

TOSSD Task Force – 14th Meeting – Dec 2021

CSO initial comments on agenda items

We would like to note that the backgrounders to inform the 14th Task Force meeting outline future scenarios that might undermine TOSSD relevance. More specifically, we observe that there are recommendations in these documents to further expand the boundaries of this new metric in a such a way that its focus on the sustainable development in TOSSD-eligible countries and on the substantive benefits from IPGs for these countries will be compromised. We believed that the TOSSD definition had already reached a significant level of maturity and reopening this definition will undermine the consensus reached so far.

Significant issues continue to exist in the current Reporting Instructions particularly for Pillar Two (e.g. research, peace and security, climate mitigation). As agreed, the Task Force has yet to systematically consider lessons from the first years of data reporting in relation to the agreed criteria for Pillar Two (§69 and §70). It is possible to improve on TOSSD relevance without losing sight of its agreed ambitions as captured in the Reporting Instructions: *The Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) statistical framework aims to provide a comprehensive picture of global, official and officially-supported resource flows provided to promote sustainable development in developing countries.*¹

Item 1 – Mobilizing institutional investors for financing sustainable development

- We acknowledge that the role of institutional investors in supporting the realization of the international development goals have been at the center of the global community’s concerns for quite a long time. Amongst others, the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Developing Financing recalled already, ahead of the endorsement of the Agenda 2030, the role, while untested, that these institutions might play through strategies to redirect global savings for the benefit of global development.
- As we appreciate the importance that TOSSD pilot studies to shed light on new and problematic areas, we are also aware that these pilots may well further complicate the development of this metric as the Pilot on Health to be later discussed demonstrates, at a time when we should be consolidating data reporting.
- With this concern in mind, we would warmly suggest that a pilot on institutional investors is robustly anchored to the already accepted TOSSD definitions and to the boundaries set by the Reporting Instructions: focus on sustainable development in partner countries; demonstrable support for SDGs; substantial benefit for TOSSD eligible countries from investments in IPGs, and a direct link between official intervention for these purposes and private resources.

Item 5 - Pilot on Health

- We appreciate the efforts by the Task Force secretariat to embark on a thorough examination of the implications stemming from need to shed light on Research & Development expenditures on health. The current global crisis provoked by the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic strongly vouch for the timeliness and appropriateness of such a commitment. We acknowledge that significant public investments in the development of COVID-19 vaccines and COVAX could be included as International Public Goods under Pillar Two of TOSSD. However, restricted access to vaccines for partner countries - resulting from current policies of most provider countries to command the market for effective vaccines for the benefit of their citizens and then to restrict production by protecting vaccine International Property Rights - raise questions about consistency with TOSSD eligibility criteria. As with all IPGs included in TOSSD, clear benchmarks need to be established to demonstrate “substantial benefits to eligible TOSSD countries,” which is the stated purpose of TOSSD as a new metric.

¹ Preamble, Reporting Instructions - <https://www.tossd.org/docs/reporting-instructions.pdf>

- However, we worryingly also notice highly problematic recommendations drawn from this thematic pilot that go well beyond the intended purpose of TOSSD as identified through years of careful work (and compromises) by the TOSSD Task Force. The general implication of the recommendations relating to a shift in focus to “global sustainable development” in fact implies a major overhaul of the TOSSD definition and its application in Pillar Two, which inter alia was very recently updated. In particular, it is suggested to shift the focus away from the promotion of sustainable development with substantial benefits for partner countries.
- It is our view that changes in these directions will undermine, if not destroy, the relevance and credibility of TOSSD for many stakeholders most interested in its potential for strengthening transparency for resources directed to SDGs of relevance to developing country partners, including international civil society organizations who have been following this metric closely. To date, we have seen little evidence that members of the Task Team are reviewing current reporting for Pillar Two against the agreed Reporting Instructions as they committed to do in controversial areas such as research, peace and security. Rather, we witness repeated efforts to expand the scope of TOSSD to the point where if accepted, in our view, TOSSD as a measure will be meaningless as a source of evidence to drive better policies in relation to urgent resources needed for partner countries to fully implement Agenda 2030. These latter resources go beyond ODA, but are distinguishable from broad areas of provider investments in “Global Public Goods” and in their domestic support for SDGs.
- Such a change in the definition of TOSSD along the lines proposed would, in our views, accentuate tense discussions on data eligibility and inflation, which will reinforce concerns so evident in the critical arguments within the UN IAEG regarding TOSSD (Pillar Two) and its relevance to SG 17.3 – which is focused on mobilizing resources for developing countries.
- As challenging it might be, the current TOSSD focus on sustainable development with substantial benefits for partner countries offers the new metric a strong argument to back up its relevance, legitimacy and credibility. We propose that the Task Force examine the health pilot evidence in light of existing criteria in the Reporting Instructions and further clarify the eligibility of research, particularly the current inclusion of basic research, against the key notion of with substantial benefit for TOSSD eligible countries.

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