



"Evidence of Policy Engagement & Advocacy in VSO Programmes: 2022-23 Synthesis"

Acknowledgement

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Disclaimer

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Executive summary

In the 2022-2023 project year, VSO project teams in nine countries submitted reports of 22 projects that supported policy advocacy initiatives. Twelve of these were policy actions, 10 were advocacy for various issues including uptake of the Global Volunteering standard. Status of actions at the close of the year varied, nine projects had supported initiatives in the early consultative stages prior to drafting of policy documents, seven supported drafting of policy documents, two projects completed their advocacy actions and four projects supported policy operationalization.

Policy Advocacy initiatives were anchored in one or more practice area, others were cross cutting or in support of volunteering policy and the Global Volunteering Standard. It was interesting to note that some country teams had multiple projects focused on the same policy issues, for instance four of the projects in Nepal were in support of operationalisation of an inclusive education policy.

- **Health focus was reported by two projects.** One Youth led advocacy initiative in Myanmar, the other an initiative with Civil Society Nepal.
- **Education focus was noted in six projects**, two in Cambodia and four in Nepal. Of the two in Cambodia, one project team worked with Technical colleges the other with Civil Society organisations. Nepal had four project teams work with civil society.
- **Livelihoods focus was noted in four projects** in Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. All project teams, with the exception of Uganda, worked with Civil Society to push their agendas. The work in Uganda was led by Youth.
- A focus on **Health and Livelihoods** was noted in initiatives reported by two projects, one in Eswatini, the other in Kenya. The work in Eswatini was in collaboration with community members whilst that in Kenya was led by Youth. One project team in Tanzania reported a Youth led initiative focused on **Health and Education**.
- Four projects, supported uptake of **the Global Volunteering Standard**. Cambodia and Myanmar worked with civil society, Malawi efforts were a collaboration with Civil Society and Government. In Nepal these efforts were Youth led.

Challenges noted by project teams include: Limited resources; Complexity of changes required for instance upskilling educators; Inequity in service access; Sustainability and Continuity of projects that relied on volunteers; Low acceptance and support of some policy advocacy agendas particularly in conservative contexts e.g. LGBTQIA+ ; Incomplete progress updates; and susceptibility to external factors e.g health pandemics.

Main lessons learnt over the course of implementing these initiatives include: Importance of multisectoral collaboration and comprehensive approaches to address

issues; Need for strong and clear policy frameworks; Need to share best practices and have effective data collection and reporting mechanisms.

Recommendations going forward include: Foster multisectoral partnerships and collaboration; Straighten policy frameworks; Establish platforms to share best practice; and Improve data collection and reporting so that contribution of policy advocacy initiatives to organisational goals can be documented.

Introduction

Alongside projects to improve access to and quality of services in health, education and livelihoods, VSO also strives to effect change through policy advocacy. Countries identify issues that need to be addressed or changed, then work with partners to define the problem, prioritise action plans and engage duty bearers to develop policy or make system changes to address the issue that was identified. In most cases, issues taken up will support efforts to improve access to quality health, education and livelihood services for primary actors. Some initiatives are targeted at promoting adoption of the Global Volunteering Standard as a way to support responsible and impactful volunteering. Country project teams provide regular updates of policy advocacy actions taken and status through a policy advocacy tracker. This report provides a summary of all policy advocacy initiatives reported via the tracker for the 2022 – 2023 project year.

Findings

Country teams reported individual project contribution to policy advocacy initiatives as shown in Figure 1. Nepal, with a total of eight projects that contributed to policy advocacy efforts had the largest number of projects driving change in this way.

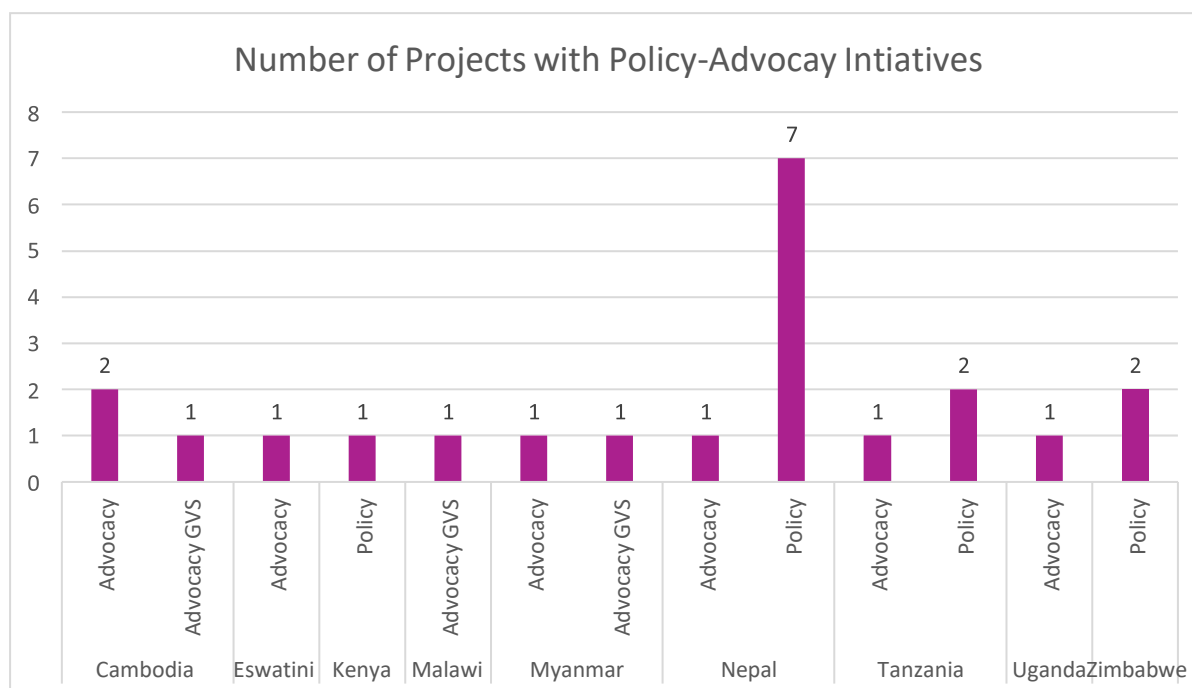


Figure 1: Number of Projects Contributing to Policy-Advocay Initiatives

The specific practice area of focus for policy advocacy initiatives are informed by country team priorities. Efforts can be in one or more of the practice areas as reflected in Figure 2. The Other areas of focus include youth engagement and development of volunteering policy.

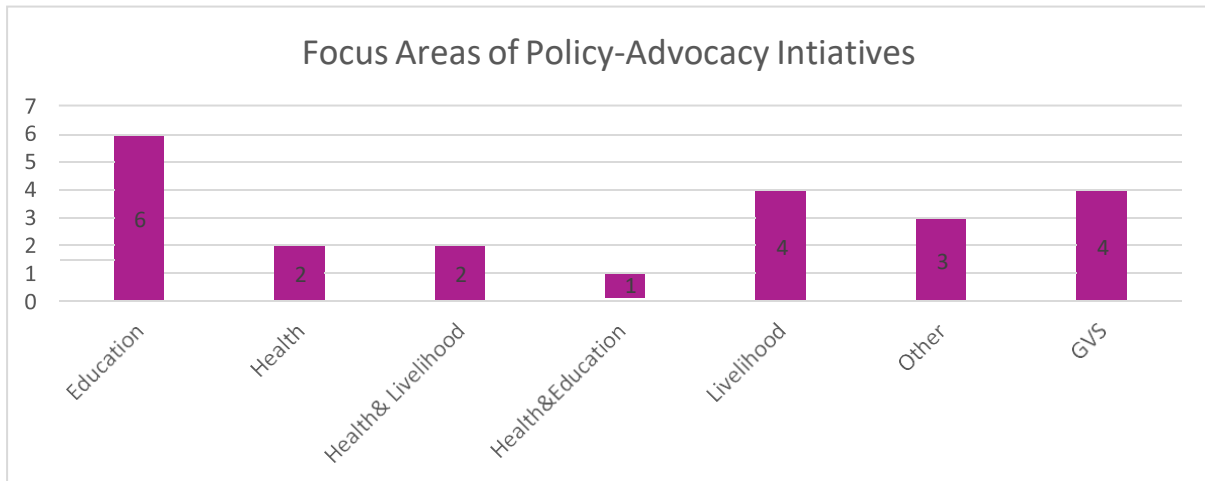


Figure 2: Practice Areas of Focus

Country teams can have one or more projects pushing the same agenda or working on different areas. For instance, Nepal had several projects contribute to an inclusive education policy whilst in Cambodia one project focused on Education and another on Adoption of the Global Volunteering Standards. Some initiatives had a dual focus such as is the case in Eswatini and Kenya where efforts focused on Health and Livelihoods. The focus areas for policy advocacy initiatives in each country are shown in Figure 3. The Other areas of focus are Youth engagement (Nepal and Tanzania) and development of national volunteer policy (Zimbabwe).

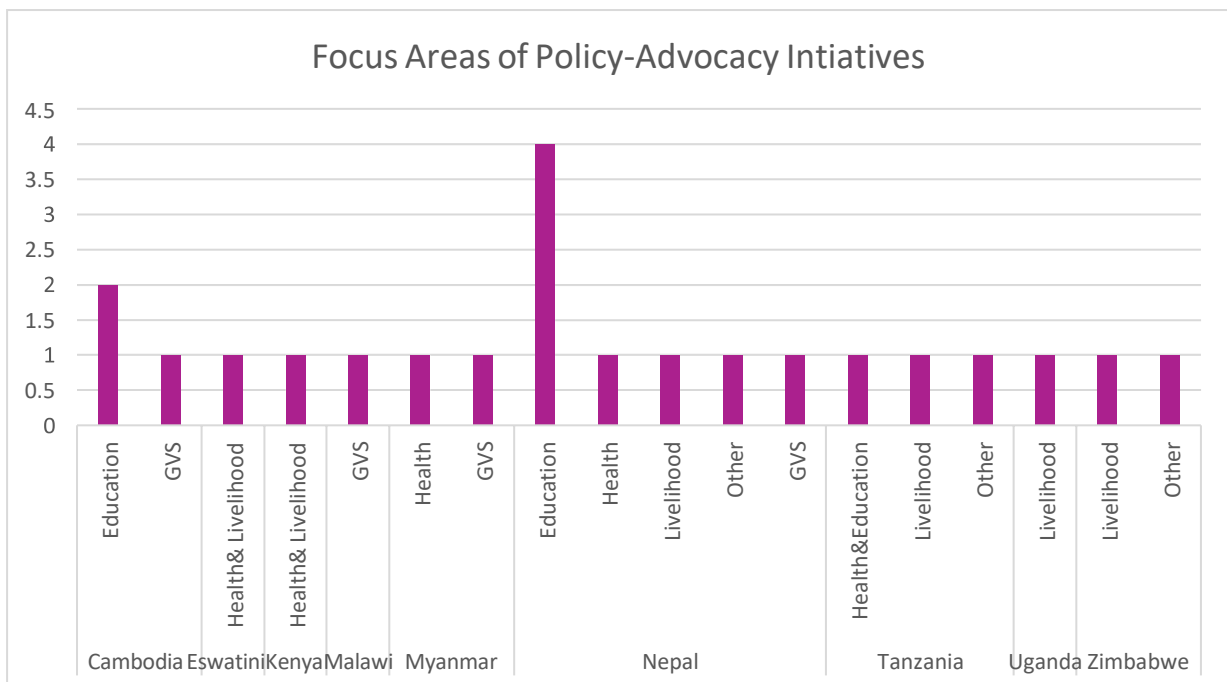


Figure 3: Practice Area of Focus

Typically, policy advocacy efforts involve numerous consultations with stakeholders to gain consensus on issues to prioritise and put forward, how to word documents or policies and often a draft policy with undergo several revisions before finalisation. As

such, policy advocacy actions can take years before desired improvements to health, education or livelihood services are made. Review of VSO initiatives shows that most projects supported consultations prior to drafting policy or advocacy statements, four projects supported operationalization of a policy post finalization. Figure 4 provides a summary of the status of policy-advocacy initiatives supported by VSO projects in the past calendar year.

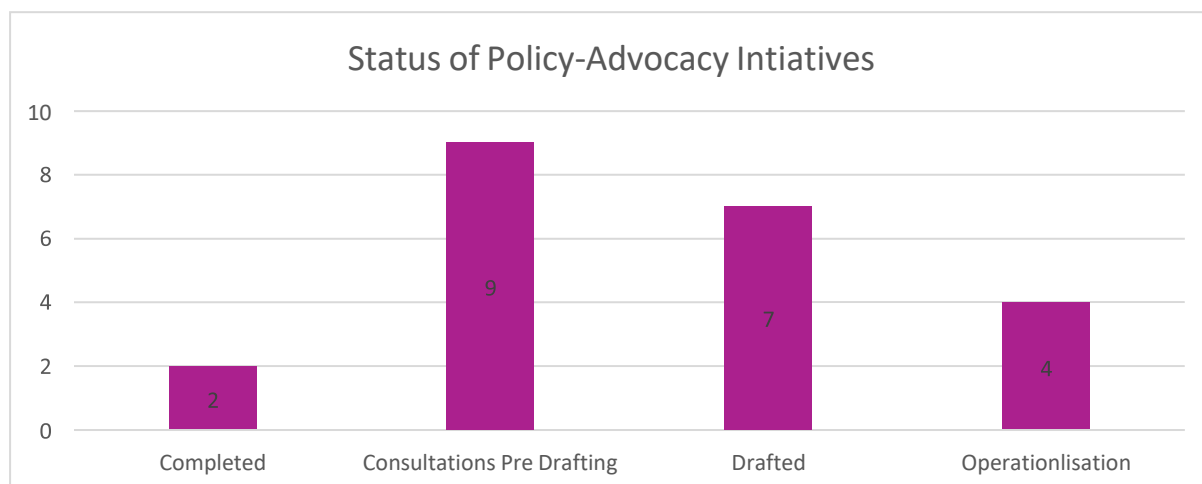


Figure 4: Status of Policy-Advocacy Initiative Supported by VSO Project

Figure 5 shows that Nepal with four projects supporting operationalisation had the most advanced stages of policy work, which entailed setting up mechanisms and securing resources to support policy roll out. The two complete initiatives in Cambodia and Myanmar were advocacy efforts to support use of improved training curricular and to raise awareness of various health issues.

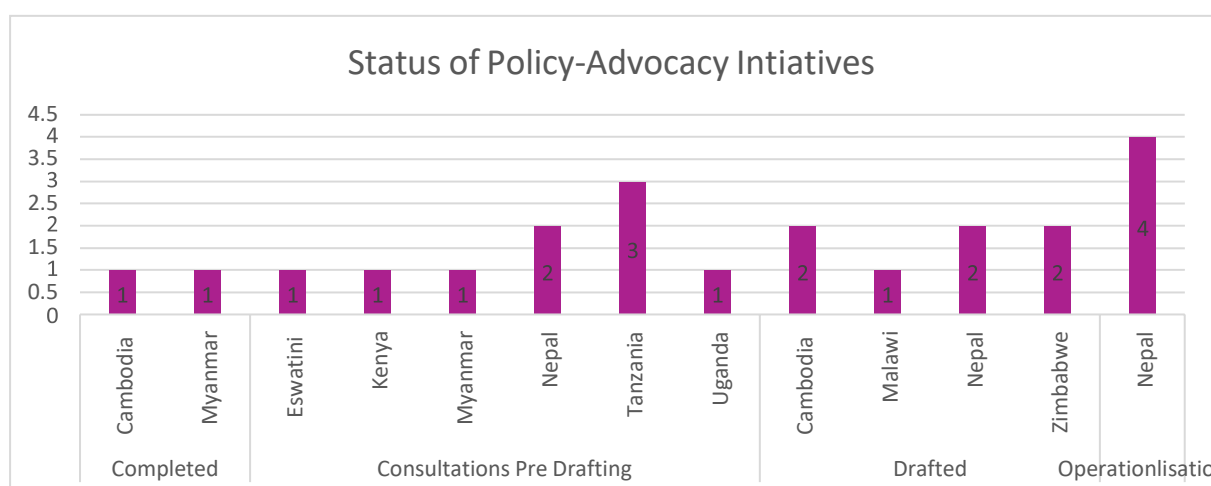


Figure 5: Status of Policy-Advocacy Initiative

Country and Practice area Distribution of Policy Advocacy Initiatives

A review of the policy advocacy initiatives by practice area shows that most projects supported initiative in Education (6 projects), followed by Livelihoods and support of the Global Volunteering Standard (four projects each). The health practice had two projects solely focused on health, with another two projects focused on health and Livelihood, and one on health and education.

Policy Advocacy Initiatives in Health

Myanmar and Nepal each had one project with a sole focus on health. The Myanmar project team focused on **Youth Led Advocacy** to build awareness of SRHR, MHPSS, and GBV among parents, guardians, and influencers. This initiative was **completed**. In Nepal the ACTIVE project team worked with **Civil Society** on efforts to influence the National Health strategy for improved services to marginalised groups. This included development of health facility resilience plans and strengthening capacity in this area for health facility and local government staff. The team also provided inputs to the draft national health strategic plan.

Policy Advocacy Initiatives in Education

Over the course of the year, six VSO projects, two in Cambodia and four in Nepal, focused their efforts on Education related policy advocacy initiatives.

In Cambodia, the Professional Development in Upper Secondary School (PDUSS) project team worked with **Technical Colleges** to advocate for improved manuals in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and in Library Management. Revised manuals have been **drafted**, coaching and mentoring to teacher at national and sub national levels is on-going



Figure 6: VSO Cambodia, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MOEYS) youth volunteers and Mr. Dominic Williams, British Ambassador to Cambodia

The Rural Employment for COVID-19 Economic Recovery (RECOVER) project worked with **Civil Society** to make Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions curricular more responsive to agro-enterprise needs and to set up public-private partnerships. This work has been **completed**.

Nepal had four projects that worked with **Civil Society** to support **operationalization** of an inclusive education policy. These were the (SAHAYATRA); Empowering a New Generation of Adolescents Girls with Education (ENGAGE); SIKAI and ACTIVE. Project teams supported formation and strengthening of Girls and Inclusive Education

Network (GIEN) networks. The networks are tasked with advocating for inclusive education and allocation of required resources at sub national level. These efforts were the most advanced across the VSO portfolio.

Policy Advocacy Initiatives in Livelihoods

Four countries, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, had one project each where policy advocacy efforts focused on livelihoods. Nepal, Tanzania Uganda collected data and held **consultations** with various stakeholder as part of the **pre drafting** preparation process.



Figure 7: Youth-led Advocacy Toolkit Workshop -Nepal

In Nepal, the ACTIVE grant team worked with **Civil Society** organisations to support localisation of the Right to Food Policy.

In Uganda, the Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship and Decent Employment team worked with various **Youth** to support entrepreneurship and decent employment opportunities for youth.

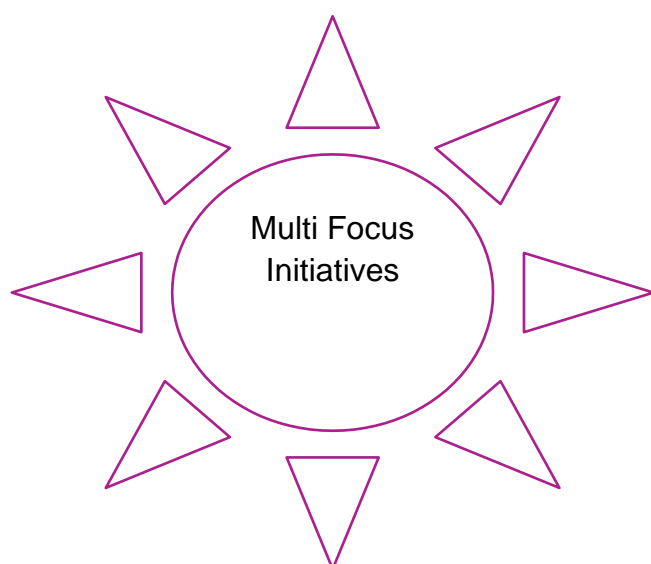
The work in Zimbabwe is a bit more advanced, the ACTIVE grant with **Civil Society** went beyond the consultation phase and progressed to actual **drafting** of an agroecology policy.



Figure 8: Agroecology Consultation Workshop- Zimbabwe

In Tanzania, the CLARITY project worked with **Civil Society** to effect change in the Land and Mining policies to enable communities realise their rights in the extractive sector

Multi Focus Policy Advocacy Initiatives



In Kenya, policy efforts are **Youth led**, here the project team conducted vulnerability assessments to inform submissions by youth in the county integrated development plans. Involved youth groups sought to ensure that the plans were youth, gender and disability responsive.

Efforts in Eswatini are with **Community Members**, the intention empower youths to demand and negotiate their rights to youth-friendly health services provision, build capacity if ex-inmate association to support successful reintegration and to build a spirit of volunteering using the global volunteering standards.

Eswatini and Kenya had one project each, with policy advocacy initiatives that had a dual focus on Health and Livelihoods. Both projects are under the ACTIVE grant and are in the early stages of stakeholder consultations prior to **drafting** of a policy statement.

Tanzania, through the ACTIVE grant also worked on multi focused policy advocacy initiative. The team worked with **Youth** to gather data and hold **consultations prior to drafting a policy** statement that would target Health and Education. This work seeks to increase Health access for youth and to build youth capacity to become education advocates who can engage authorities on education and health.

Policy Advocacy Initiatives in Support of the Global Volunteering Standard

One of the mandates under the ACTIVE grant is to support volunteer involving organisations and government bodies with awareness and adoption of the Global Volunteering Standard. Cambodia, Malawi, Myanmar and Nepal focused some of their efforts in this area.

The team in Malawi supported efforts to develop a National Volunteer policy which was informed by the Global Volunteering Standard. This policy has been ***drafted***, and will be validated in the 2023-2024 project year. This work was done in collaboration with ***Government and Civil Society***.

In Cambodia, the project team worked with Civil Society in partnership with DYC/MoEYS to improve access and delivery of volunteering for development services for youth volunteers, including the vulnerable and marginalized. This included technical assistance to promote uptake of the **Global Volunteering Standard** as well as creation of civic spaces for primary actors, volunteers and staff to engage with duty bearers. This is at **drafting** stage.

GLOBAL VOLUNTEERING STANDARDS

In Myanmar, the project team worked with ***Civil Society*** to develop plans that will help partner organisations move towards being more responsible and impactful in how they work with volunteers. The project team further provided tools and guidelines to aid development standard operating procedures. At the close of the year, efforts to support adoption of the Standard were still in the early phases of ***consultation prior to drafting***.

In Nepal, the project team worked with ***Youth*** to hold consultations and dialogues on to facilitate adoption of the Standard in the work done by the National Youth Council. These efforts were still in early phases of ***consultation*** prior to drafting of policy statement.



Figure 9: Validation of National Volunteer and Internship

Challenges

Challenges noted by county teams are summarized herein:

Stakeholder Resistance Limited Resources:

Resistance from various stakeholders when implementing changes or initiatives. Some of the stakeholders resisted proposed changes due to fear of the unknown, concerns about the potential impact on their interests or power, or simply a preference for maintaining the status quo.

Political and Social Context and Institutional Resistance:

Country teams operate within complex political and social landscapes that can influence decision-making and implementation of initiatives. Political factors, such as changes in leadership or shifts in government priorities at times limited ability to gain support for some projects. Social factors, such as cultural norms and traditions, also influence how communities perceive and embrace proposed changes.

Limited Capacity and Awareness and Data and Information Gaps:

Limitations in terms of their own capacity and expertise to collect and report complex data, which led to information gaps in the policy tracker. There is need to invest in data collection and analysis to inform strategies and enable effective impact measurement.

Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination and Sustainability:

Meaningful and sustainable change requires active engagement with stakeholders from all sectors of the community. Building strong partnerships and involving stakeholders in the decision-making process can lead to more comprehensive and widely accepted solutions. However, coordinating efforts among diverse stakeholders can be complex and time-consuming, necessitating effective communication and collaboration mechanisms.

Lessons Learnt

1. **Inter-sectoral Collaboration:** The data highlights the need for collaboration and integration across sectors. Integrating efforts across sectors recognizes intersectionality and the need for comprehensive approaches to address complex challenges. Initiatives combining education, health, and livelihoods indicate an understanding of the interdependencies and synergies between these areas. Coordinated efforts can lead to more comprehensive and impactful outcomes.
2. **Contextual Considerations:** The variation in the number of initiatives across countries underscores the importance of considering the unique context and needs of each nation. Tailoring initiatives to specific challenges, resources, and priorities within a country can lead to more effective and relevant outcomes.
3. **Ongoing Commitment:** The presence of ongoing initiatives indicates a sustained commitment to addressing challenges and driving progress. Continuity and long-term investment in initiatives can lead to sustainable development outcomes and maximize the positive impact on communities. This may require extensive collaboration with government agencies and where possible establishment of public private partnerships. Long term follow up is required for all policy and advocacy initiatives.
4. **Evaluation and Learning:** Analysing data and monitoring the progress of initiatives is crucial for understanding their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. Tools used for reporting on policy and advocacy initiatives need to provide a clear picture of where efforts are targeted and progress made. Regular evaluation, learning, and sharing of best practices can enhance future initiatives and ensure continuous growth and development.

Recommendations

1. **Foster Multi-Sectoral Partnerships:** Encourage collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, community organizations, and other stakeholders to develop integrated initiatives that address the interdependencies between education, health, and livelihoods. By working together, organizations can leverage their expertise and resources to achieve greater impact and sustainable outcomes.
2. **Coordination and Collaboration:** Given the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including civil society organizations, government agencies, and private sectors, ensuring effective coordination and collaboration can be a challenge. There is need to balance differing priorities, perspectives, and interests while maintaining a unified approach. This requires strong leadership and communication mechanisms.
3. **Strengthen Policy Frameworks:** Develop comprehensive policy frameworks that provide a clear vision, objectives, and guidelines for education, health, and livelihood sectors. Ensure that policies align with international best practices, prioritize equity, inclusivity, accountability and support long-term sustainable development goals.
4. **Share Best Practices and Lessons Learned:** Establish platforms to share best practices, lessons learned, and successful models of interventions across countries and organizations. Facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration to promote cross-learning, replication of successful approaches, and scale up of effective initiatives.
5. **Improve Data Collection and Reporting:** Enhance data collection mechanisms to gather comprehensive and accurate information about ongoing initiatives. Ensure that projects are categorized properly, with clear indicators of their status, focus areas, and progress. Regularly update and share this information to facilitate analysis of contribution to pathways of change and knowledge sharing.

