copake, New York, and engage organizations in their area by offering to teach Camphill's successful methods and practices of providing decent and productive employment for everyone and of providing education and life-long learning opportunities. CVSA shared this example with CVSA's constituency across the U.S. through our quarterly membership newsletter *ITEMS*.

B) Coordinator of the Yes We Can Peace Builders/Campaign Nonviolence-Nonviolent Cities Project in Morro Bay, California, founded by Ruth Ann Angus who is also a member of CVSA's Executive Committee, is utilizing the CVSA Toolkit to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to the Central Coast Communities of California. Her first presentation was to a local Catholic church, where one of the members then invited her to the Morro Bay Lions Club where she held her second presentation. The Lion's Club of Morro Bay committed to publicize the SDGs and raise them to their local elected officials. Angus is scheduled to speak next to an interfaith group in Cambria, California. Of all the people she has spoken to so far, only one person previously knew of the existence of the 2030 Agenda. Angus plans to continue and expand this promotional campaign in her community until all of Morro Bay, and groups throughout the central coast region, know about the 2030 Agenda and bring their desire for the Goals to be implemented to their local elected officials. The Yes We Can Peace Builders/Campaign Nonviolence-Nonviolent Cities was formed to address issues of poverty, war, discrimination, and environmental destruction and has now taken the 2030 SDGs into its platform.

C) Rayda Marquez, Director of YMCA Global Teens, a program of the Greater New York YMCA, partnered with CVSA this year on our "Take Ownership of the SDGs" Community Education Campaign to expose New York City youth to

the 2030 SDGs and empower them to take action in advancing them in their local communities. Global Teens is a leadership program that promotes civic engagement and a deeper understanding of social issues of a local and global magnitude. The 2017 Global Teens program is made up of 43 youth representing the five boroughs of New York. Last year the program curriculum included an introduction to the SDGs and this year the Global Teens co-sponsored CVSA's "Take Ownership of the SDGs" workshop for youth in February 2017 at the West Side Y attended by members of the Global Teens program, high school teachers and counselors. Since March 2017 the teens have been working on activities about the SDGs, and carried out a community assessment in each of their own communities. The survey they conducted resulted in highlighting the SDGs that most impact their communities: three SDGs became the primary focus of recurrent workshops and service learning efforts from then on: Quality Education (SDG 4), Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3), and Zero Hunger (SDG 2). These are the Goals that most people they spoke to in each borough said appeared the most urgent for their borough. Overall, this focus will now guide the Global Teens in how to meet the needs of their own neighborhoods.

Additionally, one of the Global Teens counselors who is also a public high school science teacher, plans to start a sustainability campaign at his school in the fall of 2017, which will address Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) among other SDGs. He also plans to integrate the SDGs into his 8th grade science curriculum about humans and their needs and tradeoffs with the environment.

This summer of 2017, the teens will be making field trips to various parts of the U.S., and upon their return to New York City, New York from their trips they will participate in a youth-led roundtable on the SDGs with a group of Global Teens from Seattle, Washington on what they learned about the need for the SDGs, and share their action plans.

This program involving the teens promoting the SDGs can be reproduced by any YMCA youth leader, by contacting CVSA to get started.

Lessons Learned

Lessons 1

The most important lesson learned is a confirmation of the time-honored grassroots organizing practice of 'arms-length' organizing — the practice of

conducting person-to-person communication and activities — as the only successful method for mobilizing people around a long-term strategy and plan of action.

Through that approach and process of organizing — all being done by full-time and part-time volunteers — CVSA has been able to receive input from organizations and individuals on how they could best promote the SDGs, and out of those discussions CVSA compiled and began distributing the Community Education Toolkit.

There is much more work to be done to reach the communities that CVSA member organizations work in and work with them on how to work for these Goals locally in order to reach the global goal of living in a world where the 17 Goals have been achieved in each and every country.

CVSA’s success in building this grassroots, volunteer-driven campaign in the United States to inform and inspire action from the American public about the importance of implementing the Agenda in the United States and holding our government accountable to achieve the 17 Goals by 2030, is driven by our “arms-length” method and the process of calling organizations already involved in addressing the current lack of solutions to poverty, lack of access to health care, decent education, affordable housing, unemployment, hunger among children and the elderly, environmental destruction, and more. By informing them of the Agenda through thorough explanation and discussion; mobilizing them with plans and organizing tools that they can move forward with, we are creating a ripple effect of awareness and action. We see this as the necessary work to fulfill one of the most important aspects of the 2030 Global Agenda, which is that “It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.” (“Transforming Our World” page 12, article 52).

Lesson 2

With each phone call and presentation we have made, and through each workshop on how to use the CVSA SDG Organizer’s Toolkit, we have received 100% agreement that the SDGs urgently need to be carried out in the U.S., they are 100% relevant to unsolved and growing social, economic and environmental problems in the U.S., and there is anger and outrage that the information about this blueprint for saving planet and people is being kept out of public awareness in the U.S. Those we have spoken with who already have global perspectives also understand that if the United States government does not implement the Goals here in the U.S., current U.S. economic, social and environmental

policies will remain an obstacle to the achievement of the SDGs around the world. Everyone we met with expressed interest in finding out how they could participate at some level in the government planning processes for the implementation of the SDGs, and to assist in monitoring their progress — once they find any level of government that is doing any planning and opening arenas for civil society to participate and have a real voice; the absence of which was always cited as the first obstacle to overcome.

A Reflection

In March 2017 CVSA attended a conference in New York City about the crisis in water access at which a former U.S. Senator was a key note speaker. After the event, CVSA's Executive Director had a brief opportunity to speak with the Senator and asked why she didn't mention the SDGs. The Senator's response was indicative of why the U.S. is not advancing aggressively to implement the SDGs. At first the Senator said, "the what?!" And finally, upon recollecting what CVSA's director was referring to, she said, "Oh, yes, we signed on to that – but you don't understand, we need to address the environmental problems here in the U.S. before we deal with helping other countries!" And when CVSA's director noted that the 2030 Agenda did apply to the U.S., and is supposed to be implemented here too – the Senator said, "Oh, yes, but that is for 2030! You don't understand – we are in a political crisis right now, and we need to deal with immediate problems first, now." This inter-action with a high-ranking and senior government official affirmed the necessity for CVSA's Community Education Campaign to promote the SDGs in the absence of official promotion of this Agenda.

Creating Ownership of the SDGs and Next Steps

Despite U.S. government representatives' expressed commitment to this historic Global Agenda in September 2015, we have located no press coverage inspired by the government about that commitment to this historic Global Agenda in the mainstream U.S. media. No government official or politician spoke about the 2030 SDGs in their election campaigns of the last year. No educational materials about how civil society can participate in achieving or monitoring the achievement of the Goals have been issued broadly by any government agency that we have found.

There are several states in the United States and hundreds of local Mayors who have endorsed the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and issued initial

reports on how policies they already have in force are consistent with some of the Goals. However, a) this is insufficient towards the work that is called for in Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They need to develop active and meaningful participation and support from all the community organizations and all community-based stakeholders in their jurisdictions; and b) they will not be able to fulfill their own pledge without the active endorsement and engagement by national leadership as many of the goals depend on building national solutions.

The United States government has not yet acted on its commitment to the 2030 Agenda in regard to Article 45: *“We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, sub-regional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others.”*

Therefore, through the continuance of CVSA’s Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the 2030 SDGs, the distribution of CVSA’s SDG Organizer’s Toolkit, and providing consultation to groups and individuals committed to achieving the Agenda, CVSA is developing a platform through which all stakeholders can take responsibility to 1) promote the goals to their community and constituency, 2) orient their organization, association, congregation, classroom, school, etc. to internalize the SDGs into their day-to-day work and develop strategies for their implementation and 3) build a groundswell of grassroots support and engage with local authorities to inform them that the 2030 Agenda exists and encourage them to involve the entire community in developing and adopting legislation and budgets that will take steps to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, CVSA calls on the government of the United States to carry out its pledge to achieve the 2030 Agenda by forming a national SDG Coordinating Council. State Councils can also be set up to oversee data collection, draw up implementation plans, coordinate policies and monitor the progress of implementation in their state and submit those to the national coordinating body. The process must be made public and open. Members on the councils must include representatives from nongovernmental volunteer organizations, faith-based service organizations, social service administrators, grassroots leaders from communities, educators, religious community leaders, labor leaders, poor people’s representatives, family farms, small business

representatives, health advocates, legal justice and environmental specialists, as well as credit unions and community banks.

Conclusion

CVSA will continue to expand the Community Education Campaign for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – using our time-honored arms-length organizing approach to continue our presentations and distribution of the Toolkit and to build the groundswell of support needed to hold the government of the United States accountable to its commitments to its own people and to the rest of the international community so that we can achieve the 17 Goals that the people of United States and the people of the world so urgently need.

“We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to achieving this Agenda and utilizing it to the fullest, to transform our world for the better by 2030.”

Susan Angus, Executive Director
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